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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to the fifth volume of *The Confessional Presbyterian*. When first assaying what would become this journal, the editor desired to achieve at least five issues which might stand as a solid set even if it were not ultimately a long term success. This issue accomplishes that goal. Whether we are able to continue with more volumes in successive years will depend ultimately on whether there are enough subscribers willing to continue to support what has become a rather substantial print journal. We are also completely indebted to the many fine contributors who have made this journal worthwhile these first five years.

The fifth issue, following a trend, is the largest issue yet (and it could have been larger; several reviews and articles did not make the cut off date for publication and we hope to run these in a future issue). In this volume readers may once again find a wide range of material.

The two part *Westminster Assembly & the Judicial Law* stands out for its length if for no other reason. The first part, containing a chronological survey, is unique in ordering the source material by “release” date around a time line of the

work of the Westminster Assembly. This is largely possible due to the dating of the Thomason tracts, and to a lesser degree the records of the Company of Stationers and other sources. Matthew Winzer provides the second analytical part, concentrating on two foundational questions, of which the first is key: “Do the Westminster Confession and Catechisms teach what has come to be called the theonomic thesis—‘the abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail?’ Do the writings of the Westminster divines provide any justification for thinking that the Westminster documents teach this thesis?” Mr. Winzer concludes that “these questions should be answered in the negative.”

Some other Confessional issues are addressed in this issue. Dr. VanDuren has written a helpful defense of the Reformed view rejecting representations of Christ, which is both succinct and extensive in its references. The siren song of recent literature to abandon the view as represented in Westminster Larger Catechism 109 is strongly countered. And Lane Keister examines the exegetical basis for the Puritan view proscribing recreation on the Lord’s day as summarized in the Westminster Standards.

In the arena of Presbyterian polity, in *Presbyterian Quintessence: The Five ‘Heads’ of Church Government*, Frank J. Smith uncovers the answer to why the Presbyterian Church in America Book of Church Order speaks of five “heads” of

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# The Westminster Assembly & the Judicial Law: A Chronological Compilation and Analysis

By Chris Coldwell and Matthew Winzer

*To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which have expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.<sup>1</sup>*

## PART ONE: CHRONOLOGY

In the context of the debate over Theonomy and the Westminster Confession of Faith, there have been previous compilations published of Puritan material attempting to show their thoughts on the nature of any abiding validity of the Judicial Law. The most significant of these have been those by Sinclair Ferguson and Martin Foulner, the latter contending a kinship in theology with Theonomy, the former affirming only a practical agreement.<sup>2</sup> Both covered a broader range of time than just the years the Westminster Assembly was in session, but did not present all the material that may be found for even that period. The purpose of this survey is to narrow down to the specific time when discussions could or would have taken place on this topic amongst the Westminster divines. Therefore the time frame has been narrowed to the start of the Assembly through the completion of chapters 19, 20 and 23 of the Confession of Faith with proofs. While the inclusion of Chapter 19 on the Law of God is obvious, Chapters 20 and 23 would have afforded the same opportunity to discuss the judicial law as it related to the punishing of doctrinal error, a controversy at the time within the Assembly and throughout London. The period of the survey has been pushed back to the start of the Assembly because the divines immediately began work revising the Thirty-nine Articles, including Article 7 containing comment on the judicial law.

Any writings for this period by members of the Assembly relative to the subject under review are of interest to this study. Additionally, of particular interest are the writings by those divines that were more directly

connected with the work on the ninth proposition of Article 7 of the Thirty-Nine Articles and Westminster Confession of Faith chapters 19, 20 and 23. For instance, Anthony Burgess is of interest because of his book *Vindicæ Legis*; being on the Assembly's third committee, he would have potentially helped to craft WCF 19 "Of the Law of God," and his book was published only weeks after that chapter was finalized and approved. *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* appeared about the same time and is of keen interest as more than a few of the Westminster divines may be connected with it.

However, the goal in this survey is not to attempt to adduce any individual divine as either interpretive of or influential upon Westminster Confession of Faith 19.4. This would require proof from the records of the Assembly, and there is no known surviving account of their debates over the expiration of the judicial law. There is nothing in the record regarding the judicial law for instance, like Gillespie's insistence for a change to

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THE AUTHORS: The chronologically ordered collection of source material was compiled by Chris Coldwell, editor of *The Confessional Presbyterian*. Matthew Winzer, author of the analysis presented in part two, is pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (Australian Free Church), Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia.

1. Westminster Confession of Faith, 19.4, cited from S. W. Carruthers, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Being an account of the Preparation and Printing of its Seven Leading Editions to which is Appended a Critical Text of the Confession with notes thereon* (Manchester: R. Aikman & Son, 1937) 124.

2. Sinclair B. Ferguson, "An Assembly of Theonomists? The Teaching of the Westminster Divines on the Law of God," in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, ed. William S. Barker & W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids, Mich: Academie Books, 1990) 315–349. Martin A. Foulner, *Theonomy and the Westminster Confession: an annotated sourcebook* (Marpet Press, 1997).

| The Westminster Assembly & the Judicial Law: Chronology of Surveyed Literature                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| July 1, 1643.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Seating of the Westminster Assembly                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| July–October, 1643.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | The Revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| August 2, 1643.<br>August 9–15, 1643.<br>August 10, 1643.<br>September 30, 1643.<br>December 27, 1643.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | John Sedgwick, <i>Antinomianism Anatomized</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Lightfoot's Journal. Discussion of the 9 <sup>th</sup> proposition of Article 7.<br>Jeremiah Burroughs (2 <sup>nd</sup> committee), <i>An Exposition of the Prophetie of Hosea</i> .<br>Thomas Case (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>The Quarrel of the Covenant</i> .<br>Alexander Henderson, <i>Sermon to the House of Commons</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| May, 1644 – March 8, 1648.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | The Confession of Faith                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| May 3, 1644.<br>August 13, 1644.<br>August 14, 1644.<br>August 20, 1644.<br>August 28, 1644.<br>September 4, 1644.<br>September 5, 1644.<br>September 5, 1644.<br>September 28, 1644.<br>October 30, 1644.<br>December 25, 1644.<br>January 8, 1644/45.<br>January 29, 1644/45.<br>February 7, 1644/45.<br>March 26, 1645.<br>April 21, 1645.<br>April 30, 1645.<br>April 30, 1645.<br>May 1, 1645.<br>May 9, 1645.<br>May 12, 1645.<br>May 21, 1645.<br>May 28, 1645.<br>June 25, 1645.<br>July 8, 1645.<br>July 11, 1645.<br>September 16, 1645.<br>October 24, 1645.<br>November 17, 1645.<br>November 24, 1645.<br>November 26, 1645.<br>December 8, 1645.<br>December 18, 1645.<br>January 1, 1645/46.<br>January 7, 9, 12–13, 1645/46.<br>January 22, 1645/46.<br>January 29, 1645/46.<br>February 2, 1645/46.<br>February 9, 1645/46.<br>February 10–12, 1645/46.<br>February 16, 1645/46.<br>February 23, 1645/46.<br>March 3, 1645/46.<br>March 4, 1645/46. | Samuel Rutherford, <i>Due Right of Presbyteries</i> .<br>Herbert Palmer (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>The Glasse of God's Providence</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 265. Confession of Faith.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 269. Committee for the Confession of Faith.<br>William Reyner (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>Babylon's ruining-earthquake and the Restauration of Zion</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 278. Committee for the Confession.<br>Anthony Burgess (3 <sup>rd</sup> ), <i>Judgement's Removed, where Judgement is Executed</i> .<br>Thomas Case (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>Jehoshaphats Caveat to his Judges</i> .<br>Anthony Burges (3 <sup>rd</sup> ), <i>The Magistrate's Commission from Heaven</i> .<br>George Gillespie, <i>A Late Dialogue betwixt a Civilian and a Divine</i> .<br>Edmund Calamy (2 <sup>nd</sup> ), <i>An Indictment against England</i> .<br>George Gillespie, <i>Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty</i> .<br>George Walker (2 <sup>nd</sup> ), Sermon to the House of Commons.<br>Daniel Featley (2 <sup>nd</sup> ), <i>The Dippers Dipt</i> .<br>John Ward (3 <sup>rd</sup> ), <i>God Judging Among the gods</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 421. Confession of Faith.<br>Samuel Bolton.<br>Cornelius Burges (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>Second Sermon to the House of Commons</i> .<br>Daniel Cawdrey (2 <sup>nd</sup> ) and Herbert Palmer (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>Sabbatum Redivivum</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 432. Expediting the Confession of Faith.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 434. Confession of Faith, New Committee.<br>James Ussher. <i>A Body of Divinitie</i> .<br>Alexander Henderson, <i>Sermon to the House of Lords</i> .<br>Richard Byfield (2 <sup>nd</sup> ), <i>Zion's Answer to the Nations' Ambassadors</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 464. Confession of Faith, Committee for the Wording.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 467. Confession of Faith to the Standing Committees.<br>John Ley (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>Annotations upon Exodus</i> .<br>Jeremiah Burroughs (2 <sup>nd</sup> ), <i>Trenicum to the Lovers of Truth and Peace</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 537. Law of God to the Third Committee.<br>Robert Baillie, <i>A Dissuasive From the Errours of the Times</i> .<br>Jeremiah Burroughs (2 <sup>nd</sup> ), <i>Sermon to the House of Peers</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 549. Committee to Revise the Confession of Faith.<br>London Ministers, <i>A Letter Presented to the Assembly of Divines</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 564. Report on the Law of God.<br>Westminster Assembly. Sessions 568, 570, 571, 572. Law of God Debated.<br>Robert Baillie, <i>A Dissuasive From the Errors of the Times</i> . Second impression.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 581. Christian Liberty. Committee for Law of God (Gouge).<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 582. Report on the Ceremonial and Judicial Law.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 585. Debate on the Ceremonial & Judicial Law's Abrogation.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 586–588. Debate on Christian Liberty.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 590. Debate on Christian liberty.<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 593. Liberty, Sabbath, Magistrate, Marriage and Divorce.<br>Samuel Rutherford, <i>Divine Right of Church Government Vindicated</i> .<br>Westminster Assembly. Session 598. Christian Liberty Committee to Meet. |



| The Westminster Assembly & the Judicial Law: Chronology of Surveyed Literature |                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| May, 1644 – March 8, 1648.                                                     | The Confession of Faith, Continued                                                                                                                    |
| March 10, 1645/46.                                                             | Westminster Assembly. Session 602. Report on Christian Liberty.                                                                                       |
| March 26, 1646.                                                                | Westminster Assembly. Session 610. Report on the Magistrate. Draft of Christian Liberty.                                                              |
| March 26, 1646.                                                                | Stephen Marshall (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>God's Master-Piece</i> .                                                                                      |
| March 27, 1646.                                                                | Westminster Assembly. Session 611. Christian Liberty.                                                                                                 |
| March 30, 1646.                                                                | Westminster Assembly. Session 612. Christian Liberty.                                                                                                 |
| March 31, 1646.                                                                | Westminster Assembly. Session 613. Christian Liberty vote not to Recommit.                                                                            |
| April 23, 24, 27, 1646.                                                        | Westminster Assembly. Sessions 628–630. Civil Magistrate.                                                                                             |
| June 17, 19, 1646.                                                             | Westminster Assembly. Sessions 660, 662. Committee for Perfecting the Confession.                                                                     |
| July 30, 1646.                                                                 | Westminster Assembly. Session 680. Mr. Gillespie's Book.                                                                                              |
| August 4, 1646.                                                                | George Gillespie, <i>Aaron's Rod Blossoming</i> .                                                                                                     |
| August 21–August 31, 1646.                                                     | Westminster Assembly. Grand Committee, The Law of God.                                                                                                |
| September 1–4, 15, 17, 1646.                                                   | Westminster Assembly. Sessions 696–699, 708, 710. Committee for Perfecting the Confession, Cawdrey, Law of God.                                       |
| September 23, 1646.                                                            | Westminster Assembly. Session 716. Report on Christian Liberty.                                                                                       |
| September 24, 1646.                                                            | Westminster Assembly. Session 718. Debate on Christian Liberty.                                                                                       |
| September 25, 1646.                                                            | Westminster Assembly. Session 719. Christian Liberty Report; Law of God Passed.                                                                       |
| September 30, 1646.                                                            | Herbert Palmer (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>The Duty &amp; Honour of Church-Restorers</i> .                                                                 |
| October 1, 1646.                                                               | Westminster Assembly. Session 720. Christian Liberty Partially Approved.                                                                              |
| October 7–9, 1646.                                                             | Westminster Assembly. Sessions 722, 723, 724. Christian Liberty Debated.                                                                              |
| October 7–9, 1646.                                                             | Westminster Assembly. Session 725. Christian Liberty Debated; Report on the Civil Magistrate.                                                         |
| October 12, 1646.                                                              | Anthony Burges (3 <sup>rd</sup> ), <i>Vindiciæ Legis</i> .                                                                                            |
| October 13–16, 20, 21, 1646.                                                   | Westminster Assembly. Sessions 726–729, 730, 731. Christian Liberty; Civil Magistrate.                                                                |
| October 23, 1646.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. <i>The Humble Advice Concerning Part of a Confession of Faith</i> .                                                             |
| October 28, 1646.                                                              | Stephen Marshall (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>A Two-edged Sword Out of the Mouth of Babes</i> .                                                             |
| October 30, 1646.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. Session 733. Christian Liberty Concluded.                                                                                       |
| November 9, 1646.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. Session 736. Civil Magistrate Approved.                                                                                         |
| December 2, 1646.                                                              | London Ministers, <i>Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici</i> .                                                                                        |
| December 3, 1646.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. Session 751. Slight Alteration to Law of God.                                                                                   |
| December 4, 1646.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. Session 752. Gillespie's Alteration to "Of the Civil Magistrate".                                                               |
| December 7, 1646.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. <i>The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines concerning a confession of faith</i> .                                          |
| January 6, 1646/47.                                                            | Westminster Assembly. Session 768. Scripture Proofs.                                                                                                  |
| January 27, 1646/47.                                                           | Obadiah Sedgwick (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>The Nature and Danger of Heresies</i> .                                                                       |
| February 19 & 22, 1646/47.                                                     | Westminster Assembly. Session 796. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 19.                                                                                      |
| February 25, 1646/47.                                                          | Westminster Assembly. Session 798. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 20.                                                                                      |
| February 26, 1646/47.                                                          | Westminster Assembly. Sessions 799, 801–804. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 20.                                                                            |
| March 2–5, 1646/47.                                                            | Westminster Assembly. Session 802. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 23.                                                                                      |
| March 3, 1646/47.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. Session 802. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 23.                                                                                      |
| March 5, 1646/47.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. Session 804. Review of Scripture Proofs.                                                                                        |
| March 10, 1646/47.                                                             | Richard Vines (3 <sup>rd</sup> ), <i>The Authours, Nature, and Danger of Hæresie</i> .                                                                |
| March 11–12, 1646/47.                                                          | Westminster Assembly. Sessions 805–806. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 20.                                                                                 |
| April 5, 1647.                                                                 | Westminster Assembly. Session 820. Confession of Faith Finished.                                                                                      |
| April 6, 1647.                                                                 | Westminster Assembly. Session 821. Scripture Proofs Approved.                                                                                         |
| April 12, 1647.                                                                | Westminster Assembly. Session 825. Scripture Proofs of Chapter 23 Approved.                                                                           |
| April 29, 1647.                                                                | Westminster Assembly. Confession of Faith with the Scripture Proofs.                                                                                  |
| May 26, 1647.                                                                  | Thomas Case (1 <sup>st</sup> ), <i>Spirituell Whordome Discovered</i> .                                                                               |
|                                                                                | <b>Postscript</b>                                                                                                                                     |
| March 8, 1647/48.                                                              | Westminster Assembly. Session 1027. Cheynell and Acontius.                                                                                            |
| March 8, 1647/48.                                                              | Francis Cheynell (3 <sup>rd</sup> ), "The Report made to the Reverend Assembly." In <i>The Divine Trinunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit</i> . |
|                                                                                | Cheynell on the Judicial Law (March 26, 1650).                                                                                                        |

the wording of 23.3; and even in that case the Assembly adopted a rare if not singular memorandum that the change was “not intended to determine the controversy about the subordination of the civill magistrate to Christ as mediatur” (see below at April 12, 1646/47).

Rather, the goal is to illustrate how confessional terms and phrases are used from writings of individual or groups of Westminster divines during the period any of them may have discussed the judicial law. The analysis of this chronological compilation will be covered in the second part of this article by Matthew Winzer.

#### THE WORK OF THE ASSEMBLY

The work of the Westminster Assembly was largely carried out in the three standing committees, as well as in select ad hoc committees. The work of revising the Thirty-nine Articles was divided between the standing committees, and the second committee was assigned Article 7. After the work on the Articles was aborted, the initial work on a new confession of faith was done by two ad hoc committees set up respectively on August 20 and September 4, 1644, which eventually met as

one committee. This group included the Scottish Commissioners, **George Gillespie**, **Robert Baillie**, **Samuel Rutherford** and **Alexander Henderson**; <sup>3</sup> the English members were (from August 20) **Gouge** (chairman<sup>4</sup>), Temple, Hoyle, Gataker, Arrowsmith, **Burroughs**, **Anthony Burgess**, Vines and Goodwin, and (from Sept. 9) Smith, **Palmer**, Newcomen, Herle, Reynolds, Wilson, Tuckney, Young, **Ley**, and **Sedgwick**.<sup>5</sup> Mitchell suggests, “the subjects of some of the chapters, or part of the matter which was ultimately embodied in the Confession, was selected or prepared by these committees.”<sup>6</sup>

Nearly a year after the August 20/September 4 committees were set up, to speed the progress of the Confession, the work was divided and assigned to the three standing committees. Chapters 20 and 23 were handled by the first Committee, and Chapter 19 by the third committee. The review of the scripture proofs for the three chapters was handled by the second committee. The clerical membership of these committees is detailed as follows by Chad Van Dixhoorn:<sup>7</sup>

#### THE THREE STANDING COMMITTEES

*First Committee.* **Herbert Palmer**, Oliver Bowles, Henry Wilkinson, Sr., Thomas Valentine, William Twisse, D.D., **William Raynor**, Hanniball Gammon, Jasper Hicks, Joshua Hoyle, D.D., William Bridge, Thomas Wincop, Thomas Goodwin, **Thomas Case**, John Pyne, Francis Whidden, Richard Love, D.D., **William Gouge**, D.D., Ralph Brownerigg, D.D., Samuel Ward, D.D., John White, Edward Peale, **Stephen Marshall**, **Obadiah Sedgwick** [Sedgwick], John Carter, Peter Clark, William New, Richard Cappell, Theophilus Bathurst, Phillip Nye, Brocket (Peter) Smith, D.D., **Cornelius Burges**, D.D., John Green, Stanley Gower, Francis Taylor, Thomas Wilson, Anthony Tuckney, Thomas Coleman, Charles Herle, Richard Herrick.

*Second Committee.* Richard Clayton, George Gibbs, Calibute Downing, D.D., **Jeremiah Burroughs** (repl. by Samuel Bolton), **Edmund Calamy**, **George Walker**, Joseph Carroll [i.e. Caryl], Lazarus Seaman, John Harris, D.D. (repl. by **Daniel Cawdrey**), George Morley, Edward Reynolds, Thomas Hill, Robert Sanderson, D.D., John Foxcraft, John Jackson, William Carter, Thomas Thoroughgood, John Arrowsmith, Robert Harris, Robert Cross, **James Ussher**, D.D. (repl. by John Bond), Matthias Styles, D.D., Samuel Gibson, Jeremiah Whitaker, Edmund Stanton, D.D., **Daniel Featley**, D.D. (repl. by **Richard Byfield**), Francis Coke, John Lightfoot, Edward Corbet, Samuel Hildersham, John Langley, Christopher Tisdale, Thomas Young, John Phillips, Humphrey

3. The names in bold are authors cited in this survey, and such emphasis is added in quotations throughout, unless otherwise noted.

4. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, sixth edition [1931?]) 1.756.

5. Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1643–1652. A thesis submitted to the Faculty of History of the University of Cambridge in Candidacy for the degree Doctor of Philosophy,” September 2004. Seven Volumes. Unpublished Thesis. Hereafter Van Dixhoorn. See Sess: 269. Aug: 20<sup>th</sup> 1644: Tuesday Morning, 5.237; Sess: 278. Sept 4: Wensday morning, Van Dixhoorn, 5.262.

6. A. F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1897) 357.

7. Only ‘replacement’ divines which figure in this survey are noted parenthetically; otherwise the lists are as originally constituted and as given by Chad Van Dixhoorn (Van Dixhoorn, 1.149–150). While they were not members of the standing committees, or had right to vote on the floor, the Scottish commissioners had enormous influence and seem to have had the freedom to attend any of the committees. For the standing committees at least, the English divines also had some freedom to attend the committees of which they were not members. Baillie describes it thus: “Ordinarlie there will be present above threescore of their divines. These are divided in three Committees; in one whereof every man is a member. No man is excluded who pleases to come to any of the three. Every Committee, as the Parliament gives order in wryte to take any purpose to consideration, takes a portion, and in their afternoon meeting prepares matters for the Assemblie, settis doune their minde in distinct propositions, backs their propositions with texts of Scripture.” Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, A.M. (Edinburgh: Alex. Lawrie & Co., for the Bannatyne Club, [1841]) 2.108. Dr. Van Dixhoorn notes this freedom of attendance applied at least to one of the later ad hoc committees (Van Dixhoorn, 1.152).

Chambers, John Conant, Henry Hall, Henry Hutton, Henry Scudder, Thomas Baylie, Benjamin Pickering, Henry Nye.

*Third Committee.* Arthur Sallaway, Sidrach Simpson, **Anthony Burgess**, **Richard Vines**, William Breenhill [sic Greenhill], William Moreton, Richard Buckley, Thomas Temple, D.D., Josias Shute, William Nicholson, Thomas Gataker, James Weldy, Christopher Pashley, D.D., Henry Tozer, William Spurstow, **Francis Channell**, Edward Ellis, John Hacket, D.D., Samuel de la Place, John de la March, Matthew Newcomen, William Lyford, Thomas Carter, William Lance, Thomas Hodges, Andrea Perne, Thomas Westfield, D.D., Henry Hammond, D.D., Nicholas Prophet, Peter Sterry, John Erle, John Gibbon, Henry Painter (repl. by **John Ward**), Thomas Micklethwaite, John Wincop, D.D., William Price, Henry Wilkinson, Richard Holdsworth, D.D., William Dunning.

#### AD HOC COMMITTEES

To assist this work on the confession, there was an ad hoc committee for perfecting the wording. This seems to have first been constituted on July 8, 1645, with Reynolds, Herle, and Newcomen as members, with the stipulation they consult with the Scottish Commissioners before they report any changes to the Assembly. This committee was revised or a new one constituted on December 8, 1645, with Reynolds and Newcomen, Tuckney, and Whitaker as the members; later were added Arrowsmith (June 17, 1646) and Cawdrey (September 1, 1646).

Due to the controversy over the subject matter, another select committee was appointed to deal with the topic of Christian Liberty (WCF 20). On February 16, 1645/46 a committee was ordered made up of: Mr Seaman, Mr Newcomen, Dr Temple, Mr Dury, **Mr Calamy**, **Mr Byfield**, **Mr Ward**, **Mr Cawdry**, **Mr Channell**, Mr Delmy, **Mr Rayner**, **Mr Sedgwick**, Mr Conant, Mr Wilkenson (Van Dixhoorn, 6.254).

#### THE LITERATURE COMPILED FOR THIS SURVEY

This survey uniquely presents a chronological ordering of the work of the Westminster Assembly on the Thirty-Nine Articles, Article 7, the Confession of Faith chapter 19 (Of the Law of God), chapter 20 (Of Christian Liberty or Liberty of Conscience), and Chapter 23 (Of the Civil Magistrate), with extracts from the works of various Westminster divines (or in a few instances, other arguably influential authors), interleaved by date. As noted, the period covered is from the seating of the

Assembly on July 1, 1643 until the publication of a new Confession of Faith with scripture proofs at the end of April, 1647. As a fitting review or final word an extract is given from Francis Cheynell's heretofore overlooked words on the magistrate relative to the judicial law dating to about the end of the Assembly's significant labors. The writings cited in this survey have been assigned a specific date for their first appearance, using for the most part the Thomason dating (see the table on pages 4–5).<sup>8</sup> If Thomason recorded no copy or no exact date, other sources have been consulted to narrow down a date or date range. Public sermons delivered on a specific date and then published, have been listed under the date the sermon was delivered. Works have been chosen as they either employ terms relative to general or natural equity of the judicial law or cover topics relative to the role of the magistrate as outlined in the work of the Assembly.

#### WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY & THE JUDICIAL LAW: I. CHRONOLOGY

JULY 1, 1643

The Westminster Assembly of Divines began meeting on this date.

#### JULY–OCTOBER, 1643—THE REVISION OF THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES

The Divines discussed the judicial law early in the first month of their meeting when they began work on revising the Thirty-nine articles. As the surviving Minutes of the Assembly only date from September 4, 1643, the only record of these early days are John Lightfoot's first journal. This journal was published in the nineteenth century edition of Lightfoot's works; but it is incomplete. At the time the works were prepared for publication the MS of the first journal had been misplaced and a transcript was

8. Between 1640 and 1661 George Thomason collected pamphlets, books and newspapers as they came off the press, usually recording in hand on the title page, the month and day he acquired them. It is the most important collection of material from the time of the English Civil War, and often contains the only surviving copy of a work. The Thomason Tracts are catalogued by date in *Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books, Newspapers, and Manuscripts Relating to the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and Restoration collected by George Thomason, 1640–1661* (London: British Museum, 1908). They are available in *The Thomason Tracts, 1640–1661, Microfilm Edition of the Thomason Collection of the British Library* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1977–1981), and are also available as part of Proquest's Early English Books Online ([www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com)).

used instead. Apparently it was not realized how much redaction had been made in that transcription. Among the things missing are the few notices of discussion of Article 7 pertaining to the judicial law.

The full transcript of Lightfoot's first journal is given in the second volume of Chad Van Dixhoorn's dissertation. Still, the record is frustratingly obscure. The interesting change made to Article 7 must have been made by the second committee to which it was assigned, but the only record by Lightfoot is about debate over some of the Scripture proofs and there is no indication of any debate over the change in the text. Lightfoot also was absent for half a day during the time the article was discussed by the Assembly as a whole. He was on the second standing committee assigned the work on Article 7, but gives no notice regarding the wording change.

The two wordings of the ninth proposition of the seventh article of the Thirty-Nine Articles read:<sup>9</sup>

*Original:* Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, do not bind Christian men; **nor the civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth....**

*Westminster Assembly's Revision.* Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, do not bind Christians; **nor the civil precepts given by Moses, such as were peculiarly fitted to the commonwealth of the Jews, are of necessity to be received in any commonwealth** (Acts 25:9, 10, 25 with Deut. 17:8–13. Rom. 13:1, 5. Tit. 3:1. 1 Pet. 2:13, 14)....

The discussion of the seventh article occurred in the context of the Assembly's concern about the spread of Antinomianism. On July 19, 1643 the Assembly or at

least a portion of the Divines drafted a petition and presented it to the Parliament. The document, *A Copy of the Petition of the Divines of the Assembly, Delivered to Both Houses of Parliament, July 19, 1643* (London, 1643), noted ten reforms requiring urgent redress. The third states, "That the bold venting of corrupt Doctrines, directly contrary to the sacred Law of God, and religious humiliation for sin, which open a wide door to all Libertinism and disobedience to God and man, may be speedily suppressed everywhere, and that in such manner as may give hope that the Church may be no more infected with them." Lightfoot notes on Monday, August 7, 1643, that the "Petition of some of the Divines of the Assembly made to both houses[,] <sup>10</sup>July 19<sup>th</sup>, was this day come forth in Print, & a copy thereof delivered to every one of us." (Van Dixhoorn, Lightfoot, 2.24). Thomason dates his copy as obtained on the fourth of August, the Friday before.

August 2, 1643

John Sedgwick,<sup>11</sup> *Antinomianism Anatomized, or a Glass for the Lawless, Who deny the ruling use of the Moral Law unto Christians under the Gospel* (London, 1643). Wing S2359. Reprinted in *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature*, vol. 4 (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1992).

John Sedgwick was the younger brother of Obadiah Sedgwick. He died in October 1643, and Thomas Case, who served on the first committee of the Westminster Assembly along with Obadiah, preached the funeral sermon. The author adduced article seven of the Thirty-Nine Articles in his preface to the reader, upon which the second committee made report and laid a new petition before the Assembly against Antinomianism on August 9. Again, there was a great concern for the Antinomianism that had reappeared shortly after the start of the period of the civil war, and Sedgwick's is noted as the first work to appear against the error, within a month of the beginning of the Assembly and a couple of weeks after the July 19 petition.<sup>12</sup>

Beloved, When I looked upon the old odious heresy of the Antinomians (condemned by the doctrine of our church, Art. 7.) taking the advantage of the time's distractions newly to revive itself, and to appear with its wonted face, that cannot blush; I thought at first, following St. Augustine (*Cont. Petil.*, lib. 2.), to have said, *Non in venio quomo te refellerem, nisi ut aut jocantem irriderem, aut insanientem dolorem:*

9. Cf. Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (London: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1837; repr. Klock and Klock, 1979) 3:521.

10. Square brackets noting insertions are original in quotations from Van Dixhoorn; braces {} denote insertions by this author in such quotations. The inconsistent punctuation is original. Full titles and publication dates as well as notices on the individuals are given in Van Dixhoorn, Lightfoot, 2.27–28.

11. The license for the work is dated July 27, 1643 and the entry in the Stationers' book is dated August 1, 1643. *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers; From 1640–1708 A.D.* ed. G.E. Briscoe Eyre, 3 vols. (London: Priv. Print, 1913) 1.66.

12. "In 1642 the first Antinomian pamphlet of the revolutionary period was published by John Eaton entitled, *The Honey-combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone....* In 1643, the Westminster Assembly sent a petition with the names of the Antinomian leaders to the House of Commons, and the first anti-Antinomian work was



And so to have passed them over in silence ... (To the Reader).

If the production of the tract had not been encouraged by any of the Divines, it surely did not escape the notice of at least some members of the Assembly, not only because of the familial relationship with one of their members, but because several of their number were among the divinity licensers drafted to approve divinity books by a new law of June 14, 1643, which the Parliament passed to try to prevent scandalous publications. Among the divinity licensers were the Westminster Divines, Thomas Gataker, Callicut [Calilute] Downing, Thomas Temple, Joseph Caryl, **Edmund Calamy**, John Carter of Yorkshire, Charles Herle, and **Obadiah Sedgwick** (Neal, 2.205). Downing, Caryl and Calamy were on the second committee. For this work Calamy was the licenser and following the preface, above the Errata, the following from the licensers appears: “Perlegi Tractatum hunc cui Titulus, *The Anatomie of the Antinomian*, quem quia singulari usui futurum Ecclesiis judico, praelo mandandum censeo. Julii 27, 1643. *Ja. Cranford*. This Book intituled, *The Anatomie of the Antinomian*, I judge very fit to be Printed, and very necessary for these times. *Edm. Calamy*.”

Given these connections to some of the men of the Assembly at a time when they were highly agitated by the Antinomian error, it appears worthwhile to note John Sedgwick’s comment on the judicial law.

#### A Threefold Law.

You must know that there were three sorts of Laws delivered by God to Moses.... 2. Judiciall, which were peculiar Ordinances given by God to Moses, for the well ordering of the Common-wealth of Israel.

This Law concerned the Jews not simply, as men, but as Jews; the Nationall, personall, or particular binding right of this Law rested so in them, that it died with the decay of their Common-wealth: onely the common equity or right hereof remaineth (*i*)<sup>12</sup> as far as it was grounded on the Law of Nature, served directly to confirm any of the Ten Commandments, or to uphold the good of Family, Church, or Common-wealth, it is still in force, and of good use ... (*Antinomianism Anatomized*, 7).

*August 9–15, 1643*

Westminster Assembly. Lightfoot’s Journal. Lightfoot’s record of the discussion of the ninth proposi-

tion of Article 7 is as follows (Van Dixhoorn, Lightfoot, 2.24–32):

Wednesday. Aug. 9<sup>th</sup>.

... The chaireman of the second committee reported upon the 7<sup>th</sup> Article[,]<sup>13</sup> and concluded with a petition in the name of the Committee to the whole Assembly, that they would joyne in an humble Petition to the Parliament that they would call the Antinomian Preachers before the Assembly to give an account of their damnable Doctrine. Our committee removed to Mr Calamies in London.<sup>14</sup>

Thursday. Aug. 10<sup>th</sup>.

... Then was the report of the second committee taken into examination [*fo. 14r*] & these texts passed the votes to proove the severall proposition {sic} concluded in it.

1. The old Testament is not contrary to the New: by Old and N.T. we understand the bookes of both and doctrine contained in them. Act. 26:22–23; 2 Pet. 3:2; Luk. 24:44; Rom. 3:31, 23–24.

2. Both in the old Test. and the New[,] everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ. Gen. 3:15 and 22:18 compared with Gal. 3:8, 14; 1 Cor. 10:2–4; Luk. 1:69–70; Act. 3:24; Es. 53 *per totum* [i.e. Isaiah 53].

Now was the Petition against the Antinomians finished and read and sent away to be presented to the house of Commons[,] & it was this[:]

To the Honourable the House of Commons assembled In Parliament[:] The Humble Petition of the Assembly Of Divines & others.

Sheweth: That the Honourable Houses of Parliament having directed the Assembly of Divines and others now sitting to vindicate & cleere the 10 first Articles of Religion[,] In Pursuit wherof the Petitioners doe find so

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published by John Sedgwick entitled, *Antinomianisme Anatomized*.” Barry H. Howson, *Erroneous and Schismatical Opinions: The Questions of Orthodoxy Regarding the Theology of Hanserd Knollys (c. 1599–1691)*. Studies in the history of Christian thought, v. 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 100.

13. Several of these “(i)” notations occur in this work, including this on page 7, one each on 18, 23, 25 and 39. The last occurs at a citation out of Chrysostom, which indicates side notes were intended for these five places. Apparently the printer never set or the author failed to provide references to the printer in time to set them in the margin.

14. Lightfoot is referring to the second committee upon which he and Calamy served.



many false opinions of dangerous consequence against the 7<sup>th</sup> Article especially, which by Preaching, Printing & by other waies are daily Published & dispersed abroad in very many places of the kingd[ome][,] but chiefly in and about the city of London[,] that unlesse some speedy Course be taken therein by your wisdom and authority, they will soone draw millions of soules to cast off the whole morall law of God, and pervert the most fundamentall [*fo. 14v*] Doctrines of free grace, justification by faith in Christ & of sanctification[,] & to turne all into confusion[,] they having gained many well affected but ignorant people to imbrace their pernicious doctrines[,] whereupon we hold it our duty to give this timely notice therof[,] affixing hereunto the name of some of the principall Authors & fautors of these opinions & bookes, which expressly undermine[,] though in different degrees[,] the morall law of God in all parts thereof, & discourage good Christians from humiliation for sin in these sad times wherein God calls us to that duty above all other.

You would vouchsafe that all such bookes & persons may be speedily examined & dealt withal, as each of them shall deserve[,] in such manner as to your wisdom & justice shall seeme meet, & as appertaineth to the weight of such a cause wherein the glory of God, the good of his church, the soules of the people & the welfare of the kingdome are so much concerned.

And your petitioners shall ever pray.... {ellipse original}

The names of some bookes complained of[:]  
The HonyCombe.  
Christ alone exalted.  
The dangerous dead faith.  
A sermon upon Rev. 3:18.

The names of the persons complained of[:]  
Mr Randall.  
Mr Batte.  
Mr Lancaster.  
Mr Symson of Algate.  
Mr Haydon  
Mr Emerson  
Mr Erbury  
Mr Towne.  
Mr Den.

15. This is essentially though not exactly the original wording of the ninth proposition, which may indicate the proposition came from the committee to the Assembly on this date in the original form, and was changed in the Assembly at this time or some time afterward.

This being finished and sent away we fell to the seventh Artic[le] againe.

[*fo. 15r*] 3. Christ is Mediator between God & man. Dan. 9:17; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 Joh. 2:1.

4. Christ is the onely mediator. 1 Tim. 2:5; Joh. 14:6.

5. Christ is both God & man[:] this is proved in the second Article & therefore omitted here.

6. Christ is mediator as God & man[,] Gal. 4:4–5; Act. 20:28; Philip. 2:7–8.

7. The old fathers did not looke onely for transitory promises. Act. 26:6–7; Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:9; Heb. 11:10, 16, 35.

8. The Ceremoniall law of Moses doth not bind Christians[,] Gal. 4:9–10; Colos. 2:14, 16–17; Heb. 9:9–10.

Here we adjourned till afternoone for it grew farr in the day.

In the afternoone I was forced to be absent, being to preach at the funeral of Mr Du Boies, one of Mr Lamotts servants & partners, who got his death blow in Kent at the composing of the insurrection there[,] so that <what> particulars passed in the Assembly I was not witnesse of: But this was their afternoons worke.

The 9<sup>th</sup> proposition of the Article was read: The Civill precepts of Moses ought not of necessity to be received in any Christian Common wealth.<sup>15</sup> For the prooffe of this were produced Mat. 5:31–32 & 19:7–8, compared with Deut. 24:1. And Mat. 5:38–39 where Christ as it were repealeth the two civill laws of Divorce and Retaliation. And the debating of these two things held them all the afternoone[,] and in conclusion they were waived as improper {i.e. not germane to prove the proposition}.

[*fo. 15v*] Friday. Aug. 11.

... Then fell we upon the 9<sup>th</sup> proposition of the 7<sup>th</sup> Article againe and Act. 25:9–10 compared with Deut. 17:8 to 13 concerning Pauls appealing to a forraigne judicature[,] after very long debate was allowed as a prooffe[,] & so had we spend all the forenoone. In the afternoone our second committee adjourned[,] but our new Committee for Antinomians sate in the checker chamber.

Munday. Aug. 14.

We fell upon the 9<sup>th</sup> proposition of the 7<sup>th</sup> Article againe [and] these scriptures[,] Rom. 13:1; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13–14[,] were voted for the confirmation of it.

10. Prop: No Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called morall. Mat. 5:17 to the end; Mat. 7:12; Rom. 13:8–10; Eph. 6:1–2; Jam. 2:8–12; Rom. 7:25....

Tuesday. Aug. 15.

The first thing agitated this day was, whether there should be any thing more added for explaining this terme[,] “the morall law[,]” than this[:] “by the morall law we understand the 10 Commandments.” Mr Palmer made the quare, & gave very sound reason for an addition which at last we agreed upon to be this, “by the morall law we understand the 10 commandments in their full extent.”

Then fell we upon the 10<sup>th</sup> Article concerning free will....”

August 10, 1643

Jeremiah Burroughs, *An Exposition of the Prophetie of Hosea, Begun in Divers Lectures, Upon the First Three Chapters, at Michaels, Cornhill, London* (London: Printed by W.E. and J.C. for R. Dawlman, 1643) 561. Thomason Tracts, 17:E.98[1]. Thomason records only the month, but the printed license date is “August 10, 1643, Imprimatur, Joseph Caryl.”<sup>16</sup>

Speaking of the abolishing of things abused to idolatry in the Old Testament, Burroughs writes:

But for the opening of this there will be something required by way of answer to an objection. You will say, are not those prohibitions there particular, concerning the Jews and not so fully concerning us? they sometimes are forbidden to take off the gold and silver off the Idols, do such prohibitions concern us in every thing that hath been abused to Idolatry?

For answer, I confess I think we are not bound in every particular circumstance according to those commandments that God required of them: neither do I think that they had been bound if they had not had some express commandment in some things that they did, if they had made use of the silver, or gold of an image, for some civil use, before the express prohibition came

to them, it had been no sin unto them, those things being required of them by some positive Law, and not required in the second commandment further than there is a moral equity in them.

September 30, 1643

Thomas Case, “The Quarrel of the Covenant, with the Pacification of the Quarrel, delivered in three Sermons, on Lev. xxvi.25 and Jer. l.5” (1643); rpt. in *A Collection of Several Remarkable and Valuable Sermons, Speeches and Exhortations, at Renewing and Subscribing the National Covenant ... and ... the Solemn League and Covenant* (Glasgow: George Paton, 1741) 275; 276.

Surely there were in this Multitude, not an inconsiderable Number that were not acquainted with all the Moral Precepts, Judicial Laws, and Ceremonial Statutes, which God commanded the People by the Hand of Moses.

To these Objections I rejoin: *First*, That that Description of the Covenanters in *Nehemiah*, that *they were of Understanding, and Knowledge*, supposeth not a distinct actual Cognizance of every particular Ordinance, Judgment, Statute, and Provision, in all the three Laws, Moral, Judicial, Ceremonial, in every one that took the Covenant....

#### THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

With the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant and the seating of all the Scottish Commissioners, the revision work on the Thirty-Nine Articles was scrapped in October of 1643, and they looked to work on a new confession of faith and other standards as required by the covenant.

December 27, 1643

Alexander Henderson, *A Sermon Preached To the Honorable House of Commons At Their Late Solemn Fast, Wednesday, December 27, 1643* (London: Boſtock, 1643/44). Thomason Tracts, 242:E.81, no. 24.<sup>17</sup>

16. Overly distracting archaic spellings and/or usage in some cases have been modernized in quotations from 17<sup>th</sup> Century works (judicial for judicial, than for then, God’s for Gods, etc).

17. The text is cited from *Fast Sermons Preached Before the English Parliament by the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly 1643–1645* (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, forthcoming) 26–27.

The other reason is from common equity amongst men, which was the ground of that decree (Esther 1:22), *That every man should bear rule in his own house*. The Temple of Jerusalem was the house of God, and now under the gospel the church of Christ is the house of the living God, where he has promised his presence, his face is seen, and he is found of them that seek him, which therefore may be called, *Surely God is in there* (Isa. 45:14), and Jehovah Shammah, *The Lord is there* (Ezek. 48:35). And therefore the Lord should bear rule in his church, and his commandment ought to be obeyed. According to this ground has the Lord given precepts of his holy, just, and good law. For if he be our God, what is more equitable than that we have him and no other for our God, that he direct his own service and worship, that his name be reverently used by us, that we observe the times wherein he will have us to appear before him, and that we do duty to everyone with whom we live under him.

USE ONE. This consideration may be very useful, for it may first serve to be a cure of two great ills in this land. (1) One is of such as conceive that the law of God belongs not to Christians.<sup>18</sup> They may as well say that common and natural equity belongs not to Christians. Is it not written in the heart of man by nature? Is it not confirmed by Jesus Christ? Is it not recommended to Christians by the apostles? Is it not established by faith? Is not the observing of it a testimony of our communion with God? Is not the end of it, love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned? Is it thankfulness to God, because we are delivered from the condemnation, coercion, and rigor of the law, not to acknowledge the obligation of the Law? Shall not the domestics of the house of God observe the commandments of God, or shall they not be grieved when they transgress and observe them not? It is too common an error to turn the grace of God into wantonness.

(2) The other evil is on the other hand when men give themselves to will worship. The one sort neglects the commandments of God, the other adds the commandments of men to the commandments of God....

May 3, 1644

Samuel Rutherford, *Due Right of Presbyteries* (London:

18. John Sedgwick noted Bellarmine's unjust and false charge against Protestants that they placed "Christian liberty in this, that they are altogether freed from obedience and subjection of the Law, so that Moses and his commandments do no way belong to them" (*Antinomianism Anatomized*, 25).

E. Griffin for Richard Whittaker and Andrew Crook, 1644) 70. Wing R2378.

Thomason does not note an exact date when he acquired Rutherford's *Due Right*. However, in a letter dated January 1, 1644, Baillie notes that Rutherford had another large work against the Independents in the press (*Letters and Journals*, 123). The progress was slow. Rutherford seems to have had other pressing duties and could not attend the printers. Later insertions caused odd paginations. This is noted in the Errata: "The Author could not attend the Presse, therefore pardon errors of the Printing; Observe, that the Author was necessitated to make some occasionall addition to the mids of this Treatise which occasioned variation of the Figures of the Pages...." In a later letter sent with one to Robert Blair dated March 26, Baillie writes that he feared none of them could be spared for General Assembly and among the reasons "Mr. Samuel [Rutherford]'s great book against the Independents will be then coming out." And later still, in a letter to William Spang dated April 12, 1644, he notes he thought he had sent both Gillespie's and Rutherford's books against Independency to him but could not remember by whom (165). Gillespie's book would have been *Assertion of the Government* from 1641, and whether Baillie meant Rutherford's *Peaceable Plea* of 1642 or the aforementioned *Due Right* that was on the press, is not clear. *Due Right* surely came off the press after March 15, as Rutherford twice references Mather's and Tompson's reply to Herle (*Due Right*, 315, 410), and this piece was picked up by Thomason on March 15, 1644 (*A Modest and Brotherly Answer to Mr. Charles Herle* [London: H. Overton, 1644] Wing M1274). It seems likely then that Baillie's reference on April 12 was to Rutherford's smaller work of 1642. If the work really came out about the time of the next Scottish General Assembly, that puts the publication date before May 29, 1644. However, another letter seems to confirm a date just before May 3, 1644. Writing to Spang on that date, Baillie writes, "Mr. Samuel has sent yow one of his sermons, and one of his great books which came out the other day...." (175).

It is true, God hath not prescribed judicials to the Christian State, as he did to the Jewish State, because shadows are now gone, when the *body Christ is come*; but God's determination of what is morally lawful in civil Laws, is as particular to us as to them; and the Jewish judicials did no more make the Jewish State the Jewish Church, then it made Aaron to be Moses....

August 13, 1644

Herbert Palmer, *The Glasse of God's Providence* (London: Printed for M. Bell, 1644) 50–52. Wing P235, Thomason copy.

7. And give me leave, I humbly pray, to proceed a little further in a particular or two more specified in our Covenant for Reformation. One is that we may ever remember that Clause in the first Article, *To endeavour the Reformation of Religion in the Kingdoms of England and Ireland in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, according to the Word of God.* You heard somewhat of this in the morning, but I crave your patience that I may add a little to it. Doubtless the Word of GOD *is the only Rule* unto which we *are all tied.* He *only is the Sovereign Law-giver* to appoint how He will have His Church governed. And so He hath left a *sufficient Rule* in His Word *for all Matters of Substance* and of *Necessity*, (though all men do not see it, and though *Circumstantial*s are left to be varied by a Human, *though not carnal*, Prudence) sufficient, I say, to *preserve Truth*, and *Piety*, and *Peace* in His Church, and to *expel the contrary*, by His Blessing. And no Authority of man may presume to reject or over-rule in those things. *Where GOD's Word gives out His Will, Man's business is only to acknowledge, and submit, and call others to do so too.* All man's Authority is to be employed only to promote GOD's according to His Word. And therefore, I beseech you, Let me branch my Exhortation from this into three particulars. 1. Do not in any wise hearken to the suggestions of any that would say, *That there is no Discipline or Government of the Church to be found in the Word.* If any did think so, and yet have Covenanted, as is before expressed, I doubt they will hardly excuse themselves from *having taken GOD's Name in vain* in it. And I conceive not how, if they urge others to covenant in that manner, they do less than *cause them to sin*, by urging to *take GOD's Name in vain*. But however, surely *there was a time when the Church of GOD*, the Church of the *N. T.* had a Government; and that within itself, an *Ecclesiastical* Government, and not merely *Civil*, from the Civil Magistrate, for there was none such that professed Christianity, till 300 years after Christ. *To say, that there was no Government in the Church* (after the Apostles were gone to Heaven, and the Power of Miracles was also ceased) *for so long a time, is to suppose them to be left to an horrible Confusion*, which is exceedingly dishonourable to Christ the LORD and King of His Church, so much as to imagine. And if there were a *Government appointed by Christ*, then certainly *the Apostles* and Evangelists *recorded it in the Word* in the *N. T.* For to imagine it left

only to *Tradition* is as contradictory to Christ's Care of His People, as the supposal of a mere *Anarchy*. (And the very Papiſts themselves offer to pretend *Scripture* for the Pope's claim, and dare not stick wholly to *Tradition*.) And if it were *once* in the Word, then it is there *still* doubtless, for we have *the self same Word* that the first Christians had, and then doubtless *it binds us still*, as well as it *bound the Christians* in those first times. Unless any can show, that it was to continue but so long, but till there should be Christian Magistrates, and then to give place, and be no longer in force. And this general Rule give me leave to assert and commend to your most serious considerations and consciences. [side head: N.B. General Rule About Laws in the Word] *That whatsoever Law of GOD, or Command of His, we find recorded in the Lawbook*, in either of the Volumes of GOD's Statute, the *N. T.* or the Old, *Remains obligatory to us, unless we can prove it to be expired, or repealed.* So it is with the Statute-Law of this Nation, or of any Nation; What I can prove to be *once enacted*, I may urge as *still in force*, unless any one can answer me with a just proof that it is *now out of date*, or *Repealed by a latter Law*. And so men (*I forewarn them*) shall find one day urged upon them, for all those Laws that stand upon Record in GOD's sacred Volumes, however now many take Liberty to reject what they please, without any just ground, that GOD hath discharged them: And the *Denial* or Neglect of this (*in matter of Church-Government*) is *the Rock* that we have *dashed upon* formerly; and therefore we had need to take the more heed of it for time to come.

August 14, 1644

Westminster Assembly. Sess. 265. Confession of Faith.

On this date, "Sir Archibald Johnston, Lord Warriston, arrived from Scotland with a letter from the General Assembly emphasizing 'the general desire of all the nation of Scotland for the hastening of the work in hand.' John Lightfoot added, 'Mr. Henderson also spoke to the same purpose of forwarding and hastening our work. Where upon it was ordered, that the grand committee should meet tomorrow.'<sup>19</sup> This was the impetus which put in motion the preparation of the Confession of Faith which the Scots desired, and which was called for in the Solemn League and Covenant. The Grand Committee gave their report on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August.

19. Richard Bacon, "A Westminster Bibliography Part 8: The Confession of Faith," *The Blue Banner* v. 5. #9–12 September–December (1996) 5.



August 20, 1644

**Westminster Assembly, Session 269. Committee for the Confession of Faith.**

R[esolved]: A committee to joyne with the **commissioners of the church of Scotland** to prepare matter for a joint confession of faith.... Dr Gouge, Mr Gataker, Mr Arrowsmith, Dr Temple, Mr Burroughs, Mr Burgis, Mr Vines, Mr Goodwin, Dr Hoyle or any 5 of them (Van Dixhoorn, 5.238).

August 28, 1644

William Reyner, *Babylon's ruining-earthquake and the restauration of Zion. Delivered in a sermon before the Honourable House of Commons at Margarets Westminster, at their publique fast, August 28. 1644* (London: Printed by T. B. for Samuel Enderby..., 1644) 44–47. Wing R1233A.

Reyner spoke on the topic of preventing idolatry.

Execute judgement for God, every one as far as his power will stretch. First, do judgement upon thine own self for thy sins in all ways of godly revenge, as by Fasting &c. Sing *mercy and judgement to thy family*, as *David Psa. 101*. Do thy best that judgement that hath been turned to wormwood and hemlock, may run down like a mighty stream, in publique; and where thy hand cannot reach a blow, or cast a stone at an idolater, blasphemers, persecutors, &c. let thy heart at least do it. For if a man's consenting to, or approving of an act of injustice may inguilt him, as I may say, in it as it was with the Jews, whose state was ruined for killing Christ and the Prophets, though most part of them had never seen any of them *Mat. 23.37*. why may not a man's executing judgement, with his heart, when he can proceed no further, be accepted, in respect of him, for an act of justice, by him that is pleased both in good and evil actions, to accept the will for the deed?

This duty is principally incumbent upon the Magistrate, who is to execute judgement of the Lord, not arbitrarily as himself pleaseth; but according to the rule of the Word, both for matter and manner.

1. For the matter man hath no warrant either to leave gross and horrid sins unpunished in the committers of them; such as are the ring leaders in idolatry and persecution; nor yet to commute or change the nature of

the punishment. As (by the way) I question, whether a pecuniary mulct [i.e. fine], especially if it be alone, be a proper punishment for a swearer, or blasphemer; but it rather ought to be personal. And here I cannot choose but with grief take notice of a miserable failing in our first Reformation that the Mass priests were suffered still to continue in the places; for he that had said or sung Mass the last Lord's day (and if he were a Preacher had Preached for Popery) if he would but take the new Oath of Supremacy and read the Service-Book this Lord's day, was accounted a sufficient reformist, and admitted to the Ministry. So that of twenty thousand Prelates and Priests at least in *England* and *Ireland*, very few were cast out of their places and scarce any of them (unless it were [Bishop Edmund] Boner) for any thing they had done. Oh woeful! (I confess I think the State did then want due information on that point[]). But this hath been one thing that hath undone the Church, viz. those that have all along and do still infest the Church[.] I mean the wicked and superstitious Clergy being their natural, genuine and proper posterity. Let not such a sin therefore lie any longer upon the State; out (therefore worthy Senators) with all the generation of erroneous Teachers, Altar-worshippers &c. and prophane ones, that have made so many abhor the Offerings of the Lord. If any Object, that the Church will then be destitute of Pastors. I answer: I know no warrant at all that there is to put or keep such Wolves among God's flock. Secondly, that a thousand or two of godly and able men well distributed, if the other were out, might by God's blessing doe more good by far, then now do all the Ministers in *England*.

Nay, I take it to be an absolute duty of them that have power to eject them, (besides, what may be said otherwise) even by the equity and analogy of that Text, *Ezek. 44.10,12,13. The Levites that are gone away far from me, which went astray from me after their idols, they shall even bear their iniquity; because they ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity, therefore have I lifted up my hand against them, saith the Lord God* (i.e. I have sworn against them as most high transgressors, and so will not reverse it) *and they shall bear their iniquity. And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a Priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed.*

Besides punishments should be aggravated according to the aggravation of the sin or sins. The most capital

offender can but be put to death; but when the guilt is transcendently heinous, it ought to be with such circumstances and expressions, as may make it appear that the Judge or Magistrate hath a due sense of that heinousness, and would reach it in the punishment, if it were possible. *All Israel were to stone Achan, and to raise over him a great heap of stones, Jos. 7. 25. 26.* Now if this be so, I wonder what punishment will be found out suitable to the crimes of some malefactors now in question, who have wickedly endeavoured to seduce many whole Kingdoms quite to suppress and extinguish true Religion in them (if not throughout the world) who have proudly trampled upon all laws and estates, being undoubtedly, if all things were laid together, of the greatest if not absolutely the greatest transgressors that ever were since men were upon the earth.

For the Manner, the Word requires that judgement be executed with the spirit of justice or judgement; of which the Text speaks *Isa. 28. 6. In hatred of sin, love of God, Zeal for his glory*, as *Phenehas* did; otherwise, if you punish a Malefactor with death, who hath deserved it instead of taking away an old murder, you add a new and shall be punished accordingly, judgement ought to return to justice, *Psal. 94. 15.*

We have two remarkable examples in the Scriptures worthy to be taken notice of by all that are in authority, of two Kings that were both rewarded and punished for the very same thing.

*Baasha* destroyed *Nadab* and the house of *Jeroboam*, *Jehu* destroyed *Jehoram*, *Jezabel* and the whole house of *Ahab*; both of them had the Kingdom of Israel for their pains; and yet for these very acts, both their Families and Posterities were destroyed. *Baasha* because he killed him, viz. *Nadab*, *1 Kin. 16. 7.* and so *I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, saith the Lord, Hos. 1. 4.* And so it came to pass, as may be seen in both their Histories; What was the cause, was there equity in this? Yes: the thing done was just, to punish these idolatrous Families; but the manner of doing it utterly displeased God, because it was not done in the love of justice, &c. and so in respect of God; but out of spleen and ambition to get the Kingdom: That it was not done by either of them as an act of justice appeared, in that they both continued in the sins of *Jeroboam*, which they seemed to punish, *1 Kin. 15. 34. 2 Kin. 10. 29.* For that Magistrate or man that lives openly in the sin he punisheth in another, cannot do it as an act of justice, and so doth not please God; not to speak of this, that he that punisheth [sic punisheth]

one sin, as suppose theft, because God would have it punished, and so doth it as an act of justice, will also for the very same reason punish another sin as much or more odious to God, as blasphemy, swearing, idolatry, if his arm be strong enough and long enough to reach the Offenders, which very thing may put (I fear) some suspicion sometimes upon our publique justice, in matter of theft, &c. and makes it questionable, whether it be done out of right principles, as because it is sin against God, and punishable by his Word, or only because man is trespassed or no; which if it be so, the very laws herein ought to be reformed.

September 4, 1644

**Westminster Assembly. Session 278.** “Report from the committee for the confession of faith.”

They desire an addition of these persons to the said committee.

Ordered: Mr **Palmer**, Mr Newcomen, Mr Herle, Mr Reynolds, Mr Wilson, Mr Tuckney, Dr Smith, Mr Young, Mr Ley, <Mr **Sedgwick**> be added to the committee for the Confession of Faith (Van Dixhoorn, 5.262).

September 5, 1644

Anthony Burgess, *Judgements removed, where judgement is executed. Or A sermon preached to the Court Marshall in Lawrence Jury, London, the 5th of Septemb. 1644. Being the day of their solemn seeking of the Lord for his blessing upon their proceedings. By Anthony Burges, sometimes fellow of Emmanuell Colledge in Cambridge; now pastor of Sutton-Coldfeild in Warwickshire; a member of the Assembly* (London: Printed by M. Simmons for Thomas Underhill, at the Bible in Woodstreet, 1644) 10–12. Wing B5649.

Now that all these things may be done, take some Theological Rules; which will serve for your Information.

First, Whatsoever punishment comes upon a man by your false judgement, the guilt will return upon your own heads, their blood, their death, their loss will be your sin. And on the other side, the sinful acquitting of any, and the sad effects thereof, will also be reckon'd upon your score; therefore take heed what you do, lest you bring a curse upon yourselves, and upon your posterity also.

Secondly, You are to know, that punishments are of two kinds: First, There are such as are immediately commanded by the Law of God, or are evidenced by the Law of Nature. And here though it be seriously disputed among Divines, Whether a Magistrate may remit that punishment, which by God's Law is prescribed; yet that opinion seems safest, which doth wholly deny it: and the reason is cogent, Because that if the Magistrate should release the punishment which God hath commanded, he should then *remittere de alieno*, release another's right, which is God's; and that is altogether unlawful. Hence it is that our Divines do justly condemn those Sanctuaries and Refuges in holy places, (as they call them) for wilful murder, because here God's Law doth strictly bind them up; As also they condemn the practise of letting Malefactors loose at the time of Easter, which was a custom of the Christian Emperours: So that custom of the Jews loosing a Malefactor, though he were a murderer, is judged unlawful by them. But then in the second place, There are punishments, that are by a mere positive Law; and in these much moderation may be used without any guilt upon the Kingdom; For seeing human Laws are imperfect, and men could not possibly foresee all causes and circumstances, there is a greater latitude left to them; therefore the Rule is, *Summem jus est summa injuria*: So that the punishments which are by positive Laws, must be interpreted according unto the affection and sense of the Law-giver, or of other Laws, or the safety and benefit of the Common-wealth.

Thirdly, In all acts of Judgement, especially those of death, it is safer to incline to Clemency, than to Severity; only this Caution must be taken along; That wherein there is an express command of God, or evident profit of the Common-wealth, there must be Severity. *Saul's* pity in sparing *Agag*, was cruelty to his own self; and that can never be Clemency, which is opposite to true Justice: But yet where neither of those two is, then we ought to incline to Moderation, and Clemency. Howsoever that man is much commended, whose Tribunal was called *Scopulus reorum*, the Rock where all guilty persons were splitted; yet *Nero's* speech hath greater praise, who when he was to subscribe to the death of a man condemned, would say, *Utinam nescirem literas*, I wish I did not know how to write. For there are these things, that may move to Clemency:

First, The Consideration of man's frail nature, how all sin is contained in him; and therefore *Rom. 3.* those words; *Their Feet are swift to shed blood*; which are spoken by

the Psalmist of those enemies of the Church, are applied by the Apostle to every particular man by nature.

Secondly, The Corrigibility and relenting of the Offender, may much procure Clemency: It is true indeed that herein Spiritual Punishments differ from Civil; In spiritual, if the party repent, they ought not to inflict them; but in Civil, the Magistrate he doth it howsoever, because he looks at the good of the Common-wealth; yet where men are not straightend by the command of God, if they do see Corrigibility in persons offending, they have the greater liberty for their Clemency. And upon this ground it was, that *Austin* did intercede to the Civil Magistrates for offenders; *Intercedimus, etsi non pro sceleratis scelerati, tamen pro peccatoribus peccatores* [Cf. Augustine, Epistle 153 in Migne, PL 33.659].

Thirdly, There is a great difference between Principals, and those that are Accessories; between those that were the cause of the Stream, and those that are carried away by it.

Lastly, Man's Law useth to make a great difference between those that actually have wrought mischief to the Common-wealth, and those that have been in the preparations and endeavours of it only.

The fourth and last Rule is;

That in a judicial process, though the Law may condemn a man, yet a Judge ought not to go against his own Conscience, if he have just grounds for the acquitting of the man condemned. It is true, all the Popish Casuists almost, determine, That he must proceed to Condemnation, otherwise (say they) a door will be left open to all Judges, to pretend Conscience, as they please, and so no justice will be done; therefore the Rule is, *Illud tantum Judex novit quod novit judicialiter*, That only the Judge knows, which he knows as a Judge: But this cannot stand with Scripture, which requires, that *whatsoever we do, should be done out of Faith*, that is, a Conscience and persuasion of the thing to be lawful. And there are other remedies for a Judge in this case; As, to appeal to the Supreme, or to delay and respite, or to lay down his Commission, if he cannot help the innocent otherwise.

September 5, 1644

Thomas Case, *Jehoshaphat's caveat to his judges. Delivered in a sermon before the Honourable the commissioners for the court martiall, by vertue of an ordinance*

of Parliament dated the 17th of August 1644 (London: Felix Kingston for Luke Fawn, 1644) 14–21. Wing C832.

The ordinance was for instituting martial law in London. It appears the martial court called for a fast and for preaching before them for September 5, and Case and Anthony Burgess both preached on the occasion. The order to print and an official thanks from the court to Case is dated September 10, 1644. It would seem that Burgess is alluded to in the passage below as addressing the general rules whereof Case does not go over the same ground again.

But thirdly, Eye your *Rule*. In this I might be large, but that I was happily prevented by my learned and Reverend Brother that began the work. What therefore I shall offer unto you by way of direction shall be that only which lies before you in the text. Where first you have one *General rule* implied; and then three *particular rules* or directions expressed.

The General is lodged in these words, *For with the Lord our God there is no*, &c. Implying that Judges ought to have their *eyes fix't upon God*, and to make *him* their *pattern* in the managing of their judicature; to do, and judge, and behave themselves in the execution of their office, as they see God himself doth. And let this be your directory in your dispensations Right Honourable and beloved, Set up that Supreme Judge of heaven and earth for your pattern.

Whether you execute judgement, or

Whether you *show mercy*, do both according to the Pattern in the Mount.

Be *severe*, as your *heavenly Father* is severe; and

Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful.

First imitate God in your severity and execution of judgement. And amongst the rest I find *three Cases* wherein God shows no mercy: only let me Caution this by the way; that when I say, *Wherein God shows no mercy*, I do not look upon God as sitting upon his own *immediate Throne* of divine Judicature as the Supreme Judge of quick and dead, judging to, or saving from, eternal death and damnation as he pleaseth: But I look upon God as sitting upon these inferior thrones of Judicature amongst his Delegates and Deputie-Gods (as he is described, *Psal. 82.1. God standeth in the congregation*

*of the mighty, he judgeth among the Gods*,) there directing and commanding what sentence they shall give, whither of life or death; when they shall spare, and when they shall strike: for such is the care and wise providence of God for the *good security and peace of his Church*; Yea even of human *societies and Associations*; that even where sometimes he useth his *Prerogative Royal* for pardon of the *sin against himself*, and remitting the everlasting punishment, he yet commandeth his *Deputies and Vicegerents* not to forgive the *trepass*, whether it be against a *private person* or a *publique State*; but to execute the proportionable penalties; as *substance* for *substance*, *life* for *life*, and *blood* for *blood* without showing any mercy at all. As in the case of murder.... [Num. 35: 31, 33; Deut. 31:23 cited].

And secondly, *in terrorem* for the preventing of like wickedness and mischief, that others may hear and fear and from henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

This Caution premised I say among others I find these three Cases wherein God commands Judges not to spare the guilty person.

The first is the Case of *wilful murder*.... [Deut. 19:11–13; Exo. 21.14 cited; Case goes on to include attempted murder in this category].

The Second Case wherein God would have Judges show no Mercy, is where the ground of the quarrel is laid in irreconcilable principles of enmity against the true Religion, and the Government of Jesus Christ. *Those mine enemies that would not have me reign over them, bring them hither and slay them before me* [Luke 19:27]; Those men that rise up in cursed practices to change Religion, to bring Idolatry and false worship; to depose Christ from his Throne, and set up Antichrist in his place: And rather than fail of their project, stick not to subvert Laws, disturb peace, set whole Kingdoms into a combustion, imbrue their hands in, and make their swords drunk with, innocent blood, &c. Such a generation Christ hath doomed to execution: *Those mine enemies that would not have me reign over them: Bring them hither and slay them before me*.

And this is nothing but *Law* turned into *Gospel-language*: for so it was provided under the Law by God himself, *Deut. 13.6.7.8.9.10 verses*....

A third Case wherein God would have his Deputies



show no Mercy is, That the *Principal be not spared when the Accessory suffers*. This though the very light of Nature doth dictate, (& *Vox natura vox Dei*; Natures voice is the voice of God, God being the God of Nature) yet God hath taken distinct and special order for it, See *Numbers 25.4.5* where God commanding Execution of all the people that were joined to *Baal-Peor*, gives special charge first for the cutting off of the prime Delinquents.... And let not *Seducers* escape, where the *Seduced* shall happily feel the keen edge of the sword of Justice: for let me say thus much to you; if God have enjoined this severity to his Deputies when they have but judged between person and person; what severity will God expect from you in these Cases, who are called this day to Judge for God, between the sons of Belial, bloody Rebels, and an Whole Church and State now *resisting unto blood* for Reformation and so dangerously languishing under those wounds which these unnatural Parricides have made upon her....

And secondly imitate God in your mercy.

Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful.

And herein I do not find the Cases so many, as the provision famous, when God would have mercy used. The great known Case wherein God would have mercy shown to the guilty, was in *point of ignorance* and *im-maliciousness*. He that said, *Hee that sheds mans blood, by man shall his blood be shed*, Commanded notwithstanding the children of Israel to build themselves *Cities of Refuge*; that the Man-slayer who *killed his neighbour ignorantly, whom he hated not in times past* might flee thither, and be *rescued from the fury and vengeance of the Avenger of blood*. [Gen. 9.6; Deut. 19.1–4ff].

September 28, 1644

Anthony Burgess, *The Magistrate's Commission from Heaven. A sermon at the Election of the Lord Mayor* (London: Printed by G. Miller for T. Underhill, 1644) 8. Wing B5650.

Now in the next place, I come to show you the extent of their [Magistrates'] power.

First it extendeth, unto the reforming, and to the redressing, of all the corruptions that creep into the Church of God, and into the Worship of God: this the Magistrate's power reaches unto, in *Deut. 23*. And so we

read of *Josias, Moses, Hezekiah*, all these worthy Governors, their power did reach to the redressing of the abuses that were in the Church of God, when Idolatry and superstition came in: Why the Magistrates had power then; and should not have power now, there can no solid reason be given. Indeed the manner of the punishment, belonging to God's Judicial Law, that may be altered, but their duty to preserve the Worship of God, which floweth from the Moral Law, cannot cease:....

October 30, 1644

[Anonymous] George Gillespie, *A Late Dialogue betwixt a Civilian and a Divine concerning the present condition of the Church of England* (London: Printed for Robert Bosstock..., 1644) 18; Wing G753. New edition in *The Anonymous Writings of George Gillespie*, (Naphtali Press, 2008) 122–123.

Though the Jewish Church and Common wealth were for the most part not different materially, the same men being members of both, even as in all Christian Republics, yet they were formally different one from another, in regard of distinct Acts, Laws, Courts, Officers, Censures, and Administrations. For, 1. The Ceremonial law given was given to them as a Church, the Judicial law given to them as a State.

A little later in this tract Gillespie discussed liberty of conscience and the coercive power of the civil magistrate (*Anonymous Writings*, 132–134).

Civilian.

But tell me now your opinion of another matter, and that is concerning liberty of conscience, and toleration of heretics and sectaries, for which there are so many books written of late, and so few against it. I do not know what you will pronounce of it, from the principles of your profession, but I believe that, as in Germany, France, Holland, Poland, yea under the Turkish tyranny, contrary religions, and opposite professions and practices, have been, and are, tolerated upon State principles; so it shall be England's unhappiness, though not to choose, yet to be necessitated to grant such toleration, for avoiding a rupture in the kingdom, and for preserving a union against the common enemy.

Divine.

This question about the toleration of those whose way is different from the common rule, which shall

be established, must be both stated and resolved, *cum erano* [sic *grano*] *salis*. We must remember to distinguish persons from corporations or churches, and both these from errors. Again, to distinguish persons, whether godly and gracious, or loose and libertine, whether moderate and peaceable, or factious and turbulent; whether such as have deserved well of the public, or such as have done either no service or disservice. To distinguish corporation, whether the question be of such only as have a present existence, or of all who shall join to such a way afterward. To distinguish errors, whether practical or doctrinal only, whether fundamental, or circumstantial, or neither of the two. To distinguish toleration, whether absolute, or hypothetical and conditional, whether anywhere, or in some few certain places only, whether indefinite and general, or limited and bounded, how far and how much; whether such toleration as may stand with the Solemn League and Covenant, or such as is inconsistent therewith; whether such as is profitable for the public peace, or such as is apparently destructive thereto.

These and the like particulars I do not intend to fall upon at this instant. Only this I say, that to open a wide door, and to grant an unbounded liberty unto all sorts of heretics and sectaries (which is the thing that *The Good Samaritan*, and *John the Baptist*, *The Bloody Tenet*, and others of that kind do plead for), it is inconsistent with the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms, by which we are obliged to endeavor the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, superstition, heresy, and schism; lest we partake in other men's sins, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues; so it is, in the own nature of it, an error so pernicious, so abominable, so monstrous, that it makes all learned men to stand amazed, and taken with horror, in so much that they cannot at first gather their thoughts to put pen to paper against it. I know this liberty and toleration was maintained by the Donatists of old, and by the Socinians, Arminians, and Anabaptists of late; but it has been constantly opposed by all that were sound and orthodox, both ancient and modern, who have asserted the lawful use of a coercive power against those things, whereby (though under pretence of conscience) God is openly dishonored, souls ensnared and destroyed, faith and piety subverted and overthrown; and further, the compelling of the outward man, though not to the practice of things indifferent (which compulsion I do not allow), yet to the practice of necessary duties, and to the external use of means and ordinances, by which through the blessing of God, men's hearts and consciences may

be savingly affected and wrought upon. And I beseech you what else means Asa's covenant: *That whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman*. And what else means Josiah's covenant, whereof it is said, *He caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it*. And what else is that in Ezra, that whosoever would not come to Jerusalem to make a covenant, and to put away strange wives, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away, that is, excommunicated. And what else is that other act of Josiah in putting down the priests of the high places. And what say you to the law of stoning those who did entice the people to turn out of the way wherein the Lord commanded them to walk, saying, Let us go after other Gods to serve them?

Civilian.

I would rather hear some arguments from the New Testament, for I doubt [*fear*] these from the Old Testament shall be more subject to exception.

Divine.

To me it is plain that these things do as much concern us now, as the Jews of old, which whosoever denies, must show that, either we may take no rules nor patterns from the Old Testament; or that the foresaid laws and practices were not intended by the Holy Ghost to bind us (as other things in the Old Testament do); but were ceremonial and typical, intended to bind the Jews only. Mr. Williams in his *Bloody Tenet* (though I do not remember that any where he answers to those particular passages which I have cited, yet), perceiving that such arguments from the Old Testament cannot be taken off without this answer, that all these were typical and figurative; he therefore goes much upon that ground, and so devises more types and figures in the Old Testament than ever anybody did before him, and pleases himself with such fancies and conjectures therein as, I dare say, will satisfy no indifferent reader; and in effect making void by his principles all arguments from the Old Testament, so that we may not from the examples of the godly kings of Judah, teach Christian magistrates what their duty is; nor argue thus, God commanded that the kings of Judah should have a copy of the book of the law by them, and read therein, that they should not multiply wives, etc. (Deut. 17:17, 18:19); therefore Christian princes should search the scriptures, should not multiply wives, etc. or thus. The priests and Levites had sufficient maintenance; therefore so should the ministers of

the goſpel thus. The Jews were commanded to reſt from all ſervile labor on the ſabbath day; therefore ſo ſhould Chriſtians on the Lord's day. Or thus: Wars were lawful in the Old Teſtament; therefore they are lawful ſtill. Or the like. All theſe ſhall be caſt aſide, upon this ground: they were typical, therefore no pattern to us.

But becauſe you deſire an argument from the New Teſtament, I will convince your judgment from thence alſo....

December 25, 1644

Edmund Calamy, *An Indictment againſt England becauſe of her ſelfe-murdering diviſions: together with an exhortation to an England-preferving unity and concord. Preſented in a ſermon preached before the Right Honourable Houſe of Lords in the Abby church at Weſtmiſter; at the late ſolemne faſt, December 25. 1644* (London: Printed by I. L. for Chriſtopher Meredith, 1645) 37–38. Wing C256.

Laſtly, It is your *duty* (Right Honourable) whom God hath beſtowed with great power, to ſuppreſs theſe diviſions and differences in Religion by your *Civil Authority*, as far as you are able, leſt you be *accessory* to them. For God hath made you *Cuſtodes utriuſque tabulae*, Keepers not of the ſecond Table only, (as ſome fondly imagine) but of the firſt Table alſo, and not only Keepers, but *Vindices utriuſq; Tabulae*, Punishers alſo of thoſe that tranſgreſs againſt either of them. For you are the *Ministers of God for good*, and *Revengeurs to execute wrath upon him that doth evil*. Rom. 13. 4. And God hath deputed you for the *puniſhment of evil doers, and for the praiſe of them that do well*. 1 Pet. 2. 19.... There are ſome that would blot out half your *Commiſſion*, and reſtrain this *Good* and *evil* to civil good and to evils only againſt men. But this is againſt that General Rule, *Non eſt diſtinguendum ubi lex non diſtinguit*. Where the Law doth not diſtinguiſh, there muſt not we diſtinguiſh. Tell me I beſeech you, *Shall it be lawful for Magiſtrates to puniſh thoſe that deſtroy men's bodies, but not thoſe that deſtroy men's ſouls*? Shall they be blamed for ſuffering men to draw people away from *obedience* to the Laws of the Land and to themſelves, and not alſo for ſuffering men

to draw away people from the truth of the Goſpel, and from the ways of God, ſuch as *Hymenaeus* and *Philetus*, who overthrow the faith of ſome, and their words eat as a Canker? Shall Chriſtian Magiſtrates take up the *Maxime of Tiberius*, *Decorum iniurias Diis curae eſſe*? Let God himſelf take care to vindicate himſelf from injuries committed againſt God? As for me, I will (juſt like *Gallio*) take care of none of theſe things. Can Chriſtian ears endure ſuch language? Doth not God prophecy, *Iſaiah* 49. 23. That in the New Teſtament *Kings ſhall be our nursing Fathers, and Queens our nursing Mothers*? And how can a Chriſtian Magiſtrate diſcharge that duty aright if he hath not power from God to puniſh thoſe that would poiſon the ſouls of his *weak children* with heresies, and ſoul-deſtroying opinions? I do not deny, but that there is great wiſdom to be obſerved by Magiſtrates in diſtinguiſhing between *persons and persons*, between *errors and errors*. Some *persons* are pious and peaceable, others turbulent and furious. Some errors are ſuch, as *ſubvert the faith, and deſtroy the power of Godlineſſ*: others are of a leſſer nature, which may conſiſt with the power of Godlineſſ, and with an unity in the faith. But that which I now ſpeak againſt, is that unbounded liberty that is pleaded for in divers books lately written, which hold forth this prodigious Tenent. *That every man is to be ſuffered to have the liberty of his conſcience, be it never ſo Heretical or Idolatrical*. This overthroweth all the power of the Magiſtrate in puniſhing heresy, blaſphemy, Idolatry, and is contrary to many plain Texts of the Old Teſtament, and to thoſe of the New Teſtament above mentioned (2 Chron. 15:13; 2 Chron 34:32; Ezra 10:8; Deut. 13:5–6; 2 Kings 23:1).

Object. Will you allow the Magiſtrate to Tyrannize over men's conſciences.

Anſw. By no means. But I believe it is the Duty of Magiſtrates to keep men from infecting their Subjects with ſoul-deſtroying errors. If thou haſt an Heretical opinion, have it to thy ſelf, and the Magiſtrate will not; nay, cannot meddle with thy private conſcience. But if thou laboureſt to infect others with thy grace-deſtroying opinions. I doubt not but the Magiſtrate is bound to keep thee from ſpreading thy infection to the undoing of the ſouls of his Subjects....

January 8, 1644/45

[Anonymous],<sup>20</sup> George Gillespie, *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Chriſtian Liberty* (1645) Wing G765;

20. Some have raiſed needleſſ doubt over whether Gillespie is the actual author of *Wholesome Severity*. Internal evidences ſupports his authorſhip, and attestation by his couſin confirms that he wrote both it and *Dialogue Betwixt a Civilian and a Divine*. See Chris Coldwell, "Whose Severity? Was George Gillespie the Author of *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Chriſtian Liberty*?" in *The Anonymous Writings of George Gillespie* (Naphtali Preſs, 2008).

new edition printed in *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature* 4 (Dallas, Tex: Naphtali Press, 1991) 181–183; 193–195. Cited from *The Anonymous Writings of George Gillespie* (Naphtali Press, 2008) 52–58; 76; 78–79. The footnotes (here in 21–30 ) were translated for the first time for the Naphtali Press edition.

The third opinion [of liberty of conscience] is that the Magistrate may and ought to exercise his coercive power, in suppressing and punishing heretics and sectaries, less or more, according as the nature and degree of the error, schism, obstinacy, and danger of seducing others, requires. This as it was the judgment of the orthodox ancients (*vide Optati opera*, edit. Al. Bašpin, p. 204, 215),<sup>21</sup> so it is followed by our soundest Protestant writers; most largely by Beza against Bellius and Monfortius, in a peculiar treatise, *De Hæreticis à Magistratu Puniendis*.<sup>22</sup> And though Gerhard, Brochmand,<sup>23</sup> and other Lutheran writers, make a controversy where they need not, alleging that the Calvinists (so nicknamed) hold as the Papists do, that all heretics without distinction are to be put to death: the truth is, they themselves say as much as either Calvin or Beza, or any other whom they take for adversaries in this question, that is, that heretics are to be punished by mulcts [*finēs*], imprisonments, banishments, and if they be gross idolaters or blasphemers, and seducers of others, then to be put to death. What is it else that Calvin teaches, when he distinguishes three kinds of errors: some to be tolerated with a spirit of meekness, and such as ought not to separate brethren; others not to be tolerated, but to be suppressed with a certain degree of severity; a third sort so abominable and pestiferous, that they are to be cut off by the highest punishment?

And lest it be thought that this is but the opinion of some few, that the magistrate ought thus by a strong hand, and by civil punishments suppress heretics and sectaries: let it be observed what is held forth and professed concerning this business, by the Reformed Churches in their public confessions of faith....

II. The Arguments whereby this third or middle opinion is confirmed (that we may not build upon human authority) are these.

1. First, the law (Deut. 13:6–9), concerning the stoning and killing of him, who shall secretly entice people, saying, “Let us go after other gods.” If it is said, that this law did bind the Jews only, and is not moral or perpetual, I answer, Jacobus Acontius,<sup>24</sup> though he is of another

opinion concerning this question than I am, yet he candidly and freely confesses that he sees nothing in that law which does not belong to the New Testament, as

21. [Sancti Optati Milevitani Opera / cum observationibus et notis reverendissimi D.D. Gabrielis Albaspinæi Aurelianensis Episcopi. Accesserunt eiusdem De veteribus ecclesiae ritibus observationum libri duo ac notae in concilium eliberitanum & quosdam alios antiquos canones & aliquot Tertulliani libros (Paris, 1631).]

22. [Theodore Beza, *De hæreticis a ciuili Magistratu puniendis Libellus, aduersus Martini Bellii farraginem, & nouum Academicorum sectam* (1554).]

23. Brochmand., *de Magistr. Polit.*, [On the Political Magistrate,] ch. 2, question 3, disputation 2. We admit that those who have fallen into idolatry and lead others astray ought to be killed. [Farther on] We easily grant that heretics who have been ordered to leave the territory of the prince, but refuse to comply, can suffer capital punishment. [Farther on] We feel that heretics should be censured and punished just as those who commit forgery are, although not with death, but by imprisonment, exile, and excommunication. See Calvin's *Refutation of the Errors of M. Servetus*, p. 694, between sections. We know that there are three levels of errors, and we grant that some should be pardoned, while for others a moderate censure is sufficient, and that only notorious impiety should suffer capital punishment. Paul quite often exhorts believers to bear with one another even if there is disagreement among them, namely if some petty superstition and ignorance of simple matters occupied their minds: that they should be eager to correct it with patience rather than intemperately boil over in their eagerness to defend themselves against it. Even though the second level of error deserves censure, a moderate severity should be employed, only to the effect that the wickedness and arrogance of such as those who want to disturb the unity of the faith are not encouraged in it by indulgence. But in the event that religion is being torn away from its foundations, that abominable blasphemies are being brought forth against God, that souls are being carried off to destruction by unrighteous and destructive dogma, and finally when open rebellion against the only God and against true doctrine is being attempted, it is necessary to descend to that very last of remedies, lest the deadly poison creep farther. This Treatise is approved by Bullinger in an epistle to Calvin. See *Letters to Calvin* p. 197, where he addeth: A little while ago D. Urbanus Regius, together with all the ministers of the Church of Luneburg, and also with the published Germanic book, displayed to heretics the coercion of both divine and human law. Concerning moderation he says after: I know you are not cruel by nature, and you do not approve of any atrocity: who is unaware that this is the way to which we must adhere? But I do not see how Servetus of Lerna, a heretic and a thoroughly stubborn man, could have been spared. When Monfort had stated the question thus: There are certain people who want all heretics killed, that is, those who disagree with them, etc. Beza answers him: Then if he can, let him give the name of one who either is for the killing of all heretics, or is so pleased with himself that he would hold all others who see things differently to be heretics.

24. [Jacobus Acontius, *Stratagematum Satanæ* (1631, 1st Edition, Basel, 1565; Translation, *Satan's Stratagems*, 1648).] Book 3, pp. 150–151. [But there are those who think that the law only flourished up to the time of Christ, etc. And that corporal punishment is a type of eternal damnation, etc. Indeed this conjecture does not seem impertinent to me, so much so that I could not find a reason by which it can be thrown out, unless its reasoning can be thwarted by the law as a given. For it is in the law that all Israel should hear and fear, and after this nothing on the order of that conjecture is admitted. Certainly this reasoning is always flourishing.]



well as the Old; for, he says, the reason and ground of the law, the use and end of it, is moral and perpetual (v. 11): *All Israel shall hear and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness, as this is among you*. But yet, says Acontius, this law does not concern heretics, who believe and teach errors concerning the true God or his worship; but only apostates who fall away to other gods. In this I shall not much contend with him;<sup>25</sup> only thus far, if apostates are to be stoned and killed according to that law, then surely seducing heretics are also to receive their measure and proportion of punishment. The moral equity of the law requires this much at least, that if we compare heresy and apostasy together, look how much less the evil of sin is in heresy, so much and no more is to be remitted of the evil of punishment, especially the danger of contagion and seduction, being as much or rather more in heresy than in apostasy; yea, that which is called heresy being oftentimes a real following after other gods. But the Law (Deut. 13), for punishing with death, as well whole cities as particular persons, for falling away to other gods, is not the only law for punishing even capitally gross sins against the first table. See Ex. 22:20, *He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed*. Ex. 31:14, *Every one that defileth the sabbath, shall be put to death*. Lev. 24:16, *And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death*. Deut. 17:2–5, *If there be found among you within any of thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the Lord thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods and worshipped them.... Thou shalt bring forth that man or that woman unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shall stone them with stones till they die*.

It will be asked, “But how does it appear that these or any other judicial laws of Moses do at all appertain to us, as rules to guide us in like cases?” I shall wish him who scruples this, to read Piscator’s appendix to his observations upon the 21–23 chapters of Exodus,<sup>26</sup> where he excellently disputes this question, whether the Christian

Magistrate is bound to observe the judicial laws of Moses, as well as the Jewish Magistrate was. He answers by the common distinction, he is obliged to those things in the judicial law which are unchangeable, and common to all nations: but not to those things which are mutable, or proper to the Jewish Republic. But then he explains this distinction, that by things mutable, and proper to the Jews, he understands the emancipation of an Hebrew servant or handmaid in the seventh year, a man’s marrying his brother’s wife and raising up seed to his brother, the forgiving of debts at the Jubilee, marrying with one of the same tribe, and if there be any other like to these; also ceremonial trespasses, as touching a dead body, etc. But things immutable, and common to all nations, are the laws concerning moral trespass, sins against the moral law, as murder, adultery, theft, enticing away from God, blasphemy, striking of parents. Now that the Christian Magistrate is bound to observe these judicial laws of Moses, which appoint the punishments of sins against the moral law, he proves by these reasons.

(1) If it were not so, then it is free and arbitrary to the Magistrate to appoint what punishments he pleases. But this is not arbitrary to him, *for he is the minister of God*, (Rom. 13:4) and *the judgment is the Lord’s* (Deut. 1:7; 2 Chron. 19:6). And if the Magistrate is *keeper of both tables*, he must keep them in such manner as God has delivered them to him.

(2) Christ’s words (Matt. 5:17), *Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill*, are comprehensive of the judicial law, it being a part of the law of Moses. Now he could not fulfill the judicial law, except either by his practice, or by teaching others still to observe it; not by his own practice, for he would not condemn the adulteress (Jn. 8:11), nor divide the inheritance (Luke 12:13–14). Therefore it must be by his doctrine for our observing it.

(3) If Christ in his sermon (Matt. 5), would teach that the moral law belongs to us Christians, in so much as he vindicates it from the false glosses of the scribes and Pharisees; then he meant to hold forth the judicial law concerning moral trespasses as belonging unto us also; for he vindicates and interprets the judicial law, as well as the moral (Matt. 5:38), *An eye for an eye*, etc.

(4) If God would have the moral law transmitted from the Jewish people to the Christian people; then he would also have the judicial laws transmitted from the Jewish

25. Pelargus on Deuteronomy 13, [Christopher Pelargus, *In Deuteronomium sacram; sive Quintum librum Mosis commentarius Christophori Pelargi...* (Lipsiae, 1608). *Those who are blasphemers, who openly disfigure the church and the state, and who are seditious, incur deserved penalties: the rest are to be corrected and coerced by other means, as in the example of the Emperor Theodosius and Justinian in book 5 of Socrates, chapter 10: Theodosius threw those who believed otherwise out of the city.*]

26. [Johannes Piscator (Fischer), *Commentarii in omnes libros Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (Herbornae, 1638–1646).]

Magistrate to the Christian Magistrate: there being the same reason of immutability in the punishments, which is in the offenses. Idolatry and adultery displease God now as much as then; and theft displeases God now no more than before.

(5.) *Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning* (Rom. 15:4), and what shall the Christian Magistrate learn more from those judicial laws, but the will of God to be his rule in like cases? The ceremonial law was written for our learning, that we might know the fulfilling of all those types, but the judicial law was not typical.

(6.) *Do all to the glory of God* (1 Cor. 10:31; Matt. 5:16). How shall Christian Magistrates glorify God more than by observing God's own laws, as most just, and such as they cannot make better?

(7.) *Whatsoever is not of faith is sin* (Rom. 14:23). Now when the Christian Magistrate punishes sins against the moral law, if he does this in faith and in assurance of pleasing God, he must have his assurance from the Word of God, for faith can build upon no other foundation; it is the Word which must assure the conscience: God has commanded such a thing, therefore it is my duty to do it; God has not forbidden such a thing; therefore I am free to do it. But the will of God concerning civil justice and punishments is no where so fully and clearly revealed as in the judicial law of Moses. This therefore must be the surest prop and stay to the conscience of the Christian Magistrate.

These are not my reasons (if it be not a word or two added by way of explaining and strengthening), but the substance of Piscator's reasons. Unto which I add, 1. Though we have clear and full scriptures in the New Testament for abolishing the ceremonial law, yet we nowhere read in all the New Testament of the abolishing of the judicial law, so far as it did concern the punishing of sins against the moral law, of which heresy and seducing of souls is one, and a great one. Once God did reveal his will for punishing those sins by such and such punishments. He who will hold that the Christian Magistrate is not bound to inflict such punishments for such sins, is bound to prove that those former laws of God are abolished, and to show some Scripture for it.

2. That judicial law for having two or three witnesses in judgment (Deut. 19:15; Heb. 10:28), is transferred even with an obligation to us Christians, and it concerns

all judgment, as well ecclesiastical as civil (Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1), and some other particulars might be instanced, in which are pressed and enforced from the judicial law, by some who yet mind not the obligation of it. To conclude therefore this point, though other judicial or forensical laws concerning the punishments of sins against the moral law may, yea, must be allowed of in Christian Republics and Kingdoms; provided always, they are not contrary or contradictory to God's own judicial laws; yet I fear not to hold with Junius, *De Politicæ Mosis*,<sup>27</sup> that he who was punishable by death under the judicial law, is punishable by death still; and he who was not punished by death then, is not to be punished by death now. And so much for the first argument from the Law of God....

IV. But now after all this debate upon the question in hand, and after all these arguments for the affirmative and for the negative, some will happily desire and expect some further modification and explanation of the matter in certain positive conclusions or distinguishing assertions. For whose satisfaction I say, First, there are five sorts of toleration proceeding from five different principles. 1. Of *indifferency*. 2. Of *policy*. 3. Of *pretended conscience* and *equity*. 4. Of *necessity*. 5. Of *charity*....

The fifth and last is that kind of toleration whereby the Magistrate when it is in the power of his hand to punish and extirpate, yet having to do with such of whom there is good hope either of reducing them by convincing their judgments, or of uniting them to the Church by a safe accommodation of differences, he grants them a *supersedeas* [forbearance]; or though there be no such ground of hope concerning them,<sup>28</sup> yet while he might crush them with the foot of power, in Christian piety and moderation, he forbears so far as may not be destructive to the peace and right government of the Church, using his coercive power with such a mixture of mercy as creates no mischief to the rest of the Church. I speak not only of bearing with those who are weak in faith (Rom. 15:1), but of sparing

27. [Franciscus Junius (1545–1602), *De Politicæ Mosis Observatione* (Leyden, 1593). Also, *Francisci Ivnii Bitvrigis, Sacrarvm Literarvm in Academia heidelbergensi et LvGdvno-Batava Professoris Ervditissimi, Opera Theologica...* (Genevae, 1607) *De Politicæ Mosis, ilbellus*, cap. vi, 1517–1520.] A translation of the portion of Junius which Gillespie cites is given in *The Anonymous Writings of George Gillespie* (Naphtali Press, 2008) 40–46.

28. Calvin, *Refutation of the Errors of M. Servetus*. [Therefore prudence and moderation are to be held to in this area, lest either for an unknown reason the princes boil over in commotion, or rush to spill blood in monstrous rage.]

even those who have perverted the faith, so far as the word of God and rules of Christian moderation would have severity tempered with mercy: that is (as has been said) so far as is not destructive to the Church's peace, nor shakes the foundations of the established form of church government, and no further; these last two kinds of toleration are allowed; the first three are wholly condemned.

My *second* distinction is concerning the punishments inflicted by the Magistrate upon heretics. They are either *exterminative*, or *medicinal*.<sup>29</sup> Such as blaspheme God or Jesus Christ, or who shall fall away themselves and seduce others to idolatry, ought to be utterly cut off according to the law of God. But as for other heretics, they are to be chastened with medicinal punishments as mulcts [*finēs; forfeiture*], imprisonments, banishment, by which, through God's blessing, they may be humbled, ashamed, and reduced. Not that I think the proper end of civil and coercive punishments to be the conversion and salvation of the delinquent (which is the end of church censures and of excommunication itself), but that the right method of proceeding does require that the Magistrate inflict the smaller punishments first, that there may be place for the offenders bringing forth of fruits worthy of repentance, and he may be at least reduced to external order and obedience, being persuaded by the terror of civil power,

29. Bullinger, Decad. 2, serm. 8, p. 70. [Pertaining to those who are in error, and who try to bring others into error along with them and keep hold of them, blasphemers and those who agitate themselves into working for the subversion of the churches can be rightly cut off. Not everyone, however, who is in error should instantly be brought to capital punishment. And what can be cured by threats and rebukes ought not to be disposed of and punished by harsher means. In any case, the moderate is the best. There is also the pecuniary fine. There are jails into which people may be shut, lest they infect others, etc. But the fear of God, equity and prudence of the judge will discern from the circumstances how to penalize distorted teachings and obstinate rebellion, or dull and by no means malicious barbarity.]

30. Ep. 50. [See Augustine's Letter to Boniface, Epistle CLXXXV (185) in *St. Augustine, the Writings against the Manichæans, and against the Donatists*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 4 (Christian Literature Co, 1887) 636.] [That one persecuted Sara more by being haughty than Sara did her by correcting her, for she was doing injury to her mistress, but the mistress was applying discipline to haughtiness.]. Beza, *de Haeret. a Magistr. Punind.*, [On Magistrates' Punishment of Heresy. I say nothing of what Augustine, instructed by experience itself, gives as evidence against the Donatists and Circumcellions, that many are of such a nature as to be subdued more by official sternness, so much so that they sought to evade, in the beginning, the fear of punishment, and afterward they openly fled the thing itself, and bear witness that that harshness was most beneficial to them.]

which may and does (when blessed of God) prove a preparation to free obedience, as the needle is to the thread, or the law to the gospel, servile fear to filial fear; and that the Magistrate step not up to the highest justice till other punishments have proved ineffectual: which made Constantine punish the heretics of his time not with death, but with banishment, as is manifest by the Proem of the Council of Nicea. In such cases it may be said to the heretic of the Magistrate, *He is the minister of God to thee for good*, more good I am sure, than if the golden reins of civil justice should be loosed, and he suffered to do what he list [*likes*]. Therefore Augustine likens this coercive punishing of heretics to Sarah's dealing roughly with Hagar, for her good and humiliation.<sup>30</sup> I conclude, convenience and indulgence to heretics is a *cruel mercy*: correction is a *merciful severity*, and a *wholesome medicine*, as well to themselves as to the Church.

January 29, 1644/45

George Walker, *A sermon preached before the Honourable House of Commons, at their late solemn monethly fast, Januarie 29th. 1644 wherein these foure necessary considerations are plainly proved and demonstrated out of the holy Scriptures, viz. 1. The bands of the brethren in iniquity, the pernicious brambles, the plague and curse of a land and kingdome. 2. All the brethren in these bands, sharpe pricks of the cursed bramble, sharers in the sinne, and subject to the destruction thereof. 3 The righteous kept by God from the full sense and feeling of the mischiefe which they are sharply set, and cruelly bent to bring upon them. 4. The terrible, sudden, and totall destruction of the bramble, and every hurtfull prick thereof, by God's dreadfull storme* (London: T. B. for Nathaniel Webb, 1645) 26–27. Wing W364.

And to the same purpose the Prophet Jeremy speaks, saying, I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced: why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? Which words import, that they who are the Band of Scorners, and rejoice in their evil doings, are partakers of their wickedness, and their wages shall be perpetual pain and wounds incurable. All in Corah's conspiracy, even women and children, were found guilty before God of that rebellion and perished in it (Num. 16). And in a City falling away to Idolatry, all in it, yong [sic] & old are guilty, and to be cut off (Deut. 13).

*Reas. 1.* And indeed there is good Reason grounded on the word of God, to prove this: For if the children are punished for the sins of their fathers unto the third and fourth Generation; because so long they may by sight and hearing know them, and see the prints and monuments of their fraud, violence, oppression, pride, and the like, and wittingly hold and possess their ill-gotten goods, of which they have knowledge, become partakers of their sins, and make themselves guilty by approving, or imitating them, or neglecting to grieve and mourn for them, and to make restitution, and not removing their cursed things out of their families. Then much more they who are Counsellors, abettors, actors, and promoters of ungodly actions, and have an hand in the doing of them are partakers, and guilty of them as being their own sins for which they are justly punished. Now the first is manifest, *Exodus 20. 5.* by the express words of the Law, where the Lord saith, *He will visit the sins of the Fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation:* which sins they had no finger in when they were first committed; but only approved them by imitation, or did not sorrow and mourn for them; nor shew open detestation, nor make restitution. Therefore much more they who join in Counsel with the enemies of God's Church, and further and help forward their malicious designs, let them seem never so moderate and zealous for Religion, and the welfare of Church and State: they are all hurtful and dangerous pricks of the cursed Bramble, brethren and companions with the malignant in their mischief, guilty of the same sins, and shall perish in the same destruction, if they do not repent, and separate themselves from the Congregation.

*Reas. 2.* The common Law of Nations also confirms this, which makes accessories, though not desperately cruel, nor so hardened in malice, as the chief principals guilty of murder, robbery, treason, and the like crimes.

... Let us not be deceived with the faire shows of those instruments of Satan, who are outwardly Saints and Angels of light, professing abundance of new light, every sort and Sect of them, but inwardly are ravening and grievous wolves, not sparing the flock of Christ, his true Church planted in this Land, and like stinging and tearing pricks of the bramble wounding and tearing the high Court of Parliament, and the Assembly of Divines, with the spears and arrows of bitter words.

February 7, 1644/45

Daniel Featley (1582–1645). *Katabaptistai kataptüstoi The dippers dipt, or, The anabaptists duck'd and plung'd over head and eares, at a disputation in Southwark: together with a large and full discourse of their 1. Original. 2. Severall sorts. 3. Peculiar errorrs. 4. High attempts against the state. 5. Capitall punishments, with an application to these times* (London: Printed for Nicholas Bourne ... and Richard Royston ..., 1645) 6–7. Wing F586.

The preface *To the Most Noble Lords ... in Parliament* is dated January 10, 1644/45. Featley was the only Episcopalian to attend the assembly for any length of time. However, suspected of being a spy, he was arrested and imprisoned, September 30, 1643, dying April 17, 1645. While he was not present for the debates on the Confession of Faith, his opinion on the law from this work written during his imprisonment may be of interest. "There is a three-fold law of God delivered by *Moses*. 1. Ceremonial. 2. Judicial. and 3. Moral. The ceremonial and judicial are not now in force; but the moral is, ...."

March 26, 1645

John Ward, *God Judging among the gods. Opened in a sermon before the Honourable House of Commons assembled in Parliament, upon the solemn day of monethly fast, March 26. 1645* (London: Printed by I.L. for Christopher Meredith, at the Crane in Pauls Church-yard, 1645) 36, 51, 52–53 [sic 53–54]. Wing W773.

Ye know the Law in the case of uncertain murder, Deut. 21.1, 2. If a man be found slain in the land, and it be not known who hath slain him, then thine Elders and thy Judges shall come forth, &c. He saith not the Elders of the next City, as afterwards, ver. 3, but thine Elders, the general States of the Land, some of the high Court at Jerusalem; the equity and moral of it teacheth you: by virtue of your middle station and relation between God and the people, the care of making the expiation and atonement lyeth upon you; and ye are the men whom God seeketh to step into the gap to make intercession....

*His Sacraments;* it is your Honour as your duty to see that they be kept pure in the celebration and ministration of them. There is a book-case [precedence] for it, *Num. 9.7.* There were certain men, &c. This is clear from



that Text, and will be granted, that not withstanding the general Law, and common right, yet in some cases, cases of overt pollution, & offence, such persons must abstain, and be suspended from the present use of their liberty; and though it be not expressed, yet it may be inferred upon like moral equity, that as well the bold intruder as the wilful forbearer was to be cut off: & it cannot be denied but the keeping of all that particular Law fell under the common sanction of the whole Law of Ordinances. He that transgresseth *shall be cut off*. And the Jewish interpreters tell us, that if there be witnesses of the fact, the civil Magistrate was to draw the sword: but if this be not full, the presidents 2 *Chro. Chap 15. chap. 30* and *chap. 35.* will rule the case for the civil Magistrate, and make out this, that where the doctrine and discipline of the Church doth not, or cannot prevail, the Magistrate must interpose his Coercive Power for restraint and remedy.—In a Word, God hath many things amongst us that must be protected and maintained; and the matters of God have many adversaries, which must be watched, and suppressed....

Secondly, according to his word. His law is a glass into which is shed the image or species of his righteousness, imitable and practicable, as well by Rulers in their Spheres, as other people in theirs. If ye look into that glass, ye may see how to dress your selves, and how ye ought to be, and do in place and exercise of power, only go not away, and forget straight ways, what manner of persons ye are or should be, but continue in the meditation and practice of it, that ye may be blessed in your deed. *The law of God is your rule; for the Theory of all policy, and for the practise too, even for making of laws, the beam and standard by which all laws must be weighed and tried. There is a Law above laws, said the most learned among Kings, Free and supreme, by which all Municipal laws must be governed, except they have dependence on this law, they are unjust and unlawful.*

31. See the chart of superadded divines affixed to Gillespie's notes in his works. George Gillespie, *Works*, "Notes of Debates and Proceedings of The Assembly of Divines and Other Commissioners at Westminster. February 1644 to January 1645," ed. Edward Meek (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846) xi. See also the House of Commons Journal, March 23, 1647, volume 5 page 121. "Resolved, &c. That this House doth concur with the Lords, That Mr. Bolton be added to the Assembly of Divines." "Sess. 818. Aprill 1: 1647: Thursday morning. An order was brought into the Assembly from the lords and commons for the admitting of Mr Bolton into the Assembly as a member thereof; it was Read and is as followeth:" "Mr Boutlon came into the Assembly and tooke the protestation, and Mr Johnson and Mr Bolton tooke the covenant" (Van Dixhoorn, 7.429).

[King James in a speech in the Star-Chamber] It is your guide also for the administration of government; and all the Bible, especially the Historical part, is the exemplification of that law, lining the rule with examples if yee exercise yourselves to the reading of it, as *David the man after God's own heart* did, yee cannot be to seek either for principles, or for presidents; and give me leave to tell you, that you have power to give law to others over whom yee judge, yet yee must take law from God, who *judgeth amongst you*. I confess indeed, because yee share in the *Legislative power*, ye are not so bound up, by, or to the laws of the land already prescribed, as inferior officers in courts of judicature, &c. But as to God's law ye are no more at liberty to go from, or step beside the Moral equity and justice of it, then he that comes forth to sing a Song set to his hand, may vary from the Notes or Dittie in the book, only he may order his voice for the better grace of the music, and that must be his care, and therein lies his skill.

April 21, 1645

Westminster Assembly. Session 421. Confession of Faith.

On this date the Westminster Assembly appointed the Committee for the Confession of Faith to meet on April 23, 1645 (Van Dixhoorn, 6.106).

April 30, 1645

There are two works by Samuel Bolton that would be of interest in general to the subject of this survey, except for the parameters set forth.

Bolton took Jeremiah Burroughs' seat on March 23, 1646/47, after the latter's death in November 1646.<sup>31</sup> Thus he was not in the Assembly during the debates on the Confession of Faith. These works are, for April 30, Samuel Bolton, *The true bounds of Christian freedome or a treatise wherein the rights of the law are vindicated, the liberties of grace maintained, and the severall late opinions against the law are examined and confuted* (London: Printed by J.L. for Philemon Stephens, at the Golden-Lion in Pauls Church-yard, 1645), and for January 24, 1645/46, *The Arraignment of Errour; or a discourse to restrain the wantonnesse of men's spirits in the entertainment of opinions* (London: Printed by G. Miller for Andrew Kempe, 1645). These works are respectively Wing B3532 and Wing B3517.

April 30, 1645

Cornelius Burges, *The second sermon, preached to the Honourable House of Commons, April 30. 1645 Discovering the vanity and mischief of the thoughts of an heart unwashed* (London: printed by J.R. for Philem. Stephens, 1645) 43; 50–51. Wing B5681.

By men's delays, and projecting ways of their own for deliverance, with neglect of those of God's own appointment, the Majesty, Power, and Justice of God, as well as his Mercy, are all slighted at once.... In another place they are taxed with contempt of his Justice; Shall a Trumpet be blown in the City, and the people not be afraid? Amos 3. 6. Now then, when men thus stand it out, and thereby sin against so many Attributes of God at once, is it any wonder that he takes these delays so ill at our hands?

3. Common Equity cries shame and calls for revenge upon this sin....

Stand not upon terms with *Jesus Christ*, as if any Prescriptions or Laws of the Kingdom (although never so fundamental) were sufficient Ground not to receive and obey the Laws of his Kingdom, which seem dissonant and different from yours. This is the high way to lose all, and *Christ* too. There is a time coming, and it is at hand, wherein all the Kingdoms of the Earth shall be the Lord's; not by tempering his Laws to theirs, but by conforming theirs to his; not by blotting out the words of Scripture, but by *breaking them to pieces* that oppose it.... Take heed of those spirits of error, who with *faire*, (*specious, pargetted, glozing words*) seek to *make merchandize of you, beguiling unstable souls*. Beware of those compliances with and indulgences to all sorts of Sects and Schisms now pleaded for both by word and writing, as if it were a part of *Christ's* Legacy and his peoples Liberty to be of what Religion they will; to be tolerated in any opinions never so erroneous and pernicious (until further light:) that it is the Magistrate's duty to protect them in that Liberty; and that the contrary thereunto is to persecute *Christ*.

May 1, 1645

Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer, *Sabbatum Redivivum: or, the Christian Sabbath vindicated* (Robert White for Thomas Underhill, 1645) 3–4; 6–7; 17–18; 22–23; 26–27; 37. Wing C1634.

This work was written while the Book of Common prayer was still authorized, before its banning in favour of the *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, March 13, 1644/45.<sup>32</sup> In a side note qualifying some statements made about the Book of Common Prayer, the authors state: "This was penned while the book of Common Prayer was in use in the Church ..." (*Sabbatum Redivivum*, 39). In the preface *To the Reader*, the authors write: "... this work was undertaken (as soon as any) many years ago, and well nigh finished, when nothing was written for, but all against the Sabbath" (ibid, a3). This would place the writing of most of this work (book one of the eventual four that would be produced) at 1641 and earlier.<sup>33</sup>

... the whole of God's Laws recorded in Scripture, may well be divided (as it is usual) into three ranks, *ceremonial, judicial, and moral*: of which the two former are commonly called *Judaical, or Mosaical* Laws; though divers of the *ceremonials* were not first given by Moses, nor to the Jews only, but in *ages before them*: for sacrifices were as ancient as Cain and Abel (Gen. 4), and no doubt, from a divine command or inspiration to their father. And 2. The prohibition of eating blood was given to Noah and all his posterity, immediately after the Flood (Gen. 9). Also 3. *Circumcision* was given to Abraham and all his posterity (and their families) which were to grow into divers Nations (Gen. 17). And perhaps some others besides these may be found, which were given as laws before Israel became a People, the People of God. But however, because it is certain, that whatever of this kind was given a law to the posterities, was renewed to Israel by the ministry

32. See *A directory for the publique worship of God, throughout the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Together with an ordinance of Parliament for the taking away of the Book of common-prayer: and for establishing and observing of this present directory throughout the kingdom of England, and dominion of Wales. Die Jovis, 13. Martii, 1644.* (London: printed for Evan Tyler, Alexander Fifield, Ralph Smith, and John Field; 1644 [1645]).

33. The reissuing of the Book of Sports in 1633 marked the start of a ban on literature in favor of the Puritan view of the Sabbath (*Declaration for Sports on the Lord's Day* [1618; 1633]). After the ban was lifted works began appearing in 1641: Hamon L'Estrange, *God's Sabbath before, under the law and under the Gospel* (Cambridge, 1641); George Hakewill, *A short but cleare discovrse of the institution, dignity, and end of the Lord's-day* (London, 1641); Richard Bernard, *A threefold treatise of the Sabbath* (London, 1641); William Twisse, *The Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (1641); William Gouge, *The sabbaths sanctification* (London, 1641); John Ley, *Sunday a Sabbath* (London, 1641); George Abbot, *Vindiciae sabbathi, or, An answer to two treatises of Master Broads* (London, 1641); John Lawson, *For the Sabbath* (London, 1644).

of Moses, when God took them to be his people peculiarly; therefore these, and all other peculiarly given to them, whether Ceremonial or Judicial (which are not esteemed perpetual), are termed *Judaical*, or *Mosaical* Laws.

The nature of which, that we may briefly dispatch, we are to conceive, that the Nation of the Jews, taken to be God's peculiar people, was both a *Church*, the only Visible Church that God then had upon Earth, as also a *Body Politick*, or Civil Society. And in both those considerations, God himself was pleased to be their Lawgiver; and besides the *Moral Laws*, which concerned them as *men* (together with all the rest of Mankind, both towards God, and one another), He vouchsafed to ordain them other laws as they were a *Church*, but a Church in infancy, and under age, till the Messiah, the promised Seed, should come: and these are usually called *Ceremonials*: And others also, as they were a *Commonwealth*, to whom the Land of Canaan was allotted for an inheritance, and from among whom that promised Messiah was to be born: And these Civil Laws are they that are usually called *judicials*. But for as much as these two considerations, of their being a Church, and a Civil State, had both of them (as we have intimated) special relation unto Christ to come, and so their very Land was a Typical Land, and their Nation a Typical Nation; it is hard to give any such exact description either of *ceremonial* or *judicial* laws, as shall neither be too scanty, so as to leave out none of that kind, nor yet interfere with the other kind: And harder perhaps to find any *judicial* (proper to the Jews) which had not somewhat of *ceremoniality* in it. But we will endeavour to difference them as distinctly as we can; and that we do in the manner following:...

Now for the *judicials*, we conceive they may be thus described to be {Laws given to the people of Israel, in civil matters between man and man, to order them as they were a body politick, to whom the Land of Canaan was allotted for an inheritance, and from among whom the promised Messiah was to be born}. We put in those relations, to the Land of *Canaan*, and to the Messiah, because all the *peculiar civil laws* they had; were founded (as we suppose; and instances may undoubtedly be given of it in very many of them) upon *peculiar respects* unto those *promises*. Which we the rather conceive, because some of them were *indulgences*, and some *precepts*, which are not now so much as *lawful* to be practised (much less *perpetual* and *necessary* to us):

As to instance in no other but that of *divorce*, which was an *indulgence* to them, as our Saviour expressly saith, and by Him thenceforth *repealed* (Mat. 5 & 19 & Luk. 16). And that of *marrying the widow of a brother dead without children*; which was not so much an *allowance*, as a *strict precept*; but yet esteemed by divines generally *unlawful* now; as was at large disputed in the famous case of our King *Henry* the eighth having married his brother *Arthur's* widow: and appears contrary to the law of *Leviticus* 18:15, *Leviticus* 20:21. Which law of not marrying the brother's widow, being but *positive* (as we shall anon have our adversaries' confession for) though God made it *moral* to all generations, yet he was pleased then (as he might) to make that forenamed particular *exception* from it, among the Jews, in regard of preserving inheritances in families in that land, which he would have distinct among them for the Messiah's sake, to know clearly of what *tribe* he came, and the like. So then we esteem those properly *judicials*, which between man and man were relatives to the Land of *Canaan*, and expectation of the Messiah. And all other (not *such*, nor *ceremonial*, as before) we esteem *moral*. And of these *moral laws* we are now to speak somewhat more largely....

First, {Every Law of God (though Positive) recorded in the Scripture, is Moral and Perpetual, unless it be afterward found Repealed by God, or Expired in the nature of it}. We will explain this Rule, and then prove it. 1. This Rule is propounded of *all the Laws of God* generally, as recorded in Scripture. 1. Because the Fundamental proof of it, is equally for both Testaments. 2. Because some Laws, not only recorded in the New Testament, but seeming to be ratified there (as that of *not eating Blood*, &c. of which Law we shall speak somewhat anon) are taken to be afterward repealed. 3. Because some Laws or Precepts of the New Testament are esteemed *expired*, though not repealed; as that, *John* 13, of washing one another's feet, of anointing the sick with oil, that they might recover, *James* 5. And perhaps some others are of a like nature.

2. We say, all Laws are perpetual, except first *God hath afterward repealed them*: that we may reserve to him the *sovereignty* of his Authority, particularly over *Positive* Laws; which as they proceeded at first from his authority and pleasure, so may any of them, or all of them, at any time, by his pleasure and authority be taken away, and repealed again. Or, 2. *It be expired*: of which by and by.

3. By God's *repealing* of any Law, we understand, any *sentences of Scripture*, particularly of Christ and his Apostles, *declaring that it is not the will of God, that such Laws should any longer be counted in force*; whether they be named *expressly* (as in some places they are) or comprehended under those *general expressions* concerning the *Jewish Ceremonies*, calling them *shadows*, and *Worldly Rudiments*, Col. 2. *Weak and beggarly Elements*, Gal. 4. *Carnal Ordinances imposed on them until the time of Reformation*, Heb. 9, and, *a yoke which they were not able to bear*, Acts 15 (which latter phrase will fetch in also some of the *Judicials* perhaps, such namely as cannot now be observed by particular Christians without manifest prejudice, much less be held up by any Christian State without real and special inconveniences.) And whatsoever comes certainly under any of these Terms, we esteem and reckon it *repealed*, though not expressly named. But whatsoever is without the limits of those Phrases, and not particularly mentioned as abolished, we account not *repealed*, though possibly it may be *expired* for all that; which therefore we add.

4. By a Law's being *Expired in the Nature of it*, we mean, when it *was manifestly ceased*, and so without any repealing of it, it is of itself at an end in respect of Obligation (though it have no real inconvenience in it now, it may be freely continued still: and if the reason of it should, or could, be revived, so would the Law be in like sort). And thus expired are sundry other of the *Judicial* Laws in the Old Testament, and those fore mentioned in the New Testament....

And so we suppose we may, upon just reason infer, that the *silence of the New Testament concerning a Law, expressly and clearly delivered in the Old Testament, is a confirmation rather than an abrogation of it, or an intimation that it is expired*; judicious Divines giving this for a reason of the silence of the New Testament in diverse points, which are most vehemently urged in the old, as against *incestuous marriages* fore noted (and that others are but slightly, and as it were occasionally mentioned, as the Laws about *Tithes* and *usury*, &c.) because they are so clearly and importantly pressed in the old. And therefore till we see better reasons to the contrary, than any we have yet met within all our disputers' books, we must needs hold, that *all the Laws of the Old Testament are perpetuated to this day, if there be nothing against them in the New Testament* by way of *repealing* them: or *at least in reason*, which might plead for an *expiration*. And if anyone think, that by

this assertion, sundry of the Laws which are usually counted *judaical* will prove to be in force still; we answer, that perhaps it may prove so indeed. And, if we may have Liberty to express our apprehension of the Case in general, we must needs confess, that as we believe it lies upon our Consciences in particular, to prove any particular Law, this or that (which we hold to be *Ceremonial* or *Judaical*), to be such; or else we cannot justly (nor safely) please it to be Repealed or Expired, if it be not named among such expressly in the New Testament: So we are afraid, that many *Divines* (not to say some *Churches* and *States* nowadays), have been a little too bold in rejecting sundry Laws as merely *Judaical*, which upon further advisement might perhaps be found *Moral* and *Perpetual*. To which our next Rule will speak somewhat more fully....

And so having dispatched this not unuseful *digression* to our main purpose, we return to the prosecution of that: and so for the yet better and more clear discerning of *Moral Laws*, though but *Positive*, we propound this second Rule: {Every Law of God, though but Positive, which is Substantially-profitable for all men in all Ages to be obliged unto, is *Moral*, that is, *Universal* and *Perpetual*, unless a clear and certain repeal of it can be showed in Scripture}....

We will therefore conclude this discourse (and this Chapter) with this *Epiphonema* from both our Rules. That, as we being Subjects of the great Lawgiver, dare not plead ourselves loose from *any Law of his which we shall find in his Word*; and specially not from any such *substantially-profitable Law*, without we can be sure he hath discharged us of it (according as we have discoursed of *expirations* and *repeal*), So upon this supposition, We shall not need be *overcurious* in distinguishing *Moral-Natural*, from *Moral-Positive*, for both will come to one effect to us.

With this conclusion, Cawdrey and Palmer go on to their third chapter, *Every Law of the Decalogue, is a Moral and Perpetual Law*.

May 9, 1645

Westminster Assembly. Session 432. Expediting the Confession of Faith.

On May 9 it was ordered, "that the Assembly consider on Monday morning [the 12<sup>th</sup>] the best way to expedite



the Confession of Faith, ... and that the two Committees for the Confession of Faith be put into one.”<sup>34</sup>

May 12, 1645

Westminster Assembly, Session 434. Confession of Faith, New Committee.

“Report of the confession of faith. Read & debated; the first voted. Debate about the committee for drawing up the confession. The first draught of the confession of faith shall be drawn up by a committee of a few.” This new committee consisted of the **Scottish Commissioners**, Gataker, Reynolds, Hoyle, Herle, Harris, Tuckney and Vines.

On the day appointed, accordingly, after debate, the Assembly appointed a committee of seven, with the assistance of the Scotch Commissioners, to draw the first draft of the Confession. It was not until the 4<sup>th</sup> of July that the matter again came before them. On that day the sub committee was ordered to report on the following Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> July, so much of the Confession as they had in their hands concerning God and the Scriptures. As ordered, the report was made so far as concerned the Scriptures, and after debate thereupon it was resolved

34. “It seems that at some point between April 21, when the Committee for the Confession of Faith was ordered to meet two days later and May 9, 1645, when two committees were combined, a second committee must have been formed with no mention of it being made in the *Minutes*. Shaw supposed the August 20 committee to have been subdivided at some point and then reunited on May 9 of the following year [W. A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth, 1640–1660* (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900) 1.358]. However, it seems just as likely that the original August 20th committee consisting of nine members had met separately from the ten *new members* which were added as augmentation on September 4. Thus the scribe could write on April 21 as if there were only one committee (viewing the August 20 – September 4 as a single “augmented unit”) and yet write on May 9 as though the two separate [sub]committees were [re]combined. There is no way of knowing for sure, but the explanation here offered seems as likely as Shaw’s.” Bacon, 6.

35. *A Transcript of the Registers of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, from 1640–1708*, 1.171. This work must have come forth sometime before the May 21, 1645 entry in the Stationers’ registry, as the Archbishop disavowed the work as his own in a letter to John Downham dated May 13, 1645. *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Richard Elrington, D.D. (Dublin: Hodges and Smith; London: Whittaker and Co., [1848]) 1.248–249.

36. *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, ed. Alex F. Mitchell and John Struthers (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874) xlvii.

that Reynolds, Herle and Newcomen should take care of the wording of the Confession as voted in the Assembly from time to time [sic, this actually occurred in the July 8<sup>th</sup> session], reporting thereupon as occasion arose after consultation with the Scotch Commissioners. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of July it was ordered, doubtless for greater dispatch, to divide the body of the Confession among the three committees of the Assembly (Shaw, 1.358–359).

May 21, 1645

James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie* (London: Printed by M.F. for Tho. Downes and Geo. Badger ..., 1645) 204.

“Entred for their copie under the hands of Master Downham and Master Calamy and both the wardens a booke called *A body of divinity*,...”<sup>35</sup>

No other single theologian perhaps had as much indirect influence on the compilations of the Westminster Assembly as James Ussher. Next to the Irish Articles, this work was the next in importance. Mitchell notes. “In these [Irish] Articles, as it humbly appears to me, we have the main source of our Confession of Faith, and almost its exact prototype in its statement of all the more important and essential doctrines of Christianity. In the order and titles of many of its chapters, as well as in the language of whole sections or subdivisions of chapters, and in many single phrases and *voces signatae* occurring throughout their Confession, the Westminster divines appear to me to have followed very closely in the footsteps of Ussher and his Irish brethren. The headings of those chapters which cannot be clearly traced to this source may generally be found in a ‘Body of Divinity,’ which was published in his name while the Assembly was sitting, and which, though he declined to sanction it as a statement of his own opinions, he admitted that he had, in early life, compiled from the writings of others.”<sup>36</sup>

What call you the Judicial law?

That wherein God appointed a form of Politique and Civil government of the Common-wealth of the Jews, which therefore is ceased with the dissolution of that State, for which it was ordained; saving only in the common equity.

Is this law utterly revoked and abolished by Christ?

No; for he came not to overturn any good government

of the Common-wealth, much less that which was appointed by God himself.

May not Christian Magistrates then swerve any thing from those laws of government, which were set down by Moses?

In some circumstances they may, but in the general equity and substance they may not.

What Judicial laws are immutably to be observed now of Christian Magistrates?

Those which have reasons annexed unto them, & specially those wherein God hath appointed death for the punishment of heinous offences.

May 28, 1645

Alexander Henderson, *A Sermon preached before the House of Lords ... the day appointed for solempne and publick humiliation* (London: Printed by F. N. for Robert Bosstock, 1645) 11–14. Wing H1443.<sup>37</sup>

Again, magistracy and civil government in the general is from God, and is ordained of him, but the particular different forms of civil government are from men, and yet all of them lawful; whence it follows, that civil power is not absolute but limited, first, by the will of God whose minister the magistrate is, and next, by such laws and limitations as are agreed upon to be the foundation of that power.

June 25, 1645

Richard Byfield, *Zion's answer to the nations ambassadors, according to instructions given by Isaiah from God's mouth: in part unfolded in a sermon preached before the Honourable House of Commons at their solempne fast, Junii 25. 1645* (London: Printed by John Field) 36–37. Wing B6395.

King Asa with all Judah made a Covenant, and laid the pain of death upon those that would not stand to it, upon all of them small or great, man or woman: I allege not this to persuade you to punish with death all refusers and Violators of the National Covenant: but to show that it may and should be prosecuted with a penalty, and a penalty impartially inflicted according to the

nature of the offence, that so some provision be made to make men fear the presumptuous abuse of such a Sacred Bond: And that it may appear unto all, that it is not the taking, but the keeping of it that you are for....

4. My fourth, and last, because the time is over, and I fear to detain you beyond what is meet, it is this: Let Ministers be appointed and commanded, some that are able and fit for the work to prove and maintain, *The Coercive power of the Magistrate about matters of Religion*. I know something hath been done to this purpose of free accord by some: but I conceive that it needs more thorough and full discussing, and that somewhat of Parliamentary will and Authority be seen in the maintenance of it: that this truth you would now have preached and Printed into the hearts and lives of all the people, that the custody of the first Table of the Law is Committed to the Magistrate: without which what sit you for, for what do you call an Assembly of Ministers, what fight we for, why do you put the Kingdoms to such stirs and expense? ... Why should you not rather go on in the work of Reformation before you set up Magistracy and Ministry, and make proof of the sword which God hath put into your hands, and not in vain: and whosoever will not obey your Law, and the Law of your God, let judgement be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment, as his fault shall deserve....

July 8, 1645

**Westminster Assembly. Session 464. Confession of Faith, Committee for the Wording.**

“That Mr Reynolds, <Mr Herle, Mr Newcomen> be desired to take care of the wording of the Confession of faith as it is voted in the Assembly <from time to time and to report to the Assembly when> they thinke fitter should be any alteration in the words. They are first to <consult with> the commissioners from the church of Scotland <or one of them> before they report to the Assembly” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.145). This committee was revised or a new one constituted on December 8, 1645, with the members being Tuckney, Reynolds, Newcomen and Whitaker, and later were added Arrowsmith (June 17, 1646) and Cawdrey (September 1, 1646).

37. Cited from *Fast Sermons Preached Before the English Parliament by the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly 1643–1645* (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, forthcoming) 81.

July 11, 1645

Westminster Assembly. Session 467. Confession of Faith divided to the Three Standing Committees.

"Ordered: Munday morning to devid the body of the confession of faith to the 3 committees" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.147).

September 16, 1645

John Ley, "Annotations upon Exodus," in *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament* (London: Printed by John Legatt and John Raworth, 1645). Wing D2o62.<sup>38</sup>

"... he made a covenant with them, at Horeb, where he delivered them Laws, Moral, Judicial, and Ceremonial,

38. Ley is not listed in Van Dixhoorn's chart (1.149), but he would have served on the first committee with Case, as both were from Cheshire. The commentary on the Pentateuch has been credited to Ley. See James Reid, *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* (1811; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) 53. It is not paginated; see the Argument at the beginning of the comments on the book of Exodus. While not in Thomason; the Stationer's entry reads: "16<sup>th</sup> October 1645. Assigned over unto him by virtue of a note under the hands & seales of Thomas Downes, Nicholas Bourne, Robt Meade, Rich: Whitaker, John Legatt, Edw: Bruster, Philemon Stephens, Richard Thrale & Chr: Meredith and subscribed by both the wardens, a full tenth pte or share of & into a book called *Annotations upon the books of the old & new testament &c by the joint labour of certaine Divines thereunto apoynted.*" *A Transcript of the Registers ... from 1640-1708*, 198. The work appeared at least a month prior because a controversy came up in the Westminster Assembly, in which Ley reported the resolution. "Sess. 504. Sept. 16: 1645. Tuesday morning ... The motion about the Annotations of the Bible, some things in them against the covenant & votes of the Assembly" "Sess. 505. Sept. 17: 1645: Wednesday morning ... Debate about the Annotations." "Sess. 506. Sept. 22: 1645. Munday morning ... Mr Palmer made report about the Annotations; the stationers desired that some animadversions may be made suddenly, and they promised to sell noe more till tomorrow." "Sess. 507. Sept. 25. 1645: Thursday morning." "Mr Ley gave an account of the Antidote prepared against the particulars complained of in the Annotations of the Bible" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.178-180). Inserted after the preface of the *Annotations* in the only example in Early English Books is: "An Advertisement Touching The Annotation on *Phil.* 1.1. and on 1 *Tim.* 3.1 & 5.17 and the Argument of the same Epistle, on the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, Chap. 6.2. Wherein the Author may be thought to assert Episcopacy with some prejudice to the *Truth*, and to the *Reformation of Church-Government* now in hand: With a touch at some other particulars, for prevention of offence to the Religious Reader." The author of the Annotations on the Pauline Epistles was the late Dr. Featley who had died the previous April, and the notes are "broken and imperfect, the author dying before he had revised them." Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (London: 1837) 2.505.

for their Government, both as a Church, and as a Commonwealth." At Genesis 49:10, Ley has some lengthy remarks on the prophecy of the end of the civil polity of Israel. "The summarie sense of this Prophecie made up out of the explications forementioned may be thus: ... and about the time of his [Christ's] coming ... shall the Jewish Common-weale be dissolved, and their Government broken in pieces, they dispersed, and scattered in several Countries, without any Governour or Law-giver of their own Nation, and wholly in the power of the Princes, or Potentates, or States in whose Land they live."

October 24, 1645

Jeremiah Burroughs, *Irenicum to the Lovers of Truth and Peace* (London: Printed for Robert Dawlman, 1645) 22-24. Wing B6o88.

Against the principle, "That there is to be an absolute liberty in the things of Religion," Burroughs writes that it is against the light of nature, and "it is against the light of Scripture," citing Deuteronomy 13:6 and Zechariah 13:3. He then addresses one of the propositions used to support this principle that "Magistrates have nothing to do with men in matters of Religion":

I confess were there nothing but merely examples or Laws from the Old Testament to confute this dividing Position, to an examining eye the argument would hardly be cogent or satisfactory, only so far as there is a common reason and equity in them, and so all the judicial bind now as well as they did then.

2. So far as the New Testament approves of for the times of it, what was formerly done in the Old.

The strength of the argument from the power of Magistrates in the Old Testament, lies in these two.

First, there is a common reason and equity, what ever the strength of such kind of arguing be from one Spiritual Ordinances to prove another, yet without all question, it is strong enough from one Civil Ordinance to prove another, though it be conversant about spiritual things.

It is the Dictate of Nature, that Magistrates should have some power in matters of Religion. The generality of all people have ever thought it equal. It hath been ever challenged in all Nations and Common-wealths. The

Heathens would never suffer their gods to be blasphemed, but punished such as were guilty thereof, by the power of the Magistrate. *Socrates* was put to death for blaspheming their multiplicity of gods.

2ly, surely there is a common equity, for there is a necessity of it as truly now as there was then. I cannot argue the being of Spiritual Ordinances from our need of them, not thus there is such an institution, for the Church hath need of it; but rather thus, I find it in the Word to be an institution, and therefore the Church hath need of it. But in natural or civil things this way of arguing is strong enough; there is need of such a help, and therefore we should seek to have it.

Now sure the need we have of such a power, is exceeding great, we were in a most miserable condition if we had no external civil power to restrain from any kinds of blasphemies and seducements. The condition of the Jews, O how happy was it in comparison of ours, if this were denied us! for if any one of theirs did blaspheme God, or seek to seduce any from him, they knew what to do with him, besides persuading him to the contrary; but if any should seek to seduce the wives of our bosoms, children of our bodies, friends as dear to us as our own lives, into those ways that we think in our consciences will undo their souls to all eternity, yet we must only desire them they would not do so, we must only admonish and seek to convince them, or reprove them, but restrain them we cannot: If the deliverance of us from the pedagogy of the Law hath brought us into this condition, our burden is greater in this thing than any that the Law laid upon our fore-fathers. Hath Christ delivered us from one burden to lay a greater upon us? Must we now see those who are dearest to us drawn into the ways of eternal destruction, and stand and look on, but no way left to help them, or our selves, unless we can persuade to the contrary? surely our condition is very sad: Have we not cause to say, Lord let any burthen of the Ceremonial Law be laid upon our necks rather than this? If there were a company of men running up and down the streets with knives and swords in their hands, endeavouring to mischief and kill all they met with, and we must do nothing to restrain them, if we could persuade them to do otherwise, well and good: but that is all we can do for help; what a dangerous thing were this? The case is the same, when those who are mad with damnable Heresies, run from place to place, seeking to draw all they can from the truth; If we have no means of help but arguments, it is ill with us: Surely God hath not put his people into

such a sad condition as this is, he hath provided better for his people than thus.

Burroughs then goes on to appeal to the examples in Scripture of Heathen magistrates. He then concludes the chapter (*Irenicum*, 28):

But we have often heard that of Tertullian urged; If it be therefore said it is lawful because Scripture doth not forbid, it is therefore unlawful because the Scripture doth not command.

*Ans.* In the matters of God's worship this rule is to be urged, but not in matters civil or natural, though in their way subservient to worship, their Reason may guide very far.

November 17, 1645

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 537. Law of God Assigned to the Third Committee.

On this date the subject of the Law of God was assigned to the Third Committee, and Christian Liberty to the First Committee.

November 24, 1645

Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive From the Errours of the Times* (London, 1645, 2<sup>nd</sup> impression, 1646) 31–32; 127–128. Wing B456, B457.

"I have sent yow seven of my Dissuasives; only one for yourself; the rest, with my service, to Thomas Cunningham, Mr. Strickland, Apollonius, Spanheim, Dr. Stewart, and Voetius. As yow have occasion to send them, send allwayes a Sermon with a Dissuasive. I expect a showre of Independents about my ears; but I am not feared: I have a reserve of more stories, and I think they will have more to doe shortlie..." (November 29, 1645, to William Spang, *Letters & Journals* 2.327).

They lay it upon the Magistrate to punish by death, without any dispensation, every Adulterer, every Blasphemer, every Sabbath-breaker; and above all, every Idolater. ... For all this they will not permit any Magistrate to hang any thief at all....



... Look back upon what I have cited from the chiefe of the *Brownists* writings. I grant the *New English* polishers of *Brownism* do not express their Tenents in tearms so hugely gross; yet see how neare they come to them in substance, when they tell us that no Magistrate may make any laws about the Bodies, Lands, Goods, Liberties of the Subject, which are not according to the Laws and Rules of Scripture, Scripture being given to men for a perfect rule, as well in matters of Civil justice, as of devotion and holiness; and if so, then they must make it as unlawful and contrary to the Scriptures perfection, for any man to make Lawes in matters of Righteousness and of the state, as in matters of Holiness and of the Church.... Eightly, what men besides them have made so bold with Kings and Parliaments, as not only to break in pieces their old Lawes, and to diveſt them of all power to make new ones; but also under the Pretext of a divine right, to put upon their necks that unsupportable yoke of the Judicial Law of the *Jews*, for peace and for warre, without any power to dispenſe either in addition or subtraction. I grant this principle of *Barrow* is limited by Mr. *Cotton* to such Judicials as doe contain in them a moral equity; but this moral equity is extended by him to so many particulars, as *Williams* confesses the whole Judicial law to be brought back againe thereby, no less than by the plaine, simple, and unlimited Tenet of the rigidest *Brownists*.

November 26, 1645

Jeremiah Burroughs, *A sermon preached before the Right Honourable the House of Peeres, in the Abbey at Westminster, the 26. of Novemb. 1645. Being the day appointed for solempne and publique humiliation* (London: Printed for R. Dawlman., MDCXLVI.). Thomason Tracts, 51:E.310[2].

Speaking for toleration in lesser things, Burroughs writes (The Epistle Dedicatory, [2]):

For connivance at Blasphemies or damnable Heresies, God forbid any should open his mouth; those who are guilty herein against the light of nature, should be taken off from the face of the earth; and such as are guilty against supernatural light, are to be restrained and kept from the society of men, that they infect not others.

December 8, 1645

Westminster Assembly. Session 549. Committee to Revise the Confession of Faith.

On the 8th of December, 1645, Tuckney, Reynolds, Newcomen and Whitaker were appointed a committee to review the Confession of Faith as the parts were finished by the Assembly. This is referenced in the Minutes as the ‘committee for perfecting the confession.’

After the interruption of these debates, caused by the question of the *jus divinum*, the Assembly returned to its Confession on the 17th June, 1646, when Mr. Arrow-smith was added to the committee for perfecting it.

Further, to this committee was given power, on the 19th of June, 1646, ‘as they see things imperfect’ in the Confession to complete them, and make report to the Assembly.

After, therefore, a year’s interrupted and changing discussion, the committee for perfecting the Confession began the reporting of it piecemeal on the 17th of June, 1646. From that date to the 30th June the Assembly passed the bulk of the articles of the Confession serialim (Shaw, 1.360).

December 18, 1645

London Ministers, *A letter of the ministers of the city of London, presented the first of Ian. 1645. to the reverend Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster by authority of Parliament, against toleration* (London: Printed for Samuel Gellibrand, 1645/46).

The ministers of London at Sion College wrote a letter against toleration to the Westminster Assembly dated December 18, 1645, which was presented, already printed apparently, on January 1, 1645/46. Thomason recorded he obtained a copy on January 2, 1645/46. Among the reasons listed for opposing a toleration of sects and heresies the ministers say, “This is opposite to the Reformation of Religion, according to the Word of God, and the example of the best Reformed Churches, Article 1” [of the Solemn League and Covenant].

January 1, 1645/46

Westminster Assembly. Session 564. Report on the Law of God.

On January 1, 1646, “Dr. Wincop made report from the 3rd committee about the law of God” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.233).

*January 7, 9, 12, 13, 1645/46*

**Westminster Assembly.** Sessions 568, 570, 571, 572. Law of God Debated.

January 7. “Debate about that of <the law for the substance of it” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.238)

January 9. “Debate of the law of God.”

January 12. “Debate of the law. About the Law ceremoniall, and about the meaning of the description of ceremoniall & Judiciall. A committee to consider of those propositions.”

January 13. “Debate of the law binding in respect of the matter” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.239).

*January 22, 1645/46*

Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive From the Errors of the Times* (London, 1646). Second impression. B457.

Thomason noted obtaining a second impression of Baillie’s work on January 22, 1646. He had obtained the first impression on November 24, 1645. Early English Books has four examples. Two are the first impression of 1645. One example owned by Harvard University Library, instead of numbering the last page 252, numbers it 242. This apparently is a stop press variant. The second example has the final page number corrected. However, all examples have the pagination error that skips pages 97–100, i.e. 24, 1–96, 101–252 (242 in the case of the stop press variant). There are also two examples of the second impression, the one marked by Thomason which exhibits the 1645 year as expected for an English title, and the other with 1646 on the title page. In the 1646, either there was a third issuing or the year was changed for a portion of the second impression, perhaps for the Scottish market? In the second impression the catalog record for the Thomason copy owned by the British Library notes that the first quire (first 24 pages) is in the same setting of type as the first impression, but that the second quire is only “mostly in the same setting” as the first impression. This is clearly exhibited by the different catchword on page one, the first impression of 1645 having “ried” and the second impression having “the.” The text cited

previously was not collated for variants, and is cited from this writer’s example of the 1646 edition.<sup>39</sup>

*January 29, 1645/46*

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 581. Report and Debate on Christian Liberty. Ad hoc committee for the Law.

Thursday morning. “Mr Coleman made report of Christian Liberty” [from the First Committee]. “Debate of Christian Liberty. Mr Newcomen, Mr Dury, Mr Delmy, Dr Temple, Dr Gouge added to the committee for report about the law. To report tomorrow morning. [fo. 122v] Fryday morning [no minutes; “there is a gap of four or five lines at this point”] (Van Dixhoorn, 6.246).

*February 2, 1645/46*

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 582. Report on the Ceremonial and Judicial Law.

February 2. “Report made of the propositions for ceremoniall & judiciall lawes committed formerly. Debate upon that Report” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.247).

*February 9, 1645/46*

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 585. Debate on the abrogation of the Ceremonial and Judicial Law.

“Debate about the ceremoniall & judiciall lawes abrogation.” “Ordered: debate of Christian Liberty” (Van Dixhoorn, 249).

*February 10–12, 1645/46*

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 586–588. Debate on Christian Liberty.

“Debate of Christian liberty” (Van Dixhoorn, 250–252).

39. B456. Harvard University Library. 1645. 24. 1–96. 101–242[252]. Catchword page 1 “ried”. B456. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. 1645. 24. 1–96, 101–252. Catchword page 1, “ried.” B456/Thomason / E.317[5]. British Library. Noted as the Thomason 2<sup>nd</sup> impression. 1645/46. 24. 1–96, 101–252. Catchword “the”. B457. Union Theological Seminary. 1646. 24. 1–96, 101–252. Catchword page 1, “the”.

February 16, 1645/46

**Westminster Assembly. Session 590. Debate about Christian liberty.**

R[esolved]: The former vote for not recommitting, Revoked.

R[esolved]: That this whole head of Christian liberty shall be recommitted.

R[esolved]: This shall be recommitted to a select committee.

Ordered: Mr Seaman, Mr Newcomen, Dr Temple, Mr Dury, Mr Calamy, Mr Byfield, Mr Ward, Mr Cawdry, Mr Channell, Mr Delmy, Mr Rayner, Mr Sedgwick, Mr Conant, Mr Wilkenson, Jun. to meete tomorrow in the afternoone" (Van Dixhoorn, 254)

February 23, 1645/46

**Westminster Assembly. Session 593. Christian Liberty, Sabbath, Magistrate, Marriage and Divorce.**

"The Committee for Christian Liberty to meete on Thursday."

"Ordered to the first Committee, in chefe heads: Christian Sabbath, the civill magistrate, marriage & divorce" (Van Dixhoorn, 258)

March 3, 1645/46

**Samuel Rutherford, *Divine Right of Church Government Vindicated* (London: John Field for Christopher Meredith, 1646) 493–494.**

That this Author saith [Erasus, l. 6. c. 2. page 336–337], God commanded those that transgressed his holy Law with an high hand, and presumptuously, to be killed lest they should live and prophane his holy things; I defend not: But surely Erasus erreth, who will have all such to be killed by the Magistrate under the New Testament, because they were killed in the Old: Then are we to stone the men that gathereth sticks on the Lord's day; the childe that is stubborn to his Parents, the Virgins, daughters of Ministers that committeth fornication are to be put to death. Why, but then the whole judicial Law of God shall oblige us Christians as Carlstadtus and others teach? I humbly conceive that the putting of some to death in the Old Testament, as it was a punishment to them, so was it a mysterious teaching of us, how God hated such and such sins, and mysteries of that kind are gone with

other shadows. But we read not (saith Erasus) where Christ hath changed those Laws in the New Testament. It is true, Christ hath not said in particular, I abolish the debarring of the leper seven days, and he that is thus and thus unclean shall be separated till the evening; nor hath he said particularly of every Ordinance and judicial Law, it is abolished. But we conceive, the whole bulk of the judicial Law, as judicial, and as it concerned the Republic of the Jews only, is abolished, though the moral equity of all those are not abolished; also some punishments were merely Symbolical to teach the detestation of such a vice, as the boring with an *Aule* [awl] the ear of him that loved his Master, and desired to serve him, and the making of him his perpetual servant. I should think the punishing with death the man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath was such; and in all these, the punishing of a sin against the Moral Law by the Magistrate, is Moral and perpetual; but the punishing of every sin against the Moral Law, *tali modo*, so and so, with death, with spitting on the face: I much doubt if these punishments in particular, and in their positive determination to the people of the Jews, be moral and perpetual: As he that would marry a captive woman of another Religion, is to cause her first pare her nails, and wash her self, and give her a month, or less time to lament the death of her Parents, which was a Judicial, not a Ceremonial Law; that this should be perpetual, because Christ in particular has not abolished it, to me seems most unjust; for as Paul saith, He that is Circumcised becomes debtor to the whole Law, sure to all the Ceremonies of Moses his Law: so I argue, *à pari*, from the like, He that will keep one judicial Law, because judicial and given by Moses, becometh debtor to keep the whole judicial Law, under pain of God's eternal wrath.

We do not teach that men are to be Excommunicated, for whatever scandalous sins deserve death at the hand of the Magistrate, whether they openly repent or not; if any give evident signification of their repentance for murder, they are not to be Excommunicated, for the end of Excommunication, being once obtained, which is the visible and known repentance, and saving of the offender's soul, the mean is not to be used, which is Excommunication. But if any commit murder, whether he repent or repent not, the Lord hath made no exception of regenerate or not regenerate, of men repenting or not repenting, he should die by the sword of the Magistrate, *Gen. 9. 9*. It is true, some are to be Excommunicated for the very atrocity of the sin, it being parricide; but that is, because he giveth no positive signs of

repentance to the Church, which is contumacy added to his parricide.

March 4, 1645/46

Westminster Assembly. Session 598. Christian Liberty Committee to Meet.

“Ordered: The Committee for Liberty meet in the afternoon” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.261).

March 10, 1645/46

Westminster Assembly. Session 602. Report on Christian Liberty.

“Mr Seaman made report of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience” (Van Dixhoorn, 274).

March 26, 1646

Westminster Assembly. Session 610. Report on the Magistrate; Christian Liberty Report, debate and draft.

“Report was made from the Committee about the Magistrate: it was read.”

“Having finished the report of Religious Worship, the Assembly entred upon the Report of Christian liberty, &c., and upon debate it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: This shall be the title: ‘of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience.’

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: ‘The liberty which Christ hath purchased by his death for beleivers.’

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: Ther shall be noe addition after the word ‘death.’

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: Under the Gospell consists especially in freedome from the Guilt and power of Sin, from Bondage to Sathan, from the condemning wrath of God, from the ceremoniall and judiciall Law, and from the curse of the morrall....” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.279–280).

The debate on the chapter on Christian liberty resumed again in late September and October. Chapter 20 was reworked, probably by the committee for perfecting the confession of faith, and the final wording incorporating the above appears within paragraph one. For this chronology, the point of interest is the removal of the reference to the judicial law. See December 7, 1646 below.

March 26, 1646

Stephen Marshall, *God’s Master-Piece. A Sermon Tending to manifest God’s glorious appearing in the building up of Zion: Preached To the Right Honourable the House of Peers, in the Abbey Church of Westminster, March 26, 1645* (London: Printed by Richard Cotes, for Stephen Bowtell, 1645) 38–41. Wing M756.

Thus in a spiritual and moral way you may help to build the Church; but that’s not all, your authority and power may doe very much in this work: It is very true, that your power (who are Nobles, Magistrates, & Rulers of States) in the Common-wealth, in the building of a Civil State, and the building of the Church, doe extremely differ one from another: In building the Civil State, you doe it *ad modum imperii*, by way of rule and command; therein you have authority; *Meum* and *Tuum*, the things of this life, are by the Lord committed into the hands of a State, and the light of Nature and humane Prudence are sufficient to direct you in them, and in these things you have power and authority, according to your own reason and will, to make Laws about them; you may erect new Laws, and new Offices, and new Officers, and you may impose new burdens, and people may lawfully submit to your discretion, without seeking any further for a particular warrant out of the Word, in the things that concern this present life: but (my Lords) it is not so in the building of *Zion*, matters of Religion are spiritual and heavenly things (Heb. 3:1), which pertain only to God, the souls and consciences of men, and the communion of Saints, their end is God’s glory, men’s conversion, edification, eternal salvation; these are things which cannot be carried along by natural reason, or civil prudence, but onely by the light of that spiritual and heavenly Rule, the Word of God; and therefore in these things you have no Lordly rule; *Unum Dominum habemus qui animas nostras gubernat* [Luther]; all your power in these things must be *ad modum ministerii*, not *imperii*; you must carry your selves, not as the Church’s Masters, but as Christ’s servants, yea and as servants to the Church for Christ’s sake, not as Lords, to dispose of the affaires of it at your own pleasure, but at the direction of his Word only: This then must you set down for a Rule, That you are limited to the Word, and men under your authority must, before they obey your Orders, examine them by the Word, and find them to be both lawful in their nature, and expedient in their use, for edification, peace, order, &c. But (my Lords) though you have not such an *imperium* here, as in



humane things, yet the power and authority that God's Word hath given you for the carrying on of this work, is exceeding great, and it may be reduced to these two heads: First, the Lord would have you his instruments for the purgation and reformation; secondly, for the preservation of the Church, when you have brought it into a state of reformation.

First, for purgation and reformation of it; all the rubbish, all the dross, the Antichristian pelf and garbage that the house of God is defiled with, you are to throw it all out, with *Josiah*, into the brook *Kidron*; to sweep it all out, and to bring back the people, who have been misled into Arminianism, to Popery, to Superstition, to any of these abominable ways, you are to remove all these stumbling-blocks, and to bring them back again unto the knowledge of the Lord their God: this God requires at the hands of Princes; thus did *Jehoshaphat*, thus did *Hezekiah*, thus did *Josiah*, thus did *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, all the good Kings of old, they all made it their care to command the people, to make them enter into an Oath, and a Curse; and one might live under their privilege and protection, who would not return to the God of their Fathers: I confess, I think it is not in the power of Magistrates to compel a people (unto whom God can lay no claim by Covenant) to alter from a heathenish Religion to be the Lords people, yet they should be careful to send Ministers to preach unto them, and try if by any means they may be brought to receive the truth in love; yea and to punish them severely, if they blaspheme, or seek to draw away God's people to Idolatry, &c. When the Jews, *David*, or *Solomon*, or any of their Kings, conquered the Nations round about them, they never compelled any of them to forsake their false Gods, and to turn Proselytes, because those people never had chosen God to be their God; but a people who once had in Covenant made themselves the Lord's, and so the Lord by virtue of the Covenant could lay claim to them and their posterity, his Princes and servants have ever (according to his will) compelled these to stand to their Covenant, or else they should not enjoy their protection; and therefore *Josiah*, and those good Kings put them all to death who followed *Baal*, and returned not unto the Lord their God. For our selves, our Plantations ought never to endeavour to convert Infidels by violence, Christ's people must be a willing people, we leave such conversions to the *Spaniards*, who worried the *Indians* to death with dogs, and drove them into the river like cattle, and compelled them to be baptized: but for a people who have received Christianity, and have been seduced to

Anti-christianity, to whom still the Lord continues his claim, by the same right that *Jehu* destroyed *Baal*, and other good Kings *Jereboam's* Calves, and the rest of their Idols, and compelled them to stand to the Lord's Covenant and Oath, by the same warrant and rule may you root out Popery and Heresy, and proceed against incorrigible Papists, Heretics, Blasphemers, and such as have apostatized from the Lord, and refuse to return: This power the Lord hath given you for the purgation of Religion, to remove and cast out the things that are abominable. You have power also, and it is your duty, to set up all God's Ordinances; Ordinances for *Worship*, Ordinances for *Government*; thus did all the good Kings you shall read of....

*March 27, 1646*

Westminster Assembly, Session 611. Christian Liberty.

"The assembly proceeded in the debate of liberty of conscience, and upon debate it was

Ordered: none may practice any sin, or cherish any lust, or oppose any lawfull power, or the lawfull exercise of it, whether it be civill or ecclesiasticall upon the pretence of Christian Liberty, the liberty which is of Christs procuring and the power which are of Gods ordaining, not being opposite or intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.281).

*March 30, 1646*

Westminster Assembly, Session 612. Christian Liberty.

"The Assembly proceeded in the debate of liberty of conscience" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.282).

*March 31, 1646*

Westminster Assembly, Session 613. Christian Liberty vote not to Recommit.

"The Assembly proceeded in the debate of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience. Upon debate it was Resolved upon the Q[uestion] not to Recommitt the Rest of the Report" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.283)

April 23, 24, 27, 1646

**Westminster Assembly.** Sessions 628–630. The Civil Magistrate.

On April 23 it was ordered “to debate the Report of the civill magistrate” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.291).

April 24. “The Assembly debate the Report of the civill magistrate.

Ordered: the title: ‘of the civill magistrate.’

Ordered: Magistracy is ordained of God for the good, safety and tranquility of the people.

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: It is lawfull for a Christian to beare the office of a civill magistrate being called ther unto.

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: the word ‘rightly’ shall not be added before the word “called.”

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: Ther shall be noe addition to the proposition last voted.

Upon debate of the next proposition, viz. Noe forraign power hath or ought to have superiority and authority over magistrates in their own dominions, it was Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: this proposition shall be recommitted to the same committee” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.292).

June 17, 19, 1646

**Westminster Assembly.** Sessions 660, 662. Committee for Perfecting the Confession of Faith.

After the interruption of these debates, caused by the question of the *jus divinum*, the Assembly returned to its Confession on the 17th June, 1646, when Mr. Arrowsmith was added to the committee for perfecting it.

Further, to this committee was given power, on the 19th of June, 1646, ‘as they see things imperfect’ in the Confession to complete them, and make report to the Assembly.

After, therefore, a year’s interrupted and changing discussion, the committee for perfecting the Confession began the reporting of it piecemeal on the 17th of June, 1646 (Shaw, 1.360).

July 30, 1646

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 680. Gillespie’s Book.

“Mr Gelespy gave his bookes dedicated unto the

Assembly to the Prolocutor and the rest of the members of the Assembly then present, for which he had thanks returned by the Prolocutor in the name of the Assembly” (Van Dixhoorn, 333).

August 4, 1646

George Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming: Or, the Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated* (London, 1646) 3–4; 60. Wing G743; G744. The Thomason copy is Wing G743, which additionally contains at the end, the table of scriptures adduced in the work and the errata page.

Now all this being unquestionably true of the Jewish Sanhedrin: if we should suppose, that they had no supreme Sanhedrin but that which had the power of civil Magistracy, then I ask where is that Christian State, which was, or is, or ought to be moulded according to this pattern[?] Must Ministers have vote in Parliament? Must they be civil Lawyers? must all criminal and capital Judgements be according to the Judicial Law of *Moses*, and none otherwise? Must there be no civil punishment, without previous admonition of the offender? Must Parliaments sit, as it were in the Temple of God, and interpret Scripture, which sense is true, and which false, and determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience, and judge of all false doctrines? yet all this must be, if there be a parallel made with the Jewish Sanhedrin. I know some divines hold, that the Judicial Law of *Moses*, so far as concerneth the punishments of sins against the moral Law, Idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, adultery, theft, &c. ought to be a rule to the Christian Magistrate. and [sic] for my part, I wish more respect were had to it, and that it were more consulted with. This by the way. I am here only showing, what must follow, if the Jewish Government be taken for a precedent, without making a distinction of Civil & Church government. Surely, the consequences will be such, as I am sure our opposites will never admit of, and some of which (namely concerning the civil places or power of Ministers, and concerning the Magistrate’s authority to interpret Scripture) ought not to be admitted....

It is but a poor argument, whereby Bishop *Bilson*, of *the Government of the Church*, chap. 4. would prove the cutting off not to be meant of Excommunication, because it is applied even to capital offences, such as the Law elsewhere appointeth men to be put to death for. As if it were any absurdity to say, that one and the

same offence, is to be punished *sub formalitate scandal*i with excommunication, and *sub formalitate criminis* with capital punishment. And who knoweth not that a capital crime is a cause of excommunication, which is also sometimes the sole punishment, the Magistrate neglecting his duty. If a known blasphemous or incestuous person be not cut off by the Magistrate as he ought by the Law of God: shall he therefore not be cut off by excommunication? If he had proved that all the causes of cutting off in the Law were capital crimes, he had said much: but that will never be proved.

*August 21 through August 31, 1646*

Westminster Assembly. Grand Committee, The Law of God.

The Grand Committee received several propositions about the Law of God during this interruption of the Assembly's regular meetings. "The Assembly after this session [i.e. August 20, Sess. 695] did not sit as assembly for divers dayes till the first of September because they wanted <such> a full number <as are> ordered to be present ... they sat as a grand committee and prepared some thing for the Assembly. On said dayes ... several Reports from Committees Received, as about saving faith, the last judgement, and some additionall propositions concerning the law" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.344).

*September 1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 17, 1646*

Westminster Assembly. Sessions 696–699, 708, 710. Committee for Perfecting the Confession, Cawdry, Law of God.

On September 1, "Ordered that Mr Cawdry be added to the Committee for the perfecting of the confession of faith." The Assembly debated the Law of God (§5, §6, §7) on these dates (Van Dixhoorn, 6.345).

Sept. 15. "Report was made from the Committee for Perfecting the Confession of faith, "of the law": it was Read and debated, and upon debate <much of it> was assented too, the rest referred to the committee" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.355). Some alterations were made, Sept. 17.

*September 23, 1646*

Westminster Assembly. Session 716. Report on Christian Liberty.

"Mr Arrowsmith made Report of Christian liberty. Ordered that this Report be taken into debate Thursday in the Afternoone" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.363).

*September 24, 1646*

Westminster Assembly. Session 718. Debate on Christian Liberty.

"The Assembly entred upon the debate of the report concerning Christian liberty, and upon some debate it was recommitted. Ordered that Dr Burges prepare a title to the confession of faith" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.364).

*September 25, 1646*

Westminster Assembly. Session 719. Christian Liberty Report; Law of God Passed.

"Report was made from the Committee of that Recommended concerning Christian liberty." The Assembly also approved and passed the chapter on the Law of God.

"Dr. Burges made Report of the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> chapters of the confession of faith, and after the Reading of them it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: that the 19 first chapters of the confession of faith shall be sent to the House of Commons, in obedience to their <last> order for sending soe much of the confession of faith as is already perfected" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.364).

*September 30, 1646*

Herbert Palmer, *The duty & honour of church-restorers: set forth in a sermon preached to the Honourable House of Commons, Septemb. 30. 1646. Being the day of the monethly solemne fast, at Margarets Westminster* (London: Printed by R.W. for Thomas Vnderhill, 1646) 51; 52–53. Wing P230.

The next thing that is to be looked unto toward the building of God's house, is the settling of the Doctrine of God's truth firmly by your authority throughout all the kingdom. The Covenant in which we are all engaged, mentions a *confession of faith* to be framed for all the three Kingdoms, part of it (by your special commands) is already presented unto you, and the rest by God's assistance will speedily follow. Of it

give me leave to speak a word humbly and modestly, yet hopefully; I trust you which [sic will] find it as worthy of your *approbation* as any thing that hath hitherto been presented unto you, as having been *composed with care, and reviewed again and again with care; Plain* to those that understand religion, and *full* against the errors of our age; yet moderate in things controverted between Orthodox and sober men; and which contains *no other doctrines* than such as your selves and former Parliaments since the Reformation have *asserted*, against Papists, Arminians, and Antinomians, Libertines and such other erroneous spirits; and so tending to *advance godliness*, as we doubt not when it shall come abroad into the Christian world, the Churches of God will bless him for it not a little, and afford it such a testimony as your selves will rejoice to see and hear....

Certainly the *light of nature* teaches all to punish for *blasphemies against* God, as well as for *treasons against an earthly King*, and the *Scripture* expressly commands to *put such to death*, as also all *Seducers to Idolatry*, & the suitableness of these laws, to the law and light of nature, shows they cannot be *Typical*, or merely *Judicial* laws, considering how necessary they are both for the *honour* of God, and for the *safety of others' souls*, (what ever may become of the offenders themselves) for shall the *murdering of men's bodies*, or the *stealing of their goods*, be capital, and shall not the *stealing away or murdering of souls* be so much rather? Neither is this severity unfitting the times of the new Testament, when Zachary prophesying of the *fountain opened unto the house of David*, which is the *blood of Christ* expressly saith, that even *parents should [put?] to death a false Prophet*, chap. 13. besides other insinuations even in the *new Testament* it self, concerning the the [sic] Magistrate's duty to draw the *sword* against *evil doers*: neither is the plea of conscience any thing in this matter ....

October 1, 1646

Westminster Assembly. Session 720. Christian Liberty Partially Approved.

"The Assembly debated the Report concerning Christian liberty, and dispatched some of it" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.365.

October 7–9, 1646

Westminster Assembly. Sessions 722, 723, 724. Christian Liberty Debated.

October 7: "The Assembly proceeded in the debate 'of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience' and much debate was upon that clause, that 'for publishing of such opinions and maintaining of such practices as are contrary to the light of nature,' &c.

Upon debate that clause was Resolved.

Mr Ny, Mr Carter jun., and Mr Simpson enter their dissent, and the next clause, 'contrary to the knowne principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship or conversation,' was also debated and resolved.

Mr. Carter Jun. enters his dissent.

Ordered to proceed in the debate."

October 8. "The Assembly proceeded in the debate 'of liberty of conscience' and had some debate concerning the clause, 'or the peace of the church' and upon debate it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: to be Recommitted.

October 9. "The Assembly proceeded in the debate and finished that clause concerning the peace of the church and concerning the proceedings against them by the censures of the church" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.367–368).

October 12, 1646

Westminster Assembly. Session 725. Christian Liberty Debated; Report on Civil Magistrate.

"The Assembly proceeded in the debate 'of liberty of conscience' and upon a motion to adde the word 'obstinate' to the words in the last vote it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: The word 'obstinate' shall not be added" (Van Dixhoorn, 6.368).

"Mr. Tuckney made report '...of the civill magistrate ...' (Van Dixhoorn, 6.369).<sup>40</sup>

Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae legis: or, A vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially,*

40. Warfield notes that the chapter on the civil magistrate was possibly debated again on October 12, 13, 14, 15, and 20, "although these debates probably belong to chap. xx". The October 12 entry looks to be a report on the chapters; but Warfield is correct that the others have to do with chapter 20 and are so noted in this article. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931) 113.



| Possible Schedule of Anthony Burgess' Lectures for his book <i>Vindicae Legis</i> |                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| November 17–23, 1645.                                                             | Law of God assigned to Burges' Third Committee. |
| November 24–30, 1645.                                                             | Lecture 1.                                      |
| December 1–7, 1645.                                                               | Lecture 2.                                      |
| December 8–14, 1645.                                                              | Lecture 3.                                      |
| December 15–21, 1645.                                                             | Lecture 4.                                      |
| December 22–28, 1645.                                                             | Lecture 5.                                      |
| December 29–January 4, 1645/46.                                                   | Lecture 6.                                      |
| January 5–11, 1645/46.                                                            | Lecture 7.                                      |
| January 12–18, 1645/46.                                                           | Lecture 8.                                      |
| January 19–25, 1645/46.                                                           | Lecture 9.                                      |
| January 26–February 1, 1645/46.                                                   | Lecture 10.                                     |
| February 2–8, 1645/46.                                                            | Lecture 11.                                     |
| February 9–15, 1645/46.                                                           | Lecture 12.                                     |
| February 16–22, 1645/46.                                                          | Lecture 13.                                     |
| February 23–March 1, 1645/46.                                                     | Lecture 14.                                     |
| March 2–8, 1645/46.                                                               | Lecture 15.                                     |
| March 9–15, 1645/46.                                                              | Lecture 16.                                     |
| March 16–22, 1645/46.                                                             | Lecture 17.                                     |
| March 23–29, 1645/46.                                                             | Lecture 18.                                     |
| March 30–April 5, 1646.                                                           | Lecture 19.                                     |
| April 6–12, 1646.                                                                 | Lecture 20.                                     |
| April 13–19, 1646.                                                                | Lecture 21.                                     |
| April 20–26, 1646.                                                                | Lecture 22.                                     |
| April 27–May 3, 1646.                                                             | Lecture 23.                                     |
| May 4–10, 1646.                                                                   | Lecture 24.                                     |
| May 11–17, 1646.                                                                  | Lecture 25.                                     |
| May 18–24, 1646.                                                                  | Lecture 26.                                     |
| May 25–31, 1646.                                                                  | Lecture 27.                                     |
| June 1–7, 1646.                                                                   | Lecture 28.                                     |
| June 8–9, 1646.                                                                   | Lecture 29.                                     |
| June 11, 1646.                                                                    | Letter of thanks and request to publish.        |

*Antinomians. In XXIX. Lectures, preached at Laurence-Jury, London* (London: James Young, for Thomas Underhill, 1646) 147–148; 155; 168–169; 211–212. Wing B5667; Thomason Tracts, 57:E357[3].

These lectures were given at the request of the ministers of Sion College, which included a significant number of the Westminster divines amongst their number. The importance of these lectures for this study is assured by the fact that this body of ministers approved of them and asked for Burgess to publish them in a preface dated June 11, 1646. If Burgess lectured once a week without interruption, picking a Tuesday for example, counting back twenty-nine weeks from that date would interestingly enough place their start the week after the chapter on the Law of God was assigned to the third committee on Monday, November 17, 1645 (or if the lectures were

given late in the week, counting back places their start the same week of the committee assignment). Burgess was a member of this grand committee of the Assembly. This interesting dating does not prove a formal linkage to the Assembly's work. However, the fact that the impetus to request the lectures *may* lie with Burgess' committee formally taking up that subject, does add strength to a case for their relative importance for shedding light on the subject of the judicial law; a case already made strong by the fact that we can presume a good number of the Westminster divines approved of them.

It is true under this theory, the material of most interest to the wording in WCF 19.4 is delivered by Burgess after the February 9, 1645/46 meeting of the Assembly, where the specific subject of the abrogation of the judicial law is noted as occurring. However, since nothing is noted in the Minutes as far as resolving on any wording, the final form of chapter 19 could have been resolved upon later in the year. Regardless, Burgess' lectures reflect his and presumably many of the divines' view on the matter and the timing is not particularly significant, though it is certainly intriguing that the lectures fit neatly within the twenty-nine weeks between the assignment of the Law of God to the third committee and the letter of thanks requesting they be published.

Burgess' dedication is dated September 21, 1646, and the book came out according to Thomason's date on October 12, 1646 (the same date as the Stationer's record, *A Transcript*, 1.248), only a few weeks after the chapter on the Law of God passed in the Assembly. Given the dating and the interest of the Sion College ministers and Burgess' membership on the third committee, his comments are perhaps some of the most significant in this survey, only second in importance to those in *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* (see December 2, 1646).

First, you must still remember, that *the word Law may be used in divers senses; and, before this or that be asserted of it, you must clear in what sense you speak of the Law.* Not to trouble you again with the several acceptions of the word, which you must have always in your eye, take notice at the present, of what a large or restrained signification the word *Law* is capable of: for we may either take the word *Law* for the whole dispensation and promulgation of the Commandments, *Moral, Judicial, and Ceremonial*: Or else more strictly, for that part which we call the *Moral Law*; yet with the preface and promises added to it: and in both these respects the Law was given as a Covenant of grace (which is to be proved in due time:) Or else most strictly, for that which is mere mandative and preceptive, without any promise at all: And in this

sense, most of those assertions which the Learned have concerning the difference between the *Law* and the *Gospel*, are to be understood; for, if you take (as for the most part they do) all the precepts and threatenings scattered up & down in the Scripture, to be properly the *Law*; and then all the gracious promises, wheresoever they are, to be the *Gospel*, then it's no marvel if the *Law* have many hard expressions cast upon it. Now this shall be handled on purpose in a distinct question by itself, because I see many excellent men peremptory for this difference: but I much question, whether it will hold, or no.

2. *What Law this delivered in Mount Sinai is, and what kinds of laws there are, and why it's called the Moral Law.* It is plain by *Exod.* 20. & *cap.* 21. All the laws that the Jews had were then given to *Moses* to deliver unto the people, only that which we call the *Moral Law*, had the great preheminency, being twice written by God himself in tables of stone. Now the whole body of these laws is, according to the matter and object, divided into *Moral*, *Ceremonial*, and *Judicial*. We will not meddle with the Queries that may be made about this division. We may, without any danger, receive it, and that *Law* which we are to treat upon is the *Moral Law*. And here it must be acknowledged, that the different use of the word *Moral*, hath bred many perplexities; yea, in whatsoever controversy it hath been used, it hath caused mistakes. The word *Moral*, or *Morally*, is used in the controversy of the Sabbath, in the question about converting grace; in the doctrine of the Sacraments, about their efficacy and causality; and so in this question, about a *Law*, what makes it moral. Now in this present doubt, howsoever the word *Moral* beareth no such force in the notation of it (it being as much as that which directeth and obligeth about manners, and so applicable even to the *Judicial* and *Ceremonial*: and these are in a sense commanded in the *Moral Law*, though they be not perpetual), as to denote that which is perpetual and always obliging; yet thus it is meant here, when we speak of a thing moral, as opposite to that, which is binding but for a time....

Again, in the next place, take also this general Observation, *That although the Judicial and Ceremonial laws were given at the same time with the Moral Law, yet there is a difference between them.* And this is to be taken notice of, lest any should think, what will this discourse make for the honour of the *Moral Law*, more then the other laws? It's true, these three kinds of laws agree in the common efficient cause, which was God; and in the minister, or mediator, which was *Moses*; in the subject, which was the people of Israel; and all and every one of them; as also

in the common effects, of binding and obliging them to obedience, and to punish the bold offenders against them. But herein the *Moral Law* is preheminent: 1. In that it is a foundation of the other laws, and they are reduceable to it. 2. This was to abide always, not the other. 3. This was immediately written by God, and commanded to be kept in the Ark, which the other were not....

And, in the first place, I bring this Argument, (which much prevaieth with me:) *If so be the Ceremonial Law, as given by Moses, had still obliged Christians, though there could be no obligation from the matter, had it not been revoked and abolished; then the Moral Law given by Moses must still oblige, though it did not bind in respect of the matter, unless we can show where it is repealed.* For the further clearing of this, you may consider, that this was the great Question, which did so much trouble the Church in her infancy, *Whether Gentiles converted were bound to keep up the Ceremonial Law? Whether they were bound to circumcise, and to use all those legal purifications?* Now how are these Questions decided, but thus? That they were but the shadows, and Christ the fullness was come, and therefore they were to cease.

And thus for the Judicial Laws, because they were given to them as a politick body, that polity ceasing, which was the principal, the accessory falls with it; so that the *Ceremonial Law*, in the judgement of all, had still bound Christians, were there not special revocations of these commands, and were there not reasons for their expiration from the very nature of them. Now no such thing can be affirmed by the *Moral Law*; for the matter of that is perpetual, and there are no places of Scripture that do abrogate it. And, if you say, that the Apostle in some places, speaking of the *Law*, seemeth to take in *Moral*, as well as *Ceremonial*, I answer it thus: The question which was first started up and troubled the Church, was merely about Ceremonies, as appeareth *Act* 15. and their opinion was, that by the usage of this Ceremonial worship they were justified; either wholly excluding Christ, or joining him together with the Ceremonial Law. Now it's true, the Apostles, in demolishing this error, do *ex abundanti* show, that not only the works of the Ceremonial Law, but neither of the *Moral Law* do justify; but that benefit we have by Christ only: Therefore the Apostles, when they bring in the *Moral Law* in the dispute, they do it in respect of justification, not obligation; for the main Question was, *Whether the Ceremonial Law did still oblige*: and their additional error was, that if it did oblige, we should still be justified by the performance of those acts; so that the Apostles do not join the *Moral* and

Ceremonial Law in the issue of obligation (for, though the Jews would have held, they were not justified by them, yet they might not have practised them) but in regard of justification: and this is the first Argument....

In the first place therefore consider, *That about a Law there are these affections* (if I may call them so;) There is an *Interpretation*, a *dispensation*, or *relaxation*: and these differ from an *abrogation*; for the former do suppose the Law still standing in force, though mitigated; but *Abrogation* is then properly, when a Law is totally taken away. And this *Abrogation* ariseth sometimes from the express constitution at first, which did limit and prescribe the time of the law's continuance: sometimes by an express revoking and repealing of it by that authority which made it: sometimes by adding to that repeal an express law commanding the contrary. Now it may be easily proved, that the Ceremonial, and Judicial laws they are abrogated by express repeal. The Judicial Law 1 Pet. 2. 13. where they are commanded to *be subject to every ordination of man*: and this was long foretold, *Genes. 49. 10. The Law-giver shall be taken from Judah*. The Ceremonial Law that is also expressly repealed *Act. 15.* and in other places: not that these were ill or that they did come from an ill author; but because the fullness and substance of them was now come, of whom the ceremonies were a shadow.

October 13–16, 20, 21, 1646

Westminster Assembly. Sessions 726–729, 730, 731. Christian Liberty; Civil Magistrate.

On October 13 the “Assembly proceeded in debate of the chap. ‘of liberty of conscience’ & the power of the civill magistrate in punishing such as mantaine & publish opinions against the light of Nature, &c.”

October 14. “Mr Marshall brought another order in answer to the messadge sent to the House of Commons about the printing of the confession of faith.”

“Ordered that the scribes doe take care of the exact printing of the confession of faith.

The Assembly proceeded in the debate of the power of the civill magistrate in punishing Herisyas, &c.”

October 15. “The Assembly proceeded in the debate about the power of the magistrate.

The argument was used for the Affirmative, that the magistrate hath such a power, and upon debate it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: This Argument hath not been sufficiently answered.

An argument was also urged for the negative, and upon debate it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: This argument hath been answered.”

October 16. “The Assembly proceeded in the debate of that part of the chapter ‘of liberty of conscience’ concerning the peace of the church in reference to the power of the civill magistrate.”

October 20. “The Assembly debated the putting of the proposition concerning the power of the civil magistrate into the confession of faith.”

October 21. “The Assembly proceeded in the debate of the Report ‘of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience,’ and upon debate of the Arguments against the putting of this proposition into the confession of faith it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: That the Arguments brought against the putting of the proposition last voted into the confession of faith are answered.

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: That this proposition shall stand in the confession of faith: ‘That for their publishing such opinions or mantaining such practices,’ etc. (as before voted) ‘may be lawfully called to account, and proceeded against by the power of the civill magistrate.

Mr Simpson, Mr Burroughes, Mr Greenhill entred their dissent.

Mr Carter entred his dissent to the truth of it” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.369–371).

October 23, 1646

Westminster Assembly. *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning part of a confession of faith ...* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, [1646]) 31. W1427.

Chapter 19. Of the Law of God.

4. To them also, as a Body Politique, he gave sundry judiciall Laws, which expired together with the State of that People; not obliging any other now, further than the generall equity thereof may require.

October 28, 1646

Stephen Marshall, *A two-edged sword out of the mouth of babes, to execute vengeance upon the enemy and avenger. Presented in a sermon to the Right Honourable*

*the House of Lords ... Octob. 28. 1646. ...* (London: R. Cotes for Stephen Bowtell, at the Bible in Popes-head-alley, 1646) 21; 26–28.

Possibly I shall not be able to name every particular branch, but there are five things that are most cleare, which all are the fruit of the mouth, and by them in all ages, these babes and sucklings have overcome the enemy and the avenger [Ps. 8:2], First,

1. Preaching.
2. Confessing, or professing the Name, Truth, and Cause of God and his Christ.
3. Praising, singing out praise, and Psalms, and hymns to God.
4. Praying ...
5. Covenanting....

... And now I should think this Lesson were very fit for application, did I not know it necessary to remove one great stumbling block out of the way, which when I have done in a few words, I shall endeavour to set it home in 2 or 3 Uses.

All this which I have said of the Arms of Christians, is by some retorted upon ourselves against our present war, as if we held not ourselves within the bounds of Christianity, for say they, If these be all the weapons and strength whereby the Saints do overcome, why do you use any other means to overcome your enemies? why rest you not contented with this? either these are not all, or you are not Christians, not true to your own Principles; Indeed (say they) the time hath been when such a Sermon as this was owned as Divinity, in the time of the Fathers, when *preces & lachrynia*, prayers and tears, were all the weapons which the Church did use; but now when you have spoke all these things of the power of Preaching, and Praying, and Confessing, and Covenanting, you are glad to betake yourselves to Arms, to see what they will do, to help these out, whence it's apparent you dare not rest in these as sufficient helps; and so they throw this as a stumbling block in our way, but this is easily removed. I answer therefore,

... We acknowledge, that as we are Christians (in that capacity) we use no other weapons than these I have told you of, these only are proper and peculiar to us as

we are *Christians*; but the weapons which we enjoy as we are Christians, do not deprive us of those that we enjoy in the capacity of *Men*; look whatsoever belongs to us in the capacity of *Men*, or in the capacity of *Subjects*, or of *Freemen*, Christianity doth not take them away, but super-adds these unto them. I say therefore, that we have all the same means of defence against unjust violence, that are common to us with other men, as we are *Men*, and we have the same means of defence, as we are *Freemen*, which other *Freemen* have; and we challenge in this no more then we might lawfully use, if we were *Papists* or *Turks*, if we were *Pagans*, *Jews*, or *Indians*: we challenge not this to belong to christianity[sic], as peculiar to it, we have learned that by the law of *Nature* and *Nations*, men may defend themselves against unjust violence....

October 30, 1646

Westminster Assembly. Session 733. Christian Liberty Concluded.

“The Assembly proceeded in the debate of the last clause of the chapter ‘of liberty of conscience,’ and upon debate that clause was layed aside and the whole was concluded and is as followeth:” no text given (Van Dixhoorn, 6.372).

November 9, 1646

Westminster Assembly. Session 736. Civil Magistrate Approved.

Chapter 23 on the Civil Magistrate was passed on this date, with further adjustments made on December 3–4 (Van Dixhoorn, 6.374).

December 2, 1646

*Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici: or, the Divine Right of Church Government Asserted* (London, 1646) 29–30; 233. Wing J1217. The text is taken from the Naph-tali Press edition compiled from the first and third editions,<sup>41</sup> ed. David W. Hall (Naph-tali Press, 1995) 30–31; 240.

Sparked by the contention between Parliament and the Presbyterian majority of the Westminster Assembly over

41. There are only negligible variations between the text at the places cited in the first and third editions.



the assertion of *Jus Divinum* Presbyterianism, this work is presumed by many historians of the Assembly to be the thoughts of that majority, regardless of whether they wrote the whole work, or whether their answers were taken and incorporated in an expanded form by the “sundry ministers of London.”<sup>42</sup> These ministers of London met at Sion College informally prior to, and formally under, the Provincial Assembly of London (the Provincial government was “coming into operation in London during the months of July and August 1646, when the organization might be considered complete. The first Provincial Synod met on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1647”).<sup>43</sup> Members included Edmund Calamy, who had a hand in this group’s “valuable productions,” and more than a few of the members of the Westminster Assembly, including John Ley, Herbert Palmer, Daniel Cawdrey, George Walker, William Reyner, Obadiah Sedgwick, Richard Vines, and William Gouge.

*Jus Divinum* was entered in the Stationers’ register on August 13, 1646 (*A Transcript*, 1.242), which, though the MS may or may not have been complete, places the intent of publication within weeks of Parliament removing the pressure on the Assembly to answer their “captious” queries regarding Presbyterian polity. Baillie notes that *Jus Divinum* appeared the first of December which squares with Thomason’s date (*Letters*, 2.411). Whether or not it was an actual answer by proxy by the Assembly to Parliament, it would seem to exhibit the understanding of 19.4 of at least a significant portion of the divines, and it is therefore the most interesting and, while perhaps shy of it, possibly the closest thing to an authoritative explanation of the divines’ meaning at 19.4 that may be found.

God’s commands are either *Immediate* or *Mediate*.

1. *Immediate divine commands*. As those which God himself propounds and urges; [such] as the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20; Dt. 5) and all other injunctions of his in his word positively laid down. Of such commands the Apostle says, “I command, yet not I, but the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:10). Now these immediate commands of God, in regard of their manner of promulging and propounding, are either *Explicit* or *Implicit*.

42. The contention over the assertion of *Jus Divinum* between the Parliament and the Assembly, the breach of privilege charged upon the Assembly, and the nine queries sent up to them to answer, is covered by John R. de Witt, *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1969). The authorship of *Jus Divinum* is covered on pages 229–234.

43. Alexander H. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England: Their Rise, Decline and Revival* (London: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1889) 311.

a. *Explicit*, which are expressly and in plain terms laid down, as the letter of the Commandments of the Decalogue (Ex. 20); the commands of Christ, “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep” (Jn. 21); “Go, disciple ye all Nations &c.” (Mt. 28:19); “Do this in remembrance of me” (Mt. 26; 1 Cor. 11:23–24 &c.). Now whatsoever is expressly commanded of God in plain evident terms, that is *jure divino*, without all color of controversy. Only take this caution: the *divine Right* of things enjoyed by God’s express command is to be interpreted according to the nature of the thing commanded, and the end or scope of the Lord in commanding, e.g.: 1. Some things God commands *morally* to be of perpetual use; as, to honor father and mother, &c. These are *jure divino* for ever. 2. Some things he commands but *positively* to be of use for a certain season; as the ceremonial administrations till Christ should come, for the Jewish Church, and the Judicial observances for their Jewish polity. All these positive laws were *jure divino*, till Christ abrogated them....

We answer, the Laws of the Jewish Church, whether *Ceremonial* or *Judicial*, so far forth are in force, even at this day, as they were grounded upon common equity, the principles of reason and nature, and were serving to the maintenance of the Moral Law. It is of eternal right that the party unjustly aggrieved should have redress, that the adverse party should not be sole Judge and party too, that judgement ought not to be rashly or partially passed upon any. The *Jewish Polity* is only abrogated in regard of what was in it of *particular right*, not of *common right*, so far as there was in their Laws either a *typology* proper to their Church, or a *peculiarity* respecting their state in that Land of Promise given unto them. Whatever was in their Laws of *Moral concern*, or *general equity* is still obliging.

**William Gouge.** The last named above who was a Westminster Divine and a member of the London Provincial Assembly, also served as the first moderator of the latter, and was looked upon as the “father” of the London ministers. Gouge was also very esteemed by his fellow Westminster Divines, and he often took the Prolocutor’s chair in his absence. While there is no work that can be pinpointed to the time limited for this survey, given his stature amongst the divines and connection through the Provincial Assembly to the *Jus Divinum*, it is worthwhile to digress slightly and bring in Dr. Gouge’s summary statement on the judicial law.

For thirty years Gouge had been preaching through the book of Hebrews at the Wednesday lecture at Blackfriars, which he continued until the end of his pastorate. Prior to his death he had labored to prepare the sermons for the press in the form of a commentary. This was published in 1655. He specifically addresses the judicial law in comments on Hebrews 7:12, section 69 (William Gouge, *A Learned and very useful Commentary on the whole epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Printed by A.M., T.W. and S.G. for Joshua Kirton, 1655) 170–171.

§. 68. Of the abrogation of the Ceremonial Law.

The Jews were under a threefold Law, Moral, Ceremonial, and Judicial.

The Ceremonial Law is here intended: for that especially depended upon the Levitical Priest-hood.

The Moral Law concerns all the Sons of *Adam*: but the two other concern the Sons of *Abraham*....

Sec. 69. Of the judicial Law of the Jews.

Besides the ceremonial Law, the Jews had a judicial Law, proper and peculiar to that polity. This Law concerned especially their civil estate. Many branches of that Law appertained to the Jewish Priest-hood: as, The particular Laws about the *Cities of refuge*, whether such, as slew any unawares fled, and there abode till the death of the High Priest, Num. 35. 25. And Laws about Lepers, which the Priest was to judge, Lev. 14. 3. And sundry other cases which the Priest was to judge of, Deut. 17. 9. So also the Laws of \* distinguishing tribes [marginal reference: \*Num. 36. 7.]; of reserving inheritances to special tribes and families, of selling them to the next of Kin, Ruth 4.4. Of raising seed to a brother that died without issue, Gen. 38. 8. 9, Of all manner of freedoms at the year of Jubilee, Lev. 25. 13. &c.

There were other branches of the judicial Law which rested upon common equity: and were means of keeping the moral Law: as putting to death Idolaters and such as enticed others thereunto: and witches, and wilful murderers, and other notorious malefactors: So likewise Laws against incest, and incestuous marriages: Laws of reverencing and obeying Superiors and Governors: and of dealing justly in borrowing, restoring, buying, selling, and all manner of contracts. [Exod. 22.20. Deut. 13.9. Exod. 22.18. Num. 35. 30. Lev. 20. 11, &c. 19. 32, 35.]

The former sort were abolished together with the Priesthood.

The latter sort remain as good directions to order even Christian polities accordingly.

1. By these kinds of Laws the wisdom of God was manifested in observing what was fit for the particular kind and condition of people: and in giving them answerable Laws, and yet not tying all Nations and States thereunto.

2. That liberty which God affordeth to others to have Laws most agreeable to their own Country, so as they be not contrary to equity and piety, bindeth them more obediently to submit themselves to their own wholesome Laws, and to keep peace, unity, and amity among themselves.

*December 3, 1646*

**Westminster Assembly. Session 751. Slight Alteration to Law of God.**

A slight alteration was approved to the chapter on the Law of God. “Ordered: in chapt: 19: paragraph 6, ‘Therof’ to be put instead ‘of them’” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.383).

“The Committee doe consider of that which is propounded concerning the Chapt. of the civill Magistrate” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.384).

*December 4, 1646*

**Westminster Assembly. Session 752. Gillespie’s Alteration to “Of the Civil Magistrate”.**

“Upon a motion by Mr Gilesby for an alteration in the chapt[er] about the civill magistrate, and upon debate it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: that in the said chapter, for the word ‘Christ,’ the word ‘God’ shall be put in 3 places.

Dr Burges enters his dissent.

Memorandum: this vote was not intended to determine the controversy about the subordination of the civill magistrate to Christ as mediatur” (Van Dixhoorn, 6.385).

December 7, 1646

Westminster Assembly. *The humble advice of the Assembly of Divines, now by authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, concerning a confession of faith, presented by them lately to both houses of Parliament. A certain number of copies are ordered to be printed only for the use of the members of both houses and of the Assembly of Divines, to the end that they may advise thereupon* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, ordered December 7, 1646) 31, 32, 39. W1427.

#### Chapter 19. Of the Law of God.

IV. To them also, as a Body Politique, he gave sundry Judicial Laws, which expired together with the State of that People; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.

#### Chapter 20. Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience.

[I.] THE Liberty which Christ hath purchased for Beleevers, under the Gospel, consists, in their freedome from the guilt of sin, the condemning Wrath of God, the Curse of the Moral Law; and, in their being delivered from this present evil World, bondage to Satan, and Dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free accesse to God, and their yeelding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a Childe-like love and willing minde. All which, were common also to Beleevers under the Law. But, under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the Ceremonial Law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected; and in greater boldnesse of accesse to the Throne of Grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than Beleevers, under the Law, did ordinarily partake of...

IV. And because the Powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God, to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; They, who upon pretence of Christian Liberty, shall oppose any lawful Power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be Civil or Ecclesiastical, resist the Ordinance of God. And, for their publishing of such Opinions, or maintaining of such Practices, as are contrary to the light of Nature, or to

the known Principles of Christianity, whether concerning Faith, Worship, or Conversation; or, to the Power of Godliness; or, such erroneous Opinions or Practises, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external Peace and Order which Christ hath established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the Censures of the Church, and by the Power of the Civil Magistrate.

The original wording of 20.1 from March 27, 1646 was changed, dropping reference to freedom from the judicial law. While the abrogation of the ceremonial and judicial law was discussed February 9, 1645/46, and would have presumably informed the draft of 20.1, no wording is recorded for 19.1–4 at any point in the Minutes by which to gauge the relationship and development of the two sections. The divines began to approve chapters in June, with a timeout to deal with the *jus divinum* controversy in July, another week with no meetings, and a period at the end of August where they meet in Grand Committee for lack of a quorum. At that time the Assembly received committee reports including additional propositions on the Law of God which would form 19.5–7, and they began debating draft wording of these paragraphs as soon as they met again in full session on September 1. The whole of chapter 19 was approved on September 24, 1646, and apparently 19.1–4 was not presented to the Assembly until then. With the more nuanced statement of 19.4 approved, it may be the draft text for 20.1 was changed during the debate on Christian Liberty in October of 1646, or possibly earlier, by the committee for perfecting the wording of the confession, which was given liberty to correct imperfections and report them on June 19, 1646.

#### Chapter 23. Of the Civil Magistrate.

II. It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the Office of a Magistrate; when called thereunto: in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain Piety, Justice, and Peace, according to the wholsom Laws of each Commonwealth; so, for that end, they may lawfully now, under the New Testament, wage Warre, upon just and necessary occasion.

III. The Civil Magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and Sacraments, or the power of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: yet, he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that Unity and Peace be preserved in the Church, that the Truth of God

be kept pure, and intire; that all Blasphemies and Heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in Worship and Discipline prevented, or reformed; and all the Ordinances of God duly settled, administred, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call Synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them, be according to the minde of God.

January 6, 1646/47

Westminster Assembly. Session 768. Scripture Proofs.

“Ordered that Mr Wilson, Mr Byfield, Mr Gower, be a committee to prepare scriptures for the confession of faith” (Van Dixhoorn, 7:397).

January 27, 1646/47

Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Nature and Danger of Heresies, opened in a Sermon Before the Honourable House of Commons, January 27, 1646 at Margarets Westminster, being the day of their solemn Monthly Fast* (London: Printed by M. F. for Samuel Gellibrand, 1647) 36. Wing S2377.

Pious and learned Amesius *in cas. Consc.* [l.4.c.4.q.6.], speaking to that question, Whether Heretics are to be punished by the Civil Magistrate? Answers thus, *Magistratus locus & officiu postulat ut reprimat improbos turbatores gladio, vel potestate publica & externa si opus fuerit*: It is his place and duty to repress them, and restrain them, if they be noxious and turbulent: yea, and he adds more than every one will be patient to hear: namely, that if also they be manifestly blasphemous and pertinacious, they may be cut off *supplicio capitali*: according to that in Levit. 24. 15, 16. But I will not fall upon the discussion of that at this time....

February 19 and 22, 1646/47

Westminster Assembly. Session 796. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 19.

The Scripture proofs were debated and approved for Chapter 19, Of the Law of God.

February 25, 1646/47

Westminster Assembly. Session 798. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 20.

The proofs for the first three paragraphs of Chapter 20

on Christian Liberty were debated and approved. (Van Dixhoorn, 7:414).

February 26, March 2–5, 1646/47

Westminster Assembly. Sessions 799, 801–804. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 20.

The proofs for the fourth paragraph of Chapter 20 were debated and some approved on these dates.

March 3, 1646/47

Westminster Assembly. Session 802. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 23.

The Scripture proofs for Chapter 23 on the Civil Magistrate were debated on this date.

March 5, 1646/47

Westminster Assembly. Session 804. Review of Scripture Proofs.

“Ordered that Mr Burges, Dr Smith, Mr Calamy, Mr Palmer, Mr Seaman, Mr Strickland, Mr Spurstow, Mr Case, Mr Scudder and Dr. Hoyle or any 3 of them shall be a committee to joine with the committee for the scriptures to review the scriptures; they are to meete on Thursday next in the afternoone, the care of this committee is referred to Mr Scudder” (Van Dixhoorn, 7:419).

March 10, 1646/47

Richard Vines, *The authours, nature, and danger of haeresie laid open in a sermon preached before the Honorable House of Commons at Margarets Westminster, upon Wednesday the tenth of March, 1646: being set apart as a solemn day of publike humiliation to seeke God's assistance for the suppressing and preventing of the growth and spreading of errors, heresies, and blasphemies* (London: Printed by W. Wilson for Abel Roper, 1647) 64–65. V545.

For the blasphemous and seditious Heretics, both Lutherans<sup>44</sup> and others of the Reformed churches do agree

44. *Hæreticum seditiosum & blasphemum capitali supplicio dignum nemo ex nostris facile impugnabit. Tota quæstio est de hæretico simplici Meisnerus Philos. Sob. sect 2 cap. 4.*



that they may be punished capitally, that is for their blasphemy or sedition; but the *Socinian* stands out here also,<sup>45</sup> and denies; alleging that the punishment of false Prophets in the old Testament was *speciali jure* by special law granted to the *Israelites*, and therefore you must not look (saith the *Socinian*) into the old Testament for a rule of proceeding against false Prophets and blasphemers: Nor (saith *Calvin* and *Catharinus*)<sup>46</sup> can you find in the new Testament any precept for the punishment of Thieves, Traitors, Adulterers, Witches, murderers and the like, and yet they may, or at least some of them be capitally punished: for the Gospel destroys not the just laws of civil policy or Common-wealths; but I will not enter upon the debate of this point, neither bringing in the Scriptures or reasons for it, nor answering the arguments brought against it, of which arguments this I suggest (by the way) to your observation, that some of them do even *ship in one bottom the moral duties commanded in the old Testament, and the typical ceremonies or shadows. Some of them* do make against Ecclesiastical censures as well as civil,<sup>47</sup> and *some of them* do carry further than haply they are intended, even to take off civil punishments of sins against the *second Table* also: neither do I see any just reason, that if the office of a Magistrate have any place in the matters of the *first Table*, he can punish *sedition*, which is against his own name or dignity, and stand still and look on with his hands tied, whiles the name and honour of the great God is openly traduced or blasphemed.

March 11–12, 1646/47

**Westminster Assembly.** Sessions 805–806. Scripture Proofs, Chapter 20.

The Assembly debated the proofs to Chapter 20 which continued on the 12<sup>th</sup>, when the debate was concluded and the proofs approved: “The Assembly proceeded in the debate of the scriptures for the proove of the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of the confession of faith and the scriptures were assented to as in the margent of the confession.

Mr Carter enters his dissent to the proofes about the civil magistrate” (Van Dixhoorn, 7.420).

April 5, 1647

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 820. Confession of Faith Finished.

“The Confession was finished. Upon a motion by Mr Seaman that something be annexed by way of caution to shew how the proofes are to be applied, it was

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: ther shall be noe further debate about cautions to be added about the proofes of scripture.

Resolved upon the Q[uestion]: that the Review of the confession of faith be considered of by the 3 Committees of the Assembly.

Ordered that the Committees appointed for the review of the confession make report tomorrow morning what they have done about it” (Van Dixhoorn, 7.430–431).

April 6, 1647

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 821. Scripture Proofs Approved.

“Mr Scudder made report of the Review of the Proofes for the confession of faith, for the 7 first chapters and part of the 8<sup>th</sup>, and upon debate of it, it was assented too, as the proofes are entred in the Margent of the Confession of faith.

Ordered that the Rest of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapt: and chapt 9<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> be referred to the first committee to review, and from chapt. 18 to the 25<sup>[th]</sup> to the second committee and <from> chapt. 26 to the end of the confession to the 3<sup>rd</sup> committee” (Van Dixhoorn, 7.432).

Thus the second standing committee had review of the Scripture proofs for chapters 19, 20 and 23.

April 12, 1647

**Westminster Assembly.** Session 825. Scripture Proofs of Chapter 23 Approved.

“Mr Young made report of the Review of the 22th & 23[rd] chapt. and they ware debated and assented too” (Van Dixhoorn, 7.434).

April 29, 1647

**Westminster Assembly.** *The humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, concerning a Confession of Faith, with*

45. Schlichtingius *pro Socino contra* Meisnerus page 457.

46. Calvin *de Serveto in opusc.* Catharinus in 3 Titus 10.

47. Which Erastus denies not as to Haereticks or such as keep not the faith, *Theis.* 9. & 70.

*the quotations and texts of Scripture annexed* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, 1647) 33, 35–36, 41–42. Wing W1429.

## Chapter 19. Of the Law of God.

IV. To them also, as a Body Politique, he gave sundry Judicial Laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.<sup>g</sup>

g. Exod. 21. chapter. Exod. 22.1. to 29. Gen. 49. 10. with 1 Pet. 2. 13, 14.<sup>48</sup> Mat. 5.17 with vers. 38, 39. 1 Cor. 9.8, 9, 10 [the letters in the text have been put in superscript for legibility].

## Chapter 20. Of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience.

[I.] The Liberty which Christ hath purchased for Beleevers, under the Gospeł, consists, in their freedome from the guilt of sin, the condemning Wrath of God, the Curse of the Moral Law;<sup>a</sup> and, in their being delivered from this present evil World, bondage to Satan, and Dominion of sin;<sup>b</sup> from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation;<sup>c</sup> as also, in their free accesse to God,<sup>d</sup> and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a Childe-like love and willing minde.<sup>e</sup> All which, were common also to Beleevers under the Law.<sup>f</sup> But, under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the Ceremonial Law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected;<sup>g</sup> and in greater boldnesse of accesse to the Throne of Grace,<sup>h</sup> and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than Beleevers, under the Law, did ordinarily partake of.<sup>i</sup>

a. Tit. 2.14. 1 Thes. 1.10. Gal. 3.13. b. Gal. 1.4. Col. 1.13. Act. 26.18. Rom. 6.14. c. Rom. 8.28. Psal. 119.71. 1 Cor. 15.54, 55, 56, 57. Rom. 8.1. d. Rom. 5.1, 2. e. Rom. 8.14, 15. 1 John 4.18. f. Gal. 3.9, 14. g. Gal. 4.1, 2, 3, 6, 7. Gal. 5.1. Act. 15.10, 11. h. Heb. 4.14, 16. Heb. 10.19, 20, 21, 22. i. 1 John 7.38, 39. 2 Cor. 3.13, 17, 19 [sic 18].<sup>49</sup>

... IV. And because the Powers which God hath ordained, and the Liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God, to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; They, who upon pretence of Christian Liberty, shall oppose any lawfull Power, or the lawfull exercise of it, whether it bee Civil

or Ecclesiasticall, resist the Ordinance of God.<sup>p</sup> And, for their publishing of such Opinions, or maintaining of such Practises, as are contrary to the light of Nature, or to the known Principles of Christianity, whether concerning Faith, Worship, or Conversation; or, to the Power of Godlinesse; or, such erroneous Opinions or Practises, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the externall Peace and Order which Christ hath established in the Church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the Censures of the Church,<sup>q</sup> and by the Power of the Civil Magistrate.<sup>r</sup>

p. Mat. 12.25. 1 Pet. 2.13, 14, 16. Rom. 13.1 to 8. Heb. 13.17. q. Rom. 1.32 with 1 Cor. 5.1, 5, 11, 13. 2 John vers. 10, 11, and 2 Thess. 3.14, and 1 Tim. 6.3, 4, 5, and Tit. 1.10, 11, 13, and Tit. 3.10 with Mat. 18.15, 16, 17. 1 Tim. 1.19, 20. Rev. 2.2, 14, 15, 20. Rev. 3.9.

r. Deut. 13.6 to 12. Rom. 13.3, 4 with 2 John v. 10, 11. Ezra 7.23, 25, 26, 27, 28. Rev. 17.12, 16, 17. Neh. 13.15, 17, 21, 22, 25, 30. 2 Kings 23.5, 6, 9, 20, 21. 2 Chron. 34.33. [2] Chron. 15.12, 13, 16. Dan. 3.29. 1 Tim. 2.2. Isa. 49.23. Zech. 13.2, 3.

## Chapter 23. Of the Civil Magistrate.

II. It is lawfull for Christians to accept and execute the Office of a Magistrate; when called thereunto:(b)<sup>50</sup> in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain Piety, Justice, and Peace, according to the wholsom Laws of each Commonwealth;(c) so, for that end, they may lawfully now, under the New Testament, wage War, upon just and necessary occasion.(d)

(b). Pro. 8.15, 16. Rom. 13.1, 2, 4. (c). Psal. 2.10, 11, 12. 1 Tim. 2.2. Psal. 82.3, 4. 2 Sam. 23.3. 1 Pet. 2.13. (d). Luke 3.14. Rom. 13.4. Mat. 8.9, 10. Act. 10.1, 2. Rev. 17.14, 16.

III. The Civil Magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and Sacraments, or

48. Anthony Burges adduced 1 Peter 2:13 and Gen. 49:10 in his *Vindicae Legis* for the abrogation of the Judicial law; see above, page 44.

49. There is no verse 19. See S. W. Carruthers, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 127.

50. The typesetter switched to parenthetical reference letters with Chapter 22 paragraph 7 which falls on the same page as the first two paragraphs of Chapter 23, and this form continues through Chapter 33 (*Humble Advice*, 41–56).

the power of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven:(e) yet, he hath Authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that Unity and Peace be preserved in the Church, that the Truth of God be kept pure, and intire; that all Blasphemies and Heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in Worship and Discipline prevented, or reformed; and all the Ordinances of God duly settled, administred, and observed.(f) For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call Synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them, be according to the minde of God.(g)

(e) 2 Chron. 26.18 with Mat. 18.17 and Mat. 16.19. 1 Cor. 12.28, 29. Eph. 4.11, 12. 1 Cor. 4.1, 2. Rom. 10.15. Heb. 5.4. (f) Isa. 49.23. Psal. 122.9. Ezra 7.23, 25, 26, 27, 28. Lev. 24.16. Deut. 13.5, 6, 12. 2 Kings 18.4.<sup>51</sup> 1 Chron. 13.1, to 9. 2 Kings 23. 1, to 26. 2 Chron. 34.33. 2 Chron. 15.12, 13. (g) 2 Chron. 19.8, 9, 10, 11. 2 Chron. 29. 30 Chapters. Matt. 2.4, 5.

### May 26, 1647

Thomas Case, *Spirituell Whordome Discovered in a Sermon Preach'd Before the Honourable House of Commons Assembled in Parliament, Upon the Solemn Day of Humiliation, May 26. 1647* (London: Printed by J. Macock, for Luke Favvne, and are to be sold at his shop, at the sign of the Parrot in Pauls-Church-yard, 1647) 32–34. Wing C843.

As Mr. Case's sermon was preached upon the next fast after the printing of the Confession with proof texts, it has been included in the survey.

There is a word of *Exhortation* behind, and I beseech you *suffer it*.

First, to you *Honorable and Noble Patriots*, who are called to be the *Reformers*, and *Healers* of a poor *broken kingdome*, I would humbly move these 2. things.

First, that you would *exert that power and authority which God hath given you, to the punishing and suppressing of the Adulteries and whoredoms of the land, which do stare heaven and earth in the face, and do provoke the jealousy of God, even to give England a bil of divorce and put us away: arise I say oh ye Rulers and Governors of England, gird your sword upon your thigh,*

*and ride on prosperously because of truth and righteousness, and let your right hand teach you terrible things* (Ps. 45:[3–]4). You know what *Phineas* did in the case of *Corporal whoredom*, committed in the face of God and the Congregation. Then *stood up Phineas and executed vengeance or judgment*; and you remember how wel the Lord took it at his hands: *The plague was stayed, and it was imputed to him for righteousness* (Ps. 106, 30, 31); Oh that the *Spirit of Phineas* may come upon you; that you may *sheath your sword in the bowels* of these monstrous *whoredoms* of all sorts, *Corporal* and *Spiritual*, which are committed in the sight of all *Israel*, yea in the sight of all the *Churches* round about us: that the *blessing of Phineas* may come upon you, and the *plague* may be stayed.

Doth not indeed the *punishing* and *suppressing* of *Spiritual whoredoms* against God, *Idolatry*, *Heresie*, *Blasphemie*, and the rest: doth it not belong unto you, as wel as the punishing of *bodily whoredoms*, *theft*, *murder*, &c.? Doth it indeed belong to you only to look to the *Civil peace*, and to let *Religion*, and *truth*, and the *worship of God*, stand or fall to their own master? fight *God*, fight *Divel*, fight *Christ*, fight *Antichrist*; catch that catch can; you have nothing to do but to stand by, and look on! Say so then; speak out, publish it in your *declarations* to the world, and let the people of *England* know, that it is the *right* and *liberty*, to which the subjects of *England* are born, that every man *hold* what he *please*, and *publish* and *preach* what he holds: that it is the *birth-right* (as some would have it) of the *free-born people of England*, every man to worship God *according* to his own *Conscience*; and to be of what *religion* his own *Conscience* shall dictate: do so, and see (*fathers and brethren*) how long your *Civil peace* wil *secure* you, when *religion* is destroyed; how long it wil be ere your *Civil peace*, be turned into *Civil war*! for no doubt if this once be granted them, but they may in good time come to know also (there be them that are instructing them, even in these principles too) that it is their *birth-right* to be *freed from the power of Parliaments*, and from the power of *Kings*; and to *take up arms* against *both*, when they shal not *vote* and *act* according to their humours: *Liberty of Conscience* (falsly so called) may in good time, improve it self into *liberty of estates*, and *liberty of houses*, and *liberty of wives*, and in a word, *liberty of perdition*, of *soules* and *bodies*.

*Right Honorable*, and worthy *Gentlemen*: I cannot stand to dispute, this only would I know of you; are *Idolaters* and *Heretiques*, and *Blasphemers* and *Seducers*, are they

51. Carruthers erroneously has 1 Kings 18:4 instead of 2 Kings 18:4 (Carruthers, 136).

*evil doers?* if so, then look to your *Charge*. Rom. 13. 3, 4. *Rulers must be a terror to evil doers*, unless ye mean to *bear the Sword in vain*. And if you wil, God wil not; and if God take the *Sword into his own hand* once (as he seems to be a doing of it) he wil smite to purpose; he wil *execute vengeance thoroughly*: both upon the *evil doers*, and upon you that have not bin a *terror* to them. Oh therefore *up* and be *doing*, that you may *deliver the kingdom out of the hand of the Lord*; for it is a *fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. O let not your *patience* (I hope it is no more all this while) be interpreted a *Connivence*, and your *Connivence* be taken for a *tolleration*, it may be the kingdoms *ruin*, but it wil be your *sin*.

2. As you should *punish* the whoredoms of the land, so I humbly call upon you in the name of the Lord this day, that you would awaken and stir up your selves to *prevent the further whorish departures* of this our *Israel* from the Lord....

#### POSTSCRIPT

March 8, 1647/48

Westminster Assembly. Session 1027. Cheynell and Acontius.

“Mr Chainell made Report from the Committee appointed to consider of Acontius his booke.

Ord[ered]: The Assembly do return thanks to the Committee, particularly to that reverend brother for the pains taken therein, & that if himselfe or any other of the committee shall as from themselves publish any for vindicating of the truth & discovering the danger in that booke, it will be acceptable to the Assembly.” (Van Dixhoorn, Minutes, 7.770).

Francis Cheynell, “The Report made to the Reverend Assembly, March 8, 1647–48,” in *The Divine Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London: Printed by T.R. and E.M. for Samuel Gellibrand ..., 1650). Wing C3811; not in Thomason. The Epistle to the Reader is dated March 26, 1650.

The outline of the report mentioned in the Assembly minutes cited above appears in this work by Mr. Cheynell (*Divine Trinity*, 453–456), and presumably many of the arguments he used in the Assembly are given in the pages dealing with Acontius. The report and evaluation

of Acontius are a digression within the final chapter of the book, whose topic is that Christians should deny communion with anti-Trinitarians. Following the outline and a paragraph noting that the Assembly had ask that he publish his reasonings against Acontius at his convenience, Cheynell states, “*Acontius hath invented very pretty diversions instead of Excuses to abate our zeale against the most dangerous errorrs...*” Then, after a summary stating why Socinians are to be rejected as Christians, he ends the book with a discussion of “Whether seducing Hereticks, and blasphemous Apostates may be punished.” This would seem to be a conclusion to the chapter rather than something related to the report and discussion at the Assembly. However, while it falls outside the range originally fixed upon for this survey, it may be apt to end with Mr. Cheynell’s thoughts on the civil magistrate and the judicial law, which seem to reflect well the consensus of various of the Westminster Divines.<sup>52</sup>

Whether seducing Hereticks, and blasphemous Apostates may be punished.

I am not at leasure to handle the Magistrates duty in this point; nor are many of them at leasure to consider all that is fit to be considered in that weighty point; but for the present satisfaction of such as know not how to study in these busie times, I shall point at some unquestionable truths for the ending of that unhappy and fatal Controversie in the Church of Christ ... (459–460).

What Kind of persons are to be punished.

V. ... Moreover, it is most cleare that God doth make use of the Magistrate as his Minister and Instrument for the overawing of the people by inflicting exemplary punishment on such as do *speake lies in the name of the Lord, blaspheme the name, truth, person of Christ*, and seduce (or thrust) men away from the only true God, Father, Son, and holy Ghost. Deut. 13. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11.

The moral equity of the command for punishing Seducers: Deut. 13 compared with Zec. 13. and Rom. 13.

The Moral equity of this Command is very evident for the punishing of such as do entice men from the true Religion, because there is a reason given which is of general and perpetual equity. Thou shalt stone him,

52. Cheynell cited works by Burroughs, Palmer and Cawdrey’s *Sabbatum Redivivum*, Rutherford’s *Pretended Liberty of Conscience*, and many of the works cited by Gillespie in *Wholesome Severity* (but not *Wholesome Severity* itself).



*Because he hath sought to thrust thee away from Jehovah thy God.* It is now certainly as great a fault to seduce men from Father, Son, and holy Ghost; nay, a greater fault now, because it is a sin committed against clearer light. And it is of *general and publique concernment* to have such great examples made in a nation to make the generality of men affected with an awful regard of the truth, goodnesse, Majesty, and Justice of God. For this is God's ordinance to strike the people with such a reverence as shall at *least* *restraine* them from this sin. *And all Israel shall heare and feare, and shall do no more any such wickedness.* Deut. 13. 11. The Lord is acquainted with the frame of our hearts and spirits, and he doth propound such remedies as are proper & suitable to our distempers; and he who doth ordaine such remedies will make them effectual *by his own Spirit*, who doth often sanctifie legal terrours, and outward afflictions, and makes them *subservient to spiritual purposes*, and therefore these outward weapons are *spiritually used*, and are of a *spiritual efficacy* according to the Counsel of God's will.

When the Magistrate *as a Minister of God* draws the Sword in the cause of God for the honour of God, according to the Ordinance of God expressed in the thirteenth of *Deuteronomy* compared with the thirteenth of *Zachary*, and the thirteenth to the *Romanes*, the Sword that is thus drawn is not the Sword of *Gideon* only, the Sword of man, but the Sword of God.

And it is certainly most proper to restraine them by the Sword, who will not be restrained by any other Ordinance of God; men that have seared consciences have strong passions; and exemplary punishments will work effectually upon the passion of feare in a self condemned man, when no spiritual Physick will work upon him, because all wholesome admonitions are rejected by him.

*Carnal men are ready to pursue a new interest without any new Light, or direction from the Word of God*, and there is no way to ballance these men who are swayed by worldly hopes, but by affrighting them with legall terrours from all those sins, unto which they are tempted by selfe interest in this tempting age, *Men that will not be ruled by Law or Gospel, or conscience rightly informed by both, but do indeed seare their consciences, and harden their hearts both against Law and Gospel, must be restrained by the Sword, because they are unconscionable*; Shame and feare will worke upon men that have any manner of ingenuity remaining in them ... (462–465).

The rule of all Christian Magistrates

IX. Christian Magistrates have no other Rule of Civil Righteousness prescribed unto them by God, then that which God gave by *Moses*, and such as have expounded *Moses* in the Scriptures of truth. This one Proposition fully explained and confirmed would put an end to this unhappy controversie between all judicious and ingenuous men. We cannot in equity extend the Law of *Moses* to such as never entred into any Covenant with God, nor to any that are led away in their simplicity before they have been better instructed and admonished once and again; nor to such as do in a Christian and Peaceable way dissent from their brethren in points of lesse consequence; But *we extend the Law of Moses to seducing Apostates, blasphemous Hereticks, and Idolatours, who are obstinate against light and admonition, and poyson others, or endeavour to poyson them with Doctrines* [Deut. 13:10] *which do subvert faith and holiness in heart or life, that they may be punished according to their several demerits....*

XIII. The glory of God, the good of Soules, the happinesse of Christian societies are irresistible Motives to quicken the Magistrate to act (against such dangerous persons as we have described according to the law of judgement, and their different demerits) *in Faith and Love*.

1. In Faith; for the Christian Magistrate doth not act like himself, if he doth not performe acts of Civil-justice in Faith. And it is cleare that if there be no moral equity in any of the judicial Lawes in the Old Testament, and there are none at all extant in the New: the Christian Magistrate cannot performe any act of Civil-justice in Faith. But it is indeed too evident to be denied, that

[Margin: *What Lawes are of perpetual obligation.*]

All divine lawes which concern the punishment of Morall transgressions, are of perpetual obligation [Vide Piscator in Exodum], and therefore still remaine in force according to their substance and general equity, abstracted from special circumstances, Typical Accessories, and the old formes of *Mosaical Politie*, For

1. These divine Lawes are not expired in their own nature.
2. They are not repealed by God.
3. The authority of the Law-giver is the same under both Administrations, old and new; the consciences of

Christians as well as Jewes, are subject to his soveraigne and perpetual jurisdiction.

4. The matter of the Lawes is Moral, and very agreeable to the Dictates of nature, as doth appeare by the severall Lawes and Decrees of Heathens. *Dan.* 3. 29. *Ezra.* 7. 23. 25, 26, 27. *Ezra.* 10. 3. 5. 8. compared with *Numb.* 15. 30, 31. *Levit.* 24. 15, 16. *Deut.* 13. 8, 9. *Zach.* 13. 3, 6. *Seducing, poysoning, slaying of Soules is by the law of Nature and Nations the worst of injuries.*

5. The reason of these divine Lawes is immutable [See *Master Palmer* and *Mr. Cawdrey of the Sabbath*, Chap. 2.], and that reason is sometimes expressed and declared: But *it is not necessary that there should be any expresse ratification of every Moral Law in the New Testament, which is plainly delivered in the Old.*

6. These divine Lawes are Independent on the will of Man, and therefore indispenable by mans authority ... (473–474).

#### CONCLUSION

This survey presented a unique chronological ordering of the work of the Westminster Assembly on the judicial law, along with extracts illustrative of terminology from the works of various Westminster divines and other arguably influential authors, interleaved by date. For the most part the rather specific dating was drawn from the notations by George Thomason who collected printed works as they came off the presses in the turbulent times of the mid-seventeenth century.

Outside the Minutes of the Assembly, the various public sermons by the divines afford the most specific snapshot of a divine's thought on the date the sermon was delivered. In the instance of Herbert Palmer, we have in his September 30, 1646 fast sermon, some comments relative to the judicial law, as well as comment on the new Confession of Faith, within five days of the completion of the Assembly's chapter 19 on the Law of God.

For works written and printed over a span of time, the precise release of the book may not be as interesting as other related dating. Of the two most significant works in the survey, dating Anthony Burgess' *Vindiciae Legis* yields perhaps the most intriguing possibility that he may have begun his lectures for that book the week after his committee was assigned the subject of the Law of God. However, under this theory it should be noted that Burgess would not have delivered the material cited in

the survey, until after the debate on February 9 1645/46 about the abrogation of the ceremonial and judicial law. As for the dating of *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici*, it may be of more interest to the controversy between Parliament and the Assembly over the former's nine queries, than for anything it may add to this subject of the judicial law.

As to the contents of the works surveyed, certainly those which are clearest and most detailed in addressing definition of terms regarding the Law of God are the most important. The *Jus Divinum* of the London ministers is not the most detailed of these but its likely standing as representing the views of a larger percentage of the Assembly makes it the most important. Burgess' *Vindiciae Legis* is more detailed but next in importance given reasons covered above. While it will bear a lesser emphasis due to its drafting several years before the Assembly began meeting, Cawdrey and Palmer's *Sabbatum Redivivum* is the most lengthy and detailed in defining terms.

On the question of any obligation to the punishments prescribed by the judicial law, one sees variety in detail and fervor of expression. Marshall in his *God's Master-Piece* seems to grant magistrates the most freedom under the "light of Nature and humane Prudence." Views that would bind more strictly to the OT judicial punishments appear to be those of George Gillespie and Herbert Palmer (and possibly by extension Daniel Cawdrey; though one can see possibly Palmer having the larger hand in the section of *Sabbatum Redivivum* cited when compared to a short passage from his *Glass of God's Providence*). Baillie and Rutherford express the strongest opinions against an unrestricted obligation to the punishments. Anthony Burgess addresses the issue more in his sermons than in *Vindiciae Legis*. For instance, in his *Magistrate's Commission* he says simply that these may be altered. However, in his sermon a few weeks earlier before the Court Martial of Lawrence Jury, he qualifies when the punishments may be alterable, and when the degree prescribed by God should not.

As to the general three fold division of the law, Burgess writes, "We will not meddle with the Queries that may be made about this division. We may, without any danger, receive it..."

For a full assessment and analysis of the data presented in this survey, as well as other materials, and their bearing on various interpretations of Westminster Confession of Faith 19.4, we leave the reader to Part Two of *The Westminster Assembly and the Judicial Law*, by Matthew Winzer.

CHRIS COLDWELL ■

# The Westminster Assembly & the Judicial Law: A Chronological Compilation and Analysis

By Chris Coldwell and Matthew Winzer

*To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which have expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.*

## PART TWO: ANALYSIS

In the last several decades the theonomic movement has brought controversy to the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith regarding the judicial law of Moses. The first part of this study presented a chronological survey of the work of the Westminster Assembly with extracts from the writings of representative divines interleaved by date. This second part of the study will present an analysis of these writings and will concentrate on answering two fundamental questions. Do the Westminster Confession and Catechisms teach what has come to be called the theonomic thesis—“the abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail?”<sup>1</sup> Do the writings of the Westminster divines provide any justification for thinking that the Westminster documents teach this thesis? The analysis will show that these questions should be answered in the negative.

The first question is foremost in the discussion. What the Confession and Catechisms explicitly teach is fundamental to deciding the issue; therefore this analysis will undertake to clarify what the Confession and Catechisms teach in their own right. If it is obvious that theonomy teaches a different view of the abiding validity of the law than that which is stated in the Westminster formulary, the honourable course would be to simply

admit it rather than reinterpret the formulary in the vain attempt of making it affirm something it plainly denies.

The second question is a little more complex. Were the writings of the divines to contradict the explicit teaching of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms it should not alter the plain interpretation of these historic documents. If there were variety of sentiment amongst the formulators then this would only prove a variety of sentiment; it does not become an interpretative filter for understanding the unified formulary to which these divines gave consent. It is the conclusion of this analysis, however, that the writings of the divines do not contradict the express teaching of the Confession and Catechisms, and do not provide the slightest justification for thinking that these men taught the abiding validity of God’s law in exhaustive detail. Although there might be a circumstantial appearance of agreement with the theonomic thesis, it is clear that the divines always employed categories, distinctions, and qualifications which theonomists reject. Therefore, while the main aim of this analysis is to clarify the position of the Westminster documents, there will also be repeated reference to the writings of the divines as confirmation and illustration of the formulary. In doing so it will become apparent that there is no real agreement with the view that God’s law in exhaustive detail continues to exert a binding influence on modern nations.

The first part of this analysis will examine the nature and function of the law. Here it will be seen that moral law alone is the perpetual rule for all men and that other classifications of law are introduced for the express purpose of showing that they were temporary. The judicial laws have expired with the State of Israel and do not now function as laws to bind the consciences

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THE AUTHORS: The chronologically ordered collection of source material presented in part one, was compiled by Chris Coldwell, editor of *The Confessional Presbyterian*. Matthew Winzer, author of Part Two, is pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (Australian Free Church), Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia.

1. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, New Jersey: The Craig Press, 1979) 39.

of men; however, the spirit of these laws continues to teach principles of equity which remain obliging.

The second part will give some attention to the nature and function of the civil magistrate, where one may observe its divine institution in the sphere of nature as distinct from the sphere of grace. Nevertheless, when the State professes Christianity it enters into covenant with God and the magistrate receives a further obligation to support the Church in its endeavours. In this capacity the Christian magistrate is directed by the moral law of God as he maintains wholesome laws. The Old Testament law certainly provides moral norms for the punishment of moral crimes, but those punishments are variable both as to the kind employed and the degree to which they are inflicted.

#### PART ONE. THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE LAW: THE NATURE OF LAW IN GENERAL

A noticeable feature of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms is the presence of a distinct understanding of *law*. It is not some vague, nebulous concept, which is left to the spirit of the times to define, but is clearly articulated according to the biblical framework. The underlying belief is that God Himself provides the ultimate moral standard because “He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands” (WCF 2.2).<sup>2</sup> The *good* and the *right* are bound to what God is, what God does, and what God speaks. As explained by Samuel Rutherford, “Things are just and good, because God willeth them.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, this most holy God is the source of moral obligation: “To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them” (WCF 2.2). The concepts of duty and obligation arise as a result of God’s requirements upon man. Hence the Catechisms begin their treatment of man’s duty by tying it to that which “God requireth of man” (LC 91, SC 39).

Furthermore, this requirement of Holy Sovereignty is placed within the framework of covenant transaction. All relations and actions of God to men are understood to be a “voluntary condescension on God’s part,” which He expresses in “covenant” terms so as to make Himself the “blessedness and reward” of man (WCF 7.1). In the giving of His law God gifts Himself to man and makes Himself the measure and the means of blessing in human life. This is evident throughout the federal scheme of theology which the Confession utilises as a broad hermeneutical rule for interpreting Scripture. Law is an essential component of both the covenant of works

and the covenant of grace, thereby ensuring that ethics is intrinsically tied to theology.

The Confession states that “God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works,<sup>4</sup> by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it: and endued him with power and ability to keep it” (WCF 19.1; cf. 7.2). It also notes that Jesus Christ, in the covenant of grace, while delivering man from the law as a means of justification and an instrument of condemnation, does not “any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation” to the law (WCF 19.5, 6); so that “The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof” (WCF 19.5). In justification, the righteousness of the law is fulfilled by Christ and imputed to believers (WCF 11.1–3). In regeneration, there is “a new heart and a new spirit created in them” (WCF 13.1). In sanctification, they are “more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (WCF 13.1).<sup>5</sup> In genuine repentance, grace is

2. All quotations of the Westminster Formulary are taken from *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). WCF refers to the Confession of Faith, LC to the Larger Catechism, and SC to the Shorter Catechism.

3. Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex, or, the Law and the Prince* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver & Boyd, 1843) 138.

4. It should be observed that the Confession employs the word “law” here in a composite sense, including both the moral law and the positive prohibition concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil, as is evident by comparing this statement with Larger Catechism answer 92. According to the Confession the moral law was natural to Adam and Eve (WCF 4.2), but the covenant of works was a post-creation, superadded command and promise made only “to Adam, and in him to his posterity” (WCF 7.2). Anthony Burgess lays it down as a basic doctrine: “That God besides the natural law engraven in Adams heart, did give a positive law, to try his obedience” (*Vindiciae Legis*, 105; see in this issue “Chronology,” 41). There is therefore no basis for assuming that the divines considered the moral law and the covenant of works to be synonymous in WCF 19.1, as if law necessarily requires a works-principle and is antithetical to grace. This idea is expressly repudiated in 19.6, 7: “a man’s doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that, freely and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.”

5. This stands in contrast to the teaching of Rousas J. Rushdoony, who wrote in the Foreword to *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, x., “Sanctification is by the grace of God through faith, and sanctification is by the law.” In *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (n.p.: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, n.d.) 550, he maintains this chapter of the Confession “is excellent as far as it goes, but it fails to specify precisely what the way of sanctification is.” The reality is that



given which leads to a “purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments” (WCF 15.2). In blessed assurance, the believer finds “strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience,” one of “the proper fruits of this assurance” (WCF 18.3). So although believers in Christ are neither justified nor condemned by the moral law, yet it continues to be “of great use to them, as well as to others ... as a rule of life” (WCF 19.6; cf. LC 95). The law therefore continues to rule believers in the same way as it rules all men in general. Only now, as believers in Christ, they are free from condemnation, and are made willing to follow its precepts out of gratitude to God for the redeeming work of Jesus Christ (WCF 19.6, 7; LC 95).

Hence the law of God is the rule of life for all men, unbelievers and believers alike. The law comes to man to teach him the blessedness of human life when it is lived in communion with God—the acceptance of it results in blessing and life, and the rejection of it is the embracing of death because it is a turning away from Him who is Life and Goodness. Law therefore is both *a requirement and a gift of Holy Sovereignty*. Morality is only possible because God requires man to act in submissive obedience to His will, and by means of submissive obedience man is led to enjoy the blessed life gifted by God.

Moreover, what “God requireth of man, is obedience to His *revealed* will” (LC 91, SC 39). Man is not left to discover his duty from some mysterious code to be found in the course of the stars, animal behaviour, or in man’s social needs. God is said to have revealed His will in such a manner that man knows it and is accountable to it; in the words of one of the proof texts appended to the Catechisms, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8). Human morality is dependent on the fact that God has revealed His will to men. The Confession and Catechisms, then, have followed the clear teaching of Scripture in identifying morality with what God graciously *requires* of man and has *revealed* to man.

Given that the Westminster formulary follows the biblical framework by defining morality as submissive obedience to the divine law, it is undeniable that “theonomy” is taught in the broad sense of the term, that is, in opposition to the idea of “autonomy.” One is bound to accept God’s law as the measure and means of human

life and blessedness or be sentenced to the curse and destruction that is entailed in self-law.

### *The definition of moral law*

The Confession and Catechisms are careful to specify *what* law it is that man is obliged to obey at all times and in every situation—the *moral* law (WCF 19.5; LC 92, SC 40). It is to be observed that the writings of the divines, as presented in the chronological half of this study, have also indicated that *moral* is identical to *perpetual* by virtue of the fact that *perpetual* is used as a synonym for, in apposition to, or as a predicate of, *moral* in numerous instances (“Chronology,” 21, 22, 28, 29, 36, 43, 46, 53, 54).

As a theologico-ethical concept the word *moral* was not used lightly in seventeenth century religious works, but was part and parcel of a number of discussions which were commonplace in theology. According to Anthony Burgess,

The word Morall, or Morally, is used in the controversie of the Sabbath; in the question about converting grace; in the doctrine of the Sacraments, about their efficacy and causality; and so in this question, about a Law, what makes it morall” (*Vindiciae*, 148).

The use of this category was not fitted to support an individual teaching and then abandoned once it had served its purpose. It was a meta-concept, and its strict definition was important to the reformed system because it had a bearing on a variety of ethical and theological issues.

In ethical discussions the term was largely treated by Puritan divines for two reasons. The first was more general; it pertained to the issue of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the abiding validity of the law. It is the *moral* nature of the law which constitutes it a *perpetual* law. Anthony Burgess alluded to this when he noted the question about what makes a law moral. His treatise, written to vindicate the law, was specifically a defence of the moral law. The second reason was more specific; it dealt with the fourth commandment in particular, or the binding nature of the Sabbath. Puritan literature abounds with able defences of the moral nature of this command, and a number of Westminster representatives are to be found enlisted in the catalogue of authors. Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer, to cite but one example, indicate the necessity of correctly defining the term before they can embark on the subject at hand: “it is in a sort necessary to make

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the Confession teaches a *gracious way* of sanctification. How can this be found wanting except by those who espouse a legal method?

use of it, and accordingly to discourse a little of it in the very entrance of our Dispute, by shewing how divers men take it diversly, & what we understand by it in this Controversy.”<sup>6</sup> The time and effort taken to understand the word *moral* indicates it was a key term for the ethical system of Puritan thought. It was such an important term precisely because it identified which parts of God’s law are *perpetual*.

The Larger Catechism provides a clear and concise definition of what is meant by utilising this key term:

The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it (LC 93).

One of the features which stands out in this definition is the repetitive use of universal terms—“every one,” “personal, perfect, and perpetual,” “whole man,” and “all.” The word *moral* is thereby made to convey the idea of that which applies to every action done by every person on every occasion. A *moral* law, then, is a universally and perpetually obliging law. This is well articulated by William Gouge: “That is accounted moral, which (as a rule of life) bindeth all persons, in all places, at all times.”<sup>7</sup> The perpetual force of the word is also to be found in Anthony Burgess’ denotation of it: “that which is perpetual and alwaies obliging; yet thus it is meant here, when we speak of a thing moral, as opposite to that, which is binding but for a time” (“Chronology,” 43). The authors of “the Sabbath Vindicated,” after disagreeing with those who would make the term either too broad or too narrow, are careful to define the term so as to emphasise perpetual obligation: “We therefore so understand the word, as to imply ‘any Law of God expressed in Scripture . . . which from the time it was given, to the end of the world, binds all succeeding Generations of their Posterity to whom it was given’” (*Sabbath Vindicated*, 3).

This repeated clarification in the writings of the divines as well as the clear definition provided by the Larger Catechism demonstrates that the reason for affixing the adjective *moral* before *law* is to clarify exactly what *kind* of law is considered to be universal and perpetual. The *moral law*, then, by definition, is universal and perpetual, and if it is not classed as moral it is because it is not universal and perpetual.

Now this presents a contrasting position to that which is advocated by theonomists. According to Greg Bahnsen, “Every word which proceeds from God’s mouth, whether in the gospels of the New Testament or in the case law of the Older Testament, binds the behavior of God’s people” (*TICE*, 261). Again, “the law must be kept and endorsed just as God imposes it, and thus it must be followed *in full*. Venturing to select some commandments as binding on the believer and some as not is to come into judgment upon God’s holy law; *every* bit of it is authoritative and continues to bind God’s people” (262). It is evident from these declarations that the theonomist does not identify a specific *kind* of law as *moral*, and is highly critical of any attempt to categorise one class of commandments as moral and perpetual in distinction from other commandments which are temporary.<sup>8</sup> This is the first step of theonomy’s deviation from the Westminster formulary.

#### *The function of moral law*

The Larger Catechism speaks of the moral law as “directing and binding every one” (LC 93). The chronology has highlighted a concern with the application of the law and provided numerous instances where the focus was upon the moral law as a rule of duty. Moral law *prescribes* man’s course of action (“Chronology,” 12, 16, 26, 44, 54) and *obliges* man to act accordingly (22, 29, 36, 43) so that he bears a specific *duty* to God and man (12, 14, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 27, 38, 40, 41, 48, 49, 53). The idea of *description* or *guidance* is foreign to the language employed by the divines. In each case the issue concerns what God *requires* of man and therefore what man is *obliged* to do. This is the language of *morality*, and the Westminster divines clearly teach that it is the moral law as law which for ever binds men. The function of moral law, then, is to *bind* men to duty and to do so by legislative authority.

This understanding of law is well explained by Anthony Burgess, who notes that the essence of law consists in direction and obligation: “*Direction*; therefore

6. Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer, *Sabbatum Redivivum: or the Christian Sabbath Vindicated*, the first part (London, 1645) 2.

7. William Gouge, *The Sabbaths Sanctification* (London, 1641) 1.

8. The criticism *in toto* recoils on the theonomist when he is forced to deal with the undeniable presence of ceremonial laws and categorically distinguish them from moral laws for the purpose of showing they are not to be observed by believers under the New Testament. See Greg Bahnsen, *TICE*, 207ff. The fact that “their meaning and intention have been eternally validated” by Christ (209) does not negate the fact that they present a unique category of law which no longer practically applies to believers.

a law is a rule; hence the law of God is compared to a light.... The second essentiall constitute of a law is, *Obligation*; for therein lyeth the essence of a sinne, that it breaketh this law, which supposeth the obligatory force of it" (*Vindiciæ*, 61). The free style of Samuel Rutherford also helps to illustrate the point: "it is essentiall to the Law, as a Sunne shining, whether hell and Antinomians will or not, till Christs second comming, to give light, and shew what is our dutie."<sup>9</sup> The function of the moral law is to bind man to the will of God. The moral law does not merely provide guiding principles, but unchanging absolutes which oblige him to walk accordingly.

Because theonomists have failed to distinguish between perpetual and temporary laws of God, they give a rather vague impression as to the function of law. In general the law is thought to be inflexible in its requirements, but in particular situations these requirements become flexible to suit the situation. Greg Bahnsen explains what he means by the abiding validity of case laws as well as the ten commandments: "The case law illustrates the application or qualification of the principle laid down in the general commandment. The case law elaborates the commandment by means of a concrete illustration" (*TICE*, 313). The problem with this view is that it makes the ten commandments something less than moral law; they have lost their absolute character as a law that perpetually binds all men by reason of legislative authority. Moral law has been reduced to moral principle. Absolutes, which should apply at all times, have been turned into relative values that require qualification or elaboration in specific situations. Something other than the legislative authority of the Law-giver becomes the reason for acting under particular conditions. The theonomist has unwittingly ascribed autonomy to man by giving him the power to choose situations where the moral law must be adjusted so as to apply case-specific laws.

### *The natural origin of moral law*

Another point which the chronology has brought to the fore is the *natural* origin of moral law, that is, the way it operates in the sphere of *nature* so as to impose itself on all men. The words *nature* and *natural* are consistently used in connection with the moral law and equity ("Chronology," 9, 12, 16, 18, 29, 32, 34, 37, 41, 45, 46, 48, 55).

9. Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* (London, 1648) 2.117, 118.

The divines' utilisation of *natural law* is in perfect harmony with the Westminster formulary, which does not refer to holy Scripture as providing the first revelation of God's will to man. Rather, it notes that man himself, created in the image of God, reflects a moral nature analogous to his Life-giver. The Confession declares that God created man "with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change" (*WCF* 4.2; cf. 19.1, and *LC* 17). Man therefore is created with moral quality, ability, and liberty. This is what makes him a capable moral agent, and as such is morally culpable for his actions. The ability of man to be morally obligated is founded on the fact that the law of God is written in his heart. Says Samuel Rutherford, "the law of Nature hath all its obligation from God, who wrote it in the heart" (*Spirituall Antichrist*, 2.6).

The Confession fully recognises the effects of original sin: the corrupted nature of the first parents is conveyed to their posterity by ordinary generation (*WCF* 6.3; *LC* 26), and this corruption renders all men "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil" (*WCF* 6.4; cf. *LC* 25). Sin has so defaced the image of God in man as to take away the power and inclination to obey God's law, but it has not removed the ability to apprehend good and evil: "This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness" (*WCF* 19.2). The difference between apprehension and inclination is well explained by Anthony Burgess in his comment on Romans 2:15:

There is therefore a two-fold writing in the hearts of men; the first, of knowledge and judgement, whereby they apprehend what is good and bad: the second is in the will and affections, by giving a propensity and delight, with some measure of strength, to do this upon good grounds. This later is spoken of by the prophet in the covenant of grace, and the former is to be understood here, as will appear, if you compare this with chap. 1.19" (*Vindiciæ*, 60).

The fall into sin was not understood to have taken away the apprehension of what is good and bad, but merely the inclination to do the good required by the law. Thomas Goodwin, in speaking of the work of the law in sinful man, says, "it works there, and all truth would break out in practice, if men did not 'imprison

it' (so Rom. i. 18)."<sup>10</sup> The dictates of the law continue; it is only delight in the law which has been vitiated by the fall into sin.

This emphasis on *natural law*, a law that imposes itself on all men by virtue of creation, is seen by the theonomic advocate to be another version of autonomy. Rousas Rushdoony calls natural law "heretical nonsense" (*Institutes*, 9). He claims, "For the Bible, there is no law in nature, because nature is fallen and cannot be normative;" accordingly, it is alleged that natural law can only reflect "the sin and apostasy of man" (10). Natural law is seen by Greg Bahnsen to be "a projection of autonomy and satisfaction with the status quo" (*TICE*, 399). He provides one of two alternatives for those who maintain that natural revelation can serve as a standard of judgement: "this either amounts to preferring a sin-obscured edition of the same law of God or to denying the unity of natural and special revelation" (399, 400). Because natural revelation is suppressed in unrighteousness by the sinner, the theonomist alleges that it cannot be recognised as a "functional measure of his ethical obligation" (400).<sup>11</sup> This eventually leads to a faulty interpretation of Westminster's approval of natural law: "The Westminster divines did not expect *natural law* to be a *moral* authority, and they viewed natural revelation as identical in its demands with special (redemptive) revelation" (545).

The fact remains, however, that the Westminster divines *did* appeal to the natural law as possessing moral authority. Anthony Burgess understood the light of nature to be necessary in moral things and distinguished it from the information provided by Scripture:

the light of Nature is necessary in religious and moral things, though it be not sufficient. We speak of the light of Nature in the first consideration, as it is the residue of the glorious image of God put into us (for of the later, as it is informed by Scripture, it is no question)" (*Vindiciae*, 72).

Unity of natural and special revelation is affirmed, but whereas Scripture knowledge requires believing reception, nature's light utilises discursive reason:

Faith therefore, and the light of Nature go to the knowledge of the same thing different waies: faith doth, because of the testimony and divine revelation of God; the light of Nature doth, because of arguments in the thing it self by discourse. And faith is not a dianoeticall or discursive act of the understanding, but it's simple and apprehensive (*Vindiciae*, 73).

To reason by the light of nature is not simply and intuitively to accept the biblical testimony of what the light of nature teaches, but to use a rational process to examine the nature of the subject under investigation.

The same function is ascribed to reason by Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer:

By the light of nature we meane, The understanding that men have by naturall principles in their mindes, (even notwithstanding the present corruption of nature) whereby their Consciences, either of themselves, or awakened by others discourses, come to prescribe the Lawes of Nature to them: making them see by way of conclusion from those principles a necessity of duty, to or against such and such things, even though they have not heard of the Scriptures, or give no credit to their authority. So that the Principles of reason concerning God or man, are the light of nature, and the Practicall conclusions drawn from thence are the Lawes of Nature" (*Sabbath Vindicated*, 157, 158).

Besides ascribing to reason the power to draw moral conclusions, these divines also say that such moral conclusions "urge the Consciences of Men, where the Scripture is silent, or is not heard in the case" (*Sabbath Vindicated*, 158). The law of nature, then, is thought to possess moral authority to which appeal can be made without reference to Scripture. Samuel Rutherford calls the law of nature written in man's heart and the light of the Word "two candles that God has lighted" for the direction of conscience.<sup>12</sup>

There is obviously a fundamental point of difference

10. Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1866), 7.295. The personal view of Thomas Goodwin is complex to understand because of his insistence that the moral law was completely erased by the fall: "These characters are written, not born within us; we by nature have but *abrasas tabulas*, tables in which everything is razed out; it is the new work of some second hand hath took the pains to write them there," which Goodwin proceeds to identify from John 1:9 as a "common light" which Christ works in all men (*Works*, 10.101). Although he uses a different route Goodwin eventually arrives at the same destination because the final conclusion is that all men have the work of God's law written in their heart by the "common print of his mediation" (*Works*, 10.102).

11. Cf. Martin Foulner, *Theonomy and the Westminster Confession: an annotated sourcebook* (Marpert Press, 1997) 5fn, who acknowledges that "theonomists believe an appeal to natural law today is practically meaningless," and defends it on the basis that the law revealed in Scripture is more complete because it "has been defined by God Himself" whereas our understanding of the law revealed in nature "has been obscured by our sinful nature."

12. Samuel Rutherford, "The Soume of Christian Religion," in *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (London, James Nisbet & Co., 1886) 165.



between the view of Westminster and that espoused by theonomists as to the sufficiency of the light of nature. It is observed by J. V. Fesko and Guy M. Richard, who have appraised the writings of William Twisse, Samuel Rutherford, Anthony Tuckney, and Thomas Goodwin, that “the Westminster Confession and the divines that composed the document accept natural theology to a greater degree than present-day Reformed theologians.”<sup>13</sup> They explain that “there is continuity between the natural theology of Aquinas, the Reformation, and post-Reformation periods,” “natural theology provides unregenerate man with general principles of ethics and conduct” (“Natural Theology,” 260). The divines accepted a limited function of human reason based on natural revelation. According to the Westminster formulary and its framers, to argue from the light of nature does not equate to providing Scripture proofs as to what God naturally demands of all men; it requires rational arguments based on moral principles to establish the point. The theonomist rules this approach out of order and thereby expresses dissent with the ethical approach of the Westminster formulary.

#### *Moral law and the ten commandments*

Since the Westminster formulary and its framers have taught that the moral law is natural, a question arises as to the relationship between this natural, moral law and the commandments of God as delivered in holy Scripture. The Confession provides the answer when it declares that the moral law which had been given to Adam did not perish in the fall, but “This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables” (WCF 19.2). The words “as such” indicate what was important about this publication of the natural, moral law under Moses to the people of Israel on Sinai, viz. that “it was the perfect rule of righteousness;” further, it is stated that this perfect rule of righteousness was delivered “in ten commandments.” The ten commandments, then, contain the natural, moral law of God in such a form as to be a perfect rule of righteousness.

There is a clarification in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as to what is meant by the moral law being in the ten commandments. It is said “the moral law is *summarily comprehended* in the ten commandments” (LC

98, SC 41). The verb, to *comprehend*, means to fully include a thing; and the adverb, *summarily*, qualifies that the thing so comprehended is briefly accounted for. The moral law, therefore, is fully but briefly accounted for within the ten commandments. Taking the Confession and Catechisms together, according to the plain and common sense of their words, one may conclude that the framers considered the moral law to be a perfect rule of righteousness which is fully but briefly contained within the ten commandments.

Theonomists, however, reject this understanding of the ten commandments when they make the decalogue to serve as a summary which comprehends the whole law or a mere summary of the moral law. Greg Bahnsen states his distinctive view as follows: “the decalogue has a *summary* nature: it briefly comprehends the whole law of God without going into detail.” The consequence is that the law which the Mediator ratifies includes not only the decalogue but also “the case law applications and elaborations” (TICE, 194fn.). In a different vein Martin Foulner criticises those who “equate the Moral Law with the Ten Commandments,” and suggests that they “were only a *summary* of the Moral Law” (Foulner, *Theonomy*, 6). Unlike Bahnsen, he makes the decalogue a summary of the *moral* law, but he omits the *comprehensive* nature of that summary.

That the divines did not think like theonomists on the summary nature of the decalogue is apparent from the discussions of the Assembly on the nature of the moral law as set out in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. Under the date of Tuesday, August 15, 1643, John Lightfoot reports, “Mr Palmer made the quære, & gave very sound reason for an addition which at last we agreed upon to be this, ‘by the morall law we understand the 10 commandments in their full extent’” (“Chronology,” 11).

The same identification is to be found in the writings of the divines. Anthony Burgess, for example, teaches,

Peter Martyr did well resemble the Decalogue to the ten Predicaments, that, as there is nothing hath a being in nature, but what may be reduced to one of those ten; so neither is there any Christian duty, but what is comprehended in one of these, that is, consequentially, or reductively (*Vindiciæ*, 3).

When Burgess comes to treat of the giving of the law, he raises the following question: “What Law this delivered in Mount Sinai is, and what kindes of laws there are, and why its called the Morall Law.” His answer shows that he considered the commandments written in tables of

13. J. V. Fesko and Guy M. Richard, “Natural Theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, 3 (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor/Christian Focus Publications, 2009) 224.

stone, that is, the ten commandments, to be the moral law: “only that which we call the Morall Law, had the great prehemineny, being twice written by God himself in tables of stone” (*Vindiciæ*, 147).

In a following lecture on the same subject, Burgess specifically answers the question as to how “the Law doth binde us in regard of Moses,” and also negates any binding authority it may have because it is a revelation given by Moses: “First, this may be understood reduplicatively, as if it did bind, because of Moses; so that whatsoever is of Moses his ministry doth belong to us; and this is very false, and contrary to the whole current of Scripture; for then the Ceremoniall Law would also binde us” (*Vindiciæ*, 165, 166). The law does not bind Christians as it was given by Moses to Israel, but because “God, when he gave the ten Commandements by Moses to the people of Israel, though they were the present subject to whom he spake; yet he did intend an obligation by these Laws, not only upon the Jewes, but also all other Nations that should be converted, and come to imbrace their Religion” (*Vindiciæ*, 166). When he comes to explain how it is that the ten commandments continue to bind Christians, he explains, “we must conceive of Moses as receiving the Morall Law for the Church of God perpetually; but the other Lawes in a peculiar and more appropriated way to the Jewes.” So the ten commandments are clearly equated with the moral law which binds all men while the “other laws” are set apart from the moral law because they are addressed specifically to the Jews. He further clarifies that the reason the moral law perpetually binds all men and not simply the Jews is because it contains the law of nature: “whatsoever in it is the Law of Nature, doth oblige all: and thus, as the Law of Nature, it did binde the Jewes before the promulgation of it upon Mount Sinai” (*Vindiciæ*, 166).

Samuel Rutherford makes essentially the same point when he teaches that the law does not bind as it was given by Moses but only as it sets forth the moral law in the ten commandments: “we say not that the moral law bindeth under that *reduplication* as given by Moses, for then all ceremonials should bind us also who are Christians. But that God intended, by these *ten words* delivered by Moses, to oblige all Christians to the world’s end to perpetual obedience, is clear” (*Spirituall Antichrist*, 2.5). He further identifies the ten commandments with the moral law when he specifies what part of the law Christ has not dissolved:

the light of teaching direction to know our dutie, and how we are to order our walking in Gospel-holinesse,

which the Spirit borroweth from the ten Commandements delivered by Moses, is established and taught by Christ, and not removed; for if Gospel-grace extirpate this light of the Morall Law, either out of our heart, or out of the written Commandements and writings of Moses, then surely Christ is come to dissolve the Law, and to teach men neither to doe, nor obey Law-commandements (*Spirituall Antichrist*, 2.117).

From both statements it is apparent that the ten commandments or ten words are the moral and perpetual part of the Mosaic law because these provide “teaching direction to know our dutie,” and these ten commandments are distinct from the other commandments given by Moses.

The identification of the ten commandments with the moral law and the law of nature is also made by George Gillespie: “Now, if we consider what law was written in the nature of man in his first creation, it was no other than the decalogue, or the moral law.”<sup>14</sup> It is this moral law or decalogue which binds all nations: “By the law of God I understand here *jus divinum naturale*, that is, the moral law or Decalogue, as it bindeth all nations (whether Christians or infidels), being the law of the Creator and King of nations.”<sup>15</sup>

Further testimony is provided by William Gouge, who carefully defines the moral quality of a commandment: “How appeares it [the Sabbath] to be morall? It is one of the ten precepts of the morall law, Ex. 20.8. It is not an appendix to another precept: but an intire precept in it selfe” (*Sabbath’s Sanctification*, 1). The moral quality of a commandment is identified in terms of its independent standing among the ten precepts, and is discerned on the basis that it is not attached as an appendix to another precept. In other words, it is considered moral because it is a moral absolute in and of itself and does not provide any situational qualifications to other moral absolutes.

The Prolocutor of the Assembly, William Twisse, not only declares it as his opinion, but also considers the equation of the moral law with the decalogue to be a matter of general persuasion: “I ever conceived it [the Sabbath] for the substance to be Morall; otherwise, what should it make among the ten Commandements, which all account the Law morall, in distinction both from the law judicall, and the law ceremoniall given

14. George Gillespie, “A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies,” in *The Works of Mr. George Gillespie* (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846) 1.184; cf. *A Dispute* (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1993) 391.

15. George Gillespie, “Aaron’s Rod Blossoming,” in *The Works*, 2.121.

by Moses unto the Jewes.”<sup>16</sup> The ten commandments are identified with the moral law and this is held to be distinct from the judicial law.

So it is clear that the framers of the Westminster formulary considered the ten commandments to be a comprehensive summary of all moral absolutes and to form a perfect rule of righteousness which is binding upon all men in all ages because they are a republication of the law of nature. This view is rejected by theonomists, who are forced by their commitment to the abiding validity of other laws to give a much lower appraisal of the relationship of the ten commandments to the moral law.

### *Moral and positive law*

It has been observed that the Westminster formulary places great emphasis on the moral law as a perfect rule of righteousness, but it does not maintain that *all* law is *moral*. Within the Westminster documents and amongst the writings of the divines there is a second kind of law which goes by the name of *positive*. This is not used in opposition to *negative*, but in contrast to *moral*. As has been noted, the moral law is natural; besides these moral laws God gives other commandments which are not moral in their own nature but are obliging simply because God commands them.

There is a concrete example of a positive command in the Larger Catechism: “The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, *besides a special command* not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the moral law” (LC, 92). This demonstrates the basic nature of positive commands—they stand *beside* the moral law. As Anthony Burgess teaches, “the object of this command is not a thing good or bad in its own nature, but indifferent, and only evil because prohibited” (*Vindiciae*, 104).<sup>17</sup> If it is asked why man should be obliged to something that is not right in its own nature, John Lightfoot explains that it is in virtue of the moral law: “though the command, Eat not of the forbidden fruit, was a Positive and not a Moral Command; yet was Adam bound to

the obedience of it by virtue of the Moral Law, written in his heart, which tyed him to love God, and to obey him in every thing he should command.”<sup>18</sup> Hence positive commandments are not moral in their own right, but are only obliging because they provide temporary directions for the fulfilment of the moral law. Once the temporary situation is passed, the moral obligation attached to the positive commandment ceases.

There are various references to positive commands in the chronology (pp. 11, 16, 28, 29, 36, 46). It is assumed in all but one of the statements that a positive command is by nature non-moral, and is only binding in the time, place, and condition to which the command was addressed. These statements take it for granted that a positive law is not perpetually binding.

The one statement in the chronology which seems to suggest that positive commands may be morally binding is contained in “The Sabbath Vindicated.” It declares, “Every Law of God (though Positive) recorded in the Scripture, is Moral and Perpetual, unless it be afterward found Repealed by God, or Expired in the nature of it” (*Sabbath Vindicated*, 28). This absolute statement, however, is later qualified to indicate that, “Every Law of God, though but Positive, which is Substantially-profitable for all men in all Ages to be obliged unto, is Moral, that is, Universal and Perpetual” (29). The qualification indicates that it is not positive law as law which is perpetually obliging, but only that which is substantially profitable.

Is this statement out of accord with the previous finding that positive law is not perpetually binding? Afterall, if the command holds out some substantial profit, it would be reasonable to conclude that it must have some quality of *good* and *right* in itself so that it cannot be altogether indifferent. Closer examination will discover that the authors of “Sabbath Vindicated” utilised a definition of law which they call “moral-positive,” but which has no practical difference with moral-natural commandments. They say, “We shall not need be overcurious in distinguishing Moral-Natural, from Moral-Positive, for both will come to one effect to us” (37). When it comes to discerning the difference between a bare positive and a moral-positive command, the authors indicate, “We have one Rule more to add, to know a Law to be Moral, though but Positive, and that is, Every Law of the Decalogue, or every one of the ten Commandments, is a Moral and Perpetual Law” (*ibid.*). The difference, then, is that a bare positive command stands *beside* the moral law while a moral positive command stands *in* the moral law. The final result is that moral-positive laws are commandments *in* the

16. William Twisse, *Of the Morality of the Fourth Commandment* (London, 1641), preface.

17. Burgess explains that although there is no inherent right or wrong in the nature of the commandment it still has good reasons for it in terms of God’s purpose: (1.) “That hereby Gods dominion and power over man might be the more acknowledged;” (2.) “To try and manifest Adams obedience” (*Vindiciae*, 106).

18. John Lightfoot, *The works of the Reverend and learned John Lightfoot* (London, 1684) 1325, 1326.

decatalogue with positive aspects which cannot be discovered by the light of nature.<sup>19</sup> So “the Sabbath Vindicated” sets forth the same position as that which is taught by the other statements included in the chronology, only it has left room for the positive elements in the Sabbath commandment to be regarded as perpetual.

This Puritan approach to the fourth commandment eventually came to be formulated in the Confession of Faith, which refers to the Sabbath as “a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment” (21.7). The moral part of the commandment is traced back to the law of nature which dictates that “a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God.” The positive obligation arises from the fact that God “hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him;” and it is further observed that God has changed the Sabbath from the last to the first day of the week after the resurrection of Christ. As indicated by Anthony Burgess, the determined proportion of time must be considered positive because it cannot be discovered from the light of nature by those who never heard the Sabbath commandment: “howsoever the command for the Sabbath day was perpetually, yet it did not binde the Gentiles, who never heard of that determined time by God” (*Vindiciæ*, 148); “the Sabbath day cannot be from the Law of Nature, in regard of the determinate time, but hath its morality and perpetuity from the meere positive Commandment of God” (170). The reason why this commandment is deemed to be perpetual is because, as the proof text indicates, it is a part of the ten commandments recorded in Exodus chapter 20, which constitutes it a “perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages.” This example shows that a positive command standing *in* the moral law is considered to be “moral and perpetual” by virtue of its position in the ten commandments.

What this brief digression reveals is that, in the thinking of the divines, all law is not moral and therefore perpetual in its own nature; if it were, they would not have taken the time to identify what commands are moral, what are positive, and what are moral-positive; the very process of distinguishing between laws presupposes that some of them are time-bound expressions of God’s will. The position of theonomy stands in contrast to Westminster’s approach. All law as law is thought to be unchangeable. The thesis is the abiding validity of God’s law in exhaustive detail, in every jot and tittle. Greg Bahnsen explains the understanding behind this thesis: “the law is as *unchangeable* as the justice of God which it embraces; God is immutable, and the law as a transcript of His holiness is never modified in its content and

validity” (*TICE*, 252). Again, “God’s revealed standing laws are a reflection of His immutable moral character and, as such, are absolute in the sense of being non-arbitrary, objective, universal, and established in advance of particular circumstances (thus applicable to general types of moral situations).”<sup>20</sup> The Confession, on the other hand, distinguishes things that differ: “The *moral law* doth for ever bind all,” both in regard of *content*, “the matter contained in it,” and in respect of *validity*, “the authority of God the Creator, who gave it” (*WCF* 19.5). Likewise the Larger Catechism defines the *moral law* as a transcript of God’s holiness, which informs all men “of the holy nature and will of God” (*LC* 95). The theonomic failure to distinguish between moral and positive law places its ethical structure at variance with the Westminster formulary.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Threefold division of the law*

The Westminster Confession clearly teaches that one class of commandments is *ceremonial*, another class is *judicial*, and yet another class is *moral* (19.3–5). Particular commandments are able to be classified according to one of these three classes. The chronology demonstrates that the threefold division was standard amongst the divines and was adopted for its customary usefulness in marking areas of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments (“Chronology,” 9, 11, 25, 27, 32, 42, 43, 46, 47).

It is important to observe that the threefold division of the law is not arbitrarily imposed on the Scriptures, but is a natural result of the interpretative process which forms the system of doctrine taught by the Westminster formulary. According to the federal scheme of theology taught by Westminster, the covenant of grace “was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel” (*WCF* 7.5; *LC* 33). Remission of sins and eternal salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is

19. Cf. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciæ*, 148: “the Moral Law in some things that are positive, and determined by the will of God meerly, did not binde all the nations in the world ... so that there are more things expressed in that, then in the law of Nature.”

20. Greg L. Bahnsen, *By This Standard* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985) 346.

21. When Greg Bahnsen comes to explain the Puritan view (*TICE*, 550), he seems to be fully aware that it is the moral law which is a reflection of God’s holiness and justice, not the whole law. He writes, “The moral law was viewed as ‘consonant to that eternall justice and goodness in [God] himself’ so that God could turn it back only if He would ‘deny his own justice and goodnesse’ (Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciæ Legis*, 1646).” The particular citation is from page 4, where Anthony Burgess distinguishes “positive things” from God’s eternal justice and goodness.



the *substance* of the covenant of grace, but the *form* in which this was administered under “the law” is seen as unique to the Old Testament. The legal form of the covenant was necessary because it looked forward to “Christ to come,” “the promised Messiah,” by whom salvation would be accomplished once for all. Until that appointed time in salvation history “the law” served the necessary function of binding the covenant people of God to the faith of Jesus Christ. It was therefore intended to be a temporary administration until “Christ, the *substance*, was exhibited,” when a new dispensation of the covenant of grace was introduced (WCF 7.6; LC 35). The new dispensation is called “the gospel” and is administered with “more simplicity, and less outward glory.” The *substance* of the covenant is the same as was taught under the Old Testament, but now “it is held forth in more fulness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles” (WCF 7.6).

This radical alteration in the form of administering the covenant of grace has resulted in numerous discontinuities between the Testaments. Given that the Confession considers the *legal* form of administration to have passed away, it is to be expected that it would teach how the coming of Christ has affected *the law*. In keeping with its basic premise that the substance of the covenant continues in the New Testament, the Confession teaches that the law of God which was given to all men (19.1), and is a perfect rule of righteousness (19.2), forever binds all men (19.5), both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>22</sup> This is identified as the *moral* law. Continuity is seen in the fact that the decalogue was not tied to the legal form of administration given to the nation of Israel, but was always the rule of duty for every man of every nation. Further, in maintaining its commitment to the passing nature of the legal administration, the Confession speaks of two forms of discontinuity—abrogation and expiration (19.3, 4). The “ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the New Testament,” while the judicial laws “expired together with the State of that people.” These two categories are therefore seen to comprise *the legal form* of the covenant of grace because they were specifically given to Israel “as a church under age” and as “a body politic.” As such, they are tied to the temporary administration of the covenant of grace and have no continuing validity as laws under the New Testament.

22. Cf. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae*, 166: “God, when he gave the ten Commandments by Moses to the people of Israel, though they were the present subject to whom he spake; yet he did intend an obligation by these Laws, not only upon the Jewes, but also all other Nations that should be converted, and come to imbrace their Religion: And this is indeed the very proper state of the Question.”

This threefold division of the law, therefore, is a natural result of the covenant scheme of theology which is part and parcel of the system of doctrine taught by the Westminster formulary. If one were to suggest a new division for categorising the Old Testament laws it would necessarily involve a different understanding of the relationship between the Testaments and could only be described as an alteration to Westminster’s system of doctrine. Yet this is precisely what theologians are suggesting. It is argued, “The most fundamental distinction to be drawn between Old Testament laws is between *moral* laws and *ceremonial* laws” (Bahnsen, *Standard*, 135). This involves theological disagreement with the Confession’s use of “judicial law” as a category of discontinuity: “one does not have grounds for simply positing a third category (viz. judicial laws), which is comprised of laws not to be observed today as they were in the Older Testament” (Bahnsen, *TICE*, 450). According to theonomy’s revised classification system, the laws which were classed *judicial* by the Westminster divines may now be regarded as either *moral* or *ceremonial*. This new division for categorising the Old Testament laws introduces a different concept of continuity and discontinuity which necessarily alters the federal scheme of theology taught by Westminster. A whole range of laws which were categorised as discontinuous are now thought to be continuous according to the theonomic proposal.

### *The positive nature of judicial laws*

It has been seen that chapter 19, section 2, of the Confession identifies the natural, moral law of God with the ten commandments. When it comes to examine the other commandments which are delivered in the Scriptures, it provides five internal markers to separate them from the moral law of God and to indicate that these are *positive* commands.

The first marker is the prepositional phrase of section 3 introduced by *beside*. This sets the ceremonial and judicial laws apart from the moral law of the ten commandments referenced in section 2. The same preposition is used in LC 92 to describe the positive command given to Adam in paradise which stood *beside* the moral law written in his heart.

A second marker is the categorical definitions employed in sections 3 and 4, which class these laws as a different *kind* of law to that which is meant by the term *moral*. *Ceremonial* law prescribes ritual observance, and *judicial* law provides judgement in civil cases. By categorical definition they are situational laws which

are different from the universal norms indicated by the word *moral*.

A third marker is the particular recipient of these laws—the *people of Israel* in section 3 and *them* in section 4, which stands in contrast to the universal recipient of the moral law as taught by sections 1 and 2.

A fourth marker is the specific context in which the recipient was given these laws. The ceremonial was given to Israel as a church, the judicial as a body politic. This means the laws only apply in these specific contexts and cannot be transferred to other contexts.

A fifth and final marker is the ultimate termination of these laws—“abrogation” and “expiration.” Section 5 creates an evident contrast when it maintains, “The moral law doth for ever bind all.”

These five internal markers of the text—separating preposition, categorical definition, particular recipient, specific context, and ultimate termination—all serve to indicate that the text of the Confession intended to teach that these other laws of Scripture are a different kind of law from the moral, perpetual laws which are found in the ten commandments. Dr. Ligon Duncan is surely correct when he writes, “The precision of the Confession’s language, as a legal document, is here to be noted.”<sup>23</sup> The only possible conclusion to be drawn from such precise language is that the Confession places the judicial laws amongst the positive laws of Scripture on the understanding that positive laws are not perpetually binding.

This finding is confirmed by the various references to the judicial laws in the chronology. Jeremiah Burroughs confesses, “I think we are not bound in every particular circumstance according to those commandments that God required of them . . . those things being required of them by some positive Law” (“Chronology,” 11). Samuel Rutherford calls the judicial laws given to the Jewish State “shadows” which passed with the coming of Christ (12). Again, “the whole bulk of the judicial Law, as judicial, and as it concerned the Republic of the Jews only, is abolished” (36). Anthony Burgess indicates that the manner of punishment prescribed by the law may be altered because it belongs “to God’s Judicial Law” (18). Again, “for the Judicial Laws, because they were given to them as a politick body, that polity ceasing, which was the principal, the accessory falls with it” (43). Daniel Featley declares without qualification, “the ceremonial and judicial are not now in force” (25). Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer teach that the ceremonial and judicial laws were peculiarly given to Israel and “are not esteemed perpetual,” but are termed “Judicial, or Mosaical Laws” (28). Finally, the *Jus Divinum*,

the production of a number of Westminster representatives, states unequivocally,

Some things he commands but *positively* to be of use for a certain season; as the ceremonial administrations till Christ should come, for the Jewish Church, and the Judicial observances for their Jewish polity. All these positive laws were *jure divino*, till Christ abrogated them (46).

Outside the scope of time covered by the chronology, John Lightfoot provides further witness:

The Ceremonial Law that concerned only the Jews, it was given to Moses in private in the Tabernacle, and fell with the Tabernacle when the veil rent in twain. The Moral Law concerns the whole World, and it was given in sight of the whole World on the top of a mountain, and must endure as long as any mountain standeth. The Judicial Law (which is more indifferent, and may stand or fall, as seems best for the good of a Common-wealth) was given neither so publick as the one, nor so private as the other, but in a mean between both” (*Works*, 1028).

The judicial laws, therefore, are understood to be positive laws which were given *beside* the moral law for the specific purpose of ordering Israel’s commonwealth, and to have expired with the cessation of that commonwealth. Theonomists dislike the distinction between moral and civil laws which is made by the Westminster formulary and its framers. Greg Bahnsen criticises those who draw a line “between ‘moral’ and ‘civil’ laws with the intention of giving the impression that the latter class are mere matters of time-bound administration” (*TICE*, 310). He alleges there is a “concealed presumption in eliminating commandments from God which directly apply to social matters.... Such an approach does not live under the sovereign authority of God but is a reversion to rationalism and inclination” (311). If this is the theonomic opinion of the approach adopted by the Westminster formulary then it should be apparent that the Westminster formulary is non-theonomic.

#### *Expiry of the judicial laws*

The Confession’s language is quite explicit as to the expiration of the judicial laws. It teaches that the judicial

23. J. Ligon Duncan, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Theonomic Document?* <http://www.providencepca.com/essays/theonomy.html>. Accessed: September 3, 2009.

laws, given to Israel as a body politic, “expired together with the State of that people” (19.4). The Scripture proofs are also straightforward. Exodus chapters 21 and 22 indicate that these laws were accommodated to the State of that people;<sup>24</sup> Genesis 49:10 is adduced for the purpose of showing that the law of that people would cease with the coming of Christ;<sup>25</sup> and 1 Peter 2:12 binds Christians to submit to the ordinances of that government under which they live.<sup>26</sup> The explicit proposition of the Confession together with the obvious meaning of the Scripture proofs leads to the conclusion that the Confession teaches a hermeneutic of radical discontinuity with respect to the Old Testament judicial laws. Although the Confession qualifies this proposition to provide for an element of continuity in the general equity of these laws, the fact remains that the laws themselves are considered to have been discontinued as a result of the expansion of the covenant of grace to include nations other than Israel.

This hermeneutic of radical discontinuity is confirmed by the writings of the various divines represented in the chronology. Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer point out that an expired law is “now out of date” (“Chronology,” 13), “manifestly ceased” and “at an end in respect of obligation” (29). Anthony Burgess teaches, “And thus for the Judicial Laws, because they were given to them as a politick body, that polity ceasing, which was the principal, the accessory falls with it” (43). Samuel Rutherford speaks of abolition: “we conceive, the whole bulk of the judicial Law, as judicial, and as it concerned the Republic of the Jews only, is abolished” (36). Daniel Featley maintains they have lost their force: “The ceremonial and judicial are not now

in force; but the moral is” (25). All these expressions, when taken together, elucidate what is meant by saying that the judicial laws are expired, namely, that they are legally inactive and ineffective because the situation no longer exists for which these laws were originally given.

Some advocates of theonomy, upon being confronted with the plain meaning of the Confession, simply reject it. Rousas Rushdoony provides an example of this reaction:

in paragraph IV, without any confirmation from Scripture, it is held that the ‘judicial laws’ of the Bible ‘expired’ with the Old Testament. We have previously seen how impossible it is to separate any law of Scripture as the Westminster divines suggested.... At this point, the Confession is guilty of nonsense (*Institutes*, 551).

Other advocates attempt to reinterpret the plain meaning of the Confession in order to make it appear agreeable to theonomy. Francis Nigel Lee argues,

the *Confession* then also goes on to declare that only ‘sundry [or several] judicial laws ... expired together with the State [or *Politeia*]’ of the people of Israel” and “that even those ‘sundry judicial laws’ still oblige all people to obey them—as far as ‘the general equity thereof may require.’<sup>27</sup>

The text, however, will not permit such a reading. At no point does it partition the judicial laws and speak of expiration in terms of a subset of them. The pronoun, *which*, refers back to what was given to Israel—“sundry judicial laws.” It is therefore the whole set of judicial laws which are expired, and not merely a subset of them.

Greg Bahnsen denies the Confession maintains the position “that the penal sanctions and case laws of the Old Testament no longer bind people” (*TICE*, 539, 540). His argumentation is twofold. First, the Westminster Confession itself is thought to teach that magistrates “are obligated to observe *all* the commandments of God (23.3), even those which elaborate and illustrate the Decalogue” (539, 540). Secondly, the Scripture proofs appended to the Confession are interpreted as teaching that the whole law and specifically the case laws are “still authoritative and binding after Christ’s advent” (539, 540).

In response to the first argument, it suffices to show that 23.3 nowhere mentions the commandments of God and therefore cannot be interpreted as teaching that the magistrate is bound to *all* the commandments of God. It only declares what is the magistrate’s authority and

24. Cf. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae*, 147, “It is plain by Exod. 20 & cap. 21. All the laws that the Jews had were then given to Moses to deliver unto the people, only that which we call the Morall Law, had the great preeminency, being twice written by God himself in tables of stone.” This is further explained on p. 166, “we must conceive of Moses as receiving the Morall Law for the Church of God perpetually; but the other Lawes in a peculiar and more appropriated way to the Jewes.”

25. John Ley interprets the prophecy as relating to the time of Christ, when the Jewish Commonwealth would be dissolved, and the people left “wholly in the power of the Princes, or Potentates, or States in whose Land they live” (“Chronology,” 32).

26. Cf. Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae*, 211, 212: “Now it may be easily proved, that the Ceremoniall, and Judiciall lawes they are abrogated by expresse repeale. The Judiciall Law, 1 Pet. 2.13, where they are commanded to be subject to every ordination of man: and this was long foretold, Genes. 49.10, The Law-giver shall be taken from Judah.”

27. Francis Nigel Lee, *Are the Mosaic Laws for Today*, [www.contra-mundum.org/books/Mosaic%20Laws.pdf](http://www.contra-mundum.org/books/Mosaic%20Laws.pdf), page 39. Accessed: September 3, 2009.

duty in relation to the external affairs of the church. To discover what the Confession teaches with respect to the law of God it would be natural to turn to the chapter on the law of God. It is quite unnatural to read 19.4 in the light of 23.3, when 19.4 was written for the very purpose of showing *what* law binds all men.

The second argument is open to two criticisms: (1) the failure to ascertain the intention of the divines in appending the Scripture proofs, and (2) the use of the proofs to nullify the fundamental assertion of the Confession.

(1) The bare appeal to the Scripture proofs begs the question as to what the divines intended by appending these specific texts to prove the proposition of 19.4. Some attempt should have been made to discern the exegetical tradition which lies behind the adduction of these *common places* as proofs which establish the proposition. Instead, as Sinclair Ferguson observes, the theonomist simply “assumes the Westminster Divines would exegete the text in the same way he does.”<sup>28</sup>

The writings of the divines indicate, however, that they did not hold the theonomic view of Matthew 5:17. Greg Bahnsen insists that “the law” which Jesus did not come to abrogate cannot be restricted to the moral law: “Nothing in the text supports a restriction of this term’s referent to the moral law. Jesus is saying that He did not come to abrogate *any* part of the law” (*TICE*, 48).<sup>29</sup> The divines, on the other hand, did restrict the referent to the moral law. John Ley annotates the verse as follows:<sup>30</sup>

they hearing the law otherwise expounded than their teachers used to do, verse 21, 22, might think that Christ did abrogate the moral Law, and bring in a new one: he warns them before hand, not to think so; ... the moral Law stands still in force.

John Lightfoot makes a similar observation, and specifically excludes the ceremonial and judicial laws from the Law which Christ did not disannul:

When the Ceremonial and Judicial Law have thus brought us to Christ, we may shake hands with them and farewell, but for the Moral, as it helps to bring us thither, so must it help to keep us there. For Christ came not to disannul this Law, but to fulfil it (*Works*, 1030).

Anthony Burgess is also restrictive: “When our Saviour, Mat. 5, gave those severall precepts, he did not adde them as new unto the Morall Law, but did vindicate that from the corrupt glosses and interpretations of the Pharisees” (*Vindiciae*, 152). He also excludes the

ceremonial and judicial laws from the referent: “Mat. 5, he denied that he came to dissolve the Law... Now it may be easily proved, that the Ceremoniall, and Judiciall lawes they are abrogated by expresse repeale... We cannot say, in any good sense, that the Morall Law is abrogated at all” (211, 212).

Samuel Rutherford makes the same restriction: “God commandeth as a Law-giver in the Gospel, all that eternall righteousness which hee commandeth in the Law; for neither the Gospel, nor Christ dissolveth one tittle or jot of the eternall Morall Law of God” (*Spiritual Antichrist*, 2.120).

The only writer to include the judicials in the referent of Matthew 5:17 is George Gillespie: “Christ’s words (Matt. 5:17), *Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill*, are comprehensive of the judicial law, it being a part of the law of Moses” (“Chronology,” 22). It is evident, however, that he is not giving his own interpretation but is simply showing the opinion of Johannes Piscator.

The restriction is also made by the Confession itself. Having affirmed, in contrast to the ceremonial and judicial laws, that “the moral law doth for ever bind all,” it states, “neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation” (19.5). The proof text is Matthew 5:17–19.

If the divines tended to restrict “the law” of Matthew 5:17 to the moral law, there is no basis for the theonomic assumption that the divines appealed to this text in the belief that it teaches the non abrogation of the whole law. Rather, it would be more natural to conclude that general equity is connected in a specific way to the moral law of the ten commandments. In the next section of this analysis it will be shown that this is in fact the case, and that general equity is to be equated with the moral principles underlying the judicial laws.

(2) A further criticism is that the Scripture proofs are being used to establish a conclusion which contradicts the fundamental assertion of 19.4. The proofs—Matthew 5:17 and 1 Corinthians 9:9, 10—are intended

28. Sinclair Ferguson, “An Assembly of Theonomists?” in *Theonomy: a Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House) 335, 336.

29. It should be noted that Greg Bahnsen does not accept that any law has been set aside, including the ceremonials. The ceremonial system is simply regarded as having been made ineffective by its fulfilment in Christ, and for that reason it is not to be practised by believers in the New Testament. For a discussion of this point see Greg L. Bahnsen, *TICE*, 209, 210.

30. John Ley, “Annotations on the Gospel according to S. Matthew,” in *The Second Volume of Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament* (London, 1657) n.p., on Matthew 5:17.



to show the obliging nature of the general equity in the judicial laws. Greg Bahnsen uses them to teach that the judicial laws themselves are still authoritative and binding. Such a conclusion is in direct opposition to the Confession's basic assertion that the judicial laws have expired. It cannot be imagined that the divines utilised a Scripture text which, according to their own interpretation of it, would undermine the basic position they were proving.

This second criticism reaches the heart of the problem. The precise wording of the Confession creates an insuperable barrier to accepting the theonomic interpretation. As suggested by Sinclair Ferguson, "it is difficult ... to believe that the Westminster Divines would attempt to express a theonomic viewpoint by the wording we actually find in the Confession" ("Assembly," 328, 329). One would expect an affirmation that the judicial laws remain binding. Instead, the judicial laws are negated by a statement which declares they have expired. The theonomic interpretation could only be made possible by excising the first half of the section, and even then the qualification concerning general equity would still leave a measure of reasonable doubt.

Greg Bahnsen offers one more piece of information to support his interpretation of the Confession, which may be considered an historical argument of sorts. This is found in the "Abstract of the Laws of New England" by John Cotton, which is esteemed for its "noble attempt to bring God's law to bear in a real historical situation on the civil magistrate" (*TICE*, 557). It is claimed that "this work can be of hermeneutical benefit when it comes to present day understanding of the Westminster Confession's declarations about God's law and the civil magistrate" (557).

It is certainly correct to appeal to a seventeenth century work as providing valuable historical background to seventeenth century thought on the abiding validity of God's law, but some attempt should have been made to pinpoint which segment of the theological world it represents. It just so happens that Robert Baillie, one of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, openly criticised the work of John Cotton and

associated it with the errors of the time and the extremes of Brownism ("Chronology," 34). At least from his point of view, the abiding validity of the judicial law as taught by John Cotton is outside the theological boundaries which were accepted by the Westminster divines.

The theonomic interpretation of the Westminster formulary is impossible to defend. The plain words of the Confession, its proof texts, the writings of the divines, together with the historical denunciation by Robert Baillie, all add up to the conclusion that the judicial laws were not considered binding on modern nations. Whereas the Confession and its framers speak decisively of the expiry of the judicials as a specific category of Old Testament law, theonomists insist that no view can be taken which results "in the civil magistrate's release from obligation to the Old Testament laws" (Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy*, 541). This insistence stands in direct opposition to the view taken by the Westminster formulary.

### *The nature of general equity*

At this point it is natural to ask what might be meant by the qualification, "further than the general equity thereof may require" (*WCF* 19.4). Does this qualification breathe new life into the expired judicial laws so as to make them binding on modern nations, or does it simply indicate that these laws function like the rest of biblical revelation to teach "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man" (*LC* 5, *SC* 3)? An examination of the writings of the Westminster divines will demonstrate that the latter answer is the correct one—that it is not the law *as law* which is binding, but the law *as teaching* which requires a process of interpretation and application.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to the use of "equity in a statute," and defines it as "the construction of a statute according to its reason and spirit, so as to make it apply to cases for which it does not expressly provide."<sup>31</sup> A. Craig Troxel and Peter J. Wallace have traced the distinction between common law and equity in English jurisprudence and have concluded that "equity denotes justice which is administered according to what is right and fair as opposed to what is strictly demanded by the rules of common law."<sup>32</sup> In a legal context equity aims to achieve fairness by laying aside the letter of the law and following its spirit. As noted by Sinclair Ferguson, "It involves the recognition that laws must be applied existentially, since the application of 'the letter of the law' may in fact distort the real purpose of the law and ignore the individuality and particularity of circumstances" ("Assembly," 330).<sup>33</sup> An equitable

31. "Equity," *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. 4 Apr. 2000. <http://dictionary.oed.com>. Accessed September 3, 2009.

32. A. Craig Troxel and Peter J. Wallace, "Men in Combat over the Civil Law: 'General Equity' in *WCF* 19.4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (Fall, 2002) 308.

33. The use of the adverb "existentially" is liable to misunderstanding. In approving this statement I would like to qualify that "existential" can be used as a simple contrast with "literal" and does not necessarily deny that justice is an object of thought. As will be demonstrated, the divines considered equity to be "rational."

process requires discernment as to the principles involved in the individual circumstances of a case rather than an automatic application of what the law requires.

That this is the proper sense of equity as used by the Confession can be deduced from the chronology, where the adjectives *moral* (“Chronology,” 11, 22, 26, 34, 36, 53, 54) and *natural* (12) are used to qualify the word. There is also the synonymous use of *right* (9), *substance* (31, 54), and *reason* (32, 46). This terminology points to the fact that the divines did not think of equity in terms of the legal nature of the judicial law, but were looking through the law to discover what natural, moral, and rational principles it taught.

Furthermore, the use of “general” as an adjective of “equity” shows that they did not consider all the judicial laws to contain an obliging equity. The chronology frequently uses the adjective *common* (“Chronology,” 9, 12, 27, 30, 32, 33, 46, 47) in place of *general*. This creates a contrast with those laws which were particular to the conditions of Israel. *Jus Divinum* draws out this contrast when it refers to the abrogation of those laws which contain “a peculiarity respecting their state in that Land of Promise given unto them.” On the other hand, “Whatever was in their Laws of *Moral concern*, or *general equity* is still obliging (“Chronology,” 46). General equity is such equity as applies to all nations and not simply Israel.

So “equity” looks beyond the letter of the law to discover the moral principles lying behind it, and the adjective “general” limits the equity to those judicial laws which address the moral situation of all nations and not just the particular conditions of Israel. Although John Sedgwick was not a member of the Assembly, his definition of general equity captures the thought behind the use of this term:

the common equity or right hereof remaineth as far as it was grounded on the Law of Nature, served directly to confirm any of the Ten Commandments, or to uphold the good of Family, Church, or Common-wealth, it is still in force, and of good use (“Chronology,” 9).

First, general equity is *natural*, that is, “grounded on the law of nature.” Alexander Henderson refers to the “common and natural equity” of the law as that which is “written in the heart of man by nature” (“Chronology,” 12). *Jus Divinum* describes “common equity” as “the principles of reason and nature.” Francis Cheynell appeals to the law’s agreement “to the Dictates of nature, as doth appeare by the several Lawes and Decrees of Heathens” (“Chronology,” 55). As Robert Shaw comments,

general equity is “founded in the law of nature common to all nations.”<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, general equity is *moral*, that is, it confirms the ten commandments. *Jus Divinum* states that equity serves “to the maintenance of the Moral Law” (“Chronology,” 46). It is the “moral concern” of the judicial laws which is considered to be binding: “Whatever was in their Laws of Moral concern, or general equity is still obliging” (46). William Gouge writes, “That which we account Morall, and to have a perpetuall equity, is the substance of the Law” (*Sabbath’s Sanctification*, 27).

Thirdly, general equity is *rational*; there is *reason* for it, which makes it *right*. It is not simply binding because God made it a law to govern national Israel, but it is seen to apply to all nations because reason requires it. Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer say of an expired law, “if the reason of it should, or could, be revived, so would the Law be in like sort” (“Chronology,” 29). Jeremiah Burroughs speaks of the judicial laws as binding in regard to the “common reason and equity in them” (32), and discerns “common equity” on the basis that “there is a necessity of it as truly now as there was then” (33). Francis Cheynell refers to moral equity as “a reason given which is of general and perpetual equity” (“Chronology,” 53). As A. A. Hodge writes, “a careful examination of the reason of the law will afford us good ground of judgment as to its perpetuity.”<sup>35</sup>

General equity, therefore, is that natural, moral, and rational justice which applies to all nations. The bare existence of a divine law to regulate the society of Israel does not suffice to make it obliging. One must ask the questions, is it grounded on the law of nature? does it explain the morality of the ten commandments? and is there reason for its permanent application? Only once this process has been followed is it possible to speak of the *morality* and *perpetuity* of a law which is outside the ten commandments.

How does this compare with the theonomic interpretation of general equity? As explained by Martin Foulner, “Theonomists interpret the words of the Confession as meaning that though the precise situations addressed by the case law may no longer be found in modern society, there are *parallel cases* to which they do apply, and where these parallel situations are found, the case laws are *binding*” (*Theonomy*, 8fn.). Greg Bahnsen suggests, “Perhaps the best interpretation of 19.4 is to see it as

34. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1846) 225.

35. A. A. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1870) 255.

affirming the necessity to apply the illustrations given in the Old Testament case laws to changed, modern situations and new social circumstances" (*TICE*, 540).

Such an interpretation fails on three counts. (1) The Confession speaks of the general equity of the judicial laws as a part of the whole and considers the laws themselves to have expired. Theonomy, however, treats the judicial laws as if they were generally equitable in themselves and as if they remain valid as laws. (2) The Confession uses the word *may*, not *must*; there is no *necessity* in the application of the laws as if they continued to exercise binding force in their own right; the obligation only arises from the fact that the law teaches an equity that is generally applicable to all nations. Theonomy requires the law to be applied wherever a parallel situation is found; case laws which were fitted to specific situations are made universally binding; this creates an obligation to enforce these laws in situations they were never intended to address. (3) The Confession requires the use of right reason to discern the natural and moral spirit of these laws and apply it where the situation calls for it. Theonomy rejects this use of reason and teaches that genuine ethical guidance is to be found in the letter of the judicial laws.

If the theonomic ethic were consistently followed in matters of ethical concern today, the judicial laws would hinder magistrates from administering the justice these laws were fitted to provide. Robert Baillie makes this point in relation to John Cotton's rigid policy:

what men besides them have made so bold with Kings and Parliaments, as not only to break in pieces their old Lawes, and to dvest them of all power to make new ones; but also under the Pretext of a divine right, to put upon their necks that unsupportable yoke of the Judicial Law of the Jews, for peace and for warre, without any power to disþence either in addition or subtraction. I grant this principle of Barrow is limited by Mr. Cotton to such Judicals as doe contain in them a moral equity; but this moral equity is extended by him to so many particulars, as Williams confesses the whole Judicial law to be brought back againe thereby ("Chronology," 34).

According to this Westminster representative, the theonomic interpretation of general equity resurrects the judicial laws and divests the magistrate of the power that is necessary to maintain peace and justice. The theonomic view of general equity fails to appreciate the concern for natural, moral and rational justice which is explicit in the writings of the Westminster divines.

### Summary

To summarise the first part of this analysis—it is evident that Westminster defines morality as submissive obedience to the divine law, and thereby upholds theonomy against autonomy. This law, however, is identified as the moral law in contrast to theonomy's teaching that every law of God is perpetual. According to Westminster, the moral law is unalterably binding, whereas theonomy allows case laws to qualify the moral law. Where Westminster traces the moral law back to the law of nature and allows the use of right reason to apply this law to the life of man, theonomists reject the use of reason and bind man to the law of Scripture alone. Westminster appraises the ten commandments as a perfect rule of righteousness, while theonomy considers that they need supplementation. Westminster distinguishes between moral and positive laws, but theonomy views all law as a transcript of God's holiness. Westminster upholds the traditional threefold division of the law as a marker of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments, but theonomy rejects it in favour of a twofold division. Westminster views the judicial laws as positive and therefore discontinuous in the New Testament, which theonomists criticise as a reversion to rationalism. Westminster speaks explicitly of the expiration of the judicial laws, whereas theonomy supports the abiding validity of the judicial laws. Finally, Westminster allows that the natural, moral, rational equity of the judicial laws requires application to modern nations, but theonomy demands the enforcement of the judicial laws themselves where parallel cases exist. Westminster and theonomy disagree to such an extent on the nature of the law that they must be considered two incompatible systems of thought.

### PART TWO. THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE: THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE IS THE ORDINANCE OF GOD

The Westminster formulary teaches that God "hath most sovereign dominion" and does "whatsoever Himself pleaseth" (*WCF* 2.2). Dominion does not originate with human society and its needs, but in "God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world" (*WCF* 23.1). One man becomes a superior over another man because "God's ordinance" institutes him in a "place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth" (*LC* 124). The duties required of superiors are founded on "that power they receive from God," and the aim of fulfilling them is "to preserve that authority which God hath put

upon them" (LC 129). As stated by Samuel Rutherford, "power of government in general must be from God.... God only by a divine law can lay a band of subjection on the conscience" (*Lex, Rex*, 1).

Not only is all civil government *from* God, it is also *for* God. Civil magistrates, that is, those who bear rule over the civil sphere of society, are ordained by God to be "under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good" (WCF 23.1). George Gillespie, relating what the reformed churches believe, calls civil superiors "the ordinance of God himself appointed as well to the manifestation of his own glory, as to the singular profit of mankind;" for this reason they are to be esteemed "as the ambassadors and ministers of the most high and good God, being in his stead, and preferred for the good of their subjects."<sup>36</sup> Civil magistrates, in the words of Thomas Case, are nothing less than God's "deputies and vicegerents" ("Chronology," 17); they exercise the delegated power of God.

To fulfil the purpose for which authority has been given over civil society, magistrates have been armed "with the power of the sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers" (WCF 23.1). The power to reward and punish is nothing less than God's power given to civil superiors. Life and death itself are committed to the magistrate's hands, so that the righteous judgement of the magistrate is considered to be the righteous judgement of God. This is well noted by Francis Cheynell: "the Sword that is thus drawn is not the Sword of Gideon only, the Sword of man, but the Sword of God" ("Chronology," 54).

According to George Gillespie, the power of the sword endues the magistrate with "a compelling jurisdiction and external force, whereby such stubborn, rebellious, and undaunted pride may be externally repressed" (*Propositions*, 15). God has enjoined "severity to his Deputies," says Thomas Case ("Chronology," 18). Moreover, this compelling severity is not an option, but an obligation:

Rulers must be a terror to evil doers, unless ye mean to bear the Sword in vain. And if you wil, God wil not; and if God take the Sword into his own hand once (as he seems to be a doing of it) he wil smite to purpose; he wil execute vengeance thoroughly: both upon the evil doers, and upon you that have not bin a terror to them ("Chronology," 53).

Richard Byfield encourages the magistrates

to make proof of the sword which God hath put into your hands, and not in vain: and whosoever will not obey your Law, and the Law of your God, let judgement be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment, as his fault shall deserve ("Chronology," 31).

An individual's conscience is no plea against the power of the civil magistrate. The Confession teaches that both authority and liberty are given by God, but qualifies that these "are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another;" therefore it is a "pretence of Christian liberty" to "oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it" (20.4). As Herbert Palmer reminds his superiors, it is "the Magistrate's duty to draw the sword against evil doers: neither is the plea of conscience any thing in this matter" ("Chronology," 41).

Furthermore, the civil magistrate is to rule *through* God. This is owing to the fact that "God alone is Lord of the conscience" (WCF 20.2). As already noted, God is the source of law, which means that He has the supreme prerogative of obliging men to duty. In delegating this obliging power to the magistrate God does not relinquish His right; rather, He restricts the power of civil magistrates to what is *lawful*. There must be a "lawful exercise" of "lawful power" in order to compel the consciences of individuals to submit to it (WCF 20.4). It is the duty of people to obey the magistrates' "lawful commands, and to be subject to their authority, for conscience' sake" (WCF 23.4). It is a part of the honour that inferiors owe to their superiors to give "willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels" and "due submission to their corrections" (LC, 127). On the other side, it is the duty of superiors "to instruct, counsel, and admonish" their inferiors, "countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproving, and chastising such as do ill" (LC, 129). In short, good and evil are determined by the supreme Lord so that He is the arbiter of what may lawfully be required by the superior and what is dutifully obeyed by the inferior.

The theonomic understanding of the civil magistrate accords with the Westminster formulary up to this point. Greg Bahnsen correctly summarises Westminster's position: "The people are accountable to the ruler, and the ruler is accountable to God. This means that the ruler should follow the moral direction of God"

36. George Gillespie, "111 Propositions concerning the Ministry and Government of the Church," in *Works*, 1:12.



(TICE, 518). To this extent the view of Westminster may be defined as broadly theonomic.

### *The spheres of nature and grace*

Chapter 23 of the Westminster Confession makes three statements to indicate the sphere in which the civil magistrate exercises jurisdiction. Section 2 states, “It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto.” Section 3 states, “The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Section 4 states, “Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates’ just and legal authority, nor free the people from their due obedience to them.” In each of these statements Christianity and the State are clearly distinguished. A Christian may take up the lawful calling of a magistrate, in contrast to Anabaptism. A magistrate must not exercise his rule in sacred things, in contrast to Erastianism. An infidel magistrate still possesses legal authority, in contrast to Romanism.<sup>37</sup>

Although Anabaptism, Erastianism, and Romanism are quite divergent systems, the three share one underlying assumption in their views of the relationship of the State to Christianity—they all teach that lawful civil power is, in some way or another, derived from Jesus Christ as Mediator.<sup>38</sup> Anabaptists denied that non Christian government is ordained of God. As Robert Baillie relates, they considered the saints to be those who were “joined to their Churches and received their Anabaptisme; all the rest of them were wicked

and to be cut off.”<sup>39</sup> Erastians asserted, in the words of Thomas Coleman, “that God hath given all Magistracy to Christ to be managed under him, for him.”<sup>40</sup> Romanists made magistrates servants to the papacy. Samuel Rutherford wrote, “Stapleton, Bellarmine, and Papiſts will have them [princes] to be brutish Servants, to execute whatsoever the Pope and Councells shall decree, good or bad, without examination.”<sup>41</sup> All three systems differ as to the application of this principle and the place where ultimate jurisdiction is to be vested—Anabaptists placing it in the Conscience, Erastians in the King, and Romanists in the Pope—but they agree on the principle itself, that Jesus Christ as Mediator is the foundation of civil power.

In opposing these three errors, the Westminster divines, with the exception of the Erastian representatives, rejected the view that the civil magistrate derives his authority from Christ as Mediator. Rather, it is from God as the Creator and Supreme Ruler that magistrates receive power. This is highlighted in the proceedings of the Assembly under the date of December 4, 1646:

Upon a motion by Mr Gileſpy for an alteration in the chapt[er] about the civill magistrate, and upon debate it was

Resolved upon the Q[ueſtion]: that in the said chapter, for the word ‘Christ,’ the word ‘God’ shall be put in 3 places.

Dr Burges enters his dissent.

Memorandum: this vote was not intended to determine the controversy about the subordination of the civill magistrate to Christ as mediatur (“Chronology,” 47).

Alexander Mitchell is correct to observe that the memorandum left “both parties free to hold their respective opinions upon it.”<sup>42</sup> At the same time, however, the alteration from “Christ” to “God” significantly changes the teaching of the Confession. This is brought out by the statement of Thomas M’Crie (the younger), the first historian to locate the original minutes and comment on the alteration:

On consulting the passage, chap. xxiii., sects. 1st and 2d, it will be seen that the alteration, whatever controversy it may or may not determine, is very important. Had it stood as originally proposed, “Christ, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be, under Him, over the people,” &c., it would

37. That these are the errors addressed by the Confessional statements is indicated by the contemporary commentary of David Dickson, *Truth’s Victory over Error: or, the True Principles of the Christian Religion* (Kilmarnock: John Wilson, 1787 rpt). He represents the Anabaptists as maintaining, “that it is not lawful for Christians to carry the office of a magistrate” (159); the Erastians as maintaining, “that the civil magistrate hath in himself all church power” (161); and the Papiſts as maintaining, “that subjects ought not to suffer a king that is an infidel, or obey that king in his just commands, that differs from them in religion” (162).

38. William Cunningham astutely observed the agreement between Erastians and Ultramontanists, who placed supreme civil jurisdiction in the King and the Pope respectively, in *Discussion on Church Principles* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863) 152ff.

39. Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism, the True Fountain of Independency, Antinomy, Brownisme Familisme* (London, 1647) 32.

40. Thomas Coleman, *A Brotherly Examination Re-examined* (London, 1645) 19.

41. Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries* (London, 1644) 411.

42. Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: its History and Standards* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1883) 364.

have taught a very different doctrine from what it does as it now stands.<sup>43</sup>

The mover of this verbal alteration, George Gillespie, wrote extensively on this particular point, and explained what is involved in deriving the authority of the civil magistrate from “God” and not specifically from “Christ.” In a speech before the Westminster Assembly during the Erastian controversy, he stated,

The civil magistrate ... is God’s vicegerent, but not Christ’s, that is, the magistrate’s power hath its rise, origination, institution, and deputation, not from that special dominion which Christ exerciseth over the church as Mediator and Head thereof, but from that universal lordship and sovereignty which God exerciseth over all men by right of creation.<sup>44</sup>

The same point was stressed in Gillespie’s 1645–46 pamphlet debate with Thomas Coleman. When Coleman asserted “that God hath given all Magistracy to Christ to be managed under him, for him,” the Scottish commissioner replied,

the civil magistrate, whether Christian or pagan, is God’s vicegerent, who, by virtue of his vicegerentship, is to manage his office and authority under God, and for God; ... but he is not the vicegerent of Christ as Mediator, neither is he, by virtue of any such vicegerentship, to manage his authority and office under Christ, and for Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Eventually in 1646 Gillespie wrote a complete treatise to answer the Erastians, entitled “Aaron’s Rod Blossoming” where the Erastian view of the magistrate serving under Christ as Mediator is made an essential point of the debate: “The question is, Whether the Christian magistrate be a governor in the church *vice Christi*, in the room and stead of Jesus Christ, as he is Mediator? ... I am for the negative” (*Aaron’s Rod*, 97). It is explained that,

Christ, as Mediator, hath right to the whole earth, and all the kingdoms of the world, not as if all government (even civil) were given to Christ (for in this kind he governeth not so much as any part of the earth, as he is Mediator); ... but it is meant only of his spiritual kingdom, which is not of this world, and in this respect alone is it that Christ, as Mediator, hath right to the government of all nations: he hath *jus ad rem* [right to the thing], though not *in re* [in the thing] (97, 98).

This view is finally and more fully stated in the “111 Propositions,” a work which was commended by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647, the same year that the Westminster Confession of Faith was approved.<sup>46</sup> Gillespie states that civil and ecclesiastical power are foundationally different:

they are differenced the one from the other, in respect of the very foundation and the institution: for the political or civil power is grounded upon the law of nature itself, and for that cause it is common to infidels with Christians; the power ecclesiastical dependeth immediately upon the positive law of Christ alone: that belongeth to the universal dominion of God the Creator over all nations; but this unto the special and economical kingdom of Christ the Mediator, which he exerciseth in the church alone, and which is not of this world (*Propositions*, 13).

To summarise Gillespie’s teaching—while both civil and ecclesiastical power are derived from divine authority, they are based upon a different foundation. The civil office is dependent on the moral order of the world as created by God, not upon a special redemptive order which has been introduced for the remedy of sin. Only ecclesiastical power is founded on Christ’s authority as Mediator (*cf.* WCF 30.1).<sup>47</sup> The magistrate’s power is therefore exercised outside the spiritual kingdom of Christ the Mediator and is confined to the sphere of nature. Christians and infidels may be put in possession of civil power because the magistrate’s office is “grounded on the law of nature.”

43. Thomas M’Crie, “Original Minutes of the Westminster Assembly,” in *the Evangelical Repository*, volume 18, number 1 (June, 1859) 407.

44. George Gillespie, “Notes of Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster,” in *Works*, 2.110.

45. George Gillespie, “Nihil Respondes,” in *Works*, 1.8.

46. See the “Act approving the eight general heads of doctrine against the tenets of Erastianism, Independency, and Liberty of Conscience, asserted in the One Hundred and Eleven Propositions, which are to be examined against the next Assembly,” in George Gillespie, *Works*, 1.3. The importance of this work for the correct interpretation of the twenty third chapter of the Confession is noted by William Cunningham, *Discussions*, 231.

47. Cf. Thomas Case, *Sermon preached before the Honourable House of Commons*, August 22, 1645 (London, 1645) 26: “As King of Nations, he hath a Temporal Kingdom and Government over the world.... the Rule and Regiment of this Kingdom he hath committed to Monarchies, Aristocracies, or Democracies.... But Christ is also the King of Saints: As he hath an inward and Spirituall Government in the Conscience, which is onely his Throne; so he hath an outward Kingdom, which he doth visibly exercise in his Church.”

It is on the basis of this nature-grace distinction that Gillespie asserts the civil magistrate does not have authority to exercise spiritual functions:

the word of God and the law of Christ, which by so evident difference separateth and distinguisheth ecclesiastical government from the civil, forbiddeth the Christian magistrate to enter upon or usurp the ministry of the word and sacraments, or the judicial dispensing of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (*Propositions*, 18).

This is the same language as that employed by the Confession of Faith: “The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (*WCF* 23.3).

Gillespie’s thoughts on the distinction between authority derived from “God” and “Christ” are essential for understanding the verbal alteration which he suggested and the Assembly adopted. If the word “Christ” had been permitted to stand, the Confession would have contained a distinctive of Erastianism. In altering the word to “God” the Assembly prejudiced the Erastian cause and laid a solid foundation for denying the power of the civil magistrate to interfere in the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church. While the Erastian representatives were left free to hold their unique position, they were provided no footing in the Confession whereby they could advance this position.

It cannot be said that this alteration was the invention of a single individual. The writings of Samuel Rutherford demonstrate that he stood for the same truth with his fellow Commissioner. Like Gillespie, he insists that the king’s power does not require him to be a Christian:

though the King were not a Christian magistrate, yet hath hee a Kingly power to command men as Christians.... Christianitie maketh him not a King over Christians as Christians, for then hee could not bee their King, and were not a King over Christians, so long as hee wanteth Christianitie, which is false, for the Christians acknowledged heathen Emperours as their Kings (*Due Right*, 393).

48. Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation against pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1649) 223.

49. The Westminster Annotations take the opposite view, and judge the allegation made against Paul and Silas to be nothing less than a false aspersion cast upon them by the Jews. It also comments, “Paul and Silas endeavoured to advance the spiritual kingdom of Christ, without any injury to the Roman Empire.... the ancient Christians were no disturbers of States.” Annotations on the Acts of the Apostles,” in *The Second Volume of Annotations*, on Acts 17:7.

The insistence that civil power must be Christian is identified with the abhorrent practice of Popery: “It maketh way to the popish dethroning of Kings when they turne hereticks, and leave off to bee members of the Christian Church, which wee abhorre” (393).

The reason why Christianity is not essential to the magistrate is because he does not derive it from Christ as Mediator: “Hee who is called God, and so is the vicegerent of God, is Gods Ambassador politick commanding in Gods name.... Magistracy may bee called accidentall to Christs mediatory government” (447). This is explained more accurately in a later work: “The Magistrate, as the Magistrate (should we speak accurately in such an intricate debate) doth not serve Christ as Mediator, for then all Magistrates, Heathen and Indian, were obliged to serve him.”<sup>48</sup>

From this brief survey it is clear that the divine institutions of civil power and ecclesiastical power stand on completely different foundations. The magistrate legitimately serves in the natural sphere of the created order under God the Supreme Ruler of all things, not under the gracious sphere of the redeemed order under Christ the Mediator. It is this fundamental point which validates the three statements of the Confession in limiting the sphere of the magistrate’s jurisdiction. A Christian may fulfil the office of a magistrate because it is a natural ordinance which is blessed by God; a magistrate may not assume the spiritual functions of the Church because he has not received his authority from Christ as Head of the Church; and an infidel may exercise civil power because that power does not require submission to Christ as Mediator in order to be legitimate.

In contrast to the teaching of the Confession and its framers, theonomy rejects the nature-grace distinction and teaches that the civil magistrate is subservient to Christ as Mediator. Greg Bahnsen claims that “A nature/grace dichotomy in the area of civil government is totally alien to the scriptural outlook” (*TICE*, 433). It is taught that “the Lord’s Messiah has absolute, firm, and autocratic authority over all the magistrates of the nations; they are guided, directed, and chastised by Him” (362). The apostle Paul is alleged to have “subordinated the authority of Caesar to that of King Jesus” and “by his teaching of the Kingship of Christ Paul was opposing the decrees of autocratic Caesar” (395).<sup>49</sup> Finally, it is maintained,

The only ultimate King in civil government is Christ, and all rulers of the nations derive their authority from Him; hence all magistrates are subject to Christ’s word, even Christ’s confirmation of every bit of the law (Matt.

17f.)... National leaders have no exemption from the law of God just as they have no escape from the universal Lordship of Christ (429).

The civil magistrate, according to this view of it, is a “Christocracy” (432). This means that “state leaders are just as obligated to follow Christ’s direction *as the church elders* are required to obey the *Head of the Church*” (433).

It is true that theonomy recognises the separation of Church and State, but it only sees this separation as *functional*, not *foundational*. This is evident in Greg Bahnsen’s evaluation of George Gillespie’s teaching. He portrays “Aaron’s Rod Blossoming” as saying, “this separation pertains to the *functions* of magistrate and minister; while their jurisdiction are coordinated, being set side by side, their authority and responsibility trace back to God in both cases” (*TICE*, 529). Such an interpretation fails to note the differences in the way these two institutions are ultimately traced back to divine authority. George Gillespie asserts that the civil magistrate “is God’s vicegerent, but not Christ’s;” Greg Bahnsen, however, insists that “the only ultimate King in civil governments is Christ, and all rulers of the nations derive their authority from Him.” The Westminster divine teaches a *foundational* distinction whereas the theonomic advocate only allows for a *functional* distinction.

This is the first point of difference between the views of the Westminster formulary and theonomists concerning the civil magistrate. The non-Eraastian Westminster divines understood that the magistrate operates in the sphere of nature and derives authority from God the Creator. Whether the magistrate is Christian or not he fulfils God’s purpose for civil order. Theonomy translates the magistrate’s authority to the sphere of grace and makes it dependent upon Christ as Mediator.

#### *The connection of Church and State*

While the Westminster formulary limits the origin of civil power to the natural sphere, it also affords a large range of activity to magistrates in matters pertaining to the Christian Church. After the Confession denied the right of magistrates to assume spiritual functions, it states,

yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the Church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled,

administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God (*WCF* 23.3).

James Bannerman remarks that the Confession has been charged “with giving countenance to the Eraastian principle of ascribing to the civil magistrate a proper jurisdiction in ecclesiastical matters, and of surrendering to his power the inherent freedom and independence of the Church.”<sup>50</sup> This charge is unsustainable if the leading proposition which opens this section of the Confession is taken into consideration. As noted, this proposition limits the jurisdiction of the magistrate to the sphere of nature as distinct from the sphere of grace. Bannerman observes, “The exclusion of the civil magistrate from the whole province that can possibly belong to the Church is absolute and complete” (*Church*, 1.176). If this exclusion is taken seriously, and the Confession is not made to contradict itself, the magistrate’s duties which are listed in the rest of the section should be restricted to his own sphere of jurisdiction. “All that is fairly implied in it, is the ascription to the State of a certain authority about the Church, for the purpose of promoting its interests, not the ascription to it of an authority within the Church, for the purpose of exercising jurisdiction there” (*Church*, 1.177). William Cunningham shows the real principle inculcated by the wording of the Confession:

The words, then, do not necessarily or naturally mean more than that the civil magistrate is entitled and bound to aim at, and to seek to effect, the different objects here specified, which are all comprehended under the general heads, of the welfare of religion, and the purity and prosperity of the church of Christ. This is just the principle of National Establishments (*Discussions*, 223, 224).

The Confession teaches the Establishment principle, not the Eraastian principle—that the civil magistrate has authority about sacred things (*circa sacra*), not in sacred things (*in sacris*); that the Church and State may join together in a co-ordinate relationship as long as the one is not permitted to intrude upon the sphere of jurisdiction which belongs to the other.

The Establishment principle is often caricatured as if it sought to advance Christianity by the power of the sword and to compel men to become Christians. It is

50. James Bannerman, *Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 1.172.



certainly liable to be misunderstood if it is not set out according to two fundamental tenets which the twenty third chapter of the Confession has already taught. These tenets are, (1) the superadded obligation of Christianity, and (2) Submission to national constitutions.

(1) The superadded obligation of Christianity is taught in the correlation of sections 1 and 2. Section 1 stated that civil magistrates are ordained by God to be “under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good.” This means that civil government is a moral entity which is accountable to God for its use of power whether it is Christian or non Christian. A magistrate, as a magistrate, is to do all to the glory of God and the good of the people. Section 2 adds a new quality to the magistrate’s office when it makes it “lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate.” Upon accepting this calling to civil office, the Christian is bound to uphold his distinctive view of faith and life, and to do what is in his power to help others to uphold it also. As the Larger Catechism teaches (99.7, 8), “what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.” Further, “what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them.” A Christian magistrate, as a magistrate, is to serve for the glory of God and the public good; as a Christian, he is to advance the cause of Christ in his civil calling.

The importance of this point is seen in the way Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie speak of the duty of the magistrate towards the Christian religion. They are careful to point out that the magistrate’s authority is still valid if he is not a Christian. It is certainly beneficial to be Christian, but it is not essential. Rutherford explains:

the end of Kingly power according to its essence, and de facto, is a quiet life, though it attaine not Godlinesse, as it doth not attaine that end, nor can it attaine it, amongst Pagans, and yet there is a Kingly power in its essence, whole and intire amongst Pagans, where there is no godlinesse, or Christian Religion (*Due Right*, 388).

This does not mean there is no obligation upon heathen kings to become Christian and to act as Christians in their office. It simply means that the power to add

royal sanction to Christianity remains a virtual power that is not actually invoked:

There is in Heathen Kings a regall and Kingly power to establish Christian Religion and adde regall sanctions to Christian Synods, though there neither is, nor can be, during the state of Heathen Paganisme, any Christian Religion there; this power is essentially and actu primo, regall, yet as concerning execution, it is vertuall only (*Due Right*, 388).

Whenever a magistrate becomes a Christian he has the power to establish the Christian religion in his realm, but it is not an obligation which is derived from his office as a non Christian. It is specifically as a Christian that the magistrate enacts and enforces laws concerning Christianity in his realm:

The Magistrate, not as the Magistrate, but as a member of the Church who is extraordinary politically and guardian of each Table of the law, has a collateral authority with the Church under Christ immediately conferred to him with the Church. But this power corresponds to the King, because and insofar as he is a member of the Church.<sup>51</sup>

Gillespie also speaks of the establishment of the Christian religion as a superadded obligation which is laid on Christian magistrates as Christians:

But whereas the Christian magistrate doth wholly devote himself to the promoting of the gospel and kingdom of Christ, and doth direct and bend all the might and strength of his authority to that end: this proceedeth not from the nature of his office or function, which is common to him with an infidel magistrate, but from the influence of his common Christian calling into his particular vocation (*Propositions*, 16).

The reason why Christian magistrates bear this responsibility over non Christians is due to the spiritual quality he possesses as a Christian. As Rutherford expresses it,

Christianity spiritualizeth the exercise of marital, paternal, Magistratical power, and elevates them above their common nature in Christian Husbands, Fathers, Magistrates, which it cannot do in all husbands, as husbands; fathers, as fathers; Magistrates, as Magistrates: even suppose they be heathens (*Pretended Liberty*, 223).

51. Samuel Rutherford “Of the Civil Magistrate,” in *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal* 4 (2008) 275.

According to Gillespie, the godly magistrate shares the responsibility to advance the cause of Christ in common with all Christians:

every member of the church (and so also the faithful and godly magistrate) ought to refer and order his particular vocation, faculty, ability, power, and honour, to this end, that the kingdom of Christ may be propagated and promoted, and the true religion be cherished and defended (*Propositions*, 16).

So the Christianity of the magistrate adds an obligation towards the Christian religion which the office does not naturally require. Gillespie's position is neatly summarised by Hugh Cartwright, "Christian magistrates, having supernatural revelation, have obligations beyond those which they have simply as magistrates."<sup>52</sup>

Given the fact that Christianity adds new qualities to the magistrate's office, it is natural to apply the statement of the Confession (23.3) concerning the duty of the magistrate to the Christian magistrate. This is how Gillespie applies it:

the advancement of the gospel, and of all the ordinances of the gospel, is indeed the end of the godly magistrate, not of a magistrate simply: or (if ye will rather) it is not the end of the office itself, but of him who doth execute the same piously.... Christian magistrates and princes, embracing Christ, and sincerely giving their names to him, do not only serve him as men, but also use their office to his glory and the good of the church ... (*Propositions*, 16, 17, 20).

Besides the external testimony of the divines to this effect, the Confession itself provides four internal markers which establish this interpretation. (1) Section 2 had just stated that it is lawful for a Christian to execute the office of a magistrate, so section 3 should naturally be taken as providing an outline of the Christian magistrate's duty. (2) The leading proposition of section 3 forbids the magistrate from interfering with the spiritual government of the church, contrary to the Erastian principle that "A Christian Magistrate, as a Christian Magistrate, is a Governour in the Church."<sup>53</sup> If the debate was solely concerned with Christian magistrates then the negation of this Erastian principle in the Confession naturally applies to Christian magistrates in particular, not to all magistrates in general. (3) The closing sentence of section 3 allows the magistrate to provide that whatsoever is transacted in Synods "be according to the mind of God," which is competent only to a Christian

magistrate (*cf.* WCF 1.10). (4) Section 4 introduces the magistrate's "infidelity, or difference in religion" as a new consideration.

So the first tenet of establishmentarianism which the Confession teaches is the superadded obligation of Christianity. It is the Christian magistrate who has a special duty towards the Christian religion and the Christian church. Because he is a Christian he is obliged to exercise a care over Christian matters according to his public station.

(2) The Confession also teaches the tenet that the Christian magistrate must be submissive to national constitutions. It allows the Christian the exercise of the office with the proviso that the civil constitution of the commonwealth is respected both as to the *acceptance* and *execution* of the office: the Christian must be "called thereunto," and must manage his office "according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth." This second tenet of establishmentarianism requires the consent of the people and repudiates all persecuting measures in the advancement of Christianity in a free society.

Rutherford sets forth the following distinction for considering this subject: "There is one consideration of a Heathen or Pagan nation which never received Christianitie, and the true faith, and another consideration of a nation baptized and professing Christ" (*Due Right*, 352). The magistrate only has legal right to enact Christian laws in a Christian State: "Where a nation hath embraced the faith, and sworne thereunto in Baptisme, it is lawful for the Magistrate to compell them to professe that truth to the which they have sworne in Baptisme" (354). There is no compelling power of the sword where the consent of the people has not first been gained. Christianity must be advanced by the teaching of the Word: "the Magistrate is not to compell to profession of the truth immediately, and without any foregoing information of the mind; for the Church is to teach and instruct in all the externall acts of worship, before the Magistrate doth compell these acts" (355, 356). When a nation is still in a non Christian condition, magistrates have no coercive power to compel them to faith: "Princes have neither from the Law of nature, or from any divine Law, a coercive power over the faith of Pagans; nor is Scotus in this to bee heard, that the same divine law obliegeth all

52. Hugh Cartwright, "Westminster and Establishment: a Scottish Perspective," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, 2 (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor/Christian Focus Publications, 2005) 186fn.

53. Thomas Coleman, *Hopes Deferred and Dashed* (London, 1645) 27.

Princes, and the Churches, that did lie upon Israel to destroy the Canaanites” (362).<sup>54</sup>

Gillespie also denies that the Christian religion should be established by compelling men to an implicit faith:

it is sufficiently clear that they ought to cherish, and by their authority ought to establish the ecclesiastical discipline; but yet not with implicit faith, or blind obedience; for the reformed churches do not deny to any of the faithful, much less to the magistrate, the judgment of Christian prudence and discretion concerning those things which are decreed or determined by the church (*Propositions*, 20, 21).

The repudiation of persecuting measures is also made by Thomas Case when he distinguishes between a Christian and a non Christian nation: “We say, therefore, that religion may be considered as *to be planted*, or as *already planted, in a nation*.”<sup>55</sup> Under the first aspect, he says,

When it is to be planted and hath gotten no interest or footing among a people, the preachers and professors of it must run all hazards, and boldly own the name of Christ, whatever it cost them. The only weapons which they have to defend their way, are prayers and tears.... And what we say concerning religion in the general, holdeth true also concerning reformation, or the restitution of the collapsed state of religion ... in this case

54. Rutherford’s views on the free consent of the people are clearly stated in *Lex, Rex*. “We teach that government is natural, not voluntary; but the way and manner of government is voluntary.... Here both the free gift of God, and the free consent of the people intervene” (*Lex Rex*, 38). He maintains, “the people make a king, as a king, conditionally, for their safety, and not for their destruction” (57). The people give the power of executing laws to their superiors, but retain the fountain of the power in themselves: “when the people give themselves conditionally and covenant-wise to the king ... there is even here a note of superiority.... They never constituted over themselves a king, in regard of fountain-power” (82). The fundamental laws of State are not derived from the king, but from “the law of nature, and the law of nations, and especially from the safety of the public” (137). The same view is stated by Alexander Henderson: “civil power is not absolute but limited, first, by the will of God whose minister the magistrate is, and next, by such laws and limitations as are agreed upon to be the foundation of that power” (“Chronology,” 31). The Independent, William Bridge, also defines civil power as “that power which regularly is given to one or more, by the People, for the ordering and preservation of the Commonwealth, according to the civil laws thereof.” — *Works*, 5 (London, Thomas Tegg, 1845) 263.

55. Thomas Case, “The Conclusion of the Morning Exercise,” in *Puritan Sermons, 1659–1689* (London: 1660; repr. London: Thomas Tegg, 1845) 5.519.

56. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Sermon before the House of Peers*, Nov. 26, 1645 (London: 1645) 44.

we only press the magistrate to ‘be wise’ or cautious that he do not oppose Christ Jesus, (Psalm ii. 10,) ‘by whom kings reign, and princes decree justice.’ (Prov. viii. 15.) (Case, *Conclusion*, 519, 520.)

It is only once “religion is already planted and received among a people, and hath gotten the advantage of law and public edicts in its favour, not only for its security and protection, but also for its countenance and propagation; then it becomes the people’s birthright” (Case, 520). It is at this stage that the establishment principle is activated and becomes a force for good in the nation. Prior to the national profession of Christianity it remains a virtual power which is inactive while the power of the preached Word does its work.

Jeremiah Burroughs makes the same point as to the primacy of the Word:

Let not violence be used to force people to things spiritually that they know not; if those who now have but food and raiment should have great penalties inflicted upon them for not submitting to what they yet have had no means to instruct them in, how grievous would it be? The Votes of Parliament are to be honoured, and the judgement of an Assembly of godly and learned men is not to be slighted; but that which must subject mens consciences in matters concerning Christ and his worship, must be light from the word.<sup>56</sup>

It is clear that the Westminster divines did not consider it to be any part of the magistrate’s duty to compel men to acknowledge the Christian faith by the power of the sword. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, must first gain the consent of the people. While the nation has no interest in the gospel of Jesus Christ, civil power must not be used to coerce the people; but once the nation has been gained to the Christian faith, it becomes the Christian magistrate’s responsibility to enact laws for the protection of the Christian liberties of the people and the Church of his nation. The duty of the Christian magistrate as outlined in the twenty third chapter of the Confession cannot be interpreted as implying persecuting measures. The Christian magistrate must respect the constitution of the nation in which he serves and is not at liberty to force Christianity on his subjects.

### *Theonomy and Establishment*

Where does theonomy stand in relation to the establishment principle as taught by the Westminster formulary

and its framers? Greg Bahnsen raises the question, “whether the state should establish one denomination over others as the state-church,” and responds with what can only be called a negative probability: “the answer again might very well be that we should hold to the separation of church and state” (*Standard*, 290). J. Ligon Duncan has observed that there seems to be an anomaly in the theonomic thesis “in that Bahnsen, while adamant about the implementation of the civil laws of Israel, is indifferent toward the establishment principle. This is a strange combination, for if the Old Testament church was anything, it was established!” (*Theonomic Document*).

Notwithstanding this anomaly, the theonomist does maintain that the magistrate has authority to fulfil the duties which are listed in chapter twenty three of the Confession. Reflecting on the teaching of the Confession, Greg Bahnsen recognises that the civil ruler is obligated “to promote conditions in which the church can function prosperously (being concerned with its unity, peace, purity, etc.) by being a nursing father unto it” (*TICE*, 537). Unlike the Westminster divines, however, there is no attempt to limit this obligation to Christian magistrates, or to define it in terms of superadded obligation. Quite the contrary, when the theonomist sums up the Confession’s teaching he leaves it open for non Christian magistrates to act as a nursing father to the church:

4. The magistrate’s authority and jurisdiction is separate from that of the church; he may not administer the word or sacraments, handle the keys of the kingdom. And on the other hand orthodoxy or Christian profession are not required for civil authority.

5. This separation of church and state, however, does not render the two indifferent to each other: the ruler is to be a ‘nursing-father’ to the church, and Christians are to pray, reverence, and support the magistrate (*TICE*, 548).

It has already been shown that theonomy rejects the nature-grace distinction of the Westminster divines and views civil government as Christ’s vicegerent to establish a “Christocracy.” Besides this Erastian foundation, theonomy also teaches that the civil government’s function is to take order and make provision for the church’s unity, peace, and purity, even though that government may not be Christian. Furthermore, the magistrate is permitted to function as a nursing father to the Church without any commitment to the Establishment principle, which means there is no

constitutional basis for his actions as he seeks to promote Christianity under his dominion. This produces a situation where the magistrate, as the vicegerent of Christ, is armed with the sword to further the kingdom of Christ without any connection to the Church or recognition of its instrumentality. While it is true that he has separate *functions* to the Church, he uses these *functions* to promote Christianity independently of the Church. Such a view removes all the constitutional safeguards which the Westminster divines erected against persecuting measures. The only difference between civil and ecclesiastical government in the theonomic scheme of things is the *means* which are used to advance the cause of Christ. Whereas Westminster taught that Christian civil government has a duty to recognise the Christian Church and enact civil sanctions in its favour, theonomy converts civil government into a Christian institution which promotes Christianity by means of civil sanction.

#### *The rule of the magistrate*

According to theonomy, the civil magistrate is bound to follow the prescriptions of the whole law of God. Greg Bahnsen equates civil law with the regulative principle of worship: “when God’s law is rejected, the law of man ... is substituted; will worship preempts God’s standards for behavior” (*TICE*, 21); the only choice is between “God’s own directives or the arbitrary punishments of statesmen” (31). It is not the moral law of the ten commandments but the whole law which binds magistrates: “there is no alternative but to maintain that the civil magistrate is responsible to the entire law of God as a direction for his government and judging” (400). The State is bound to the regulative principle as equally as the Church: “state leaders are just as obligated to follow Christ’s direction as the church elders are required to obey the Head of the Church” (433).

This view is projected onto the Westminster divines: “it was the *whole* law of God which the magistrate, as God’s vicegerent, was to maintain and enforce according to the Westminster Confession” (537). George Gillespie is represented as making the magistrate responsible “to carry out the prescriptions of the whole law (the ten words and their case law elaborations)” (538). The rationale for reading the Confession in this way is quite ingenious but blatantly wrong. It is claimed that “Chapter 23, section 3 binds the civil authority to all the ordinances of God” (539). On this basis it is concluded that “the Westminster view of civil authority requires all magistrates to observe and carry out the whole law



of God as the standard of social justice and public righteousness" (539).

These ordinances, however, are not civil but ecclesiastical. The duty to take order that all the ordinances of God are duly settled, administered, and observed is not the duty of the magistrate in general but of the Christian magistrate acting as a nursing father to the church under his care; and the ordinances do not pertain to the law but to the gospel. Gillespie clarifies both of these points: "the advancement of the gospel, and of all the ordinances of the gospel, is indeed the end of the godly magistrate, not of a magistrate simply" (*Propositions*, 16).

As a matter of fact the twenty third chapter of the Confession only teaches that subjects are to obey the magistrate's "lawful commands" (23.4) without explaining the meaning of the adjective "lawful." The Assembly had already declared its mind on the law of God in chapter nineteen, where it was stated in plain language that the judicial laws expired together with the State of Israel but "the moral law doth for ever bind all" (19.4, 5). The rule of the magistrate is the same rule which binds all men—the law of the ten commandments in their full extent.

The sentiments of Gillespie will serve to confirm this view and clear him from misrepresentation. In debate with Erastian controversialists, who appealed to the Old Testament State as a pattern for the Christian State, he asks, "where is that Christian State, which was, or is, or ought to be moulded according to this pattern? ... must all criminal and capital Judgements be according to the Judicial Law of Moses, and none otherwise?" ("Chronology," 39). He mentions that

some divines hold, that the Judicial Law of Moses, so far as concerneth the punishments of sins against the moral Law, Idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, adultery, theft, &c. ought to be a rule to the Christian Magistrate, and [sic] for my part, I wish more respect were had to it, and that it were more consulted with ("Chronology," 39).

These divines did not hold that the judicial law is binding, but only "the punishments of sins against the moral law." Nor did they oblige the magistrate as a magistrate to these punishments, but only "the Christian Magistrate." Yet, even with these qualifications, the Scottish divine only wished that "it were more consulted with," not that it should be made the law of the land. Later in the same book he makes a direct statement to

the effect that the decalogue is the law which the magistrate is bound to uphold:

By the law of God I understand here *jus divinum naturale*, that is, the moral law or Decalogue, as it bindeth all nations (whether Christians or infidels), being the law of the Creator and King of nations. The magistrate, by his authority, may, and in duty ought, to keep his subjects within the bounds of external obedience to that law, and punish the external man with external punishments for external trespasses against that law (*Aaron's Rod*, 121).

Gillespie understood the magistrate to be "the keeper and defender of both tables of the law" (*Propositions*, 12). He is not bound to case law elaborations, but by secular power he "maketh and guardeth civil laws, which sometimes also he changeth and repealeth" (15, 16). He is to see to it that "virtue, justice, and the moral law of God (as touching those eternal duties of both tables, unto which all the posterity of Adam are obliged) may remain in strength and flourish" (*Propositions*, 16). So the magistrate is not responsible to carry out the prescriptions of "the whole law," but is a civil custodian of the ten commandments, and has secular power given to him to make, change, and repeal laws which best accomplish this mandate. Contrary to theonomy, the Confession and its framers assert that the rule of the magistrate is the moral law, not the whole law.

Moreover, there is no sense in which the divines bind the moral law upon the magistrate as if it prescribes specific actions. The moral law is normative, not regulative. The Confession undoubtedly affirms that the whole counsel of God is contained in Scripture (1.6), but it also distinguishes between two different *kinds* of biblical counsel. In 20.2, it is said that God has left the conscience free from the doctrines and commandments of men "which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship." According to this statement, the Word gives normative direction for life in general, but regulative prescription in the areas of faith and worship (*cf.* WCF 21.1, which teaches that the worship of God is "limited by His own revealed will"). This is another way of referring to moral and positive laws. Scripture provides moral direction for all of life, but positive prescription for faith and worship. Civil power, being derived from God as Creator, is bound to observe the moral laws of nature; but ecclesiastical power, being derived from Christ the Mediator, is bound to observe the positive laws of Christ.

When Thomas Coleman challenged George Gillespie

to prove “that Scripture-commands belong to infidels,” the Scottish Commissioner replied,

There are two sorts of duties in Scripture; some which are duties by the law of God, written in man’s heart at his creation, some principles and notions whereof remain in the hearts of all nations, even infidels by nature: other duties are such, by virtue of special commands given to the church, which are not contained in the law of nature. The first sort (of which the punishing of evil doers, mentioned Rom. xiii. 4, is one) belongs to those that are without the church as well as those within. The other only to those that are within.<sup>57</sup>

The magistrate, then, is ruled by the normative principles of the law of nature; he is not regulated by the special commands of Scripture. Jeremiah Burroughs speaks precisely to this point:

But we have often heard that of Tertullian urged; If it be therefore said it is lawful because Scripture doth not forbid, it is therefore unlawful because the Scripture doth not command. *Ans.* In the matters of God’s worship this rule is to be urged, but not in matters civil or natural (“Chronology,” 33).

An action is unlawful in ecclesiastical ordinances if Scripture does not command it, but in civil matters it is lawful if Scripture does not forbid it.

Stephen Marshall indicates that reason and prudence have an important function in the building of the State:

In building the Civil State, you doe it *ad modum imperii*, by way of rule and command; therein you have authority; *Meum* and *Tuum*, the things of this life, are by the Lord committed into the hands of a State, and the light of Nature and humane Prudence are sufficient to direct you in them, and in these things you have power and authority, according to your own reason and will, to make Laws about them (“Chronology,” 37).

The light of nature, prudence, and reason are to be utilised by the civil magistrate as he makes laws about the things of this life. Anthony Burgess teaches that the light of nature is “usefull and necessary for the making of wholsome lawes,” and remarks, “It’s wonderfull to consider, how excellent the Heathens have been therein” (*Vindiciae*, 68).

The divines do sometimes speak of the magistrate being directed by the positive commands of Scripture, but this is not for the purpose of governing the State. What

they have in mind is the connection of Church and State as discussed in the previous section. The Christian magistrate, taking care for the external worship of the Church, is bound to observe the same regulating principle of Scripture as the Church. Stephen Marshall draws this distinction in a sermon before Parliament: “Your wisdome and reason in matters of the Commonwealth is regula regulans [a ruling rule], but in matters of religion, regula regulata [a ruled rule]: every pin of the Tabernacle was appointed.”<sup>58</sup> Where the magistrate is tied to the regulative principle the context is invariably the ordinances of the Church rather than the laws of the State.

It is not as though the judicial laws have ceased to have any usefulness. All Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). Although the judicial laws have lost the force of binding laws, as Scripture they continue to serve a didactic function and provide direction for life. Therefore the divines speak of the common equity of judicial laws as providing guidance to the Christian magistrate. William Gouge notes that there were “branches of the judicial Law which rested upon common equity: and were means of keeping the moral Law;” he says that these “remain as good directions to order even Christian polities accordingly” (“Chronology,” 47). But in every instance where common equity is appealed to, the prescriptive nature of the command is denied and a reason is provided as to why a specific law gives guidance to the magistrate. The judicial law as law is expired, but as a part of God’s word it must be interpreted and applied with godly wisdom to the life of the Christian. As Samuel Rutherford warns, “He that will keep one judicial Law, because judicial and given by Moses, becometh debtor to keep the whole judicial Law, under pain of God’s eternal wrath” (“Chronology,” 36).

### *Civil punishments*

At this point it becomes necessary to clarify the nature of civil punishments. Theonomists claim to have an affinity with the Westminster divines because of their appeal to the capital punishments prescribed by the Old Testament. Martin Foulner, for example, claims that Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie were both theonomic because they employed the following hermeneutic: “If a law punished a moral crime it was a Moral law, and therefore perpetually binding, whatever lable

57. George Gillespie, “Male Audis,” in *Works*, 1:7.

58. Stephen Marshall, *The Power of the Civil Magistrate* (London, 1657) 5. Cf. “Chronology,” 37.

[sic] was attached to that law" (*Theonomy*, 6). He accepts that some of the divines, such as William Greenhill and Anthony Burgess, held different views, because they allowed that "the magistrate could impose lesser penalties under certain circumstances." Although it is admitted that such a view would not be accepted by most theonomists, nevertheless he still classifies this viewpoint "as broadly theonomic" (*Theonomy*, 7).

A close examination of the two systems will reveal that the affinity is merely a matter of appearance, and that they are in fact substantially different. This can be shown to be the case both with respect to the nature of punishment in general and to the specific punishments prescribed under the Old Testament.

First, there is a difference with respect to the nature of punishment in general. An underlying yet unproven assumption of the theonomic thesis is that punishment must be moral because it enforces moral laws, and that if there were no punishments there would be no genuine law. Says Greg Bahnsen,

The binding force and authority of any particular commandment always lies in its penal threat; if no punishment is to follow the violation of a law, then the law is merely a suggestion. A person is not *demanded* to act in a certain way unless his disobedience is followed by the application of a penal sanction (*TICE*, 435).

On the face of it this sounds quite plausible, but it actually turns out to be an antinomian fallacy. Anthony Burgess found it necessary to address this "fundamental error of the Antinomian, about a law in general; for they conceive it impossible but that the damning act of a law must be where the commanding act of a law is" (*Vindiciae*, 61). The reason why he called it a "fundamental error" is made clear by the consequence which the antinomians drew from it, namely, that the believer must be freed from the commanding power of the law as well as its condemning power because a law without punishment is not law. Ironically, it turns out that theonomists and antinomians share the same underlying assumption about the moral nature of legal punishment.

The Confession speaks against this theonomic-antinomian assumption when it declares that the believer is not under the law "to be thereby justified or condemned; yet it is of great use to them ... in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly"

59. Remarkably Greg Bahnsen quoted this passage from Anthony Burgess (*TICE*, 551), but failed to see how it contradicted his own view that punishment is essential to law.

(*WCF* 19.6). Here it is maintained that the law continues to exercise the binding nature of law upon believers even when it has no power to condemn them. The Larger Catechism, likewise, refers to the promises and threatenings of the second to fifth commandments as "reasons annexed to the ... commandment, the more to enforce it" (*LC* 110, 114, 120, 133).

The superadded nature of punishment is asserted by Anthony Burgess against the fundamental error of the antinomians: "as for the other consequent act of the law, to curse, and punish, this is but an accidentall act, and not necessary to a law; for it cometh in upon supposition of transgression ... a law is a compleat law obliging, though it do not actually curse" (*Vindiciae*, 61).<sup>59</sup> So also Samuel Rutherford, when he comes to clear Martin Luther of teaching antinomianism, lays it down as an interpretative proposition that

The binding authority in the law laying on the sinner an obligation to doe and act, is different from the binding power of the law to suffer punishment, for transgressing of the law. The former agreeth to the Law simply, as it is a Law: the latter agreeth to the Law as it is violated and disobeyed (*Spirituell Antichrist*, 1.87).

Punishment, therefore, is not considered moral by nature, but is added to the law as a result of transgression.

The theonomic view of punishment is not the same as that which is taught by the Westminster formulary and its framers. Theonomy teaches that punishment is essential to a law while the divines teach it is superadded to a law. This must be considered a substantial point of variance even if it appears there are similarities with respect to capital punishments.

Secondly, the two systems approach the punishments prescribed under the Old Testament in substantially different ways. Theonomy asserts that a punishment prescribed under the Old Testament is binding by virtue of the fact that God commands it. In the words of Greg Bahnsen, "the social punishments detailed in God's word are as authoritative as any other command He sets down to be obeyed" (*TICE*, 436). "When the magistrate follows God's law in executing criminals he has the approval and authorization of God" (445). "God's standards for public and civil justice have *not* changed, for God is immutable (as is His law, Matt. 5:17-18). Thus the death penalty for certain crimes is not simply a suggestion from God but a formal *command*" (447). "In this present age the civil magistrate ought to follow the law of God and its commandments pertaining to punishment for social crimes" (455). The theonomic

penology considers the Old Testament punishments to be inherently moral and therefore perpetually binding at all times and places. There is no process of reason which ensures the punishment fits the crime; it is simply assumed that these punishments are just because God has commanded them.

One does not find anything like this in the Westminster divines. They certainly appeal to the Old Testament punishments and may even draw the conclusion that such punishments were binding upon the covenanted nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland, but they transgress the theonomic thesis in three significant ways: (1) they do not simply assume the justice of the prescribed punishments but follow a process of reasoning which deduces the general equity of these laws; (2) they are careful to qualify that the punishments are applicable only in a covenanted nation; and (3) they more or less allow for the alteration and moderation of these punishments to ensure the punishment fits the crime.

(1) The divines do not simply assume that the judicial punishments are just. As was noted under the discussion on general equity, the bare existence of a divine law to regulate the society of Israel does not suffice to make it obliging. It must be grounded on the law of nature, explain the morality of the ten commandments, and have a reason for its permanent application. This is the process the divines employ when they appeal to the Old Testament punishments. Herbert Palmer appeals to the law and light of nature:

the Scripture expressly commands to put such to death, as also all Seducers to Idolatry, & the suitableness of these laws, to the law and light of nature, shows they cannot be Typical, or merely Judicial laws, considering how necessary they are both for the honour of God, and for the safety of others souls ("Chronology," 41).

Samuel Rutherford states that the reason why the punishment against blasphemy is binding is because there is a reason for it in nature:

This law obligeth the stranger, and any heathen to be put to death, if hee should blaspheme God, saith it is the law of nature, and obligeth us under the New Testament as being the first and highest sin that nature crieth shame and woe upon" (*Free Disputation*, 183).

Such laws are binding, not because they are a part of the judicial laws of God, but because of their natural equity:

To be sure, these laws do not pertain to us, as they are Judicial laws (as Theodore Beza notes in his *de Haereticis puniendis*):<sup>60</sup> ... But in respect to their natural equity, it cannot be proven from the Scriptures that these Laws are of those which are abrogated by the death of Christ (Rutherford, "Civil Magistrate," 272).

William Gouge refers to the maintenance of the moral law:

There were other branches of the judicial Law which rested upon common equity: and were means of keeping the moral Law: as putting to death Idolaters and such as enticed others thereunto: and witches, and wilful murderers, and other notorious malefactors ("Chronology," 47).

Francis Cheynell argues for the reason of it: "The Moral equity of this Command is very evident for the punishing of such as do entice men from the true Religion, because there is a reason given which is of general and perpetual equity" ("Chronology," 53).

This is a distinct approach to that taken by the theonomic penology. There may be cases where the divines arrive at the same conclusion with respect to the enforcement of specific punishments for specific crimes, but the method employed includes a number of variables for which the theonomic method does not make any allowance. Under different circumstances the variables might produce a different conclusion whereas a theonomic approach is bound to the same inflexible conclusion at all times and places.

(2) The divines are careful to qualify that the punishments prescribed by God are applicable to a covenanted nation. One should not overlook the driving force behind the Assembly's "work of reformation"—the Solemn League and Covenant. This context is of utmost importance in coming to a proper understanding of the statements of the divines as they urged the Parliament of England to resist an unbounded toleration of all sects and to undertake the punishment of seducing

60. Theodore Beza's views are as follows: "We acknowledge those politic laws to be prescribed only to the country of the Jews; neither are we so unskilful that we would have Moses' common wealth or government called back again, as though it were not lawful for every magistrate within his own dominion to make laws in civil matters." "The judicial laws were framed only for one nation. Therefore, seeing they were never written for us, they cannot be said to be abrogated." "Only the Israelites were bound to the judicial laws, that is, those that dwell in Jewry, because they were made fit for that commonwealth only." The translation is supplied by John Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1851) 1.277, 278.



heretics. In 1643, Parliament had entered into a “Solemn League and Covenant for the reformation and defence of religion.” One of the articles which the Parliament was sworn to uphold was “the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, ... superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness.”<sup>61</sup> The sermons which were delivered to the Parliament were either fast day or thanksgiving day messages. Their objective was to assist in bringing the covenanting magistrate to humiliation before God or thanksgiving to God so far as the great work of reformation was concerned. Herbert Palmer serves as a good example of a court preacher who invoked the covenant for reformation as the basis of his appeal:

And give me leave, I humbly pray, to proceed a little further in a particular or two more specified in our Covenant for Reformation. One is that we may ever remember that Clause in the first Article, *To endeavour the Reformation of Religion in the Kingdoms of England and Ireland in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, according to the Word of God* (“Chronology,” 13).

The monthly appeals of the ministers to the Parliament to suppress heresies were grounded on the covenanted commitment of the civil magistrate.

Where the Confession states it is the duty of the magistrate “to take order ... that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed” (WCF 23.3), it is important to note that the divines limit this obligation to a Christian magistrate governing in a Christian nation according to a Christian constitution. Samuel Rutherford makes this the true state of the question in his work against pretended liberty of conscience:

the true state of the question is ... whether or no ought the Godly and Christian Prince restrain & punish with the sword false teachers, publishers of hereticall and pernicious doctrines, which may be proved by witnesse, and tends to the injuring of the souls of the people of God, in a Christian societie, and are dishonorable to God, and contrary to sound doctrine (*Pretended Liberty*, 57).

Rutherford insists that it is not a non Christian nation, but a nation “in covenant with God,” which is the object of the magistrate’s punishment:

61. “The Solemn League & Covenant,” in *Westminster Confession*, 359.

62. Anonymous (ascribed to George Gillespie), *Wholesome Severity Reconciiled with Christian Liberty* (London, 1645) to the Christian Reader.

Hence not simple Idolaters, nor all the Nations round about, nor all the Papiſts, that are educated in Idolatry, by this Law shall be put to death, but such as are *within the gates of Israel*. 2. *In covenant with God*. 3. It is *wrought in Israel*, and so Apostates to Judaisme, to strange Gods are to be punished; so we teach not that Nations are to be converted by the sword, or that the idolatry of Indians, the blasphemy of Jews, is a sufficient ground to make war against them, and cut them off with the sword (*Pretended Liberty*, 187).

Nor is it simply the magistrate, “But the Magistrate, as such a Magistrate, lustered with Christianity, punisheth Gospel Heretics, and sinneth against his Magistral office if he do not so” (*Pretended Liberty*, 223).

George Gillespie makes the same fundamental qualification. Throughout the many rhetorical flourishes of his anti-sectarian work, “Wholesome Severity,” he does not fail to specify who should undertake the punishment of heretics:

I have endeavoured in this following discourse to vindicate the lawfull, yea necessary use of the coercive power of the Christian Magistrate in suppressing and punishing hereticks and sectaries, according as the degree of their offence and of the Churches danger shal require.<sup>62</sup>

The adjective “Christian” is subsequently used on pages 1, 6, 7 (thrice), 8 (thrice), 12, 29, 31 (twice). In pressing for the punishment of heretics, Gillespie specifies that the covenanted reformation requires it: “It is for ... drawing factions among the people contrary to the covenant, for resisting the reformation of religion, for lying and railing against the covenant” (*Wholesome Severity*, 34). “Other seduced ones the Magistrate is to command *subpoena*, and cause them stand to the covenant of God” (35). The magistrate’s duty is “to endeavour the discovery of all such as have been or shall be evil instruments, by hindering the reformation of religion, or making any faction or party amongst the people, contrary to the solemn league and covenant” (*Wholesome Severity*, 37). The same point is made in the *Late Dialogue*: “to grant an unbounded liberty unto all sorts of heretics and sectaries ... is inconsistent with the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms” (“Chronology,” 19).

Francis Cheynell also ties the duty of suppressing blasphemies and heresies to a covenanted State:

We cannot in equity extend the Law of Moses to such as never entred into any Covenant with God, nor to any

that are led away in their simplicity before they have been better instructed and admonished once and again; nor to such as do in a Christian and Peaceable way dissent from their brethren in points of lesse consequence ("Chronology," 54).

The use of "equity" is striking. It means there are situations where the punishments prescribed by the Old Testament code would be unjust, and an uncovenanted nation is just such a situation.

This qualification—that the Old Testament punishments are applicable only to a covenanted nation—provides a concrete example of the way the divines might reach a different conclusion to that which is reached by the theonomic approach. The divines take the situational perspective of a State into consideration whereas theonomy requires the inflexible enforcement of God's penal laws regardless of the situation.

(3) Finally, the divines more or less allow for the alteration and moderation of these punishments to ensure the punishment fits the crime. Samuel Rutherford makes an important distinction between the nature and the mode of punishment:

the punishing of a sin against the Moral Law by the Magistrate, is Moral and perpetual; but the punishing of every sin against the Moral Law, *tali modo*, so and so, with death, with spitting on the face: I much doubt if these punishments in particular, and in their positive determination to the people of the Jews, be moral and perpetual ("Chronology," 36).

When a punishment is added to a moral commandment it is considered a matter of common moral equity. Such an addition demonstrates that the nature of the crime requires punishment, but the mode of punishment is a positive determination.

Rutherford not only considered the mode but also the degree of punishment to be variable. He asks the question in plain terms, "Whether the rulers by their Office, in order to peace, are to stand to the Laws of Moses, for punishing seducing teachers;" and answers it with like plainness, "Judicial Laws may be judicial and Mosaic, and so not obligatory to us, according to the degree and quality of punishment" (*Pretended Liberty*, 298). He provides a concrete example in the case of theft:

No man but sees the punishment of theft is of common moral equity, and obligeth all Nations, but the manner or degree of punishment is more positive: as to punish Theft by restoring four Oxen for the stealing of one Ox,

doth not so oblige all Nations, but some other bodily punishment, as whipping, may be used against Thieves" (*Pretended Liberty*, 299).

The addition of a punishment is moral-positive: the morality of punishing the crime is due to the fact that the crime is against the moral law; but the mode and degree of punishment is positive and variable.

When Rutherford comes to apply the law of punishing seducing prophets, the most he claims is that the crime is punishable by nature: "the Christian Magistrate is tyed and obliged to these punishments to be inflicted for morall offences, that the Law of God hath ordained, at least in nature" (308, 309). "The punishing of a seducing Prophet is morall" (*Pretended Liberty*, 310). There is no insistence that death must invariably be the punishment.

The position of George Gillespie is a little more difficult to evaluate because he did not provide explanation and qualification of his views. It might even appear that Gillespie contradicted himself. On the one hand, it is maintained, "He who will hold that the Christian Magistrate is not bound to inflict such punishments for such sins, is bound to prove that those former laws of God are abolished, and to show some Scripture for it." On the other hand, there is place given for "toleration whereby the Magistrate when it is in the power of his hand to punish and extirpate ... granteth them a *Supersedeas* [forbearance]" ("Chronology," 23). If this is accepted as a real contradiction in the light of modern debate then it only serves to show the problems involved with imposing a modern theonomic understanding on Gillespie's writings.

Alternatively, the apparent contradiction might be removed by an application of Rutherford's distinction of punishment by nature and punishment by degree. Where Gillespie speaks of "such punishments for such sins," he might be understood as referring to the crime naturally deserving punishment; but where he allows a forbearance, he might have been thinking of the degree to which the deserved punishment might be inflicted. Given the fact that Gillespie has not undertaken to qualify himself, this could be the best way of reconciling his conflicting statements. It certainly accords with his stated purpose for writing the pamphlet, which was to vindicate the suppressing and punishing of heretics and sectaries "according as the degree of their offence and of the Churches danger shall require" (*Wholesome Severity*, to the reader). The only other option is to conclude that Gillespie was still undecided on the matter.

However one chooses to interpret Gillespie, the

allowance of forbearance in the matter of prescribed punishments indicates a “moderate” position akin to that which was taught by Anthony Burgess. The position of Burgess is stated as follows: “The Corrigibility and relenting of the Offender, may much procure Clemency (“Chronology,” 16). This “moderate” position essentially consists in taking the situational perspective into consideration and allowing the magistrate the power to exercise mercy. Gillespie’s position is no different. First, he takes the situational perspective of the offender into consideration: “having to do with such of whom there is good hope either of reducing them by convincing their judgments, or of uniting them to the Church by a safe accommodation of differences, he grants them a *supersedeas* [forbearance]” (“Chronology,” 23). Secondly, he allows for clemency:

or though there be no such ground of hope concerning them, while he might crush them with the foot of power, in Christian piety and moderation, he forbears so far as may not be destructive to the peace and right government of the Church, using his coercive power with such a mixture of mercy as creates no mischief to the rest of the Church (“Chronology,” 23).

Contrary to Martin Foulner’s evaluation, there is no basis for alleging that the views of Rutherford and Gillespie were less moderate than those of Burgess and Greenhill.<sup>63</sup> Their allowance for variability in the degree of punishment is basically non-theonomic because it ascribes discretionary power to the magistrate.

The testimony of Robert Baillie may be added to confirm the view of the Scottish commissioners. To be sure, Baillie was equally opposed to the toleration of all sects: “Liberty of Conscience, and Toleration of all or any Religion is so prodigious an impiety, that this religious Parliament cannot but abhorre the very naming

of it.”<sup>64</sup> Yet, when it came to the capital punishments prescribed under the Old Testament, he found fault with the Brownists because “They lay it upon the Magistrate to punish by death, without any dispensation, every Adulterer, every Blasphemer, every Sabbath-breaker; and above all, every Idolater.” (“Chronology,” 33). From the perspective of this Westminster representative, the theonomic penology is to be associated with the errors of Brownism.

It is clear, then, that the Westminster divines appealed to the Old Testament punishments, but they deviated from the theonomic approach in three significant ways. First, they followed a process of reasoning which sought to discover where and when such punishments were justly administered; they did not simply assume the punishments were just and binding. Secondly, they carefully noted the covenanted context of Israel and only applied the punishments to the context of a Christian magistrate upholding a Christian constitution in a Christian nation. Thirdly, while they spoke of the punishment of specific crimes as moral, they allowed for variation in the kind and degree of punishment. These deviations are significant enough to conclude that the Westminster divines did not follow the theonomic approach.

To summarise this part of the analysis—Westminster teaches that the magistrate is an ordinance of God, and in that sense it is broadly theonomic in its outlook. Westminster confines the magistrate’s sphere to nature in distinction from the sphere of grace in which the Church functions, but theonomy denies the nature-grace distinction and derives the authority of the magistrate from Christ as Mediator. Whereas Westminster teaches the connection of Church and State by means of Christian constitutionalism and guards against persecuting measures, theonomy separates the two and makes the State an agency for propagating the Christian religion independently from the Church. Westminster teaches that the rule of the magistrate is the moral law of God which gives normative direction for law-making, but theonomy advocates the magistrate is bound to the whole law of God as it prescribes specific actions in particular situations. Finally, Westminster maintains that a Christian magistrate over a covenanted nation may suppress blasphemies and heresies with the liberty to alter the kind and degree of punishment, but theonomy makes the Old Testament punishments binding and unalterable on all nations. Westminster and theonomy clearly set forth two divergent schemes as to the nature and function of the civil magistrate.

*Continued on Page 322.*

63. There is no record of disagreement in the discussions of the Assembly anent the judicial law or the punishment to be meted out to blasphemers or heretics. The minutes show that some of the Independents dissented over statements such as “the known principles of Christianity” (“Chronology,” 41), “publishing opinions” (44), and the civil magistrate’s duty to suppress heresies (50). Most of these disagreements arose because of the way the propositions were worded. The fact that Jeremiah Burroughs was among the dissenters shows that there was no genuine dissatisfaction with the teaching of the Confession because he openly preached against toleration (32). It seems that Mr. Carter Jr. took exception to the truth as stated. None of these disagreements, however, touch on the kind or degree of punishment which blasphemers and heretics should receive. In fact, there is no record that the Assembly ever discussed it.

64. Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time* (London, 1646), epistle dedicatory.

# John Calvin

## On the Doctrine of Divine Revelation

By W. Gary Crampton, Th.D.

### INTRODUCTION

John Calvin (1509–1564)<sup>1</sup> was born and raised in Picardy, France. He studied for the Roman Catholic priesthood at the University of Paris, receiving a Master of Arts degree in 1528. Following this, at the advice of his father, he took up the study of law, and earned the doctorate of law in 1531. Somewhere between 1532 and 1534, John Calvin became a Christian. In his own words: “God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame.”<sup>2</sup> After his conversion, Calvin committed himself to the study of and the exposition of the Scriptures. *Sola Scriptura* was for him the way of life. The power of the Word of God overwhelmed the Reformer. Later, in his *Institutes*, he wrote:

Now this power which is peculiar to Scripture is clear from the fact that of human writings, however artfully polished, there is none capable of affecting us at all comparably. Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle and any others of that tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, move you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them this sacred reading [Scripture]. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your marrow, that, compared with its deep impression, such vigor as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. Consequently, it is easy to see that the sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breath something divine (I.8.1).<sup>3</sup>

In this article we will study John Calvin’s doctrine of divine revelation. We will see that his view of Scripture was at the center of all that he thought, wrote, and practiced. Ronald Wallace said it this way: “Calvin’s work—and his approach to it—can be fully understood only

when we comprehend also the constraint in which he found himself under the Word of God; for it was his experience of the Word, and his interpretation of it, which determined what he attempted and achieved.”<sup>4</sup> In his own words, Calvin wrote: “I am one, to whom the law of my heavenly Master is so dear that the cause of no man on earth will induce me to flinch from maintaining it with a pure conscience.”<sup>5</sup> His symbol was an outstretched hand holding a burning heart, offered up to God; his motto: “My heart, O Lord, I offer as a sacrifice to God—promptly and sincerely.”<sup>6</sup> The Reformer’s lifetime commitment to a high view of Scripture is recognizable in his deathbed utterance: “As for my doctrine, I have taught faithfully . . . and I have not corrupted one single passage of Scripture nor twisted it so far as I know.”<sup>7</sup>

As we investigate the Reformer’s doctrine of Holy Writ, we will see that his beliefs are very much in conformity with the later Westminster Standards, specifically the *Westminster Assembly’s Confession of Faith* (1647) and the *Larger Catechism* (1648) and the *Shorter Catechism* (1648).

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THE AUTHOR: Dr. Crampton is the author of many books and articles and is a frequent contributor to *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

1. A large portion of this article is taken, with permission, from W. Gary Crampton, *What Calvin Says* (The Trinity Foundation, 2002).

2. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Volumes I–XXII (Baker, 1981), “Preface” to the *Commentary* on the Psalms.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Westminster, 1960).

4. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation* (Baker and Scottish Academic Press, 1990) vii.

5. Cited in Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, 300.

6. Cited in F. Nigel Lee, *John Calvin: True Presbyterian* (Jesus Lives, 1981) 20.

7. Cited in John H. Gerstner, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Zondervan, 1980) 393.



## CALVIN ON KNOWLEDGE

John Calvin began his theological masterpiece, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, with the following words: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern” (I.1.1). Without a knowledge of oneself, there is no knowledge of God. But to know one’s self, and the whole of creation in general, there must first be a knowledge of God. God is known both better, and before, oneself or anything else (I.1.1–3). According to the Geneva Reformer, God—not one’s self or the world—is the object best known to man.

Calvin began his *Institutes* with epistemology (the theory of knowledge); he did not begin with how we know there is a god, and then go on to attempt to prove that this god is the God of the Bible. Calvin’s starting point was revelation. The doctrine of God follows epistemology (I.13–18). In his theological and philosophical system, Scripture is foundational. It is “the Word of God” (I.7.1). As far removed as the creature is from his Creator, nevertheless, God accommodates Himself to our human capacity, and speaks to us in His Word.<sup>8</sup> Therein God “lisps” to us; He speaks to us “in mean and lowly words” (I.13.1; I.8.1). “Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know” (III.21.3).

John Calvin was saying nothing more than the apostle Paul taught and the Westminster Assembly confirmed.<sup>9</sup> In the words of Paul: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17, NKJV). And in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1.6) we read:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and

8. Ford Lewis Battles, “God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity,” in *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Baker, 1984) 21–42.

9. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* begins with the chapter called “Of the Holy Scripture.” The remaining 32 chapters are erected on the axiom of Biblical revelation. Citations from the *Confession* and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* are taken from *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994).

10. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel C. Craig (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956, 1980) 117.

necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added.

This is the Reformed principle of *sola Scriptura*, which affirms the all-sufficiency of Scripture. According to this principle, there is no two-source theory of knowledge. The Bible is sufficient for all the truth we need and all the knowledge we can have. True knowledge, said the Reformer, “is that which is delivered in the Law and the Prophets” (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 44:1–7). Our knowledge is “confined within its [Scripture’s] limits” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 8:20).

In the *Institutes*, Calvin maintained that there is a two-fold revelation of God to man: general (I.3–5) and special (I.6–12). The former is general in audience (all mankind) and limited in content; the latter is more restricted in audience (those who read the Bible) and much more detailed in content. Special revelation is now found in Scripture alone. Even though general and special revelation are in perfect harmony (I.10.1), due to its limited nature, general revelation must always be interpreted in light of special revelation (I.6.1).

## GENERAL REVELATION

Calvin taught that God had implanted an innate knowledge of Himself (*sensus deitatis*) in all men, a knowledge that is propositional and ineradicable. “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct,” he contended, “an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God Himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of His divine majesty” (*Institutes* I.3.1). Man, as the image bearer of God, even has the moral law imprinted in his heart: It is “engraved upon the hearts of all [and] in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables.... It has been engraven by God in the minds of men” (II.8.1; IV.20.16). B. B. Warfield correctly maintained that for Calvin the “innate *sensus deitatis* in man [lies] at the root of all his knowledge of God.” Here man has in-born propositional and ineradicable general revelation.<sup>10</sup>

This innate knowledge, taught Calvin, enables man to see the rich revelation of God in creation:

Men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see Him. Indeed, His essence is incomprehensible; hence, His divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon His individual works He has engraven unmistakable marks of His glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the

excuse of ignorance.... Wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern some sparks of His glory.... There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and on earth that declare His wonderful wisdom; not only those more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and all natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them (*Institutes* I.5.1–2).

All men, therefore, have an awareness of God which leaves them without excuse. Nevertheless, due to the noetic effects of sin, fallen man, even though he possesses this seed of true religion, continually suppresses the knowledge which he has and knows to be true:

But although we lack the natural ability to mount up unto the pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of the dullness is within us. And, indeed, we are not allowed thus to pretend ignorance without our conscience itself always convicting us of both baseness and ingratitude (*Institutes* I.5.15).

Without the “spectacles” of special revelation sinful man is not able to come to a sound and saving knowledge of God. “We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from His works, while these very works are appraised not by our depraved judgment but by the rule of eternal truth” (I.6.1, 3). The testimony of general revelation is “such as that it made men without excuse, and yet was not sufficient to salvation” (*Commentary* on Acts 14:17). “Although by nature the knowledge of God is engraven on the hearts of all men, yet it is so confused and dark, and entangled by many errors, that, if the light of the Word be not added to it, by knowing they know not God, but wander miserably in darkness” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 55:5).

Calvin’s doctrine here is in agreement with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1.1):

Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore, it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and afterwards, for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against

the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.

“The real relation between general and special revelation, as the matter lay in Calvin’s mind,” wrote Warfield, is “that in the absence of Scripture, that is of special revelation, the general revelation of God is ineffective to preserve any sound knowledge of Him in the world.” Thus, “in these Scriptures alone ... do we possess an adequate revelation of God” (Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 69, 32.). Special revelation is necessary due to the insufficiency of general revelation.

Although the Geneva Reformer did adhere to a natural or general revelation, and did believe that this is the reason for the universality of religion,<sup>11</sup> he did not develop a natural theology, i.e., the theory of evidentialist apologetics that maintains that not only is there a general revelation which God gives to mankind, but also that it is possible for man to develop the true knowledge of God from this general revelation alone.<sup>12</sup> In the *Institutes* (I.3–5), he taught that the innate knowledge that God has implanted in every man, and (because of this) the daily disclosure of God’s attributes in nature are more than sufficient to prove that the God of Scripture is the one and only true God. Calvin spoke of the persuasiveness of the religious and/or moral argument, the cosmological argument, the argument from God’s kind and common dealings with mankind, and the argument from the human anatomy. But unaided by Scripture, these arguments speak in vain. Not even the knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus Christ led the disciples to saving faith; it merely confirmed the faith that they already possessed (II.2.2–5).

Niesel was correct: “The critic who desires to find in Calvin a natural theology encounters [numerous] difficulties.”<sup>13</sup> Calvin is no natural theologian. “The proofs of faith,” he claimed, “must be [sought at] the mouth of God alone. If we dispute about matters which concern men, then let human reasons take place; but in the doctrine of faith, the authority of God alone must reign, and upon it we must depend” (*Commentary* on Acts 17:2). In other words, one does not attempt to prove God. He is the necessary

11. Calvin taught that “God has sown a seed of religion in all men” (*Institutes* I.4.1).

12. For the opposite view of Calvin and natural theology, see R. C. Sproul, John H. Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Zondervan, 1984) 198–208.

13. Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Westminster, 1956) 40.

premise of all proof, the object of knowledge better known than any other. “The best method of seeking God is to begin at His Word” (*Commentary* on Genesis 48:15).

This is not to assert that Calvin was opposed to the use of the evidences for the existence of God. Rather, he believed that they were very useful, even though they do not “prove” the existence of God. First, the evidences are useful in strengthening the faith of Christians, arousing them to worship God with greater reverence and encouraging their hope of eternal life (*Institutes* I.5.10). And second, the evidences can be used in an *ad hominem* (“to the man”) fashion to reveal the foolishness of non-Christian systems, pointing the gainsayer to the one true and living God (I.5.1–9).

#### SPECIAL REVELATION

John Calvin taught that the propositional truth of special revelation was necessary if one is going to come to a sound and saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. General revelation reveals God as Creator; Scripture alone reveals Him as Savior (*Commentary* on Romans 1:16–17). He wrote:

Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds [innate knowledge], having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift [special revelation], where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens His own most hallowed lips. Not only does He teach the elect to look upon a god, but also shows Himself as the God upon whom they are to look.... God has provided the assistance of the Word for the sake of all those to whom He has been pleased

14. Technically speaking, “internal evidences” are not evidences at all in the empirical sense; they are a part of special revelation. Only external evidences (extra-Biblical evidences) are actually “evidences” in the empirical sense.

15. B. B. Warfield might take issue with this statement (*Calvin and Augustine*, 29–130), as would Sproul, Gerstner, and Lindsley (*Classical Apologetics*, 198–208). They would maintain that Calvin thought of the evidences (*indicia*) as working together with the testimony of the Holy Spirit; thus, Calvin would use them as inductive arguments. The problem here is that all inductive arguments are formal logical fallacies. Even in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall, man was dependent on propositional revelation for knowledge. He could not, by observation, have determined where he was or what he was to do. God had to tell him then, and the present situation, exacerbated by sin, is worse. For example, in his *Commentary* on Exodus 4:5, Calvin asserted that miracles, as a Biblical evidence, are used, “sometimes ... as preparatives to faith, sometimes for its confirmation.” They can be used to “open a door of faith.” But they are only to be presented as the biblical evidences of the God of Scripture, and never as proof. For

to give useful instruction, because He foresaw that His likeness imprinted upon the most beautiful form of the universe would be insufficiently effective.... We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from His works” (*Institutes* I.6.1, 3).

True knowledge, said Calvin, “is that which is delivered to us by the law and prophets” (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 44:1–7).

The Geneva Reformer maintained that Scripture is self-authenticating and self-evident. “Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture is indeed self-authenticating” (*Institutes* I.7.5). Metaphorically speaking, “Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste” (I.7.2). There are, he claimed, a number of evidences, both internal<sup>14</sup> and external, that the Bible is God’s inspired, infallible, inerrant revelation to mankind. There is the antiquity of the Bible, the majesty of its style, the heavenliness of the doctrine, the logical consistency of Scripture, the various miracles and prophecies, and the faithfulness of the martyrs (I.8.3–13). But apart from the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, these evidences are “vain”; they are “secondary aids to our feebleness” (I.8.13; I.7.1–5).

Calvin would have been in agreement with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1.4–5):

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.... We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation, the many incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

Calvin did not attempt to prove by extra-Biblical arguments that the Bible is the Word of God.<sup>15</sup> He wrote:

They mock the Holy Spirit when they ask: Who can convince us that these writings came from God? Who can assure us that Scripture has come down whole and intact even to our day?... Thus, the highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it. The prophets and apostles do not boast either of their keenness or of anything that obtains credit for them as they speak; nor do they dwell upon rational proofs. Rather, they bring forward God's holy name, that by it the whole world may be brought into obedience to Him (*Institutes* I.7.1).

Therefore, it is "not right to subject it [the Bible] to proof and reasoning" (I.7.5). The Bible is the axiom on which all knowledge and proof are based. "Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps. For unless this foundation is laid its authority will always remain in doubt" (I.8.1).

Calvin is not anti-logic. Philip Schaff claimed that as the best theologian and exegete of the Reformation period, John Calvin "never abused reason ... but assigned it the office of an indispensable handmaid of revelation."<sup>16</sup> Whereas Calvin favored the study of logic as a discipline, what he opposed was human thinking that is unaided by the teaching of Scripture (*Institutes* I.15.6; I.5.14). Church historian Gregg Singer confirmed this. According to Singer, although Calvin never wrote much on philosophy, he nevertheless did advocate the legitimacy and necessity of a Biblical philosophy. In fact, he laid the groundwork for a solid Reformed Christian philosophy based solely on the Word of God.<sup>17</sup> Niesel was of the same opinion: "The aim of Calvin's theology ... [is] to interpret those fundamental principles of Christian philosophy which God has granted us in the Bible" (Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 24).

Sadly, Calvinists have often been characterized as being too logical, rather than anti-logical. The Geneva Reformer would have agreed with the Westminster theologians who averred that a man seeking the office of minister of the Gospel should be trained and examined, not only regarding his skills in the original languages of "the Hebrew and Greek Testaments," but also "whether he has skill in logic and philosophy."<sup>18</sup>

Calvin taught that even though there is a common ground between believers and non-believers due to the fact that they are all created in the image of God, there are no notions common to Christianity and non-Christian philosophy and theology (*Institutes* I.5.13).

True faith rests alone on an implicit belief in the Word of God, as revealed by the Holy Spirit (III.2.6–10). Calvin said that evidentialist apologetics is "doing things backward" (I.7.4).

Every human being has an innate and inescapable knowledge of God because God has chosen to reveal Himself to His image bearer. This knowledge is not derived by either sensation or unaided reasoning (*Commentary* on Acts 8:31). Such knowledge is revelational and propositional, and it has its source in the God of Holy Scripture. Further, taught the Reformer, Jesus Christ is the eternal *Logos* who makes all knowledge possible. Christ makes all men aware of God because He is "the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (*Commentary* on John 1:9, 15).

#### CALVIN ON SCRIPTURE

##### *The All-Sufficiency of Scripture*

As we have seen, John Calvin was an advocate of *sola Scriptura*. He believed, as taught by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1.6):

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Calvin's voluminous writings—commentaries, sermons, and catechisms—fully attest to this fact. Scripture to the Geneva Reformer is "the Word of God," which comes to us from "the mouth of God" (*Institutes* I.7.1, 5). And "when the Lord closes His holy mouth, let us also stop the way, that we may not go farther" (*Commentary* on Romans 9:14).<sup>19</sup> "I do not venture to make

more on this, see Gordon H. Clark, *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (The Trinity Foundation, 1989) and Gordon H. Clark, *Religion, Reason, and Revelation* (The Trinity Foundation, 1995).

16. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Eerdmans, 1910) VII.32.

17. C. Gregg Singer, *John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits* (A Press, 1989) 52–55; see also Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, 99–104.

18. "The Form of Presbyterian Church Government and of Ordination of Ministers," in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 412–413.

19. Calvin's comment here on Romans 9:14, that we should not go beyond that which God has revealed, has to do with the doctrine of predestination, but it is applicable to any subject.



any assertion,” he commented, “where Scripture is silent” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 6:2).

Note is made here that Calvin and the Westminster Assembly did not restrict the truth of special revelation to the explicit propositions of the Scriptures, i.e., that which has been “expressly set down in Scripture.” Those things which are implicitly taught by these propositions, i.e., that which “by good and necessary consequence may be [logically] deduced from Scripture,” are also God’s truth. In the words of Calvin: “The commandments and prohibitions always contain more than is expressed [explicitly] in words.... Therefore, plainly a sober interpretation of the law goes beyond the [explicit] words” to the implications taught in those explicit words. For example, “the purpose of the fifth commandment is that honor ought to be paid,” not just to one’s father and mother, but “to those to whom God has assigned it” as well (*Institutes* II.8.8).

We have also noted that Calvin taught that Scripture is necessary for salvation. Sin is so pervasive in fallen man that God’s general revelation is continually suppressed. If men were taught only by general revelation, “they would be so tied to confused principles as to worship an unknown God” (*Institutes* I.5.12). Thus, God has given us His Word, as “spectacles” to direct us to Jesus Christ the Savior (I.6.1). According to Calvin, the Holy Spirit is the effectual agent, which united with the Word, as the instrumental, objective factor, gives light to a sin-darkened mind (II.2.20). “Indeed, the Word of God is like the sun,” he wrote, “shining upon all those to whom it is proclaimed, but with no effect among the blind. Now, all of us are blind by nature in this respect. Accordingly, it cannot penetrate into our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through His illumination makes entry for it” (III.2.34).<sup>20</sup> The Reformer’s view is that of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 31): “Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, He does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel.” The Holy Spirit causes the sinner to believe what he reads in the Gospel.

The Word of God is also that sole source of knowledge

20. In his *Institutes* (III.2.15), Calvin refers to this new ability to see the truth of God’s Word as “our truly feeling its sweetness” (*sensus suavitatis*), and “experiencing it in ourselves.” See Stephen J. Nichols, *An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit in the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards* (P & R Publishing, 2003) 54.

21. Cited in *Table Talk*, edited by Robert F. Ingram (Ligonier Ministries, March 1991) 10.

through which man is to interpret the world. Scripture is all-sufficient. It is not only that which reveals Jesus Christ as Savior, it is also the one and only guide for the Christian’s life (*Institutes* I.6.1–2). “Everything that relates to the guidance of our life is contained in them [the Scriptures] abundantly” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 30:1). Calvin’s high view of Scripture is particularly evident in his refutation of certain anti-Trinitarian heresies of his day:

Let us use great caution that neither our thoughts nor our speech go beyond the limits to which the Word of God itself extends. And let us not take into our heads either to seek out God anywhere else than in His sacred Word, or to think anything about Him that is not prompted by His Word, or to speak anything that is not taken from that Word. But if some distinction does exist in the one divinity of Father, Son, and Spirit—something hard to grasp—and occasions to certain minds more difficulty and trouble than is expedient, let it be remembered that men’s minds, when they indulge their curiosity, enter into a labyrinth. And so let them yield themselves to be ruled by the heavenly oracles [Scripture], even though they may fail to capture the height of the mystery.<sup>21</sup>

### *Progressive Revelation*

The Geneva Reformer held that Biblical revelation was progressive in nature. He taught that there is a continuously enlarging body of special revelation from the time of Adam in the Garden of Eden to the time of the apostles. In Eden, God first revealed Himself to Adam in propositions and He continued to do so until the close of the canon of Scripture. Throughout the entirety of the progress of revelation, the revelation is inerrant at every stage (*Commentary* on Hebrews 1:1–2; *Institutes* I.6.2). Wrote Calvin:

The first promise of salvation was given to Adam.... There it glowed like a feeble spark. Then, as it was added to, the light grew in fullness, breaking forth increasingly and shedding its radiance more widely. At last—when all the clouds were dispersed—Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, fully illuminated the whole earth (II.10.20).

This is the same doctrine as taught in the *Westminster Confession* (1.1): “Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church.”

The Biblical doctrine of progressive revelation, as taught by the Reformer, holds that God has seen fit to give special revelation little by little over the centuries of time: some to Adam, more to Noah, more to Abraham, more to Moses, more to David, and so forth, until the coming of the New Covenant. The Old Testament pointed beyond itself to the coming of Christ and the New Testament age. But until this new era arrived, revelation was incomplete (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 31:31–34).

One of the ways that progressive revelation is recognizable in the Bible, maintained Calvin, is in the various covenants which God has instituted and established with His people, both in the Old and New Testaments. The covenant is that which gives unity to the Word of God, and makes the people of God in both covenant eras one people (*Institutes* II.10–11).

In his *Sermon* on Deuteronomy 26:16–19,<sup>22</sup> Calvin taught that the only way that man is able to have any relationship with God is that God has chosen to enter into covenant with His creatures. His view is well expressed in the *Westminster Confession* (7.1):

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

Although the Genevan does not refer to the initial covenant which God made with Adam as a “covenant of works,” he does recognize Adam’s federal headship with the entire human race (*Commentary* on Romans 5:12 and 1 *Corinthians* 15:45). It is clear by his writings that he would be in basic agreement with the *Westminster Confession* (7.2), that “the first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”<sup>23</sup> Adam, however, broke covenant with God, and he and his posterity fell from the state of original righteousness (*Commentary* on Romans 5:12).<sup>24</sup> Man is now totally depraved. Due to “Adam’s sin,” there is “an hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which makes us liable to God’s wrath” (*Institutes* II.1.8). Man is in desperate need of a Savior.

With the Fall, however, came a new covenant: the “covenant of grace.” This covenant was instituted in the first messianic promise of *Genesis* 3:15 (“And I [God] will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman,

and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”), immediately subsequent to the Fall (*Institutes* I.14.18; II.10.20). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (7.3) explicates the covenant of grace as follows:

Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [of works], the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.

With this explanation, John Calvin would have been in full agreement. In the covenant of grace, promises were made to Adam and Noah, along with covenant signs (*Institutes* IV.14.6, 18). But the covenant really came into its own with Abraham and his seed (III.21.7; *Commentary* on *Genesis* 12:3; 17:1ff.). Once given to Abraham, this covenant continued to flow through redemptive history, reaching its Old Testament zenith in David, as a type of Christ (*Commentary* on *Psalms* 89:3ff.). And then, having come into its fullest measure with the advent of Christ Himself, the covenant remains as valid for us today as it was to Israel: “It is most evident that the covenant which the Lord once made with Abraham is no less in force today for Christians than it was of old for the Jewish people” (*Institutes* IV.16.6).

In the Reformer’s thought, there are not two covenants—the Old and the New—in some radical sense. On the contrary, “the covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation” (*Institutes* II.10.2). As stated in the *Westminster Confession* (7.6): “There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.”

Scripture tells us that the covenant of grace is that which unifies the people of God, in both Testaments. They are all saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Wrote Calvin: The “blessed and happy

22. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).

23. See Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Baker, 2001) 304; and M. Eugene Osterhaven, “Calvin on the Covenant,” in *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, 90.

24. See John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959) 17–18.

state of the church [both Old and New Testaments] always had its foundation in the person of Christ”:

The Old Testament was established upon the free mercy of God, and was confirmed by Christ’s intercession. For the Gospel preaching, too, declares nothing else than that sinners are justified apart from their own merit by God’s fatherly kindness; and the whole of it is summed up in Christ. Who, then, dares to separate the Jews from Christ, since, with them ... was made the covenant of the Gospel, the sole foundation of which is Christ? Who dares to estrange from the gift of free salvation those to whom we hear the doctrine of the righteousness of faith imparted? (*Institutes* II.6.2; II.10.4).

Calvin believed that which is taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (8.6), that “although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world.” In Calvin’s own words, “the virtue of the one sacrifice” of Jesus Christ “is eternal and extends to all ages.... Except the sacrifice of Christ was [eternally] efficacious, no one of the [Old Testament] fathers would have obtained salvation” (*Commentary* on Hebrews 9:26).

Therefore, Calvin could write that all of the Old Testament saints, from Adam onward, belonged to the New Covenant in that they embraced Christ, the promised Messiah, by faith alone: “The children of the promise (Romans 9:8), reborn of God, who have obeyed the commands by faith working through love (Galatians 5:6), have belonged to the New Covenant since the world began.... For they believed especially in the Mediator; and they did not doubt that through Him the Spirit was given to them that they might do good, and that they were pardoned whenever they sinned” (*Institutes* II.11.10). “There is always to be presupposed a mutual relation and correspondence between the covenant of God and our faith, in order that the unfeigned consent of the latter may answer to the faithfulness of the former” (*Commentary* on Psalm 78:36–37).

The covenant promise of God to all His elect, covenant children, in both Testaments, is the same: He is their God and they are His people. In this way God has covenanted with all of the elect in Christ: “For the Lord always covenanted with His people thus: ‘I will be your God, and you shall be My people’ (Leviticus 26:12)”

(*Institutes* II.10.8). The perpetuity of the covenant, noted the Reformer, is guaranteed by God in Deuteronomy 5:2ff. (*Sermon* on Deuteronomy 4:44–5:3). In this respect, wrote Parker, “the relationship between the two Testaments could hardly be closer than Calvin saw it.”<sup>25</sup>

This does not mean that Calvin did not recognize the difference between the two dispensations of the one covenant of grace; he clearly did. The difference, however, was not in “substance and reality,” but “in the mode of dispensation” (*Institutes* II.10.2). The Old Testament promises what the New delivers in Jesus Christ. “Those mysteries which they [the Old Testament people of God] but glimpsed in shadowed outline are manifest to us.” And “the grace of which they bore witness is put before our very eyes. They had but a slight taste of it; we can more richly enjoy it” (II.9.1). The Old Testament “showed but an image and shadow in place of the substance; the New reveals the very substance of truth as present.” The Old became “new and eternal only after it was consecrated and established by the blood of Christ” (II.11.4).

The New Covenant is one of greater realization; it is one of greater power in the Holy Spirit. And in this respect, it is superior (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Hebrews 8:10). As taught in the *Westminster Confession* (19.3), Calvin believed that the Old Testament church was the “church under age,” whereas the New Testament church is the church which has come of age (*Commentary* on Galatians 4:1–5).

The Geneva Reformer, then, did not radically separate the Old and New Testaments. He believed that the Bible is one covenant book, which belongs to the people of God throughout all ages. The same Holy Spirit inspired writers of both Testaments; both are the eternal unchangeable Word of God (*Commentary* on Psalm 119:89 and Isaiah 40:8).

In fact, taught Calvin, the immutable law of God is included in the covenant of grace. The same law which was formerly written on tablets of stone is now written on fleshly hearts. But it is the same law and the same Holy Spirit which does the writing, and the same Holy Spirit is necessary in both Testaments for the illumination of God’s Word to non-believers. The Spirit is the one who gives life to the law (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 2 Corinthians 3:1–18). Moreover, in his *Commentary* on Matthew 5:17, Calvin wrote:

God had, indeed, promised a New Covenant at the coming of Christ; but had, at the same time, showed that it would not be different from the first, but that, on the contrary, its design was, to give a perpetual sanction to

25. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) 63.

the covenant, which He had made from the beginning with His people. "I will write My law," (says He) "in their hearts, and I will remember their iniquities no more" (Jeremiah 31:31–34). By these words He is so far from departing from the former covenant, that on the contrary, He declares, that it will be confirmed and ratified, when it shall be succeeded by the New. This is also the meaning of Christ's words when He says that He came to fulfill the law: for He actually fulfilled it by quickening with His Spirit the dead letter and then exhibiting with His Spirit the dead letter and then exhibiting, in reality, what had hitherto appeared only in figures.

It is obvious that John Calvin would have roundly endorsed the teaching of the *Westminster Confession* (19.5), that "the moral law does for ever bind all, as well justified and others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it: neither does Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation."

Calvin would have also endorsed the teaching of the Westminster Assembly regarding covenant theology and the sacraments.<sup>26</sup> In his *Institutes* (IV.14.1–6) he made it clear that, as stated by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (27.1), both baptism and the Lord's "are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace." Further, Calvin was in full accord with the *Confession* (27.5) that "the sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard to spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New." Jesus Christ, said the Reformer, was promised in the "ancient sacraments" (IV.14.20).

Moreover, in his *Commentary* on 1 Corinthians 10:1–12 he claimed that "the ancient sacraments of the law had the same virtue as ours have at this day.... The reality of the sacraments was presented to the people of God no less than to us." When the Jews ate the Old Testament covenant feast they partook of Christ, for even though:

His flesh did not as yet exist, it was nevertheless, food for them.... The promises given to them shadowed forth the Gospel in such a way, that they had it included in them. Their sacraments served to prefigure ours in such a way that they were nevertheless, even for that period, true sacraments, having a present efficacy.

At the same time that the substance of the sacraments was the same as ours, yet we have a fuller revelation and feasting: "Christ is now presented to us more fully."

Biblical revelation and covenant theology are inseparably tied together in the thinking of John Calvin.

### *The Close of the Canon*

Calvin, along with the later Westminster Assembly, did not adhere to any form of extra-Biblical special revelation. He, with the Westminster theologians, averred that the canon of Scripture was closed at the end of the apostolic age. The extraordinary offices of the first century (apostles, prophets) and the miraculous word gifts which accompanied them (prophecy, tongues, etc.) passed away with the close of the canon (*Sermon* on Ephesians 4:11–12).<sup>27</sup> God now speaks authoritatively only in His written Word. In the words of the *Confession* (1.1–2), with the close of the canon, "those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people [has] now ceased." Special revelation is now found only in "the Word of God written, [wherein] are now contained all the [66] books of the Old and New Testaments."

This is precisely the teaching of the Geneva Reformer. When God was pleased "to raise up a more visible form of the church, He willed to have His Word set down and sealed in writing." Once this was done, "every doctrine to be taught should conform to that rule" (*Institutes* IV.8.6). The law, the prophets, and the apostolic writings are "the limits of revelation" (*Commentary* on 1 Peter 1:25). Wrote Calvin:

God will not speak intermittently through some and through others; nor will He add prophecies to prophecies, or revelations to revelations. Rather, He has so fulfilled all functions of teaching in His Son that we must regard this as the final and eternal testimony from Him this way, the whole New Testament time, from the point that Christ appeared to us with the preaching of His Gospel even to the Day of Judgment, is designated "the last hour" ... "the last times" ... "the last days." This is done that, content with the perfection of Christ's teaching, we may learn not to fashion anything new for ourselves beyond this or to admit anything contrived by others.

Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to be

26. More will be said on the sacraments as a "means of grace" below.

27. John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1973, 1987). There are some places where at first glance Calvin seems to have another opinion regarding the cessation of the miraculous word gifts. For example, in his *Institutes* IV.3.4, and in his *Commentaries* on Romans 12:6 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, he makes reference to the ongoing gift of prophecy. But when these are studied in their context, and compared to his other writings, it is evident that Calvin spoke of the gift of prophecy, not as receiving new, direct revelation from God, but of the ongoing ministry of the preaching of the Word of God.



held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of His Word (*Institutes* IV.8.7–8).

And in his “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France,” which introduces the *Institutes*, the Reformer clearly stated that miracles were for the purpose of confirming the message and messenger of special revelation. He wrote: “In demanding miracles of us, they [certain antagonists] act dishonestly. For we are not forging some new Gospel, but are retaining that very Gospel whose truth all the miracles of Jesus Christ and His disciples ever wrought to confirm.” When special revelation ceased, so did the age of miracles.

Calvin’s view is that of the *Westminster Confession* (1.6):

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

The Charismatic camp cannot reasonably claim the Genevan. His basic position was that God does not reveal Himself to man (in special revelation) apart from Scripture. There are no “new revelations of the Spirit,” as claimed by the Charismatics. “Indeed,” averred Calvin, “it is the highest virtue to ask nothing beyond the Word of God” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 7:12). “Let us not be like those fanciful persons who would have God to send them some revelation from heaven, that they might have no need of preaching or reading” the Word of God (*Sermon* on Ephesians 4:11–12). “Fanatics [Charismatics], abandoning Scripture and flying over to [new] revelation, cast down all the principles of godliness” (*Institutes* I.9, title). Wallace rightly commented that in Calvin’s doctrine, “we cannot expect revelation to come through heavenly oracles or private communications or visions or irregular signs, since the days for such modes of communication are long past.”<sup>28</sup>

28. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Geneva Divinity School, 1953, 1982) 99.

29. The *Confession of Faith* (1.2) lists the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments.

30. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Doubleday, 1994) paragraph 120, and *The Creeds of Christendom* ed. Philip Schaff (Baker, 1983) II.240–242.

### The Inspiration of Scripture

All Scripture, said Calvin, “is divinely inspired” (*Commentary* on 2 Timothy 3:16). He agreed with the teaching of the *Westminster Confession* (1.2), that “under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the [66] books of the Old and New Testaments.... All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.”<sup>29</sup> And here he differed with the Roman Catholic Church-State, which avers that the rule of faith and practice for the church is found, not only in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, but also in some of the Apocryphal books; all of which are to be interpreted by the Magisterium of the Roman Church (“Mother Church”).<sup>30</sup>

As noted above, according to the Genevan, the Old Testament writings and the apostolic documents are the “limits of revelation,” and “those who wander beyond” these limits, “find nothing but the impostures of Satan and ... not the Word of the Lord” (*Commentary* on 1 Peter 1:25). “Everything which is added to the Word must be condemned and rejected.... Everything that is introduced by men on their own authority will be nothing else than a corruption of the Word” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 8:20). Nothing “can be added to them [the Scriptures] without doing grievous injury to the Holy Spirit” (*Commentary* on John 16:13). Roman Catholicism errs, taught Calvin, by sinfully locating “the authority of the church outside God’s Word” (*Institutes* IV.8.13). He concluded:

Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church, is by the prescription and standard of the Word (IV.8.8).

Herein we see the Reformer, as noted, in full agreement with the *Westminster Confession* (1.6), that “nothing at any time is to be added” to the 66 books of the Bible, including “the traditions of men,” i.e., the Roman Catholic Church-State. B. B. Warfield said it this way: In the canon of Scripture, Calvin “included all the [39] books of the Old Covenant which were recognized by the Jewish church as of divine gift, and as such handed down to the Christian church; and all the [27] books of the New Covenant which have been given the church by the apostles as its authoritative law-code.... Such, then, are the Scriptures as conceived by Calvin: sixty-six sacred books” (Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 48, 67).

Moreover, Calvin adamantly denied the necessity of the Magisterium of any church to interpret the Bible for the individual. There is a “clearness” to Scripture, a “guiding light,” wherein every Christian is able to read and understand the Bible (*Commentary* on 2 Peter 1:19). As stated in the *Westminster Confession* (1.7):

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

It is also noteworthy that Calvin disagreed with the teaching of Roman Catholicism that it is the church which has given us the Bible. Rather, said the Genevan, the apostle Paul “testifies that the church is ‘built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles’ (Ephesians 2:20). If the teaching of the prophets and apostles is the foundation, this must have had authority before the church began to exist” (*Institutes* I.7.2). In Calvin’s view, the Bible exercises authority over the church; it is the church which assents to the Bible, not vice-versa. Ronald Wallace commented:

For Calvin the Bible is not only the sole source of church proclamation but also the sole authority that must rule the life of the church.... Through the preaching of the Word of God Christ rules within His church.... This means that the Scripture is set over the church by God as the authority that must be allowed full freedom to rule the life of the church. It must be given a place of unsurpassed honor within the church. It was through the Word that the church was brought into being; it is through the same Word always being given afresh that the church is continually renewed in its life and preserved as a church (Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 99–100).

According to Calvin, the Bible is the Word of God; it does not become the Word of God, as in Neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodox theology maintains that parts of the Bible subjectively “become” the Word of God—different parts for different hearers at different times; the Bible is not “the Word of God.” Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, two champions of Neo-orthodoxy, taught that the only true revelation of God to man is Jesus Christ (the Word of God incarnate), and when Scripture “reveals” Christ to the reader, then the Bible subjectively

becomes God’s Word. According to Barth and Brunner, it was beneath God, who is “Wholly Other,” to communicate the transcendent Christ through logical propositions. Thus, God reveals events to us in the Bible, but not the meaning of the events. The understanding of the events is a subjective enterprise. Neo-orthodoxy, then, in claiming that revelation is merely an event (i.e., something that happens), denies that the Bible gives us propositional revelation.<sup>31</sup> In Neo-orthodoxy, the Bible and the Word of God are not one and the same thing. There is also an incompatibility between Christ as the Word of God and the Bible as the Word of God. Further, in Neo-orthodox theology, the Bible contains errors. It was written by fallen men and is full of logical paradoxes (as distinguished from rhetorical paradoxes) and contradictions. Thus, Neo-orthodoxy is called the “Theology of Paradox.”<sup>32</sup>

According to John Calvin, such teaching is nonsensical. The Bible teaches propositional truth. Propositions are logical, understandable combinations of words which affirm something. They are the meaning of indicative sentences. The truth of Scripture is not “in between” or “above” or “behind” the words, or only in the mind of the interpreter. Neither are the words secretly symbolic, merely intimating some higher truth. Rather, God’s truth lies in the logical meaning and organization of the words themselves. His truth comes via our understanding of these propositions according to the rules of grammar and logic. Thus, the Bible does not contain logical paradoxes (*Commentary* on Deuteronomy 30:11; *Institutes* I.7.1). “Certainly, wrote Calvin, ‘no one can be more averse to paradox than I am.’”<sup>33</sup>

As the *Westminster Confession* (1.5) says, in Scripture there is a “consent of all the parts.” The Bible is logically consistent. Just because something in Scripture might “exceed [our] mental capacity,” said Calvin, does not make it paradoxical. “For our wisdom ought

31. See Robert L. Reymond, *Introductory Studies in Contemporary Theology* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968) 91ff.; Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Zondervan, 1982) 35ff.; and Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth’s Theological Method* (The Trinity Foundation, 1997).

32. R. V. Schnucker, “Neo-orthodoxy,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Baker, 1984) 754–756, 827.

33. John Calvin, *Selected Works*, edited and translated by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet (Baker, 1983) V.330. John Robbins correctly stated: “The Reformation began with a rejection of contradiction and logical paradox, not an embrace of it. Those who today claim to be Reformed, and yet praise paradox, have abandoned this principle of the Reformation.” See John W. Robbins, “Forgotten Principles of the Reformation,” *The Trinity Review*, ed. John W. Robbins (October 2004) 3.

to be nothing else than to embrace with humble teachableness ... without finding fault, whatever is taught in sacred Scripture" (*Institutes* I.18.4). "In short, we ought to believe that the doctrine of Scripture is so full and complete in every respect, that whatever is defective in our faith ought justly to be attributed to ignorance of the Scriptures" (*Commentary* on John 20:9).

This also relates to the events of history and their meaning. Not only does the Bible teach us that certain events occurred in history, but it also tells us what those events mean. The interpretation is not subjective. God reveals the meaning to the reader in His Word (*Institutes* I.6–10; *Commentary* on 2 Timothy 3:16–17). "How different is this modern view [Neo-orthodoxy] and that ... of Calvin," said E. J. Young. "Calvin would have reacted with all his being against this false idea that the Bible and the Word of God are not to be identified."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, asserted John Murray, "we find in Calvin himself no sense of incongruity between Scripture as being itself the truth of God and Christ as truth incarnate, nor even between an inerrant Scripture and Christ as the focal point of revelation."<sup>35</sup> Neo-orthodoxy cannot rationally claim the Geneva Reformer as one of their own.<sup>36</sup>

Scripture, taught John Calvin, was written through God's prophets and apostles, who were moved along by the Holy Spirit, so that they wrote without error. These men were the "certain and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit and therefore their writings are to be received as the oracles of God." We are to "regard

them [the Scriptures] as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard." We "have received it [the Bible] from God's own mouth by the ministry of men.... [In the Bible] we hold the unassailable truth" (*Institutes* IV.8.9; I.7.1, 5). "Peter especially bids us to believe the prophecies as the indubitable oracles of God, because they have not emanated from men's own private suggestions" (*Commentary* on 2 Peter 1:20).

Some critics have assumed that Calvin did not hold to such a high and lofty view of the inspiration of Scripture because he never wrote a major formal treatise on the subject. But as John Gerstner pointed out, "that is not at all surprising inasmuch as the doctrine was not an issue of his day. His debate with Rome was not over the inspiration or inerrancy of Scripture. Both sides tacitly assumed the position." Nevertheless, "when Calvin does speak explicitly on Scripture, his view is asserted unambiguously." For example, he says that Scripture is God's "sure and infallible record," "the inerring standard," "the pure Word of God," "the infallible rule of His holy truth," "free from every stain or defect," "the inerring certainty," "the certain and unerring rule," "unerring light," God's "infallible oracles."<sup>37</sup> A higher view of Scripture as the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God could hardly be expressed. As stated by Kantzer, it cannot be seriously questioned that Calvin held to the "rigidly orthodox verbal type of inspiration."<sup>38</sup>

Because of this, taught Calvin, Scripture is to be given the same reverence which one owes to God Himself, "since it has proceeded from Him alone, and there is nothing human mixed with it" (*Commentary* on 2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible owes its origin to the Triune God. It is His "eternal and inviolable truth"; God speaks in His Word (*Institutes* I.6.1–3; I.7.1). In the words of Wileman, "the Word of God was as sacred to him [Calvin] as if he heard it spoken by the lips of the Author."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, averred Calvin, "God is its Author" (I.7.4).

As noted in his *Commentary* on Matthew 27:9, Calvin did not deny that during transmission, due to scribal error, a few textual corruptions had crept into the copies (*apographa*) and translations of the original writings (*autographa*). His view was that of the *Westminster Confession* (1.8), that only the autographs were "immediately inspired by God." But he also would agree with the *Confession* that God, "by His singular care and providence [had so] kept [His Word] pure in all ages," that the copies we have are to be considered "authentic" (*Commentary* on Psalm 119:89).<sup>40</sup>

Calvin's view of inspiration maintained that the authors of Scripture were acted upon by the Holy Spirit in an "organic" way,<sup>41</sup> in accordance with their own

34. Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Eerdmans, 1957) 232.

35. John Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty* (Evangelical Press, 1979) 37.

36. Wilhelm Niesel has asserted that John Calvin was basically Neo-orthodox in his view of Scripture; *The Theology of John Calvin*, 27–39. As we have seen, such an assertion is unfounded.

37. Cited in Gerstner, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines," 391.

38. Kenneth S. Kantzer, as cited in Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*, 11.

39. William Wileman, *John Calvin: His Life, His Teaching, and His Influence* (Gospel Mission, 1981) 124.

40. Calvin's confidence that God had preserved His Word through the centuries of time is also evident in his defense of the Johannine comma: 1 John 5:7–8, as part of the original writings (*Commentary* on 1 John 5:7–8). The Reformer's adherence to these verses as being a part of the autographic writings also makes it clear that he was an advocate of the Majority Text or Textus Receptus view of textual criticism, and that he would have strongly opposed the Critical Text theory of Westcott and Hort. See W. Gary Crampton, "Original Manuscripts, the Majority Text, and Translations," *The Trinity Review* (July and August, 2004).

41. Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Eerdmans, 1933; 1987) 42–43.

personalities, characters, temperaments, gifts, and talents. Each author wrote in his own style, and all the while it was the Holy Spirit moving him along to write infallible truth. In fact, each author's style was itself produced by the providence of God (*Commentary* on 2 Peter 1:20–21 and John 3:12).

It is true that the Reformer used the word “dictated” when referring to the inspiration of Scripture. In his *Commentary* on 2 Timothy 3:16, for example, he taught that “the Law and the Prophets are ... dictated by the Holy Spirit.” But, as Warfield concluded, when Calvin used the word “dictate” he was speaking with regard to the result, not the mode of inspiration; that is, “the production of a pure Word of God free from all human admixtures” (Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 63–64). E. J. Young agreed with this conclusion:

At the same time, although the term *dictation* in itself is not objectionable and expresses forcefully the divine origin of the words of the Bible, it is perhaps unwise to use the word today without some qualification. A new connotation has come upon the term which it obviously did not have in the day of Calvin. When we speak of dictation, there immediately comes to mind the thought of the businessman dictating to his stenographer, or the teacher dictating an exercise to her pupils. In both these instances it does not make too great a difference who takes down the dictation. One stenographer can probably do it as well as another, and if one is not available, another can easily be obtained. Likewise, when the teacher dictates a passage to her class, the important thing is that the pupils take down precisely what has been dictated, and do not add to it or subtract from it. The person of the stenographer or of the pupil is in reality a comparatively negligible factor. Such, however, is not the situation with respect to the human writers of the Bible. True enough, the words which they employed were taught them by the Holy Spirit, but it is not the case that it makes no difference who wrote those words. It is not true that Peter might just as well have written the Pauline epistles as the great Apostle himself. It would serve the interests of clarity, therefore, if, in the discussion of this doctrine, we lay stress upon the fact that although the Bible teaches that its very words are from God, it most emphatically does not teach a mechanical dictation view of inspiration.

Men like [Francis] Turretin, Calvin, and others who have written on this subject have been eager to do justice to the human side of the Bible as have some of the modern rejecters of the Biblical doctrine. It is a sad thing

that scholarly men of our day constantly erect a straw man and seek to attack it instead of coming to grips with the Scriptural teaching itself. Those who believe the Bible and who wish to do justice to its teaching are as concerned as anyone to refute the notion that inspiration was a mechanical kind of dictation, that the human writers were mere automata whose personalities were entirely suspended in the writing of the books of the Bible (Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, 66–67).

To Calvin, it was not merely the doctrine and/or the content of Biblical revelation that is inspired; it is Scripture itself. Every word is God-breathed (*Commentary* on 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:20). This is the doctrine of plenary, verbal revelation. Wrote Gregg Singer:

There can be no doubt that Calvin regarded the men who wrote the Bible as organs of the Holy Spirit, who guided them to write in such a way that they were without error of any kind.... In his *Institutes*, his commentaries, and his many writings, there is an abundance of evidence ... [which points to] one inescapable fact: Calvin believed that the Bible is the uniquely inspired Word of God and that, as such, it differs from all other literature (Singer, *John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits*, 8–9).

### *The Authority of Scripture*

According to Calvin, the authority vested in Scripture is derived from its unique origin. It is the Word of God. We are to give to Scripture the same allegiance as if the words were spoken by God Himself: “Hence the Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there [in Scripture] the living words of God were heard” (*Institutes* I.7.1). “For God is not to be separated from His Word” (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 1:9–10).

The 66 books of Holy Writ are not only the sole authority for the church of Jesus Christ, but they are the sole authority for every institution. “It is the will of the Lord that we shall depend wholly on His Word, and that our knowledge shall be confined within its limits.... Everything that relates to the guidance of our life is contained in them [the Scriptures] abundantly” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 8:20; 30:1). Not even the decisions of church councils are to have precedence over the Word of God (IV.8.1, 8, 10; IV.9.1–14). The view of the Reformer is well stated in the *Westminster Confession* (31.3–4): The “decrees and determinations” of church councils are to be followed only “if consonant to the



Word of God.” “All synods and councils, since the Apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to made the rule of faith or practice; but to be used as a help in both.”

Gregg Singer maintained that it was John Calvin’s high view of Biblical revelation by which he could “with full assurance assert that the Scriptures are the final authority in all areas of human life” (Singer, *John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits*, 10). Ronald Wallace was of the same opinion: Calvin “was convinced that the challenge and power of the Gospel must be allowed to cleanse, regenerate and direct not only the human heart but every aspect of social life on earth—family affairs, education, economics, and politics. Christ sought not only an altar in the human heart for His priestly ministry, but a throne at the center of all human life for His kingly ministry” (Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, 28). Here the Reformer is in accord with the teaching of the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Q. 3): “The holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the *only* rule of faith and obedience.” Calvin held to “the Puritan principle,” said Warfield, “of absolute dependence on the Word of God as the source of knowledge of His will, and exclusive limitation to its prescriptions of doctrine, life, and even form of church government and worship” (Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 39n). There was only *one* rule, *one* standard, *one* final authority over every area of life for John Calvin, and that is the Word of God.

Of course, as taught by Calvin and the Westminster theologians, it is the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit which corroborates this authority. As stated in the *Westminster Confession* (1.5): “Our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” “It is the part of the Holy Spirit,” commented Calvin, “to confirm within us what God promises in His Word” (*Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 1:21). And again:

I reply: the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is fit to witness of Himself in His Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.... For even if it [Scripture] wins reverence for itself by its own majesty, it seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit” (*Institutes* I.7.4–5).

Non-believers may have a certain understanding of Scripture, but because they are not “inwardly taught”

by the Spirit, they never have a genuine spiritual grasp of it (*Commentary* on James 2:19 and 1 Corinthians 2:14). “All that have not the Holy Spirit as a witness, so as to return their Amen to God, when calling them to an assured hope of salvation, do on false grounds assume the name of Christians” (*Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 1:21).

As the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit is necessary to confirm the authority of God’s Word and to cause one spiritually to acquiesce to it, Calvin also recognized our need for the Spirit to further illuminate the Word of God for us. In this process, the Spirit does not reveal new information which causes the reader to believe and/or further understand the Scriptures. Rather, the Spirit progressively gives to the Christian a greater and greater understanding of the Scriptures. He sheds more light on Biblical texts so that the believer can better grasp the fullness of the message set forth in the Bible. The Christian’s mind is transformed to think and act Biblically (*Commentary* on John 17:17). It is by “living doctrine,” said the Genevan, that God “works effectually on the minds of men, through the grace of the Spirit” (*Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 3:6). “For Christ is never dormant where He reigns, but the Spirit renders effectual His power.” And the Spirit does this by increasing our “knowledge of Christ; for it transforms us into His image” (*Commentary* on 1 John 3:6). The Scriptures are only “read profitably, when we renounce the mind and feelings of the flesh, and submit to the teaching of the Spirit” (*Commentary* on 2 Peter 1:20).

John Murray aptly summed up Calvin’s view of Biblical authority:

The sum of this is clear. God speaks in Scripture. In it He opens His sacred mouth. In Scripture the majesty of God confronts us. The divinity inheres in the Scripture and it therefore exhibits the plainest evidence that it is God’s Word. When we bring sound minds it compels our submission and obedience. And our conclusion must be that this is but another way of saying that Scripture is by its nature divinely authoritative (Murray, *Calvin on Scripture and Divine Sovereignty*, 50).

### *The Word Preached*

*The Second Helvetic Confession* asserts that “the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God” (Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, III.237–238). Calvin agreed. For him the preaching of the Word of God is, when properly spoken, to be considered as nothing less than the

Word coming out of the mouth of God, because He “employs [such] men as His ministers” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 55:11). In this sense, “the Word of God is not distinguished from the word of the prophet” (*Commentary* on Haggai 1:12). The authority which Christ has given to Gospel ministers in His church, as “porters ... of the kingdom of heaven, because they carry its keys,” along with the “power of binding and loosing,” has to do with the power resident in the proclamation of the Word of God and its affect on the auditors (*Commentary* on Matthew 16:19).<sup>42</sup>

Calvin believed that which is taught in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 89), that “the Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.” “Peter declares that what is preached,” commented Calvin, “is the life-giving Word ... the voice which is in itself mortal, is made an instrument to communicate eternal life” (*Commentary* on 1 Peter 1:25). It is, of course, the Spirit united with the Word that empowers the preaching. “All power of action ... resides in the Spirit Himself, and thus all praise ought to be referred to God alone.” The Word preached, “without the efficacy of His Spirit ... would be fruitless” (*Commentary* on Ezekiel 2:2).

Calvin held to a presbyterian form of church government, wherein there are four basic orders of offices: pastors, doctors (teachers), elders, and deacons. The pastors and teachers have as their primary responsibility that of preaching and teaching the Word of God (*Institutes* IV.3–4).<sup>43</sup> God “instituted ‘pastors and teachers’ (Eph. 4:11) through whose lips He might teach His own.” The ministry of the Word is “the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body” (IV.1.1; IV.3.2).

Preachers and teachers of the Word must be faithful to their calling. They must be diligent in their service to God. “Saint Paul shows us also that when we have good and faithful teachers and others that labor to show us the way of salvation, it is a sign that our Lord Jesus Christ has not left us, nor forgotten us, but that He is present with us, and watches for our salvation” (*Sermon* on Ephesians 4:11–12). There is a vast difference “between the true servants of God, who discharge their duty in earnest, and talkative men, who are satisfied with their own powers of eloquence or rather garrulity.” Those pastors “who truly consecrate themselves to God, not only learn what they speak of,” i.e., they must be diligent students of the Word of God, “but as food is eaten, so also they receive within them the Word of God, and hide it in the inmost recesses of their heart, so that they may

bring it forth from thence as food properly dressed” (*Commentary* on Ezekiel 2:8).

As alluded to above, Calvin taught that those who minister the Word of God should be God-ordained men (not women). The office of the bishop is “forbidden” to women. It is restricted to men who have a “profound learning” of the Scriptures, and who also possess the “talent for teaching.” Those men who have been ordained to preach Christ’s Word “ought to be qualified for teaching” (*Commentary* on 1 Timothy 3:1–2). Paul “assigns to teachers the duty of dividing or cutting” the Scriptures, “as if a father, in giving food to his children, were dividing the bread, by cutting it into small pieces” (*Commentary* on 2 Timothy 2:15).

When the Word is preached, said Calvin, it has a two-fold effect: It either softens or hardens the heart of the hearer (*Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 2:14–17). It always accomplishes its purpose. “As the Word is efficacious for the salvation of believers, so it is abundantly efficacious for the condemning of the wicked” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 55:11).

According to the Reformer, when the Word of God is properly preached, it is a sign of the presence of God and the instrument of Christ’s rule. The Spirit continues to speak through His Word in this God-ordained function. The Lord approaches His people through the preaching of Scripture (*Commentary* on Isaiah 50:2). “God has ordained His Word as the instrument by which Jesus Christ, with all His graces, is dispensed to us.”<sup>44</sup>

Further, said the Genevan, the Gospel is the sceptre for Christ’s kingdom. “He reigns by His Spirit, and by means of His Word. And by that means as it were all things are filled with Him, and by the Gospel” (*Sermon* on Ephesians 4:7–10). Then too, Gospel preaching is also the means by which Christ intends the reconciliation of the whole world, i.e., the reconciliation of all things in Christ (*Commentary* on Isaiah 51:16). The world will be “brought under Christ’s authority” by means of Gospel preaching (*Commentary* on 2 Thessalonians 2:3). And even though the Antichrist (the Roman papacy) will not be “wholly and in every respect destroyed ... [until] that final day [the second advent] of the restoration

42. In Calvin’s teaching, “the power of binding and loosing” primarily has to do with church discipline. The church “binds him whom it excommunicates,” whereas it “looses” the repentant sinner whom it receives back “into communion” with the church, “for it makes him a sharer of the unity which it has in Christ” (*Institutes* IV.11.2).

43. The pastors also administered the sacraments (*Institutes* IV.3.1–4).

44. From the *Opera Selecta*, cited in Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, 85.

of all things,” in the meantime, Christ will “put to flight the darkness in which Antichrist will reign” by means of the preaching of His Word. The proclamation of “true and sound doctrine ... is spoken of as Christ’s coming to us” (*Commentary* on 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

It is obvious that Calvin had a very optimistic view of the advancement of Christ’s kingdom on earth, prior to the second advent.<sup>45</sup> “We have no reason to doubt, that whenever He [Christ] raises up faithful teachers, He will crown their labor with prosperous success” (*Commentary* on Luke 10:18). Christ “subdues the world to Himself by the preaching of the Gospel” (*Commentary* on Acts 1:8). Through the proclamation of the Scriptures, God’s kingdom “is continually growing and advancing to the end of the world” (*Commentary* on Matthew 6:10). We are to expect a time to come “when Christ shall have brought the Gentiles and the nations under His dominion.” There will come a time when the boundaries of the church “shall be extended as far and wide as there shall be space throughout the whole world” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 2:4 and 60:4). Wallace said it well:

To Calvin, the preached Word of God was the sceptre by which Christ continually established His unique and spiritual rule over the minds and hearts of His people. If such a Word was to be heard with its full authority and power the pastors must be left entirely free to preach it in its fullness without interference. He believed that such unfettered preaching of the Word would change Geneva and indeed the whole world (Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, 63).

This is not to say, however, that Calvin believed that there will ever be a converted earth prior to the final day. On the contrary, the “more God offers Himself by the Gospel to the world, and the more He invites men to His kingdom, the more audacious on the other hand

will ungodly men vomit forth the poison of their impiety” (*Commentary* on 2 Peter 3:3).

### *The Interpretation of Scripture*

It should come as no surprise that Calvin considered sound exegesis, i.e., faithful Biblical interpretation, as imperative. He used “the best tools and methods of scholarship available at his time.”<sup>46</sup> “Calvin,” wrote John Murray, “was the exegete of the Reformation and in the first rank of Biblical exegetes of all time.”<sup>47</sup> Gregg Singer called him “the prince of exegetes” (*John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits*, vi).

According to Donald McKim, among the early church theologians, “Calvin relied most heavily on Augustine for theological interpretations and on John Chrysostom for matters of Biblical interpretation” (McKim, “Calvin’s View of Scripture,” 65). The former was far more influential on the Genevan (he quotes Augustine over 400 times in the *Institutes* alone). Calvin believed that the African Bishop was the most Biblical of all the church theologians.<sup>48</sup> As is evident from his *Commentary* on Romans 12:6, along with Augustine, he held to the basic hermeneutical principle of “the analogy of faith,” which is well explained by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1.9): “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one) it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

At the same time, Calvin took issue with Augustine in opposing any form of allegorical interpretation. He avoided speculative theology altogether. In his *Commentary* on Romans 9:14 he stated: “When the Lord closes His holy mouth, let us also stop the way, that we may not go further.” And in the preface of the Geneva Bible He wrote:

The Bible was not given to us to satisfy our foolish curiosity and pride. Yet Paul says it is useful. For what? To instruct us in sound doctrine, to comfort us, to inspire us, and to make us able to perform every good work. If anyone asks us what constructive power we expect to receive from it, the answer can be given in one sentence, that through it we learn to place our trust in God and to walk in fear of Him.<sup>49</sup>

In all of his exegesis Calvin had a genuine desire to edify the church of Jesus Christ. In his Dedicatory to the exposition of the minor prophets he wrote:

45. My thanks to Dr. F. Nigel Lee for his insights on Calvin’s view of eschatology.

46. Donald K. McKim, “Calvin’s View of Scripture,” *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, 64–65.

47. John Murray, *Collected Writings* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) I:308.

48. Singer, *John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits*, 7. Interestingly, according to Curt Daniel, the Italian Peter Martyr Vermigli (1560–1562) was the contemporary with whom Calvin was closest when it came to theology. Vermigli is quoted in the *Institutes* more than any other contemporary, and more than anyone else besides Augustine. See Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Good Books, 2003) 21.

49. Cited in McKim, “Calvin’s View of Scripture,” 66.

If God has indued me with any aptness for the interpretation of Scripture, I am fully persuaded that I have faithfully and carefully endeavored to exclude from it all barren refinements, however plausible and fitted to please the ear, and to preserve genuine simplicity, adapted solidly to edify the children of God, who, being not content with the shell, wish to penetrate to the kernel.<sup>50</sup>

As noted above, Calvin taught that God has given us ministers of the Word to help us in understanding the Scriptures. “Frantic men require inspiration and revelations from heaven ... [and] they condemn the minister of God, by whose hand it ought to be governed.... But God will not have us despise those helps which He offers unto us.... And here we must remember, that the Scripture is not only given us, but that interpreters and teachers are also added, to be helps to us” (*Commentary* on Acts 8:31).

John Calvin himself was an arduous laborer in the ministry of the Word. In addition to his preaching each Lord’s Day, he preached each Thursday in the university, and gave a public exposition every Friday. This was in addition to his writing ministry, which was extensive (Wileman, *John Calvin: His Life, His Teaching, and His Influence*, 83). In his address “to the reader” of the *Institutes*, he wrote: “Moreover, it has been my purpose in this labor [writing the *Institutes*] to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling” (*Institutes*, “John Calvin to the Reader”). The man seemed to possess an indefatigable industry.

Calvin averred that “the best method of seeking God is to begin at His Word” (*Commentary* on Genesis 48:15). It is here, in a serious study of the Bible, that one comes to know Christ more intimately. Calvin agreed with the teaching of the *Shorter Catechism* (Q. 24), that Jesus Christ, as the Word of God, is the author of all Scripture: “Christ executes the office of a Prophet, in revealing to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.” Jesus Christ “is Himself the eternal and essential Word of the Father,” said Calvin, and “all divinely revelations” come through Him; He is the “wellspring of all oracles.” Christ “alone is the schoolmaster of the church” (*Institutes* I.13.7; IV.8.1). Further:

First, if what Christ says is true—“No one sees the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son

chooses to reveal Him (Matt. 11:27)—surely they who would attain the knowledge of God should always be directed by that eternal Wisdom [Christ]. For how could they either have comprehended God’s mysteries with the mind, or have uttered them, except by the teaching of Him to whom alone the secrets of the Father are revealed? Therefore, holy men of old knew God only by beholding Him in His Son as in a mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). When I say this, I mean that God has never manifested Himself to men in any other way than through the Son, that is, His sole wisdom, light, and truth. From this fountain Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others drank all that they had of heavenly teaching. From that same fountain, all the prophets have also drawn every heavenly oracle that they have given forth (*Institutes* IV.8.5).

But Christ is not only the author of all Scripture, He is also the subject of all Scripture. Calvin commented:

If we wish to obtain the knowledge of Christ, we must seek it from the Scriptures.... First, then, we ought to believe that Christ cannot be properly known in any other way than from the Scriptures; and if it be so, it follows that we ought to read the Scriptures with the express design of finding Christ in them.... By the Scriptures, it is well known, is here meant the Old Testament; for it was not in the Gospel that Christ first began to be manifested, but, having received testimony from the Law and the Prophets, He was openly exhibited in the Gospel (*Commentary* on John 5:39).

And again:

God has never manifested Himself to men in any other way than through the Son, that is, His sole wisdom, light, and truth. From this fountain Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others drank all that they had of heavenly teaching. From the same fountain, all the prophets have also drawn every heavenly oracle that they have given forth (*Institutes* IV.8.5).

For the Geneva Reformer, “the whole Bible is primarily a book about Christ.”<sup>51</sup> He considered “that the Old Testament and the New Testament form in the strictest sense one single testimony to Christ” (Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 110).

50. Cited in Murray, *Collected Writings*, I.309–310.

51. John T. McNeill, “John Calvin: Doctor Ecclesiae,” in *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, 14.



*Scripture as a Means of Grace*

Calvin, along with the other Reformers and the later Puritans, considered the Scriptures, the sacraments, and prayer to be the “means of grace” which God has given to His church. As explained in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 88): “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption, are His ordinances, especially the Word, the sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”

Calvin taught that the means of grace are administered by the church. In his view, “the elect are called by the preaching of the Gospel, sealed by baptism, and nurtured by the Lord’s supper, and thus brought into and kept in the society of Christ [i.e., the church]” (Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought*, 127). In the words of Calvin, “the church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry” (*Commentary* on Ephesians 4:12). Ordinarily, said the Reformer, there is no salvation outside of Christ’s church: “For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother [the church] conceive us in her womb, give us birth, [and] nourish us at her breast.... Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation” (*Institutes* IV.1.4).

The means of grace, then, are those means by which the Spirit of God ministers to the saints, through the church, building them up in the faith. They are indispensable to the sanctification of the Christian. Of these

52. Ultimately, for Calvin, the reason that the call of God becomes effectual to some rather than to others has to do with God’s predestinating grace: “It is evident ... that all alike are not called; and observation proves the ignorance of those who will assert that the grace of God is extended to all in common, without any choice exerted on His part. Can any reason be imagined why God should not call all alike, except it be that His sovereign election distinguishes some from others?” (*Commentary* on Psalm 65:4).

53. In the *Institutes* (I.7–8) Calvin refers to saving faith in various ways: “true faith,” “the faith of the godly,” “firm faith,” “a solid assurance of eternal life,” “the certainty of the godly,” “the certainty which piety requires,” and “saving knowledge.”

54. When Calvin stated that faith is “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us,” he did not mean to indicate that “assurance of salvation” is necessary for salvation. For example, in his *Institutes* (III.2.17) he wrote: “Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety.” Calvin would have agreed with the teaching of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (18.3), that “assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it.”

three means of grace, however, Calvin, along with the Reformers in general and the later Puritans, stressed the Word of God over the sacraments and prayer, because Scripture is a means of grace in itself. The sacraments and prayer, as essential as they are, are means of grace only with the Word. For one cannot understand the meaning of the sacraments apart from Biblical revelation, and one cannot know how to pray properly apart from the teaching of Scripture.

We have seen that Calvin believed that special revelation is necessary for man to come to a sound and saving knowledge of God, through Jesus Christ. He would have agreed with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (14.1):

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts; and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word: by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

Calvin believed that there is a universal or “general call, by which God invites all equally to Himself through the outward preaching of the Word—even those to whom He holds it out as a savor of death ... and as the occasion for severer condemnation.” But the “general call” only becomes effectual, “while by the inward illumination of His Spirit He causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts” (*Institutes* III.24.8). Even though the Word preached “turns into poison to the reprobate,” the first and “natural use of God’s Word is to bring salvation” (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 23:29). The effectual call of God is gracious and irresistible, and the person so called will be saved: “Grace is by no means offered by God only to be rejected or accepted as it may seem good to one; it is the same grace alone which inclines our heart to follow its movement, and produces in it the choice as much as the will” (*Institutes* II.13.13).<sup>52</sup> God, by His powerful, Spirit directed Word, both created the heavens and the earth and continues to sustain, govern, and preserve the heavens and the earth. And it is that same powerful, Spirit directed Word which God uses effectually to call elect sinners and bring them into His kingdom (IV.20.20–22; *Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 5:17–18).

Saving faith,<sup>53</sup> according to Calvin, rests upon the Word of God. “We hold faith to be a knowledge of God’s will toward us, perceived by His Word.” It is “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely-given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (*Institutes* III.2.6–7).<sup>54</sup> “There is no faith without God’s Word, for of His

faithfulness we cannot be convinced, until He has spoken.... True faith then is that which hears God speaking and rests on His promise" (*Commentary* on Hebrews 11:11). As taught in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 86), saving faith "in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the Gospel." "Therefore," wrote the Genevan, "take away the Word and no faith will then remain" (*Institutes* III.2.6).

To Calvin, then, saving faith and the Word of God are inextricably bound together. Such faith rests upon the Word, and it is applied by means of the Holy Spirit: "Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit" (*Institutes* I.8.13). "Let it suffice that Paul calls faith itself, which the Spirit gives us but which we do not have by nature, 'the Spirit of faith' (2 *Corinthians* 4:13)." When Jesus Christ "illumines us into faith," He does so "by the power of His Spirit, [and] at the same time so engrafts us into His body that we become partakers of every good" (III.2.35).

The "every good" the Reformer speaks of includes justification and sanctification. Saving faith ushers in both, with God, in Christ, being the author of both:

We are on His [Christ's] account acceptable to God, inasmuch as He expiated our sins by His death, and His obedience is imputed to us for righteousness. For as the righteousness of faith consists in remission of sins and a gracious acceptance, we obtain both through Christ.... From this also, we infer, that we cannot be justified freely through faith alone without at the same time living holily. For these fruits of grace are connected together, as it were by an indissoluble tie, so that he who attempts to sever them does in a manner tear Christ in pieces (*Commentary* on 1 *Corinthians* 1:30).

Calvin referred to the doctrine of justification by grace alone, in Christ alone, by faith alone (*sola fide*), as "the main hinge on which religion turns" (*Institutes* III.11.1). According to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 33), "justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." This is Calvin's view. "He is said to be justified in God's sight who is both reckoned righteous in God's judgment, and has been accepted on account of His righteousness ... justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through

faith, and clothed in it, appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man" (III.11.2).

As seen, when Calvin spoke of justification "by faith alone," what he meant was "by Christ alone." The ground of justification is Christ's vicarious righteousness and sacrifice. Faith is in no way to be considered as meritorious. Faith means trusting in Christ who alone justifies (*Institutes* III.11.23). "Our justification rests upon God's mercy alone and Christ's merit, and faith, when it lays hold of justification, is said to justify.... We say that faith justifies, not because it merits righteousness for us by its own worth, but because it is an instrument whereby we obtain free the righteousness of Christ" (III.18.8).

Finally, the Bible teaches that justification is forensic; it is a legal act. In justification, righteousness is imputed, not infused, as in Roman Catholicism.<sup>55</sup> Calvin and the Westminster Assembly taught that it is an alien righteousness which justifies; it is the righteousness of Christ (*Commentary* on 2 *Corinthians* 5:21). In the words of the *Westminster Confession* (11.1):

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous, not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness, but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

According to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 35), sanctification is "the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." With justification the guilt of sin is instantaneously eradicated, but with sanctification it is the pollution of sin which is progressively removed. Sanctification, as Calvin and the Westminster theologians agree, is inseparably related to and flows from justification. "God justifies no one whom He does not sanctify at the same time." Therefore, "the whole life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness, for we have been called to sanctification" (*Institutes* III.16.1; III.19.2).

As noted, Calvin stressed the Biblical teaching that Bible study, along with the sacraments, and prayer, are

55. See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1989–1995.

essential for spiritual growth, i.e., sanctification. He commented:

As Satan is daily making new assaults upon us, it is necessary for us to have recourse to arms, and it is meditation upon the Divine Law which furnishes us with armor to resist. Whoever, therefore, would desire to persevere in uprightness and integrity of life, let them learn to exercise themselves daily in the study of the Word of God; for whenever a man despises or neglects instruction, he easily falls into carelessness and stupidity, and all fear of God vanishes from his mind (*Commentary* on Psalm 18:22).

The Word of God functions as “spiritual food” for the soul, which must not be neglected. Christians see “the face of Christ” in the Word of God, and are progressively renewed into His image (*Institutes* IV.1.5). The process of renewal involves self-denial: a total resignation of the whole man to the sovereign will of God (III.7.1–10). The entirety of the Christian’s life entails “mortification” —a dying to self and sin—and “vivification”—a holy seeking after God (III.3.3). Progressively, “both the thoughts of our minds and the words of our mouths should be conformed” to the teaching of Scripture (I.13.3). Moreover, sanctification manifests itself in “good works,” i.e., works that are done in obedience to God’s Word, out of love for God and gratitude for His mercy toward us, with the purpose of glorifying Him (III.16.1–3). The doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone does not eliminate the need of good works. In fact, it necessitates it (*Commentary* on Ezekiel 18:14–17). Yet these good works are not the cause of our justification, but the result of it (*Commentary* on James 2:21). Calvin’s doctrine of good works was that of the later *Westminster Confession* (16.1–3):

Good works are only such as God has commanded in His holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention.

These good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the Gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto; that,

having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life.

Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ. And that they may be enabled to thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of His good pleasure: yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit; but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them.

In the process of sanctification, said Calvin, God comes to meet with His saints in His Word; it is through the Word that the blessings of God’s promises flow to the elect (*Commentary* on Psalms 18:31; 81:14; and 119:65). The Christian man loves the Word of God. “Believers embrace and grasp the Word of God in every respect” (*Institutes* III.2.29). It is an “unfeigned love of God’s law [which] is certain evidence of adoption, since such a love is the work of the Holy Spirit.” One who despises the Word reveals a hardened heart; to despise the Word is tantamount to despising God Himself (*Commentary* on Psalms 119:159 and 95:8). There is “nothing more precious to Him [God] than His own truth” (*Institutes* III.2.8). Therefore, “no crime is more offensive to God than contempt of His Word” (*Commentary* on Matthew 10:14). “God cannot approve of anything that is not supported by His Word” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 17:8). On the other hand, when the law of God is written in the heart by the Spirit, that law will rule the individual. His life will be conformed to God’s Word through the process of sanctification (*Commentary* on Jeremiah 31:33).

### *The Sacraments as Means of Grace*

We have already noted that Calvin and the Westminster theologians taught that although the Word of God is to be considered as the primary “means of grace,” the sacraments are also considered to be a “means of grace.” In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church-State, which maintains that there are seven sacraments in the New Testament age (Cf. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, II.119), in his *Institutes* (IV.19.1–37)<sup>56</sup> Calvin made it very clear that he believed that which is taught in the *Westminster Confession* (27.4), “that there be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.” In the Geneva Confession (1536) he wrote:

56. In this section of the *Institutes* (IV.19.1–37), Calvin refutes the “five other [Roman Catholic] ceremonies, falsely termed sacraments.”

We believe that the sacraments which our Lord has ordained in His church are to be regarded as exercises of faith for us, both for fortifying and confirming it in the promises of God and for witnesses before men. Of them, there are only two which are instituted by the authority of our Savior: Baptism and the Supper of our Lord; for what is held within the realm of the pope concerning seven sacraments, we condemn as fable and lie.<sup>57</sup>

“It seems to me,” said Calvin, “that a simple and proper definition [of a sacrament] would be to say that it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of His good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward Him in the presence of the Lord and of His angels and before men.” A sacrament, he taught (following Augustine), is to be seen as “a visible form [sign] of an invisible grace” (*Institutes* IV.14.1). This accords with the teaching of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 92), that the sacraments “are sensible [i.e., may be impressed upon the sensory organs] signs [by which] Christ, and the benefits of the New Covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.” As covenant signs the sacraments signify inward spiritual graces. And as seals they attest to the genuineness or validity of the covenant promises of God (IV.14.3–6). But as with the other means of grace:

Christ is the ... substance of all the sacraments; for in Him they have all their firmness, and they do not promise anything apart from Him.... Therefore, the sacraments have effectiveness among us in proportion as we are helped by their ministry sometimes to foster, confirm, and increase the true knowledge of Christ in ourselves; at other times, to possess Him more fully and enjoy our His riches (IV.14.16).

The sacraments, taught Calvin, as external signs and seals, do not convey grace *ex opere* (“by the work performed”), as in Roman Catholicism (Cf. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, II.120–121); neither are they absolutely necessary for salvation (*Institutes* IV.14.14). Rather, he believed, in agreement with the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 91), that “the sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of His Spirit in them that by faith [in the promises of Scripture] receive them.”

Thus, Calvin commented that “the sacraments are

never separated from the Word.” This being so, “we may infer, that in the sacraments the [spiritual] reality is given to us along with the sign; for when the Lord holds out a sacrament, He does not feed our eyes with an empty and unmeaning figure, but joins the truth [of Scripture] with it, so as to testify that by means of them He acts upon us efficaciously.” Therefore, “we ought to believe that the truth must never be separated from the signs, though it ought to be distinguished from them” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 6:7). “A sacrament is never without a proceeding promise but is joined to it as a sort of appendix, with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself.” The sacrament is “a visible word” because “it represents God’s promises as painted in a picture and sets them before our sight, portrayed graphically and in the manner of images” (*Institutes* IV.14.3, 6). The sacraments are “seals of the Word.” And the Word is “the promise which explains the value and use of the signs” (*Commentary* on Ephesians 5:26).

It should also be noted that Calvin believed that the sacraments were graciously given by God to His church as a teaching device. As noted, the Word of God is a means of grace by itself, whereas the sacraments are means of grace only with the Word. But the sacraments (with the Word) do teach and strengthen the saints of God. As visible (and sensible) means of grace the sacraments aid us in our human weakness. Wrote Calvin:

For God’s truth is of itself firm and sure enough, and it cannot receive better confirmation from any other source than from itself. But as our faith is slight and feeble unless it be propped on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, totters, and at last gives way. Here our merciful Lord, according to His infinite kindness, so tempers Himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and, do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, He condescends to lead us to Himself even by these earthly elements [sacraments], and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings (*Institutes* IV.14.3).

### *Prayer is a Means of Grace*

Prayer is also a means of grace. According to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 98), “prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable

57. Cited in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, edited by J. K. S. Reid (Westminster, 1954) 29–30.



to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies." Calvin concurred. He himself was very much a man of prayer. The Reformer practiced and recommended regular times of prayer: (at least) when rising in the morning, when retiring at night, and at meals (*Institutes* III.20.50).

Calvin called prayer "the principal exercise which the children of God have." It is the "true proof" of saving faith (*Sermon* on 1 Timothy 2:1–2).<sup>58</sup> In the mind of the Reformer, a non-praying Christian is a contradiction in terms: "He who pretends that he trusts in God, and yet is so listless and indifferent" when it comes to the exercise of prayer, "lies shamefully. By prayer, then, true faith is known, as the goodness of a tree is known by its fruit" (*Commentary* on Psalm 22:4).

In His Word, God speaks to His people; in prayer, they speak to Him (*Institutes* III.20.1–2). Therefore, we must be diligent to study the Scriptures if we are to pray in a manner that pleases God (III.20.27). In our prayers, we are "not to ask any more than God allows ... faith grounded upon the Word is the mother of right prayer" (III.20.5). "For it is to be held as an axiom, that our prayers are faulty, so far as they are not founded on the Word" (*Commentary* on Genesis 19:18).

The *Psalms* are especially helpful and instructive in guiding our prayers. "It is by perusing these inspired compositions [the *Psalms*], that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book."<sup>59</sup>

Calvin would have agreed with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21.3, 6), that "prayer ... is required by God of all men.... [and] God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself." But he would also have us know that "our prayers are acceptable to God only in so far as Christ sprinkles and sanctifies them with the perfume of His own sacrifice" (*Commentary* on Psalm 20:3). For "there is no way of obtaining favor from God but through the intercession of Christ" (*Commentary* on Isaiah 42:1).

It is also noted that Calvin's teaching on Scripture, along with the other means of grace affected his theology of public and corporate worship. He held to the

"regulative principle of worship," which maintains that God is only to be worshipped in a manner which He has ordained in His Word.

This principle is concisely set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21.1) as follows:

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.

God, wrote the Reformer, "makes us conform to His lawful worship, that is, a spiritual worship established by Himself" (*Institutes* II.8.17). "Modes of worship regulated according to our own fancy, and honors rashly contrived by men, have no other advantage than this, that they rob God of His true honor, and pour upon Him nothing but reproach" (*Commentary* on John 6:15). We must reject "any mode of worship, that is not sanctioned by the command of God" (Calvin, *Selected Works*, I.133). The Reformer believed that in Acts 2:42 we are taught that "no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving" (*Institutes* IV.17.44).

### The Law of God

John Calvin, along with the Westminster Assembly after him, did not separate the law and the Gospel, though he carefully distinguished one from the other. Law without Gospel kills, but there is no Gospel without the law to reveal one's sinfulness and need for the grace of God in Christ (*Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 3:4–18). "For what is proposed to us in Christ, unless what God had promised in the law? and therefore Christ is called the end of the law, and elsewhere its spirit: for if the law be separated from Christ, it is like a dead letter: Christ alone gives it life" (*Commentary* on Ezekiel 16:61).

In his *Institutes* (and other writings), Calvin distinguished categories of the law: moral (II.8.1–59), civil (II.7.10–11; IV.20.14–15), and ceremonial (II.7.1–2, 16–17). His overall teaching confirms that the moral law, i.e., the Ten Commandments and the general equity of the civil law, is continually binding on all mankind. "We must not imagine that the coming of Christ has freed us from the authority of the law: for it is the eternal rule of a devout and holy life, and must, therefore be as unchangeable, as the justice of God, which it embraced, is constant and uniform" (*Commentary* on Matthew 5:17).

58. John Calvin, *Sermons on Timothy and Titus* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1983).

59. Calvin, "The Author's Preface," *Commentary* on Psalms.

Here he would have been in basic agreement with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (19.4–5):

To them [the people of Israel] also, as a body politic, He [God] gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.... The moral law does for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it: neither does Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

For example, Calvin was convinced that the civil magistrate is obliged to enforce both tables of the Decalogue. Not to do so was to disobey the God of the law (*Institutes* IV.20.9). Further, throughout his *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, he showed that it is also incumbent on the magistrate to adopt the general equity of the Mosaic law as found in Scripture. And in the *Institutes* he said that magistrates “are wholly God’s representatives ... acting as His vicegerents” (IV.20.4). Therefore, “that ruler is deceiving himself who expects his kingdom lastingly to prosper when it is not ruled by God’s sceptre, that is, by His holy Word.”<sup>60</sup>

According to the Genevan, the church and the state are separate institutions, with different functions, but they are both under the dictates of God’s law, and both are to work together for the advancement of God’s kingdom on Earth (*Institutes* IV.20.2, 8). As Greg Singer wrote: “Calvin believed that both the church and the state are divinely ordained and created, and that both are directly under Jesus Christ, who is both Lord of the church and King of kings.” The two institutions are assigned to two different spheres of operation, and both are still under God’s law (Singer, *John Calvin: His Roots and Fruits*, 40–41). Whereas the church wields only the sword of the Spirit in dealing with sin, the state wields the sword of iron in accordance with Scripture, in dealing with crime. The state is to promote the welfare of the true church, as well as all his subjects, and to guard her against her opponents. But the magistrate is not to administer the Word of God or the sacraments. It has no authority over the keys of the kingdom. The church is to pray for and uphold the magistrate, to teach the magistrate his Biblical function, and to give rulers the honor due a Biblical institution. But the church is not to enter into the affairs of the civil government, other than for advice and counsel (*Institutes* IV.11.3; 20.1–3, 8; *Commentary* on Romans 13:1–7).

The duties of the state are mainly relegated to those of justice and defense. They include the prevention of open idolatry, swearing and cursing, illicit forms of dance, and Sabbath disobedience, as well as the promotion of proper marital relationships, sanctity of human life, and so forth. In so doing, the magistrate “carries out the very judgments of God” (*Institutes* IV.20.10). The civil magistrate is to work toward a holy commonwealth which God intended to establish on earth (IV.20.3). In fact, the Genevan went so far as to say that the office of civil magistrate “is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men” (IV.20.4). His view is that of the *Westminster Confession* (23.2):

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate, when called thereunto; in the managing whereof, as they ought especially to maintain piety, justice, and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth.... The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he has authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed.

Frank Roberts wrote:

Building upon the doctrines of God and predestination, Calvin developed an activist form of Protestantism quite unlike that of Luther. Both Luther and Calvin believed that a sovereign God would certainly accomplish His purposes in the world. But Luther tended to limit his interest in this work of God to personal salvation, while Calvin believed God also intended to establish a holy commonwealth on Earth. In Geneva, Calvin attempted to found such a commonwealth which would honor God in every area of life.<sup>61</sup>

That Calvin was a strong advocate of Biblical civil law is related by Philip Schaff:

Calvin’s plea for the right and duty of the Christian magistrate to punish heresy by death stands or falls with his theocratic theory and the binding authority of the Mosaic code. His arguments are chiefly drawn from the

60. From the *Opera Selecta*, cited in Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 235.

61. Frank Roberts, *To All Generations* (Bible Way, 1981) 165.

Jewish law against idolatry and blasphemy, and from the examples of the pious kings of Israel (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VIII.792).

Scripture also teaches that within the sphere of the civil magistrate is the right and duty to wage a lawful war, if necessary. “Princes must be armed,” said Calvin, “not only to restrain the misdeeds of private individuals by judicial punishment, but also to defend by war the dominions entrusted to their safekeeping, if at any time they are under enemy attack” (*Institutes* IV.20.11). Here he was in agreement with the teaching of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (23.2), that the magistrate “may lawfully now, under the New Testament, wage war, upon just and necessary occasion.”

As for the ceremonial law, Calvin would have firmly supported the teaching of the *Westminster Confession* (19.3), that under the Old Testament economy, “God was pleased to give the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the New Testament.”

The “ceremonies,” said the Reformer, function “as shadows and figures corresponding to the truth” of Jesus Christ and His cross work. These “ceremonies guided them [the Old Testament people of God] to Christ,” who “is the end of the law unto salvation to every believer” (*Institutes* II.7.1–2). With the coming of Christ, the ceremonial laws have been abrogated, “not in effect but only in use”:

Christ by His coming has terminated them [the ceremonies], but has not deprived them of anything of their sanctity; rather, He has approved and honored it. Just as the ceremonies would have provided the people of the Old Covenant with an empty show if the power of Christ’s death and resurrection had not been displayed therein; so, if they had not ceased, we would be unable today to discern for what purpose they were established (II.7.16).

Calvin also taught that the law of God has a three-fold purpose (Pedagogical, Political, Pattern):

*Pedagogical:* The law shows the righteousness of God and discloses the sinfulness of man, leading him to seek God’s forgiveness (*Institutes* II.7.6–9):

The first part is this: while it [the law] shows God’s righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone acceptable

to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness.... The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both—just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face. For when the capacity to follow righteousness fails him, man must be mired in sins. After the sin forthwith comes the curse. Accordingly, the greater the transgression of which the law holds us guilty, the greater the judgment to which it makes us answerable (II.7.6–7).

*Political:* The law restrains sin, sinners, and criminals, and is to be used to protect the community against unjust men. “The second function of the law is this: at least by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats of the law.” Here the law serves as a “bridle” which restrains man “in some fear and reverence toward God” (*Institutes* II.7.10–11). But the law is also to be used as a guideline by which society is to be governed. Calvin recognized the various forms of civil government: absolute monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy; and he opted for aristocracy—a form of republican government (IV.20.8). Further, the Genevan preached that the law of God is to be a guide in determining how crime is to be punished:

Then let us not think that this law is a special law for the Jews [only]; but let us understand that God intended to deliver us a general rule, to which we must yield ourselves ... it is lawful for all kings and magistrates, to punish heretics and such as have perverted the pure truth; but also that they be bound to do it (*Sermon on Deuteronomy 13:5*).

In a *Sermon on 1 Samuel 8:11–22*, Calvin taught the principle set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (23.1): “God, the supreme ruler and king of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the public good.” He preached:

Yet it is certain that all royal dominion is meant to be ministerial. Indeed, I must add that kings are to be servants and ministers of God. Therefore it behooves them to consider themselves His commissioned legates to the people, who are to administer His affairs faithfully and are to take care of the people. Even though the power of earthly princes be great in this world, still they must

realize that they are ministers and servants of God and the people.<sup>62</sup>

*Pattern:* The law is a pattern for life (*Institutes* II.7.12–13). It admonishes the Christian man to seek and obey his God. “Here it is the function of the law, by warning men of their duty, to arouse them to zeal for holiness and innocence.” And “the law of God contains in itself that newness by which His image can be restored in us” (III.19.2; III.6.1). This third use of the law (*tertius usus legis*) is the “principal use” in Calvin’s theology. It not only reveals the character of God (II.8.51), it also sets forth His will (II.8.59). In the law God “lays down what He demands for us, and, in short, everything necessary to be known” (*Commentary* on Isaiah 8:20). It is “perfect pattern of righteousness . . . the everlasting and unchangeable rule to live by.” The law of God is “applicable to every age, even to the end of the world” (*Institutes* II.7.13). Further, “we must not imagine that the coming of Christ has freed us from the authority of the law: for it is an eternal rule of a devout and holy life” (*Commentary* on Matthew 5:17). This is in accord with the statement of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (19.5) that “the moral law does for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof . . . neither does Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.” Hesselink correctly said that Calvin, “more than any other Reformer, stressed the continuing need of the law as a norm and guide in the Christian life.”<sup>63</sup>

As is obvious from what we have seen, Calvin believed that even though the law of God functions as a pattern for the Christian’s life, at the same time the Christian has a certain freedom from the law. As stated by McKim, Calvin “sees Christian freedom as consisting of three parts: 1) freedom from the law—the Christian is justified by God’s mercy alone and not by his own works; 2) freedom of conscience—freed from the law’s yoke, one obeys God’s law willingly, as a response to grace, and not out of necessity; 3) freedom in ‘things indifferent’ (*adiaphora*).”<sup>64</sup>

First, the Christian is no longer under the curse of the law: “Not that the law no longer enjoins believers to do what is right, but only it is not for them what it formerly was: it may no longer condemn and destroy their consciences by frightening and confounding them” (*Institutes* II.7.14). Second, “those bound by the yoke of the law are like servants assigned certain tasks each day by their masters unless they have fulfilled the exact measure of their tasks.... But sons, who are more generously and candidly treated by their fathers, do

not hesitate to offer them incomplete and half-done and even defective works, trusting that their obedience and readiness of mind will be accepted by their fathers, even though they have not quite achieved what their fathers intended. Such children ought we to be, firmly trusting that our services will be approved by our most merciful Father, however small, rude, and imperfect these may be” (III.19.5). And finally, “the third part of Christian freedom lies in this: regarding outward things that are of themselves ‘indifferent,’ we are not bound before God by any religious obligation preventing us from sometimes using them and other times not using them, indifferently” (III.19.7). Calvin’s thought here is in accord with the teaching of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (20.1–2):

The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the Gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin; from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also, in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto Him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind. All which were common also to believers under the law [OT]. But, under the New Testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish Church was subjected, and in greater boldness of access to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith and worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

62. Cited in W. Gary Crampton and Richard E. Bacon, *Built Upon the Rock* (Dallas, 2000) 47.

63. I. John Hesselink, “Christ, the Law, and the Christian,” in *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, 179.

64. Donald K. McKim, “John Calvin: A Theologian for an Age of Limits,” in *Readings in Calvin’s Theology*, 295–296.



### Conclusion

Louis Gaussen concluded his masterful treatise on the Word of God, *God-Breathed*, with the following words:

It follows from all we have said that there are in the Christian world but two schools, or two religions: that which puts the Bible above everything, and that which puts something above the Bible. The former was evidently that of Jesus Christ; the latter has been that of the rationalism of all denominations and of all times.

The motto of the former is this: The whole written Word is inspired by God, even to a single jot and tittle; the Scripture cannot be destroyed.... The motto of the second is this: There are human judges lawfully entitled to pass judgment on the Word of God.<sup>65</sup>

John Calvin would have stood with His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He believed and taught that “the whole written Word is inspired by God, even to a single jot and tittle; [and that] the Scripture cannot be destroyed.” According to the Geneva Reformer, the Bible in all of its parts is from God, and there is nothing human added to it. The Bible is the ultimate authority of all areas of life. It stands in judgment over all, and it is to be judged by no one or no thing. In his *Commentary* on 2 Timothy 3:16, he wrote:

In order to uphold the authority of Scripture, he [Paul] declares that it is divinely inspired; for if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that men ought to receive it with reverence. This is the principle which distinguishes our religion [Christianity] from all others, that we know that God has spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the [authors of Scripture] did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.

If it be objected, “How can this be known?” I answer, both to disciples and to teachers, God is made known to be the author of it by the revelation of the same Spirit.

Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have received from their hand, but, speaking at the suggestion of God, they boldly and fearlessly testified, what was actually true, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke. The same Spirit, therefore, who made Moses and the prophets certain of their calling, now also testifies to our hearts, that He has employed them as His servants to instruct us. Accordingly, we need not wonder if there are many who doubt as to the Author of Scripture; for, although the majesty of God is displayed in it, yet none but those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit have eyes to perceive what ought, indeed, to have been visible to all, and yet is visible to the elect alone. This is the first clause, that we owe to God; because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it.

*Soli Deo Gloria* ■

65. Louis Gaussen, *God-Breathed: The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*, trans. David Scott, ed. John W. Robbins (The Trinity Foundation, 2001) 310.

# Samuel Rutherford's Contribution to Covenant Theology in Scotland

By D. Patrick Ramsey

## INTRODUCTION

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to discuss covenant theology without mentioning Reformed theology because its growth and development occurred primarily within Reformed circles.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, "covenant thinking became a fundamental part of the early Reformed and Puritan worldview and has remained a distinctive feature of the Reformed interpretation of Scripture ever since."<sup>2</sup> Within the world of Reformed covenant theology, at least in the English speaking part, one would be hard pressed not to refer to Scotland and her theologians. The idea of covenant in general and covenant theology in particular so pervades Scottish political and religious history that David Hay Fleming could refer to Scotland as "the land of the Covenant"<sup>3</sup> and James Walker could assert that "the old theology of Scotland might be emphatically described as a *covenant theology*."<sup>4</sup> Among Scotland's covenant theologians, Samuel Rutherford must be ranked near the very top. According to Thomas F. Torrance, Rutherford's breadth of learning was astonishing, enabling him to become "one of the great and most influential theologians in the Calvinist and Presbyterian tradition of the post-Reformation Kirk."<sup>5</sup> John Coffey notes that of the Scottish Covenanters Rutherford was the most distinguished theologian. Besides having an international reputation as an astute defender of Reformed orthodoxy, no other Covenanter, except Robert Baillie, approached the range of his theological writings.<sup>6</sup>

Born in 1600 in Nisbet, near Roxburgh, Samuel Rutherford rose to serve the Scottish Church in the pastorate and the academy with distinction. After nine years as a student and teacher at Edinburgh University, Rutherford left to spend the next eleven years as the pastor in Anwoth (Coffey, 41). Subsequently, he becomes a major figure in the Church of Scotland, reaching the height of

his influence in 1649 (55). In 1639, Rutherford becomes professor of divinity at the University of St. Andrews. He is sent as a Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly in 1643, returning to Scotland and his teaching at St. Andrews in 1647. Rejecting invitations to teach elsewhere, including Harderwyck in 1648 and Utrecht in 1651, Rutherford stays at St. Andrews for the rest of his teaching career, becoming Rector in 1651.<sup>7</sup> With the return of the Stuart monarchy, Rutherford is cited to appear before Parliament on a charge of treason. Unable to

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THE AUTHOR: D. Patrick Ramsey is the pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church (OPC) in London, Ky. He is the co-author with Joel R. Beeke of *An Analysis of Herman Witsius' The Economy of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002) and has written for periodicals, including *The Westminster Theological Journal*, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* and *Ordained Servant*. Mr. Ramsey's article "Baptismal Regeneration and the Westminster Confession of Faith" appeared in the 2008 issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

1. See Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2004) 10; John Murray, "Covenant Theology," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) 4:216.

2. Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) 11.

3. David Hay Fleming, "The Story Of The Scottish Covenants in Outline," *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature* (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1992) 5:44.

4. James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland: 1560-1750* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982) 73.

5. Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1996) 93.

6. John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 114. See also M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Handset Press, 1985) 70; John Macpherson, "The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology," *Anthology*, 5:139.

7. Sherman Isbell, "Samuel Rutherford," in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. David F. Wright et. al. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1993) 735.

attend because of declining health, he replies: "I have got summons already before a Superior Judge and Judicatory, and I bebove to answer to my first summons, and ere your day come, I will be where few kings and great folks come" (Isbell, 735).<sup>8</sup> Shortly thereafter, Rutherford crosses over into Immanuel's land in 1661.

In light of Samuel Rutherford's significance as a Scottish covenant theologian, this paper will assess his contribution to the development and establishment of covenant theology in Scotland. In so doing, we will first provide an overview of the history and development of covenant theology up to the time of Rutherford. Then, we will examine his covenant theology based upon his writings, looking primarily at the works wherein he expounds his covenant doctrine, namely *The Covenant of Life Opened*, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*, and *Ane Catachisme Containing The Soume of Christian Religion*. Finally, we will place Rutherford's covenant theology in historical-theological perspective, drawing some tentative conclusions about his role in the development and establishment of covenant theology in Scotland.

#### HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

A history of covenant theology, especially its starting point, will in part be shaped by one's definition. Unfortunately, there is no scholarly consensus as to what constitutes covenant theology. It may be defined as using the biblical theme of the covenant as a key idea; as holding to a two-covenant system (covenant of works and covenant of grace); as holding to a three-covenant system (covenant of works, covenant of grace, covenant of redemption); as one's hermeneutic; or as a means of organization of one's theology.<sup>9</sup> While in its broadest sense covenant theology is present throughout the history

of the church,<sup>10</sup> it does not appear in its more narrow senses until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

##### 1. The Reformation and Post-Reformation Period

Covenant theology begins to come into its own in the Reformation and Post-Reformation era. The Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) builds upon the covenant tradition, using the Abrahamic covenant as a model for the Christian's relationship with God. Interactions with the Anabaptists lead him to sharpen and hone his covenant doctrine, especially his teaching on the continuity and discontinuity of the Old and New Covenants. Stressing the unity of the covenants, Zwingli taught that the Old and New Covenants are the same in substance and differ only in minor matters. Like those before him, Zwingli noted that the covenant consisted of promises and conditions. God promises salvation while man is required to believe and obey, though the latter must not be understood in a legalistic or pelagian/semi-pelagian manner. The elect keep the requirements of the covenant because God graciously enables them. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are held together in Zwingli's doctrine of the covenant (Bierma, 31–35).

Zwingli's successor Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) is credited with the first study of the covenant in the history of the church with his *De Testamento Seu Foedere Dei Unico et Aeterno* in October 1534 (Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 110). His use of the covenant primarily revolves around his discussion of the sacraments and the development of redemption. Following his mentor, Bullinger taught that the covenant is two-sided, with promises and conditions, and that there is only one covenant of grace in substance spanning the Old and New Covenants.<sup>11</sup>

John Calvin agrees with Zwingli and Bullinger vis-à-vis the bilateral and conditional nature of the covenant. The covenant is not merely a divine promise, but includes man's response of faith and obedience.<sup>12</sup> Also in line with Zwingli and Bullinger, Calvin uses the concept of the covenant in the context of the sacraments and salvation, believing that the Old and New Covenants are the same in substance, differing only in "the mode of dispensation" (Calvin, 2.10.2). Lyle Bierma notes, however, that Calvin goes beyond these Reformers, at least in terms of clarity and development, in his discussion of the relationship between covenant and election (Bierma, 48). Calvin relates the doctrine of predestination to the covenant but he does not conflate them. Instead, he makes a distinction between general election, which includes all those in covenant, that is, members

8. For a moving account of Rutherford's last days on earth see John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (1870; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995) 236–240.

9. Peter Lillback helpfully summarizes the various definitions in his *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 26–28.

10. See Andrew A. Woolsey, "The Covenant in the Church Fathers," *Haddington House Journal* 5 (2003): 25–52; Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 13–14; Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 29–35; "Covenant," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 1988) 175.

11. Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 110–113; Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 35–40.

12. See e.g. John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) 3.17.5. Cf. Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 307; Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 40–42.

of the visible church, and secret election, which refers to those who are predestined to salvation. Membership in the covenant is thus not co-extensive with election narrowly understood (Calvin, 3.21.5–7). Peter Lillback helpfully summarizes Calvin's position:

The covenant is not the same as secret election that infallibly secures salvation. Rather, the covenant is a general election that offers the promise of the benefits of the covenant. Only secret election ratifies the covenant in the case of any individual. Such is the covenant as viewed from the decree of God. Nevertheless, the covenant has duties for men to execute. Thus man must not look to the decree for his salvation, but to the promises he finds in the covenant that he embraces by faith. Hence, the covenant creates an intermediate category of persons between those who are the ones rejected by God, and those who are elect.... For Calvin, the covenant is the place of salvation, but not all who are in the covenant will receive that salvation because of the mystery of divine election (*The Binding of God*, 308–309).

Two of Calvin's students, Zacharias Ursinus (1534–1583) and Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587), adopt and add to Calvin's covenant doctrine. Both make the covenant idea a unifying theme in their theology, thereby making it more than just one doctrine among many and expanding the range of theological topics included under the covenant rubric. Ursinus, however, for some unknown reason does not maintain this covenant emphasis after the publication of his *Summa theologiae* (Bierma, 147).

It is at this stage that the seeds of two major developments in covenant theology are planted, namely the covenant of works and the covenant of redemption. Ursinus and Olevianus both speak of man at creation in terms of covenant though they do not use the term covenant of works. Calvin had spoken of a legal covenant, in contradistinction to the covenant of grace, but it referred to the law at Sinai and not to Adam in the garden (Murray, 4.218). Ursinus and Olevianus thus appear to be the first to describe the creational relationship in covenantal terms. Amandus Polanus (1561–1610) and especially Robert Rollock (c.1555–1599) take this idea further by developing and articulating a well-formed statement of the covenant of works.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, the covenant of works becomes a staple of Reformed theology and is encased in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646). Olevianus also plants the seed for the covenant of redemption by being the first to refer to a pretemporal redemptive *pañtum* between the Father and the Son (Bierma, 152). The actual term "covenant

of redemption" does not seem to emerge until David Dickson's speech at the 1638 Glasgow Assembly (Coffey, 138); while the doctrine reaches creedal status in 1658 with the Savoy Declaration.

Having become a unifying theme in Reformed theology, it was only a matter of time before the covenant became an organizational method for expounding the whole of theology. Olevianus' student, Robert Howie, along with Robert Rollock and Junius, headed down this path by suggesting that everything in Scripture is related to some covenant of God. This suggestion is then enthusiastically embraced by Cocceius.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, by the middle of the seventeenth century, covenant theology is firmly established in the Reformed community, even according to the narrowest of definitions.

## 2. Covenant theology in Scotland

Robert Howie (1568–1646?) was born in or near Aberdeen and studied for the ministry at Herborn Academy in Hesse under Caspar Olevianus from 1585–1588. Evidently Olevianus made a considerable impact upon his student because Howie spoke of him with respect in his work *De reconciliatione hominis cum Deo* (1591). Having thus imbibed German Reformed covenant theology, Howie returns to Scotland where he undoubtedly influences his good friend Robert Rollock who becomes for all intents and purposes the father of covenant theology in Scotland.<sup>15</sup> Robert Rollock was the first Principal of Edinburgh University. In 1597 he publishes his widely read and influential *Tractatus De Vocatione Efficaci*, wherein he expounds the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. An English translation comes off the press in 1603 entitled *A Treatise of God's Effectual Calling*.

According to Rollock the covenant of works is the covenant that God made with man at creation, "wherein he promised him [man] eternall life, under the condition of holy and good works, which should be answerable to the holinesse and goodnesse of their creation, and conformable to his law."<sup>16</sup> The covenant of grace

13. See Rowland S. Ward, *God & Adam: Reformed Theology and The Creation Covenant* (Wentworth, Australia: New Melbourne Press, 2003) 59–60.

14. R. Sherman Isbell, "The Origin of the Concept of the Covenant of Works," unpublished M.Th. dissertation (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1976) 73.

15. See Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 176; Mark W. Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* (hereafter WTJ) 43 (1980): 22.

16. Robert Rollock, *A Treatise of God's Effectual Calling* (London, 1603) 7.



consists, as does every covenant,<sup>17</sup> of two parts. First, there is the promise of life, which consists of the gift of righteousness (imputed and inherent) and is grounded upon the person and work of Christ. Second, there is the condition of faith. Although good works by believers are not strictly a condition of the covenant, they “are necessarie unto eternall life promised in the Gospele, but not as merits, or meritorious causes: but as the means and way, wherein we are to proceed on from justification and regeneration unto glorie and life eternall” (Rollock, 19). Thus, Rollock follows a train of theologians in asserting the bilateral and conditional nature of the covenant of grace. He also follows Olevianus and Calvin in affirming a distinction between two types of calling. What Calvin had done in terms of election (general and secret), Rollock does in terms of God’s gracious calling; and both are essentially the same as Olevianus’s distinction between the substance and administration of the covenant. Rollock writes:

Our calling, to speak thereof in the first place, is by Gods free grace, and that in a double: respect, for first in our effectually calling the publishing of the covenant, & the preaching of the gospele, is of the only free grace of God.... Next faith, whereby we receive the promise of the covenant, which is offered unto us in Christ, is of the mere grace of God.... That former grace may be called the grace of our vocation, this grace is common to all that are called elect and reprobate. But the latter grace in our effectual calling, may be called the *grace of faith*, appertaining only to the elect: for it is given only to those that are predestinated, to life everlasting to believe.... For whereas there is a double mercy of God in our effectual vocation, to wit: First, an offering

of Christ with all his benefits, in the covenant of grace, or the Gospele: secondly, faith to receive Christ being offered.... Therefore in our effectually calling two graces must be understood the grace of our vocation, or of the offering Christ unto us, and the grace of faith, or of receiving Christ by us (233–235).

Another Scottish covenant theologian worthy of mention before we move on to discuss Samuel Rutherford is John Cameron (c. 1579–1625) who was born and educated in Glasgow. He spent most of his teaching career on the continent, where he developed a three covenant view: covenant of nature, covenant of grace and subservient covenant. His unique contribution was his explanation of the Sinaitic covenant, which he considered to be a third covenant (the subservient covenant), distinct from the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace.<sup>18</sup> Although rejected by Rutherford and the Westminster Assembly,<sup>19</sup> Cameron’s distinctive view does seem to have influenced later Scottish and American covenant theologians.<sup>20</sup>

#### SAMUEL RUTHERFORD: HIS COVENANT THEOLOGY

According to Rutherford, a covenant is a reciprocal relationship which is both personal and legal. It is reciprocal in that a covenant “speaks something of giving, and taking, work, and reward, and mutually engagements, betwixt parties.”<sup>21</sup> It is personal and legal in that a covenant can be described in marital and commercial terms (Torrance, 102–103). In other words, a covenant involves parties, promises and conditions. Rutherford sees three main covenants in Scripture: the covenant of works, the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption.

##### 1. The covenant of works

The covenant of works involves two parties, a promise and a condition. The two parties are God and Adam who represents all of mankind. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 15:47, Rutherford concludes that Adam is a “publick” person, “to whom was committed the standing and falling of all mankind” (Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 1, 225). Thus, the answer to the question, “With whom did God make the covenant?” is “With Adam and with all mankind in him.”<sup>22</sup> Since Adam broke the covenant, all are guilty of his sin, inclined to evil and unable to do any good (ibid, 172).

The promise of the covenant of works is eternal life that is communion with God in glory (Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 16, 49–50). This life is distinct from

17. “The covenant of God generally is a promise, under some certaine condition,” Rollock, 6.

18. Originally written in Latin, an English translation of John Cameron’s work on the three covenants was prepared by Samuel Bolton and appended to his book, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (London, 1645).

19. See D. Patrick Ramsey, “In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg,” *WTJ* 66 (2004): 379–384.

20. See James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (1867; repr., Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997) 38–39; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 2.374–375. Buchanan and Hodge define one aspect of the Mosaic covenant as a legal national covenant in similar terms to Cameron’s subservient covenant.

21. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened: Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh, 1655) 15–16.

22. Samuel Rutherford, “Ane Catachisme Conteyning The Soume of Christiann Religion,” in Alexander F. Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1886) 175.

and better than the life and fellowship Adam had in the Garden of Eden since it is eternal, in glory and held out to Adam as reward.

The condition of the covenant of works is obedience to God's law, positive and moral.<sup>23</sup> Part of the law in question is the law of nature, which is written on man's heart, and it is to be kept by the strength of nature. For these reasons, Rutherford agrees with Rollock, whom he calls solid and eminent, in labeling the covenant of works a natural covenant.

Rollock had asserted that the covenant of works was founded in nature because God made the covenant with man who was created pure and holy, and thus able to keep the law of the covenant, which was the very same law written on his heart. "Therefore," Rollock writes, "the ground of the covenant of works was not Christ, nor the grace of God in Christ; but the nature of man in the first creation holy and perfect, endued also with the knowledge of the law" (7). Thus, one difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is that the good works in the former are required from man according to his own created natural ability, while good works in the latter "are required of them which be in Christ, not such as proceede from their own nature, or such as they can yeelde of their own strength, but onely such as proceede from the grace of regeneration" (9).

Rutherford agrees with Rollock because he admits that there are good reasons for calling the covenant of works a natural covenant in contradistinction from the supernatural covenant of grace (Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 19). Moreover, his definition of the covenant of works in his catechism says that we are obligated to "keep the law by the strength of our nature" (Rutherford, "Catechisme," 175). Nevertheless, there are several aspects of the covenant of works that are not natural, which make the term "natural covenant," insufficient. For example, the positive laws of the covenant, such as the observance of the *seventh* day and the command to not eat the fruit of one tree, are not "deduced from the Law of Nature" (Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 19). Also the covenant itself was not natural to man's created state. As a creature made in the image of God, man was naturally obligated to love, trust, fear and obey God. But God was not compelled to make a covenant promise or to lavishly reward him for his obedience (20–21). Thus, "it is condescension that he [God] commands Covenant-wayes, with promise of a reward to the obeyers."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the reward promised in the covenant of works is not natural. Rutherford explains:

But that Adam should have such an eminent life, for

the reward of his obedience as a communion with God, which is farre above his obedience, is the free donation of God: nor is there any necessary connexion between Adams perfect obedience, and so high and eminent life, nor can this Covenant, as touching such a promise, be written in his heart (Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 22).

Consequently, if Adam had obeyed, he would only have merited the reward *ex pacto* (196). Rutherford, therefore, concludes that the covenant of works was a gracious covenant. It was gracious in the sense of "undeserved goodnesse," and with respect to its establishment and terms. However, this covenant was not gracious in a gospel sense in that it was not a fruit of the work of Christ and God did not promise to enable man to keep the covenant (35, 22, 194).

## 2. The covenant of grace

Like the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, according to Rutherford, involves two parties, promises, and a condition. We will look at these in turn and then conclude this section by looking at what Rutherford has to say concerning the unity of the covenant of grace.

### a. The parties of the covenant of grace

There does appear to be some development in Rutherford's thought concerning the parties of the covenant of grace. In his catechism, which according to John Coffey was written during his ministry in Anwoth,<sup>25</sup> Rutherford only mentions two covenants (covenant of grace and covenant of works) and that the parties of the new covenant are God and the elect only. He does, however, make a distinction, which he builds upon and elaborately expounds in his work on the covenants, between the preached covenant that is to all and the elect who alone are "the heires and the bairnes of the promise to

23. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 19; "Ane Catechisme," 175.

24. Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 15. Rowland Ward notes some tension in this regard in the Westminster Standards. In one place it is suggestive that a promise of eternal life is attached to the natural/moral law whereas elsewhere it seems to be a result of God condescending to enter into covenant. See his *God & Adam*, 72.

25. Coffey, *Samuel Rutherford*, 41. No evidence however is given to support this assertion. This handwritten catechism was first published in 1886 in Mitchell's *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*. Mitchell avers, without any supporting evidence, that it was undoubtedly prepared for the purpose of being presented before a committee of the Westminster Assembly (*Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, xxxiv–xxxv).

quhom the inheritance is bought” (Rutherford, “Catachisme,” 176). In his work *The Tryal & Triumph of Faith*, first published in 1645, Rutherford states that the parties of the covenant of grace are on the one hand God and on the other hand Christ and the elect in him. He writes:

The parties of the Covenant are, God and Man.... Now the parties heer, on the one part, is God; on the other, *The Mediator Christ, and the children that the Lord gave him*. Observe, 1. In the Covenant of Nature and Works: God and his friend Adam were parties contracting: And in the second covenant, God and his fellow Christ, and all his are parties ... Christ is the party here; so Christ hath a sevenfold relation.... 7. As he is a side or the half of the Covenant; he is the *Party contracting in the Covenant*.... 7. The seventh relation of Christ maketh way to the parties, and here Christ cometh under a double consideration, one as God; so he is one with the Father and Spirit, and the Lord and the Author of the Covenant. 2. As Mediator, and so he is on our side of the Covenant; Then is the Covenant made with Christ and all his heirs, assigns principally with Christ.... As the covenant of nature and works was made with Adam, and all his, and there were not two covenants; so here, the better covenant coming in the place of the former, is made with the second Adam and his children, Rom. 5.18,19. 1 Cor. 15.20, &c.<sup>26</sup>

By making Christ the principal party of the covenant of grace, Rutherford appears to include what he will later call the covenant of redemption or the covenant of suretyship under the rubric of the covenant of grace. To be sure he does extend the covenant back before time as being transacted between the Father and the Son in eternity. But he does so in the context of the covenant of grace and with respect to Christ as the principal party (*Tryal & Triumph*, 72–73). Thus, there does not seem to be three clearly delineated covenants at this point.

Rutherford’s discussion of the parties of the covenant of grace in 1645 is strikingly similar to that found in the Westminster Standards, particularly Larger Catechism question 31. That the concept of the covenant of redemption was still subsumed under the covenant of grace by Rutherford during the time of Westminster Assembly seems to indicate that it was still in its nascent form and may help explain the reason for its conspicuous absence from the Westminster Standards.

In his fullest work on covenant theology, published

six years before his death, Rutherford does make a sharp distinction, though not a separation, between the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption (Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life*, 308–309). Since the two covenants differ in the “parties contracting,” it is not surprising to find that Rutherford does not refer to Christ as the principal party of the covenant of grace. Instead, he notes that the party besides God is either the elect alone or all within the visible church, depending upon which perspective of the covenant is being considered. Like many others before him, Rutherford distinguishes between the external administration and internal appropriation of the covenant. He notes that there are two ways a person can be in covenant with God: “externally by Visible profession, and conditionally, not in reference to the Covenant, but to the thing promised in Covenant, which none obtains, but such as fulfill the condition of the Covenant” (72). Correlatively, he says that the covenant must be considered in two ways:

*In abstracto* and formally, in the letter as a simple way of saving sinners, so they believe, so all within the Visible Church are in the Covenant of Grace, and so it contains only the will of precept. 2. In the *concret*, as the Lord carries on the Covenant in such and such a way, commensurably with the decrees of Election and Reprobation; As the Lord not only promises, but acts and ingraves the Law in the heart, commensurably with his decree of Election, so the Elect only are under the Covenant of Grace (*The Covenant of Life*, 94).

Thus, from one perspective the covenant of grace is made with all those who have made a profession of faith, and their children. All those who come under the “the call and offer of Christ in the Preached Gospel,” and give their consent by making a profession and receiving the seals, along with their children, are “externally in Covenant” and “under the Covenant of Grace” (72, 86, 87, 90). This is so because God’s promise of salvation through faith is made to them, whether they believe or not (91–92). That some are reprobate does not imply that they are not truly in covenant with God because a conditional covenant with promises and requirements is a genuine covenant (90). To deny that it is, is to make the mistake of the Anabaptists who “ignorantly confound the promise, and the thing promised; the Covenant, and benefits Covenanted” (90). Thus, “it is no inconvenient that the Reprobate in the Visible Church, be so under the Covenant of Grace, as some promises are made to them, and some mercies promised to them conditionally” (94). Yet, from another perspective the covenant

26. Samuel Rutherford, *The Tryal & Triumph of Faith* (London, 1651) 64, 65, 70, 72.

of grace is made only with the elect. From the perspective of the thing promised and of special promises the covenant is only established with the elect. And if we consider the covenant in terms of fulfillment or with regard to the special and principal blessing of regeneration then the covenant is restricted to the invisible church (92, 343).

The relationship between these two perspectives of the covenant, both of which are gracious (107), is that of means to an end. Preaching of the Gospel is the saving means of regeneration and faith. Faith comes by hearing the preached word. Thus, "external Covenantee goes before internal Covenantee as the means before the end, and the cause before the effect" (107). Therefore, in order to properly identify the parties of the covenant of grace and avoid the opposing errors of the Antinomians and Anabaptists on the one hand and the Socinians, Arminians and Papists on the other, Rutherford says that the covenant must be considered "As Preached according to the approving and commanding will of God," and "as it is internally and effectually fulfilled in the elect according to the decree and the Lords will of purpose." Once this distinction is made, the parties of the covenant of grace become clear:

The parties contracters in the Covenant preached, are God, and all within the Visible Church, whether Elect or Reprobate, and their seed, they professing the Gospel.... But the parties contracters of the Covenant in the latter respect [the internal covenant] are, Jer. 31. Heb. 8. only, the house of Judah, the taught of God, the people in whose heart the Law is ingraven (*The Covenant of Life*, 340).

#### *b. The promises of the covenant of grace*

In his catechism, Rutherford states that God promises forgiveness of sins, renovation of our nature and life eternal in the new covenant. The promises are preached to all outwardly but only the elect are the heirs and children of the promise. He also states that all the promises of the covenant are made to Christ as principal and to the elect as heirs and assigners ("Catechisme," 176–177).

Expounding upon this theme that all the promises are made to Christ in *The Tryal and Triumph of Faith*, Rutherford says that the promises "flow from God to us, but all along they fall first on Christ" (74). The promises are of two sorts, some only to Christ while others to Christ and his elect. The promises to Christ and his elect are also divided into two kinds: general and special. The general promise is "I will be your God." The special

promises, which are first made to Christ and then by proportion to the elect are the gift of a new heart and a new spirit, justification, victory and dominion, the Kingdom and glory and resurrection from the dead. Concerning the promise of justification, Rutherford writes:

Justification is promised to Christ, not personall, as if he needed a pardon for sin, but of his Cause, there is a cautionary or Surety-righteousness due to the Surety when he hath paid the debt of the broken man, and commeth out of prison free by Law, so he came out of the Grave for our righteousness, but having first the righteousness of his Cause, in his own person, *Isaiah 50.8. He is neer that justifieth me (saith Christ) who shall contend with me?* 1 Tim. 3.16. *Justified in the Spirit.* So have we Justification of our persons, and Remission in his blood, Eph. 1.7. and that by Covenant, Jer. 31.32.33 (*Tryal & Triumph*, 76).

A key distinction made in *The Covenant of Life Opened* is between conditional and absolute/unconditional promises, which naturally correspond to the external and internal aspects of the covenant of grace. The promises which require a response in order to receive the promised blessing are made to all in the visible church. The unconditional or absolute promises which do not require a response in order to be received are made only to the invisible church. Rutherford writes:

For all the promises belong not the same way, to the parties visibly and externally, and to the parties internally and personally in Covenant with God. So the Lord promiseth life and forgiveness shall be given to these who are externally in the Covenant, providing they believe, but the Lord promiseth not a new heart and grace to believe, to these that are only externally in Covenant. And yet he promiseth both to the Elect (*The Covenant of Life*, 94).

Since only the elect receive the blessings that are promised and the "speciall and principall Covenantal blessing" of a new heart is only promised to "the Elect and Invisible Church," it is appropriate to say in one sense that the "promises of the Covenant are not really made to the Reprobate within the Visible Church" (92).

Conditional and unconditional promises also correspond to the perceptive and decretive will of God. The perceptive or what Rutherford calls the approving and commanding will of God refers to the promises, precepts, and threatenings of the covenant and applies to all in the church, the elect and non-elect; whereas the



decretive will refers to the effectual fulfillment of the promise of a new heart in the elect only, according to the decree of election (340–344). This distinction between the conditional and unconditional promises is exactly the same that is made in the Westminster Confession of Faith 7.3:

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.<sup>27</sup>

### c. The condition of the covenant of grace

James Walker has observed that Rutherford's genius is evident in his letters (Walker, 8). It can also be seen in his ability to equally stress God's sovereign role and man's responsibility in the covenant and to maintain the proper relationship between law and grace. That he does so is all the more remarkable in light of his supralapsarianism, which has been unfairly characterized as "breathhtakingly stark" and "stern and extreme."<sup>28</sup> William Tisbe, a giant intellect and first prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, held to supralapsarianism, yet

he also believed in justification before faith, thereby stressing the sovereignty of God to the detriment of the responsibility of man in the covenant.<sup>29</sup> The fact that Rutherford had to defend Reformed orthodoxy against Arminianism and Antinomianism, while the older Tisbe focused upon Arminianism, helped, but many lesser intellects who followed in his wake were unable to maintain the proper balance as demonstrated by the English Non-Conformist debate in the 1690's and the seventeenth century Marrow controversy.

Rutherford's careful balance between the divine and human roles is highlighted in his discussion on the condition of the covenant. According to the Scotsman, faith is the only condition of the covenant.<sup>30</sup> To limit the condition to faith only is in line with Rollock but is somewhat of a departure from a good number of notable Reformed theologians, such as Calvin, Ursinus, John Ball, and Turretin, who include obedience.<sup>31</sup> So why did Rutherford not include obedience? He seems to relate the condition of the covenant with justification when he says that faith only is the condition "because Faith sendeth a person out of himself, and taketh him off his own bottom, that in Christ he may have his righteousness."<sup>32</sup> This does not mean, however, that good works are not necessary for salvation or that they are not required by those in the covenant. Although not a condition of the covenant, "holiness and sanctification is the condition of the Covenanters" (*Tryal & Triumph*, 77). Another distinction made is between the covenant of grace and the broader Gospel, which is similar to the one made by Turretin between justification and the covenant (Turretin, 2:189). Rutherford writes:

But wee may say the formal promise of the covenant of grace is made to believing, as the Law-promise is made to doing Legally, and perfectly out of our own, without grace; and that the Gospel, as it is larger then the covenant of grace; and as it containeth the whole doctrine of grace, taught by the *Prophets and Apostles*, is a promise of life eternall, made to Evangelike and unperfect doing through the strength of grace.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning the nature of faith that is required, Rutherford says that it must be lively and sincere. It is of the nature and essence of saving faith to persevere to the end but the condition of the covenant is not faith as it perseveres to the end. A sinner is justified if he sincerely believes, the moment he believes, whether his faith is weak or strong. Indeed, if faith did not immediately justify but only as it endures to the end, then no one would be completely justified, saved and united to Christ, until

27. *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* (Willow Grove, Pa.: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2005) 30–31.

28. See Guy M. Richard, "Samuel Rutherford's supralapsarianism revealed: a key to the lapsarian position of the Westminster Confession of Faith?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59 (2006): 27–44. See also *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4:162–170, 310.

29. See Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004) 68, 80–88.

30. Rutherford, "Ane Catéchisme," 176; *Tryal & Triumph*, 77. T.F. Torrance is therefore mistaken to assert that Rutherford believes that "with faith obedience also is a condition of salvation and justification," *Scottish Theology*, 103.

31. See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3:17:5; Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (1852; repr., Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.) 99; John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1645) 18; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. G. M. Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994) 2.175.

32. Rutherford, *Tryal & Triumph*, 77. Cf. "Ane Catéchisme," 176; *The Covenant of Life*, 201.

33. Samuel Rutherford, *Survey of the Spirituall Antichrist* (London, 1648) 2.38.

death, which is contrary to the testimony of Scripture (*The Covenant of Life*, 201–204). Refusing to avoid the difficult questions, Rutherford addresses the objection that in Scripture the promise of eternal life is made to faith that perseveres to the end. In answering this objection, he resorts to a distinction between the title and possession of life. The former is given to a sinner the moment he believes, while the latter as he perseveres to the end of his life (204–205).

Though faith is a condition, condition must be understood properly. Condition is not to be understood in the Arminian sense of “a free act, which we absolutely may perform by free-will, not acted by the pre-determinating grace of Christ” (*Tryal & Triumph*, 84). Nor is it to be understood in the Popish sense of “doing that which by some merit moveth God to give to men wages for work” (84). So faith is not a condition in any pelagian/semi-pelagian or meritorious sense. For that reason Rutherford is content to say that faith is not a condition in a strict and narrow sense.<sup>34</sup> However, one must not swing to the other extreme and conclude that faith is not a condition in any sense, which is to commit the error of the Antinomians. Rutherford writes:

But if a condition be taken Evangelicallly for a qualification wrought in us, by the grace of Christ, and without which we are not justified, nor saved; then to deny the Gospel to be a conditionall covenant, is to bely the Gospel.... We teach that faith in Christ is both a condition of grace on our part, but not Antecedent and preparatory to the Covenant, and also a grace promised, when the new heart is articulated to us; so that Christ bringeth into the covenant himselfe, his righteousness, his free grace, and the condition of Faith that receives him (*Spirituell Antichrist*, 2.40, 129).

Besides faith, good works play a pivotal role in the covenant, though they are not, as we have already noted, a condition of the covenant. As a condition of the “covenanters,” good works are necessary for salvation as the believer’s way to salvation and eternal life. According to Rutherford, these scriptures “evidence to us, that holy walking is a way to heaven, as sowing is to harvest, and that Christ maketh a promise of life eternall to him that doth his Commandements”: 1 Timothy 4:8; John 15:2; Matthew 25:29; Galatians 6:8; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Philipians 4:17–18; Romans 8:13, 6:22; Revelation 22:14 and John 14:23 (2:37–38). Once again the distinction between title and possession is employed to explain the role of good works. Keeping God’s commandments is a “mean, and way, not to the right of salvation, but to the actual

possession of it.”<sup>35</sup> Faith in Christ gives us the right to eternal life based upon the person and work of Christ. Walking in the path of holiness leads us into actual possession of the life we have in Christ. The grace of God is what enables the elect to live holy lives and is itself a “fruit of the Covenant of Grace promised to us” (*Tryal & Triumph*, 182). Indeed, this role of good works would seem legalistic if it were not for the fact that God has promised and tied himself by covenant to make his children holy. God has both promised to cause his elect to walk before him in truth and he has promised to save and deliver the upright in heart (183). Therefore, good works do not merit salvation, or purchase the right to eternal life. In addition, they do not have any effective influence or proper causality to receiving or possessing eternal life. Nevertheless, they are the way to salvation as “sowing is to harvest, running to the garland, wrestling to the victory.”<sup>36</sup>

These distinctions notwithstanding, Tobias Crisp, among others, objected to this role of good works. While insisting that sanctification is an inseparable companion to justification and that believers are created in Christ Jesus for good works, Crisp vigorously denied that good works are a way to life or salvation. They are “the business of a person that he hath to do in his Way, Christ; but it is not the Way it self to Heaven.”<sup>37</sup> For Rutherford, and the Westminster Standards, however, good works are not just the way of salvation but also the way to salvation (see Larger Catechism 32).

#### d. The unity of the covenant of grace

Following his Reformed predecessors, Rutherford argues that the old covenant is the same as the new covenant in substance (*The Covenant of Life*, 111). The one covenant of grace is declared in the old covenant “to the Jews undir shadow and types in the law of ceremonies, and in the new testament clearlie in Christ” (“Catachisme,” 178).

Rutherford defends the unity of the covenant of grace against those who viewed the Mosaic Covenant as a covenant of works or as a legal subservient covenant (*The Covenant of Life*, 56–65). He notes that the covenant of works is made with perfect men, who do not stand in need of mercy, while the preface to the

34. *Tryal & Triumph*, 85; *Spirituell Antichrist*, 2:39–40.

35. Rutherford, *The Tryal and Triumph*, 182. Cf. *The Covenant of Life*, 177.

36. Rutherford, *Spirituell Antichrist*, 2:39. Cf. *The Covenant of Life*, 180.

37. Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted* (London: 1690) 46.

Ten Commandments expresses God's mercy to Israel. Furthermore, the Sinaitic covenant is the same as the one made with Abraham, which was a covenant of grace. To be sure there were some differences, yet it was the same in substance as the promises and requirements are the same.

### 3. *The covenant of redemption*

Rutherford marshals eleven arguments to prove from the Scriptures that there is a covenant between Jehovah God and the second person of the trinity. A key point is the interaction between God and Christ, wherein God makes certain promises to Christ and Christ willingly submits to the conditions in order to obtain the promises. Specifically, Jehovah promises to give a people to the Son and the Son chooses to "own and answer for the given, and to lose none, but to raise them up at the last Day" (*The Covenant of Life*, 293). And as Rutherford notes, "a mutuall agreement between Jehovah and the Son for one and the same undertaking is a compact and Covenant, to have us saved" (293).

The covenant of redemption is to be considered in two ways: its transaction in eternity and its transaction in time. This covenant was decided upon and made before the world began. It was decreed from everlasting. Nevertheless, it did not become a real covenant until it was made in time. It "had not being as a Covenant, nor could have any, so long as the Covenant of Works did stand" (31). Thus, it was not until Adam sinned that the covenant of redemption took effect.

That this covenant is distinct from the covenant of grace is made clear by Rutherford's discussion of the differences and relationship between these two covenants (308–315). There is a difference in parties. The covenant of redemption is between Jehovah God and the second person of the trinity. The covenant of redemption is the foundation of the covenant of grace. Therefore, "though the Covenants of Suretyship and of Reconciliation differ, yet must they not be separated" (309). Moreover, the covenant of redemption has different commands, promises and conditions. Christ is not only required to keep the law, but he is also given the special command to lay down his life as a sacrifice for sins. Unlike the elect, Christ is promised dominion over all. As we have seen, the condition of the covenant of grace is faith. Christ exercised a faith of dependency, but faith was not a condition of the covenant of redemption. Rather, since the covenant is "a bargain of buying a people to God," the condition was "the payed price and rasure" (356). Included as well was

the requirement of obedience to the moral law because that "was the condition of the Covenant of Works, to which the Man Christ, as Man, was obliged, that he might have right to Law-justification and life eternall" (356). Consequently, in the covenant of redemption, Christ willingly became the second Adam, agreeing to fulfill what the first Adam had failed to do in the covenant of works. Rutherford writes:

He [Christ] hath place in the Covenant of Works as a satisfier for us. 2. As a doer and an obedient fulfiller thereof in all points. And he is *Mediator* and *Surety* of the Covenant of Grace. 2. The first *Adam* marres all, the second ADAM who makes all things new, mends all. The first *Adam* was a publick sort of stirresman, to whom was committed the standing and falling of all mankind, and in reference to man, the standing Heaven, Earth, and Creatures in their perfection, and he spoiled all, put all things a-reeling. The second ADAM received in his arms the whole Creation that was a-falling.... He satisfied for our sins, and for our breach of the Covenant of Works (225).

### SAMUEL RUTHERFORD'S CONTRIBUTION TO SCOTTISH COVENANT THEOLOGY

Having briefly examined the history of covenant theology and the covenant theology of Samuel Rutherford, the first observation to be made with respect to assessing Rutherford's contribution to the development and establishment of covenant theology in Scotland, is that it was already established in Scotland and elsewhere by the time Rutherford makes any sort of contribution. After Rollock died in 1599, covenant theology became the norm in Scotland. This is not to say, however, that Rutherford did not make a significant contribution. He not only helped to maintain covenant theology in Scotland, he was instrumental in developing and advancing it. Rutherford's tremendous influence upon the Scottish church, his contribution to the Westminster Assembly and his discussion of the covenant of redemption substantiate his notable impact upon Scottish covenant theology.

#### 1. *Rutherford's influence upon the Scottish church*

Great men of great influence tend to leave a lasting impression and Rutherford is no exception. Many have noted his vast influence upon the Scottish church and theology. For example, M. Charles Bell has written that

Rutherford “played a major role in shaping the religious and political thought of his day, and his teaching made a lasting impact well into the future” (Bell, 70).

One way Rutherford was able to impact Scottish theology was by serving as professor for over twenty years at St. Andrews. In so doing, he “exercised an immense influence on the future ministry of [the Scottish] church” (Walker, 9). Teaching the next generation of pastors and theologians is a sure way to pass on distinctive theological views and positions, especially if the students become influential. Such was the case with Rutherford who taught William Guthrie. Of Guthrie’s impact on Scotland and connection with Rutherford, Bell writes:

Guthrie’s influence, however, was gained not so much as a parish minister as it was from his only published work, *The Christians’ Great Interest*, which first appeared in 1659. This work is truly a classic in Scottish divinity, and because it was so widely read in Scotland over so many generations, it provides an accurate reflection of the theological views of both clergy and laity. Having studied under Rutherford, one would expect that Guthrie would reproduce the main tenets of Rutherford’s theology, and such, in fact, is the case (Bell, 84).

Rutherford’s numerous published writings are another influential factor. He published eight theological works amounting to approximately 4,000 printed pages, including one work devoted to the topic of covenant theology (Coffey, 114). Perhaps his greatest legacy, however, is his involvement with the Westminster Assembly, to which we will now turn.

## 2. Rutherford’s contribution to the Westminster Assembly

Samuel Rutherford was one of the original eight Scottish delegates commissioned by the 1643 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to attend the Westminster Assembly, meeting in London, England. He was received by the Assembly on November 20 1643 and was the longest serving Scottish commissioner, leaving on November 9 1647. Although George Gillespie was the one who spoke the most of all the Scots,<sup>38</sup> Rutherford played a major role in the Assembly’s debates. Guy Richard writes:

Rutherford’s influence is seen in the prominent position he assumed in the proceedings of the Assembly. Chad Van Dixhoorn, who is working to publish the

full minutes of the Assembly, informed me in private conversations that Rutherford is among the most outspoken of the divines and commissioners in terms of sheer quantity of speeches given before the Assembly (Richard, 36n38).

Being active in the proceedings of the Assembly certainly indicates an influential role but it would be very difficult to determine to what extent and degree Rutherford impacted the shaping of the Westminster Standards, especially its covenant theology. After all, covenant theology was well developed in England before the first session of the Westminster Assembly. Determining who influenced who or whether they were already in general agreement on covenant theology is not easy to discover and is certainly beyond the scope of this paper. What is fairly certain is that there is general agreement between the covenant theologies of the Westminster Standards and Rutherford.

We have noted already the similarity between the two in regards to the parties of the covenant of grace, at least with respect to the early Rutherford. Further agreement was also noted between Rutherford and the Westminster Standards on the promises of the covenant of grace. To this we can add the covenant of works (see WCF 7.1) and the condition of the covenant of grace. Similar to Rutherford, the Westminster Standards only mention faith as a condition of the covenant. Though good works play a prominent role in salvation in that, also like Rutherford, they are the way to salvation, they are not technically said to be a condition of the covenant (see WLC 32).

Rowland Ward has recently argued that the Westminster Assembly did not side with Rutherford concerning the three covenant system. Instead, he avers that there is an intentional tension in the Confession to allow room for those who held to the covenant of redemption like Rutherford and for those who did not like Edmund Calamy (Ward, 71–72). The problem with this explanation is that it fails to take into account that Rutherford, assuming our earlier analysis is correct, did not hold to a three covenant system at the time of the Assembly. Rutherford’s position in the 1640’s seems to be the same as the Confession, namely a two covenant view system, containing the ingredients of a three covenant system.

According to A.T.B. McGowan, the one significant disagreement is Rutherford’s supralapsarianism, though

38. R.S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985) 116.



he points out that the Confession does not condemn this view.<sup>39</sup> However, in a recent study, Guy M. Richard has demonstrated that the Confession's views are most consistent with Rutherford's particular brand of supralapsarianism. Indeed, he says that the "Confession is perhaps 'more patient' of a supralapsarian reading, especially if we understand it through the eyes of Rutherford" (Richard, 43).

Since the Westminster Standards were adopted by the Scottish church, Rutherford's similar if not identical covenant theology was ensconced in the Church of Scotland. One could hardly imagine a greater contribution to the maintenance and propagation of covenant theology in Scotland.

### 3. Samuel Rutherford's doctrine of the covenant of redemption

As John Murray has observed, the emergence of the covenant of redemption "signalized a distinct development in the formulation of covenant theology" (Murray, 4:234). Rutherford, who was probably building upon the work of his friend David Dickson, was one of the first Scottish theologians to teach a three covenant system. Thus Bell correctly writes that "his formulation of a conditional covenant of redemption, as distinguished from the covenant of grace, marks a further advance in Scottish covenant theology" (Bell, 83). Not all later Scottish theologians, however, followed Rutherford in embracing a three covenant system, notably Thomas Boston and Adam Gib.

### CONCLUSION

Covenant theology is inextricably linked to Reformed theology and to a lesser degree to Scottish theology. Among the numerous first rate theologians of Scotland stands the towering figure of Samuel Rutherford. Living during a pivotal period in Scotland's history, Rutherford played an instrumental role in shaping and molding the theology that would dominate the Scottish church many years after his death.

Following a long distinguished line of great theologians, Samuel Rutherford upheld and defended Reformed orthodoxy in general and covenant theology in particular. He defended biblical truth against Arminianism and Romanism on the one hand and Antinomianism on the other as he boldly proclaimed the

absolute sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. His greatest contribution was perhaps his role in advancing covenant theology with his exposition of the covenant of redemption. Though he died nearly three hundred and fifty years ago, his covenant theology lives on in Scotland and throughout the world, particularly wherever the Westminster Standards are embraced. ■

### In Brief: James Walker's Assessment of Samuel Rutherford

Samuel Rutherford I have put first on this list and perhaps he is the greatest.... It is not easy to find any one in Church history with whom to compare this remarkable man (though I have sometimes thought of Bernard of Clairvaux), a man of power, I may say of genius, fresh, bold, penetrating, to whom no subject came amiss, teeming with intellectual energy, distinguished for his learning, but never cumbered by it, the greatest scholastic of our Presbyterian Church, and yet we are told, the plain and faithful preacher, the fieriest of Church leaders and the most devout of saints, equally at home among the tomes of Aquinas, and writing letters to a poor congregation. Altogether a sort of intellectual, theological, religious prodigy. Great defects he had assuredly. His intensity, both intellectual and spiritual, led him to extremes. He seems to have written *currente calamo*; and in style and arrangement he greatly fails. But for all, he is one of our highest names. And it was not only his countrymen that thought thus of him; he was twice over invited to occupy a chair in the Low Countries, whose universities were still in their glory. James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland: Chiefly of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Cunningham lectures, 1870-71, Second Edition, Revised (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888) 8, 13. ■

39. A.T.B. McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1997) 5.

# Presbyterian Quintessence: The Five ‘Heads’ of Church Government

By Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

## INTRODUCTION

Everyone enjoys a good mystery. And the story of this article revolves around a mystery, which, we are happy to report, has now been solved.

In 2007, this present author was given the assignment, as pastor of a congregation in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, to instruct the flock with regard to church polity.<sup>1</sup> As we began to think about how to approach that topic, our mind turned to the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) *Book of Church Order (BCO)*,<sup>2</sup> which states: “The scriptural form of church government, which is representative or presbyterian, is comprehended under five heads: a. The Church; b. Its members; c. Its officers; d. Its courts; e. Its orders” (BCO 1–1). Here was a ready-made way of understanding this aspect of ecclesiology.

But as we began to delve more deeply into the matter, several things became apparent. One is that there had not been much thinking given to polity over the last several decades, with the result that many of the concepts that were historically employed were no longer fully understood or appreciated. Another is that the description of the Church by means of the various Biblical metaphors has not been cultivated as richly as it could have been, particularly in terms of application of those metaphors to polity. And a third observation was that this terminology of five “heads” of Biblical polity was unique, in contemporary books of church order, to the PCA—which led us to wonder from whence this concept had arisen, and why.

Hence the quest was on to find the answer to the mystery, as well as to develop, though in a modest way, the implications of this five-fold approach—the quintessence, as we have dubbed it, of Presbyterian polity.

As we started on this journey, we consulted numerous church polity experts, most of whom were likewise

baffled by the question—where did this concept of five “heads” come from? Conversations with high officials (retired and active) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and with polity experts from more conservative denominations finally narrowed the matter down to this: the PCA, which had separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (or Southern Presbyterian Church), had adopted the language of the Southern tradition. But why Southern Presbyterianism? Why is this terminology not used in the other Presbyterian traditions? When was this terminology first adopted, and what prompted the Southerners to employ it?

But before we answer these questions, perhaps it is good for us to step back for a few moments and reflect on why the matter is important in the first place. Is this merely an esoteric question?

We suggest that this matter of church polity is more than merely academic, but is of great importance. This is true not only because Jesus Christ reigns over His church as king, but also because of the fact that the church is so integral a part of the life of the believer. And it has often been the case that matters of polity have intertwined with the more foundational building blocks of theology properly considered, in both the more pristine times of church history, and the times when apostasy has

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THE AUTHOR: Dr. Frank J. Smith is a contributing editor for *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

1. We would like to thank Reformation Presbyterian Church, not only for its patience in receiving our instruction, but also for assisting us in thinking through the implications of the five heads of church polity and in suggesting some of the thoughts represented in this paper. Appreciation is also hereby expressed to several churchmen, including Wayne Sparkman, Dr. David C. Lachman, Vaughn Hathaway, Dr. C. N. Willborn, and Dr. Jack Maddex, for taking the time out of their busy schedules to read the manuscript and give insightful suggestions.

2. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America, Sixth Edition* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2003).

gained the upper hand in the institutional church. Having a good grasp of church polity, therefore, is of prime significance for the blessedness of God's people and in ascertaining how to avoid doctrinal pitfalls.

## I. WHAT COMES UNDER EACH HEAD

### *A. The Church*

The first head is that of the Church itself. In this category, we properly consider the distinction between the visible and the invisible Church.

There has been confusion in contemporary Reformed theology through the failure of certain churchmen to differentiate between the Church visible and invisible. But the Bible gives warrant for this distinction.

Christ Jesus has established His Church. In the ultimate sense, His people are the elect who were chosen by God the Father from before time began, were redeemed by the blood of Christ at Calvary, and were regenerated by the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. This Church, though invisible to us, is visible to God; and, properly speaking, is that which is heir to all the promises.

There is a visible expression of this kingdom of Christ, which is the Church as it exists in this world. The Church consists of all those who make profession of faith along with their children.

However, not everyone who is a member of the visible Church is truly a believer. Or, to use a common Scriptural metaphor, "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel" (Romans 9:6). Over and over again, the Bible speaks of "the remnant" as a way of reminding us of the danger of hypocrisy, and of the fact that at least some who have the correct outward pedigree have not closed with Christ.

This consideration of the Church as such, then, is the foundational doctrine of Biblical polity. Without a proper understanding of the nature of the Church, all of the detailed discussion of polity will be virtually meaningless.

Before we pass on to the other four "heads" of polity, it is good for us to contemplate the various facets of the Church that are brought out by means of various metaphors of Scripture. The PCA BCO alludes in the Preface to two of these: Christ's "body" and His kingdom.

The most common Scriptural metaphor to speak of the Church is that of the "body of Christ." Chief among the relevant passages are 1 Corinthians 12:12–31 (the various gifts given to the body); Ephesians 5:30 (in the passage where Paul compares the Church to a bride); and Colossians 1:18.

The notion of the Church as a kingdom is brought out in numerous texts, including these: Ephesians 1:10, 22–23; 4:8ff; Matthew 13:47; and Isaiah 9:7.

But there are other metaphors which richly describe the Church. The Church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22–33; Psalm 45:10ff). The Church is the new Israel (Galatians 6:16 [cp. 3:29]; Romans 2:28–29; Philippians 3:3; Ephesians 2:11–16). The Church is a building (1 Corinthians 3:9–15), as well as a temple (2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19–22) and God's house (Hebrews 3:3–6). It is also the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). The Church consists of branches that are rooted in Christ (John 15:1–8), and is itself an olive tree (Romans 11:17–24) and a field of crops (1 Corinthians 3:6–9). The Church is the people of God (Psalm 50:4–7; 81:8; 66:8; 100:3; 125:2; 149); as well as constituting a family (Ephesians 3:14–15; 2 Corinthians 6:18). It is a flock (Psalm 28:8–9; 77:20; 78:52–55, 70–72; 80:1–3; 95:7) as well as an army (Numbers 1:45–46; 2:1ff). The Church consists of servants (Psalm 119:121–128, 176; 123:2–4; 134; 135:1–3; 143:1–2), who can be called a "worm of Jacob" (Isaiah 41:10–21).

Throughout this article, we will maintain that this metaphorical language tells us something not only about the nature of the Church in general, but also about its polity in particular.

### *B. The Members*

The next category is that of the members. How does one get to be a member of the Church?

Although we are members of the Church invisible, polity, by definition, deals with the Church visible—the Church as we see it expressed in time and space. And the members of the Church visible are those who profess the true faith along with their children.

Notice that the standard definition does not indicate faith, but rather a profession of faith. The officers to whom Christ has given the keys of the kingdom cannot read the heart—only God can. Therefore, the standard for admission of adults into Christ's visible kingdom is a credible profession of faith. There are at least four elements of this profession so that it can be regarded as believable.

First, it must be with words; Romans 10:9 says, "That if thou wilt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus." Secondly, deeds must follow, in order to validate the profession (Luke 19:8–10; Acts 19:18–20; Ephesians 2:8–10). Thirdly, profession is not a private affair, but is corporate and public (Psalm 107:2f, 32; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 2:13–22). Fourthly, that which is professed

must be the true faith (Jude 3; Acts 20:28–31; Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:16).

The children of those who profess the faith are also members of the visible Church (Genesis 17; Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Matthew 19:13–14). This truth, of course, has implications for infant baptism: these children are to be baptized because they are members of the covenant and have a right to the sign of the covenant, which is baptism.

But there is much more to be discovered. Notice how the metaphors for the Church apply to the concept of membership.

The Church is the body of Christ—which implies an organic connection among the various members. The members of the Church are to enjoy a profound and warm fellowship with one another. They belong to one another.

The Church is the kingdom of Christ—made up of a willing people who follow Jesus (Psalm 110).

As the bride of Christ, we submit to King Jesus—He is our Head, and He commands how the Church is to operate. There is also a relationship of love between Christ and His Church. Further, this metaphor implies the notion of royalty—marrying the King means that we are the royal bride (Psalm 45).

As the new Israel, the Church consists of a new ethnicity, as people from various races and backgrounds constitute it.

As a building, the Church has a definite structure which the Chief Architect has set in place. As a temple, the Church is a place of God's dwelling, made up of a people designed to be inhabited by Him and to worship Him. As God's house, the Church is God's own possession. Although the Church consists of people, the fact is that truth is paramount in the Church, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Christ is the vine, and the followers of Christ are branches. With this metaphor, we are taught the organic connection between Christ and His people, as well as the necessity of internal growth and the fact that the Church spreads like a vine. The picture of an olive tree also underscores the organic nature of the Church, as well as its spread throughout the world and its universality (Jew and Gentile alike being incorporated). The field of crops portrays the personal and corporate growth of the members.

The Church is the people of God—we belong to Him. The Church is the family of God—we're all related, through our heavenly Father and elder Brother. And sometimes, among the members of the Church, we have family squabbles.

As the flock of God, there is a preciousness to all of the sheep—exemplified by Jesus' parable of the Good Shepherd who would leave the ninety and nine to find the one lost sheep. As His sheep, we are led into green pastures and fed (Psalm 23). As an army, we are geared for battle. And our being the Church militant is seen by our living in tents ("tabernacles"), which point to our moveable and military estate.

We are servants—we're all unworthy and unprofitable to be part of His Church. And we confess that we are the worm of Jacob—a reality that must always lead us to humility in our dealings with one another.

### *C. Her Officers*

In the Old Testament, priest, prophet, and elder were the ecclesiastical officers. In the New Testament economy, new offices were instituted: apostle, evangelist, and deacon, with prophet and elder continuing.

We know from history that the post-apostolic system, in which Church rulers enjoyed parity with one another, was replaced as hierarchical bishops—particularly the Bishop of Rome—increasingly came to exercise power over others. Even before the Medieval period, there was a full-blown hierarchical system, featuring pope, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, and priest.

The Calvinistic branch of the Reformation rejected that hierarchical scheme. Four offices were generally recognized: pastor; doctor (teacher); elder; and deacon. Several factors come into play here. One is the revival of "lay leaders" (i.e., non-ministers who exercise significant office, viz., elder and deacon). Another is that there is no special priesthood (i.e., the Protestants taught the priesthood of all believers). And a third is that there was no lording of one pastor or minister over others.

In American Presbyterianism, the office of "doctor" has been enfolded into that of the "teaching elder" (another name for a minister or pastor), resulting in a "three-office" position (minister, elder, deacon). There has also been a strong move toward a "two-office" view, in which teaching elder and ruling elder are seen as equal. Sometimes this has taken the form of a radical two-office position, in which there is no distinction between minister and elder with respect to function. But most often, what has been dubbed the "two-and-a-half office" view has been adopted, in which teaching elder and ruling elder are part of the same "genus" of elder, but are distinguished as two different "species"—a distinction which entails both the qualifications for office and the functions thereof. The impetus for the two-office perspective comes from Biblical passages such as Titus



1:5–7, in which a bishop is another name for an elder; and Philippians 1:1, where Paul identifies only two offices, viz., elder and deacon.

Elders in general have the responsibilities of feeding the flock (Acts 20:17, 28), of watching over the flock (1 Peter 5:1–3), and of shepherding the flock (Jeremiah 10:21; 12:10; 17:16; 22:22; 23:1; Ephesians 4:11). The teaching elder, with respect to his role as a pastor, is to engage in these duties: (1) pray with and for his flock (Acts 6:2–4; 20:36); (2) read the Scriptures publicly (Deuteronomy 31:9–11; Nehemiah 8:1–3, 13; Isaiah 66:21; Matthew 23:34); (3) feed the flock via preaching (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:16; Titus 1:9); (4) catechize (Hebrew 5:12); (5) administer the sacraments (Matthew 28:19–20; 1 Corinthians 4:1–2; 10:16; 11:23–25); (6) bless the people (Numbers 6:24–26; Isaiah 66:21); (7) oversee the church's work, including care of the poor (Acts 11:30; Galatians 2:9–10); and (8) serve as “first among equals” (*primus inter pares*) in administration, especially with respect to the moderating of a Session meeting. The principle enunciated in Romans 12:6–8, of differing roles for different people, means that some ministers will have a special role as teacher or professor or “doctor” (2 Timothy 2:2), and some will have a special assignment as evangelist or missionary.

The special role for the ruling elder is that of being a church governor (1 Corinthians 12:28f). With the teaching elders, ruling elders turn the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:17ff; 18:17f).

The role of deacon concerns, first of all, a ministry of mercy (Acts 6:1–4), and, by extension, taking care in general of the physical needs of the church.

Only those who are qualified are suitable for office. Various moral qualities are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1ff and Titus 1:5ff. For an elder, it must be someone who is apt to teach. In all cases, it must be a man (cf. 1 Timothy 2:11–15; 1 Corinthians 14:34f).

#### D. Her Courts

Many people wonder why Presbyterians invariably refer to sessions, presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies as “courts.” What exactly, then, is a “court”?

In the minds of many people, the first thing they think of when hearing the term “court” is that of judicial process. Of course, courts do have responsibility with regard to judicial matters. A court tries cases, where evidence is presented and a judgment rendered. Ecclesiastically, this judicial activity entails turning the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:18–19; 18:15–18).

But the scope of church courts is far broader than the

trying of cases and adjudication of charges. As a matter of fact, this judicial aspect of a church court is not the primary function of a court.

In the first place, a court of the Church is the kingly court of the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ: all else is subsumed under this—the judicial aspect is but a part and not the primary part.

The first object is to see that the Lord's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, so far as is possible here on earth, in and by the Church. This first aspect concerns God's worship, ensuring that we worship Him as He would be worshipped—that is, the proper elements of worship, especially the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments.

A meeting of a court is also for discussing and deciding matters of common concern—for example, missions home and abroad; mutual encouragement, support and oversight; and ethical matters concerning the wider community (such as the sin of abortion).

Even apart from trials and discipline cases, a court is indeed a judicatory—i.e., it declares the will of the Sovereign, rather than being a legislative body. It is a meeting of the elders who exercise authority in the courts of the Lord—i.e., with a conscious (and conscientious) awareness of the One in whose presence they have assembled.

So many people today tend to think of the Church as “their” church and not that of the Lord Jesus. Thus from first to last, many have their own ends in view. As a result, worship turns largely into entertainment; the work of the Church becomes subject to pragmatic concerns rather than the Word of God; and judicial remedy is sought for protecting or rewarding one's friends and the more powerful, on the one hand, and taking revenge on one's enemies or opponents, on the other. But whenever a court acts in these ways, it obviously has abandoned what is meant by being a genuine court in the Lord's house.

What does a court do? Fundamentally, it discerns the truth of a situation in light of the facts and the Word of God, and makes pronouncements in accordance with its determination.

How does it operate? First of all, it should operate in a representative fashion—that is to say, in republican rather than democratic fashion, decisions are made by elders who have the responsibility to make such decisions on behalf of the whole. Secondly, however, the way in which said decisions are made must respect the Body as a whole: elders are not to lord over the flock, but tenderly guide them to a proper understanding as to what verdicts are meted out and why. Thirdly, the court

operates in the name of the Lord and power of the Holy Spirit—therefore, its meetings and deliberations must be bathed in prayer. Fourthly, the court must proceed in an orderly, and predictable, way, rather than according to arbitrary standards. Fifthly, the court must operate in a transparent way: it is, after all, a court—a place of jurisprudence, in which the society as a whole has great interest. And sixthly, it must act in a just manner, reflecting the equity of the Great Judge of all.

In a Presbyterian system, there are different grades or levels of courts, from the session up to a synod or general assembly. What, then, are the particular functions of a church court?

First, we would note that every court has the same inherent authority and is of the same nature. Theoretically, therefore, the same types of actions may be performed by the courts of any level.

Secondly, however, it is expedient for there to be a division of labor, according to church rules. Specifically, within Presbyterianism as a general rule, the following division of labor is observed.

At the local or sessional level, the court, in general, has care of and authority over the local church. The session admits members to the church, and exercises discipline over members of the church. It examines and ordains ruling elders and deacons. It calls congregational meetings. It also adopts the budget of the congregation (though usually with input from the deacons).

At the regional level, the presbytery has care of and authority over a district, comprised of ministers and churches. As such, it ordains and receives ministers, and exercises discipline over them. It plants, organizes, and receives churches. It exercises authority over the sessions within its jurisdiction, and does so in four “modes”: review and control (usually by means of review of sessional minutes); reference (a request from the lower court for answer to a difficult issue, or for assumption of judicial process); appeal (a formal review of a guilty verdict, initiated by one convicted of sin by a session); and complaint (a formal complaint against any action by the lower court). A presbytery also may send out missionaries (although usually this power is exercised only at the regional level, as in church planters and evangelists, rather than on a “foreign field”).

At the national level, a synod or general assembly has care of and authority over the church as a whole; exercises authority over the Presbyteries; and can send out missionaries (particularly into foreign fields).

At this point, it is important to note the significant difference between several and joint power. The elders have authority that they exercise individually (i.e., in

their “several” capacity), such as preaching, teaching, counseling, and so forth. However, there are some matters which they may exercise only in the courts of the Church. Among these are control over lower courts, and the carrying out of ecclesiastical discipline.

Much confusion exists today because of not making this crucial distinction between several and joint authority, particularly with respect to discipline. It is true that an elder or group of elders may privately rebuke an erring brother or sister; however, that private discipline may not become a turning of the keys of the kingdom apart from proper judicial process, including, either a trial or a confession of sin, with the outcome (and usually the procedure itself) being public.

Discipline is important, but in the appropriate sequence. Initially, discipline involves instruction and training. It becomes remedial and corrective as necessary and then only so far as necessary. Judicial remedy is a last resort and quite a serious matter in church courts, at whatever level (local, regional, or higher).

Following the pattern we’ve used with respect to previous “heads,” how does the notion of church courts relate to the metaphors for the Church?

First, consider the concept of the Body. It is courts that act like the skeleton in giving structure to the Body. Furthermore, we see again the organic concept: courts properly operate in a context of body life, rather than autonomously.

The Church is Christ’s kingdom—but His rule is mediate, as He exercises His control through courts.

As bride, the Church is to submit to Christ’s courts. At the same time, those who rule in courts are to do so out of love and respect for the Church, not lording it over her.

The Church consists of branches—again, we recognize the organic notion, rather than a mechanical one, of the relationship of courts to the Church as a whole. Moreover, courts should provide shade and protection to the members of the Church, rather than simply being concerned with a finding of guilt. However, the figure of a vine teaches us that the Church visible does engage in work of purging and pruning—actions which reflect the ultimate realities of the Church invisible and the differentiation between the elect and the reprobate.

The Church is a temple—and Christ, upon whom the temple is built, has given the keys to the door to be exercised by the church governors. A temple is a place of worship—and these rulers themselves engage in worship and encourage worship among the people and in families. The Church is the pillar and foundation of

the truth—a reminder that truth is foundational for a court's proceedings.

The Church is the flock of God—and when courts make decisions, they should do so in the spirit of never wanting to leave any of the sheep behind. Indeed, even in their joint capacity, elders should be shepherding the flock.

And the Church is known as the worm of Jacob. This is a reminder that humility is essential and arrogance is unacceptable: truths that church courts need constantly to keep in mind.

### *E. Her Orders*

When we speak of the “orders” of the Church, we usually think of the process by which a person is ordained. However, the notion of “orders” is grounded more generally in the idea of vocation, or calling.

The *PCA Book of Church Order* says that “Ordinary vocation to office in the Church is the calling of God by the Spirit, through the inward testimony of a good conscience, the manifest approbation of God’s people, and the concurring judgment of a lawful court of the Church” (*BCO* 16–1). The Bible embraces a representative principle with respect to officers: “The government of the Church is by officers gifted to represent Christ, and the right of God’s people to recognize by election to office those so gifted is inalienable. Therefore no man can be placed over a church in any office without the election, or at least the consent of that church” (*BCO* 16–2). Finally, a person must be equipped for office: “Upon those whom God calls to bear office in His Church He bestows suitable gifts for the discharge of their various duties. And it is indispensable that, besides possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, every one admitted to an office should be sound in the faith, and his life be according to godliness. Wherefore every candidate for office is to be approved by the church by which he is to be ordained” (*BCO* 16–3).

Out of the doctrine of vocation comes the doctrine of ordination. “Those who have been called to office in the Church are to be inducted by the ordination of a court” (*BCO* 17–1). “Ordination is the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship” (*BCO* 17–2). “As every ecclesiastical office, according to the Scriptures, is a special charge, no man shall be ordained unless it be to the performance of a definite work” (*BCO* 17–3).

In the Presbyterian Church in America, a man seeking to be ordained to the ministry must first become a candidate, and then undergo an internship for at least one year (*BCO* 18 and 19). It is expected that a candidate for the ministry will be a college graduate, and either have a seminary diploma or a certificate of having completed a theological study program; a waiver for these educational requirements requires a three-fourths vote of the Presbytery. *BCO* 21 specifies the process:

Trials for ordination shall consist of:

a. A careful examination as to:

1. his acquaintance with experiential religion, especially his personal character and family management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, and Titus 1:6–9),
2. his knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages,
3. Bible content,
4. theology,
5. the Sacraments,
6. Church history,
7. the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, and
8. the principles and rules of the government and discipline of the church.

A Presbytery may accept a seminary degree which includes study in the original languages in lieu of an oral examination in the original languages.

b. He shall prepare a thesis on some theological topic assigned by Presbytery.

c. The candidate shall prepare an exegesis on an assigned portion of Scripture, requiring the use of the original language or languages.

d. He shall further be required to preach a sermon before the Presbytery or committee thereof, upon three-fourths (3/4) vote.

No Presbytery shall omit any of these parts of trial for ordination except in extraordinary cases, and then only with three-fourths (3/4) approval of Presbytery.

While the prescribed course for ordination may seem daunting, it is borne out of a desire to keep the standards high and to preserve the Church from corruption that can come from ill-prepared officers. All manifestations of the bride must strive to keep her skirts clean,

by ensuring, as much as possible, that those who would turn the keys in Christ's kingdom and God's house are well-trained and suited to the task.<sup>3</sup>

## II. THE INTERRELATIONSHIP AMONG THE FIVE HEADS

As we have mentioned previously in this article, it is only the Southern Presbyterian tradition that sets forth church polity under five "heads." Many of the concepts and provisions in Southern Presbyterianism are found in other Presbyterian streams, but they are not arranged in this distinct way.

Particularly fascinating about this schema is that it helps to relate various aspects of polity to one another. Indeed, each of the heads serves as a foundation for the next one in line.

For instance, the notion of the Church as such must, of necessity, come first. It seems so very obvious, doesn't it? And yet, by means of speaking of five heads of church polity, that truth takes on fresh significance. It emphasizes the fact that church polity must not be understood apart from the life of the Body—or, in other words, polity is not an abstraction.

Another aspect of how each category builds on the previous one is that "the people" come before "the officers." This, it seems to us, reflects an important reality—that the Church is a commonwealth, and that the officers are servants not only of Christ, but secondarily, of the people as well.<sup>4</sup>

From the officers—particularly the ruling and teaching officers—come the courts, which is the fourth head of church polity. It is the courts who do the ordaining of officers, and ensure orderliness in church business—hence the fifth head, which is that of "the orders."

We are not the first to take notice of this natural progression. Toward the close of the nineteenth century, Franklin Pierce Ramsay observed that "the doctrine concerning this scriptural form of government [i.e., Presbyterian polity] naturally falls under five heads. After telling what the Church is, it will be next in place to tell who constitute it, that is, of what members it consists. As it is governed by officers and not by the members, the next thing must be to tell what officers it has; but as these officers do not govern severally but jointly, the courts next in place; and finally, when we have the courts for admitting to office, we may learn concerning orders, or how officers are ordained. It is this exhaustive and logical treatment that the Form of Government proposes."<sup>5</sup>

## III. WHERE AND WHY?

As we noted above, the phraseology of five heads of Biblical polity is unique today to the PCA documents. It is

3. Most Presbyterian denominations spell out in their respective Constitutions the expected qualifications for those to be ordained to office—but none more so than the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly, whose *Book of Church Order* painstakingly details the expectations. For example, in addition to the usual trials for ordination (examination in the original Biblical languages, theology, English Bible, church history, apologetics/practical theology, and exegetical skill; exposition of a passage of Scripture; a theological paper; and preaching), there is also a whole section of the BCO called the Directory for Examination. This Section G prescribes 403 questions, at least two-thirds of which must be asked of the candidate, who must pass at least eighty per cent of the questions that are asked. (There are 80 questions in the Old Testament portion, 80 questions in the New Testament, 155 in Theology [which includes hermeneutics, theology, and ecclesiology and sacraments], 20 in Apologetics, 38 in Church History, and 30 in Practical Theology.) It is noted that these questions are intended as "a guideline for examination" and that other questions may also be asked (G 1:1 C). The RPCGA, which celebrates a strongly two-office position, requires ruling elders to go through the same rigorous requirements. It is expected that a teaching elder will have a three-year seminary degree (M.Div.) while a ruling elder (or church governor) will have a two-year degree (M.A.R.), or their equivalent. "All prospective elders without a proper degree shall be examined by an approved seminary of the RPCGA, to determine that their knowledge is equivalent to the degree. A written report shall be sent to the presbytery with the results and any recommendation for further study. Presbytery shall consider this information prior to ordination" (B 4:8 N). Of course, having these daunting standards for ruling elders may virtually ensure that practically no ruling elders are ordained.

4. On a related issue, some Presbyterians have maintained that it is the officers themselves, and not the people, who are the subject of ecclesiastical power. However, James Bannerman, nineteenth century Free Church of Scotland theologian and historian, wrote: "The proper and primary depository or subject of Church power is not the office-bearers exclusively, nor the whole body of believers exclusively, but both equally, although in different ways and for different purposes" (*The Church of Christ: A treatise on the nature, powers, ordinances, discipline and government of the Christian Church*, Vol. I [New York/Seoul: Westminster Publishing House, 2002] 273). James Henley Thornwell wrote that "it is nonsense to talk about the people having a *part* in the government, they have the *whole*. And so they have the whole inherent, radical, primary power of preaching and of dispensing the sacraments. All lawful acts of all lawful officers are acts of the Church, and they who hear the preacher or the Presbytery, hear the *Church*. The case is analogous to the motions of the human body. Vital power is not in the hands or the feet, it is in the whole body. But the exercise of that power, in walking or in writing, is confined to particular organs. The power is one, but its functions are manifold, and it has an organ appropriate to every function. This makes it an *organic* whole. So the Church has functions; these functions require appropriate organs; these organs are created by Christ, and the Church becomes an organic whole;" see J. H. Thornwell, "The Princeton Review and Presbyterianism" *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIII 4 (January 1861) 788. [Note: all italicization and capitalization from quoted material throughout this paper are as in the original]

5. F. P. Ramsay, *An Exposition of the Form of Government and*



not found in the books of order of any of the other conservative Presbyterian churches, including those with “Northern” roots (such as the Bible Presbyterian Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) nor those of Covenanter and/or Seceder heritage (such as the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America). Nor is it present in the governing documents of the PC(USA): the 1983 merger between Northern and Southern branches of “mainline” Presbyterians caused the peculiarly Southern terminology to be lost.

Solving this mystery entailed going back to the writings and actions of Southern Presbyterians in the nineteenth century. An article at the very end of the antebellum period demonstrates the importance of the issue of polity. Entitled “The Divine Right of Presbyterian Church Government,” the article consisted of a lengthy review of *The Ancient Church: its History, Doctrine, Worship, and Constitution, traced for the first three hundred years*, a book by W.D. Killen, a distinguished Irish Presbyterian. The burden of the book, as well as the article, was the demonstration of *jure divino* Presbyterianism. The article set forth four heads of polity, viz., the Church herself, the officers of the Church, the courts of the Church, and the Representative system of Church government. These categories do not exactly line up with the five heads later incorporated into the Southern Presbyterian Book of Church Order; for example, instead of considering the members of the Church as a separate category, reference is made under “the Church herself” of the Church as a Christian commonwealth and of the communion of saints. Nevertheless, what we see here is a churchman beginning to think about how to structure church government in an orderly fashion under various “heads.”<sup>6</sup>

The early minutes of the Southern Presbyterian Church, known initially as the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCCSA) and from 1865 as the Presbyterian Church in the United

States (PCUS), shed more light on the subject. In 1861, the First General Assembly declared, “in conformity with the unanimous decision of our Presbyteries, that the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory of Worship, which together make up the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, are the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, only substituting the term ‘Confederate States’ for ‘United States.’”<sup>7</sup>

Upon motion from Dr. John S. Wilson, that same inaugural Assembly adopted a resolution, calling for a committee to recommend revising the polity. The minutes read:

*Whereas*, It will now become necessary, in the altered relations of our Church, shortly to publish a new edition of the Confession of Faith, with such emendations as shall conform it to the style and title of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States; and,

*Whereas*, The necessity has long been felt for a revision of the Book of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church, it is highly proper that such revision should be made before another edition of the Book is printed. Therefore,

*Resolved*. That a committee be now appointed, to which shall be referred the work of such revision or amendments of the Form of Government and Book of Discipline, and that said committee be required to report to the next General Assembly.

The Assembly Resolved, That this committee should consist of nine members, to be appointed by the Moderator.

The following persons were placed upon this Committee: J. H. Thornwell, D.D., R. L. Dabney, D.D., B. M. Smith, D.D., J. B. Adger, D.D., and E. T. Baird, D.D. Ministers: with Ruling Elders W. P. Webb, T. C. Perrin, W. L. Mitchell, Job Johnstone.

To this Committee Judge Shepherd was afterwards added on motion of Dr. Thornwell (*Minutes*, 1861, 11-12).

The next year, Dr. Thornwell, as Chairman of the Committee on Revision of the Form of Government and Book of Discipline, sent a communication to the General Assembly, informing the court that “he had been unable to convene said Committee, owing to the disturbed state of the country, and the pressure of

*the Rules of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Richmond, Va.: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1898) 12. Pastor Vaughn E. Hathaway, Jr., presently a minister in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, was a Constitutional expert for the Presbyterian Church in America. In a 2008 telephone conversation, he noted how the chapters of the PCA *Book of Church Order* were laid out according to the five heads.

6. John B. Adger, “The Divine Right of Presbyterian Church Government: A Review of Killen’s *Ancient Church*,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIII 1 (April 1860) 122–259; see especially pp. 148–159.

7. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America: With An Appendix*, Vol. I. A.D. 1861 (Augusta, Ga.: Steam Power Press Chronicle & Sentinel, 1861) 7.

Seminary duties." The Assembly accepted this explanation, and the Committee was "requested to report to the next General Assembly."<sup>8</sup> The Assembly also referred to the Committee an overture that had been presented in 1861, asking for specific provisions for amending the Constitution.<sup>9</sup>

Later that year, Thornwell died, and his death precluded the Committee from reporting to the 1863 Assembly. A special committee, selected to fill the vacancy caused by Thornwell's death, unanimously recommended that J. B. Adger replace his fellow South Carolinian as chairman. As constituted in 1863, ministerial members of this blue-ribbon panel were John B. Adger, R. L. Dabney, B. M. Smith, E. T. Baird, T. E. Peck, Benjamin M. Palmer, who were joined by ruling elders W. P. Webb, T. C. Perrin, William L. Mitchell, and W. P. Finley.<sup>10</sup>

Three members of the committee (B. M. Palmer, E. T. Baird, and J. B. Adger, along with the Honorable J. G. Shepherd) had been able to gather on April 27, 1864 in Charlotte.<sup>11</sup> Chairman Adger reported to the 1864 General Assembly: "The chief improvement which we flatter ourselves that we have made, is a classification of them [i.e., *General Rules of Order*] under distinct heads (suggested by a similar arrangement in Baird's Digest), by the use of which the Moderator and members of any Court may find at a glance any rule sought for." Referring to the Form of Government, he said,

This book was committed to us by specific reference at Augusta, and on subsequent occasions particular questions relative to the same were likewise referred. The committee are deeply impressed with the desirableness of our possessing, as a Church, a more scientific statement of the Scripture Doctrine of Church Government than is found in our present form. The subject has been largely discussed, and the doctrine much developed in various directions since our present form was adopted, and the book is no longer fully abreast of the advanced stage of the doctrine as it is actually held amongst us (*Minutes*, 1864, 244–245).

Reading those words was, for this present author, one of those "Eureka!" moments. He quietly (but still loudly enough for one of the archivists at Columbia Theological Seminary, where he was examining these minutes, to hear him<sup>12</sup>) exclaimed, "Fascinating! Fascinating!" For here we find one key piece of the puzzle to help to solve the mystery.

What we discover in these words is another manifestation of the nineteenth century interest in science.

Protestants in general, and Southern Presbyterians in particular, frequently appealed to natural religion as a way of buttressing the Christian faith. Science was viewed as the handmaid of theology, and a way of helping to demonstrate the existence of God and the validity of Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the Darwinian perspective would eventually undercut this relationship between science and theology. But Darwin's *Origin of Species* had been published only a few years before (1859), and its impact was not yet being felt—especially on a continent caught up in war.

8. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America: With An Appendix*, Vol. I. A.D. 1862 (Augusta, Ga.: Steam Power Press Chronicle & Sentinel, 1862) 7.

9. *Minutes*, 1862, 17. As noted in the 1861 Minutes (p. 39), that resolution was from Dr. Francis McFarland of Lexington (Va.) Presbytery, and proposed that amending the Confession of Faith or Catechisms would require a vote of three-fourths of the Assembly and three-fourths of the two succeeding Assemblies (or a proposal by two-thirds of the Presbyteries and ratification by three-fourths of the Assembly); and that amending the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline, and the Directory of Worship would require a vote of three-fourths of the Assembly and a three-fourths of the next succeeding Assembly (or a proposal by two-thirds of the Presbyteries and ratification by a majority of the Assembly).

10. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America: With An Appendix*, Vol. I. A.D. 1863 (Columbia, S.C.: Southern Guardian Steam-Power Press, 1863) 152.

11. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America: With An Appendix*, Vol. I. A.D. 1864 (Columbia, S.C.: Steam Power Presses of Evans & Cogswell, 1864) 244. The Honorable W. L. Mitchell was hindered from attending because of "the government's restrictions on railroad travel," R. L. Dabney and T. C. Perrin arrived on the last day of the committee's work (246).

12. Perhaps this is the best point at which to express appreciation to the staff at John Bulow Campbell Library at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, for their patience and assistance. Most of the material in this article from the nineteenth century PCUS General Assembly minutes and from the *Southern Presbyterian Review* was reproduced from the holdings of the C. Benton Kline, Jr. Special Collections and Archives at the Campbell Library.

13. Demonstrating the intertwined interest in ecclesiology and science is the list of articles for the April 1859 edition of the *Southern Presbyterian Review*. Among the articles are the following: "The Deaconship," by Rev. James B. Ramsay, of Lynchburg, Va.; "The Changes Proposed in our Book of Discipline," by Rev. R. L. Dabney; "Morphology, and its Connection with Fine Art," by Joseph LeConte, M.D., Professor of Chemistry, Mineralogy and Geology, in S. C. College; "Testimony of Modern Science to the Unity of Mankind," by J. L. Cabell, M.D., Professor of Comparative Anatomy and Physiology in the University of Virginia; "The Telluric Portion of the Cosmos," by Prof. Daniel Kirkwood, Indiana University; "Inaugural Discourse on Church History and Church Polity," by Rev. J. B. Adger, D.D., Professor of Ecclesiastical History and Church Polity, Columbia, S.C.; "The New Theological Professorship of Natural Science in Connection with Revealed Religion," by Rev. James A. Lyon, D.D., Columbus, Mississippi.

Many mainline Protestants toward the close of the nineteenth century either abandoned an interest in science or accepted evolution as a divine way of creation. But within Southern Presbyterianism, two strands developed: one which embraced the new science and consequently was willing to adopt evolution, and one which continued the old understanding of the role of (and limitations of) science.

Starting in 1861, James Woodrow was the Perkins Professor at Columbia Theological Seminary. As he wrestled in the 1870s with the alleged evidence for evolution, he gradually adopted evolutionary views. Even though in a distinct minority in the Church, this premier Southern Presbyterian evolutionist did, nevertheless, have prominent supporters. One of those supporters was none other than J. B. Adger, chairman of this committee on polity. But another member of this committee, Robert Lewis Dabney, would become one of Woodrow's staunchest opponents regarding scientific matters. These antithetical approaches would exemplify the battle over the meaning of science. But in the 1860s, the old paradigm was largely still in place.<sup>14</sup>

This commitment to the scientific enterprise led to another phenomenon, viz., that of looking at everything, including religious matters, through the prism of "science." Accordingly, Southern Presbyterian churchmen penned articles on the "science" of pastoral theology, including, among other things, a scientific evaluation of evangelism, of prayer, and of revivals.<sup>15</sup>

In his 1866 article on "The Science of Pastoral Theology," John Rice wrote:

The greatest difficulty in the way of constructing a true science of administrative theology, is that the whole subject has always been regarded as a matter of purely subjective experience. No one seems willing to learn any thing except from what he himself has felt, or from the experience of some other man, to whom he has committed the duty of doing his thinking and feeling for him.

14. This is not to say that there was total agreement even in the 1860s. Robert Lewis Dabney sparred with James Woodrow as to the relationship of natural and special revelation: see Dabney, "Geology and the Bible," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIV 2 (July 1861) 246–274; and Woodrow, "Geology and Its Assailants," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XV 4 (April 1863) 549–568. Nevertheless, in these early days, there appeared to be concord as to the role which science should play with respect to illustrating divine truth and supporting the Church in its theological endeavor.

15. See, for example, the following: John Rice, "The Science of Pastoral Theology," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XVII 3 (November 1866) 330–341; and George D. Armstrong, "A Scientific Study of the Doctrine of Prayer," *Presbyterian Quarterly* VI (1892) 227–245.

One way of arranging the "four great departments of theological science" is by putting Exegetical Theology first, followed by Historical Theology, Didactic Theology, and Administrative Theology.

According to this classification, the first and second furnish the material of which the third is constructed, while the fourth takes the finished result, and working it over again, moulds it all into forms and formulae which render the whole system practical. Thus every truth taught in the Scriptures, illustrated in the history of the Church, and systematized by the labors of gifted and pious men, is incorporated and actually reduced to practice by the science of pastoral theology. Thus viewed, the department of administrative theology, demands more learning, profounder views, and more constructive genius, than any of the others. Whoever undertakes to teach this science, will find himself under the necessity of creating it. He must not only construct it out of the material furnished by the other three departments; he must also use up all those materials, and leave no rubbish which could not be made to fit anywhere in his building. So far as we know, the first course of this grand edifice is yet to be laid.

After writing of the other departments of theology, Rice stated that the Church is the "great central idea of administrative theology."

The science will therefore show the relation of the Church to man the sinner, and man the saint; to salvation as a present reality, to faith, repentance, and all graces; then to effectual calling, to election, to the persons of the Godhead, the Spirit, the Son, the Father. It will show the reverse process, the relations of the Church to the Father who chose, the Son who redeemed, and the Spirit who effectually calls; and so through election, redemption, calling, faith, repentance, and ever grace, we come back to the sinner saved, or the saint—the member of the Church of God. Then, as the second branch of the subject, it will be necessary to trace the relation between all that we have thus learned, to the visible organisation of the Church, the form of its government, its nature and powers, its officers, courts, members, and ordinances. A true science of Church government must necessarily exhibit the correspondence between the great end for which the Church was instituted, viz., the glory of God in the salvation of men, through the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and the form which, under divine direction, the Church has assumed, with all its officers and their functions.

Then the administration of the affairs of this Church, so constituted and so related to man and to God, is the business of the pastoral office, by whomsoever exercised. Pastoral theology, therefore, is the science by which the details of this administration are shown in their relations to the design of the Church, and the whole of the grand system of truth of which the Church is the pillar and ground.

The author contended that pastoral theology will “include the discussion of the functions of the officers and courts of the Church, and the time and manner of their exercise. These functions are two, teaching and ruling.... The fundamental principles of pastoral theology as a science is that every power and function of the Church must be used in accordance with the system of doctrines taught, and the end for which Christ gave his Church authority to rule. The science must show this agreement. The Church, to its minutest fibre, must be pervaded by the energy of a divine life, and this life must be supported by the truth as it is in Jesus. Orthodoxy and living piety must be inseparably blended in the manifestations of the activity of the Church. Take away the life, and the Church of course is dead; take away the truth, and she is insane. We shall then have madness first, and then death. The theology of the truth and that of the life must be coextensive.” Rice concluded by saying that the “science of administrative theology must be built up and settled as truly and strongly as our science of dogmatic theology.”

We are traveling in an unknown land, where a few pilgrims have preceded us, but no surveys have been made, no highways cast up, no land-marks established. If we have succeeded in giving ever so rude and incomplete a map of the country, it is more than we dared to hope for, perhaps more than any one will that we have accomplished. If, however, what we have written shall induce some abler mind, and more vigorous and graceful pen, to discuss this subject, which to us seems to be of transcendent importance, our utmost expectations will be realised.

In general terms, there was a desire, as expressed in this article just after the War, for a scientific approach to pastoral or administrative theology. And, as the evidence clearly shows, Southern Presbyterian leaders, in accord with that general motif, also sought to discover and observe the scientific principles of church polity.

An 1861 article by a minister from Laurens District,

South Carolina, acknowledged that the “magnitude of Church government, as an object of thought, and its consequent difficulty, to some extent accounts for the imperfection of our knowledge of this object. But we may find another reason in the nature of language—the relation of language to thought.... The languages of the Church were first Hebrew, then Greek, after that chiefly Latin, and now, with us, English. From these changes of language, and our imperfect knowledge of them, they have failed to yield us a vivid and enduring light—to give us a *science* of the Church. The twinkling and expiring sparks of thought have not sufficed to reveal the symmetry and beauty, the order, firmness, and duration of the Christian temple.”<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, the author went on to refer to Princeton College president, James McCosh, a proponent of Scottish Common Sense Realism who would later attempt to harmonize Darwinism and Scripture. In 1855, four years prior to the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, McCosh had published a book entitled, *Typical Forms and Special Ends in Creation*. The 1861 article states: “We think the opinion of Presbyterians, that the form of Church government is divine, and that that form is a system of courts having judicial and executive powers, may receive confirmation from a new source. We believe that our views are in harmony with the great laws of ‘typical forms and special ends,’ so fully illustrated by McCosh. The one, ‘typical forms,’ as well as the other, ‘special ends,’ will be found in the dispensations of God *in the kingdom of His Son*, and point to a most interesting analogy between nature and revelation.” The article applied these laws this way: “God gave His people, through Moses, a form of government, which is typical to His Church now, though that form was modified, especially at the coming of Christ, to suit a grander field of operations. It would result from this that we can not now comprehend the ‘true Tabernacle’ without recurring to the Old Testament. And this harmonizes with the words of the Apostle: ‘The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.’ We must yet consult Moses for law and forms of government” (Hillhouse, 441–442).

The same motif of relating science and polity continued into the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1881, J. A. Quarles employed the terms “genus” and “species” to discussion the relationship between the offices of bishop and deacon: he observed that “no species is

16. J. B. Hillhouse, “Principles of Church Government,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIV 3 (October 1861) 431–443; the quote is from page 432.



ever cointensive with its genus; for species must equal the genus plus the differentia.” He concluded:

The true relation between these two orders or offices is quite simple and clear. It is not that of species and genus, but of co-ordinate species of the common genus, church-officer.... Bishop and deacon are not higher

17. J. A. Quarles, “Our Church Policy—Shall it be Progress or Petrification?”, *Southern Presbyterian Review* XXXII 4 (October 1881) 597–628; the quotations are from pp. 613–614.

18. James Murray, “The Capacity of Presbyterianism as a Form of Government for Rapid Church Extension,” *Presbyterian Quarterly* III 3 (July 1889) 375–388; the quotations are from pp. 380 and 388.

19. This, we believe, is one of the errors manifest in the way in which a significant portion of the PCA has construed church polity: not really acknowledging the organic connection among the members and hence among the courts of the body as a whole. The impetus for rejecting an organic connection among church courts comes from a fear of higher courts being able to take over congregations and their assets, as has often happened when bureaucrats in liberal denominations seek to squelch conservative dissent or prevent ecclesiastical separation. Of necessity, however, if a relationship is not organic, then it must be mechanical—and sterile. If church courts do not relate to each other in the context of a “body,” then their relationship is only a matter of cold law, and not of love.

The apprehension over confiscation of property has caused PCA churchmen to conclude, bizarrely, that a higher court may *not* “act for” a lower court—even though the PCA *Book of Church Order* specifically provides that in an appeal, a higher court may “render the decision that should have been rendered” (42–9); and that in a complaint, a higher court “has power, in its discretion, to annul the whole or any part of the action of a lower court against which complaint has been made” (43–10).

In 1986, the PCA General Assembly heard a report from its Ad Interim Committee on the General Assembly. The Committee minority report, authored by Ruling Elder Bruce Ferg (an Arizona attorney) and Dr. George Knight (at the time a professor at Covenant Theological Seminary), argued that the Committee’s recommendations “are a radical deviation from American Presbyterianism, without adequate support in law, logic, or Scripture.” That minority report lost by a vote of 372–373, “with the acting moderator casting the deciding vote.” The court proceeded to adopt the Ad Interim Committee’s report, which eschewed a higher court from “taking an action on a matter over which a lower court had original jurisdiction, which action is as conclusive of the matter as if it had been made by the lower court and is similarly enforceable.” A higher court, according to the Ad Interim Committee (and the General Assembly), could “act against” a lower court by suspending some of its ecclesiastical privileges or even “dismissing it from the fellowship.” However, please note that that action might not protect a congregation that is having to deal with a rogue Session—a point made by the minority: “although the existence of power in a higher court to act for a lower one (like all power) is subject to abuse, properly exercised such power is a good thing, providing *protection*, especially for congregations.” In other words, we might say that the minority wanted the higher court to be able to act in a way that allows for the use of a scalpel rather than an ax. See *Minutes of the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Decatur, Ga.: Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, 1986) 102–105, 442–443. This mechanistic concept was also

and lower orders, considered as species and genus, but simply in the sense that the separate and distinct functions of the bishop are of a higher dignity than those of the deacon. As man and monkey are both species of animals, but man is the higher of the two.<sup>17</sup>

In 1889, James Murray argued that the Presbyterian form of government is Scriptural and therefore well-adapted to missions and church extension; he wrote:

Granting the premise that our polity is Scriptural, the inference is unavoidable that, in every respect, it must be such a vehicle as the church of Christ can use to the greatest possible advantage in the successful prosecution of her evangelistic work. Everywhere in nature, both animate and inanimate, a correspondence has been established by the Creator between form and function. Does this great law, which seems to pervade the heavens and the earth, break down only at its point of contact with the Christian church? Has the wisdom of God suited the means to the end even where the movements of microscopic life are involved, and contravened this broadly-marked principle of its working only where the end is one of transcendent importance, of no less moment indeed than the glory of his grace in the salvation of countless millions?

Later in the article, having appealed to nature, Murray used mechanical science to speak of Presbyterian polity:

In form and structure it is as faultless as any organization can be. It is a machine of master workmanship down to even the smallest detail, without a superfluous wheel, an unnecessary screw, or a useless lever; and if it has not been worked up the full measure of its capability, it is either because the motive power has not always been wisely and faithfully applied, or because we have too often attempted to effect with only a part of the machinery what was designed to be effected by the machinery as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

We must confess that we are not totally comfortable with this employment of a mechanical figure to speak of the Church. As a matter of fact, this particular a-Biblical metaphor might indeed be misleading in at least two ways. One, it could denigrate the organic concept of the Church that is set forth by the figure of vine and branches, or the figure of the body. Two, it could imply a mechanistic construct with respect to the relationship of the graded courts to each other.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Murray's mechanical metaphor is another illustration of how a scientific mindset contributed to the concept of polity.

### *Applying the Science of Polity*

Southern Presbyterians employed scientific methodology and appealed to analogies between nature and revelation in dealing with church polity. But what did that mean in practical terms? In 1864, the General Assembly committee explained some of the deficiencies which they sought, by means of a scientific methodology, to rectify:

For example: the book does not contain any statement of what are the radical principles of our system, except a very imperfect one, introduced by a mere foot-note. Again, our doctrine of the Courts receives no adequate presentation, nor is anything found in the book respecting the duties in full of the different office-bearers. Again, the Evangelist does not appear in any part of the book, except in a clause appended to the chapter on Ordination and in the general references made to that important office in the chapter on Missions. Then, again, the method prescribed in the book for setting apart Ruling Elders and Deacons without the imposition of hands is clearly unscriptural; and the remarkable omission cries aloud for the consideration of the Church (*Minutes*, 1864, 245).

The committee that year asked the General Assembly "to have the opportunity of a still further revisal of their work, and of submitting it to another and a fuller meeting of their own members." Because of the extensive nature of the emendations being proposed, the committee argued "that there is no possible way of our reporting to the Assembly satisfactorily than by spreading out the documents in print before the eye, that their various parts may be deliberately considered and compared together, and the whole be compared with the present books" (*Minutes*, 1864, 245–246). Due to the War, the committee was unable to meet prior to the 1865 General Assembly, or to distribute copies among ministers and elders.<sup>20</sup> However, the next year, the whole report was adopted, which included revision of the Rules of Parliamentary Order, Canons of Discipline, and Form of Government. The committee was given "liberty to make verbal changes" in the report, and each part was "sent down as a separate overture to the Presbyteries for their adoption."<sup>21</sup>

### WANDERING IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL WILDERNESS

But this effort at revision met with an ambiguous response. The Assembly appointed a "Committee to examine the reports of the Presbyteries concerning the Book of Order," chaired by the Rev. Dr. J.R. Wilson. This Committee examined the Presbyteries' responses to the overtures from the 1866 General Assembly with regard to "the 'Form of Government,' 'Canons of Discipline,' and 'Rules of Parliamentary Order.'" The Committee stated that thirty-five of the forty Presbyteries which responded answered "all the overtures with an unconditional negative;" four of them "with a conditional negative;" and only five adopted "the overture with reference to Rules of Parliamentary Order" and only one adopted "the whole three absolutely." It was noted that "the Presbyteries are impressed with the importance of the labors that have been performed by the Assembly's Committee on Revision, and express their desire to have the results of these labors preserved." However, the answers from the Presbyteries "also bring out the fact that there is a great diversity of opinion in the Presbyteries with respect to the changes proposed by the overtures; very few of them coinciding in the same objections or concurring in the same criticisms." Accordingly, the Assembly, following the recommendation of this Committee, voted that "it is inexpedient to continue the Committee on Revision, or to appoint another at this time." However, the Presbyteries' responses were to be "all carefully filed away, with the overtures themselves, for future reference and use;" and the Assembly expressed to the Committee on Revision "its sense of the value of their long-continued and laborious work" and offered "its thanks for what they have done in their endeavor to set forth the great principles of the Constitution of our Church."<sup>22</sup>

Less ambitiously, the 1868 Assembly appointed a special committee to deal with "the powers of elders,

widely circulated throughout the PCA and various seminaries training future ministers in the form of a book by a couple of prominent attorneys, Ruling Elders Robert C. Cannada and W. Jack Williamson, *The Historic Polity of the PCA* (Greenville, S.C.: A Press, 1997).

20. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States: With An Appendix*, Vol. I, A.D. 1865 (Augusta, Ga.: Printed at the Constitutionalist Job Office, 1865) 349–350.

21. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. II, A.D. 1866 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed at the office of the Southern Presbyterian Review, 1866) 37.

22. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. II, A.D. 1867 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed at the Office of the Southern Presbyterian Review, 1867) 149.

deacons, and trustees.”<sup>23</sup> This committee apparently morphed the next year into the Committee on the Revised Book of Church Order. The 1869 minutes state: “Resolved, That this Assembly having received the report of the Special Committee to whom was referred the ‘Book of Church Order’ for revision and amendment, hereby orders the said Book in the amended form reported by the Committee to be sent down to the Presbyteries so that they may take such action as is specified in the memorial and in the report of the Committee on the subject which was adopted by this Assembly, to wit: That they express their assent to such portions thereof as may meet their approval; and send up also to the next Assembly objections to any portions they may disapprove of; and with a request that the portions disapproved of be revised by that Assembly and sent down for the action of the Presbyteries, with a view to final action by the Assembly of 1871.”<sup>24</sup>

An October 1869 article, “The Amended Form of Government,” delineated several of the issues which that author, John Archibald Smylie, had with the proposal. First, he noted that it would be prudent to consummate full organic union with the Synod of Kentucky

(which had withdrawn from the PCUSA) before taking final action on the new Form of Government. Secondly, he wanted to protect against *in thesi* statements becoming binding upon the Church—especially given the 1861 experience with the Gardiner Spring Resolutions, in which the Northern-dominated General Assembly of the PCUSA required allegiance to the Federal government in Washington, D.C. Thirdly, he argued that non-communicant members should have a vote in the election of pastors. Fourthly, he desired strong statements on almsgiving, which he viewed as voluntary but also enforceable in that failure to pay a tithe should result in loss of church privileges. (“The deacons might be, and should be, empowered in certain cases to assess the sums due or lawfully required upon the church members *pro rata*, according to each one’s list of taxable property. As the government is representative, it is therefore, theoretically, the church voluntarily taxing itself, by its own authority.”) Fifthly, this system of requiring financial support requires that “there must be in the judicatories a proper system of representation. Taxation without a proper system of representation is exceedingly objectionable. It would be improper, then, to have church courts filled up with members who represent no persons but themselves.” This is a principle which the author would apply not only to ruling elders but to ministers without charge. This is especially so, since ministers and elders are not two separate classes—a point which the author believed the proposed Form of Government did not sufficiently clarify. He also advocated the abolition of synods, as being unnecessary and expensive.<sup>25</sup>

According to Jack Maddex, underlying the general opposition in the PCUS was a reluctance to adopt the “centralizing” trends embodied in Thornwell’s original understanding. “Framed by disciples of Thornwell and conditioned by the founding events of the Southern Church, the proposed *Book of Church Order* appeared to write ‘Centralization forever!’ on its Church’s banner.” However, with the defeat of the Confederacy, Southern Nationalism gave way to fears about Radical Reconstruction enforced by the Federal government. That, coupled with the experiences of the brethren in the Synods of Kentucky and Missouri who were objecting to the PCUSA Assembly’s crackdown upon themselves as ecclesiastical dissenters (and who were in the process of switching sides by joining the PCUS), swung the pendulum in the Southern Church toward the side of those who preferred a decentralized approach to church polity.<sup>26</sup>

The General Assembly Committee reported in 1870,

23. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. II, A.D. 1868 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed at the Office of the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 1868) 276. This committee’s membership consisted of R. L. Dabney (Va.); J. R. Wilson and W. L. Mitchell, Esq. (Ga.); J. A. Lefevre (Md.); A. W. Miller and Jesse H. Lindsay, Esq. (N.C.); and Judge J. A. Inglis (S.C.).

24. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. II, A.D. 1869 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed at the Office of the *Southern Presbyterian Review*, 1869) 396.

25. J. A. Smylie, “The Amended Form of Government,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XX 4 (October 1869) 477–492. The author at the time was a minister in Milford, Texas.

26. See Jack Maddex, “Presbyterians in the South, Centralization, and the *Book of Church Order*, 1861–1879,” *American Presbyterians* 68:1 (Spring 1990) 24–45. Professor Maddex demonstrated that there was not uniformity among Southern Presbyterians with respect to polity, which led to the long, drawn-out process of adoption of the revised Book. For an example of the on-going debate even two years after the revision was finally approved, see J. A. Quarles, “Our Church Policy—Shall It be Progress or Petrification?” Quarles observed that while the “mother Church of Scotland has never had but one theology; she has had, however, two books of discipline. In this country we adopted neither of the Scottish formularies, but took the English Westminster, and modified it. Under this we had repeated, prolonged, and bitter controversies. We have revised, developed, pruned, and greatly improved it in our present Book of Church Order. But it is manifest that the thoughtful and progressive element in the Church is not yet satisfied. No one wished to change our Confession of Faith or Catechisms; but there are many who believe that we have not yet succeeded in developing and perfecting a pure scriptural Presbyterianism” (597–598).

1871, and 1872. The 1870 Assembly took note of the following responses from the various Presbyteries. Of the fifty-four Presbyteries, exactly half "may be classed together as favoring the further revision and early adoption of the Book." However, twenty "may be classed as being unfavorable to the present agitation of this subject." There were seven Presbyteries which did not respond. Thus there was "an exactly equal division of the Presbyteries, so far as the question of the present adoption of the Book is concerned." The Special Committee on the Book of Church Order moved that "In light of this fact, and in view also of the great importance of a general agreement in the change of our fundamental law, your Committee recommend that all these proposed amendments by the Presbyteries, be referred to the original Committee on Revision, to be examined and incorporated in the new Book, according to the mind of the majority in the Church as therein indicated, which, in its amended form, shall be reported to the next Assembly."<sup>27</sup>

In 1871, the "Committee was continued, to prosecute the work assigned to it, and to make further report to the next Assembly."<sup>28</sup> However, that bare action masks the fact that there was drama behind it, as recounted by Dr. Adger himself.

Dr. J.R. Wilson reminded the house that the answers of the presbyteries in 1869 had been referred by that Assembly in one mass to this Committee for examination and collation. This work the Committee had been doing, and now it was proposed to cut them off in mid career. Dr. Wills thought no good would come of this work. The new book is full of crotchets which are not Presbyterian, and will damage Presbyterianism. The Church wants life rather than law. Dr. Samuel J. Baird said the principles of Presbyterian church government are found in the Scriptures; the details as found in our Constitution are of less than one century's standing, and some of these are the results of compromises of principle by various parties, involving as a consequence the emasculation of the Church's strength and energy. Moreover, our present book is adapted in its details to the small and dense population of Scotland, and not to this country; to a period one century back, and not to this age. Missions are hardly named in our book, and the Sabbath-school is utterly unknown to it. He urged moreover that the examination of the book of ministers and laymen had been of great service to the Church, and wished the Committee continued, but not restricted in their labors; but desired that they in their wisdom select such portions of their work to be reported from

time to time as it might be convenient for the Church to consider. The motion to instruct the Committee was not agreed to, and the question recurred on continuing the Committee. Mr. Cater said the oldest member of his Presbytery had pronounced that the leading principles of the new book were neither in the Scottish standards nor the Bible. The motion to continue the Committee was agreed to.

It is gratifying to note the intelligent conservatism which thus marked the Assembly's decision. Touching the actual condition of opinion throughout our presbyteries as to this revision, there was some error in the statements of some of the speakers. It is very far from being correct, that the Church has "almost unanimously rejected the Committee's work." How could that be the judgment of the Church, and yet her Assembly year after year manifest such a different estimate? In this very Assembly several men of influence exhibited the desire to put an end to this whole undertaking, yet the Assembly refused to sustain them. *First*, there was a motion for indefinite postponement of the subject, which upon discussion was withdrawn. Then, *secondly*, there was a motion to confine the Committee for the present to the Book of Discipline; and whilst that was under discussion, there was, *thirdly*, another motion to docket this business and take up what the mover thought was "much more important." But the Assembly differed with this opinion. Then, *fourthly*, the Assembly voted not to confine the Committee to the Discipline. *Fifthly*, and finally, it voted to continue the Committee without any restrictions. These proceedings of the Nashville Assembly, as well as those of Louisville and Mobile and other Assemblies, show that it must be an error to suppose that our Church is generally, not to say unanimously, unfavorable to the revision. But we have it on the very best authority, that a careful collation of the answers of presbytery to the Assembly at Louisville, which were all referred back to the original committee by that Assembly, reveals a very different state of opinion amongst the presbyteries generally from what some of the speakers in the late Assembly supposed to exist. Out of some thirty-nine presbyteries which responded to the Mobile Assembly's overture, not more than three expressed the desire to have the revision come to an end. The remainder expressed

27. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. II, A.D. 1870 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed at the Presbyterian Publishing House, 1870) 518–519.

28. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. III, A.D. 1871 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed at the Presbyterian Publishing House, 1871) 9.



themselves generally favorable to the revision, if certain changes could be made in that document. A number of the larger presbyteries went through a very minute and thorough revisal of the revision and indicated all the changes they desired; whilst nearly all the presbyteries pointed out more generally their corrections. It may not be amiss to state here, on the same authority, that there is not one captious criticism amongst the many offered, and not one which exhibits any other disposition towards the revision than to make it as perfect as possible. And further, that nine out of ten of all the changes suggested are such as the Committee of Revision must themselves unhesitatingly approve and recommend; so that, in the language of members of that Committee, the collation manifests these two things—*first*, that the revision is at least fifty per cent. the better for the work bestowed on it by the presbyteries; and, *secondly*, that there is one hundred per cent. more ground to believe now than previously to this examination of it by the presbyteries, that it is destined to be adopted by the Church. Meanwhile, it is getting to be more and more the fact, that this revision is the work not of any committee, but of the whole Church. And this, of course, is the best possible augury both for the acceptableness and the goodness of the work.<sup>29</sup>

In the springtime prior to the next year's Assembly, the discussion on church polity continued in the unofficial church organs. J. A. Smylie wrote: "There is no doubt a wide dissatisfaction in our Church with its Form of Government. It is equally clear that a great variety of views exists, as to whether any, and if any, what changes should be made." Even though Southern Presbyterians "harmonise so completely on doctrinal points, the same is not true in regard to the principles of Church government." The author opined: "The Westminster Assembly endeavored to effect such a compromise as would be accepted by all parties. The result was that

many important points were left unsettled or obscure; and those professedly adopting the system have differed both in their interpretation and in their practice." He went on to write: "It would seem to be a strange fact that so many are wedded to the Book as it is, and so averse to any change. That which is confessedly an assemblage of compromises, assuredly needs to be so far changed as to be made coherent; especially do things that are undetermined and vague need to be accurately defined." The Texas pastor focused particularly on the issues surrounding the nature of the ruling elder and the issue of parity of office between minister and elder.<sup>30</sup>

At the 1872 Assembly, in conjunction with the Committee report, the Rev. S.R. Wilson, D.D., offered a substitute motion that commended the "care and diligence" of the Committee but which argued that "In full view of the facts bearing upon this matter of the Revision of the Constitution of the Church, the Assembly deem it inexpedient to send down to the Presbyteries the Rules of Discipline reported by the Committee, or further to continue the agitation of this subject in the Church." The motion further resolved "That the revision of the Form of Government and Book of Discipline be indefinitely postponed, and that the Committee of Revision be, and they are hereby, discharged from the further consideration of the subject." However, this motion was voted down, 38–52. Instead, the Assembly, by a vote of 50–38, adopted a resolution by the Rev. Dr. George D. Armstrong which sent down to the Presbyteries the Book of Discipline "to be by them either adopted as it stands, or to be further criticized, and their criticisms sent up to the Assembly, as they may elect." Also in 1872, the Committee of Publication "was instructed to forward without delay one copy of the Revised Rules of Discipline to every minister, and one to every session of the Church, with a view to examination of it at the next meeting of the Presbyteries." During the Report on the Revised Book of Discipline, the Assembly decreed that the revision committee would "retain the Form of Government in their hands until they can with due care affix to it the necessary proof texts. In the meantime the Presbyteries and the ministers and elders of our Church should have the privilege, we conceive, of suggesting any further emendations which may occur to them." Meanwhile, the revision committee recommended the adoption of the revised Rules of Discipline.<sup>31</sup>

The 1873 Assembly met in Little Rock. John B. Adger on behalf of the Committee on Revision of the Book of Church Order sent a report, which noted that the Committee had deferred to the "expressed wishes of several of the Presbyteries, to have the Revision submitted in

29. John Bailey Adger, "The General Assembly of 1871," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XXII 4 (October 1871) 541–543.

30. J. A. Smylie, "The Presbyterate," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XXIII 3 (April 1872) 228–245; the quotations are from pp. 228–229. John Archibald Smylie's no-compromise approach is seen in a sermon on Proverbs 14:12, delivered on April 20, 1860 during his pastorate in Rosedale, Louisiana; the preacher declared: "As it is in the physical world so it is in the moral world. There are some mistakes which are radical and soul destroying in the moral world, while all mistakes injure the soul more or less."

31. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. III, A.D. 1872 (Columbia, S.C.: Printed at the Presbyterian Publishing House, 1872) 164–166, 172, 218–219.

portions." The report continued: "As it has become evident that a majority of the Presbyteries have declined to adopt the Revised Rules of Discipline, and as the desire of a number of them is to have your committee discharged, it seems to us proper, with a view to relieving the Assembly of any possible embarrassment in acceding to their request, that your committee should now send up to your venerable body a copy of the Revised Form, with the Presbyteries' amendments incorporated, so that the Assembly may dispose of the whole matter as it may deem best."<sup>32</sup>

That Assembly appointed a special committee to which it referred "the answers of the Presbyteries on the revision of the Book of Discipline." That special committee reported "that out of the forty-seven Presbyteries from which reports have been received, thirty approve the work of revision, and of the revised Rules of Discipline. But, of this number, ten, on the ground of expediency, or for other reasons, decline to adopt. Of the remainder, fifteen decline to adopt; while three decline to vote either to adopt or not." Therefore, "a majority of the Presbyteries are in favor of a revision of this portion of our standards, and substantially approve of the changes proposed in the Revised Rules of Discipline. Yet, at the same time, it is evident that a majority of the Presbyteries heard from do not adopt the said Rules." Moreover, "a majority of the Presbyteries reporting to this Assembly are in favor of discontinuing the work of revision for the present," but virtually all of these "desire that the Revised Rules, with the criticisms and amendments proposed by the Presbyteries, shall be preserved in the archives of the Assembly for future reference." The special committee recommended that the Committee on Revision be commended and that its work, and the suggestions of the Presbyteries, be preserved for posterity. However, the special committee's recommendation extended not only to the Rules of Discipline, but to all of the work of the revision ("That the Book of Church Order having the amendments of Presbyteries incorporated ... be placed in the hands of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, to be preserved by him in the archives of the Assembly, together with the Rules of Discipline, as already provided"). The Assembly approved the report of its special committee, with the result that "the whole work of revision" was "for the present, suspended, and the Committee, entrusted with the same, discharged" (*Minutes*, 1873, 328–339). Thus the controversy over the Rules of Discipline spilled over to the revision of the Book of Church Order as a whole, delaying the implementation of the polity revisions as had been originally proposed a decade earlier.

Richmond K. Smoot, pastor in Bowling Green, Kentucky, commented on the situation:

Looking at the matter as it now stands, we cannot but express a regret that the two classes of men in the Church, the tender-footed and the profoundly indifferent, so trot together in this ecclesiastical harness as to defeat those who are deeply concerned for a better state of things in our Church touching the question of discipline. We need no better evidence of the sad and lamentable condition of the Church on this subject, than the fact that, after so long a time agitating the question, there are ten *venerable* courts of the Church which have not condescended to notice one of the most excellent, thorough, and exhaustive productions ever offered to the Church on the subject of discipline....

The Committee on Revision have reason to congratulate themselves that a majority of the whole Church has approved of their work and stand ready to make it the law of the Church; and all the more so, because the Presbyteries which adopted it are able to give a reason for the proposed changes, pointing it out in the superior excellency, beauty, and truth, of the Revised Book. Yet a source of regret is, that part of this very number are willing to yield up, or waive, the whole matter upon that which is always an uncertain ground, *expediency*,—and yield up this deep conviction, too, to those very fathers and brethren who have shown little disposition to tolerate the question, and would neither hear nor examine with any degree of patience the reasons which the advocates of the Revised Book were able and willing to give for the changes which they asked. The cry came up that they were weary of the agitation of these questions, and wanted the Church to have rest. Without having ever thoroughly considered the issues involved, they solemnly asked the Assembly and the Church to dismiss the whole subject upon the flimsy plea that such agitation would mar the peace of the Church. They seem to have forgotten that agitation is a source of purity and health quite as often as it is a disturber of the peace. They appear not to have seen that, as the ocean purifies itself by its own agitation; or the atmosphere, by its agitation, lifts the hazy fog from the valley and lets in the sunlight; and the forest tree, by the agitation of its branches, sends its roots deeper and fixes them firmer between the rocks; so the Church of God, must sometimes, by agitation, purify herself, clear up the haziness

32. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. III, A.D. 1873 (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1873) 307–308.

that hangs round her discipline, and fix the soundness of her doctrine deeper in the hearts of her people.<sup>33</sup>

However, the matter was destined to come back.<sup>34</sup> In 1876, a ruling elder from Louisville Presbytery, Mr. P. Joyes, offered this resolution, which the Assembly adopted: "In light of the increasing calls upon the General Assembly by overtures for the interpretation of the Form of Government and Book of Discipline, and the difficulty of considering properly such overtures amidst the pressure of the routine necessary business of the Church, which requires all the time—Resolved, that the Committee of Bills and Overtures be instructed to consider and report to this Assembly whether it be not expedient to refer again to the Presbyteries the Revised Book of Government and Book of Discipline."<sup>35</sup>

33. R. K. Smoot, "The General Assembly of 1873," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XXIV 4 (October 1873) 598–600. The "Historical Preface for the Form of Government and Rules of Discipline" in the 1961 PCUS Book of Church Order blamed the delay on the "uncertainty of the times and the uncertainty of the church as to what it wanted in its polity" (*The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* [Richmond, Va.: The Board of Christian Education, 1972] 7).

34. Indeed, the discussion continued in the religious press. In "Form of Government of the Apostolic Church," Atlanta pastor R. C. Ketchum argued for the three-fold distinction set forth in Philippians 1:1 of saints, bishops, and deacons; and also contended that Jesus' kingship over the Church implies that He is the only law-giver in Zion. See his article in *Southern Presbyterian Review* XXIV 4 (October 1873) 471–501.

35. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. With An Appendix*, Vol. IV, A.D. 1876 (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, Printers, 1876) 239, 241. Patrick Joyes' interest in polity matters is perhaps understandable, considering that he was at that very time involved in a dispute over church property. In 1874, the First Presbyterian Church of Louisville split. Joyes and six other elders, a majority of the Session, remained loyal to the PCUS, and eventually filed suit to recover the property then being occupied by Rev. S. R. Wilson, D.D., and a majority of the congregation. The appellate court ruled in September 1878 that the property belonged to the loyal congregation. In making the ruling, the court referred to the PCUS Form of Government, as it wrote: "Connection with and subjection to the recognized presbyterial system of government is as essential to constitute a Presbyterian congregation or church as belief in the Westminster Confession of Faith." See W. P. D. Bush, *Reports of Selected Civil and Criminal Cases Decided in the Court of Appeals of Kentucky*. Vol. XIV (Louisville, Ky.: John P. Morton and Company, 1879) 252–283; the quotation is from p. 270. Notice one other curious fact—it was Rev. S. R. Wilson who had tried at the 1872 General Assembly to kill off further consideration of the proposed revisions because of the agitation being caused thereby in the Church, while it was one of his disenchanting elders who four years later brought the matter back by way of motion on the floor of the Assembly.

36. This presbytery was located in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).

At the 1877 Assembly, the Rev. Dr. Armstrong, as chairman of a committee, reported regarding the *Book of Church Order*. Sixty of the sixty-three Presbyteries (all but "the Presbytery of Indian<sup>36</sup> and the two small Presbyteries of Central Ohio and Sao Paulo, in Brazil") had sent in reports to the Assembly. After "a careful examination of the answers—some of them very voluminous," the committee concluded that "outside the six or seven points proposed to be submitted to the direct vote of the Presbyteries, there is really very little difference of opinion in our Church. Nine-tenths of the amendments suggested by the Presbyteries are mere verbal amendments, affecting not the doctrine but the style of the Book." Those amendments being submitted to the Presbyteries included the following: "restricting the right to vote in Presbytery in certain cases;" a section on Ecclesiastical Commissions; requiring examination in experimental religion as well as theology and church government for ministers being admitted to a Presbytery; a provision regarding judgment without process; the transferring "in certain circumstances" of a person from the roll of communicant members to non-communicants; and demission of the ministry. There were also new provisions regarding "Electors of Pastors," with the Presbyteries being instructed to choose from three options: either allowing "adult persons as are regular in their attendance on the common ordinances, and who regularly contribute to the support of the Pastor in that congregation" to vote with the communicant members of the Church when electing a Pastor (but not when electing Ruling Elders or Deacons); or allowing, with regard to the election of a Pastor, for a separate vote by "non-communicating adult members of the church who are regular in their attendance on the common ordinances in that congregation, and all other persons who regularly contribute to the support of the pastor, in order to be laid before the Presbytery as a representation of their desires in the premises;" or simply providing that "All communicating members of the church, in good and regular standing, but no others, are entitled vote in the election of Pastors, Ruling Elders and Deacons." Other amendments were proposed and adopted by the Assembly as amendments to the proposed Form of Government and Book of Discipline. These amendments to the Form of Government, among other matters, dealt with the work of the minister (e.g., "When a minister is called to labor through the press, or in any other needful work, it shall be incumbent on him to make full proof of his ministry by disseminating the Gospel for the edification of the Church"). A committee of five was authorized to "revise the language and style" of the

Revised Book “in the light of the criticisms upon those points sent up to the Assembly by the Presbyteries, and publish the same and send it down to the Presbyteries.” The five members of this committee were J. B. Adger, B. M. Palmer, George D. Armstrong, J. L. Marye, and D. C. Anderson. The Committee of Publication was directed to print and have sent to each minister and each Session a copy of the Revised Book “as soon as practicable.”<sup>37</sup>

The next year, a majority and a minority report from the revision committee were presented to the General Assembly. The minority asked “that the work of revision be discontinued, and the whole subject of the Book of Church Order be indefinitely postponed.” After debate, this substitute motion was rejected on a roll call vote, 28–96. Prominent churchmen divided on the issue: voting for the minority report was R. L. Dabney; voting against it were T. E. Peck and G. D. Armstrong.

The committee report, which included a tabulation of the votes of the Presbyteries, was then discussed. Twenty-nine of the Presbyteries had approved the Revised Book as a whole, while thirty-two had voted “No.” The Committee noted that “the Revised ‘Book of Church Order’ has not been adopted, ‘as a whole,’ by the vote of a majority of the Presbyteries.” However, several of the items which had been marked as a “separate vote” had been approved. The Committee argued: “It will be recollected that the overture of the last Assembly submitting these articles for a separate vote, did not submit them as independent propositions overtured to the Presbyteries, but as ‘parts of the Book.’ By this was meant that their adoption by the Presbyteries should make them, not parts of the organic law of the Church, but parts of the Revised Book.” The Committee therefore recommended “that this Assembly declare such of them as have been adopted by the Presbyteries to be parts of the Revised Book, and direct that such of them as have failed to be adopted be stricken out of said Book.” In other words, even though the Book as a whole had been voted down in the Presbyteries, 29–32, it was judged that that vote was on the non-perfected Revised Book—a revision that now had been modified through the votes in the Presbyteries. It was this amended Revised Book that was sent down to the Presbyteries for a final vote that would make it part of the Constitution of the PCUS. This report of the Committee was approved by the Assembly, 96–20.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Revision at Last*

This action set the stage for a final approval of the revised Book in 1879. At that year’s Assembly, it was noted

that forty-six of the fifty-six Presbyteries had voted in favor of the revised Book of Church Order. One Presbytery (Muhlenburg, in Kentucky) declined to vote; one Presbytery (Fayetteville, in North Carolina) had a tie vote; and eight Presbyteries—Columbia (Tennessee), Knoxville, Maryland, Mecklenburg (North Carolina), Nashville, North Alabama, Western District, and Western Texas—voted against.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of this report, the PCUS General Assembly declared “that the new Book of Church Order has been adopted by a large majority of the Presbyteries, as shown in their official reports to this body; and that the said new Book of Church Order is, therefore, hereby declared to be the law of the Church.” Later in the Assembly, the court reconstituted the Revision Committee, to consist of B. M. Palmer, G. D. Armstrong, Stuart Robinson, T. E. Peck, James Woodrow, J. A. Lefevre, J. B. Adger, R. K. Smoot, Thomas Thomson, and W. W. Henry. Various papers and questions were referred to this Committee, which was “empowered to cause to be corrected any and all manifest typographical or clerical errors which they may find or have pointed out to them in the present edition.”<sup>40</sup>

Notice several very interesting things with regard to the composition of the Revision Committee. First, it was a blue-ribbon group, consisting mostly of well-known churchmen from across the geographical and ideological spectrum. Secondly, Robert Lewis Dabney was not

37. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; With An Appendix*, Vol. IV, A.D. 1877 (Wilmington, N.C.: Jackson & Bell, Book and Job Printers, 1877) 423–426. One plan suggested by the Presbyteries was for the General Assembly to “call a convention, to meet at some central point, at some suitable seasons during the coming year, to perfect a Book of Church Order on the basis of the present Revised Book, to be sent down for adoption or rejection by the Presbyteries before the meeting of the next Assembly.” The committee recommended against that plan, not only because of the expense involved, but also because the Presbyteries themselves are “the proper bodies to decide such questions” (*ibid.*, 424).

38. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; With An Appendix*, Vol. IV, A.D. 1878 (Wilmington, N.C.: Jackson & Bell, Book and Job Printers, 1878) 636–640.

39. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; With An Appendix*, Vol. V, A.D. 1879 (Wilmington, N.C.: Jackson & Bell, Printers & Binders, 1879) 15–17. Of the forty-six in favor, five sent in no official returns; however, “The papers publish West Hanover [Virginia] as adopting by a vote of 16 to 9; Potosi [Missouri] by a vote of 17 to 1; Chickasaw [Mississippi] by a vote of 9 to 7; and Florida by a unanimous vote. The papers say also that Sao Paulo has adopted, and that it is to be published by them in the Portuguese language, to set forth our Church to the people of Brazil” (*ibid.*, 17).

40. *Minutes*, 1879, 54–55. The Committee was also “authorized anew by this Assembly, as was done by a previous one, to prepare a revised Directory of Worship.”



included—perhaps because of his opposition the previous year to the whole effort toward revision.<sup>41</sup> And thirdly, with reference to the “scientific” approach, we see once again a spectrum represented. Within a very few years, Adger and Woodrow would support a new science with regard to evolution and the origins of man, while Palmer, Armstrong, and Peck would champion the historic approach and views. And yet, both sides were committed to the “science” of polity which led to the revised Book becoming part of the organic law of the Church.

### *The Rhyme and Reason for the Changes*

As has been demonstrated above, revising the *Book of Church Order* proved to be a daunting task. However, it would appear that most of the opposition was not so much with respect to the new organization of the document or the broad sweeping principles, but a few disputed points. As a committee in 1877 observed, “outside the six or seven points proposed to be submitted to the direct vote of the Presbyteries, there is really very little difference of opinion in our Church. Nine-tenths of the amendments suggested by the Presbyteries are mere verbal amendments, affecting not the doctrine but the style of the Book.”

Assuming that assessment to be accurate, what this indicates is that there was a broad consensus to adopt the new schema—one which would “scientifically” set forth church polity. Particularly, it would be one which acknowledged the five “heads” of polity, and organized the chapters on that basis.

When one looks at the predecessor document, it is easy to see why the new approach was attractive. The 1821 Form of Government<sup>42</sup> adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the USA consisted of the twenty-two chapters in Table 1.

41. In 1867, Dabney wrote to his wife: “I don[']t want to be looked to as the exponent and defender of the new book, of which I know and care little, and which I think is all to end in Smoke,” Robert L. Dabney to Lavinia Dabney, 2 August 1867, Charles W. Dabney Papers, University of North Carolina; cited in Maddex, “Presbyterians in the South, Centralization, and the *Book of Church Order*, 1861–1879,” 42. Maddex noted that Dabney’s letter was penned after the matter became “controversial.”

42. *The Form of Government, Discipline, and the Directory for Worship, of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1840).

43. Both the draft document adopted by the 1866 Assembly (and passed down to the presbyteries in 1867) and the 1869 draft document (which included both the Form of Government and the Canon of Discipline) are found at the website for the PCA Historical Center: <http://www.pcahistory.org/bco/bibliog.html>.

TABLE 1: 1821 PCUSA FORM OF GOVERNMENT

- I. Preliminary Principles
- II. Of the Church
- III. Of the Officers of the Church
- IV. Of Bishops or Pastors
- V. Of Ruling Elders
- VI. Of Deacons
- VII. Of Ordinances in a Particular Church
- VIII. Of Church Government, and the Several Kinds of Judicatories
- IX. Of the Church Session
- X. Of the Presbytery
- XI. Of the Synod
- XII. Of the General Assembly
- XIII. Of Electing and Ordaining Ruling Elders and Deacons
- XIV. Of Licensing Candidates or Probationers to Preach the Gospel
- XV. Of the Election and Ordination of Bishops or Pastors, and Evangelists
- XVI. Of Translation, or Removing a Minister from One Charge to Another
- XVII. Of Resigning a Pastoral Charge
- XVIII. Of Missions
- XIX. Of Moderators
- XX. Of Clerks
- XXI. Of Vacant Congregations Assembling for Public Worship
- XXII. Of Commissioners to the General Assembly

Even at a glance, one can see this book’s somewhat haphazardness—jumping, for example, in one chapter from the ordinances in a particular church, to the several judicatories in the next chapter; and after considering the General Assembly in the twelfth chapter, waiting until the twenty-second chapter to deal with the commissioners to the General Assembly.

By way of contrast, the Southerners appealed to “science” in order to construct a new form of government—one which dealt with church polity in a predictable and logically progressive fashion. The outline of their 1866 draft document with seven chapters is given in Table 2.

### *Substance as well as Form*

But there was more substantive difference here besides the broad outline of five “heads.” Understanding the changes will require a detailed comparison of the PCUSA Form of Government with the draft version adopted by the 1866 PCUS General Assembly.<sup>43</sup>

TABLE 2: 1867 DRAFT PCUS FORM OF GOVERNMENT

|      |                                                                                                                                 |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I.   | Of the Doctrine of Church Government                                                                                            |
| II.  | Of the Church                                                                                                                   |
|      | SECTION I.—Of its King and Head                                                                                                 |
|      | SECTION II.—The Church Defined                                                                                                  |
|      | SECTION III.—Of the Nature and Extent of Church Power                                                                           |
|      | SECTION IV.—Of the Congregation                                                                                                 |
| III. | Of Church Members                                                                                                               |
| IV.  | Of Church Officers                                                                                                              |
|      | SECTION I.—Of their General Classification                                                                                      |
|      | SECTION II.—Of the Teaching Elder, or Minister of the Word                                                                      |
|      | SECTION III.—Of the Ruling Elders                                                                                               |
|      | SECTION IV.—Of the Office of Deacon                                                                                             |
| V.   | Of Church Courts                                                                                                                |
|      | SECTION I.—Of the Courts in General                                                                                             |
|      | SECTION II.—Of the Jurisdiction of Church Courts                                                                                |
|      | SECTION III.—Of the Church-Session                                                                                              |
|      | SECTION IV.—Of the Presbytery                                                                                                   |
|      | SECTION V.—Of the Synod                                                                                                         |
|      | SECTION VI.—Of the General Assembly                                                                                             |
|      | SECTION VII.—Of Ecclesiastical Commissions                                                                                      |
| VI.  | Of Church-Orders                                                                                                                |
|      | SECTION I.—Of the Doctrine of Vocation                                                                                          |
|      | SECTION II.—Of the Doctrine of Ordination                                                                                       |
|      | SECTION III.—Of the Election of Church-Officers                                                                                 |
|      | SECTION IV.—Of the Ordination and Installation of Ruling Elders and Deacons, and of the Dissolution of their Official Relations |
|      | SECTION V.—Of the Ordination of Ministers and the Formation and Dissolution of the Pastoral Relation                            |
|      | SECTION VI.—Of the Licensure of Probationers for the Gospel Ministry                                                            |
| VII. | Of the Constitution of This Church                                                                                              |

The first modification was the absence from the PCUS document of the original first chapter, consisting of the eight “preliminary principles” of American Presbyterianism which had been adopted by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia in 1788 (one year prior to the meeting of the first General Assembly).<sup>44</sup> Instead, the PCUS draft began with a new Chapter I, “Of the Doctrine of Church Government.”

I. It is absolutely necessary that the government of the church be exercised under some definite form. The scriptural form, which is that of presbytery, is comprehended under these five heads of doctrine, viz: 1 Of the church; 2. Of its members; 3. Of its officers; 4. Of its courts; and 5. Of its orders.

II. The Church which the Lord Jesus Christ hath erected in this world, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, is His kingdom, and is one and the same in all ages.

III. The members of this visible church catholic are all those persons in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of the holy religion of Christ, and of submission to his laws.

IV. The officers of the church, by whom all its powers are administered, according to the Scriptures, are presbyters (or bishops) and deacons, whose officers are ordained, defined and limited by God himself. As ecclesiastical rulers, these presbyters, or elders, are of the same rank, dignity and authority; but they are divided into two classes, viz: those who both teach and rule, and those who rule only.

V. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction is never a several but always a joint power, and is committed to church-courts, consisting of presbyters of the two classes. These courts may have jurisdiction over one or many congregations; but they sustain such mutual relations as to realize the idea of the unity of the church.

VI. The ordination of officers is ordinarily by a court.

VII. Although the practical adoption of the scriptural doctrine of presbytery is necessary to the completeness of the efficiency and the perfection of the order of the church, yet it is not essential to its existence.

Right up front, the authors of this draft document wanted to make sure that there was no question as to the Southern Presbyterian commitment to Presbyterian polity. Although there are parallels to certain statements in the PCUSA Form of Government, the placement of these statements as the first chapter is telling.

But even the parallels are not synonymous. For example, Chapter VIII of the PCUSA's Form of Government, which began, “It is absolutely necessary that the government of the church be exercised under some

44. According to Prof. Jack Maddex, the deletion of the Preliminary Principles was made at the 1866 General Assembly on motion from the floor. In his estimation, the reason for the deletion is probably because of the recognition that it was in the original Presbyterian constitution “not as a list of principles of Presbyterian polity, but as a ‘Preliminary’ list of methodological axioms a church would consider in deciding a system of polity”—a list with which many Protestants (such as Baptists and Congregationalists) could agree (email, September 21, 2009).

certain and definite form,” continued, “And we hold it to be expedient, and agreeable to Scripture and the practice of the primitive Christians, that the church be governed by congregational, presbyterial, and synodical assemblies.” At least two major differences exist between the PCUSA and PCUS formulations. One is that the PCUSA appealed first to that which is “expedient” and maintained only that its polity was “agreeable to Scripture;” while the PCUS stated that the “scriptural form . . . is that of presbytery.” The other is that the PCUSA document was vague on what it meant by “congregational, presbyterial, and synodical assemblies;” while the PCUS document would spell out what it meant by “presbytery.”

### *“Of the Church”*

In the 1867 document, Chapter II is “Of the Church,” which was the title of Chapter II in the existing Form. However, the PCUS proposal, starting here, utilized a totally different structure to the chapters: Chapters II through VI were on each of the five “heads” of polity, and those items which fell under each chapter were styled “sections.” This systematization fit well with the “scientific” approach advocated by Adger and others. Moreover, the PCUS document began this chapter on the Church by incorporating a much lengthier statement on the kingship and headship of Jesus Christ over the Church.

Section III of Chapter II in the 1867 draft was entitled, “Of the Nature and Extent of Church Power.” No comparable section or chapter existed in the PCUSA Book. This section stated: “The power which Christ hath committed to his church vests in the whole body, the rulers and the ruled, constituting it a spiritual commonwealth; but this power is exercised by his people in the choice of those officers whom he hath appointed in his church.” Emphasis was placed on the distinction between joint and several power—a concept not specifically enunciated in the PCUSA document.

Continuing with the theme “Of the Church,” Section IV was “Of the Congregation.” The only comparable chapter in the PCUSA Form of Government was Chapter VII, “Of Ordinances in a Particular Church”—a topic which this section of the PCUS draft document also mentioned. However, there was much more material covered—including how a congregation should be organized.

45. The 1869 draft version toned down this statement just a bit, removing the clause about disciplining parents. However, the implication is still there, since it referred to neglect of this duty as constituting “sin.”

46. The 1869 version removed the reference to “the Teaching Elder.”

47. The 1869 version removed the phrase “are of the same rank.”

### *“Of Church Members”*

Chapter III of the PCUS document, covering the second head of polity, was entitled, “Of Church Members.” Again, nothing comparable had been in the PCUSA Constitution. The first sentence of this chapter stated: “The infant seed of the faithful are federally holy, and members of the church;” and the paragraph went on to speak of their entitlement to baptism—even making the point that, “It is the bounden duty of Christian parents to present their children for baptism within a reasonable time, and should they neglect this duty they must be visited with discipline. Notwithstanding this sinful neglect of their parents, these little ones are lambs of Christ’s flock, and entitled to the pastoral oversight and religious instruction of the church, with a constant view to their embracing the covenant personally, and on arriving at years of discretion receiving the seals thereof.”<sup>45</sup>

### *“Of Church Officers”*

Chapter IV, “Of Church Officers,” began with a general classification. The next section was on the minister, also referred to as a teaching elder.<sup>46</sup> Similar to the PCUSA document, there was a list of various terms by which the minister is called in Scripture (bishop, pastor, minister, presbyter/elder, angel of the church, ambassador, evangelist, apostle/missionary, preacher, doctor/teacher, steward of the mysteries of God). Added is a paragraph on the lifestyle appropriate to the office. Other additional material includes a paragraph on the duties of his office, a paragraph on those called to be teachers either in theological schools or colleges and universities, and a paragraph on those called to be evangelists—including those “appointed to use the press in diffusing the truth, and to superintend the work of systematic evangelization.”

The section on the ruling elder made clear that “[t]hese presbyters, as ecclesiastical rulers, are of the same rank, and possess the same authority with the teaching elder.”<sup>47</sup> Instead of one paragraph, as found in the PCUSA standard, this draft document had four paragraphs, elaborating on the nature and duty of the office. Similarly, the one paragraph on deacons found in the PCUSA Book, was expanded to nine paragraphs (although much of this material, dealing with administration, was eliminated in the 1869 version).

### *“Of Church Courts”*

In Chapter V, “Of Church Courts,” Section I noted that the “various assemblies, in regular subordination; such

as congregational, classical, provincial, national, and oecumenical,” are “all, nevertheless, presbyteries, inasmuch as they are lawful bodies of presbyters.” Section II, “Of the Jurisdiction of Church Courts,” contained four paragraphs—most of it new material. The first paragraph distinguished ecclesiastical power, which is “in all respects, moral or spiritual,” from civil power. The second paragraph spoke of the jurisdiction of church courts, “which is only ministerial and declarative,” as being

three-fold, technically termed the dogmatic, the diatactic and the diacritic. The first relates to the doctrines and precepts of Christ; the second to the order of the church; the third to the exercise of discipline. *First*, they can make no new laws binding the conscience, but declaratively they may frame symbols of faith to be received by all who enter into church-communion; they may bear testimony against errors in doctrine and immoralities in practice within or without the pale of the church; and ministerially may decide cases of conscience. *Secondly*, they have power, ministerially, to establish canons for the government, discipline, worship and extension of the church, which must be agreeable to the general doctrines relating thereto contained in the Scriptures; only the circumstantial details of these matters being left to be regulated by the Christian prudence and wisdom of church-officers and courts. *Thirdly*, they hold the power of the keys, and therefore the right of requiring obedience to the laws of Christ. Hence, ministerially, they admit those qualified to sealing ordinances and to their respective offices; and they exclude the disobedient and disorderly from their offices, or from sacramental privileges; but the highest censure to which their authority extends, is to cut off the contumacious and impenitent from the congregation of believers. *Moreover*, they possess all the administrative authority necessary to give effect to the other powers.

The third paragraph stated:

All church-courts are one in nature, constituted of the same elements, and possessed inherently of the same kind of rights and powers; the highest court being a mere expansion of the lowest. Yet it is according to scriptural example, and promotive of the purity and harmony of the whole church, that disputed matters of doctrine and order arising in the lower courts should be referred to the higher for decision.

The final paragraph of this section “distinctly defined” the “sphere of action of each court.”

What we see in this section, then, is a highly-developed

understanding of church power and court jurisdiction—something not found in the PCUSA Form of Government.

Sections III–VI of Chapter V detailed the rights and responsibilities of the sessions, presbyteries, synods, and general assembly. The provisions found here are similar to what was in the PCUSA Constitution.

Section VII dealt with ecclesiastical commissions. This, too, represented an addition to what had been in the PCUSA formulary.

### *“Of Church-Orders”*

Chapter VI, “Of Church-Orders,” contained many similar provisions with regard to the process of election, examination, and ordination. However, what is noteworthy is the addition of two sections at the beginning of this chapter. Section I, “Of the Doctrine of Vocation,” spoke of the necessity of “the calling of God by the Spirit, and the inward testimony of a good conscience,” and “the manifest approbation of God’s people,” for a valid call to office. This section declared: “Since all the power which Christ hath committed to the church and vested in his people, is exercised by them in the choice of their officers; and since the government of the church is representative; the right of the election of officers by God’s people, either immediately by their own suffrages, or mediately through church courts composed of their chosen representatives, is indefeasible.” Also, God provides the appropriate gifts to those whom He has called to office. Section II, “Of the Doctrine of Ordination,” specified: “No man ought to be ordained to any office in the church, unless he is lawfully called thereto. And since every ecclesiastical office, according to the Scriptures, is a special charge, no man ought to be ordained, unless it be to the performance of a definite work lawfully belonging to some office in the church.”

### *Provision for Constitutional Amendment*

Chapter VII formally defined the Constitution of the Church, and also prescribed methods for its amendment. “The Doctrinal Symbols may be amended on the recommendation of one general assembly, when three-fourths of the presbyteries and synods advise and consent thereto, and a succeeding general assembly shall ordain the same. But in every instance the proposed amendment must be carried in these respective courts by a vote of three-fourths of the members.” “The Book of Church Order may be amended on the recommendation of one general assembly, when a majority of the presbyteries advise and consent thereunto, and



a succeeding general assembly shall ordain the same, except that the Rules of Parliamentary Order may be amended by a majority of two successive general assemblies.”<sup>48</sup> Once more, we discover that the PCUSA standards contained no formal method for amending the Constitution.<sup>49</sup>

*Embodying the “Radical Principles” of  
Presbyterian Polity*

Overarching these substantive changes was a commitment to certain principles—in the words of J. B. Adger, “radical principles” of Presbyterian government, which he desired that the Church express Constitutionally. In his inaugural address as a professor of ecclesiology at Columbia Theological Seminary on October 29, 1858, Dr. Adger stated:

There is a note, p. 425 of our Book, which sets forth that the radical principles of Presbyterian Church Government and Discipline are—that the several different congregations of believers taken collectively, constitute one Church of Christ, called emphatically *the Church*; that a larger part of the Church, or a representation of it, should govern a smaller; that in like manner a representation of the whole should govern every part—that is, that a majority should govern; and consequently that appeals may be carried from lower to higher judicatories. Now, this unity of the whole church in one body which governs its several parts, and governs them by majorities, and governs by courts of appeal—these several principles certainly are among our radical principles of church government.

48. The 1869 version omitted the provision for amending the doctrinal standards.

49. That is not to say that amendments were not effected—only that there was no formal provision for doing so. Today, most Presbyterian denominations require more than a majority vote at a meeting of the highest judicatory in order to amend the Constitution or to effect merger with other denominations. For example, in the PCA, amending the confessional standards (Confession of Faith and Catechisms) requires a three-fourths vote of the General Assembly, followed by consent of three-fourths of the presbyteries, followed by ratification by a subsequent General Assembly, also by a three-fourths vote. The same vote requirements are in place with regard to full organic union; however, there is a provision for “joining and receiving” (sometimes abbreviated “J&R”), whereby a simple majority of the General Assembly and three-fourths of the presbyteries may authorize the absorption of another body by the PCA; it was this procedure that was used to effect the reception of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) by the PCA in 1982.

50. J. B. Adger, “Inaugural Discourse on Church History and Church Polity,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XII 1 (April 1859) 140, 164–166.

But they are evidently not all the principles which we hold to be fundamental.

Professor Adger then added the following principles: The Headship and Kingship of Christ; The State’s freedom of the church, and the freedom of the individual conscience; the parity of Bishops; the distinction between Bishops or Elders who teach *and* rule, and Bishops or Elders who rule *only*; the right of the people to choose their own rulers; and the right of the chosen rulers to govern the people. The churchman contended:

It is all these Divinely revealed principles of church government taken together, which, co-operating with the doctrines of a sound theology, make the Presbyterian Church what she is. It is these principles which separate her from lax, disjointed Congregationalism on the one hand, and from the tyrannical Prelacy or Popery on the other. It is these principles which set forth that beautiful system revealed in the Scriptures of a Head of the Church, who is, at the same time, one with His members—who gave them their freedom and their rights, and at the same time imposed on them duties of submission to him, and to one another, and to the whole body. It is these principles which make the Presbyterian Church so eminently conservative in her temper, and yet so able to sympathise with the spirit of the age, in respect to every kind of real and true progress and improvement. It is these principles which make her at once the supporter of good and just government, and yet a lover of true and real liberty; at once the defender of necessary, wholesome, righteous restraint, yet the advocate of freedom, regulated and enlightened. It is these principles which influence her to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and yet to deny to Caesar the things that are God’s.<sup>50</sup>

What we see here, less than three years prior to the crisis that would break apart the Federal Union and the Presbyterian Church, are themes which the South employed in the civil realm: an appeal to liberty in contrast to tyrannical rule, and an assertion that these principles are the way of “progress and improvement.” Also evident is the theme of the spirituality of the Church—that is, not intruding civil politics into ecclesiastical courts.

*Distinction between North and South*

The Mason-Dixon divide was defined by differences far more pervasive, and far more subtle, than the matter of slavery. In the realm of polity, in both Church and State, North and South had a significantly different way

of looking at things governmental. In the Presbyterian ecclesiastical realm, the distinction can be described with regard to the doctrine of the spirituality of the Church—that is, that civil political matters should not intrude onto ecclesiastical courts. Many Presbyterians in the South were inclined toward this principle, while many of their Northern brethren, as evidenced by the Gardiner Spring Resolutions in 1861 which pledged the denomination to allegiance to the Federal government in Washington, D.C., held a diverging perspective. But another difference—and a more pronounced one—is that Southern Presbyterians, in contrast to their Northern counterparts, were committed not only to the spirituality of the Church, but also to *jure divino* Presbyterianism—that is, the notion that the way that the Church conducts her business, in all its essentials, was to be determined strictly by the Word of God.

James Henley Thornwell presented this perspective in his criticism of Princeton's Charles Hodge in a January 1861 article, "Princeton Review and Presbyterianism."<sup>51</sup> The South Carolinian professor employed two terms to distinguish his approach from that of Hodge. Thornwell wrote:

General principles are of two sorts, regulative or constitutive. Regulative principles define only ends to be aimed at, or conditions to be observed—constitutive principles determine the concrete forms in which the ends are to be realized. Regulative, express the spirit—constitutive, the form, of a government. It is a regulative principle, for example, that all governments should seek the good of their subjects; it is a constitutive principle that power should be lodged in the hands of such and such officers, and dispensed by such and such courts. Regulative principles define nothing as to the mode of their own exemplification—constitutive principles determine the elements of an actual polity.<sup>52</sup>

Thornwell then applied this prescriptive principle to the question of the eldership. Toward the close of the article, Thornwell gave the summary of his evaluation of Hodge's position:

In the first place, his persistent representation of the clergy as an estate in the Church, separate and distinct from the people, and his degradation of the office of ruling elder to a lower order than that of the minister of the Word, are thoroughly *Prelatic*. To this extent, therefore, he is no Presbyterian. In the second place, his theory of the right of the people to a substantive part in the government of the Church—thus making them a second estate

in the kingdom, and ascribing to them the functions of office-bearers—savours strongly of Independency. It has no smack of Presbyterianism. In the third place, his vague notions of the relations of the Spirit to the Church, taken in connection with his celebrated essay on the idea of the Church, has a striking affinity with Quakerism. His notion of the unity of the Church, as realized through the organization of its courts, is Presbyterian. He is, therefore, a little of every thing, and not much of any thing. His true position is that of an ecclesiastical eclectic. He looks out upon all sects with the eye of a philosopher, and as he does not feel himself tied down by the authority of Scripture to any one mode of organization, as he is quite at liberty to make new officers and organs, according to the exigencies of the times, so long as they do not contradict certain regulative principles, he selects what strikes him as good from all, and casts the bad away.

He comes short of a thoroughgoing Presbyterianism—1. By maintaining that the discretion of the Church is limited only by the express prohibitions of Scripture. His motto is, whatsoever is not prohibited is lawful. The Church's motto is, whatsoever is not commanded is unlawful. 2. By making the people and the clergy two distinct estates, between whom the power of government is shared, and by whom it is jointly exercised; whereas, the Church makes the clergy to be only that portion of the people through whom she exercises the various functions of her spiritual ministry. 3. By making *two* orders of spiritual rules, the Presbyter or bishop, and the ruling elder; whereas, the Church makes only *one* order, which she distributes into two classes, the teaching and the ruling elder. 4. By making the ruling elder merely a deputy, to maintain the rights of a particular class; whereas, the Church makes him a representative, a chosen ruler, through whom she herself, and not a class, declares and executes the law of God.

51. The title found at the beginning of the article is "Princeton Review, Art. VI., July, 1860": *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIII 4 (January 1861) 757–810.

52. *Ibid.*, 767. The astute reader will realize that the term "regulative principle" was being used by Thornwell in a different way than how it was employed starting in the mid-twentieth century and continuing today. In contemporary nomenclature, "regulative principle" (especially with respect to worship) is roughly equivalent to what Thornwell referred to as the "constitutive principle." For an extensive discussion of the subject, see a two-part series by Frank J. Smith with Chris Coldwell: "The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature. Part One (1946–1999)," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 2 (2006) 89–164; and "The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature. Part Two (2000–2006)," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007) 155–215.

5. By allowing the claim of a *jus divinum* only for regulative principles, and not for the mode of organizing the Church. 6. In order to afford freer latitude and scope for the exercise of discretion in creating new officers and courts, he absolutely repudiates the principle of inference, and denies that what is deduced from the Word of God, by good and necessary consequence, is of equal authority with its express statements. In all these points Dr. Hodge has departed from the faith of the Fathers. His doctrines in respect to them are not the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. We have maintained no new, no peculiar, theory of Presbyterianism. We have shown that, in all the points enumerated, we are standing upon the ground occupied by the purest Presbyterian Confessors, and especially upon the ground of our own venerable standards ("Princeton Review, Art. VI., July, 1860," 807–808).

The *jure divino* perspective reflected in Thornwell's 1861 article is illustrated also in an 1860 article by John B. Adger, which, like the Thornwell piece, opposed the views of Dr. Charles Hodge with respect to the eldership.<sup>53</sup>

Adger set a high and principal standard for the resolution of the controversy: "The Presbyterian system is what the Scriptures teach about Church government, which is set forth in our book." Even though "large majorities" of three General Assemblies may vote in a way contrary to that understanding, "It is not 'majorities' that are the rule of our faith, but God's word. It is not 'majorities' that we have 'solemnly covenanted' to follow in all their wrong interpretations of our constitution, but is that constitution itself, fairly and justly interpreted. An appeal will always be allowed to Presbyterians from the accidental majority of any Assembly to the constitution they have misinterpreted. This is the birthright of us all" (Adger, "Theories of the Eldership," 599).

J. B. Adger was a professor at Columbia Theological

Seminary, then located in the state capital of South Carolina. His appealing to the constitution against an erring majority mirrors the argument which his fellow South Carolinians would make just two months later, in seceding from the United States of America.<sup>54</sup> Of course, Adger had a higher sphere in view, viz., the kingdom of Christ, which is governed in a direct fashion by His Word: the Church's constitution, unlike the U.S. Constitution, is no mere human document.

### *The Ruling Eldership as a Key Factor*

Professor Adger's specific focus was the eldership. The Princetonian position on ruling elders was that of representatives "speaking the popular voice," thus "introducing a lay element into our government." "Surely," Adger chides, the article in the *Princeton Repertory* "does not mean to say that popular prejudice or passion is to sway the Elder; that he is to be the organ of an individual, or of a clique, or of a mob; that he is to be directed by the will of one man, or of twenty men, or of all the crowd of men, women and children that belong the Church of which he is a Ruler, so that their voice may directly reach the Presbytery. If this be the Repertory's doctrine, do let it speak it out distinctly, that the Church and her Ruling Elders may understand! And do let it prepare a clear and thorough exposition of the rules and regulations which may be best observed by our brethren of the Eldership in the discharge of these, their new and hitherto unheard-of duties!"

But this view of ruling elders necessarily mixes in a Congregationalist element, rather than maintaining a pure Presbyterianism.

We say, the Scriptures teach, and our Fathers held, that the Lord Jesus set up His Church as an organized body, with officers appointed by Him to rule her, not according to the popular will, in any direct sense whatever, but only in the indirect and secondary sense, that they, being taken from amongst the people, would fairly consider their real and true interests. They were to do for the people, not whatever the people should wish, but what they might judge, in the fear of God, and in a paternal love for the Church, that the people *ought* to wish. Christ made no promises to the people, in a separate capacity, but all to *His Bride*, as she is an organized body, with divinely appointed officer-bearers. Churches were from the beginning, and are now, always organized with Elders over them, and the whole right of the people, as respects government, is to choose whom they will to rule them. Nor can they proceed to this choice of

53. J. B. Adger, "The Princeton Review on Theories of the Eldership," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIII 3 (October 1860) 578–624.

54. "The people of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, on the 26th day of April, A.D., 1852, declared that the frequent violations of the Constitution of the United States, by the Federal Government, and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the States, fully justified this State in then withdrawing from the Federal Union; but in deference to the opinions and wishes of the other slaveholding States, she forbore at that time to exercise this right. Since that time, these encroachments have continued to increase, and further forbearance ceases to be a virtue." (Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union, adopted December 24, 1860).

themselves, independently of their existing rulers. They cannot do any thing, as people, apart from their office-bearers—least of all can they take men from themselves, being still mere *individuals of the people*, mere *laymen*, and *not ordained to be high spiritual office-bearers*, and send them to the Church courts, to exercise “the people’s part” of the Church government. We say, this whole doctrine of “the people’s part in the government” is un-presbyterian. Our Board of Publication has issued Dr. Hodge’s book by hundreds and by thousands, as we were told by him, but we believe that the Church will, upon examination, repudiate this, as a new and unsound addition to the system of our Fathers.<sup>55</sup>

Besides introducing a Congregationalist element into polity, Dr. Hodge’s position also embraces “a prelatric principle. It sets up a hierarchy who exercise powers of rule in their own right, and not as representatives, or chosen Rulers of the people.” Dr. Adger understands why these prelatric or semi-prelatric views “should deny the right of Ruling Elders to lay on hands in the ordination of a Clergyman.”

*Laymen*, of course, can take no part in the ordination of such. Only Ministers can make a Minister—only those who have orders can communicate them to others. There is a mysterious influence which oozes out of the sacred persons of Ministers through the tips of their fingers, when they lay on their holy hands upon the head of any man, and then, in his turn, can hand down and finger down this *virus* to others after him; and thus, only, is the apostolical succession of true Presbyterian Clergymen to be preserved (Adger, “Theories of the Eldership,” 622–623)!

This article exhibits the melding of several themes into an organic whole: *jure divino* Presbyterianism, as applied particularly to the eldership; the importance of a written Constitution to delineate the doctrine and practice of polity; and the relationship between the people and Church officers so as to avoid prelacy on the one hand and a democratic Congregationalism on the other. J. B. Adger, along with other Southern churchmen like Thornwell, had reflected carefully on these issues, and the result was a major modification of the Church’s official statement on polity—including the employment of five “heads” in order to handle these matters systematically and scientifically. And what ties these five heads together is that of the organic unity of the Church, with a polity that is “representative or presbyterian.” This concept, of course, was present in the PCUSA book. But this

particular language was deliberately used in the PCUS revision and placed in a prominent position, in order to distinguish the Southern view from the Princeton perspective of Charles Hodge, in which government was an admixture between two castes: ministers, who were regarded as clergy; and ruling elders, who were regarded as mere layman.

#### IV. OVERVIEW

Why did the Southern Presbyterians formulate the five “heads” of church polity? Perhaps the most significant factor was the intense discussion for a decade or so concerning the nature of the church and her officers. The famed debate between James Henley Thornwell and Charles Hodge with regard to church boards was one example of the broader issue of *jure divino* versus *jure humano* polity—a disagreement which manifested itself with respect to the eldership. This controverted issue caused Southern churchmen to think more deeply with respect to church government, and further inculcated the idea that how the Church is governed is, at root, a doctrinal issue, and not one of pragmatism. Given the proclivity toward a scientific approach to theology as a whole, these churchmen naturally gravitated toward the same systematic, scientific approach to polity. And the separation from the North, ultimately in both Church and State, gave further impetus to the drive to re-formulate the *Book of Church Order*.

Think of it—in the midst of a devastating war, and then the reconstruction of society, the Southern Presbyterian Church gave considerable attention to the subject of church polity! Part of the reason for this attention was a desire to demonstrate the superiority of the Southern approach to polity, in both Church and State.

Adger’s 1860 article on “The Divine Right of Presbyterian Church Government” argued that the “representative principle” is the only protection against the dangers of democracy, monarchy, and oligarchy in the civil realm. The author continued:

Our Church government is not in the hands of the mass of the people, nor yet in the hands of individual officers whom they have appointed, but in the hands of representative assemblies chosen by the people. This is it which distinguishes it from Prelacy on the one hand,

55. Adger, “Theories of the Eldership,” 620–622. Adger’s reference to Congregationalism would have recalled to his readers the Old School–New School schism in 1837–1838, in which the Old School majority excised four synods because of their being un-Constitutionally formed as an amalgam between Presbyterians and Congregationalists.



and Congregationalism on the other. And it is worthy of special notice that in these free representative assemblies, instituted by Jesus Christ for the rule of His Church, there is provided an arrangement answering precisely to that most important check which, in the freest modern States, is imposed on their popular assemblies, viz: the principle of *two chambers*, composed of different persons, belonging to different classes or elected for different terms of service. Our courts have both Ministers and Elders, and the one class operates as a check upon the other. So, too, our higher courts are a check upon the lower. Thus is the discovery of truth promoted, and the probability diminished that party-interest or temporary prejudices shall predominate in the result (Adger, "The Divine Right of Presbyterian Church Government," 156f).

Of course, it was apprehension about the elevation of a sectional party—the Republican Party, in the person of Abraham Lincoln particularly—that led to Southern secession in 1860 and 1861. The checks and balances were perceived as no longer effective in the civil sphere, with the result that the Southern states would no longer be able to exercise their freedom and rights within the U.S. Constitution.

In his January 1861 article disputing the views of

56. Thornwell, "Princeton Review and Presbyterianism," 774. Comparing ecclesiastical and civil government has often been characteristic of Presbyterianism. In 1881, J. A. Quarles referred to a David Dudley Field, who "has thus interpreted our civil government: That the individual is free in his own individual sphere, and comes under the control of social law only in his relations to others. That the States are free and sovereign in their own sphere, and have control of all affairs that pertain in common to the entire State. That the National Government is limited, therefore, to those matters which are general and concern all the States. Whether he be right or not, this general principle prevails in the relations of our graded courts" (Quarles, "Our Presbyterian Policy—Shall It Be Progress or Petrification?", 618). In 1888, Henry M. White, in an article which sought to avoid prelacy and the claims of the papacy, stated: "In a republican government, whether civil or ecclesiastical, all power resides primarily in the people" ("The Organization of Churches in Heathen Lands," *Presbyterian Quarterly* I 3 [January 1888] 476–491; the quotation is from p. 489). And in 1890, Clement Read Vaughn wrote: "To make government, and especially a free and popular representative government, synonymous with tyranny, and call it 'an oligarchy,' because it is a real government and not a sham, and asserts its own distinctive principles, is to abuse the invaluable human privilege of talking nonsense. A true and faithful government in church, or state, or family, or in any place where associated men are bound together, is the noblest of God's gifts for the welfare of mankind in a world like this. It is the most glorious image of the divine justice within the earthly sphere of human existence" (C. R. Vaughn, "Representative Government in the Church," *Presbyterian Quarterly* IV 4 [October 1890] 561–589; the quotation is from p. 589).

Charles Hodge, James Henley Thornwell argued for "the principle that whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden." He then drew this conclusion: "The Church, like the Government of the United States, is a positive institution, with positive grants of power, and whatever is not given is *withheld*."<sup>56</sup>

Even more explicit in drawing analogies between the civil and ecclesiastical spheres is the October 1861 article, "Principles of Church Government." The author, a South Carolinian pastor, asserted: "The powers of civil government have been divided and subdivided, so as to make a complex and refined organism, according to the maxim: without division of power there is no constitution; without constitution, no liberty. This division was made by the framers of the Constitution of the United States, with an approach towards perfection, we hope, now, in our blessed Confederacy. There is a triple division of these powers—those delegated to the Confederacy; those to the State governments; and those which the people still retain, not having delegated them to either government." After a lengthy quotation of John C. Calhoun, the author argued that the system of ecclesiastical government can be simpler than that of the State, "for the officers have, substantially, but one everlasting code to which they can require obedience. This, of itself, is a mighty wall of salvation from ecclesiastical tyranny, where the people are not too ignorant or careless to perceive it" (Hillhouse, "Principles of Church Government," 438–440). The article concluded this way:

Constitutions and forms of government, in Church and State, are among the most complex and difficult, yet the most ennobling and important, objects of thought. For the subjects of a large part of history are usurpations of unjust and unconstitutional power, and consequent oppression; the subject of nearly all the other part of history is resistance to usurpation, calling into play the most godlike virtues of our nature.

And our Southern Zion is amply justified in her profound sympathy with our Confederacy in the bloody conflict for constitutional liberty. Boasting of a complete separation of Church and State, we may forget how intimate is the relation of these divine institutions, and how powerful is their mutual influence. Civil and ecclesiastical tyranny have ever been closely combined. On the other hand, constitutional liberty in the Church, tends to bring about constitutional liberty in the country. And this, in its turn, has the most happy influence upon the Church, which never flourished extensively, and for a

long period, where despotism prevailed. This conflict, then, is not merely for temporal advantages, but for the noblest opportunities for spiritual and eternal life.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, we should not impute mere sectional motives to the enterprise.<sup>58</sup> Polity was and is, intrinsically, of prime importance, and these churchmen viewed these matters as such.

Illustrative of this point is an article towards the end of the nineteenth century by Thomas Cary Johnson. This professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia contended for the Importance of Church Polity on several grounds: church polity has a great affect upon doctrine; it affects the carrying out of the Great Commission (evangelism and edification); it affects how the State is politically organized; God commends in Scripture only one form of church government. Indeed, "If, according to the Scriptures, church government is important then it is important." Johnson painted the issue with bold, broad strokes:

There is power in a great religious idea; the autocratic edicts of a Zeno, a Justinian, a Heraclius, fell back on themselves, and the world went on as it was carried by the idea. Even the dull Charles V., with a world-empire at his back, and Rome as his ally, felt the power of a great religious idea, though unable to understand it—felt it as he slunk away broken and cowed to his convent. Such an idea beheaded Charles I., and placed England at the feet of Cromwell. There is power even in a false religious idea, believed to be of God. The Baptist belief in *jure divino* (?) immersion as the only valid baptismal form, carries multitudes of the superficial with them. And if the Lord shall put into the minds and hearts of our people belief in the *jure divino* polity as a thing of importance, giving them also the essentials of his saving truth, and a burning desire for the full salvation of souls; then we shall see a lengthening of the cords and a strengthening of the stakes.<sup>59</sup>

And because polity is inherently important, it should not be reduced to a sectional dispute. Adger, in his January 1861 article, "Presbyterian Authorities on Theories of the Eldership," tried to distance himself from Charles Hodge's attempt to portray "even the discussion itself, as some thing altogether 'Southern' and not 'Northern' at all." By way of contrast, Adger proved that the best Reformed authorities, from Calvin to the Scottish Church, believed that ruling elders are presbyters, rather than "lay leaders" (as maintained by Hodge). Furthermore, the American Presbyterian standards also reflected the

commitment to this precept—Hodge's view was the novelty.<sup>60</sup>

What this demonstrates is that prominent churchmen above and below the Mason-Dixon line looked at polity differently. The North-South divide, evident even in the antebellum period and intensified by the onset of secession and war, served as a catalyst for reformulating church polity. A scientific approach provided the rational basis for how to make those changes. The science of church government, then, was put into the service of the Southern Presbyterian Church not only in establishing the categories of five "heads" of church polity, but also in incorporating into the ecclesiastical constitution a Southern accent on matters such as the importance of the ruling eldership.

### *New Insights into Polity*

And these Southern churchmen understood that important reflection was taking place regarding polity. That is why J. B. Adger reported on the floor of the 1864 General Assembly about the desire for "a more scientific statement of the Scripture Doctrine of Church Government than is found in our present form"—one

57. Ibid., 443. Providing a secular evaluation of the different perspectives on freedom is historian James M. McPherson, who wrote that "when secessionists protested that they were acting to preserve traditional rights and values, they were correct. They fought to protect their constitutional liberties against the perceived northern threat to overthrow them. The South's concept of republicanism had not changed in three-quarters of a century; the North's had. With complete sincerity the South fought to preserve its version of the republic of the founding fathers—a government of limited powers that protected the rights of property . . ." (*Battle Cry of Freedom* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988] 860–861).

58. Jack P. Maddex, Jr., wrote that the *Southern Presbyterian Review* was established by a group of South Carolina ministers because Charles Hodge's *Princeton Review* "was closed to the Carolinians as a forum for subjects about which they disagreed with Hodge—distinctly, church government, and subtly, the degree of divine sanction for slavery." According to Professor Maddex, although the journal narrowed in focus after the War, this was in contrast to the publication's "early catholicity." He also noted that the "intellectuals" among the Southern Presbyterians "carried on a long tradition of seeking to comprehend all knowledge within a grand ideological synthesis." See his chapter, "Southern Presbyterian Review, 1847–1885," in Ronald Lora and William Henry Longton, eds., *The Conservative Press in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century America* (Westwood, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1999) 303–311.

59. T. C. Johnson, "The Tenet of Jure Divino Presbyterian Polity," *Presbyterian Quarterly* VII 4 (October 1893) 505–533; see especially pp. 512–521, 532–533.

60. John B. Adger, "Presbyterian Authorities on Theories of the Eldership," *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIII 4 (January 1861) 811–859. The quotation is from p. 812.

which would reflect the fact that the doctrine of polity had been “much developed in various directions since our present form was adopted, and the book is no longer fully abreast of the advanced stage of the doctrine as it is actually held amongst us.” Three years prior to that report, Adger wrote:

It will now be felt, we think, by every reader, that there is necessarily great danger in any careless appeal to past authorities about Church government—that, in fact, the doctrine is now better understood in Scotland, by the Free Church, than it ever was understood in Scotland at any previous period—that it is better understood, on some points, by American Presbyterians, than any where else in the world; and that whoever would look backwards for light on the subject, must, in the first place, *look all the way back* to the Scriptures; and secondly, in looking at any particular point of the development of the doctrine, after it was exhumed by Calvin, and began again to be received into the Church’s experience, he must always be ready to compare the positions assumed directly with God’s Word, according to the best light of his own private judgment, enlightened by God’s Spirit.<sup>61</sup>

Around the turn of the century, Robert A. Lapsley made the case that the Southern Presbyterian Church did indeed have distinctive principles—as evidenced, for example, by the difference in polity between the PCUS *Book of Church Order* and its Northern counterpart. The New Book (i.e., the PCUS Book) is almost twice as long as the Old. Besides “matters of detail,” “the enlargement of the New Book is brought about mainly by the fuller statement of important principles, some of which are not recognized at all in the Old Book, or are only obscurely hinted at there.” Because of the Westminster Assembly being composed of divines representing a mixture of polity positions, the Westminster Form of Church Government contains not just Presbyterian principles, but “Erasian, Congregational and

Prelatical elements, forced on the Assembly by the Parliament of England.”

While the Old Book thus exhibits distinct evidence of admixture from sources outside of pure Presbyterianism, our New Book is a far more accurate representation of the real ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly. It is in fact the Presbyterianism of Ruth-erford and Gillespie, revived in the last generation by Thornwell and Breckinridge, and embodied in our new Form of Government by such ecclesiastical statesmen as Adger and Peck, and Armstrong and E. T. Baird, and Stuart Robinson, and Girardeau and Palmer.

The “divine right of Presbytery,” noted Lapsley, “rings out in the very first words of our New Book, ‘The scriptural form of church government, which is that of Presbytery’—and so throughout—and which cannot be found at all in the Old Book.” Another significant addition is that of “vital distinction as to church power”—that is, the difference between power of order (in which presbyters act severally) and power of jurisdiction (in which presbyters act jointly, in church courts). Other important distinctive points of polity include the notion of vocation (the three-fold call of a person to office, including not only the inner call but also the confirmation of that call by the church); the doctrine of ordination (specifying that it is an “act of a court made of Presbyters, formally inducting into office one who in their judgment, has been duly called of God thereunto”); a “clear demarcation of the sphere of jurisdiction of each court;” and the limitation of franchise to communicant members. But the “crowning distinction” revolved around the fact that ruling elders were recognized as presbyters on a par with ministers: “In no other statement of constitutional principles will you find a clear recognition of that great doctrine which lies at the head of the Presbyterian system, the doctrine of the parity of the eldership.”<sup>62</sup>

### *The Doctrine of Polity*

Another point of interest is the way in which each of these five “heads” of polity is regarded as a doctrinal matter. In the Westminster Assembly memorial volume in 1897, Dr. Eugene Daniel, pastor of Raleigh’s First Presbyterian Church, addressed the relationship between doctrine and ecclesiology, particularly polity and worship. He used the truth of Christ’s sovereignty to bind together these concepts: “The sovereign Jesus himself gathers his elect into the one body of which he is the

61. Ibid., 826. Adger was willing to challenge the position of the Westminster Assembly, which prescribed that “preaching presbyters” rather than “the Presbytery” (which would include ruling elders) would lay hands on ministers being ordained. “The departure of the Westminster formulary from the principle of the Second Book [of Discipline of the Church of Scotland], is, in its turn, departed from by our Constitution. Deliberately forsaking the Westminster standard, it goes back to the ground maintained in the Second Book” (857).

62. Robert A. Lapsley, “Has the Southern Presbyterian Church any Distinctive Principles?” *Presbyterian Quarterly* XV 3 (July 1901) 414–430; see especially pp. 427–429. The article is available on-line at <http://www.pchistory.org/HCLibrary/periodicals/tpq/15-3-5.pdf>.

Head;" "the King gives his own word as the exclusive law of being, of belief, and of daily life;" "in the Scriptures given by the King to his church, he hath appointed for her 'a government,' in the hands of officers chosen and qualified by himself and 'distinct from the civil magistrate';" and "As founded by our Lord and his apostles, the worship of the church partook of the simplicity of its government."<sup>63</sup>

Dr. Daniel's piece at the end of the nineteenth century illustrates that because of the *jure divino* principle, all of ecclesiology was considered to be doctrinal. This position which characterized Southern Presbyterian polity, extended to all of the parts or elements of polity, including the five "heads." Hence it was natural to speak of the doctrine of each of these parts.

That terminology was not immediately employed in the Form of Government. However, in the various versions of the Southern Presbyterian *Book of Church Order*, there was an evolution as to how these particular sections were titled. By the twentieth century, the nomenclature being employed was that of the "Doctrine of" each of these heads.

And yet, this belies the fact that the Book includes things that are circumstantial—a factor which undermined the notion of doctrine and precept. This reality was recognized by nineteenth century authors. In "The Divine Right of Presbyterian Church Government," we read:

If these four heads of the doctrine of Church government be acknowledged must the whole system be acknowledged? What more is there in the system besides these four main things? There are only some circumstantials; but these also are of Divine right, because they are necessary for decency and order, and we have the Divine command to do all things decently and in order. The government is specifically of deliberative assemblies representing the Church and acting for her edification. Of course it is their right and duty to make all mere circumstantial rules, and every one of those rules has the Divine sanction, if it accord with Scripture. The courts that make them are liable to err, and the Word is always the only standard whereby everything is to be tried. But, when agreeable to Scripture, those rules, even the minutest of them, are of Divine right. They are made by an authority which the Lord Himself set up, and which acts in His name. They proceed from Rulers that have the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and have power to bind and to loose on earth, and it is bound or loosed accordingly in Heaven (Adger, "The Divine Right of Presbyterian Church Government," 158).

A January 1861 article entitled "The Manner of Altering Our Doctrinal Standards" also noted the differences:

The constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America consists of four parts, pertaining respectively to doctrine, government, discipline and worship. We claim that all these formularies are scriptural, and hence are binding on the consciences of those associated together in the Presbyterian Church, in Christian and ministerial communion. But we do not consider them all scriptural in the same sense, nor binding in the same degree.

The author argued that the doctrine of the Westminster Standards "we hold to be the very system of faith revealed in the Bible for man's salvation. Hence, we require the office-bearers, but especially the authorized teachers of the Church, to receive them as the confession of their faith, adopting them, *ex animo*, in their plain and obvious sense, 'as containing that system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures;' and the private members, in like manner, are under obligation to receive instruction therefrom, with that docility which becomes disciples in the school of Christ." On the other hand,

The principles and rules of our government, discipline and worship, we hold to be derived from the Bible, either from its direct and positive precepts, or by good and necessary inference therefrom. While, therefore, we claim our Church order to be *jure divino*, in the sense that all the prerogatives, the officers and the ordinances of the Church are clearly ordained in the Scriptures, we do not hold that all the details of ecclesiastical regulation are given, but that much is left, in the practical administration of the Church, to human wisdom and prudence, in subordination to the directions of the Divine word. Hence, we profess those parts of our Constitution pertaining to the order of the Church, in a very different sense from the confession we make in adopting our doctrinal formularies, since they necessarily contain, not only the principle of government,

63. Eugene Daniel, "Church Polity and Worship—Emphasizing Their Relation to Doctrine," in Francis R. Beattie, et al., *Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly. 1647–1897. Containing Eleven Addresses Delivered Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, at Charlotte, N.C., in May 1897. In Commemoration of the Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly, and of the Formation of the Westminster Standards.* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Richmond, Va.: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1897), 150–160.



discipline and worship, which the Scriptures ordain, but, also, such prudential rules and regulations as the necessities of the Church have constrained her to enact. As these are, in good part, the mere product of human wisdom, instead of receiving and adopting them as we do the system of doctrine taught in the Confession, we are simply required to declare that we “approve of the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church.” So, also, the private member is under obligation to submit to his brethren placed over him in the Lord, in the due exercise thereof.

The article recounted that while the first American Presbyterian General Assembly in 1788 adopted the Westminster Standards largely unchanged, much greater changes were enacted with the other parts of the Constitution. However, even with the extensive modifications in the formularies dealing with government, discipline, and worship, the principles have remained the same.<sup>64</sup>

This article might be seen as engendering a bit of confusion. That which is divinely ordained is discovered both by that which the Bible directly and positively teaches, and by that which may be gleaned by good and necessary inference. The “therefore,” therefore, if not misplaced, could be seen as ambiguous. Nevertheless, the basic point is true: that which is incidental to the carrying out of divine mandates is also Biblical, as well as obligatory upon the Church.

But too much emphasis on that point could mask the fact that the prescriptions of the Presbyterian Constitution on government, discipline, and worship include things that are both normative and situational—both doctrinal and circumstantial. And it could also lead to

64. E. T. Baird, “The Manner of Altering Our Doctrinal Standards,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XIII 4 (January 1861) 717–719. The author was a pastor in Columbus, Mississippi.

65. This suggestion is akin to what has been called “minimalistic” church polity, as exemplified, for example, in the practice of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Hanover Presbytery. The Hanoverian approach is that of embracing the Westminster Standards (including not only the Confession of Faith and Catechisms but also the other products of the Westminster Assembly, such as the Directory for Public and Family Worship and the Form of Church-Government), while eschewing all other extra-Scriptural documents. The basis for Hanover’s position is that of “Constitutional Presbyterianism” or the “regulative principle of polity”—contemporary terms for a *jure divino* polity; and its best theoretical expression can be found in “The Pattern in the Heavens, Volume II: A Demonstration of the Manner in Which Scripture Alone Circumscribes the Polity of the New Covenant Temple, The Church,” a 2003 doctoral dissertation by Dr. Richard E. Bacon presented to Greenville (S.C.) Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Dr. Bacon has also written a more popular version, *Constitutional Presbyterianism* (Manassas, Va., and Clover, S.C.: Full Bible Publications, 2009).

an overemphasis on the details of church polity, with one of at least two results possible: either those circumstantial details will take on the same authority as that which is strictly Scriptural (whether by direct statement or good and necessary consequence), or the Biblical principles set forth regarding polity will be denigrated or lost totally.

This potential denigration is hinted at by means of the varying ordination vows taken: an ordinand subscribes to the Westminster Standards, but agrees only to “approve of the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church.” Perhaps the way of strengthening ecclesiastical commitment to Biblical polity is by delineating the *doctrines* of government, discipline, and worship in the Constitution, while leaving *circumstantial details* to a secondary document, such as a set of by-laws.<sup>65</sup>

### *Biblical Proof Texts*

Besides this mixing of doctrine and circumstance, another potential weakness becomes apparent by comparing the Southern product with its predecessor. As published in the early nineteenth century, the PCUSA Constitution included the Westminster Standards and the other formularies: the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship. Throughout the Form of Government were sprinkled Scripture proof texts. Of course, proof texts cannot be supplied for the circumstantial provisions. Nevertheless, there was an awareness of the importance of trying to justify the Church’s polity from the Word of God. As noted above, the 1872 Southern Presbyterian General Assembly had voted that its committee tasked with revising the Book of Church Order should add the proof texts. However, the very next year, the General Assembly dismissed the committee. After the committee was resurrected in 1876 by means of personal resolution on the floor of the Assembly, the assignment of adding the proof texts apparently was never accomplished. So while attention was paid to the “science” of church polity, the Bible references were left out.

### V. SUMMARY

The reformulation of polity in the Southern Presbyterian Church was fueled by the Thornwell-Hodge debate on ecclesiology, spurred by the formal separation between North and South, and informed by the application of a scientific model to church polity. The employment of science—that is, not just analogies with

natural science, but also, more broadly, a systematic and logical approach—fit with the mindset of nineteenth century churchmen.<sup>66</sup>

What we have seen is the utilization of science in order to conclude that church government consists of five heads. These Southern Presbyterian churchmen had formulated, if we may coin a phrase, the “taxonomy of polity.”

But while science formed a conceptual framework, there was also simultaneously an attempt to flesh out the meaning of the five “heads” of church polity. However, disagreement on some of the particulars led to a lengthy process before the revision was finally enacted.

These Southern Presbyterians believed that they were building on the historic foundation of their Reformed and Presbyterian forefathers, in contrast to the Northerners as represented by Charles Hodge at Princeton. Indeed, the PCUS leaders more than once skewered and tweaked their Northern counterparts. In 1869, a review article of a book by James Bannerman of the Free Church of Scotland stated: “Dr. Bannerman’s views are those which represent truly Scotch Presbyterianism. We suppose, indeed, that upon some points, Presbyterians on this side of the water may be in advance of their Scotch brethren and enjoy a fuller and a juster development of scriptural Presbyterianism. But if we are to appeal at all to our mother for confirmation of what we understand the Scriptures to teach, let us be sure that we refer to authorities respecting her understanding of the Scriptures who are qualified to represent her.”<sup>67</sup> That last sentence was a deliberate jab at Hodge for not appealing to the best of the Scottish sources—especially with respect to the ruling eldership.

The Southern tradition developed the theme of the doctrine of the five “heads” of polity, and eventually delineated those sections as “Doctrine of the Church,” etc. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) continues the Southern formulation; however, in its *Book of Church Order*, the particular sections (headings) dropped out, leaving just the bare statement in the first chapter regarding the five heads, and the chapters following in that order, but without specificity: like having the outline of a body but without the skeleton. The PCA’s *Book* also followed the PCUS in not adopting Scripture proof texts—thus further downplaying the doctrinal nature of polity, and lending credence to the notion that the *BCO* is more like a technical manual rather than a reflection of Biblical truth.

The Southern Presbyterians of the nineteenth century did not contemplate the relationship among the five heads in a sterile fashion: they had an organic view of

how these doctrines fit together—a notion that fit with their understanding of the organic unity of the Church itself. In 1857, Samuel J. Baird wrote an article, “Constitution of the Presbyterian Church,” in which he contrasted Presbyterianism with the other alternatives of polity: Hierarchicalism and Congregationalism. After noting that a Congregationalist or Independent system cannot logically support world missions, he observed the advantages of Presbyterianism:

Development by growth and subdivision is the law of this system. The growing church at Jerusalem sends forth its shoots to all quarters of the world, each of which taking root becomes a new centre of expansive and healing influence, pushing forth into other regions as yet unevangelized. At the same time, all recognize and cherish the relation of unity to the parent stock, and subordination to the authority which resides in the body of which it is the centre. The church of Scotland, planted by the labors of a few divinely enlightened men, maintains at first the communion of its in [sic] members through the annual convocation of its pastors and elders in one assembly. As it expands, this body develops [sic] an organization of subordinate synods, which, in their turn, are divided into presbyteries, each exercising in its sphere its distributive part of the functions of the body. A few missionaries of this church organize in Ulster a presbytery, which, by a like process, becomes the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in Ireland. Driven from their homes by privation and persecution, a handful of members of these churches find themselves exiles from the means of grace, scattered in the wilds of the new world. Their call for help is heard; and a missionary from their native land erects, in their midst, the standard of the Cross, and performs the work of an evangelist by planting churches and dispensing the ordinances of the Gospel beneath the shades of the primeval forests. Others join in his labors, and the organization of the Church is completed. At first, half a dozen names make up their roll when met in full assembly. But, as years roll on, the infant Church expands with the widening continent, and creates out of its bosom a numerous retinue of synods and presbyteries, whose annual commissioners, in General Assembly, perpetuate the succession of the original court. Hundreds of thousands of souls, the flock of Christ in her fold, are

66. Notice even the title of J. A. Quarles’ 1881 article, “Our Church Policy—Shall it be Progress or Petrification?”: “petrification” is a technical term relating to fossilization.

67. Anonymous, “Bannerman’s Church of Christ,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XX 4 (October 1869) 522.

led in the paths of knowledge and holiness by a growing multitude of ministers, her sons. By them the call of mercy is urged on unconverted millions throughout the land. Herself planted by the spirit of missions; her organization constructed in special adaptation to that work; her commission from Him who is the Prince of the kings of the earth; and her field the world; missionaries trained in her schools, commissioned and sent forth through her executive agencies, sustained by her contributions, and followed with her prayers, bear the glad tidings of salvation to the dark tribes of Asia and Africa, the aborigines of America, and the baptized pagans of Europe; and her General Assembly welcomes to its bosom commissioners from presbyteries which are springing into existence in India, China and Africa; the germinating courts of churches which shall yet flourish among regenerated nations, where heathenism now broods amid the gloom of the shadow of death.

Neither historically, nor in theory, is the system which thus unfolds itself one of confederate association, but of organic union. The functions and powers exercised under it are not derived by concessions of the inferior courts; nor do they primarily reside in theirs. Originating in the fountain Christ, and replenishing the spring-head—the Church catholic—his body; they flow downward from the higher courts in a rich and exhaustless stream, which, freighted with the riches of immortality, permeates every congregation, and pours the blessings of life and salvation into the heart of every believer.<sup>68</sup>

Four decades later, F.P. Ramsay sounded the same theme. In his 1898 exposition of PCUS polity, we read: “Not only by the word, but also by the Holy Spirit, is the ascended Christ present with his Church; and this he is ever effectually discharging all his offices in his own living presence through the human media.” The Church is “but the completion of Christ, his bodying of himself forth: take him away, take away his living

activity, and the Church is nothing, and its authority is nothing” (Ramsay, *An Exposition of the Form of Government*, 22).

The five “heads” form the structure. But these Southern Presbyterian churchmen never forgot that the structure without life is worthless. And they realized that the life was in the body as a whole; or, to change the metaphor, in the vine and its branches.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This article has explored a nexus of religious, intellectual, social, and cultural history—with the history of science thrown in for good measure. We hope that, though in a small and suggestive way, we have advanced the understanding, not only historically, but Biblically and theologically as well, by means of the application of Scriptural metaphors for the Church to polity, and especially to the five heads of church polity.

But metaphors, while informing, also entail a bit of mystery. It is not without reason, after all, that the Church is referred to as the mystical body of Christ.

The visible Church is a commonwealth of people, organized for the good of all, totally transparent, and overseen by elders. Her structure—her polity—is all to serve the whole, and to promote Christ’s relationship to His Church. The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 used the metaphor of the relationship between husband and wife to illustrate the relationship of Christ and His Bride. Paul describes that relationship as being a “great mystery.” Scripture often employs the term “mystery” to refer to some hidden truth that has now been revealed, and there is certainly a sense in which that is true regarding Christ and His mystical body. But there is often a connotation, at least, of something that is somehow beyond our ken—something which we still cannot fully grasp. Who, indeed, can fully fathom all that is entailed in the working of God’s Holy Spirit in the ministry of the Church? Who completely understands the way in which Christ both immediately and mediately rules over His kingdom?

No, we are all on the learning curve in these matters, and can only hope to continue to build a bit at a time. But what we can know is that Christ is pleased to use His visible Church, through its polity, discipline, and worship, in the evangelism of the world and the edification of the elect—a phenomenon which, in the final analysis, is among the best mysteries of all. ■

68. Samuel J. Baird, “Constitution of the Presbyterian Church,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* X 1 (April 1857) 1–16; available online at <http://www.pcahistory.org/periodicals/spr/v10/10-1-1.pdf>. The quotation is from pp. 12–13. This concept of the organic unity of the Church is found also in Adger’s 1874 article, “Church Power.” Besides considering the various uses of the concept of ecclesiastical power (including the distinction between joint and several power), the professor rang the changes on the oneness of the Church and of her courts. Every meeting of these courts is “solemn.” “They are making Church history. They are bearing the keys, and using them. They are opening the kingdom and shutting it.” See John B. Adger, “Church Power,” *Southern Presbyterian Review* XXV 4 (October 1874) 497–498.

# Johannes Megapolensis: Pioneer Reformed Missionary to the Mohawks

By Wes Bredenhof

## INTRODUCTION

It is often claimed that the churches tracing their lineage directly to the Reformation have been lacking in missionary motivation and action, particularly in earlier times. Norman Thomas, for instance, claims that “no great missionary impulse” resulted from the theology of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Such a claim is commonly found among modern day missiologists and church historians.<sup>2</sup> However, the historical record bears out plainly that the Reformed churches of the continent were both aware of the mission task and faithful in its execution. Further, we ought to note that this was long before the time of William Carey and the dawn of the so-called age of missions.

The Genevan mission work in Brazil is usually the first witness called to the stand and this is understandable since it does stand out in the Reformation era. However, we should not think that Reformed missions began or ended there. Scott H. Hendrix has pointed out that the Reformation itself can be considered a mission-oriented movement—at the very least, the Reformers regarded themselves as missionaries in some sense.<sup>3</sup> Moving on from the Reformation, one might be led to think from the histories of mission that any missionary zeal disappeared with the first or second generation of Reformers. For example, Stephen Neill makes no mention of the fact that the Dutch Reformed were involved with mission work in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> From Neill it would appear that no Protestant mission work was done among native peoples in the early days apart from that of John Eliot and David Brainerd. However, this is simply not the case. The Reformed churches in the Netherlands sent out ministers with the dual task of pastoring colonialists and discipling native peoples. This task took place in the context of a cooperative

arrangement between the Reformed Church and the Dutch West India Company.

The West India Company had been founded in 1621 partly with the intent of establishing colonies in North America and so providing a base from which to engage in fur trade with the indigenous peoples. During this time the state exerted a large amount of control over the Reformed Church. In the North American context, the West India Company effectively took the place of the state and so it was assumed that the Company would take care of certain religious matters as well.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it happened that the churches would select ministers and teachers for the colonies, but the financial support for these would come from the Company. It was on these terms that on March 28, 1624, the Directors

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THE AUTHOR: Wesley Lloyd Bredenhof is the pastor of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario. He is an instructor in the missions department at Reformation International Theological Seminary in Fellsmere, Florida, where he is also pursuing a Doctor of Theology degree. Mr. Bredenhof has written numerous articles for a wide variety of publications including *Clarion*, *Christian Renewal*, *Reformed Perspective*, *Koinonia*, *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, and *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

1. *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, ed. Norman E. Thomas (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995) 32.

2. For a recent example, see A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) 120–121.

3. Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), *passim*. Cf. Fred. H. Klooster, “Missions – the Heidelberg Catechism and Calvin,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 7.2 (November 1972): 187. “... the Reformation deserves to be called one of the greatest home missionary projects of all history.”

4. Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin, 1964). The same has to be said for Ruth A. Tucker’s *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

5. Charles E. Corwin, “Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial Pastors for the Conversion of the Indians,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 12.4 (October 1925), 228.



of the Company passed a number of rules concerning the governance of the new settlement in New Netherland (an area which today includes much of New York state and parts of neighboring states). The second rule is particularly interesting. It reads as follows:

Within their territory they shall only worship according to the true Reformed religion, as it is done within this country at present, and by a good Christian life they shall try to attract the Indians and other blind persons to the knowledge of God and his Word, without, however, committing any religious persecution, but freedom of conscience shall be left to every one (*Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial Pastors*, 228–229).

From this it is clear that the colonists as a collective entity had a missionary or evangelistic calling and intent, even if this was only in terms of lifestyle. Further, it should be noted that while the Company's many devoutly Reformed backers insisted on facilitating the spread of the gospel, this principle on the home front often met with passive resistance from the front line merchants and traders overseas. For those on the ground, everything was subordinate to business and financial interests.<sup>6</sup>

The head office of the West India Company was within the region of Classis Amsterdam, so it happened that this Classis managed the pastoral work in New Netherland, including whatever mission work was being done. They did this through a committee, *Deputati ad Res Externas*. So, in a sense, this committee became the foreign mission board of the Netherlands Reformed Church, at least insofar as it pertained to North America (*Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial Pastors*, 229).

The first minister to arrive in New Netherland was Jonas Michaelius (1584–?), a cousin of the better-known professor at Dordrecht, John Michaelius.<sup>7</sup> Our Michaelius was theologically oriented to the classical side of the Reformed church, rather than the *Nadere Reformatie* or Dutch Puritanism.<sup>8</sup> After serving for some time in the Netherlands, Michaelius went overseas in 1624 as a

chaplain for a naval expedition against the Portuguese in Brazil. In 1627 he returned to the Netherlands and it was at this point that the West India Company called him to serve as a pastor on Manhattan in New Netherland. With his wife and two children, Michaelius made the treacherous journey on January 24, 1628.

Within seven weeks his wife was dead and the Michaelius family fell on hard times. For almost a year the family had to live on stale supplies from the ship. In spite of these difficulties, Michaelius carried out the duties of his calling. His task was first of all to minister to the colonists, but he was also mandated to give attention to the native peoples of the area. He did this with zeal and great interest. It is worthwhile to consider his perception of the native inhabitants. In a letter to Adrian Smoutius, a pastor in Amsterdam, we find the following remarks:

As to the natives of this country, I find them entirely savage and wild, strangers to all decency, yea, uncivil and stupid as garden poles, proficient in all wickedness and godlessness; devilish men, who serve nobody but the devil.... They are as thievish and treacherous as they are tall; and in cruelty they are altogether inhuman, more than barbarous, far exceeding the Africans.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of this very negative evaluation (and it does go on and on), Michaelius remained concerned for their salvation. Being vexed himself, he asks the question at one point in the letter: "Now by what means are we to make a salutary breach for the salvation of this people?" (*Ecclesiastical Records*, Volume 1, 58).

He was frustrated and appears to have had little, if any success, in his missionary efforts. For this reason, he reached the conclusion that "It would be well then to leave the parents as they are, and begin with the children who are still young. So be it. But they ought to be separated from their parents; yea, from their whole nation." (*Ecclesiastical Records*, 60). This was not accomplished during the lifetime of Michaelius (nor soon thereafter), but we do find here the seeds of later developments, particularly with respect to residential schools. That aside, Michaelius was only in New Netherland for a period of four years. He then returned to the Netherlands and seems to fall out of sight.

John Backerus succeeded Michaelius in the period 1647–1649, but he does not appear to have done any work among the native people (*Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial Pastors*, 233). Several years before this, however, we find the man who would be called "the chief apostle to the Indians under the Dutch regime."

6. Donna Merwick, *The Shame and Sorrow: Dutch-Amerindian Encounters in New Netherland* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) 117.

7. Unless otherwise noted, all the biographical information on Jonas Michaelius is drawn from Charles E. Corwin, "The First Dutch Minister in America," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 12.3 (April 1925): 144ff.

8. Leendert Jan Joosse, *Geloof in de Nieuwe Wereld: Ontmoeting met Afrikanen en Indianen (1600–1700)* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2008) 239.

9. State of New York, *Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York*, vol. 1 (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1901) 56–57.

(*Efforts*, 233). That man was Johannes Megapolensis and it is his life and work that we now proceed to survey.

#### A BRIEF LIFE OF JOHANNES MEGAPOLENSIS

Megapolensis was born to Roman Catholic parents in 1603 in Koedijk, a town in the Dutch province of North Holland. It appears likely that the original form of his surname was Van Meckelenburg, although Grootstadt is also a possibility (depending on whether his family originates from Germany or the Lowlands).<sup>10</sup> At some point he hellenized the surname to Megapolensis, following the example of an uncle who was also a Reformed pastor. It was this same uncle, also named Johannes Megapolensis, who appears to have been instrumental in his conversion from Roman Catholicism to the Reformed faith. This took place when he was 23 and it resulted in his parents literally disowning him (*Ecclesiastical Records*, 602).

We know little about the years preceding or immediately following this event. All we know is that he decided to become a Reformed minister and thus in 1634, we find him accepting a call to the church at Wieringerwaard, just north of Alkmaar. Like Michaelius, he was more oriented to the classic orthodoxy of the Reformed church rather than the pietistic side (Joosse, 252). He remained in Wieringerwaard for four years and then also served churches at Schoorl and Bergen, also near Alkmaar. Sometime during this time period, he also married Machtelt Steengen, the stepdaughter of his uncle, Johannes Megapolensis, Sr. Together with his wife, the younger Megapolensis raised four children: three sons and one daughter.

In 1642, Megapolensis was called to serve in the colony of New Netherland. Having been honourably discharged by Classis Alkmaar, Megapolensis and his family set sail for New Netherland on June 3, 1642, sailing on the ship *De Houttuyn*. They arrived on August 4.<sup>11</sup> Megapolensis had agreed to serve as a pastor in a settlement being developed by a diamond merchant and landowner from Amsterdam, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer. Van Rensselaer, under the patroon system, had received a large grant of land in the area of present-day Albany, New York. This patroonship eventually consisted of over 700,000 acres and was known as Rensselaerswyck. Under the patroon system, Van Rensselaer was given certain quasi-feudal rights and privileges with respect to the colonists, and he was also responsible for their spiritual well being. Thus Van Rensselaer was looking for a minister and heard of Megapolensis and his willingness to go overseas. The patroon then put in a request with

Classis Amsterdam and asked them to make the necessary arrangements. So, after conferring with Megapolensis, the Classis brought the two men together and on April 6, 1642, they entered into an agreement.<sup>12</sup>

According to this contract, Megapolensis was going to serve the settlement at Rensselaerswyck for a six-year period, receiving a salary from the patroon. The contract provided a pension for his wife and family in case of death and was otherwise fairly generous. Moreover, the contract also stipulated that Megapolensis was to work “for the edifying improvement of the inhabitants and the Indians.” (*Ecclesiastical Records*, 144). Megapolensis received a similar charge from Classis Amsterdam. In a letter to the Consistory of New Amsterdam (which resembles in many ways an attestation), we read this concerning Megapolensis:

[with Johannes Megapolensis] Rev. Bogardus and his entire Consistory are admonished and exhorted to hold correspondence and communion, so far at least as the circumstances permit; and thus with united hands to proclaim the Word of the Lord, not only among our own nationality, but also among the blind heathen in America. Thus we will all heartily rejoice that the Kingdom of Christ Jesus is more widely extended there. May the Lord bless the labours of both these ministers abundantly, strengthen them by the power of the Holy Ghost, and grant that they may faithfully use their talents to the magnifying of His Holy Name, to the extension of the kingdom of our Saviour Christ, and to the conversion and salvation of men (*Ecclesiastical Records*, 151).

Thus, as Michaelius before him, Megapolensis was sent out with two functions: pastor and missionary.

Having been thus sent out, Megapolensis and his family arrived at New Amsterdam. Seventeen other colonists accompanied them who were likewise bound for Rensselaerswyck. Megapolensis quickly made the journey northward up the Hudson River and preached his first sermon in his new congregation on August 17. This worship service was held in a storehouse, since a church building had not yet been constructed. In fact,

10. Unless otherwise noted, most of the biographical information here was gleaned from Gerald Francis DeJong, “Dominie Johannes Megapolensis: Minister to New Netherland,” *The New York Historical Society Quarterly* 52.1 (January 1968): 7–47.

11. *Ecclesiastical Records*, 152–153. Joosse, 255.

12. “Dominie Johannes Megapolensis,” 9. There is a discrepancy between DeJong and the copy of the agreement found in *Ecclesiastical Records* (143–145). The latter states that the contract was signed on March 6, not April 6. I have not been able to determine which is correct.

during the first several years of Megapolensis' ministry in Rensselaerswyck, the services appear to have been held in his house. Eventually, however, the storehouse was remodeled into a church building.

The congregation in this place was a varied group. Most were of Dutch ancestry, though apparently there were also Scandinavians, Germans, and English mixed in. Some local native people occasionally attended the worship services and most likely some black slaves as well. Most of the colonists were farmers or artisans by trade. They seem to have been a rather lawless and uninhibited group. Many of them refused to pay their tithes to the patroon (as part of the patroon system) and many were given to excessive drinking and dishonesty. At one point, Megapolensis complained that many of the male colonists were fornicating with the local native women. Large numbers of inhabitants in the settlement were fined or reprimanded for stealing, brawling, blasphemy and other crimes. Megapolensis clearly had his hands full.

Besides his regular work of preaching and pastoring, Megapolensis was required to carry out other duties at Rensselaerswyck. These duties "included the witnessing of deeds and contracts, serving as a special advisor to various magistrates of the colony, and acting as an arbiter of disputes." Over top of all this, he also worked zealously among the Mohawk people of the area. In this he was strongly supported and encouraged by Kiliaen Van Rensselaer. In one of the patroon's letters to Megapolensis we read:

We did not fail to join our daily prayers with yours, nor do we fail to continue therein, hoping that as the Lord our God has been your leader and given you a happy and speedy voyage, he will also bless the purpose which I thereby have in mind, extending His blessing over yourself, your wife and family, especially to make your reverence a blessed instrument in His service to establish there a church and community both among the Christians and the blind heathen; for the Christians, that they may see the day of their holy baptism and confession and practise righteousness more and more; for the heathen who live among and alongside us, that their stony hearts may be softened, their blind eyes opened

and their deaf ears unstopped by the power of the Holy Ghost, in order that they may see and understand the wonders of His law, recognize their sins and His grace and that they may be brought to the fold of Jesus Christ and go among other heathen bringing forth righteous fruits of confession and gratitude. Amen.<sup>13</sup>

We will look at this work in more detail momentarily.

Megapolensis worked for the six years that he had initially agreed upon. Shortly before the six years were up, he made plans to return to the Netherlands. It is uncertain as to why he desired to return, but in any case he was so eager that he sent his wife and children on before him. He had requested Classis Amsterdam to release him from his duties, but when they took their time, Mrs. Megapolensis appeared before the committee *Deputati ad Res Indicas* and asked them to speed up the process. By this point, Megapolensis had been in New Netherland for over seven years. The decision was finally made on March 29, 1649 and Megapolensis was honourably released from his duties at Rensselaerswyck (*Ecclesiastical Records*, 249).

However, it is not until August of 1649 that we find Megapolensis in New Amsterdam preparing to board a ship for the long journey home. It was not to be. The magistrates of New Amsterdam persuaded Megapolensis to remain in New Netherland. They argued, "if he were to leave, there would be no Reformed minister in all New Netherland and that someone was needed to baptize the children, who at New Amsterdam alone sometimes numbered four at a single presentation." It is intriguing that the argument appears to have centered on the administration of baptism, rather than the preaching of the Word. At any rate, Megapolensis was convinced by their arguments and decided to stay and become pastor of the church at New Amsterdam. Soon afterwards his family joined him once again and he settled into life in his new parish.

The challenges of this new pastorate were in some ways greater than those of his previous. The inhabitants of New Amsterdam were even more badly behaved than those of Rensselaerswyck. Drunkenness was a serious problem, as was brawling. Brandy shops and beer houses were said to make up a quarter of the town.

During his pastorate in New Amsterdam, Megapolensis gave much attention to furthering the spiritual education of the youth. To that end, he had also written a catechetical book entitled, "Examination and Confession for the Benefit of Those Who Are Inclined to Approach the Table of the Lord."<sup>14</sup> A copy of this catechism was submitted to Classis Amsterdam in 1651 with the

13. *Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts Being the Letters of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, 1630–1643*, ed. and trans. A.J.F. Van Laer (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1908) 645.

14. According to Schalkwijk, this catechism was (also?) intended for use among the Mohawks. Cf. F.L. Schalkwijk, *The Reformed Church in Dutch Brazil (1630–1654)* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1986) 227.

suggestion that it receive widespread use in the colonies of New Netherland and Brazil. The Classis did not accede to this request. In fact, they were not at all impressed: "The Assembly judges that it would be more edifying to send thither instead a goodly number of the Netherland catechisms, and the Compendiums of the same." (*Ecclesiastical Records*, 287). The Classis was, of course, referring to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Compendium of that catechism prepared by Herman Faulkelius. The matter came up again five years later, in 1656, and the reply of the Classis was the same. It was inadvisable to print and use such a catechism. The reason given was this:

Such a course would war against the general order and usage of our church, both in this country and in distant churches, planted by and dependent on us. In these churches no other catechisms besides the Heidelberg and the Compendium of the same, called the Short Inquiry, is in use in the catechetical sermons, catechetical classes and schools. Dear brethren, the general Formula, the doctrines which are good, tried and established by long practice...should not be lightly changed (*Ecclesiastical Records*, 349).

Despite this negative judgment, it appears that the catechism was published and it was quite likely used in New Amsterdam and elsewhere in the colony.

During this ministry at New Amsterdam, Megapolensis also continued his work among the local native peoples. This will be discussed further momentarily. For now, let it suffice to mention that these efforts were not as successful as those previous.

Megapolensis played a significant role in efforts among the colonists to prohibit the right of public worship to such groups as the Lutherans and the Mennonites. Megapolensis was one of the most outspoken in the colony on this issue, coming down on the side of prohibition rather than tolerance. However, as more and more Jews, and especially Quakers, arrived in New Amsterdam, the Reformed ministers began to feel more and more pressure. At certain points they were even compelled to compromise. The West India Company, for instance, pressured the ministers into changing the liturgical form for baptism to suit the Lutherans. If the change was not made, the Company threatened to allow the Lutherans their own church.

However, all of this became moot when, on August 26, 1664, four British warships commanded by Richard Nicolls appeared in the bay off New Amsterdam. The British had long desired to possess these regions. Some

of the leaders of the colony were intent on fighting to the bitter end, but the ministers, including Megapolensis, advised surrender.

This advice was personally ruinous for Megapolensis. Directly because of it, the West India Company refused to give him his salary (both arrears and what he was presently owed). He appealed to Classis Amsterdam for assistance but his request was rejected until he "shall give further satisfaction concerning the events of the surrender of New Netherland to the English." This was never forthcoming and the end result was that he carried out the last years of his ministry in poverty since the members of the churches could not be persuaded that it was their responsibility to provide for their pastors.

Johannes Megapolensis died in the Lord in January of 1670, though we do not know the exact date. His wife survived him by several years and a son, Samuel Megapolensis, ministered for several years in New Netherland before returning to the Netherlands. In the end, Johannes Megapolensis served 28 years in New Netherland. Though he influenced the spiritual life of the congregations he served, it is especially his work among the Mohawks that strikes our attention. It is that work which will now be more closely surveyed.

#### HIS WORK AMONG THE MOHAWKS

It has already been noted that Megapolensis was sent out both as a pastor and as a missionary. Over and over again, the extant primary documents emphasize this dual task. Having looked at his pastoral work and its challenges in some detail, we will now look closer at his missionary efforts.

Right from the beginning of his days in Rensselaerswyck, Megapolensis made efforts to learn the Mohawk language. This is evident in a letter written to a friend in 1644. This letter, published during his lifetime without his consent, is the most important primary source for our knowledge of Megapolensis and his missionary work. Some have also regarded this letter as a source of valuable information about the 17<sup>th</sup> century Mohawk people. However, the reality is that it may say more about Megapolensis than the Mohawks. Megapolensis remarked about his efforts to learn the language are particularly revealing:

This nation has a very difficult language and it costs me great pains to learn it, so as to be able to speak and preach in it fluently.... I am making a vocabulary of the Mahakuaas' [Mohawks'] language, and when I am among them I ask them how things are called; but as



they are very stupid, I sometimes cannot make them understand what I want.<sup>15</sup>

Rather than seeing the problem as his own, Megapolensis quickly attributed his problems in learning the language to the collective intelligence of the Mohawk people. Needless to say, modern day Mohawks read this with indignation! At any rate, Megapolensis did make efforts to learn the language, though it is not altogether certain whether, as some have claimed, he was able to at some point preach fluently in Mohawk (DeJong, 45). Nevertheless, the fact that he made the effort reveals that he took seriously his responsibility to bring the Christian faith to those who had never heard.

Megapolensis' zeal for the gospel and ability in the Mohawk language are further confirmed in a letter he wrote in Latin to Simon Le Moyne, a French Jesuit missionary. Towards the end of this letter, in a long rambling sentence, Megapolensis upbraids Le Moyne for his failure to preach the Biblical good news to the Mohawks:

For although for twenty years as you have told me, you have traversed the regions of America, and have wandered about in them; have lived among the savages [Latin: *barbaros*], and have baptized very many of them, or rather profaned baptism; since in giving it to non-believers, and to men in the agonies of death, who were not possessed of any proper knowledge of the true God and Saviour, as I have often found out when I have spoken with such savages [*barbaros*] who have been baptized by you or those like you, and how had no knowledge whatever of Christianity, except that according to your custom, they were able to make the sign of the Cross, and to praise those idols of yours which you have in your churches; but who in other respects were thieves, whoremongers, etc. even as other barbarians [*barbaros*].<sup>16</sup>

Megapolensis claims to have conversed enough with nominally Roman Catholic Mohawks to know that their knowledge of the gospel was non-existent. If true, such communication would have required a fairly fluent grasp of the Mohawk language.

How exactly did Megapolensis carry out his missionary work as the opportunities presented themselves? From his letter, it appears that there were three particular ways this was done:

We go with them into the woods, we meet with each other, sometimes at an hour or two's walk from any houses, and think no more about it than as if we met with a Christian. They sleep by us too, in our chambers before our beds. I have had eight at once lying and sleeping upon the floor near my bed, for it is their custom to sleep simply on the bare ground, and to have only a stone or a bit of wood under their heads (*Narratives of New Netherland*, 175).

So, the missionary would go out with them into the forest, but he would also welcome them into his home. It appears that it was primarily through these two means that he became better acquainted with the Mohawks and also began to bring them the gospel. But there was also the regular preaching of the Word in a worship service that the Mohawks would occasionally attend:

When we deliver a sermon, sometimes ten or twelve of them, more or less, will attend, each having a long tobacco pipe, made by himself, in his mouth, and will stand awhile and look, and afterwards ask me what I am doing and what I want, that I stand there alone and make so many words, while none of the rest may speak (*Narratives of New Netherland*, 177–178).

Obviously these sermons were preached primarily for the benefit of the settlers and in Dutch. However, it is worth noting that Megapolensis goes on to say that he would explain the sermon to them afterwards in their own language. The Dutch preacher/missionary at this point indicated that he was preaching the law of God to his parishioners and that he would in due time “preach the same to them and come to them in their own country and castles when I am acquainted with their language.” (*Narratives of New Netherland*, 178). The fact that he was able to communicate this much at this point is quite a feat, considering that he had only been in the area for two years. There is no information available as to whether Megapolensis was able to attain his goal of travelling deeper into Mohawk country to bring the gospel in their own language.

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the missionary was able to establish good relationships with the Mohawks. Those relationships would only have been possible on the basis of effective communication. Another element reinforcing this is found with the story of an old native woman who told Megapolensis the Mohawk creation narrative. The story involves a pregnant woman falling down from heaven, and having a tortoise take her on its back. As the woman sat upon the tortoise, she “groped

15. *Narratives of New Netherland 1609–1664*, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909) 172.

16. *Reply of Rev. Johannes Megapolensis to a Letter of Father Simon Le Moyne* (New York: the Collegiate Church, 1907) 21.

with her hands in the water, and scraped together some of the earth, whence it finally happened that the earth was raised above the water.” (*Narratives of New Netherland*, 178). While Megapolensis notes this creation narrative, he does not give any indication whether he used this as a point of contact in his discussions with the Mohawks. It was potentially such a point of contact, but whether it was actually capitalized upon must remain a matter of speculation.<sup>17</sup> However, contemporary retellings of the Mohawk creation narrative illustrate that Megapolensis did correctly report the basic elements of the story which confirms that effective communication appears to have been established.

This also becomes evident in the role which Megapolensis played in securing the freedom of certain Europeans who had been captured by the Mohawks. The example most often brought forward is that of Isaac Jogues, a French Jesuit missionary. Jogues was working among the native peoples south of Lake Huron. While returning from Quebec in the summer of 1642, Jogues was captured by several Mohawks and taken to present-day upstate New York. While there he was subjected to various forms of torture, including have parts of his fingers chewed off. Eventually, however, he began receiving kinder treatment. His captors would take him on visits to Rensselaerswyck and other places. On one such visit he had contact with Megapolensis. As a result of French hostility, the Mohawks were preparing to kill Jogues. Through his knowledge of the language, Megapolensis became aware of this fact and advised Jogues to escape. The Dutch assisted Jogues in his successful escape, although this greatly aroused the wrath of the Mohawks. Eventually, however, Megapolensis and the other settlers managed to appease the Mohawks. Jogues returned to France for a time and then came back to North America where he was later recaptured by the Mohawks and killed (DeJong, 20–21).

Thus it is clear that Megapolensis had a good grasp of the Mohawk language and, for his time, a good understanding of Mohawk culture. Did all this result in an effective communication of the Gospel message? Care is required when answering this question since the definition of “effective” can vary. For our purposes, we will enquire as to what sorts of positive results *appeared* from his work among the Mohawks.

The first thing we can note is the hesitancy among the Mohawks to accept the gospel message because of perceived hypocrisy among the settlers who claimed to be Christians. When Megapolensis would tell them that he was admonishing the settlers in his sermons not to

steal, commit lewdness, get drunk, commit murder and so on, then the Mohawks would respond: “Why do so many Christians do these things?” (*Narratives of New Netherland*, 178). From Megapolensis’ letter, it appears that the Mohawks thought it good to say these things, but they could not understand why it made no difference in the lives of those who heard it. Of course, this is a classic example of *ad hominem* reasoning, but one not lacking some validity. Hypocritical believers (including missionaries) on a mission field can do much damage to missionary efforts to bring gospel truths to unbelievers.

However, in this instance, the damage done may not have been too severe. Corwin relates that thirty Mohawks were admitted to church membership after being carefully examined (*Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial Pastors*, 234). Corwin cites no primary source for this information, nor does he tell us whether these members remained until death. Others have questioned this assertion, especially on the basis of the claims of the directors of the West India Company that it is essentially impossible to convert adult native people to Christianity.<sup>18</sup> It is true that the Company often showed a lack of concern for spiritual matters, being more interested in social control and profits. This lack of concern impacted the effectiveness of the Dutch colonial pastors/missionaries.<sup>19</sup> The results of Megapolensis’ work are thus not entirely clear.

We find more clarity with his work in New Amsterdam among the native people of that area. The native people of the Manhattan area were far less positively disposed towards the white settlers and the message which their pastors brought. DeJong speculates, “Perhaps one reason for this was that the Indians around Manhattan Island had frequently been mistreated by the Dutch and were definitely more hostile than the Mohawks.” (DeJong, 27).

Despite this, Megapolensis still had one potential convert with whom he was working in the hope that he might become a missionary to his own people. However, in the end, Megapolensis had to write the following to Classis Amsterdam concerning this “convert”:

17. See Joosse, 315. Joosse is ambiguous: “This religious account of the origins of the world gave a point of contact [*aanknopingspunt*] in communication.” (Translation mine, WB).

18. Allen W. Trelease, *Indian Affairs in Colonial New York: The Seventeenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1960) 170. Trelease asserts, “By 1649, when he took up a pastorate in New Amsterdam, Megapolensis had almost certainly failed to convert a single Indian.”

19. Laurence M. Hauptman and Ronald G. Knapp, “Dutch-Aboriginal Interaction in New Netherland and Formosa: An Historical Geography of Empire,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 121.2 (April 29, 1977): 174.

We have had an Indian here with us for about two years. He can read and write Dutch very well. We have instructed him in the fundamental principles of our religion, and he answers publicly in church, and can repeat the Commandments. We have given him a Bible, hoping he might do some good among the Indians, but it all resulted in nothing. He took to drinking brandy, he pawned the Bible, and turned into a regular beast, doing more harm than good among the Indians (*Narratives of New Netherland*, 398–399).

So also in New Amsterdam, efforts made at mission work among the native people were not as successful as one might have hoped.

Nevertheless, seeds were sown for the future. This period (1628–1649) has been described as one of the Dutch and the Mohawks getting to know one another. The following years would be ones in which more Mohawks would come to faith and be gathered into small Reformed churches in New Netherland (Joosse, 313–320). Though Megapolensis may not have seen much fruit in his lifetime, there were small successes at mission work among the Mohawks in the area surrounding present-day Albany. Godfreidus Dellius pastored at Albany and Schenectady in the period 1683–1699. Within ten years, Dellius had established a native church in the Albany area, a church which was reported to consist of some 200 attendees, of whom sixteen were full communicant members. By the end of his ministry in 1699, he had baptized at least 131 aboriginals, mostly Mohawk.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Peter Tesschenmaeker was able to establish a smaller church of approximately 40 converts in the Schenectady area (*Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial Pastors*, 244). Thus it was only after nearly 80 years that it was possible for churches to be established among the Mohawks of upstate New York. Megapolensis was among the pioneers and it is only regrettable that he was not able to see some of the blessing that later came upon this work.

However, were these latter-day conversions really a blessing? Or were they a sham? Any consideration of later Reformed successes among the Mohawks also

needs to consider carefully the argument of Mark Meuwese that these conversions were largely pragmatic rather than spiritual. According to Meuwese, Dutch Calvinism eventually appealed to the Mohawks “because it emphasized the written word in evangelization.”<sup>21</sup> By taking over literacy, the Mohawks were better able to cope with European colonization. There were also political and military reasons that made it expedient for Mohawks to become Reformed during the days of Dellius and Tesschenmaeker. In the days of Michaelius and Megapolensis, the Mohawks were not interested in Dutch Calvinism and the Reformed Church was not all that interested in converting them. However, later political developments conspired to make the Reformed faith more attractive. Meuwese grants that some Mohawks were “drawn to Protestantism to spiritually revitalize their individual lives.” They were interested in obtaining new spiritual power in a time of upheaval (Meuwese, 127). But he does not appear to allow for genuine spiritual conversions to the Christian faith among the Mohawks of this period.

Meuwese’s approach to these issues is interesting and his thesis may well have some elements of truth to it. However, when dealing with the attitudes and motivations of Mohawks from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there are simply no primary sources on which to base one’s assertions. While becoming literate, the Mohawks did not leave behind written records of their religious conversions and what led to them. We have secondary observations from the colonial Dutch and English, but nothing from the Mohawks themselves. Therefore, one cannot say for certain why 131 Mohawks were baptized by Dellius and received as members of the Reformed church. One can bring theories related to the social, political, military and economic circumstances, but one also cannot rule out theories related to the mysterious and wonderful work of the Holy Spirit.

## CONCLUSIONS

It should be clear that the Reformed missions among native peoples in North America are not a recent development. In fact, Reformed missions to indigenous North Americans pre-date William Carey and thus invalidate the thesis that Reformation theology produced no missionary work on its own. The Reformed tradition has a long history of contact with aboriginal peoples in North America. In later times, one could think here also of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). The CRCNA worked for many years among

20. “Efforts of the Dutch-American Colonial Pastors” 240; Daniel K. Richter, “Some of Them ... Would Always Have a Minister with Them: Mohawk Protestantism, 1683–1719,” *American Indian Quarterly* 16.4 (Autumn 1992): 471.

21. Mark Meuwese, “Dutch Calvinism and Native Americans: A Comparative Study of the Motivations for Protestant Conversion among the Tupis in Northeastern Brazil (1630–1654) and the Mohawks in Central New York (1690–1710),” in *The Spiritual Conversion of the Americas*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2004) 119.

the Navaho and Zuni peoples of the American South-West—this work culminated in the establishment of a classis consisting of the former mission churches. The Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church of America have also been committed to gospel outreach among Native Americans and Canadians. While more could have been done and more remains to be done, there is a long history and it is one from which we can learn many valuable lessons.

One of those lessons has to do with the foolishness of the gospel. Allen Trelease speculates that the Mohawks were not “ready to appreciate the introspective and unadorned Calvinism offered by the Dutch Reformed Church.” (Trelease, 171). By ‘introspective’ we can understand Trelease to refer to the Reformed insistence on a religion of the ears (excepting the sacraments), rather than a religion of the eyes. The aboriginals preferred the pomp and ceremony of the Roman Catholics with their multi-faceted rituals, sacraments (and sacramentals), and symbols. In short, their preference was for a religion of the eyes. Given a choice, they would also prefer the Roman Catholic approach to baptism and church membership rather than the rigours of the Reformed. We have to say it was because the Reformed wanted to stay close to Scripture that the ‘success’ was not as great as might have been hoped. The Word was offensive—and what else can be expected? The Word cannot be compromised for the sake of results. Faithfulness to the Word was required of missionaries then and it continues to be required of missionaries today. If we are faithful to the Word in every way, neither adding or taking away, and we do not see abundant fruit, that should not be a discouragement. The Word never returns empty and Reformed missionaries do well to keep that in mind, also when things appear hopeless and seem to be going nowhere.

There are also positive lessons to be learned from the missionary experiences of Johannes Megapolensis. One of these is patience. The seeds were sown in some measure by Megapolensis, but the real harvest did not begin until many years later with men such as Dellijs and Tesschenmaeker. There is much impatience in our modern world and this has the potential to impact how we view mission work. This can be exacerbated when the mission work is done close to home, for instance, among native North Americans. We must be patient—the Lord will do his work in his time.

As we survey Megapolensis’ life and work, we also see the importance of a missionary taking the time to learn both language and culture. Although it was very

time consuming, it proved to be of great value to Megapolensis. It appears that after two years he was able to adequately communicate with the Mohawk people and also testify to the gospel message. Closely connected with language is culture. While the advent of cultural anthropology has placed more emphasis on this than in previous ages, Megapolensis did give some attention to this area as well. In today’s milieu, most North American aboriginals speak English relatively fluently, so language is no longer as much of a barrier. However, this can deceive a missionary into thinking that effective communication will be a given. Culture impacts communication in ways that we often take for granted.<sup>22</sup> We may be speaking the same language, but the cross-cultural barrier should not be underestimated.

The gospel of our Lord Jesus must go out to the ends of the earth. Those entrusted with this treasure invariably recognize the great necessity and impulse of missions. Reformed churches around the world continue to be concerned for those lost in the darkness of sin and unbelief. Their concern, growing out of faith in Christ, unites them with Reformed believers in ages past. That concern has always born fruit of one sort or another, sometimes great, sometimes little. Could the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century have done more for the native inhabitants of North America? Definitely. Could we be doing more today? Even more certainly so. ■

22. See David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).



# An Answer to the Challenge of Preaching the Old Testament: An Historical and Theological Examination of the Redemptive-Historical Approach

By Rev. Anthony T. Selvaggio, J.D., M. Div.

## INTRODUCTION

All honest exegetes will readily admit that preaching from the Old Testament is a difficult task. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Reformed church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a debate regarding how to properly exegete and preach the texts of the Old Testament. This debate continues to rage in early parts of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Included among the methods of approaching the Old Testament which emerged from this debate was the redemptive-historical approach. This approach has significantly impacted the Reformed debate regarding how to preach the Old Testament.

The purpose of this article is two-fold: (1) To trace and explain the historical and theological development of the redemptive-historical approach as it emerged in the Netherlands; (2) To explore and synthesize the core

principles of this approach by examining the writings of several of its most prominent advocates.

Before commencing our pursuit of this two-fold purpose, it will be helpful to set the stage by providing a brief historical overview of the challenge of preaching from the Old Testament. This challenge, which gave rise to the redemptive-historical approach, is not new, but rather stretches back to the very beginning of the Christian era.

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

“And the first question that confronts the interpreter is that of the relation in which the Old and New Testaments stand to each other.”<sup>1</sup>

Louis Berkhof (1873–1957) penned these words in the context of articulating the principles which compose the foundation of sound biblical interpretation and exegesis. It is unequivocal, based on the substance of Berkhof’s quotation, that he considered the relationship between the Old and New Testaments as a primary question in hermeneutics. It is a primary question because the answer to it impacts the entire scope of one’s theology, particularly how one approaches and exegetes the Old Testament.

Berkhof’s question is not a novel one. Interpreting the Old Testament has been a struggle for exegetes throughout church history. For example, in the early church theologians were divided over the issue of how to preach from the Old Testament. Some early church fathers employed an allegorical approach to the Old Testament. The church father Origen (185–254) is a prime example of one who adopted this approach. Origen considered the Bible as containing a mystery which is revealed through a complex system of symbolism.<sup>2</sup> Other church fathers, such as John Chrysostom

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THE AUTHOR: Anthony T. Selvaggio is a Teaching Elder in Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America and a member of the Rochester Reformed Presbyterian Church (Rochester, NY) where he contributes regularly to the preaching ministry. He previously served as the Senior Pastor of the College Hill Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCNA) in Beaver Falls, PA. He is also a visiting professor at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. Mr. Selvaggio is an active preacher and conference speaker. He received his Juris Doctor (J.D.) from the University at Buffalo School of Law and his Masters of Divinity from the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. His major published works include *The Prophets Speak of Him: Encountering Jesus in the Minor Prophets* (Evangelical Press, 2006), *What the Bible Teaches About Marriage* (Evangelical Press, 2007), *A Proverbs Driven Life* (Shepherd Press, 2008) and *24/7 Christian: Practical Help From the Book of James* (Evangelical Press, 2008). He also edited and contributed to *The Faith Once Delivered* (P & R Publishing, 2007). The author lives in Rochester, New York with his wife, Michelle, and his two children, Katherine and James.

1. Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950) 134.

2. Robert M. Grand and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984) 59.

(347–407), were committed to expounding the historical and literal meaning of the Old Testament and avoided allegorizing the text.<sup>3</sup> The allegorical and literal-historical approaches to the Old Testament competed for the minds of exegetes throughout the patristic and medieval periods.<sup>4</sup>

During the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods, the Reformers and their theological progeny generally rejected the allegorical approach and instead embraced the literal and historical approach, but the Reformers placed an even greater emphasis on the use of the original languages.<sup>5</sup> Some Reformation exegetes, like John Calvin, employed a typological hermeneutic when interpreting the Old Testament which focused on the glory of Christ, but avoided most of the excesses of unwarranted and fanciful allegory.<sup>6</sup> However, even during this glorious period of exegesis, many exegetes continued to interpret the Old Testament in an overly simplistic typological manner choosing to focus on identifying remote references and allusions to Christ in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup>

The next major development in the interpretation of the Old Testament occurred in the 19th Century with the work of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918). He, and his intellectual progeny, set a pattern for interpreting the Old Testament which remains the predominate methodology employed among modern liberal theologians (Grand and Tracy, 116). Wellhausen's view of the Old Testament was humanistic and naturalistic, rather than theocentric and supernatural, and he understood the Old Testament as a composite work written from four different textual traditions.<sup>8</sup> Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), like Wellhausen, viewed the Old Testament in a naturalistic manner, but Gunkel chose to focus on the form and genre of Old Testament literature as a method of exegesis and interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, the history of Old Testament exegesis is much broader and deeper than this brief sketch suggests. However, this overview is more than sufficient to reveal that the challenge of interpreting the Old Testament is not a new one. The question that remains is how will the Christian exegete respond to the challenge of the Old Testament? More poignantly and practically, how will he preach the Old Testament? Should he take an allegorical or typological approach? Should he take a Christological approach? Should he take a grammatico-historical approach? Should he take a multi-perspectival approach? The very presence and difficulty of these questions has led to an unfortunate neglect of preaching from the Old Testament. Many pastors simply avoid preaching from the Old Testament rather than dealing

with its inherent complexities. Why is preaching from the Old Testament so difficult?

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. attempted to answer this question by stating that the main difficulty in preaching from the Old Testament is “the Bible’s historical particularity; that is, its words are most frequently, if not always in the Old Testament, directed to a specific people in a specific situation at a specific time and in a specific culture. That is the real difficulty” (Kaiser, 37). What Kaiser is articulating is that the difficulty which the exegete faces in preaching from the Old Testament is bridging the historical-cultural gap which necessarily exists in Old Testament interpretation. The exegete must determine how he will bridge this gap; he simply cannot ignore it.

The debate over how to bridge this gap led to a controversy within the Gereformeerde Kerken in Holland in the 1930’s and 1940’s which eventually contributed to a church schism. This conflict, and the literature and study it spawned, gave rise to the modern development

3. Ibid., 66. It should also be noted that even in the early church period there were those engaged in what we now commonly refer to as Biblical Theology. Although many consider the discipline of Biblical Theology to have its formal birth in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, on a practical and informal level it has always been with the church. J.V. Fesko has ably argued that the church father Irenaeus (115–202) was a biblical theologian (see J.V. Fesko, “On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology,” *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2008) 443–477.

4. Traditionally, most scholars contended that there were two different schools of interpretation in the early church period—the Alexandrian school (emphasizing the allegorical approach) and the Antiochian school (emphasizing the historical-literal approach). This traditional understanding has been ably challenged in recent scholarship (see Donald Fairbairn, “Patristic Exegesis and Theology: The Cart and the Horse,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (2007), 1–19). Fairbairn contends that the differences in exegetical emphases between Antioch and Alexandria were primarily the result of each school’s theological response to the heresy of Arianism. I am indebted to Rev. James Cassidy for enlightening me regarding this scholarly advancement.

5. Grand and Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 92.

6. J.V. Fesko provides a short, but helpful summary of Calvin’s biblical theological approach in “On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology.”

7. Grand and Tracy, 93. For example, Martin Luther is often criticized for taking an overly simplistic Christological approach to the Old Testament.

8. Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 40–41. Wellhausen advocated a form of higher criticism which was concerned with the source of biblical literature.

9. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 40.

and articulation of the redemptive-historical approach to the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT IN THE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN

It is interesting that the modern Reformed debate regarding how to preach from the Old Testament finds its origin in the small country of Holland. It was within the Reformed church of the Netherlands, in the early part of the past century, that a debate arose over the proper methodology for preaching from the Old Testament. Sidney Greidanus, professor emeritus at Calvin Theological Seminary, has provided the best historical summary of this controversy in his book *Sola Scriptura*.<sup>11</sup> Greidanus summarizes the genesis of the controversy as follows:

In the 1930's a number of men in the Gereformeerde Kerken raised objections to the usual practice of preaching in that church. Simply put, their complaint was that the preachers, in preaching historical texts, would display the persons mentioned in the texts as models to be imitated, as examples to be followed—hence the term 'exemplary preaching' (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 8).

The Old Testament, in which historical narratives predominate, is particularly subject to being treated in an exemplary manner and therefore much of the debate revolved around how to preach the Old Testament.

In order to properly understand the controversy in the Netherlands it is important to gain some perspective on the political, philosophical and theological climate of the period. On the political front, it is important to realize that this controversy arose in the period between

two World Wars, both of which impacted the European continent in an extraordinary manner. In addition, it was during this period that a new Calvinistic philosophy was developed by Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 23). In the arena of theology, Herman Bavinck's (1854–1921) theological contributions and legacy, emphasizing the importance of Reformed exegesis and dogmatics, began to influence a generation of scholars and pastors thereby reviving a love for the classic doctrines of the Reformed faith (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 25).

A second theological figure of great import also arose during this period who was antithetical to Bavinck, but no less influential—Karl Barth (1886–1968). Barth's dialectic theology, which was built on a non-historical approach to God and the Scriptures, spurred on the minds of theological conservatives to formulate a supernatural response to Barth which fused supernatural redemption with real history.<sup>12</sup>

The confluence of these factors led to what Greidanus calls a "new direction" in the Reformed church in Holland. This "new direction" is difficult to fully articulate and define, but J. H. Bavinck<sup>13</sup> attempted to give it some contours:

We can speak of a 'new spirit' or a 'new direction'.... In the totality of our church life in which various elements of earlier pietism and mystical subjectivism persist, this new spirit reveals itself as a rejuvenating and disquieting force (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 22).

This "new direction" also impacted the study and teaching of homiletics where those embracing change sought a "new method of interpretation and preaching" (Greidanus, 27). This new approach to preaching was labeled the redemptive-historical approach. In direct contradiction to Barth's ahistorical approach; the Reformed preachers in Holland were embracing the realness of redemptive history in their preaching by means of this new method.<sup>14</sup> This new direction had returned vitality to the church in Holland, but it also brought complications.

The introduction of the "new direction," and all of the change which accompanied it, left many in the church of Holland feeling unsettled. During the Synod of 1936, a committee was appointed to investigate and report on the substance and nature of this "new direction." Greidanus notes that this committee was replete with conflict and had little success in achieving its appointed task (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 25). Powerful personalities were emerging and a cleavage was developing between

10. As has been noted in the brief historical sketch provided in this article, what we now refer to as Biblical Theology or the Redemptive-Historical approach has been with the church since the dawn of the New Testament era. However, it is my contention that the controversy in the Netherlands was the genesis event for the modern development of the approach and also served to fuel the modern debate over how to preach the Old Testament in the Reformed church.

11. Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura* (Toronto, Canada: Wedge Publishing, 1970).

12. Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 32. Barth's influence on the development of the redemptive-historical approach should not be underestimated. In many ways, the redemptive-historical approach is a direct answer to Barth because it emphasizes the supernatural work of God in redemption and centers this redemptive work in a real unfolding of history.

13. Not to be confused with Herman Bavinck.

14. Greidanus credits Klaas Schilder as pioneering this attack against Barthianism (see Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 30.)

two major groups. The stage was set for the blossoming of a controversy.<sup>15</sup>

Before dissecting the heart of the controversy, it will be helpful to obtain some understanding of the players on each side of the argument and the general substance of their respective positions. We will begin with the advocates of the redemptive-historical approach.

Greidanus includes the following names as a list of men who represented the redemptive-historical approach: B. Holwerda, K. Schilder, H.J. Spier, D. Van Dijk, M.B. Van't Veer and C. Veenhof.<sup>16</sup> Greidanus notes that, among these men, Schilder was the most prominent and he "might be called the initiator of the redemptive-historical approach" (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 40). J. Faber described Schilder's influence on this movement as follows:

Schilder showed the coherence and connections in Holy Scripture. His work caused the formation of a school of mostly young Reformed ministers and led to the renewal of the preaching of the Word in an inspiring manner. This labor reached a summit in 1930 with the publication of *Christus in Zijn Lijden* (Christ and His Suffering), a trilogy that was ably translated into English.<sup>17</sup>

The position for which Schilder was the torchbearer was summarized succinctly by one of his comrades, Holwerda:

The Bible does not contain many histories but *one* history—the one history of God's constantly advancing revelation, the one history of God's ever progressing redemptive work. And the various persons named in the Bible have all received their own peculiar place in this one history and have their peculiar meaning for this history. We must, therefore, try to understand all the accounts in their relation to each other, in their coherence with the center of redemptive history, Jesus Christ (Faber, 41).

As Greidanus points out, the goal of the redemptive-historical approach is to achieve *sola Scriptura* in preaching.<sup>18</sup> For the advocates of the redemptive-historical approach, the principle of *sola Scriptura* is violated when Scripture is reduced solely to moralistic, or exemplary, instruction. This is especially at issue when preaching from historical narratives of the Old Testament. Van Dijk, a proponent of the redemptive-historical approach, captured the essence of this concern when he wrote, "No justice is done to Scripture when the deeds of persons who figured once upon a time in a particular

historical episode occasion some stimulating, warning, or edifying remarks in the sermon" (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 42). Van Dijk goes on to conclude, "It is my conviction that exemplary treatment of historical texts cannot rightly be called 'ministry of the Word'" (42).

The second position is the exemplary approach and Greidanus lists the following as advocates of this approach: J.H. Bavinck, K. Dijk, J. Douma, Ph. J. Huyser, J. Schelhaas, and N. Streefkerk (42). Greidanus judiciously notes that these men did not defend the gross extremes of the exemplary approach, but rather they were advocates for a balanced approach which had room for what they considered a proper use of Scripture, namely an exemplary or moralistic application (43). J. Douma attempted to express the balanced view of his side and its historic validity:

Our fathers knew very well that redemptive history is a unified structure with Christ at its center, but they still felt free to treat separately (using biblical givens) certain persons described in Scripture, to picture them psychologically, to speak of their struggles and trials, their strengths and weaknesses, and then to draw parallels between the experiences of the Bible saints and the struggles of believers today. Without any hesitation our fathers held up the virtues of the biblical persons as an example to all, but also their sins and weaknesses as a warning (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 43).

After reading Douma's statement, one might wonder whether a conflict exists at all between these two views. After all, the exemplary approach appears to have no conflict with the fundamental nature of the redemptive-

15. Greidanus notes that the exemplary—redemptive-historical conflict was not the only area of disagreement within the church of Holland. It would be overly simplistic to place the schism entirely on this issue. Greidanus points out other areas of disagreement including subjectivism, individualism and spiritualism. However, the preaching issue became the focus of this schism. See Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 33–39.

16. Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 40. For more information on some of these men, and their historic role in this controversy, see C. Trimp, *Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Photolithoprinted in Korea, Distributed by Westminster Discount Book Service, Inc., Scarsdale, N.Y., translation copyrighted by Nelson D. Kloosterman, 1996) 75–91.

17. J. Faber, "Klaas Schilder's Life and Work", *Always Obedient: Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder*, ed. J. Geertsema (Philipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 1995) 6.

18. It is important to note that Greidanus is not accusing those maintaining the exemplary approach as denying the inspiration and authority of Scripture. He is not using *sola Scriptura* here in the Reformation sense.



historical approach, but rather only seeks to conjoin to it the liberty to preach in an exemplary manner as well (43). For example, Douma, an ardent defender of the exemplary approach, admits that his group is seeking a synthesis of the two approaches, “Not one of us is opposed to the redemptive-historical method as such; what we object to is the *exclusive* redemptive-historical method” (45). Therefore, as Greidanus rightly recognized, the true debate is not exemplary versus redemptive-historical, but rather the exemplary-redemptive-historical synthesis versus the redemptive-historical approach.<sup>19</sup> This is really what rests at the heart of the Dutch preaching controversy.

These two approaches, with their respective defenders, battled it out for the minds of Reformed preachers in Holland for nearly a decade. The controversy which began in the early 1930’s began to dwindle around 1940 and reached its “low point” after 1944 (50). The decline in the controversy was mainly due to the invasion of Holland by Germany in May of 1940 (50). However, even after the debate had ceased the church in Holland continued to feel the lasting effects of this controversy. A watershed event during this period was Klaas Schilder’s suspension on March 23, 1944 and his subsequent excommunication on August 3, 1944.<sup>20</sup> This

action precipitated the official schism which occurred on August 11, 1944 (51). The Gereformeerde Kerken was now divided and the division centered on the method of preaching Old Testament texts. As Greidanus stated, “the redemptive-historical and exemplary camps had become two churches.”<sup>21</sup>

The debate over how to preach from Old Testament historical texts did not die in Holland. Rather, this debate has continued to foment and is a contemporary issue in Reformed churches and seminaries in America today. The next section of this article, the main body of it, is an attempt to examine and synthesize the core principles of the redemptive-historical approach to the Old Testament.

#### THE REDEPTIVE-HISTORICAL APPROACH ARTICULATED

The best way to understand the core principles of the redemptive-historical approach to the Old Testament is to examine the writings of some of the major figures in this movement. This article will focus on the writings and thought of C. Trimp, S.G. DeGraaf, Sidney Greidanus, Edmund Clowney, and Graeme Goldsworthy.<sup>22</sup>

Due to the fact that this controversy emerged from Dutch theology, it should not be surprising that some of those who succeeded the players in the original controversy would be in the Dutch Reformed church both in the Netherlands and in the immigrant church in America. Three significant figures from this background include C. Trimp, S.G. DeGraaf, and Sidney Greidanus.

#### C. Trimp

C. Trimp was a professor at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands where he taught on numerous subjects including homiletics. He was also an ordained minister and coeditor of a popular Reformed magazine in the Netherlands entitled *De Reformatie*.<sup>23</sup> His primary contribution to this discussion is his short work entitled, *Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion*.<sup>24</sup> Trimp entitled his work as he did because he considered the “discussion” which occurred in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands between 1930 and 1944 to be unfinished.<sup>25</sup> In this work, Trimp sets forth a definition of the nature of biblical history and a description of the history of salvation. He also makes a plea and apology for redemptive-historical preaching.<sup>26</sup>

19. Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 45. Greidanus goes into a discussion of how these two views play out in theory and in practice. He notes that the synthesis approach plays itself out in practice as an exemplary method. See pages 45–49.

20. Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 51. It should be noted that, according to J. Faber, Schilder’s excommunication was not simply over the issue of hermeneutics, but occurred ostensibly because “he opposed the doctrinal statements of 1942 (concerning covenant and baptism, presumed regeneration, and ‘common grace’) and because he opposed the hierarchical actions of the synods held in 1939–43 and 1943–45.” See Faber, “Klaas Schilder’s Life and Work,” 2.

21. Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 51–52. Greidanus admits that the divide did not fit “neatly” into these two categories, but the main advocates in each movement ended up in different churches.

22. One might wonder why Geerhardus Vos’ name is not included in this list as he is often associated with this movement. It would, in some sense, be anachronistic to include Vos in this movement because he died in 1949 and his life and work was completed prior to this controversy reaching maturity. However, it is clear that Vos’ writings and preaching style would be consistent and supportive of the redemptive-historical approach. In addition, Vos’ contributions to Biblical Theology are so significant they would require an entirely separate article.

23. See “About the Author” in Trimp, *Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion*.

24. C. Trimp, *Preaching and the History of Salvation: Continuing an Unfinished Discussion*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman.

25. See Trimp’s preface.

26. In this section, Trimp also discusses the contributions of Schilder, Holwerda and van’t Veer.

At the end of the first section of his book, Trimp introduces the following topic which is pertinent to the purpose of this article: “The New Testament congregation reads the Old Testament” (Trimp, 34). It is within this section that Trimp sets out several core principles of his approach to preaching from the Old Testament. First among these principles is that the Old Testament reveals God’s relationship with his people in history. He stresses the fact that God “did not consider it beneath His dignity to connect *His* Name to the names and life stories of these people” (35). In fact, Trimp concludes that “Every Old Testament story as such typifies God’s desire to dwell with people and to be involved with people” (Trimp, 36).

A second principle of Trimp’s approach is that Old Testament history is not static, but rather it progresses dynamically “toward the incarnation” (36). He considered this insight as the greatest contribution of the redemptive-historical movement which occurred in the Netherlands. According to Trimp, the redemptive-historical movement emphasized “that the Old Testament showed a *forward-moving impulse*” (Trimp, 64–65). Trimp noted that the Old Testament reveals God as making and fulfilling promises in history in various “dimensions” or epochs (64–65). Trimp conceived of a building block approach to redemptive history wherein each epoch, with its promises and fulfillments, is the foundation for the subsequent epoch and he illustrated this concept through the metaphor of a tall building with its successive stories (64–65).

Thirdly, Trimp advocated a Christocentric approach to preaching the Old Testament because he argued that it is in Christ that “all stories find their meaning” (37). According to Trimp, Christ occupies the center of Old Testament revelation and history. He articulated this principle as follows, “When the typical character of God’s administration is in view, then Scripture argues on the basis of the Old Testament in terms of the unity of history and its center is Christ” (38).

Finally, Trimp considered it vital to understand the legitimate discontinuities between the old and new covenants (38). He believed that a failure to understand these legitimate discontinuities could lead to Judaistic legalism. While he viewed the Old and New Testaments as interconnected, Trimp also considered the incarnation as a significant dividing point in the history of redemption (38). He maintained that the New Testament “brings the Old Testament dispensation to its rest” and that “The Old Testament cannot possibly be understood apart from the New Testament, and the New cannot be read apart from the Old” (37).

Trimp believed that these core principles must compose the theoretical backbone of the exegete’s approach to the Old Testament. However, Trimp argued that in order to move from theory to the practice of preaching the preacher must employ typology (Trimp, 66). He defined typology as follows, “Characteristic of typology is attention to analogies and structural similarities evident between institutions, persons or events of an earlier era and those of a later period” (66). Trimp understood typology as an historical concept which journeys “along the horizontal line of history” (66). For Trimp, typology was inextricably wedded to the progressive advance of redemptive history. He insisted that the progressive unfolding of the redemptive plan, expressed in typology, must be the paradigm which controls the exegete’s interpretation of the Old Testament:

So we may not suffice with explaining an Old Testament story simply by examining its connection to the time preceding the text or to the surrounding milieu within which the story occurred. We must also explain the narrative texts in a way that honors their ‘forward motion’—which is to say: according to the Bible’s own character (Trimp, 69).

This is the essence of Trimp’s approach to preaching from the Old Testament.

Trimp considered the redemptive-historical approach as the best method to express in preaching what he described in theory. He defined the characteristics of redemptive-historical preaching as follows:

‘Redemptive-historical’ preaching is based on respect for this broad context of God’s activity. To preach redemptive-historically is to preach in such a way that the interpretation of the text inherently drives the congregation to Christ and the Spirit, who establish and complete God’s work begun in the old dispensation (Trimp, 73).

Trimp believed this approach would act as a prophylactic against “numerous mistakes” in preaching (Trimp, 94). The following list represents a sampling of the errors which Trimp hoped to avoid by means of the redemptive-historical method: 1) **Allegory** – Trimp described this approach as “cheap, superficial typology based on details in the story”; 2) **Moralism** – which Trimp considered as “aiming the message along subjective, individualistic or psychological lines”; 3) **Misuse of Scripture** – Trimp described this approach as “the inclination to use the Bible to illustrate what we already know from philosophy or ethics, or to illustrate our

aspirations in the arenas of politics, morality or mysticism”; 4) **Denigration of Scripture** – he argued that this approach resulted in “denigrating biblical history to a picture book illuminating mystical or doctrinal truths” (94).

It should be noted that while Trimp denounced the excesses of the exemplary approach to the Old Testament, he did make some room for the legitimate use of example with regard to Old Testament characters. However, Trimp contended that the example must be found in the typological nature of the story. For example, Trimp stated, “if the sermon is dealing with a theme like faith or prayer, then such a sermon may well be illustrated with a historical reference (Heb. 11 and James 5).”<sup>27</sup>

Trimp advocated a redemptive-historical approach to the Old Testament because he considered it as the only method which adequately recognized the forward moving history of salvation which culminated in the person and work of Christ. By means of typology, properly understood, Trimp believed the Reformed preacher could effectively preach Christ from the Old Testament while avoiding the misuse and abuse of the Scripture.

### S.G. De Graaf

The next advocate of the redemptive-historical approach to be examined is S.G. De Graaf (1889–1955). De Graaf was a well known preacher in Amsterdam.<sup>28</sup> He was very interested and concerned with the teaching of Bible stories, particularly Old Testament stories, in Sunday schools and in Christian schools (De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, 11). De Graaf noted that he became interested in this topic as a result of his conversations with Christian educators, “In these conversations the teachers repeatedly sought guidance on the practical implementation of the principles I was defending, especially for stories drawn from the Old Testament” (15). This concern led him to compose the work *Verbondsgeschiedenis* which was translated into English as a four-volume work entitled, *Promise and Deliverance*.<sup>29</sup> Although initially targeted at Sunday school teachers, this set of books has made its way to the shelves of many Reformed

pastors who find it a helpful resource in preaching. De Graaf’s goal in *Promise and Deliverance* was to instruct Christian educators how to teach the stories of the Old Testament without falling into the traps of moralism and exemplarism.

The overriding principle of De Graaf’s approach is that the stories of the Old Testament must be interpreted in a Christocentric manner. He stated:

God reveals Himself in His grace only in the Mediator. As a result of the fall, there is no revelation of grace apart from the Mediator. Therefore, your stories should tell about Him, whether you tell the history of the Old Testament or of the New Testament (De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, 18).

While De Graaf contended that the “Old Testament is the book of the Christ to come”, he was not satisfied with a pedantic approach wherein a predictable and simplistic reference to Christ is found in each passage (21). In fact, he clearly despised this approach:

We do the content of the Old Testament an injustice when we repeatedly draw lines from its history to the Christ. We say, for example, that God saved Israel or sent Joseph to Egypt to save His people in order that the Christ might be born of that people. This is certainly a real aspect of revelation. It is a line we must follow because it is suggested by Scripture itself. But it is not enough (21).

De Graaf argued for a serious exegetical approach to preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

De Graaf believed that the teacher could avoid the simplistic approach by understanding the progressive nature of God’s revelation (21). He did not call the teacher to simply retell the entire redemptive story from each passage, but rather recognize what portion of that story is being unfolded in the particular text in question. He considered every story to be about redemption because each story reveals God as “the prime agent” who acts to complete His redemptive plan in history (19). For De Graaf, all of redemptive history flowed from what he called the “mother-promise” of Genesis 3:15 (21). He described the task of the teacher as recognizing that, “... the seed of redemption is present in every story in the Old Testament” and that the teacher’s “job is to use the light of the New Testament to uncover it” (21).

De Graaf also insisted that the main focus of an Old Testament story was not the person in the story, or his or her particular actions, but rather on what God was doing in and through that person to bring about the fulfillment

27. Trimp, 95. Trimp spends a good section of his book describing the use of examples in preaching in general and by Luther and Calvin. See pages 96–114.

28. S.G. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, vol. 1, trans. H. Evan Runner (St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1977) 11. This is from the translator’s introduction.

29. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance*, 10. De Graaf’s work was actually built upon the work of an earlier scholar J. C. Sikkel (1885–1920).

of His plan. Rather, De Graaf contended that the exegete must take a covenant oriented approach to interpreting the Old Testament which emphasized God as the main character. He believed that this approach renders it impossible to isolate and individualize the people as the main characters of the stories of the Old Testament (23–24). De Graaf considered it a grave error to preach about an individual personality from the Old Testament in a manner that detached that person from the greater covenant context.

In summary, De Graaf's approach stressed that the text of the Old Testament represents the unfolding of a redemptive story in which God is the main character. Therefore, he believed that the primary focus in teaching and preaching from the Old Testament should be God's actions in the lives of the people of the Old Testament, rather than the actions of the people themselves. Furthermore, he was not content with simplistic and superficial references to Christ as a means of teaching of Old Testament stories, but rather he insisted on serious exegesis which seeks to proclaim the promise of God unfolded throughout the Scriptures.

#### Sidney Greidanus

The final figure to be reviewed from the Dutch development of the redemptive-historical approach is Sidney Greidanus. Greidanus is currently professor emeritus at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. He has authored several books on preaching including *Sola Scriptura*, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*<sup>30</sup> and, his more recent contribution, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.<sup>31</sup> He is the most significant living scholar on the topic of redemptive-historical preaching, both with regard to its historical origin and its practical implementation.

While *Sola Scriptura* and *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* yield much helpful information regarding his views on the application of the redemptive-historical method to preaching from the Old Testament, I have chosen to limit my review of Greidanus to *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* given that it best represents the maturation of his life-long study and reflection on this topic.

In the preface to his work, Greidanus notes that the impetus for writing the book was the fact that there was a paucity of available books dealing with the topic of preaching Christ from the Old Testament (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, xii). Greidanus was also motivated by the lack of preaching Christ from the Old Testament in the modern church. In addition to these problems, Greidanus notes that where efforts are made to preach Christ from the Old Testament the

results are often less than satisfying. He admits that he is well aware that, "Horror stories abound of preachers twisting an Old Testament text in order to land miraculously at Calvary" (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 2). Greidanus condemns such an approach noting, "subverting the Scripture in order to preach Christ only undermines the authority of the message."<sup>32</sup> While Greidanus laments these problems, he recognizes that they flow from the difficult nature of the task (2–3). It was Greidanus' hope that his book might assist in confronting and solving these problems.

Before setting forth his methodology, Greidanus first identifies the factors which contributed to the lack of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Among these factors Greidanus cites the following: 1) a human-centered focus in preaching; 2) concerns on the part of pastors regarding forced interpretation; and 3) the more general problem of properly understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.

By human-centered preaching, Greidanus is referring to a popular approach to the Old Testament which seeks to preach about the human experiences of the Old Testament saints (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 34). The major culprit here is biographical preaching which, according to Greidanus, always ends with the errors of "generalizing, spiritualizing, and moralizing" (36).

The problem of forced interpretation usually rears its head in the forms of "allegorizing and typologizing" the Old Testament (36). Here Greidanus is referring to the numerous tortured attempts to find Christ in every symbol and action in the Old Testament.

The third error he mentions is that of understanding the relationship between the two Testaments of Scripture. As Greidanus comments, "Simply put, many preachers separate the Old Testament from the New and view the Old Testament as a non-Christian book" (37–38). These three problems, according to Greidanus,

30. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

31. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

32. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 2. In a later part of Greidanus book, he also warns against the danger of "Christomonism" which attempts to detach faith in Christ from faith in God. Interestingly, Greidanus, after warning of the particular danger of this in Lutheran circles due to Luther's methodology, goes on to admit that this danger is a greater risk in churches which fail to sing the psalms, "The tendency toward Christomonism is also noticeable in other Christian communities where the Psalms are no longer sung and "gospel songs" as well as sermons focus primarily on Jesus in isolation from God the Father." (see page 178).



have resulted in a general neglect of the art of preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

Greidanus insists that the exegete must get beyond these errors in order to properly preach Christ from the Old Testament. He informs his readers that to preach Christ from the Old Testament is to “proclaim some facet of the person, work, or teaching of Jesus of Nazareth so that people may believe him, trust him, love him, and obey him” (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 8). He provides the following comprehensive definition of preaching Christ from the Old Testament, “...we can define ‘preaching Christ’ as preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament” (10).

After surveying an array of historical and modern approaches to preaching Christ from the Old Testament<sup>33</sup>, Greidanus offers his own alternative which he refers to as “the redemptive-historical Christocentric method of interpretation.”<sup>34</sup> He describes this approach as follows:

It should be clear by now that our concern is not to preach Christ to the exclusion of the ‘whole counsel of God’ but rather to view the whole counsel of God, with all its teachings, laws, prophecies, and visions, in the light of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it should be

33. In this section of Greidanus’ book he provides a useful historical study covering the history of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. In this study, he includes the views of the Apostolic Fathers, the Reformers (primarily Luther and Calvin), Spurgeon, and Wilhelm Vischer. See Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 69–176.

34. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 227. Greidanus considers his position to be “somewhere between Calvin’s theocentric method and Luther’s Christological method...”

35. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 229–230. Greidanus is concerned about the modern exegete’s “predilection to slight the God-centered focus” of the Old Testament. He does not want the exegete to jump over the work of God the Father to land on the person and work of Christ. He calls upon the exegete to take a two-step approach.

36. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 231–232. For example, Greidanus notes that biblical themes and biblical laws “develop” in the transition of the Testaments. Another example cited by Greidanus is that of circumcision developing into its equivalent sign, baptism, in the New Testament. These two signs are linked, but they develop along the lines of redemptive history and therefore result in continuity and discontinuity. He calls upon the exegete to be sensitive to these types of developments within the canon.

37. Although most of these categories are self-explanatory, Redemption in Old Testament Times is not self-evident. By this term, Greidanus is specifically referring to God’s redemption of “his people Israel to be a light to the nations.” (see Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 235).

evident that we must not read the incarnate Christ back into the Old Testament text, which would be eisegesis, but that we should look for legitimate ways of preaching Christ from the Old Testament in the context of the New (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 228).

In order to accomplish this goal, Greidanus sets forth two preliminary steps in the exegetical process.

First, he calls upon the exegete to “understand the passage in its own historical context” (228). Greidanus is adamant that the exegete begin with the grammatico-historical method. He believes it is incumbent upon the exegete to find the historical objective meaning of the text by focusing on the literary, historical, and theocentric interpretation of the text.<sup>35</sup> Second, he implores the exegete to “understand the message in the contexts of canon and redemptive history” (230). Greidanus insists that the exegete must understand what the passage means in light of the entire scope of the canon. Specifically, he is concerned that the exegete be sensitive to the legitimate discontinuities between the Testaments.<sup>36</sup> Greidanus next instructs the exegete to move from these two preliminary steps to the Christocentric interpretation on the Old Testament text. This second phase of Greidanus’ approach includes seven principles which will assist the exegete in properly navigating the treacherous landscape of the discipline of preaching Christ from the Old Testament.

It is important to note that Greidanus’ seven ways of arriving at a Christocentric interpretation are not equally weighted. The first of the seven ways is the funnel through which all the others flow. Therefore, this first way will be dealt with in greater detail and the remaining six will be summarized briefly. The first way is “**The way of redemptive-historical progression.**”

He views the way of redemptive-historical progression as the transcendent hermeneutic which should govern the discipline of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. He refers to redemptive history as “...the bedrock which supports all other ways that lead to Christ in the New Testament” (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 234). He also refers to redemptive history as the “meta-narrative” of the Bible (234). Greidanus understands redemptive history as consisting of four pivotal periods: Creation, Redemption in Old Testament Times (Gen. 3–Mal. 4);<sup>37</sup> Redemption through Christ (Mat. 1 – Rev. 20) and New Creation (Rev. 21–22). He understands each of these periods as presenting one unified story of redemption wherein God serves as the primary actor (235–236).

Furthermore, Greidanus emphasizes the progressive nature of redemptive history. He states that the entire Old Testament “progresses steadily and reaches its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and ultimately in the new creation” (237). It is within his discussion of the progressive nature of redemptive history that Greidanus reveals his bias towards an eschatological approach to interpretation. He makes this unequivocal by stating, “The whole Old Testament throbs with a strong eschatological beat” (237). This is the essence of the first of seven ways,<sup>38</sup> the remaining ways are summarized as follows:

2. **“The Way of Promise-Fulfillment”** – This way advocates preaching from the Old Testament by focusing on the progressive fulfillment of God’s promises throughout redemptive history. These promises, of course, culminate in the person and work of Christ. Greidanus warns against the error of reading the New Testament text back into the Old and instead promotes a methodology which moves from the Old Testament promise to the fulfillment in Christ and then returns to the text of the Old Testament. Greidanus advocates treating the promise in the Old Testament on its own merits and examining how it was fulfilled in the Old Testament prior to its complete fulfillment in the New.<sup>39</sup> He notes that the benefit of this method is that “...it enlarges people’s vision to the full scope of kingdom history; in fact, it places the hearers right in the dynamic flow of God’s promises and fulfillments” (248).

3. **“The Way of Typology”** – Greidanus is careful to differentiate this approach from that of allegory. He notes that typology “...is limited to discovering specific analogies along the axis of God’s acts in redemptive history as revealed in Scripture” (249). He also differentiates this method from that of promise-fulfillment by noting that promises “...are usually words spoken, types are historical events, persons, and institutions. Further, whereas promises point forward to future fulfillment, typology generally moves in the opposite direction, from New Testament fulfillment to the past type” (252). In addition, he is careful to set ground rules for using typology including beginning with a “*literary-historical interpretation*,” searching for the type in the “*central message*” of the text, and determining the “*symbolic meaning* of the person, institution, or event in Old Testament times.”<sup>40</sup>

4. **“The Way of Analogy”** – This method of preaching from the Old Testament focuses on analogies between how God dealt with His people in the Old Testament and how He deals with them in the New Testament.

Greidanus provides the simple example of comparing what God did for Israel with what God did for the church; or what God demanded from Israel and what God demands of the church.<sup>41</sup>

5. **“The Way of Longitudinal Themes”** – This way focuses on the history of revelation rather than on redemptive history *per se*. It attempts to preach about Biblical themes in Scripture. Greidanus notes that this approach is primarily related to the work of Biblical Theology. He provides the example of preaching from Deuteronomy 26:12–15, which deals with tithing, and instructs the exegete to follow this theme (i.e. giving, tithing) through revelation noting such things as Paul’s command in 2 Corinthians to be generous in giving.<sup>42</sup>

6. **“The Way of New Testament References”** – This method emphasizes the use of New Testament references of Old Testament passages as the basis of making a link between the Old Testament and Christ. Greidanus cites examples such as the words of Christ on the cross drawn from Psalm 22 or linking Abraham’s offering of Isaac to God’s giving of His only son in John 3:16 (269–271).

7. **“The Way of Contrast”** – This way recognizes the great contrasts which occur between the Testaments and uses them as a method of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. For example the preacher can contrast Jesus’ sacrifice to the insufficient sacrifices of the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament (271–277).

In addition to offering these seven ways, Greidanus also provides a helpful section in his book which he entitled, “Steps from Old Testament Text to Christocentric Sermon” (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the*

38. Greidanus does provide brief examples of the way of redemptive-historical progression operating in the contexts of narrative, psalms and wisdom literature. See Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 237–240.

39. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 240–249. Greidanus gives examples of how to preach in this manner from the prophets, psalms and narratives.

40. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 257. Greidanus notes that the person, institution or event cannot be type unless it had a symbolic meaning in the Old Testament. He relies on Geerhardus Vos for this insight.

41. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 261–266. Again, Greidanus provides examples of how to preach this way from a variety of Biblical genres.

42. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 266–268. The difference between this method and the strict redemptive-historical approach is that the main focus need not be the development of redemptive themes, but rather this approach can focus on other themes which impact the Christian life, like the example used here of giving.

*Old Testament*, 279-319). This section applies the seven ways noted above by means of helpful examples from actual texts of Scripture.

Clearly, Greidanus provides the most developed methodology regarding preaching Christ from the Old Testament. He is unashamedly Christ-centered in his approach, but he denounces employing a simplistic approach to arrive at a Christ-centered interpretation which sacrifices the dignity and integrity of the Old Testament. He is not simply advocating reading Christ into every passage of the Old Testament, rather Greidanus calls the preacher to treat the Old Testament text on its own merits and then link the text to Christ through one of the seven ways which he has outlined.

#### Edmund Clowney

Edmund Clowney (1917–2005) was a professor of practical theology, and eventually became president, of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He later also taught occasionally at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. In 1961, Clowney published a book in which he weighed in on the preaching debate. The book was entitled *Preaching and Biblical Theology*.<sup>43</sup>

The overarching principle of Clowney's approach as expressed in this book is to preach Christ. He wrote, "Most important of all, biblical theology serves to center preaching on its essential message: Jesus Christ" (Clowney, 74). Clowney relied heavily upon the work of Vos to establish and defend his approach to preaching. It is important to note that in his book Clowney does not always employ the terminology "redemptive-historical," but rather often prefers to use the term "biblical-theological."<sup>44</sup> However, the two terms are basically synonymous in Clowney's thought.

Clowney considered the biblical-theological approach as the means to resolve many of the difficulties which preachers face when attempting to preach Christ from the Old Testament (74). He echoed two classic themes of the redemptive-historical approach, the unity of Scripture and the progressive nature of revelation:

The unifying structure of Scripture is the structure of redemptive history. The Bible does not have the form of a textbook, and the witness to Christ unfolds with

the progressive epochs of revelation which in turn are grounded in the successive periods of redemption. Biblical theology recognizes both the unity and the epochal structure of redemptive history (Clowney, 74–75).

He believed that this redemptive-historical perspective, which he labeled as the "theological horizon," is essential to Christ-centered preaching (75).

Clowney believed that a neglect of the theological horizon inevitably leads to a series of errors in preaching. First, Clowney argued that a rejection of theological horizon results in a type of preaching that is simply "moralizing" and "misses the progress of redemptive history and fails to see Christ in the midst" (75). As an example of this danger, Clowney cited the example of preaching about Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac as simply a test of Abraham's faith (75). Second, Clowney contended that a rejection of the theological horizon may also result in allegorism and he cited the example of allegorizing the red cord of Rahab as a type of the blood of Christ (75). A third error cited by Clowney is taking a static, isolated and atomistic view of the Old Testament. He described this as follows:

If, on the other hand, we develop the most thorough knowledge of the period without relating its conceptions to the whole structure of redemptive history, we may risk the mistake of the history of religions school, failing to recognize, in the organic development of the whole, the hand of God in redemption and his voice in revelation (Clowney, 75).

According to Clowney, the exegete can avoid these errors by always keeping the theological horizon before him when preaching from the Old Testament.

In addition to recognizing the importance of the theological horizon, Clowney also insisted that preaching from the Old Testament must be Christocentric and connected to New Testament realities, "The Christian proclamation of an Old Testament text is not the preaching of an Old Testament sermon" (75). Clowney advocated the use of the promise-fulfillment approach to preach Christ from the Old Testament noting that, "Since it is the Son of God who fulfills these promises, the redemptive epiphanies of God are particular revelations of Christ" (77).

Up to this point, Clowney's approach adds little new material to the redemptive-historical approach. However, Clowney's discussion of preaching becomes more intriguing when he deals with the tension between the redemptive-historical approach and the exemplary

43. Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

44. These two terms are often used interchangeably and Clowney's definition of biblical theology is nearly identical to the redemptive-historical hermeneutic. Clowney may favor biblical theology as a term because of his respect for Gerhardus Vos.

approach. The interesting twist in Clowney's thought is his attempt to downplay this tension, even to the point of denying its existence.<sup>45</sup> For example, he states, "It has been assumed by some that a choice must be made between ethical preaching and that which is redemptive-historical. The New Testament, however, not only sanctions both but does not set them in opposition" (78). As evidence for his position Clowney cites the use of Job and Elijah as examples in the Epistle of James and 1 Corinthians 10:11 which make a general statement regarding the role of Old Testament examples (Clowney, 78).

In Clowney's view the two approaches, redemptive-historical and ethical (or exemplary), must be utilized together because the "redemptive-historical approach necessarily yields ethical application, which is an essential part of preaching the Word" (80). He recognized that obtaining the proper balance and relationship between these two approaches is difficult and that exegetes often overemphasize one to the neglect of the other. However, he considered his biblical-theological approach, emphasizing the unfolding of the covenant of grace in redemptive history, as the means by which to resolve this dilemma (Clowney, 81–82).

Clowney provided several examples of striking a proper balance between redemptive-historical and exemplary preaching included among these is the conflict between David and Goliath (82–86). He saw the redemptive-historical significance of this particular conflict in its demonstration of the theocratic king's utter devotion to see the name of God exalted. According to Clowney, David's devotion in this conflict points us to Christ, the great son of David, who as King exalts His Father who sent Him to perform the work of redemption. The preacher must seize upon this to preach Christ from this Old Testament account, but Clowney did not stop with this insight. He demanded that the exegete proceed to develop the ethical component by connecting all believers to David through emphasis on their role as a kingdom of priests who have the duty, like David, to exalt the name of God in this world (Clowney, 82–84). Clearly, Clowney's defense of ethical application is a far cry from the moralizing extremes of the exemplary approach. For instance, according to the extremes of the exemplary approach, the message would be reduced to something like "be like David and slay the giants of sin in your own life."

Clowney, like other advocates the redemptive-historical approach, emphasized the unity of Scripture, the unfolding nature of the redemptive plan and the centrality of preaching Christ. However, he also argued that

ethical application may be made without eviscerating the redemptive-historical message of the text.

### Graeme Goldsworthy

The final advocate of the redemptive-historical approach that we will examine is Graeme Goldsworthy who is a lecturer in Old Testament, biblical theology and hermeneutics at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia. He recently authored a book related to this inquiry entitled, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*.<sup>46</sup> In the preface to his work, Goldsworthy reveals his purpose, "The aim of this book is to provide a handbook for preachers that will help them apply a consistently Christ-centered approach to their sermons" (Goldsworthy, IX).

Goldsworthy, like the other scholars reviewed in this article, recognizes the difficulty inherent in preaching Christ from the Old Testament. He states, "It is plainly easier as a Christian to preach from the New Testament than from the Old" (Goldsworthy, XII). Goldsworthy laments the fact that the difficulty inherent in preaching Christ from the Old Testament leads many to use simplistic and predictable ways of attaching a Christocentric meaning to the text. To support this claim he cites anecdotal evidence from his teaching experience noting that students often recount to him how they often say to themselves in the middle of an Old Testament sermon, "Ho hum! now here comes the Jesus bit" (Goldsworthy, XI). Goldsworthy places the blame for these problems on the academy. In his view, the theological academy aggravated the problem of preaching Christ from the Old Testament because the theological institutions in which they operate have strictly separated the departments which deal with the two Testaments (Goldsworthy, XIII). He believes that this division leads students to study the Old Testament in "total isolation" from the New Testament and, therefore, provides them with little help on "how this significant body of literature should function as Christian Scripture" (XIII). In the remainder of his book, Goldsworthy endeavors to remedy this problem.

Goldsworthy begins by laying a foundation of what he considers to be the most important principles in preaching. These include understanding the unity and selectivity of redemptive history, the progressive nature

45. It is in this section of his work that Clowney begins to use the term redemptive-historical and demonstrates his awareness of the debate which arose in the Netherlands.

46. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).



of divine revelation, the tension between the Testaments, and the role of epochs in revelation. Each of these principles warrants further explanation.

First, Goldsworthy argues that the Bible is unified and this unity rests in the fact that the Bible reveals the unfolding saving work of Jesus Christ (Goldsworthy, 60). However, Goldsworthy admits that “The matter of the nature of the unity of the Bible is quite a complex one” (67). It is complex because while the Bible is unified, it is also selective. Goldsworthy considers biblical theology as the tool to properly understand the relationship between the unity and selectivity of Scripture. According to Goldsworthy, biblical theology directs the interpreter of the Old Testament through the selectivity of biblical history by connecting the selectivity directly to the revelation of the redemptive plan. He explains, “Thus we follow Seth, not Cain; Shem, not Ham; Abraham, not Lot; Israel, not Edom; David, not Saul; Judah, not Samaria; Jerusalem, not Babylon” (69). Goldsworthy is noting the fact that the Bible is concerned especially with redemptive history and the preacher must be attuned to this selectivity to preach the Old Testament accurately.

Second, Goldsworthy insists that the history of the Bible must be understood progressively. According to Goldsworthy, the exegete must keep in mind that the history of the Bible is moving forward to the consummation, “From one point of view the revelation is not complete until the great consummation, the final stage when the people of God see God face to face and are revealed with Christ in glory” (73). He demands that preaching from the Old Testament reflect the progressive nature of revelation, particularly its culmination in the New Testament in the work of Christ. He states, “Preaching from the Old Testament demands of us some appreciation of how the text relates to Christian existence” and further that “The bottom line in all this is that all texts somehow testify to Jesus” (Goldsworthy, 73, 76).

Third, while Goldsworthy espouses the unity of Scripture he also contends that Scripture is not uniform. Goldsworthy locates this lack of uniformity primarily

in the tension between the Testaments which he expresses by citing a number of “polarities” between the Testaments (73). Goldsworthy articulates the following polarities: “salvation history and eschatological consummation, type and anti-type, promise and fulfillment, law and gospel, and Israel and the church” (73). It is crucial to recognize that Goldsworthy’s goal is not to create a dichotomy between the Testaments, but rather his intent is to make the exegete sensitive to the presence of these polarities so that he may use them as a means of understanding the complexity of the unity of the Bible. He summarizes his thoughts on this topic by noting that revelation has “essential unity” with “underlying... diversity” (74).

Finally, Goldsworthy cautions against viewing revelation as unfolding in a consistent, gradual and predictable manner. He contends that progressive revelation unfolds through “discernible stages or epochs”, but he argues that this progression is not gradual and even, but rather abrupt and uneven (74). He argues that the preacher must comprehend these epochs and the transitions between them. He further contends that the preacher must treat these epochs seriously and he suggests that the preacher must examine the “historical details, the characters, or the institutions that figure in the text...in the epoch to which they belong” (Goldsworthy, 114). Accordingly, Goldsworthy advocates taking the Old Testament seriously by means of a grammatico-historical approach focused on the original context.<sup>47</sup>

After explaining these basic principles, Goldsworthy moves to the next step by presenting three major methods of preaching Christ from the Old Testament including: Promise-Fulfillment, Type-Antitype (typology) and Salvation History-Eschatological Goal (76–80). The first two methods are very similar to Greidanus’ methods (“ways” no. 2 and no. 3 respectively) and do not warrant further comment, but the third approach, although present in the thought of Greidanus and others, is more deeply developed by Goldsworthy, and therefore, is worth examining in more detail.

Goldsworthy’s method of Salvation History-Eschatological Goal, is his effort to convince the exegete that preaching from the Old Testament must begin with eschatology rather than ending with it.<sup>48</sup> He considers it essential to understand that salvation history flows out of eschatology, as he puts it, “Salvation history is the process of eschatology being worked out in the history of our world” (Goldsworthy, 79). Goldsworthy maintains that the Gospel is central to the fulfillment of biblical eschatology and therefore it is present in the

47. Goldsworthy advocates understanding an Old Testament passage first in light of how it would have been understood by the original audience. However, he adamantly commands that our preaching cannot remain there. He states, “I maintain that no Christian preacher ever lets the Old Testament speak purely in and of itself.” He demands that we proceed to a Christian interpretation, but simply does not want us to do so in a careless manner. See Goldsworthy, 125–127, under the title, “Letting the Old Testament Speak.”

48. Goldsworthy, 79. Geerhardus Vos is credited with recognizing the priority of eschatology in revelation.

entire unfolding of salvation history. He refers to the Gospel as the “hermeneutical key” to all of Scripture (81–96). This eschatological perspective, with its Gospel focus, inevitably drives the exegete toward Christ-centered preaching.

For Goldsworthy, Christ is the central message of the Old and New Testaments. As evidence of this, he poses the following question to his readers, “Can I preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus?” and he answers it as follows, “Why would you even want to try to preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus? Is there anywhere else we can look in order to see God? To see true humanity? To see the meaning of anything in creation?” (115). He makes this even more emphatic by stating, “The key question of interpretation is, ‘How does this text testify to Christ?’” (Goldsworthy, 122). Goldsworthy demands that preaching from the Old Testament must be the proclamation of Christ and His Gospel.

#### SUMMARY AND RECAPITULATION

Having reviewed the writings of several prominent advocates of the redemptive-historical approach, a synthesis of their contributions may now be articulated. While all of the advocates share similar core themes, they each also make idiosyncratic contributions which make the whole of their combined work more valuable than each individual component part. The following is a brief summary of the main principles gleaned from these various sources:

1. **All of Scripture is Christ-Centered:** Christ, and His work, is the story of revelation and the preacher must orient himself by the person and work of Christ.
2. **God is the primary actor in the Bible:** Preaching must be focused on God and His actions toward His people and not on the actions of the people themselves.
3. **Redemptive history is progressive:** The history of the Bible is not static, but rather progresses toward the fulfillment of God’s plan.
4. **Redemptive history is unified:** The Bible represents one story of salvation.
5. **Redemptive history is selective:** The Bible focuses in on the redemptive story leading to the work of Christ. It deals with the fulfillment of God’s promises through the lives of God’s people. The Bible is concerned primarily with covenant history.
6. **Redemptive history is revealed through various epochs:** The progressive unfolding of God’s plan in the Scriptures occurs through epochs (Creation, Fall, Patriarchs, Israel as Nation, Israel as Kingdom,

Captivity, Restoration, New Covenant, Consummation, etc.) which, while related and unified, also represent important shifts in God’s relationship with His people. The most drastic shift that occurred in redemptive history is the transition to the New Covenant.

7. **Redemptive history is eschatological:** Redemptive history represents the fulfillment of God’s plan and thus is directed by eschatology. The preacher must understand that eschatology precedes redemption because it was present as a goal set before Adam in the covenant of works.

#### ASSESSMENT OF THE REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL APPROACH

It is the author’s opinion that the redemptive-historical approach to preaching from the Old Testament is the best approach available. It alone adequately addresses the challenge of preaching from the Old Testament. It is built upon the foundation of the grammatico-historical method and demands a serious treatment of the Old Testament text. It also inexorably forces the exegete to preach Christ and the realities of redemption.

This doesn’t mean, however, that the approach is without its flaws, particularly as it is often applied in the modern pulpit. Unfortunately, many of the benefits of the redemptive-historical approach have been obscured by the behavior of some of its more recent and ardent defenders who have morphed the approach into a theological movement. Once the approach became a movement it attracted hardcore followers, particularly among the ranks of young seminarians, who have gravitated to extremes and often done a disservice to the approach.

The manifestation of this movement dynamic among some advocates of the redemptive-historical approach has led Reformed theologians like John Carrick, John Frame and Jay Adams to criticize the movement even though they value aspects of the method. For example, John Carrick, in his book, *The Imperative of Preaching*, launched numerous salvos at the redemptive-historical approach, mostly aimed at the extremes of those enamored with it as a movement. In his book, Carrick contends that the redemptive-historical approach, as applied by many of its modern advocates, often fails to be faithful to the Reformed tradition of *explicatio et applicatio verbi Dei*, inappropriately promotes an effective hermeneutical tool to the governing force of the entire homiletical process, leads to an obsession with particular terms, results in an unhealthy level of homage for Geerhardus Vos (Carrick uses the term “hyper-Vosian”), underemphasizes the *ordo salutis* and unfairly ignores

numerous biblical texts which support an exemplary use of the Old Testament (e.g. 1 Corinthians 10:6, James 5:10–11, 17, Luke 17:32 and Hebrews 11).<sup>49</sup>

John Frame shares many of Carrick's concerns and expresses them in his article entitled, "Ethics, Preaching and Biblical Theology."<sup>50</sup> Like Carrick, Frame sees great benefit in the contributions of biblical theology and the redemptive-historical approach, but, also like Carrick, he believes that some have taken the approach to an unhelpful extreme. Frame lists eight points of concern in his article regarding the redemptive-historical approach many of which focus on young seminarians and pastors becoming enamored with a method which ultimately, in Frame's view, leads them into "jargon-laden" and poorly constructed sermons.

Finally, Jay Adams also joined his voice to the chorus of those raising concerns about the redemptive-historical approach to preaching. Adams has written prolifically on the topic of preaching and is adamant about the necessity of application in preaching, something he finds wanting in many practitioners of the redemptive-historical approach. Adams has even criticized the published sermons of Geerhardus Vos for their lack of application,

49. John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 2002). I find John Carrick's critique of redemptive-historical preaching to be most helpful. I also benefited greatly from his book on preaching and highly recommend it.

50. John M. Frame, "Ethics, Preaching and Biblical Theology" available at [www.thirdmill.org](http://www.thirdmill.org) and [www.frame-poythress.org](http://www.frame-poythress.org).

51. Jay Adams, *Truth Applied* (London: Wakeman Trust, 1990).

52. John Carrick has made similar remarks regarding the preaching of Vos, criticizing it for its perceived overemphasis on the indicative mood (see John Carrick, "Redemptive-Historical Preaching: An Assessment," *Katekomen: A Publication of Greenville Presbyterian Seminary* vol. 13, no. 1, Summer 2001, 11–12).

53. Jay Adams, "The Proper Use of Biblical Theology in Preaching," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, vol. 9, no. 1, 47. Adams likens redemptive-historical preaching to a "one-week tour of Europe" where "very little time can be spent at any one location."

54. See Adams, *Truth Applied*, 20 and Adams, "The Proper Use of Biblical Theology in Preaching," 47–49. Adams particularly refers to a link between redemptive-historical preaching and the theology of Karl Barth.

55. I'm most persuaded by some of the careful criticisms of Carrick. I find Frame and Adams' critiques to be more like "straw man" arguments. It is very easy to attack the extreme examples, excesses and the sermons of seminarians!

56. For instance, Mark Boda employs the term "redemptive-ethical" as a complementary concept to "redemptive-historical" in his book on King David. See Mark Boda, *After God's Own Heart: The Gospel According to David* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2007), 4. Boda's book on David is part of P & R Publishing's *The Gospel According to the Old Testament* series which represents an effort to champion a redemptive-historical approach to lives of Old Testament saints.

"Although these sermons are beautifully written and full of instructive matter, there is no application in them."<sup>51</sup> Adams also criticizes redemptive-historical preaching because, in his opinion, it too often sounds more like a lecture than a sermon and because it overemphasizes the "forest" of the full scope of redemption while giving only a cursory treatment to the actual "trees" of a particular text.<sup>52</sup> Adams even goes so far as to suggest that there is a link between redemptive-historical preaching and neo-orthodoxy.<sup>53</sup>

While I ultimately embrace the redemptive-historical approach to preaching *all* of Scripture, I must admit that I find merit in some of the criticisms of Carrick, Frame and Adams.<sup>54</sup> I've personally witnessed the inappropriate use of the redemptive-historical approach and I confess that some of my early preaching was illustrative of such criticisms. In addition, my study of historical theology makes me mindful of the fact that when such matters become the subject of movements there is risk for unnecessary distraction, division and debate in the church. Finally, I must also admit that I sometimes wrestle with whether the original opponents of the redemptive-historical approach in the Netherlands had some wisdom when they suggested an exemplary-redemptive-historical synthesis. I recently came across the term "redemptive-ethical" which was employed by an author as a complement to the term "redemptive-historical."<sup>55</sup> This term seems helpful to me as a means of acknowledging that the indicatives of God's mighty acts in redemptive history consistently lead to concrete ethical imperatives in our lives. I think advocates of the redemptive-historical approach would be well served by greater exploration of the proper role of imperatives and ethics in redemptive history.

In conclusion, while I readily acknowledge the merit of some of the criticisms of the redemptive-historical approach, I remain steadfast in my conviction that the redemptive-historical approach, when it is properly understood and applied, liberates the preacher from the bondage of both moralism and allegoricalism. Even more significantly, the redemptive-historical approach allows the people of God to see Jesus from a portion of Scripture that they are inclined to misunderstand, dismiss as irrelevant, or neglect entirely. By means of the redemptive-historical approach the pilgrims in the pew experience the joy of traveling the Emmaus road and having their hearts burn with the glories of Christ as he is revealed to them from the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. ■

# The Deacon: A Divine Right Office with Divine Uses

By C. N. Willborn

“The Bible, history, confessional Presbyterianism, and need argue for a fully functioning diaconate.”<sup>1</sup> Thomas Peck (1822–1893), argued that the office of deacon “is not a small office.”<sup>2</sup> That may surprise some in our day. It would have surprised many in the day of Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847). Indeed, the office of deacon had been virtually lost to the church in early nineteenth century Scotland and America.<sup>3</sup> Although many churches have “deacons” today, the “office” is generally perceived to be a small one. It suffers from lack of definition and, in many cases, from low self-esteem. Let me reassert, “It is not a small office.” It deserves a fresh infusion of definition and esteem.

Toward the end of defining the office of deacon, elevating it in the eyes of church membership, and providing a fully functional diaconate, this essay is offered. To accomplish this goal, I shall set forth the biblical basis of the office of deacon, the biblical nature and duties of the office of deacon, and the relation of the diaconate to the eldership. In developing this paper I stand on the shoulders of various fathers of the faith, believing that the Holy Spirit has been faithful to teach godly men throughout the generations. The end product, I believe, will be a fresh examination and articulation of a rich heritage of biblical scholarship, which could enrich the church for years to come.

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF THE DIACONATE

In the sixteenth century John Calvin taught that deacons find “their origin, institution, and office” in Luke’s history in Acts 6.<sup>4</sup> In the following century, the scholar-pastor-biblical theologian John Owen utilized the historical account of Luke to explain the beginning of the diaconal office when he said, “[Acts 6] was the *institution of a new office*.”<sup>5</sup> The eighteenth century witnessed the same view in John Brown of Haddington:

“The Divine appointment of Deacons in the Christian Church is beyond dispute, Acts 6:1–6; 1 Tim. 3:8–11; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28; Phil. 1.1.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise, in the nineteenth century, Professor John Dick said “we have an account in the sixth chapter of the Acts” of the institution of deacon.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the twentieth century provided us the testimony of various scholars including Robert Reymond, who wrote: “Deacons, first chosen to assist the apostles (Acts 6:1–7), were thereafter appointed to assist the elders.”<sup>8</sup> Acts 6, for Reymond, is the earliest biblical account of deacons. Thus, we have seen that

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THE AUTHOR: Dr. C. N. Willborn is Associate Professor of Historical and Biblical Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Oakridge, TN (PCA).

1. C. N. Willborn, “The Diaconate: God’s Office of Temporal Affairs,” in *Confessing Our Hope: Essays in Honor of Morton Howison Smith on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and C. N. Willborn (Taylors, S.C.: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2004) 179. “The Diaconate” offers a historical overview, particularly focusing upon American Presbyterianism.

2. Thomas E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1892; repr., Taylors, S.C.: Presbyterian Press, 2005) 199.

3. For an extended account of the decline and revival of the office in Scotland see John G. Lorimer, *The Diaconship: A Treatise on the Office of Deacon With Suggestions for its Revival in the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1842).

4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke & Co., 1957) 2.322.

5. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Gould, 16 vols. (repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981) 16.146.

6. John Brown, *Systematic Theology* (1782; repr., Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications and Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002) 569.

7. John Dick, *Lectures on Theology*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J. Whet- ham, 1836) 2.498. Dick was Minister of the United Associate Church, Greyfriars, Glasgow, Scotland and Professor of Theology in the College of the United Session Church. Dick was a favorite of nineteenth century American theologians like R. L. Dabney and Charles Hodge.

8. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998) 899.



careful handlers of God's word have reckoned Acts 6 as the inaugural account of the office of deacon.

It is evident from our brief survey that there is something of a consensus in the Reformed community that "deacons" have their initial biblical basis in Acts 6. Now, I raise this early in order to address a concern that some express over the Lucan account in Acts. Some would acknowledge Acts 6 to be an account of the appointment of "those who were to oversee the distribution of what was given to meet the needs of the church's poor in Jerusalem," but deny the "seven" were "deacons." The primary ground for denying an early diaconate in Jerusalem is the subsequent ministries of Stephen and Philip as "evangelists." Stephen was "full of grace and power," and "was performing great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8).<sup>9</sup> The attesting gifts seem to be correlative to the "spreading" of the word of God (Acts 6:7). Thus, as one of the seven, Stephen is immediately related to the public proclamation of the word. Likewise, Philip was later described as "Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven" (Acts 21:8), and was said to be "proclaiming Christ" and performing signs (Acts 8:5, 6). Therefore, since the office of deacon is one of service alone and does not include the "able to teach" qualification (1 Tim. 3:2), it would appear that Stephen and Philip were not deacons as we know deacons and so Acts 6 does not present us "deacons," but some "temporary, *ad hoc* arrangement."<sup>10</sup>

In response to the "modern scholars,"<sup>11</sup> Louis Berkhof has offered a biblical rationale for the classic position on Acts 6 as the Divine inauguration of the diaconal office. His arguments include: (1) Prior to Acts 6, the term *diakonoi* is used in a general sense designating "servant," but afterwards it began to be used in a more restricted fashion to indicate those who "engaged in works of mercy and charity"; and (2) "The requirements for the office, as mentioned in Acts 6, are rather exacting, and

in that respect agree with the demands mentioned in 1 Tim. 3:8–12" (Berkhof, 587).

George Knight argues somewhat differently, but in complementary fashion to Berkhof. In 1 Timothy 3:1–13, Dr. Knight explains, we have "a twofold pattern for the official ministry of the church, that of oversight (ἐπισκοπος) and that of service (διακονος)."<sup>12</sup> He supports his thesis by pointing out the same pattern in Philippians 1:1 where Paul greets "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi including [σύν— "with"] the overseers and deacons." While somewhat more reserved than others, Knight admits that the same twofold pattern of oversight and service "seems to be reflected in the early division of labor at Jerusalem between the ministry of the apostles (of prayer and ministry of the Word, Acts 6:1, 4) and the aid to widows on the part of the Seven (vv. 1–3)" (Knight, 175). Not only is the Acts passage a "conceptual parallel" to 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1, but we must also recognize "linguistic parallels," Knight suggests. For example, Peter, one of the apostles in the early Jerusalem experience, "can refer to himself as a 'fellow elder' (συνπρεσβυτερος, 1 Pet. 5:1)."<sup>13</sup> In similar fashion, the responsibility of the Seven in Acts 6 is "referred to as the daily διακονεῖν τραπεζῶν (Acts 6:12 [sic] 6:2)," which parallels those responsibilities inferred from the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8–13 (Knight, 175). Thus, Knight has argued that there are both "conceptual" and "linguistic" parallels between the Acts 6 passage and the other primary passages which describe the office of deacon and set it apart from the "spiritual"<sup>14</sup> office of elder.

Although the parallels between the office of Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 and Philippians 1 have been drawn, I have not answered the specific objection that Stephen and Philip exercised the role of an evangelist—a word ministry—and, therefore, were not singularly set apart for official "service" ministry. It is our contention that their activity in word ministry does not invalidate the classic position that the Seven of Acts 6 were the first class of deacons. I would acknowledge *first* that Stephen and Philip certainly were used as evangelists subsequent to Acts 6; but this does not invalidate the proposition that they were ordained to the Jerusalem diaconate any more than a man's subsequent usefulness as an elder would deny him an earlier role as a deacon. It is not unusual for a man to serve in the diaconal office and later in life, as he matures in his giftedness, to be recognized for his gifts and usefulness as an elder. Second, I would argue that deacons will, no doubt, have "a wider sphere of Christian usefulness" than individuals ordinarily might.<sup>15</sup> As Douglas Bannerman explains, "There was

9. Scripture quotations offered by the author are taken from the New American Standard Bible, updated edition.

10. Orthodox Presbyterian Church, "Women in Office," at [www.opc.org/GA/women\\_in\\_office.html](http://www.opc.org/GA/women_in_office.html).

11. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988) 586.

12. George W. Knight III, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992) 175.

13. Knight, 175. Of course, it is clear from Tit. 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28; and 1 Pet. 5:2 that πρεσβυτερος is a synonym for ἐπισκοπος.

14. Quotations are inserted here because I will argue later that the office of deacon is also a spiritual office and this has great consequences for its esteem and the qualifications for holders of the office.

15. D. Douglas Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church Historically and Exegetically Considered* (1887; repr., Grand Rapids:

nothing in the fact of the seven having been set apart specially for service in the diaconship to hinder them from using freely, like the other disciples, as they had opportunity, all spiritual gifts of utterance and exhortation which might be in them" (Bannerman, 425). As the deacon attends the various needs of the congregation and the community, he will have opportunities to declare the riches of the Father's common and special grace, the sufficiency of Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. One of the most natural ways for the poor to be evangelized (Matt. 11:5) will be through the diaconal ministry of the church. The deacon merely expands upon his specific work of mercy and charity to the broader sense of servant or minister, as an ambassador of reconciliation. Thus, he is ministering to the complete man—body and soul.

Having paused to answer this objection, I would offer a second line of reasoning, which would suggest that the "seven" of Acts 6 were deacons, i.e., the manner in which the men were chosen. First, the Apostles did not *appoint* seven men but instructed the congregation to "select from among you seven men." The congregation's selection process was to be based upon some basic qualifications which the Apostles outlined for them.<sup>16</sup> Once the congregation "chose" the seven, they brought them before the Apostles and the Apostles, in turn, prayed about the men, no doubt considering their qualifications and ability to do work of service. "After praying," Luke tells us, "they [the apostles] laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).<sup>17</sup> From Acts 6:7, we may infer that the deacons proceeded to carry out their new task, investigating the complaint, and *caring for the existing temporal needs*. Thus, the Apostles successfully continued their work of prayer and ministry of the word, without the distraction of the temporal needs, which were met by the seven.

The mode of appointment which we have just rehearsed is not unlike that mode followed for the election, examination, and ordination of church officers today. Indeed, the church today takes its lead from NT passages such as this one. *First*, the Apostles called the people to consider whether there were qualified men among them and to identify them. *Second*, the people elected or chose qualified men. *Third*, the Apostles took the men under consideration and prayed over the qualifications of the men. Finding them qualified, we see the *fourth* step in the process as the Apostles laid hands on them, thus ordaining them to the official work of serving tables (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις).

From the mode of selection revealed in Acts 6 we learn much about the Church and the seven. First, the

Church is a commonwealth with a representative government; it is neither dictatorial nor hierarchical. Second, we see that spiritual qualifications are a *sine qua non* of official ecclesial work. Finally, the "seven" were ordained to official status *with specific purpose* in the Church and that of serving tables, which we understand from the context to be all temporal affairs of the Church. From close observation of these facts, Douglas Bannerman concluded: "All these facts taken together seem to prove beyond doubt that we have here the first recorded appointment of ordinary office-bearers in the Christian community, that the nature of the office was as stated above, that it was in one sense a new one, and that therefore the grounds on which it was established, and the mode in which the first deacons were appointed, were carefully put on record for the future guidance of the Church" (Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine*, 427).

For these reasons I believe Acts 6 belongs in that corpus of NT literature (along with 1 Timothy 3:8–13; Romans 12:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 12:28; and, Philippians 1:1) given for instruction about the office of deacon. Thus stands the Biblical basis for the Office of Deacon.

#### THE BIBLICAL NATURE OF THE OFFICE OF DEACON

While it may certainly be said that the deacon was "formed upon Jewish analogies," we have seen that a good portion of scholarship argues against the continuity of the "office" from OT to NT. The office of deacon as given in Acts 6 and qualified in 1 Timothy 3 is "a new one;"<sup>18</sup> nevertheless, it has Jewish OT roots which help us understand the nature of the office. The care of the poor, orphans, and widows was certainly a responsibility of the OT Church, but the care was a general duty of *all* saints rather than the duty of an official body (Exod. 23:11; Lev. 19:10; 23:22; 25:25; Isa. 58:7, 8). A clear passage on this is Deuteronomy 15 where we read: "If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955) 425. This volume has been reprinted recently by Tentmaker Publications and is available with a new introduction by C. N. Willborn.

16. The qualifications will be dealt with in a subsequent section.

17. See John Calvin, *Commentary on Acts* (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989) XVIII:238. "Laying on of hands was a solemn sign of consecration under the law. To this end do the apostles now lay their hands upon the deacon, know that they are offered to God." For OT and NT examples of consecration to special service through laying on of hands, see Num. 8:10; 27:18; Deut. 34:9; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6.

18. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 16:146; Douglas Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine*, 420.

your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother" (v7). Notice that the poor are the object of the people's generosity. Indeed, the people are to be so generous that "there will be no poor among you" (v4). Next, we are assured in this passage that the provisions for the poor will emanate from the covenant faithfulness of God toward His people: "the LORD will surely bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess" (v4). The LORD makes such ample provision for His people that the needs of *all* can be met! Now this raises a third point from this passage, the definition of the object. The proper object of the Israelites' generosity is the poor, but then God qualifies the "poor" when he says, "a poor man with you, one of your brothers" (7). In verse 9 we read "your poor brother" and again in verse 11 the people are exhorted to "freely open your hand to your brother." Thus it is that the primary objects of the OT peoples' charity are the poor brothers among them. All the people of Israel were to care for the poor and to do it in such proportions that there would be no poor among them.<sup>19</sup>

Having suggested, if not established, that the NT Deacon has only "Jewish analogies,"<sup>20</sup> we may say that God withheld the office, formally, for the New Covenant epoch. In the progress of revelation and redemptive history, God reserved the "office" of mercy and charity for the covenantal epoch established by the work of our precious Savior. I would suggest that while the office may find analogies in the Jewish landscape of the OT, it finds its defining characteristic in the compassion of Christ and this compassion is not only *exhibited* in the Church in Acts, but divinely *concentrated* and *constituted* in the Jerusalem diaconate. The diaconate, I would argue, is part of the "better covenant" we have in Christ Jesus (Heb. 7:22); it was revealed in the fullness of time as an abiding example of the compassion of our Savior who came in the fullness of time and

gave himself—not coming to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28).

Just as there is movement from the OT ceremonial feasts to the New Covenant sacrament of the Lord's Supper and from circumcision to baptism, we have a clear illustration of movement from the OT paradigm of general duty toward the poor to the NT office of deacon. The relation of the OT approach and the NT office is clearly seen in Acts 4 and Acts 6. The OT "general duty" to the poor is seen in Acts 4:34–35: "For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need." In the "congregation of those who believed" (v. 32) at Jerusalem there was provision made for the needy of their number. The rich and the poor were harmonized as God blessed the congregation.

Sadly, however, something happened between Luke's record of Acts 4:35 and 6:1 so that "a complaint arose" from one sector of the church "because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." What caused this neglect? I would suggest that the divine providence, which led to the neglect of the widows, and the subsequent ordination of the seven deacons, is recorded for us in Acts 5:1–11. There we are told that Ananias and Sapphira "put the Spirit of the Lord to the test," through complicity in lying, and met their death at God's hand. This punitive act of God caused "great fear" to come over "the whole church" (5:11). Without being dogmatic and without presuming too much upon silence, I would suggest that the fear that gripped the Jerusalem Church "and all who heard of these things" (5:11) paralyzed the church, as fear is apt to do to each of us, and thus blunted its zeal for bearing burdens and meeting needs. Out of this occasion of need, the Holy Spirit of God led the church to make new, specific, and better provisions for her temporal needs, as exemplified in the "widows." This new, specific, and better provision came through an official body of men (*ανδρας*).

Thus far we have observed the deacon as an office of compassion as exhibited in meeting the needs of the poor and widows. More will be said of this, but for now we move to the qualifications of the office and observe what this reveals to us about the nature of the office. First, the fact that this body of *διακονοι* (deacons) is exclusively *ανδρας* (men) is certainly significant and demands particular note here. While intelligent and well meaning men have suggested that passages like Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11 offer a proviso for female deacons (deaconesses), the case lacks biblical

19. Zechariah 7:9, 10 tells us that the Israelites were to "practice kindness and compassion each to his brother and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger [in their midst] or the poor." Because they did not as the LORD instructed, He withheld good things from them and even cast them from the land. He had provided the land and its bounty, not for some to grow wealthy at the expense of others, but for the rich and poor to be reconciled.

20. This fact notwithstanding, there are some who would attempt to equate the "Chazzan of the synagogue" with the Seven and the deacons and, thus, show more direct continuity from the OT to the NT. See Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine*, 421; Thomas Smyth, *Presbytery and Not Prelacy the Scriptural and Primitive Polity* (Boston: Croker and Brewster; New York: Robert Carter, 1843) 243.

support, particularly in the light of Luke's use of "men" (read "male") in the passage before us in Acts and the prescribed order of nature by which Paul argues consistently in 1 Timothy. The fact that the office of deacon is a leader office *and* is spiritual by nature *and* involves doctrinal acumen strongly suggests, even demands, that the office should reflect created order so that all things in the Church reflect divine warrant. Therefore, to qualify for the office of deacon one must be a male.

Second, we must not overlook the fact that the men who were first chosen to care for widows in the church were Christians. The congregation was instructed to "select from among you" in order to meet the widows' need. It is not the world's place to care for the widow of the church. "It was work among brethren and sisters," explained Bannerman, "to be done by brethren in a spirit of brotherly love and willing service" (Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine*, 423).

Third, the deacons were to have a "good reputation." The "good reputation" would appear to find a parallel and commentary in Paul's first letter to young Timothy: "Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain" (1 Tim. 3:8). Among the many things intimated in this passage, here the "deacon" is to possess personal characteristics not terribly unlike the elder. Indeed, Paul introduces the office with its title, ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΥΣ, and immediately supplies the adverb *οσαυτως* (likewise), which, as Knight explains, "both distinguishes the *διακονοι* from the *επισκοπος* and compares the two" (Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 168). Thus the qualifications of the deacon are similar to the elder, yet distinct. The point here is that we have qualifications which are obviously those of an office of the church. The same qualifications (though in expanded form) are those demanded of the "seven" to be chosen from the congregation in Jerusalem. The seven deacons of Jerusalem were to be *μαρτυρουμενους* ("good reputation" or "well reported ones"), which is analogous to the qualification of *σεμνους* ("men of dignity" or "worthy of respect") in 1 Timothy 3:8. Paul proceeds to define "men of dignity" in negative terms as "not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain." Thus, one may be satisfied that "men of dignity" (the overarching qualification in 1 Timothy) are "well reported men" or men of "good reputation" (the overarching qualification in Acts 6).

In addition to being men of dignity—worthy of respect, well reported men, of good repute—the seven to be chosen from among the congregation were to be men "full of the Holy Spirit." Now we have already

established that the deacons were to be Christians so why the emphasis on the Holy Spirit? The answer is simple: The offices of the Church, whether elder or deacon, require spiritually mature men, men known for being filled with the Holy Spirit. They are to be men "tested" (1 Tim. 3:10) and known for their spiritual stability and growth. While the work of the deacon is one of service to the poor and the widows; while the work of the deacon is one of serving tables and making distributions to those in need (thus, handling the monies of the church), we must never lose sight of the fact before us in Acts 6:3—the deacon is to be "full of the Holy Spirit." It is not enough that a man be respected by or successful in the world, he must exhibit a deep spirituality if he is to be considered for the office of deacon. What the Apostles were attempting to spell out for the Church was that the respect one has for a man who will engage in the work of mercy and charity must be of a high order, a spiritual order.

Paul expounds this qualification when he says deacons are "men of dignity ... holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim. 3:8, 9). Indeed, the LORD promised to send the Holy Spirit and "He will guide you into all the truth.... He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you" (John 16:13, 15). In "holding to the mystery of the faith," the deacon is to be the possessor of the same truth content, the same objective body of doctrine, as the elder. Note 1 Timothy 1:19 where Paul exhorts Elder Timothy to "fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected." This truth content, this objective body of doctrine, this *faith*, is that teaching of Scripture, which the Holy Spirit gave through inscripturation and into which He guides His people. So, we see the relationship of "full of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 6 and "holding to the mystery of the faith" in 1 Timothy 3:9. If we walk in truth; if we possess "the mystery of the faith," it is only because we are full of the Spirit (see Rom. 8:1ff.).

We must not leave this point without attending to Paul's addendum to that qualification of "holding to the mystery of the faith;" he appends the little prepositional phrase—"with a clear conscience." First, one can only own the faith through the work of the Holy Spirit Who is *with* the Christian and *in* the Christian (John 14:17). Deacons must be marked, as Knight writes, by "the genuineness of their faith" and this being "evident in their godly life" (Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 169). The Church errs greatly when she chooses men "hoping" they will become deacons. The Church errs greatly when she chooses men who are not convinced of the doctrine of the Church. The Church



errs greatly when she does not choose men of the highest spiritual reputation. To be qualified for the office of deacon, a man must hold the doctrine of the Church and this with a clear conscience.

Finally, the Apostles stipulated that the men of choice for the Jerusalem Church were to be full of wisdom. This qualification I take to go hand in hand with the previous one of being full of the Holy Spirit. This is indicated by various English translations that translate “the Holy Spirit and wisdom” as correlatives. Certainly it takes little discussion to show how important it is for one to possess godly wisdom when one’s task involves discerning needs, genuine needs from false needs. In the context of Acts 6 and the complaint that arose, a man would need great wisdom, wisdom permeated with the “mystery of the faith” as taught by the Holy Spirit, in order to sort out the situation and act as a good steward of God’s wealth. The Apostle James addresses this topic and we may apply James’ general exhortation to the specific case of the deacons—if it is true of all Christians, how much more must it be true for the deacons who are to possess the very qualification. James speaks of “the gentleness of wisdom” and how it works against “jealousy and selfish ambition,” which in turn produce “disorder and every evil thing.” Certainly Acts 6:1 shows that the Jerusalem Church was divided—Jewish and Hellenistic—and this division had caused disorder, marked by complaints. In this context, James says the remedy is wisdom—“But the wisdom from above [i.e., from the Holy Spirit] is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). Notice particularly that “wisdom” is “full of mercy and good fruit.” Again, if this is a general exhortation, how much more is it to characterize the church officer, especially the deacon?

From the objects of the deacon’s labors (poor and widows), to the subject of their labors (temporal and fiscal), to the qualifications of the office (spiritually equipped), the church is behooved to declare the diaconal office to be of a spiritual nature. Yes, the office is one directly related to and involving the temporal affairs of the Church, an office of service, but whether the office is concerned with the physical needs of the Church or the financial welfare of the church or the care of church property, the deacon is dealing with the affairs of King Jesus. The diaconate labors as an office of a spiritual enterprise—the Church of the LORD Jesus Christ.

21. Of course, I acknowledge that a man may be dismissed from office through various biblical disqualifications (e.g., egregious sin or change of doctrinal views).

The qualifications for the deacon from Acts 6 to 1 Timothy 3 are spiritual qualifications. This should not surprise us since it is the office of the Church and not the world. Let us state it this way: The Church is a distinctly spiritual institution, her work is only spiritual by nature; thus, her officers will be of a spiritual nature (Matthew 28:18–20), even when dealing with the temporal affairs related to the church.

Finally, it should be noted that the nature of the office is also perpetual. This office demands a divine calling, in order to be recognized by the church. As such, it is perpetual. A man may not take up the work and lay it down of his own volition. God has ordained his life to one of service to the church and only God can dismiss. Ordinarily, I would submit, dismissal from the office of deacon comes only through a re-qualification process whereby a man’s gifts change to include the ability *and* desire to teach and rule in the church.<sup>21</sup> As the temporal needs of the congregation and community always stand before the church, so the need of the office always exists. The office is perpetual.

Having established the Biblical basis for the Office of Deacon and the Biblical Nature of the Office, I turn next to the Biblical Duties of the Office.

#### THE BIBLICAL DUTIES OF THE OFFICE OF DEACON

The office of deacon is a spiritual office, but it is distinct from that of the eldership. The office of elder is specifically directed to the spiritual oversight and nurture of the congregation. He is primarily distinguished in that he is “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2). In Titus we find this explicated when Paul says, “the overseer must be ... able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:7–9). This is consistent with his instruction to the elders at Ephesus to “shepherd the church of God” because there will be “savage wolves” from outside the church who prey upon the innocent sheep *and* there will even be those from within the church who will speak “perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:28–30). The elders then are overseers of all things spiritual. The deacons are spiritually mature men who administer the temporal affairs of the congregation. With this distinction drawn, let us proceed to consider the duties of the deacon.

As I develop this section, I shall set forth some basic principles which run throughout the section. Christ is Our Prophet and has given the Church her instructions and because He is also Our King we are to do all that He has commanded us. It is a common expression,

although commonly ignored, that the Church should do nothing but that which is warranted in Holy Scripture. Are we to follow only that which is explicitly or propositionally stated in God's word? We are also warranted in doing those things which we deduce from the good and necessary consequence of Scripture. John L. Girardeau sets forth the classic position on the authority of Scripture and the truths inferred from it rightly when he writes:

Without a warrant from his word, which is the constitutional law of the Church, either explicitly given in it or derived from it by good and necessary consequence, no element can lawfully exist, no office be established, no measure be adopted, within the whole extension of the ecclesiastical sphere; that a good and necessary consequence—a logical and therefore legitimate inference from facts, statements, principles, in the divine word—is, with us, formally acknowledged to be of equal authority with the word itself, and when declared to the Church bind her conscience and enforce her practice.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the principle of biblical warrant for all we do, it is important to consider the duties of the diaconate with this principle ever before us—Christ has made ample provisions for us, spiritually and temporally—“many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life” (Luke 18:30). These provisions he administers through elders (spiritual provisions) and deacons (temporal provisions). With these biblical principles before us let us draw from God's word the duties of the diaconate and discuss them under three *loci*—Fiscal Agent, Property Management, and Mercy Ministry.

#### DUTY AS FISCAL AGENT

The *First Book of Discipline* (1560) makes it plain, “The office of deacon is to gather and distribute the alms of the poor according to the direction of session.” Again, the Scottish Book says, “The deacons should take up the whole rent of the Kirk, disposing them to the ministry, the schools, and poor within their bounds, according to the appointment of the kirk.”<sup>23</sup> The “bounds” spoken of here is, of course, the parish or community in which the church finds here location.

The *Second Book of Discipline* (1578), the product of Andrew Melville, says of the deacon, “Their office and power is to receive, and to distribute the whole ecclesiastical goods unto them to whom they are appointed.” Again, the *Second Book* explains, “The goods ecclesiastical ought to be collected and distributed by the deacons,

as the word of God appoints, that they who bear office in the Kirk be provided for without care or solicitude.”<sup>24</sup> For use of space and time, I shall suspend further evidence from the Second Scottish Book, but iterate that early Scottish Presbyterian witness supports the role of the deacon as a fiscal agent of the church.

In the American context, Samuel Miller of Princeton wrote consistently with that of the Scottish divines when he said, “They might, with great propriety be made the managers of all the money-tables, or fiscal concerns of each congregation; and, for this purpose, might be incorporated, if it thought necessary, by law, that they might be enabled regularly to hold and employ all the property, real and personal, of the Church.” Miller proceeds to include in their work “the cause of the Bible; of Missions, foreign and domestic; of Sabbath schools; and of the various other Christian and benevolent undertakings.”<sup>25</sup> All of this he summarized when he said, “the function to which the Deacon was appointed by the Apostles, was to manage the *pecuniary affairs* of the Church, and especially to preside over the collections and disbursements for the poor” (Miller, 242). Drawing on Miller, I wish to emphasize the scope of the fiscal utility of the office; the diaconate is responsible for collection and distribution of church monies.

One last example from the American landscape will suffice to illustrate our point. In his little known but marvelously useful *Ecclesiastical Catechism*, Thomas Smyth states: “Deacons were appointed for the purpose of managing the temporal affairs of the church, and especially to attend to the needs of the poor, by inspecting their situation and supplying their wants.”<sup>26</sup> In another of his ecclesiological writings, he says, “All the reformed churches agree in believing that the scriptures clearly point out deacons as distinct *officers* in the church, whose business it is to take care of the poor—to

22. John L. Girardeau, “The Diaconate,” in *The Southern Presbyterian Review* (hereafter *SPR*) 31, no. 1 (January 1880): 138. I acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Girardeau for stimulating and directing much of my thinking about the diaconate, but especially the duties and sphere of the diaconal office.

23. *First Book of Discipline of the Church of Scotland*, VII and XVII. Author's translation. Cf. “The First Book of Discipline,” in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (1848; repr. New York: AMS Press Inc, 1966) 2.225, 236–237.

24. Cf. James Kirk, *The Second Book of Discipline with Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1980) 207, 210.

25. Samuel Miller, *An Essay on the Warrant, Nature and Duties of the Office of the Ruling Elder, in the Presbyterian Church* (1832; repr., Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1987) 237, 238.

26. Thomas Smyth, *An Ecclesiastical Catechism of the Presbyterian Church*, 6th edition, ed. Geoffrey W. Donnan (1843; repr., Fellsmere, Fla., 2000) 33.

distribute among them the collections which may be raised for their use—and generally to manage the temporal affairs of the church.”<sup>27</sup>

Why, it may be asked, do these varied sources from Presbyterian history maintain the fiscal agency of the diaconate? The answer is simple: from explicit warrant and inference of Scripture. Acts 6 provides us an example. The provisions to meet the needs of the widows necessitated money, which would be collected from the congregation. In Acts 4 money was collected and distributed by the Apostles. The original seven deacons are ordained to the very work previously carried out by the Apostles, other than “prayer” and “ministry of the word.” In Romans 12: 6, 7, writes Smyth, “the deaconship is immediately connected with ‘giving’ and ‘showing mercy’” (Smyth, 244). Calvin, while not relating verses 6 and 7 to the diaconate per se, explains verse 8—“he who gives, with liberality . . . he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness”—in terms of the deaconship when he writes, “By the μετὰδιδόντοί, *the givers*, of whom he speaks here, he did not understand those who gave of their own property, but the deacons, who presided in dispensing the public charities of the Church.”<sup>28</sup>

From the Acts passages we see explicit biblical warrant for the diaconate’s collecting and distributing the finances of the church. From the Romans passage, and I would add passages like 1 Peter 4:10, 11, we may infer from the general to the specific that, what every Christian is called upon to do, it is certainly the specific duty of the deacon to carry out. Deacons are to be “good stewards,” handling those gifts of the church with discernment of judgment, a winsome cheerfulness, and spiritual sensitivity.

27. Thomas Smyth, *Presbytery and Not Prelacy the Scriptural and Primitive Polity* (Boston: Croker and Brewster; New York: Robert Carter, 1843) 242.

28. John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* (repr., Baker Book House, 1989) XIX:462–63.

29. *The Book of Church Order of Presbyterian Church in America* [hereafter BCO], Sixth edition (Atlanta: The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2002) 9–2.

30. The spiritual nature of the handling of monies is set forth by Thomas Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology*, 202—“That it is the official duty of the deacons to take charge of the pastor’s salary would probably never been questioned, if the salary had not been regarded as a pure affair of business, and not in any just sense as an expression of the communion of saints.”

31. I realize that in those exceptional times, such as a new work or church plant, before deacons are given by God, the work devolves upon the ruling elder (see BCO of the PCA 9–2), as it had on the Apostles prior to the giving of the office. However, I would argue for the ideal or norm rather than the exception.

In establishing the diaconate as the fiscal agent, we saw Samuel Miller suggest that the deacon should be the agent of missionary and benevolent enterprises. The diaconate, according to Girardeau, “is of course legitimately employed in relation to the raising of collections for congregational and benevolent purposes.” “Congregational” purposes would certainly include providing for the poor and needy of the congregation, but it would include much more. First, in the collecting of the necessary funds for the various uses of the church, the fiscal agent of the church is developing “the grace of liberality”<sup>29</sup> in the membership. It is primarily the deaconship that promotes the spiritual attitude of “generosity” (2 Cor. 9:5) and “cheerfulness” (2 Cor. 9:7). The deacons make known the financial needs of the church. The deacons make concrete or specify the need so that the prayers for generosity and preaching on liberality may be readily obeyed. As men and women generously and cheerfully and readily give of their abundance, they are further sanctified “so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (1 Tim. 6:19). Again, I point out the spiritual effect of the diaconal labors.

Another responsibility flowing from the fiscal agency of the diaconate is provision for the welfare of the minister.<sup>30</sup> In 1 Timothy 5:17 we learn, “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor.” That “double honor” included financial remuneration as is clear from verse 18: “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” The “wages” are meant to be of such proportion that the minister is not “muzzled” or hampered by financial exigency. This is the basis for the terms of call for a Presbyterian minister, when the congregation vows “to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised” (BCO, 21–6, #4), which is the confidence the minister has that he “may be free from worldly cares and avocations” (BCO, 20–6). The diaconate is responsible for reviewing the needs of the minister(s), collecting funds and distributing as salary the necessary funds for meeting the “world cares” of the minister.

A third area of labor for the deacon in his fiscal agency pertains to the mission of the church. The deacon, as the fiscal agent given the church by her Supreme Head, is responsible for collecting and distributing funds for the missionary endeavor of the church. This, of course, means that the deacon has a proper function at every level of the church—local, regional, national, and international—where there is involvement in the missionary enterprise. We have no warrant to jettison God’s plan and place non-deacons in charge of church monies.<sup>31</sup> When we do we risk confusing the offices and,

thus, we confuse “the *purse* and the *keys*,”<sup>32</sup> as Thornwell argued.

We do have biblical precedent to argue that the mission of the church will advance significantly when the diaconate is utilized in the handling of financial concerns. In Acts 6, when the Apostles “laid hands on them” (ordained them), the very next word we read concerns the advancement of the gospel—“The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts 6:7). We may further add that the minister’s work on the field would advance more smoothly if he is complimented by a diaconate that is caring for the fiscal needs of the work.

#### DUTY AS PROPERTY MANAGER

The next duty of the deacon relates to his care for the physical properties or buildings of the church. Here I argue succinctly for the deacon to have charge of all matters pertaining to buildings, land, and revenues. All these are given for and used for ecclesiastical purposes and are, as such, temporal concerns of the church, for the church, and by the church. Thus, it can only be right that the diaconate is the agent responsible for meeting the demands of the properties of the church, so long as they are held for and used for ecclesiastical ends. Again, we would suggest that the diaconate’s work in relation to the properties of the church contribute to the worship and instruction of the church and so, it can easily be seen, has a spiritual end in sight.

Is there Scriptural ground for us to give the physical properties over to the diaconship for their management? I would argue support from good and necessary consequence of Scripture. J. H. Thornwell lays the argument before us so well, drawing from Acts 6:

It is certain that the reason assigned by the Apostles for ordering their [deacons] election applies just as strongly to the collection and disbursement of funds for one purpose as for another. Their purpose was not to get rid of attending to the poor, but to get rid of secular distractions: “It is not reason,” said they, “that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” What would they have gained by divesting themselves of the care of the poor, and continuing to be perplexed with the collection of funds for all other purpose? It must be perfectly obvious to every candid mind that the entire secular business of the Church was entrusted to the Deacons (Thornwell, 4.201).

The responsibility for the properties are not to be entrusted to a tertiary group of extra-biblical agents (commonly called trustees), nor placed as a burden upon the elders’ back. It is for the diaconship to manage the physical properties and this from the good authoritative inference of Scripture. “Where the ends are ecclesiastical,” explains Girardeau, “and the congregation acts in the capacity of a church, as in the case of property for religious purpose ... it ought to commit the attainment of those ends to ecclesiastical functionaries” (Girardeau, “The Diaconate,” 146). The “ecclesiastical functionaries” divinely granted to the church are elders and deacons alone. And, of these two offices, the one ordained to care for the physical/temporal matters of the church is the diaconate.

Sadly, the latter work, of attending to the physical properties of the church is too often the one work popularly attributed to the diaconate. It is often only when there is a discomfort in the church building that the deacon is called upon. Then, the office is disparaged rather than esteemed. It should be insisted that this is only one of his duties, as necessary and important as it is. Yet, it has spiritual significance since it relates to the worship and service of the church and should be taken seriously by the diaconate and esteemed in the eyes of the congregation.

#### DUTY TO THE POOR AND NEEDY

The most biblically explicit duty the diaconate undertakes is that of care for the poor. In his relation to the poor, we see the deacon expressing the compassion of Christ and uniting the church in suffering. It is obvious that the “compassion of Christ” is exhibited through the functioning diaconate, but what do I mean by “uniting the church in suffering”? I mean that the body of Christ is one and “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Again, Paul reminds us that “as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort” (2 Cor. 1:7). The body of Christ must never allow an attitude of indifference to separate her members. We are one body in Christ Jesus. The rich are instructed in God’s word not to be “conceited” but “to be generous and ready to share” (1 Tim. 6:17, 18). In other words, the rich are to share in the sufferings of the poor through their generosity—giving freely that which God “richly supplies us” (1 Tim. 6:17).

32. James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, 4 vols., ed. John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication; New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1873) 4:155.



When one member of the body of Christ suffers—such as lacking essentials of life or a young mother left a widow—we have the opportunity to better know Christ and “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). Thus, we are united to one another as we are brought more closely to experience Christ. Our LORD gave us clear teaching on this when he said, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it [food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, visitation to the sick and imprisoned] to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me” (Matthew 26:40).

The diaconate is a representative body of men, drawn from the church, to unite the body of Christ in the sufferings of the poor and needy and, thus, make more real to the church and the observing world our union with Christ. Indeed, our care for the poor flows from our real union with Christ to produce a more experiential union with Christ. James Ramsey said it so well: “The care of the poor, relieving their wants and soothing their sorrows, and encouraging their crushed spirits is, therefore, a duty entwined in the very nature of the Christian life—springing naturally and necessarily out of the believer’s union with Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

“What if,” someone asks, “we have no poor and needy in our midst?” What a sad and telling question. No poor in our midst! The LORD and the great preponderance of Scripture says, “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them.” A church without poor is like unto a church without children or a church without the aged. Can it be a biblical church and be so selective in its membership? For the answer, hear the collective wisdom of men who studied the church and her diaconate and utilized the biblical office so effectively. “But, it may be asked,” writes James Ramsey, “of what use are deacons to take care of the poor in churches where there are no poor, or but two or three? *That, indeed, is a sadly defective state of the church where there are no poor; there must be something very deficient in its zeal and aggressiveness, if amidst the multitudes of poor around us, and mingling with us, there are none in the church itself*” (Ramsey, 15). John Girardeau assesses such a situation in similar fashion: “A church in which there are no poor would do well to raise the question, whether it does not lie outside the pale of God’s election. For, ‘hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?’ Christ’s poor

relations will ever be found where Christian organizations exist, and the nominal church which neglects to provide for them confesses itself apostate” (Girardeau, “The Diaconate,” 120). Elders may preach and rule in a church where there are no poor, no widows, no orphans, argues Thomas Peck, “but deacons have nothing to do, except in a church which has life enough to show itself in a ministry to the saints” (Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology*, 198). These men agree, a local congregation should be represented by the poor. If the local church is not thus characterized, then God gave offices without purpose and that simply cannot be for our God does all things with purpose.

Ramsey is surely correct when he avers that among the functions of the diaconate, “the care of the poor stands prominent” (Ramsey, “The Deaconship,” 9). Our union with Christ is made evident when care is provided to the poor. With the care of the poor, the union of the body of Christ is made evident. The tenderness, mercy, and compassion of Christ is exemplified in the Church when the diaconate functions among the poor. In short, Christ is honored, the Church edified, and the gospel validated, when the diaconate meets the needs of the poor.

Before we leave the topic of the poor, it is incumbent upon me to ask a thorny question. A thorny question because it is often assumed or ignored or misunderstood. The question: Who are the poor? No one would disagree that the deacons are responsible for the poor of the church membership. The widows in Jerusalem were members of the congregation and the deacons were responsible for their care. While the primary responsibility of the diaconate is the membership or brotherhood, I wish to support the position that the work of the diaconate may extend beyond the poor of the church, “when warranted by the ability of the church” (Girardeau, “The Diaconate,” 123). A number of fathers would support this position of whom I wish to cite two representatives of the Dutch and Scottish branches of the Church. Voetius, the celebrated Dutch divine, supported the thesis when he said, “That they [deacons] may exercise beneficence towards all men, especially towards those who are of the household of faith.”<sup>34</sup> The Scottish pastor and historian John G. Lorimer concluded his discussion of the question by saying, “it is an honorable light in which Christianity is presented, when she appears as the friend of the poor, even those who do not make a profession of faith” (Lorimer, *The Deaconship*, 69).

There may be some who would object to this position on grounds of the spirituality of the church—that the

33. James B. Ramsey, “The Deaconship,” *SPR* 12, no. 1 (April 1859): 10.

34. Cited in Girardeau, “The Diaconate,” 124.

nature and duty of the church is singularly spiritual.<sup>35</sup> Let me assure you that I fully support that classic distinctive of biblical Christianity and, furthermore, I do not believe this position out of accord with that hallowed view. Allow me to answer this concern with a few observations. First, the doctrine of redemption is one that encompasses both body and soul. The Bible will not support the one-sided fundamentalist emphasis on the soul; neither will it support the social gospel's opposite extreme which emphasizes the body. The view of the diaconate set forth here is consistent with a full-orbed spiritual view of man as body and soul. The redemption of man as body and soul is, as Girardeau reminds us, "the genius and spirit of the gospel" (Girardeau, "The Diaconate," 126).

A second reason I believe the Church may minister to the poor and needy, regardless of church affiliation, is based upon biblical precedent. Earlier I observed that it was a general duty in Israel for citizens to care for "your brother" in the land (Deut. 15:7, 11). However, we must also wrestle with the LORD's instruction to make some provision for the "alien" or stranger who may reside within the Jewish context (Lev. 23:22). In Leviticus 25:35 we are told, "Now in case a brother of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, *like a stranger or sojourner, that he may live with you*" (emphasis added). It is the LORD's design that care for those within our local context (or, to used an old term, *parish*) be sustained so they "may live with you." Further support for this point could be drawn from the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:30–37) where the question of "Who is one's neighbor?" is answered with "The one who showed mercy toward him." Paul's instruction to the Galatians is also one with which we must reckon—"So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to *all people*, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10; emphasis added). So, I suggest that there is OT and NT precedent for defining the poor and needy more broadly than simply those within our church membership. However, we must remember that the diaconate's work with strangers is toward the end of seeing them gathered into the church. Thus, the redemptive or spiritual element is further exemplified as a work of the diaconate.

The third reason for allowing a broader definition of "poor and needy" relates to our LORD's exemplary life. Take one example, that of the LORD's care for the Syrophenician or Greek woman "whose little daughter had an unclean spirit" (Mark 7:25). He established that she was not of the covenant community, indeed she was described as one of "the dogs" (27). Yet, out of

his compassion He responded with mercy to a needy person outside the covenant community.

Here I conclude our reasons for having a broader view of "poor and needy" than simply "our brothers" of the church. As you can see, to take this view does not injure the doctrine of spirituality of the church. Rather, it supports it, if done carefully and biblically. The diaconate becomes, through the administration of temporal assistance, an agent of spiritual care with the intention and desire of having those strangers "live with you" (Lev. 25:35). Those who are far away may be brought near through the agency of the diaconate. "The Church is, in a sense," wrote Girardeau, "the representative of [Christ's] charity in the midst of an afflicted world, and the deacon is the agent of her benefactions" (Girardeau, "The Diaconate," 127).

Briefly, before moving to the next duty of the deacon, another objection to our expansion of the definition of "poor and needy" is anticipated. What if the church has limited resources? Do we meet the needs of those outside the church membership when we have unmet needs within? The answer is one of common sense—No. The church does as she is able to do and she prays that God would bless her faithfulness with greater resources that she may do more and so see the church expand her roots.

The summary of the duties of the diaconate may best be offered in the words of Girardeau when he wrote: "As donations are spontaneously made, and legacies left, to the Church, he is the *receiver*; as money is to be raised for various purposes, he is the *collector*; as funds and property are to be kept and administered, he is the *treasurer and manager*; and as relief is to be extended to the poor, the stipends paid church-officers and agents, he is the *distributor*." Indeed, "it is not a small office."

#### THE DUTY OF DELEGATION

There is no reason to belabor this point, but it deserves to be singled-out. The Diaconate is an office of delegation and ought to delegate its duties as necessary and when possible. This duty may be deduced from Acts 6:3 where the diaconate is "put in charge of this task."<sup>36</sup> Thus, the deacons are not ordained to "do" everything,

35. For a fine development of the spirituality doctrine see Stuart Robinson, *Discourses of Redemption* (Louisville, Ky.: Davidson and Robinson, 1867) 474–88.

36. The ESV translates καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ as "appoint to" rather than "put in charge over" (NASB) or "appoint over" (NKJV). The NASB and NKJV both capture the force of the ἐπὶ better than the ESV.

but to “do” and “delegate.” In being “put in charge” they have *authority over* the various duties given them in Scripture and summarized above. In exercising the authority and duty of delegation, they will utilize the gifts of men and women in the church in various and numerous ways. This auxiliary service knows no biblical name and certainly demands no office. In a culture like ours where titles are sought, even demanded, the idea of serving in the church without the recognition or “honor” of a title is peculiar to many. However, we should act counter-to-culture when Scripture demands it and enjoy the rewards of our Savior’s words of “well done good and faithful δούλε (servant/slave)” (Matt. 25:23).

When the diaconate exercises its authority to delegate deeds pertaining to mercy, monies, and material structures, the household of faith will be more fully involved in the day to day work of the kingdom. The diaconate, when delegating as it ought, will become perhaps the primary agent for the promotion of the communion of the saints for they will be actively considering how they may “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24). Having considered it prayerfully, they will then act to “stimulate” the saints to “love and good deeds.” A fully functional diaconate has the divine warrant and authority to delegate and, for the good of the church, it will.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE DEACONS TO THE ELDERS

In this final section I wish to address the relationship between the two biblically prescribed offices Christ has given His Church—elder and deacon. A discussion of the diaconal office too often reveals less than clear thinking about the nature and duties of the office, thus I have addressed those aspects above. A corresponding discussion often reveals what I consider to be a less than biblical view of the relationship of deacons to elders in

the Church. At the same time, I understand that the question of how the deacon relates to the elder and vice versa has been “one of the most debated subjects in connection with the office of deacon.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, I wish to argue against the all too common view of inclusion of the lower office in the higher and for what I believe to be the biblical view of complementary offices.

Briefly, I shall argue that the office of deacon is not possessed *within* the office of elder. That is, I do not believe that the higher office includes the lower office, although certain qualifications are shared by the two offices.<sup>38</sup> I would insist upon *duæ ordines* or two orders of office. There is the ruling office (which is *duplex ordo*—one order with two distinct functions, i.e., preaching and ruling) and the distributing office. Each office is ordained to distinct functions within its specific order or office.

There are a number of substantial reasons for maintaining the *duæ ordines* of eldership and deaconship. First, unless the two orders are clearly distinguished and maintained, there is likelihood of confusion and conflict in the administration of the various functions of the offices. The purse and the keys, while both have spiritual ends, cannot be confused without deleterious results for the gospel program of the Church. For the elders to be drawn away from their labors of word, prayer, and ruling, to do the diaconal work will have substantial effects upon the spiritual health of the church. Likewise, for the deacons to falter in their weighty work will leave a body of believers without the care they need to experience the compassion of Christ. And, the failure of the diaconate will necessitate that the elders’ labors be diverted to that of the diaconate. Second, when the offices are confused or reduced to one, the “lower office” easily becomes superfluous in the eyes of the people (if not the bearer of the lower office also). Thus, it loses its status and falls out of use. This is exactly what happened in the Scottish and American *milieu* by the early eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Third, when the offices are not properly distinguished, the likelihood of certain functions being omitted increases significantly. In other words, the widows may not be served as they ought, due to demands upon the elders of prayer, shepherding, and preaching.

Fourth, it is not right that the two should be telescoped into one. The Apostles said “It is not desirable [“right” ESV, “reason” AV] for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). J. A. Alexander explains, “The idea of *right* or *proper*, although not expressed [in ἀρεστον], is necessarily implied.” It is not right in God’s eyes for the preaching of the word

37. Peter Y. De Jong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1952) 159.

38. In anticipation of objections, let me assure my readers that there are overlapping qualifications for the two offices. And, there may be exigencies within the life of the church that requires an elder to perform a diaconal function. However, this is not to be deemed normative, nor should it provide precedence which would undermine the functionality and esteem of the “lower” office. The necessity of the office displayed in Acts 6 speaks to the necessity of maintaining the *duæ ordines* for the spiritual vitality of the church.

39. Thomas Smyth, “The Office of Deacon,” in *SPR* 2, no. 3 (December 1848): 344. Smyth (1808–73) was intimately familiar with ecclesiastical practices in both Scotland and America and he attributed the obscurity of the deacon in both contexts to “the want of a definite and clear discrimination between the sphere of duty and the ecclesiastical relations of these two classes [elder and deacon] of officers.”

to be neglected for the menial tasks of service. Thus, Christ gave the office of deacon through the apostles.

Fifth, it simply does not make good sense that what God has given to a specific office should be routinely performed by another; conflict would be certain, confusion would abound, and the work of both would suffer.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, ordination to specific functions would be shown to be ridiculous. Yet, when we ordain a man to an office, we are saying that he has a specific work. Notice in Acts 6:3 that the deacons were *καταστήσομεν* (“appointed” or “put in charge”) *ἐπὶ* (“over”) the business or tasks which I have described in the sections above. The *ανδρας* (“men”), as deacons, are placed in an official capacity over the distinct functions of the office. Thus, they possess an authoritative role in the Church.<sup>41</sup> An elder is not ordained to have authority over diaconal labors anymore than a deacon is ordained to rule the household of God. Therefore, ordination to a specific office makes the inclusive view unreasonable and untenable.

Finally, I would argue against the inclusion of the lower office into the higher on grounds that Christ provided distinctly different offices. The Lord of the Church did not simply supply the Church with more apostles in Acts 6, when the need for serving tables arose. Neither did He use that occasion to institute the office of elder. Rather he took the occasion to institute a distinctively new office, the office of service and distribution—the deacon. Again, when the Holy Spirit spoke through Paul (1 Tim. 3:1–13), He did not provide the Church with one set of qualifications for one office. Rather, He clearly spoke of two orders *and* two sets of qualifications. With greatest deference to all, what God has separated, let man not join.

Having set forth several reasons why the offices are distinct offices with distinct callings and functions, permit me to show their complementary nature. It is a sad truth that many sessions spend an inordinate amount of their energies on temporal matters and a pathetically small amount of time actually shepherding/pastoring the flock under their *spiritual* oversight. Their oversight of the covenant community resembles more the meeting of a corporate board than that of a prayerful band of shepherds interceding for their sheep. Sadly, more time is spent contemplating the future finances of the church than visiting in the homes of the sheep. Thus, the flock is ravaged by wolves and the elders know little of the true spiritual state of their brethren.

In Acts 6, the apostles would not allow the physical needs of the people to divert their attention away from the spiritual needs of the flock—“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

J. H. Thornwell suggested, and I believe his insight proper, that “our spiritual courts would soon cease to be, what they are to an alarming extent at present, mere corporations for secular business” (Thornwell, 4.155), if the diaconate functioned biblically. A revival of the diaconate places temporal cares where God placed them—in the diaconate—and does not “secularize” the eldership.

Furthermore, the revival of the diaconate would improve the spirituality of the eldership, jointly and severally, for they would have more time to devote to prayer and study of the word of God—thus, being apt to teach, which is a distinguishing and non negotiable requirement for the office! A qualitative improvement in the spiritual condition of elders would lead to a significant increase in their efforts on behalf of their charge and spiritual growth in the church membership. The improved spiritual nurture of the entire congregation would produce a correlative leavening effect in the neighborhoods or parishes affected by the church.

Elders and deacons, each performing his distinct function, would go out into the homes of the membership (often side by side) ministering to the complete needs of the congregation. They would complement one another and portray to the membership the equal importance of each office and the distinct, yet inseparable, interests of the two. Similarly, they would traverse the neighborhoods of their parish with the gospel message of a Savior who saves men from their sins and provides for their needs in this life and the life to come (Luke 18:30; Matt. 5:5).

Therefore, the maintenance of a proper and healthy relationship between the two offices is of the utmost importance to a healthy church. There is a saying, which

40. I speak of functions of the deacons’ office being “routinely performed by another,” namely elders, for I acknowledge that occasion may arise when, on a temporary basis, an elder may have to fulfill a diaconal function. This, however, should be the exception and not the normative function of an elder, who is ordained to specific functions unlike those of the deacon.

41. The authoritativeness, i.e., being in charge over the tasks, of the office of deacon, argues against the office being filled by women. As stated in the text above, I am acutely aware that some have tried to justify “deaconesses” or female deacons on the basis of passages like Rom. 16:1 where Phoebe is called a “servant” or “minister” (*δουλοῦν*). But, since the office of deacon in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 specify that *ανδρας* (men of masculine gender) fill the office, we are compelled to understand Phoebe’s designation as a servant to be one of general service, a general sense of service in which all Christians find themselves classified. At the same time, the deacons should delegate (since they are over the tasks and not the exclusive doers of the tasks) the work to others and in this manner, through delegation from proper authority, a woman and non-ordained man may find “ministry” or “service” opportunities aplenty in the church.



most surely is correct: “The church’s spirituality will rise only as high as that of the elders.” So long as elders are consumed with temporal matters, the congregation will be temporally minded. When the diaconate functions as the temporal agents of the church, freeing the elders for their spiritual calling and business, the church will grow in grace and the spiritual aptitude and piety of the congregation will rise to new heights. The offices are complementary and necessary for the growth of the church, spiritually and numerically.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Thomas Smyth said, “The office of Deacon is undervalued by many, only because this great function of the Church is little known and little felt.” In this essay, I have attempted to make its function and value better known and we pray more strongly felt. It is a biblical office, its nature is spiritual while its object is the temporal affairs of the church, and its duties are multifold. Why do our churches limp along like a dysfunctional

family? Because, in many (if not all) cases, the offices are not fully understood, appreciated, and utilized. This is certainly true of the diaconate.

Why does the gospel too often fall upon hard hearts and deaf ears? In many cases, we have contributed to the hardening of the hearts through our callousness toward the poor around us. Why do elders not spend time in the homes, nurturing the flock on the sweet milk of the gospel? More often than not, it is because they are entangled in the secular or temporal affairs of the church. If the church is to preach a full-orbed, robust gospel that touches the whole man, body and soul, the diaconate must function well. If the church is to resemble a true “communion of saints,” the deacon must function well. “We are one, one in Christ,” wrote James Ramsey, “and one by our union with each other, so that none shall be in want while others are blessed with plenty. By [the diaconate] we are helped to bear one another’s burdens, and so to fulfill the law of Christ, to love one another” (Ramsey, “The Deaconship,” 20).■

#### *In Brief: “The Office of Deacon:” Extracts from The Presbyterian Quarterly (April, 1896)*

I would not suggest that the deaconess is an office in the church, for the sufficient reason that whereas we have a distinct account of the election and ordination of deacons, we have no such warrant for deaconesses. No woman holds office in the regular government of the New Testament church. Our *Book of Church Order* [PCUS] puts that matter where the Scripture does, when it states that the session may appoint godly women to care for the sick, for prisoners and poor widows and orphans. The word deacon, used in the New Testament in connection with women helpers, does not seem to imply an office, for no account is given of the institution of such an office, but simply to mean servant or helper in the work of caring for the poor. There is a peculiar propriety in the gentle ministrations of woman being called into requisition by the church in behalf of the suffering and distressed.

Friction and misunderstanding between the deacons and the session ... usually arise from a misunderstanding of the provinces of these officers, and hence a confusion of jurisdiction and conflict of action.

It is clear that there cannot be two governing bodies in one church without conflict; and it is also clear that it is impossible to separate, in all cases, matters temporal from spiritual matters; as, for example, in the election of an organist and the fixing of his salary, and as in many other things.

Dr. Peck, in his *Ecclesiology*, says: “In reference to all funds other than those contributed for specific purposes, as for

Home and Foreign Missions, they are under the direction and control of the session.” “To give the deacons, who are not rulers, power to dispose of the revenues as against the elders, would virtually be to create an *imperium in imperio*; for the power goes with the purse. Hence, we find the contributions in the primitive church laid ‘at the feet of the apostles.’”

Hence, we conclude that the whole power of the government of the individual church is vested in the session. The minister, of course, has an authority of his own in the preaching of the gospel, and is responsible for the proper discharge of it to the Presbytery which ordains and installs him. So the deacons are responsible to the session which ordains and installs them, for a deacon is not ordained and installed by the laying on of the hands of deacons, but of elders.

... The session has control of the church building, and to it must be referred all questions as to what purposes it may be used for. If any extension of the church building be contemplated, or any unusual and very extensive repairs, the proper method is for the session to direct the deacons to inquire into the feasibility and cost of what is proposed, or, if the matter originate with the deacons, for them to ask permission of the session, laying their plans before that body; and if the changes proposed be of a very important or expensive character, the session ought to ask the consent of the congregation in which they rule as representatives (Robert P. Kerr, “The Office of Deacon,” *The Presbyterian Quarterly* X.36 (April 1896) 206–207).■

# Francis Turretin and Barthianism: The Covenant of Works in Historical Perspective

By James J. Cassidy

## I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the covenant of works has been in recent days much maligned, even as it has been scarcely and unsympathetically studied. It is as if theologians are so anxious about getting to the covenant of grace that they have very little patience to reckon with a doctrine which now seems so “moot.” After all, the covenant of works may be relegated to the prelapsarian state of man, and thus of no practical value for us today. Or, perhaps such angst has something to do with speaking about human obedience as the way in which a covenant with God can be fulfilled. For many, this smacks of a medieval view of human merit—whether of the condign or congruent sort. For others, the doctrine is held to be speculative and not exegetically tenable.<sup>1</sup>

However, in these discussions what is too often missing is the significance of the doctrine of the covenant of works for the covenant of grace. In other words, for the covenant of grace to be truly gracious, a robust doctrine of the covenant of works must be set forth. This was certainly the opinion of many of the Protestant Orthodox in the seventeenth century. Wilhelm à Brackel encapsulates the concern well:

Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus.... Whoever denies the covenant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well.<sup>2</sup>

For à Brackel there is a “mirror effect” in the doctrinal formulation of the covenants of works and grace. What is of the former has implications and effects in the latter. In other words, the theologian cannot rework

the doctrine of the covenant of works—or eliminate it altogether—without suffering consequences to the doctrine of the covenant of grace. And what is perhaps most ironic is that the more the covenant of works is diluted in one’s doctrine of the covenant, the more diluted grace becomes in one’s doctrine of the covenant of grace.

No one was more aware of this fact than Francis Turretin. Serving as both a pastor and a professor, this second generation Italian refugee living in Geneva built his understanding of salvific grace upon the foundation of the covenant of works. Even so, the ages have not been particularly kind to the doctrine of the covenant of works, especially in the twentieth century. Karl Barth and those who have followed him have criticized the doctrine as being speculative, legalistic and even a corruption of the early Reformers’ theology. They view covenant theology in general and the covenant of works in particular as

... a dangerous innovation that undermines and ultimately destroys a theology of grace. In particular, [the critics] argue that covenant theology removes Christ from his central place in God’s reconciliation and leads to a skewed understanding of various doctrines,

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THE AUTHOR: James J. Cassidy is the pastor of Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Ringoes, New Jersey. His article “Critical-Realism & the Relation of Redemptive Act to Revelatory Word” appeared in volume two of *The Confessional Presbyterian* (2006).

1. See the helpful survey and the literature cited in J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin’s Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vanderhoeck and Ruprecht, 2007) 78–80.

2. Cited in Richard A. Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brackel,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (April 1994): 76. Hereafter CTJ. A similar position is taken, more recently, in M.G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (Overland Park, Kans.: Two Age Press, 2000) 109.

especially the doctrines of predestination, atonement, and assurance.<sup>3</sup>

But is this an accurate assessment? This essay will seek to review the critique of the covenant of works offered by Barth and Barthians, and compare and contrast that critique with the doctrine as it was held by Francis Turretin himself.

## II. FRANCIS TURRETIN *Turretin on the Covenant of Works*

It is not an exaggeration to say that for Turretin the covenant idea is of the utmost importance in theology and for understanding God's self-disclosure in the Bible. After all, the covenant is "the center and bond of all religion, consisting in the communion of God with man and embracing in its compass all the benefits of God towards man and his duties towards God."<sup>4</sup> However, to properly understand the idea of a covenant, we must go to the original covenant in the prelapsarian realm of creation.

Now, it should immediately be kept in mind that the act of creation itself does not constitute God's covenant with man. Rather, as J. Mark Beach states it, the Creator-creature relation "establishes the foundation that *makes possible* the more intimate covenant relationship."<sup>5</sup> This would imply, Beach shows, that God was under no obligation to make a covenant with man. However, given the fact God did choose to enter into a covenant with his human creature we might ask: what is that covenant like?

3. A.T.B. McGowan, "Karl Barth and Covenant Theology," in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham, U.K.: Apollos, 2008).

4. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Pub, 1992–1997) XII.I.I. Hereafter *IET*.

5. J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 96. Emphasis is his.

6. See the summary in Stephen R. Spencer, "Francis Turretin's Concept of the Covenant of Nature," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirkville, Mo.: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994) 74.

7. *IET*, VIII.III.I. See also Ostella, "The Merit of Christ in the Covenant of Works: Francis Turretin and Herman Bavinck Compared" (Th.M. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2007) 9.

8. Beach, 83. Emphasis is mine.

9. Spencer, "Francis Turretin's Concept," 74.

10. This distinction between man-as-created and man-in-covenant—as Beach points up—was common in 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed Orthodoxy. He cites from John Ball, Samuel Rutherford, and the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.1). See Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 84.

Turretin begins his discussion of the question concerning God's covenant with man by asking: "of what kind was it" (*IET*, VIII.III)? First, he defines a covenant on human terms. In sum, a human covenant is a mutual agreement between two persons in which mutual goods and offices are exchanged for their common utility. And this theory includes at least three things; (1) that the persons involved be equal, (2) each party should have it in their power to bestow such goods and thus be perfectly independent, (3) they should not be bound to bestow those items without the covenant.<sup>6</sup>

From this Turretin concludes that a covenant, "strictly speaking," between God and man cannot exist.<sup>7</sup> And it cannot exist for the following reasons: first, there is no equality of persons, goods given, or duties rendered between God and man; second, man is not perfectly independent and thus is bound to give unto God obedience even without a covenant; and third, man cannot bring anything to the covenant and is utterly dependent upon God for providing any goods or duties. Yet, despite all this, God does in fact condescend to man and wills to enter into a covenant with him. From this we can clearly see that Turretin eschews any notion of a "secular" contract in his notion of covenant.

Further, Turretin explains that God was under no obligation to enter into this covenant with his human creature. He could have "by his own right" required full obedience of man—by virtue of his being the creature—without a promise of reward (*IET*, VIII.III.II). Beach helpfully explains:

We see that, for Turretin, humans as created are obliged to render to God all that is due him as God. As created, being the creatures God made them to be, they are *already and immediately under the obligation to give God his due*, for God is God and they are his creatures. In this sense, even *apart from any sort of covenant relationship*, humans (*in their bare existence*) are under the demand to love and serve God according (*sic*) their capacity as creatures made in the divine image. Moreover, this obedience is without compensation or reward; it is simply owed to God.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, God freely and willingly entered into this covenant promising a reward on the condition of obedience. This covenant was an act of his "highest benignity" by which he enters into a "nearer communion" with man.<sup>9</sup> In this way, God binds himself according to his inherent faithfulness and justice.<sup>10</sup>

Further, it is true that the covenant idea in the Bible may denote a promise of God without any stipulation

or demand of obedience (i.e., one-sided or monopoleuric) such as you see in the Noahic covenant and in the order of the universe (*IET*, VIII.III.III). Strictly, however, a covenant is dipoleuric or two-sided/mutual: God promises and man responds in duty and worship. And this we see nowhere more clearly than in the covenant of nature.

Turretin explains that this is called a covenant of “nature” because eternal life was on the basis of innocent man’s “perfect and personal obedience.” It is based on man’s own natural God-created abilities to do what the Creator commands. However, he is quick to note that this does not place God under obligation to man. It is a covenant of nature *not* because there is something inherent in the created order which makes God indebted to man. That would posit a law which stands above even God himself. This cannot be the case as God is the creator and the originator of all things—including law and order. So here we see that the proper creator-creature distinction—over against all kinds of medieval *analogia entis* metaphysics—is jealously maintained. Therefore, any idea of God as the giver of rewards to man who merits them must always and everywhere be covenantally conceived. If man is said to merit the reward, that is only the case because God has bound himself in covenant to reward obedience. Secondly, the covenant of nature is also called legal because the condition is Adam’s obedience to the law of God engraved in him. And, lastly, it is of works because it depends upon his own personal obedience, and not the obedience of another (*IET*, VIII.III.V).

At this point Turretin turns to address more directly the Arminian denial of a prelapsarian covenant and to set forth a positive case for the doctrine. The doctrine can be proven under four points. First, the principle parties which make up a covenant are present in the garden—God and man. Because God is creator, he must also be governor and legislator. But God is also good. Citing Hebrews 11:6 the implication is drawn that since God is good he is the rewarder of those who seek him. This does not, however, mean that God is at all obligated to man, for man must always depend upon God for the reward. In this way, Turretin maintains the initiatory nature of God’s dealings with man. Even the covenant of nature must be understood from—as it were—the top down. Man is always dependent upon God in the covenant, and never the other way around (*IET*, VIII.III.VI).

The second proof offered by Turretin is the fact that a law was imposed on Adam, which itself denotes a “federal agreement.” The one to whom the law is given must

obey it; and he who gave it must reward its obedience. The reward for obedience, Turretin adds, is there in the text by way of implication and sacrament. The tree of life sacramentally signifies the promise of reward offered to Adam on condition of his obedience. But also, “by reason of contraries,” since death was threatened for disobedience, life must be promised for obedience.<sup>11</sup> The law referred to here, however, is not law given in general,<sup>12</sup> rather Turretin has in view the specific command that comes in the covenant itself to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>13</sup>

Next, two Scripture texts are invoked to support the idea of a covenant in the prelapsarian situation. The first is Hosea 6:7. Already, Turretin shows that he is familiar with the exegetical discussions concerning this verse.<sup>14</sup> He states, from the Hebrew, that it is best translated “transgressed the covenant like Adam.”<sup>15</sup> He knows that others object to this translation and prefer to render the Hebrew “transgressed the covenant like man”—making the referent of the transgression humanity in general rather than the one man Adam in particular. Interestingly, Turretin does not pit the one interpretation against the other. Rather, he reasons that the two are *not* mutually exclusive and may refer to both humanity in general *and* Adam in particular. In support of this thesis, he brings in the teaching of Job 31:33 which speaks about the transgression of Adam—this time a clear reference to the one man of Genesis 3. This buttresses his contention that what is referred to in Hosea 6:7 is the one man Adam—if not also humanity in general. Far from being enraptured with speculation, Turretin shows himself concerned for and capable of detailed exegesis of the biblical text.<sup>16</sup>

11. *IET*, VIII.III.VII. Cf. Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 97ff.

12. Pace Stephen Spencer, “Francis Turretin’s Concept of the Covenant of Nature,” 79.

13. See the helpful observations, contra Spencer, in Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 100.

14. For a helpful overview of early Protestant exegesis of this text see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 436–441.

15. Pace John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Lectures in Systematic Theology*, v. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978) 49.

16. *IET*, VIII.III.VIII. For an extensive interaction with the literature that is critical of Turretin’s exegesis here, and a detailed answer to those objections, see Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 101–102. For a view that is not persuaded by Turretin’s exegesis, see Spencer, “Francis Turretin’s Concept,” 80–81. It appears that Spencer does not understand how Turretin argues from Hosea and Job. For instance, he says that the Hosea passage is a problem that “concerns translation.” Actually, there is no debate over the translation. The matter is one concerning interpretation of *ha ’adam*; one interpretation is broader (Turretin), the other is more narrow.



Lastly, the covenant of nature is proven by the fact that man had a desire for happiness which God placed in him. It would be altogether blasphemous to say that God placed this desire in man and not offer to man eternal happiness and communion with him. This would only serve to frustrate man and drive him ultimately to unhappiness (*IET*, VIII.III.IX). Such a cruel work is unworthy of God given his divinely just nature and infinite goodness.

Having disposed with the proofs for the doctrine, now Turretin turns to speak about the respective parties in the covenant and the pact itself. The pact itself includes the things agreed upon—on the part of God the promise of blessing and on the part of man the stipulation of obedience. The parties are God as creator/Lord and man as creature/subject. And here there is a two-fold relation. God as Lord has the power to make laws and also the goodness to reward the keeping of those laws. In this way, God as covenant Lord has these two aspects grounded in his very nature. God cannot *not* govern his creature, and he cannot *not* reward him if he is obedient. The covenant, in other words, is established by his unchangeable attributes.<sup>17</sup>

As God was understood in a two-fold relation, so must man be understood. Man is perceived as “just” or “the first.” As just, Adam is able to obey the law given to him. As first, he represents the whole human race. Adam serves as the federal head for all those who would be born from him. This federal union between Adam and his posterity is also in a two-fold relation: natural and forensic. As a “natural union,” Adam is the father of all the human race; as a “forensic union,” he is made the representative head in which he holds or looses the goods given to him on behalf of those he represents (*IET*, VIII.III.XI). What he looses, humanity looses; what he gains, humanity gains.

Therefore, the pact itself had two parts. The first part consisted of the demand of God to duty and the obedience of man. The second part consisted of God’s promise to bless and man’s acceptance. Now, the duty which was required is also two-fold: general and special. The

general consists of man’s obligation to worship God and love his neighbor; the special consists of his not eating of the forbidden fruit. The former is a law which is inherent to man, written on his heart by nature. In other words, it is an internal testimony to God’s pact and law. The latter is a law that is revealed externally to man by way of the symbol and verbal command from God. What is interesting is that Turretin argues that the internal law given to man is primary and as such is all the more to be obeyed. The external verbal command given by God served merely as a further explication of what was given internally. In other words, had the external command never been given, the internal would sufficiently serve to render Adam accountable for his disobedience (*IET*, VIII.III.XII).

Turretin continues by articulating what exactly it means to obey God’s law. It means, (1) that it be performed sincerely, from the whole heart; (2) that the obedience be fulfilled with reference to things universally; (3) that it be fulfilled with right intension and thus perfect and complete; and (4) that the obedience be perpetual (*IET*, VIII.III.XIII). Turretin further explains that while man was obligated to fulfill these requirements by virtue of being the creature, yet he was all the more to do so because of the external pact made with him by God. To be sure, as not fallen, Adam was able to perform this requirement. However—and this is all important—to actually perform it Adam required the “help of God” in order to accomplish and continue in this obedience. And it is this aspect of the covenant, the preservation of Adam in obedience, that does not belong to the covenant of nature as such; but only upon the “most free good pleasure (*eudokia*) of God” (*IET*, VIII.III.XIV). It is important here to underscore this very point. The kindness and benevolence of God is required for the fulfillment of even the covenant of works. It ought to be noted, however, that Turretin does not go so far as to use the term “grace” with reference to the preservation of Adam in the prelapsarian covenant. That is a term he will reserve exclusively for the post-fall covenant.

Continuing on to discuss the sanctions of the pact, he says that they are two-fold: (1) threatening of punishment and (2) promise of the reward of eternal life in heaven (*IET*, VIII.III.XV). Therefore the obligations of the covenant unto the fulfillment of these sanctions are also two-fold. On the part of man he was obligated to it, not just on the basis of the pact itself, but by the very nature of the Creator-creature distinction. However, on behalf of God his obligation to reward such obedience is altogether “gratuitous” because he is bound to reward

17. *IET*, VIII.III.X. Spencer here detects a second and contradictory “strain” in Turretin’s covenant of nature; see “Francis Turretin’s Concept,” 88–89. He says the first strain is that the covenant is distinguished from and in addition to the creator-creature relationship. The second strain is that the covenant is necessary because of the creator-creature distinction. This, however, is to set up a false dichotomy. The truth is, the covenant relation is in addition to God’s act of creation, *and* that relation is made necessary because of the infinite gulf that exists between the creator and the creature. In fact, the latter is necessary precisely because of the former! Far from being conflicting strains, they are in harmony in Turretin’s thought.

obedience. Now, this binding is not by man; rather, God is self-bound. What makes God's promise to reward obedience is not that man has some claim upon God and has placed the Creator into his debt. Rather, it is because of the divine nature itself as one who is inherently faithful and true. Therefore, Adam may never level a charge of debt against God. Thus, Turretin describes God's owing the reward to an obedient man as a "debt of fidelity" (*IET*, VIII.III.XVI). Therefore the reward which would have come as a result of man's obedience is never due to some condign merit found in the work of man. Even after Adam had done all he was required to do, he would still be regarded as an unworthy servant. Hence the basis for the reward is never found in man or in his work, but in God who is faithful and just.

Therefore, Turretin concludes this section by making it clear that had man obeyed, his merit could not be understood in a strict sense. Man, as the creature, owes all things to God—and that relation may never be transposed. God may never—and can never—become man's debtor. The source of the debt that God owes to obedience is found exclusively within himself. Also, the reward can never be based on the condignity of the obedience. This is because the reward is far greater than the act—thus, the reward and the obedience are out of proportion. God's reward is magnanimous.

In summary, the covenant established between God and man is a covenant on the condition of obedience. Man had the opportunity to secure and even merit his way to eternal life. Granted, the idea of merit is qualified by Turretin. It is not a strict, condign merit in which there is a proper proportion between the work and the reward.<sup>18</sup> The greatness of the reward far exceeds the merit of the work of the creature. Nevertheless, in the prelapsarian covenant, God forms this covenant which is conditional upon the work of obedience of the one man. Far from this being the reintroduction of a medieval form of legalism, understanding the covenant of works in this way is essential for preserving the absolute graciousness of the covenant of grace. Given the two Adam structure of the New Testament's eschatology, if the second Adam is not seen as the one who perfectly, completely, and eschatologically merits the very eternal life which the first Adam forfeited, then the way is opened for the sinner to contribute something to his own salvation. In other words, the idea of the merit of works in the Garden of Eden is crucial for preserving the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works in the covenant of grace. And it is this reason that drives Turretin so passionately to answer the Arminians in this section.<sup>19</sup>

That said, however, the link between the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace is of utmost importance for Turretin. Because of space and time constraints we are unable to develop that notion in any in-depth way here. Suffice it to say, however, that we can summarize Turretin's view in this way: *what was a covenant of works for Christ—and only because it was a covenant of works for him—becomes a covenant of grace for us*. Because Christ did it all for our salvation, we need not add anything for our salvation. Because it was all *of works* for Christ, for us it is all *of grace*. The covenant of works makes the covenant of grace truly gracious. This is a fact that is missing in Barthian interpretations of the seventeenth century formulations of the covenant of nature. And so, to that interpretation we now turn.

### III. BARTH AND THE BARTHIAN *Setting the Historical Context*

Karl Barth developed his theology in the context of battles on two fronts: neo-Protestantism on the one side and Roman Catholicism on the other. Barth's decided break with his liberal professors over their support for the Kaiser and German aggression, along with the pastoral challenges he faced in day-by-day parish life in Safenwil, forced him to radically rethink theology.<sup>20</sup> In 1914 ninety-three German intellectuals—among whom

18. A point that can be categorized as "muted," at best, in Kline's doctrine of the covenant of works (or, the "Covenant of Creature," as he prefers).

19. Some historical qualification needs to be made at this point. In both the works of Jacob Arminius and in the *Confession of 1621* (authored by Arminius' student Simon Episcopius), there is an explanation offered of the prelapsarian covenant which sounds strikingly similar to Turretin's covenant of nature. Both speak about there being a covenant between God and man in Eden, that there is a law given to Adam, and that the fulfillment of this law would culminate with the reward of eternal life. However, by the time the second edition of Episcopius' *Opera Theologia* is published, it seems the notion of a covenant of nature is rejected. Also significant is that the concept of merit in the prelapsarian covenant is not present even in the earlier formulations as found in Arminius himself nor in the *Confession of 1621*. See, *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, trans. Mark Ellis (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2005) and Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).

20. For the early transition in Barth's theology, see Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 60–125; Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*, 177 ff; and Carl R. Trueman, "Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology: Historical Prolegomena," in *Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology*, ed. Neil B. MacDonald and Carl R. Trueman (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2008) 11ff.

were a number of his former theology professors—signed a declaration in support of the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II. Part and parcel of this action was “an easy identification of God with popular movements and dominant ideologies in contemporary culture.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, the signers believed that to be German is to be a Christian, and to be a Christian is to be a German. They believed God was on their side in the pursuit of cultural transformation and domination. In response to this mentality which sought to “make God a predicate of history,” Barth developed his dialectical theology which would allow “God to be God” (Migliore, xxvff). This would, from man’s perspective, objectify God. Contrary to neo-Protestant theology with its revelation of God in man through faith’s feeling of utter dependence, for Barth God is always hidden from man even when he is revealed.

At the heart of this dialectical reconstruction is his pervading *Nein!* to natural theology and any notion of the *analogia entis*. The implied pantheism of the *analogia* was at the root of the problems for both Rome and Berlin. Rather, what needs to become central in theology is the Word of God. Drastically redefined, the “Word of God” is not a “thing” to be handled by man, but rather an act performed by God in Jesus Christ. God’s being is in his act of grace and love for us in Christ. In him revelation and redemption, time and eternity, God’s yes and no, come together in perfect harmony. It is all about Jesus Christ.

It is in this context that we need to understand the rejection of the covenant of works by Barth and the

Barthians in current theological discussion. The idea of a covenant which is outside or independent of Jesus Christ is unacceptable as it already smacks of natural theology and the *analogia entis* (cf. McGowan, “Karl Barth,” 122). The idea that man can climb the ladder of God’s favor by virtue of the merits of his own works cuts against the grain of the Barthian emphasis on the triumphant of grace in a theology which is Christocentric to the core. Therefore, seventeenth century theology is seen as the ideological linchpin which holds together two anthropocentric theologies: medieval Catholicism and 18<sup>th</sup> century neo-Protestantism.<sup>22</sup>

But we should not assume that Barth himself was unfamiliar with seventeenth century Reformed theology. After his pastorate in Safenwil, he left for Göttingen in 1921 for his first academic charge—albeit, a somewhat irregular one (Migliore, xvii). He was to work with an all-Lutheran faculty as the sole professor of Reformed Theology, which struck him as strange given that he did not know much about it (Migliore, xviii)! His employer was kind enough to give him a grace period before having to lecture, so he spent his time wisely seeking to catch up on his knowledge of classic Reformed Theology. As he read the primary sources, he grew in his appreciation of both Calvin and the Calvinists. However, “while open to instruction from the old Reformed theologian, Barth was not uncritical of them” (Migliore, xix).

Nothing could be more true with reference to the topic to be discussed here in Barth’s early dogmatics.<sup>23</sup> In his lectures delivered at Göttingen, he criticized the post-Reformation Reformed view of the covenant of works as “a corruption of the Calvinist tradition” (Migliore, xxxviii). In fact, he described the covenant of grace as all-pervasive. The *foedus gratia* is present in the way in which God interacts with man from even before the fall and the *protoeugelum* of Genesis 3:15 (*Unterricht in der Christlichen*, III:15). The only way in which God deals with man is on the basis of grace. To say otherwise is to introduce legalism into the covenant. And, we might suspect for Barth, even worse is how such a view would betray remnants of a natural theology in one’s own thinking.

#### Excursus: Barth’s Use of Turretin

All this leads us to ask somewhat of a tangential—though very much relevant—question: How did Barth interact with the thought of Francis Turretin? A search made available by recent advances in Barth scholarship reveals some interesting information.<sup>24</sup> First, throughout his writings the name Turretin appears one hundred

21. Daniel L. Migliore, “Karl Barth’s First Lectures in Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion,” in Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) xxxi.

22. Although Barth could say many complimentary things about Protestant Orthodox theology; see for instance McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 335–337. For the role that Heppel played in Barth’s conceptual connection between the seventeenth century Reformed Orthodox and theological liberalism, see Trueman, “Calvin, Barth, and Reformed Theology,” 17ff. According to Trueman, Heppel linked together the “pietism” of Reformed Scholastics like Cocceius with that of Schleiermacher.

23. Migliore explains that there were three “rounds” of Dogmatics for Barth. The very first is what is referred to as “The Göttingen Dogmatics.” These were, of course, the first lectures he delivered as a professional academic. Originally published in German under the title *Unterricht in der christlichen* (three volumes), to date only the first volume has been translated into English (see fn. 33 above). All three volumes are available in the comprehensive collection of Barth’s works *Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Hinrich Stoevesandt and published by Verlag.

24. Alexander Street Press, Karl Barth Digital Library, <http://libweb.psem.edu/databases.aspx>.

and forty-six times. Second—and of less significance for our purposes here—we see that throughout his writings, Barth refers to Turretin's son J.A. Turretin at least two times. Third, of the one hundred and forty-six hits, Barth refers to the senior Turretin in the *Church Dogmatics*<sup>25</sup> alone fifty times (excluding references in the index volume). It is this third piece of data which we will analyze in this excursus.

To begin with, of the fifty mentions of Turretin in his *CD* the bulk of the citations are found in I/1 and I/2 (thirty appearances).<sup>26</sup> Of these thirty hits, the majority of them are in settings where Turretin is employed in a generally positive way.<sup>27</sup> But there is indication of some interesting development in Barth's thinking and attitude toward Turretin in *CD* I/1–2. Throughout the two parts of the first volume, in the citations from *CD* I/1 (pages 6, 22, 192, 309, 313, 475, 478 and *CD* I/2, pages 25, 33 (both times), 34, 35, 55, 147, 189, 193, 195, 201, 202, 477), the Genevan professor is employed in explicitly positive ways; usually quoted in a way that supports the theological point which Barth is trying to make. The same can be said of positive citations from *CD* II/1 on page 574<sup>28</sup> as well as *CD* III/3 on pages 97 and 292. However, there are points in which Turretin is cited negatively: in *CD* I/1 on page 123;<sup>29</sup> in *CD* I/2 on pages 285, 863 (all three times), 864 (the two times), and 866 (the two times);<sup>30</sup> in *CD* II/1 on pages 523 and 578; in *CD* II/2 on page 77,<sup>31</sup> 129, 130 (three times), 131, 132, 133<sup>32</sup>, and 337; in *CD* III/3 on pages 31 (twice) and 32;<sup>33</sup> and lastly in *CD* IV/3 on pages 15,<sup>34</sup> 765 and 767.

How then ought we to evaluate this data? First, we ought to note that the majority of Turretin citations in volume one of the *CD* are positive; at least until the end of the second part. Second, after *CD* I/1–2 the amount of interactions with Turretin drop dramatically. Equally striking, however, is that with the decrease in the number of citations comes a significant *increase* in negative/critical uses. Barth, in the latter half of his *magnum opus* uses Turretin less and less but reveals more and more an antipathy toward the Genevan professor (and with him much of seventeenth century Protestant Orthodoxy). Historically, Barth's attitude toward Turretin becomes more and more negative. To what do we attribute this phenomenon?

Karl Barth published *CD* I/1—in which we find the most citations of Turretin—in 1932. The second part of that volume—in which we find the second most Turretin quotes—was released in 1936. Then, in 1940 and 1942 the two parts of his second volume on the Doctrine of God are published—respectively. Here we find just about all the references are negative! From here on out

one is hard pressed to find a positive implementation of Turretin or any other seventeenth century Reformed theologian. Obviously, we must attribute something to this shift in Barth's attitude; but what? What happened between 1936 and 1940?

The Calvin Congress of 1936 in Geneva is what happened. Barth traveled to the city of Calvin and Turretin to hear a series of lectures on Predestination, among

25. Hereafter abbreviated as *CD*. It is worthy of note that the remainder of the hits are references to Francis Turretin and find themselves sprinkled throughout the corpus of his writings.

26. *CD* I/1: pages 6, 22, 114, 122, 192, 309, 313, 475, 478. *CD* I/2: pages 25, 33 (2x), 34, 35, 55, 147, 189, 193, 195, 201, 202, 285, 477, 863 (3x), 864 (2x), 866 (2x).

27. We will not be asking the question here as to whether or not Barth *rightly* implement's Turretin's thought, only whether Barth quotes him favorably or unfavorably/critically.

28. Here he quotes Turretin and commends him (along the other Protestant orthodox) for his stand against Molinism. However, note well how Barth takes away what he gave on page 578 where he criticizes Turretin for the way he handled the problem (i.e., as if the problem of Molinism were a mere matter of "logic and metaphysics").

29. Here Barth speaks about the Protestant Orthodox doctrine of the Word of God and cites Turretin with Gerhard and Hollaz. He says concerning their formulations "All this is true." But he then goes on to criticize their doctrine of inspiration which—according to Barth—takes away a proper "dynamic" to the Doctrine of the Word of God and which has a "freezing" effect on the relation between Scripture and revelation. So, while he does say that their statements are "true," we have placed this citation in the negative column because ultimately he expresses criticism of Turretin's doctrine of Scripture.

30. The five citations between pages 863–866 come in the context of discussing the difference between fundamental articles of faith and non-fundamental articles. Barth works closely here with the text of Turretin's *IET*, more so than previously in his *CD*. Concerning Turretin's distinction Barth states, "the principle introduced at this point is one which we cannot whole-heartedly approve." (864). Furthermore, Barth blames Turretin (with Quenstadt) for the later Neo-Protestant effort to distill theology down to an "essential Christianity" (866).

31. Barth here is critical of a cadre of 17<sup>th</sup> century theologians (among whom is Turretin) for not giving the doctrine of predestination enough consideration (i.e., by separating it and not bringing it into "direct relationship" with their doctrine of God).

32. On pages 129–133 the citations from Turretin are generally set within the context of telling the history of the debate between supra- and infralapsarians. In this way, the citations are used in a relatively neutral fashion. However, in the broader scope of this section of *CD* II/2, Barth is setting forth his doctrine of election which is thoroughly supralapsarian. In addition, he also recasts the traditional doctrine of election and Trinity in actualistic terms and as such is being very much critical of the tradition. See McCormack, "Grace and Being."

33. Here Barth takes Turretin to task as a representative of the "older Protestantism" for having abstracted the doctrine of providence from the triune God and Christ particularly. Turretin is clearly pitted against Calvin who—in his Genesis commentary—speaks about the role of Christ in creation and providence.

34. Again, here we see Turretin's formulation cited over and against that of Calvin.



which were those given by his brother Peter Barth and a little known scholar by the name of Pierre Maury.<sup>35</sup> According to Bruce L. McCormack, this conference—but especially the lecture by Maury—was paradigm shifting for Barth in general but in his doctrine of election and the Trinity particularly. In many ways it solidified the actualistic trajectory of his thinking and critical stance toward seventeenth century theology which is manifest early on. We might even say that whereas before 1936 Barth was open—even if critical—to a traditional metaphysic and theology, after 1936 any concept which is not understood actualistically would have been either discarded or reworked significantly. From here on in, Barth would use traditional theologians not to bolster his theological points, but as foils against which he would develop his own uniquely consistent existentialist theological system. He would enter the city of Turretin, only to leave it and the theological ontology of its greatest Italian pastor-professor behind.

### *Barth's Rejection of the Doctrine of the Covenant of Works*

We now return to explore in greater depth Barth's treatment of the doctrine of the covenant of works itself. It is interesting to observe that Barth draws upon Turretin quite a bit, and he will discuss the doctrine of the covenant of works at length, but never does he deal with Turretin on the covenant of works explicitly. However, we can gain a clear understanding of how Barth would view Turretin's doctrine by how he interacts with seventeenth century formulations in general.

The only appearance in the *Church Dogmatics* of the terminology "covenant of works" is in section fifty-seven (found in IV/1). Covenant is at the heart of understanding the God who is with us. This is at the center of the Christian faith (CD IV/1, 3). In fact, "reconciliation is the fulfillment of the covenant between God and man" (CD IV/1, 22; emphasis is mine). That is to say, "the covenant is with the whole human race."<sup>36</sup> Man's fellowship with God which was originally disturbed is now restored in Jesus Christ—this is covenant. In this

way, the very idea of covenant is understood actualistically.<sup>37</sup> The covenant is God's revelation and act of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. In fact, "Jesus Christ is the atonement" (CD IV/1, 34; also cf. 127; emphasis is mine). Thus atonement, revelation, and reconciliation are understood as different words for the same reality: Jesus Christ. Barth explains:

... if Jesus Christ is the content and form of the first and eternal Word of God, then ... the beginning of all things ... is preceded by God's covenant with man .... At the beginning of all things in God there is the Gospel and the Law.... For Jesus Christ ... He is both at one and the same time. He is the promise and the command, the Gospel and the Law ... He alone is at once and altogether very God and very man. To that extent He alone is there at the beginning of all things. As the basis and purpose of the covenant He and He alone is the content of the eternal will of God which precedes the whole being of man and of the world.... Ultimately, therefore, Jesus Christ alone is the content of the eternal will of God, the eternal covenant between God and man (CD IV/1, 53–54).

Jesus Christ alone—who is very God and very man—is the covenant between God and man. Further, observe how the covenant is something which precedes even God's act of creation. There is no other kind of covenant of which we may speak: none before, after, or besides Jesus Christ. And since it is Jesus Christ, God's covenant with man is—and can only be—gracious.

It is at this point that Barth enters into a lengthy small print section where he speaks about a development in the history of theology; namely, the idea of the covenant in Federal Theology (CD IV/1, 53–66). He explains that Federal Theology was an advance on medieval Scholasticism in that it sought to view Scripture dynamically and historically (McGowan, "Karl Barth," 122). The Bible was perceived—as we see for example in Cocceius—as a history of God and man in covenant from the creation to the judgment (CD IV/1, 55). The Federal Theologians are even paid a high compliment in that "they saw excellently that the Bible tells us about an event" (CD IV/1, 56). However, the Basel professor levels an even larger complaint about their theology:

But they did not see that in all its forms this narrative has the character of testimony, proclamation, evangel, and that it has as its content and subject only a single event, which in every form of the attestation, although they all relate to a whole, is the single and complete

35. See McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, 455ff; and "Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. Van Driel," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60/1 (2007): 66f. Hereafter *SJT*. See also Barth's account of the conference in CD II/2, 188ff.

36. McGowan, "Karl Barth," 118. McGowan brings into sharp relief time and again in his summary of Barth's doctrine of the covenant that it is universal in scope.

37. See the fine summary of this section by Bromiley as cited in McGowan, "Karl Barth," 116.

decision on the part of God which as such calls for a single and complete decision on the part of man. They overlooked the fact that in all the forms of its attestation this single and complete event is a special event which has to be understood in a special way.... As becomes increasingly plain in the sketches of the Federal theologians, the atonement accomplished in Jesus Christ ceases to be the history of the covenant.... They brought the whole under the concept of the covenant, but they did not read the concept out of this one event. Instead, they imported the concept into this one event like all the others ... (CD IV/1, 56).

In sum, the problem is that the Federal theologians “downloaded” the concept of the covenant into their doctrine of the atonement, instead of “downloading” the concept of the atonement in Jesus Christ into their doctrine of the covenant. In other words, they conceived of a covenant which was apart from and outside of Jesus Christ.

Barth continues by lamenting the way in which Federal theology “obliterated” the earlier Reformed theology of Zwingli and Bullinger with their emphasis on a universal covenant (CD IV/1, 57). He argues that in these two Reformers the covenant concept “does seriously apply to all men and is made for all men” (CD IV/1, 57). However, by the time Cocceius writes, the doctrine of the covenant has shifted to teach “that Christ did not die for all men but only for the elect” (57). This particularism Barth describes as being “grim,” “pessimistic,” “gloomy,” and even “unfriendly.”<sup>38</sup> He explains that the problem is when the idea of the covenant is abstracted from the atonement in Jesus Christ. So, Jesus Christ is no abstract *Logos asarkos*. Rather, he is always the God-man. And as “God with us,” he has reconciled God and man once and for all.<sup>39</sup> Again, here we see Barth’s revolutionary actualistic view of election—this time in the context of the covenant—come into sharp relief. Jesus is God for us (i.e., humanity).

He then goes on with a description of the *foedus naturae* as it was found in Ursinus. He rightly explains that for Ursinus we have two covenants which are in “rivalry” with each other—the one of nature the other of grace. The former is on the basis of perfect obedience and thus is dubbed by Polanus and Wolleb the *foedus operum*. Using Cocceius as his guide, Barth enters into a lengthy summary of the doctrine of the covenant of works. According to Cocceius, the ongoing history of the covenant is understood in negative terms; i.e., as a series of five abrogations of the covenant of works: (1) abrogation by way of sin, (2) abrogation by the institution of

the covenant of grace as an unfolding of a pretemporal covenant between the Father and the Son, (3) abrogation by way of God overlooking (paresis)—though not forgiving (aphesis)—sin, (4) abrogation by way of sanctification in which the Law is no longer a means by which we are justified but by which we fight the spiritual warfare against the devil and mortify our old sinful nature, and (5) abrogation by way of the eschatological reawakening of the body in the consummate state.<sup>40</sup>

Barth notes “two discordant features” of the idea of the covenant of works; which was not found in the theology of the Reformers.<sup>41</sup> First, the idea of an eternal—or timeless—covenant between the Father and the Son goes against the grain of the rest of Cocceius’ “historicism.” Second, any notion of the New Testament as an “autonomous” covenant independent of the Old Testament is missing (CD IV/1, 61). He continues by asking the critical question: how could the seventeenth century theologians put this idea of a covenant of works first, and thus make it the standard and reference for the covenant of grace (62)? Barth answers that there is only one possible explanation for this “innovation:”

... biblical exegesis had been invaded by a mode of thought in which this history, however extraordinary the course it took, could only unfold itself and therefore only begin as the history of man and his works, man who is good by nature and who is therefore in covenant with God—a God who is pledged to him by virtue of his [i.e., man’s] goodness (CD IV/1, 62).

In other words, a “mode of thinking” crept into post-Reformation thought which was legalistic—or at least anthropocentric—to the core. Barth attributes this to increasing pressure within the context of the day towards

38. It is also described as a “blind allay.” See the discussion in McGowan, “Karl Barth,” 123–124.

39. For further discussion on how this view of election eliminates any notion of a *Logos asarkos* for Barth see Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 184–192. Interestingly, and apparently unbeknownst to McCormack, Cornelius Van Til made the same observation nearly fifty years previous in “Karl Barth on Chalcedon,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 22 (1960): 158. Hereafter WTJ.

40. Cocceius’ scheme is referred to by Richard Muller as a “rather idiosyncratic notion of a gradually abrogated covenant of works.” However, Muller argues that this “idiosyncrasy” was overcome during the high orthodox theologians Burman and Witsius—a fact not noted in Barth’s treatment. See *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 78 and 206 along with the literature by William J. van Asselt cited there.

41. We will examine this claim below, as it comes up again in the later Barthian historiography.

a way of thinking that begins with man. Cocceius, under the intellectual pressure from his contemporaries who embraced Cartesianism, was not free to control his thinking according to the biblical text. For it is in the text that we see God—from the beginning—turned toward man *in grace*. Therefore, there are not two diametrically opposed ways in which God deals with man in the Bible. Rather, there is only one; namely, in a covenant of grace. However, what seems to concern Barth most of all is that “this side of the *eschaton*, in time, there is no effective abrogation of the covenant of nature and works, either in the Old Testament economy or consequently in the New” (63). In other words, there is a constant fear placed upon man—a fear of punishment and the expectation of a reward—which makes the Federal Theology doctrine of the covenant of grace legalistic and demanding.

Next, Barth asks a series of rhetorical questions concerning the relation between the eternal Father-Son covenant, and the idea of a covenant of works. After all, what is the need to speak of a covenant of works when already in eternity there is the basis of the covenant of grace established:

Even where it was thought necessary to speak of a first covenant of nature or works, was it really possible to see anything but the one covenant of grace, which has been instituted in eternity.... Why was it thought necessary to see man in any other light than that of the pledge which God Himself had made for him in His Son even before he ever existed? (*CD IV/1*, 64).

The argument behind these questions is clear: if we can speak about an eternal covenant which is gracious through and through, then it must be an illegitimate

move to propose a works-based covenant afterwards. How can we move from grace to works? Cocceius was correct in his doctrine of the covenant of grace, for it was grounded in God himself. However, the intrusion of a covenant of works only serves to break the symmetry. The covenant of works appears to be a superfluous (Barth might say, “infelicitous”) insertion of an extra covenant that does not need to be there. It is far better to think of God’s covenant with man as gracious from beginning to end; from eternity past through to the consummation.

Barth then turns to consider the eternal intratrinitarian covenant of the Federal theologians, and finds three doubtful features about it. First, was there any need to propose a contract within the Godhead which was distinguished from the being of God? This presupposes an abstract notion of the righteousness of God—that is, a God who is essentially righteous and thus can be no other. Barth sees this as an infringement upon the freedom of God in not allowing him to be gracious from the beginning. Instead, God’s righteousness and his graciousness were seen as two separate things. Yet,

... this proposition of a covenant of works could obviously never have arisen if there had been a loyal hearing of the Gospel and a strict looking to Jesus Christ as the full and final revelation of the being of God. In the eternal decree of God revealed in Jesus Christ the being of God would have been seen as righteous mercy and merciful righteousness from the very first (*CD IV/1*, 65).

This is a concept that Barth has developed previously in his *CD*. In II/2 he treats the relation between the being of God as triune and his act of election. As Bruce McCormack has demonstrated Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity is actualistic through and through.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, we may not speak about a divine nature or essence or even Trinity prior to or apart from his act of electing in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not only the object of election from eternity, but also its subject as well. Jesus Christ is both elect man and electing God. Thus, from all eternity the second person of the Trinity is and must always be Jesus Christ and never a *Logos asarkos*. If this is the case, then God is and must be essentially gracious, and thus there is no place in God’s dealing with man for a strictly legal covenant.

Second, we must not think of God as two subjects entering into obligations with one another. This he calls “mythology” and says it has no place in an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. God is one, and as such cannot enter into a contract with himself. This would only serve

42. See his “Grace and Being: The Role of God’s Gracious Election in Karl Barth’s Theological Ontology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 92–110; and republished in *Orthodox and Modern*, 183–200. McCormack’s proposal is not without protest; see George Hunsinger’s paper delivered at the 2007 Barth Conference, Princeton, NJ, “Election and the Trinity: Twelve Theses.” This lecture has recently been published under the title “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Modern Theology* 24/2 (2008): 179–198. Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002); and more recently, “The Trinity, Election and God’s Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin Hector,” *IJST* 8/3 (2006): 294–306. Also, Edwin Chr. van Driel, “Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ,” *SJT* 60/1 (2007): 45–61. For a sympathetic critique see Kevin Hector, “God’s Triunity and Self-Determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack, and Paul Molnar,” *IJST* 7/3 (2005): 246–261.

to reintroduce uncertainty by way of conditionality in the covenant of grace (CD IV/1, 65). Barth further asks, “how can the will of God seen in the history of the covenant of grace be known to be binding and unequivocal, the first and final Word of God” (CD IV/1, 65)? In other words, if God has multiple wills then his covenant with man is not dependable. And this then opens the door for uncertainty and thus legalism, along with an anthropocentric view of the covenant.

Third, and closely related to these other two, Barth criticizes the eternal covenant and its consequent doctrine of the covenant of works at this most “decisive point”: in it there is no Jesus Christ. Again, his recast doctrine of election is in view:

In this free act of the election of grace the Son of the Father is no longer just the eternal Logos, but as such, as very God and from all eternity He is also the very God and very man He will become in time. In the divine act of predestination there pre-exists the Jesus Christ who as the Son of the eternal Father and the child of the Virgin Mary will become and be the Mediator of the covenant between God and man, the One who accomplishes the act of atonement.... He who in Scripture is attested to be very God and very man is also the eternal *testamentum*, the eternal *sponsio*, the eternal *pactum*, between God and man ... to know the eternal and therefore the only basis of the divine work in the work itself, in its temporal occurrence, to know the eternal divine Logos in His incarnation (CD IV/1, 66).

Put another way, to speak about an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son is to say too little. The covenant between God and man, the eternal decree, is not made between the Father and the *Logos asarkos*, but between the Father and the God-man Jesus Christ. It is made with him who is the act of atonement, and thus with all men. Had this remained front and center in the minds of the Federal Theologians, they would never have lost (from what was delivered to them from the Reformers) the universalism in the idea of the covenant. Instead, law entered in and took the place of grace.

### The Barthians

Along similar lines, J.B. Torrance in his 1970 article argues that Federal Theology marked a significant move away from the the theology of Knox and Calvin.<sup>43</sup> The seventeenth century was a time of social and political upheaval where non-conformists spoke about “contracts” and “covenants” which would provide for

individual human rights and liberties against an imposing central government. This idea of “social contract” would “provide a conceptual framework within which Reformed theology was to be recast.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, there is a radical difference between contract and covenant.<sup>45</sup> A covenant is a promise which binds people together unconditionally, whereas a contract is conditional.<sup>46</sup> The former and not the latter is what we find in the Bible when God makes covenants with man, whether in creation or redemption.<sup>47</sup> The problem occurs when, as happened in Puritan Calvinism, God’s costly grace is turned into conditional grace.

Even so, while in the Bible covenant is all of grace and unconditional, yet it does demand a response. Put another way, the indicatives are always prior to the imperatives (“Covenant or Contract,” 56). However, the order was inverted in the eighteenth century during the Marrow Controversy when the General Assembly upheld the idea that repentance is a condition for the forgiveness of sins. So, asks Torrance, why did this idea of conditional grace and legalism creep into the church? The answer is because of Federal Theology (“Covenant or Contract,” 61). Federal Theology made a hard and fast distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. It made the original covenant with

43. J. B. Torrance, “Covenant or Contract: A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland,” *SJT* 23 (Feb 1970): 52. Cf. his later article, “Strength and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology,” *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today: Papers Prepared for the Church of Scotland Panel on Doctrine*, ed. Alasdair I.C. Heron (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1982) 48–49. Due to space limitations, we will not be examining the views of Holmes Rolston III here. However, suffice it to say that they very much parallel Torrance’s. See his “Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession,” *SJT* 23 (1970): 129–156; and *John Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972).

44. “Covenant or Contract,” 53. Cf. T.F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 136.

45. For a similar view of the relation between contract and covenant see Stuart D. McLean, *Humanity in the Thought of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981) 56f.

46. One point of interesting distinction between Torrance and Barth is that the latter does not shy from using the term “contract” to describe the covenantal relationship; see for example CD IV/1, 25. However, Barth does deny the *concept* of contract as defined by Torrance, even if not the *terminology*. See also McGowan, “Karl Barth,” 117.

47. “Covenant or Contract,” 54. Torrance states that this is how the Reformers viewed covenant, as opposed to seventeenth century Calvinists. For more on the Calvin versus the Calvinists’ theory see Carl R. Trueman, “Calvin and Calvinism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 225f., and the literature cited there.



Adam into a contract in which eternal life was conditioned upon Adam discerning and obeying “the laws of nature by the light of reason” (61). Such a conditional contract, however, was unknown to Calvin and the Reformers who taught only one covenant between God and man: the covenant of grace in Christ. In fact, such a distinction between the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace is a throwback to the pre-Reformation period of the nature/grace dualism (67). Torrance even goes so far as to place blame for racial discrimination and policies of segregation at the feet of the covenant of works (“Covenant or Contract,” 67)!

Another example of how the idea of works in the covenant of grace is treated by Barthians is found in Bruce McCormack. He is arguably Karl Barth’s premiere interpreter in the current theological landscape. He offers us a helpful review of the Swiss pastor-theologian’s doctrine of justification in his recent “*Justitia aliena*: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness.”<sup>48</sup> While the study focuses primarily on Barth’s doctrine of justification, the Princeton professor touches on issues concerning the relationship between Christ’s redemptive work and the application of that work to the believer; and thus touches on the issue of the role of the covenant of works in salvation.

McCormack begins his explication of Barth’s doctrine of justification against the backdrop of current discussions among advocates of the so-called New Perspective on Paul. In particular he interacts with Douglas Harink whose thesis is that Barth’s recasting soteriology in exclusively objective terms overlaps at significant points with current trends among New Perspective scholars.<sup>49</sup> Harink believes that this convergence sets both the New Perspective and Karl Barth over and against the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification. For both Barth and the New Perspective, imputation—as it was developed in the thought of John Calvin—is rejected (McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 172).

However, McCormack’s contention is that Harink is wrong to draw such a strong dichotomy between the evangelical doctrine of justification (as represented in the theology of John Calvin) and that of Karl Barth. In

fact, McCormack’s thesis is that “a relationship of shared interest exists between Karl Barth and today’s defenders of classical Protestant teaching on justification” (169). Even so, he offers the qualifier that “[Barth’s] doctrine is not precisely [the evangelical’s]” (169). Nevertheless, the similarities are significant:

But the two are compatible on the most fundamental level. Again, this is not to deny the parallels that Harink is able to establish between Barth’s teaching in *Romans* especially and some of the exegetical conclusions now emerging under the banner of the New Perspective on Paul. But these parallels touch only upon Barth’s corrections of the Reformation doctrine; they do not offset in any way the still deeper-lying continuity that joins him to the Reformation (McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 169).

So, to summarize McCormack’s thesis: where the New Perspective and the Reformation diverge, Barth is always and everywhere on the side of the Reformation and not the New Perspective. In other words, Barth has far more in common with Calvin than with Sanders.

After this, McCormack then develops Barth’s doctrine of justification. He admits up front that Barth’s thinking will sound strange to the evangelical.<sup>50</sup> He explains that the reason why this may sound so strange to evangelical ears is because of Barth’s radically different theological ontology (McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 178). Yet, this radical difference does not preclude Barth’s soteriology from sharing important concerns with evangelicals. Barth’s soteriology may begin from a different ontology, yet his concerns are radically Protestant. Even so, Barth’s doctrine differs from traditional evangelicalism in significant ways. For him, there is no “dualism” between the objective work of Christ on the one hand, and its subjective appropriation of it on the other. McCormack explains:

For much of the Protestant tradition, ‘justification’ could be regarded as taking place in Christ only in an improper sense. Actual justification, it was thought, occurs in the historical existence of the believer; what takes place in Christ provides only the basis for a further act of God in the present that is to be distinguished from it. For Barth, this way of thinking fails to understand that *what Jesus Christ accomplishes is not merely the possibility of reconciliation but the reality of it* ... justification is not first made effective when the Holy Spirit awakens faith in us; rather, the Spirit awakens faith in us so that we might live from and toward the reality of

48. In *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 167–196.

49. See his *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003).

50. McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 177. Remember, when McCormack says “evangelical” he means a view of justification as formulated in the theology of Calvin.

a justification that is already effective for us even before we come to know of it.<sup>51</sup>

He continues by showing how Barth utterly rejects any talk of an *ordo salutis* (McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 180–181). This is because all of God’s saving is accomplished not by some subjective union between the believer and Christ, but *through the act of the incarnation*:

The unity of the divine and the human in the God-man means this: reconciliation is effected in and through a unitary movement of God toward the human in Jesus Christ, a movement that embraces both the humiliation of God (in which is our justification) and the exaltation of the human (in which is our sanctification) (McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 182).

At least three points need to be made in response to these two previous citations. First, notice that for Barth his theological ontology—i.e., actualism—forms the basis for his soteriology in general and his doctrine of union with Christ in particular. Its not that we speak about justification or sanctification in the abstract. We never speak about these things *an sich*. But we speak about them only in so much as God in Christ has *actually* performed them. Justification, sanctification, union, etc., are events. More specifically, they are Christ events. That is, they are acts accomplished *and* applied in the life event of Jesus Christ. They are wholly and completely objective because they are wholly and completely actualized in God’s life-event in Jesus Christ. To put it another way, the so-called dualism between redemption accomplished and applied is eliminated by unification in Christ. The God-man at once and at the same time accomplishes justification, sanctification, etc., and applies these things to humanity in his own flesh.

Second, notice the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not—as is traditionally thought—unite the sinner to Christ and thereby communicate all of Christ’s benefits to him. Rather, the Holy Spirit merely “awakens” the sinner to show him that redemption has been already accomplished *and* applied to him. When was the sinner justified, sanctified, and united to Christ? The answer for Barth is in the Christ event. But in the Christ event these things are *both* accomplished *and* applied. So, for the sinner in his life history there is no transition from wrath to grace. And there is no receiving of the benefits of Christ’s work to him. The Holy Spirit merely opens his eyes to a fact that is already a reality for him—both before and after he believes. Nothing actually changes existentially in

the unbeliever-turned-believer. The Christian cannot look at the time before he was a believer compared to his life as a believer and say “I once was lost, but now I am found.” For Barth, Jesus was the man lost and then found for us, so that we are lost and found in the Christ event; but never in our own personal life histories:

Christ’s history is *as such* our history ... ‘participation’ in Christ is not something that has first to be realized by means of an independent work of the Holy Spirit but is already real even as the God-man carries out his work (McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 191).

Third, the incarnation is the absolute key to unlocking all of Barth’s soteriology. By virtue of God’s “move toward humanity”—in the God-human, Jesus Christ—reconciliation is effected. It is here that atonement is made. As Trevor Hart would say, following T.F. Torrance, “the Incarnation *is* the Atonement” (Hart, “Humankind in Christ,” 83). It is in this act—the event of incarnation—that man is united to God *in Christ*. To be in Christ is for the eternal Logos to be man exalted to God (sanctification) and to be God humiliated to man (justification).

Notice that for the “evangelical”<sup>52</sup> view of union with Christ there is a twofold benefit that comes by that union—justification and sanctification. Barth uses these two items here to describe the benefits given to humankind, albeit not by the Holy Spirit applying them to the believer in a subjective act of union with Christ. Rather justification and sanctification are accomplished and applied by way of the incarnation. Language usually reserved to describe the application of redemption in the *here and now* is taken up by Barth to describe what happened in the incarnation *there and then*.

In summary, for Barth—according to McCormack—the doctrine of union with Christ (along with the other traditional aspects of the *ordo salutis*) is objectively conceived because it is incarnationally effected. And while McCormack does not draw into his discussion directly the notion of the covenant of works, the implications working back from justification to the prelapsarian covenant are clear: *the role of the merit of works is not*

51. Ibid., 179. Emphasis is his. This concern of McCormack’s here seems to parallel that of Trevor Hart in his article, “Humankind in Christ and Christ in Humankind: Salvation as Participation In Our Substitute in the Theology of John Calvin,” *SJT* 42 (1989): 67–84. Hart is reacting against any “polarization between objectivity and subjectivity” in soteriology.

52. Again, here we are using the term “evangelical” in the way McCormack has previously defined it as the view of Calvin.

needed. Any notion of the imputation of Christ's active obedience, as we see in Turretin, is utterly superfluous. Justification is not conceived in terms of the imputation of a righteousness which Adam should have originally secured for himself and his posterity. Rather, justification occurs at the moment of the hypostatic union—prior to and apart from the work of Christ as second and last Adam who secures obedience-merit. Anything which would take away from this Christ-focused understanding of justification—such as a putative covenant by which man himself could merit his own salvation—would smack of natural theology and anthropocentric religion. In this way, McCormack has helpfully shown us exactly why Barth rejects the covenant of works—this time from the perspective of the doctrine of justification.

#### IV. EVALUATION OF THE BARTHIAN PROPOSAL

Returning to Turretin, then, can we say the Barthian proposal accurately represents the doctrine of the covenant of works? At least as far as Turretin is concerned, the answer is a resounding no. For starters, the idea that the seventeenth century Orthodox developed the doctrine of the covenant of works in contradistinction to the theology of Calvin has been shown to be thoroughly misguided by Muller, Letham, and Lillback.<sup>53</sup> But we can also see that in Turretin, while the covenant of works contains conditions, it is not a crass covenant by which man pulls himself up by his own boot straps. Beach explains:

God does not begin to be gracious to Adam upon the fulfillment of an obligation. Rather, that God enters into a relationship with Adam at all, that he fashions Adam as a moral agent who can know him; and that God so arranges Adam's relationship with himself that human obedience issues forth unto eternal happiness, each of these testifies to God's kindness and favor.... That God chooses to 'reward' humans for giving the Creator his due is according to God's graciousness and love, for the

creature does not have rights over the Creator (Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 85).

Turretin is able to go so far as to explain that God could have demanded obedience from his creature without a promise of reward at all (*IET*, VIII.III.II). Even so, God binds himself in covenant to Adam to reward him with eternal life upon the stipulation of obedience. In other words, this covenant was not necessary. God could have demanded perfect obedience from Adam without a promised reward—and Adam would have owed that to God by virtue of his creatureliness. The fact that God condescends to Adam by way of covenant and binds himself to reward that which man owed to God anyway, is an act of kindness and "philanthropy" (II).

From this it ought to be clear that having conditions in the covenant does not in anyway contravene the benevolent nature of it or the fact that it is all of God's own initiative. For Turretin, God's covenant of nature, no less than the covenant of grace, is of God, by God, and through God. It is by his initiation, it is on the basis of his "highest benignity" (II), and thus even the fulfillment of the conditions are given by God. Further, it is true that the covenant idea in the Bible may denote a promise of God without any stipulation or demand of obedience (i.e., one-sided or monopoleuric) such as you see in the Noahic covenant and in the order of the universe (*IET*, VIII.III.III). Ordinarily, however, covenant is dipoleuric: God promises and man responds in duty and worship. And this we see nowhere more clearly than in the covenant of nature—which is replete with benevolence.

But what of the Barthian "consistent grace" approach to the covenant idea? This is more difficult to argue against. For Barth and his followers it is grace "all the way down." And, after all, who can argue against grace? It is no exaggeration to say that for Barth grace is all triumphant. God never did, nor did he ever intend, to reward man for obedience. And this is the case for both the first Adam and the second Adam. Christ's salvific work is not contingent upon his having to merit a righteousness for those that he represents. Again, it is grace all the way down.

How then ought we to respond to this? Is not the Barthian way better? Is it not more safe—if we want to guard against legalism—to simply posit grace as the all comprehensive element in God's covenant with man? Why even bother to introduce the element of law at all? Given the perennial battles which have surfaced within the history of Reformed theology over the role of works/law with reference to justification, would it not simply

53. Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus A. Brackel," *CTJ* 29 (April 1994): 75–100; esp. 88. Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007) 69–82. Robert Letham, "The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting For Its Development," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 14.4 (1983): 457–67. Peter A. Lillback, "Ursinus' Development of the Covenant of Creation: A Debt to Melancthon or Calvin?" *WTJ* 43 (1981): 247–188 and *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) 276–304.

be easier to hop on the gracious Barthian bandwagon and let it just be grace all the way down?

In response to these questions we can say simply—even if it sounds somewhat simplistic—that the Bible does not allow for us to take this position. Whatever one’s exegetical opinions are with reference to the finer details of the prelapsarian covenant, one thing is for sure, God demands obedience to his law. This is clear not only from Genesis 1 and 2, but also from a slew of other biblical references. The Barthian antinomian<sup>54</sup> notion—while ideal in the abstract—simply cannot make sense of the Scriptural witness. Scripture time and again witnesses to the holiness of God and the correlate demand of holy behavior from his creatures in passages such as Leviticus 18:5, Isaiah 6, Romans 6:23, Galatians 3:10 and 12; not to mention passages which refer to the perfect obedience of Christ and his just reward for said obedience as in John 17:1–5, Philippians 2, and Romans 5:12–21. An in-depth exegetical study of these texts is beyond the scope of this study, nevertheless their very presence stand as a monumental challenge to the Barthian rejection of law in general and of the covenant of works in particular.

But also, are there not ramifications for making it “grace all the way down?” Surely, if the Barthian paradigm cannot account for a large portion of the biblical witness, there will be adverse effects in one’s system of theology. And as we saw in McCormack’s work, denying the covenant of works has a profound affect on the doctrine of justification. Like playing a game of chess, a player cannot expect to move even one piece without affecting the situation at other places on the board. In this instance, the rejection of the covenant of works affects the gospel itself. For example, if sin is not essentially the breaking of the covenant of works, then what happened to Christ on the cross? In fact, what was the entire process of Christ’s humiliation all about if it was not to obey where Adam sinned and to take upon himself the just punishment for Adam’s breaking and our breaking God’s law? If that is taken away, then the cross and the resurrection becomes something else. And once it becomes something else, Christ’s work becomes something other than good news.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

We can appreciate both Barth’s and the Barthian’s zeal to do away with a medieval and neo-Protestant notion of the *analogia entis* and natural theology. We can also appreciate their desire to set forth a system of doctrine in which grace is triumphant. However, we cannot go down the path of their rejection of the covenant of

works. It is clear from Turretin’s writings that the covenant of nature is not the same as the medieval natural theology with its resident notion of nature and grace. For medieval Scholasticism, man in the state of nature is in an inherently neutral position with all its accompanying autonomy and independence from God. However, for Turretin, in the covenant of works Adam is always and everywhere utterly dependent upon the initiatory benevolence of God and his revelation—both internally and externally. Secondly, in the medieval conception of man in the natural state, Adam and God shared a common ontology; albeit on different ends of the metaphysical spectrum. Man stood on the same ladder of being with God; man towards the lower rungs with God at the top. The garden, on this conception, represented man’s opportunity to climb that ladder by virtue of condign merits. Yet, in Turretin the Creator-creature distinction is all pervasive and with it the rejection of both condign merit and the *analogia entis* in the probationary period.

To be sure, the Barthian critique of theological liberalism as being an aberration of Reformation theology and thus standing closer to medieval rationalism and metaphysics is spot on. But a close reading of Turretin’s theology as a whole, and his doctrine of the covenant of nature in particular, belies the Barthian clustering of seventeenth century Reformed orthodoxy with medieval and eighteenth/nineteenth century Protestant rationalism. There seems to be a common thread that runs throughout the writings of Barth and his followers which manifests an allergy towards speaking of God’s demands on man and man’s response to those demands. A proper reaction against the moralism and legalism of both Roman Catholicism and Liberalism is not antinomianism. Rather, the proper response is to understand the truly gracious nature of the covenant of grace. And the only way to do that is to fully comprehend what exactly it was that Christ came to do. For in understanding that Christ came under the law to fulfill all righteousness, we can see that what was for him a covenant of works becomes for us a covenant of grace. Only if Christ has truly fulfilled the covenant of works, can we say that “it is finished;” that is, that there are no works left for us to do which can earn God’s favor. According to this understanding—and only on this understanding—can we put to rest any notion of legalism or moralism whatsoever.

*Continued on Page 323.*

54. An allergy towards the law is manifested in Barth’s thinking at least as early as his 1923 Göttingen lectures on Reformed Confessions. See *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002) 144ff.



# Pictures of Jesus

## And the Sovereignty of Divine Revelation: Recent Literature and a Defense of the Confessional Reformed View<sup>1</sup>

By David VanDrunen

### INTRODUCTION

Reformed Christians are used to hearing critiques of their theology from those outside the tradition, but perhaps no Reformed idea has drawn as much internal dissent and triggered as much home-grown unease as the prohibition of pictures of Jesus via the second commandment. Whether through benign neglect (in the use of illustrated story Bibles or Christmas cards with manger scenes) or intentional opposition by preachers and theologians, the prohibition of pictures of Jesus may hardly seem to be a genuine feature of contemporary Reformed Christianity but more like a relic of a quaint past enshrined in a few confessional documents. Whatever are we to make of this issue and can the Reformed community agree on a doctrine that will match its practice (and vice versa)?

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THE AUTHOR: David VanDrunen is Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Theological Seminary, Escondido, California. His articles have appeared in the *Journal of Law and Religion*, *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, *Calvin Theological Journal*, *Journal of Church and State*, *The International Journal of Systematic Theology*, *The Journal of Markets and Morality*, and *The University of British Columbia Law Review*. Dr. VanDrunen is the author of *A Biblical Case for Natural Law and Law and Custom: The Thought of Thomas Aquinas and the Future of the Common Law*, and edited *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries: Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*.

1. My sincere thanks to editor Chris Coldwell, both for inviting me to write this piece and for supplying a number of sources of which I would otherwise have been unaware.

2. E.g., see Willemien Otten, "The Tension Between Word and Image in Christianity," in *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm: Struggle for Religious Identity*, ed. Willem van Asselt, Paul van Geest, Daniela Müller, and Theo Salemink (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 33–48.

3. See Anton Houtepen, "The Dialectics of the Icon: A Reference to God?" in *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm*, 49–73.

4. David Bentley Hart speaks of how "theology has suffered, historically, from a variety of etherealizing susceptibilities," of which one example is "the Calvinist mysticism of bare and unadorned worship (which idolatrously mistakes God for some object that can be lost

If we have wondered about ourselves, plenty of others have wondered about us too. According to some writers, Protestant opposition to religious imagery, and especially the hard-core Reformed version, was an expression of bibliolatry<sup>2</sup> or a precursor to the larger secularization of the West.<sup>3</sup> Other claims have an ironic character. Some writers have suggested that the Reformed have an idolatrous conception of God<sup>4</sup> (ironic since other people's idolatry was precisely what we were trying to avoid) or harbor latent Eutychean proclivities<sup>5</sup> (ironic since that was what we always suspected of Lutheran ubiquitarianism). Whatever the case, scholars in various fields have pondered the historic Reformed view in the context of the larger and deeper spiritual issue of religious imagery. In recent years writers have explored the dynamics of iconoclastic tendencies across religious traditions,<sup>6</sup> the ancient Near Eastern context of

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among other objects)...". See *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 255. Readers may not be surprised to learn that Hart cites no sources to explain exactly what he means.

5. In the eighth century debates the iconoclasts often sounded like Eutycheans/monophysites to the iconophiles. When the former argued that images of Jesus were only able to portray his human nature and thus could not do justice to the union of the human and divine natures (hence separating the natures in Nestorian fashion), the latter perceived a mixing of the natures and hence a failure to distinguish properly between them. See, e.g., Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 125–126. As will be observed below, many Reformed authors historically have echoed the old iconoclasts' arguments about the Nestorian tendencies of their opponents. In response, one defender of pictures of Jesus from within the Reformed community has suggested that a recent defender of the traditional position may be guilty of Eutycheanism. See Jeffrey J. Meyers, "Vere Homo, The Case for Pictures of Jesus: A Critical Examination of *Seeing Jesus* by Peter Barnes" (unpublished; revised June 1999) 51. Available at [http://www.prpc-stl.org/auto\\_images/1077769417Vere\\_Homo.pdf](http://www.prpc-stl.org/auto_images/1077769417Vere_Homo.pdf).

6. See generally the essays in *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm*.

Israelite aniconism,<sup>7</sup> the phenomenon of Eastern Christian iconoclasm leading up to the Seventh Ecumenical Council,<sup>8</sup> and of course the Reformed (and especially “Puritan”) opposition to the kind of religious imagery that had flourished in medieval Catholicism.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of the present article is to present and evaluate recent arguments from within the Reformed community in support of (at least limited) use of pictures of Jesus. Since space is tight and summarizing the case of each individual writer or speaker would be tedious, I focus upon the arguments themselves rather than upon individuals’ appropriation of them. Though defenders of the traditional Reformed prohibition of making and using pictures of Jesus have not always made their case in the most compelling manner, I argue that the prohibition is morally sound and the historic arguments by and large on target. Despite the initial plausibility of some of the contemporary arguments in favor of pictures of Jesus, the arguments suffer from significant flaws and do not sufficiently grasp the fundamental genius underlying the traditional Reformed conviction. Its fundamental genius, I believe, is that God is sovereign over his revelation of himself—when, to whom, and how.

I first review the traditional Reformed arguments against the use of pictures of Jesus and offer some initial analysis of their theological impetus. Second I survey contemporary arguments in support of pictures of Jesus. Third I present a brief and unified restatement of the traditional case, utilizing and building upon its great insight concerning God’s sovereignty in revelation. Finally, I offer specific responses in critique of recent defenders of pictures of Christ.

# I. THE PROHIBITION OF PICTURES OF JESUS: TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY ARGUMENTS

Polemics against religious imagery generally, and images of God and the Lord Jesus Christ in particular, span the Reformed tradition. In addition to the work of numerous theologians, many of whom will be cited below, a number of catechisms and confessions place these sentiments in the mouth of the church as a whole. The Heidelberg Catechism, for example, states that we may “in nowise make any image of God,” for “God may not and can not be imaged in any way.” In response to the objection that we might have pictures in church to serve as “books for the laity,” the Heidelberg Catechism responds: “we should not be wiser than God, who will not have his people taught by dumb idols, but by the lively preaching of his Word.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, chapter 4 of

the Second Helvetic Confession states: “Although Christ assumed human nature, yet he did not on that account assume it in order to provide a model for carvers and painters.” It goes on to assert that images are forbidden by the law and the prophets, which Christ did not come to abolish, and that Christ has promised to be near to us by his Spirit, not bodily. “Who, therefore, would believe that a shadow or likeness of his body would contribute any benefit to the pious?”<sup>11</sup> Perhaps most notably, the Westminster Larger Catechism (109) teaches that the second commandment forbids, among other things, “the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever.” Among twentieth-century Reformed writers specifically defending the traditional position, particularly in regard to pictures of Jesus, were Johannes Vos, J. Marcellus Kik, John Murray, Loraine Boettner, G. I. Williamson, J. I. Packer, and Peter Barnes.<sup>12</sup> All

7. See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995).

8. E.g., see Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (New York: Brill, 1994). Among other recent discussions of this topic, as part of larger studies, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Imago Dei: The Byzantine Apologia for Icons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Besancon, *The Forbidden Image*.

9. E.g., see Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Willem J. van Asselt, “The Prohibition of Images and Protestant Identity,” in *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm*, 299–311. For a closer study of the Puritans, particularly in New England, see Maria Lynn Haims, “The American Puritan Aesthetic: Iconography in Seventeenth-Century Poetry and Tombstone Art” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1981).

10. See questions and answers 96–98. Translations are taken from *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (reprinted, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 343.

11. Translation taken from *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, Part I, *Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1991) 5.020.

12. See Johannes Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*, ed. G. I. Williamson (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2002) 291–293 [this was originally published as a series of articles in 1946–49]; J. Marcellus Kik, “Pictures of Christ,” *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* 14 (17 August 1955): 9–11; J. Marcellus Kik, “The Reformed Faith and Worship,” *The Southern Presbyterian Journal* 14 (14 September 1955): 9–12; John Murray, “Pictures of Christ,” *Reformed Herald* 16 (February 1961): 65–66; Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962) 283–284; G. I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) 26–30; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973) 38–44; and Peter Barnes, *Seeing Jesus: The Case Against Pictures of*

of their treatments are rather brief and largely reiterate older arguments. Since the turn of the new century, I have offered a journal article to a mainstream theological audience in defense of the classic prohibition of pictures of Jesus, utilizing some older argumentation and also presenting at least one argument that, to my knowledge, was not developed by earlier Reformed

*Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990). For lengthy arguments against pictures of Christ by those outside of Reformed circles, see J. Virgil Dunbar, *Christ Can't Be Pictured: God Is Not Like Art* (Montgomery: Grace Bible Publishers, 1994); and Jerome Christopher Crichton, "A Manual for Church Leaders, to Transform the Consciousness and Practice of the Church as Relates to Divine-Human Image in Art, in Accordance with the Second Commandment" (final document for Doctor of Ministry degree, United Theological Seminary, 1995).

13. David VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology: Toward a Catholic Understanding of the Reformed Doctrine of the 'Second' Commandment," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 (April 2004): 130–147. See also my briefer pieces for a popular audience: David VanDrunen, "Faith Comes By ... Seeing!" *Modern Reformation* 13 (May/June 2004): 8, 15; and "Celebrating Jesus' Birth—Without His Picture," *New Horizons* 27 (December 2006): 6–7.

14. Daniel R. Hyde, *In Living Color: Images of Christ and the Means of Grace* (Grandville, Mich.: Reformed Fellowship, 2009). Another recent book-length treatment is Justin Griffin, *The Truth about Images of Jesus and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment* (n.p., Tate, 2006).

15. This is clear, for example, from the exposition of the first and second commandments in Heidelberg Catechism 94–98 and Westminster Larger Catechism 103–110.

16. For a recent, brief defense of this basic point, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008) 18–19.

17. E.g., see John Calvin, *Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, trans. and ed. Benjamin W. Farley (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 66–67; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.11.1–2; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1994) 63–64; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 3, trans. Bartel Elshout (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994) 106; William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (1968; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 281; James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 2002) 92–95; Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965) 60–62; Ebenezer Erskine and James Fisher, *The Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained* (Glasgow: Gillies and Leith: Coke, 1796) 59; anonymous author, "Is the Church of Rome Idolatrous," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 26 (April 1854): 261–262; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 290; Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1871; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996) 363; Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, 291; Barnes, *Seeing Jesus*, 2; Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom* (Chicago: Moody, 1994) 90; J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1996) 41–42; and J. V. Fesko, *The Rule of Love: Broken, Fulfilled, and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009) 34.

18. E.g., see Thomas Vincent, *An Explicatory Catechism: or, an Explanation of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (New Haven: Walter, Austin, and Co., 1810) 121; Erskine and Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 60; Packer, *Knowing God*, 41–44; and Barnes, *Seeing Jesus*, 5–6.

theologians.<sup>13</sup> Daniel Hyde has recently written an entire book considering pictures of Jesus that, in my judgment, is the finest Reformed work on the subject in recent memory.<sup>14</sup>

The classic Reformed case against pictures of Jesus has centered around the second commandment and its implications. As traditionally understood, the first commandment prohibits worship of any God except the one true God and the second commandment has special concern to prohibit worshiping the true God in ways that he has not authorized.<sup>15</sup> According to Reformed lights, in other words, the sin of idolatry extends not only to creating false deities but also to creating one's own paths for communing with the God of Israel. The second commandment excludes graven images of Jehovah as well as of Baal.<sup>16</sup>

Since Reformed discussions of pictures of Jesus have traditionally been embedded within discussions of images of the deity more broadly, in this section I first identify some of the common general arguments against images of God and then discuss the arguments that focus more specifically on pictures of Jesus. I conclude this section by offering some initial analysis of these arguments.

The first general argument is that God is invisible and spiritual and thus images of him simply cannot capture his majestic glory.<sup>17</sup> A second general concern that flows naturally from the first is that images debase and dishonor God, thereby lessening our esteem for him and creating false thoughts about him.<sup>18</sup> Third, many writers make the simple point that there is no biblical command to make such images. Images of the deity lack divine warrant.<sup>19</sup> In regard to this third point it is helpful to remember that the Reformed tradition has typically grounded the *regulative principle of worship* in the second commandment, and has thus seen this commandment as directing believers toward what Scripture positively authorizes (and not merely against what it specifically prohibits). The fourth argument turns inward to the sinful human heart. Fallen human beings are prone toward idolatry, and thus, even

19. E.g., see Nicholas Ridley, "A Treatise on the Worship of Images," in *The Works of Nicholas Ridley, D.D., Sometime Lord Bishop of London, Martyr, 1555*, ed., Henry Christmas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1841) 85–86; George Estey, *Certain Godly and Learned Expositions upon Divers Parts of Scriptures* (London: James Roberts, 1603) 43; Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, 92–93, 103; Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, 61; Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 361; Murray, "Pictures of Christ," 66. Also see pertinent comments by Edward M. Curtis, "The Theological Basis for the Prohibition of Images in the Old Testament," *JETS* 28 (September 1985) 283–285.



were images of God harmless in themselves, people who have them will tend to use them for worship.<sup>20</sup> Fifth, Reformed theologians have connected the use of images with the sinful human desire to control God and to use him for our own purposes, such that we fail to acknowledge his sovereignty. In this connection, some Reformed writers have noted that even the heathen do not ordinarily think that idols *are* their gods. Rather, idols serve as a means for people to access the deity on their own terms and in their own way. Likewise, many Reformed theologians argue that Israel's sin with respect to the golden calves—whether under Aaron at Sinai or under Jereboam at Bethel and Dan—was a violation of the second rather than the first commandment, since they sought to worship YHWH through them. Obviously the Israelites at Sinai did not think that their newly minted golden calf *was* God, since the God they professed to honor was the one who had brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 32:4).<sup>21</sup> Sixth, Reformed theologians have traditionally viewed the use of images of God as an implicit rejection of the sufficiency of God's verbal revelation and its proclamation. If God has revealed himself sufficiently in Scripture, why the need to portray him visibly?<sup>22</sup> Finally, Reformed writers have often appealed to the lack of such images (and religious imagery generally) in early Christianity.<sup>23</sup> This last consideration, of course, is not a constructive theological argument but a piece of corroborating evidence.

Is there a common thread in these general considerations, apart from the last? I believe that there is: a concern about usurping the divine prerogatives. God's nature is spiritual and invisible, unknowable to the world apart from his own sovereign revelation of himself. God initiates and defines his relationship with human beings, but sinful humans wish to be the initiators of the relationship and want to deal with God on their own terms, in their own way and at their own time, rather than adhering steadfastly to his revelation alone. This inevitably distorts their perception of God and destroys their relationship with him. All of the first six general concerns revolve around this central theme.

In addition to the general considerations discussed above, Reformed theologians also turned their attention specifically to images of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same theological impetus is at work here too, but the incarnation of the Second Person of the Godhead raises peculiar questions that a general consideration of divine images does not necessarily face. Five distinct but in some ways interrelated arguments are worth mentioning.

First, many writers have argued that we are ignorant of Jesus' actual appearance, since there are no extant contemporary pictures of him and the New Testament provides no specific description of his features. This means that pictures of him created by artists are not accurate or authentic, being products of their imagination and thus functioning as a species of will-worship.<sup>24</sup>

20. E.g., see Calvin, *Sermons*, 65–66; Ridley, "A Treatise on the Worship of Images," 83, 86–87; Estey, *Certain Godly and Learned Expositions*, 43; Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 281; Turretin, *Institutes*, vol. 2, 64; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 303–305; Murray, "Pictures of Christ," 66; Kik, "The Reformed Faith and Worship," 9–12; Kik, "Pictures of Christ," 9–11; Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 281; and Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 37.

21. For various discussions of related points, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.1, 9; William Perkins, "A Warning Against the Idolatry of the Last Times and an Instruction Touching Religious or Divine Worship," in *The workes of that famous and worthy minister of Christ in the Unversite of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins. The first volume: newly corrected according to his owne copies. With distinct characters, and contents of euery booke, and two tables of the whole: one of the matter and questions, the other of choice places of scripture* (London: Iohn Legatt, 1635) 676, 688–690; à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 3, 112; Durham, *The Ten Commandments*, 97–100; Erskine and Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 61; William S. Plumer, *The Law of God, as Contained in the Ten Commandments, Explained and Enforced* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864) 206; Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 363; Packer, *Knowing God*, 40; Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 152–153; Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom*, 79–81; Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 37–41; Richard Lints, "Imaging and Idolatry: The Sociality of Personhood in the Canon," in *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, ed. Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 222; and Fesko, *The Rule of Love*, 34–35.

22. E.g., see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.5; Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism*, 27; Packer, *Knowing God*, 43–44; Barnes, *Seeing Jesus*, 13; Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom*, 82–87; and Hyde, *In Living Color*, 18–19, chapter 2.

23. E.g., see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.6, 9, 13; Ridley, "A Treatise on the Worship of Images," 88–96; Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, 60; Thomas Ridgely, *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion Are Explained and Defended. Being the Substance of Several Lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1815) 465; Kik, "Pictures of Christ," 9–11; Barnes, *Seeing Jesus*, 8–10.

24. E.g., see à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 3, 109; Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, 96; Robert Parker, *A Scholasticall Discovrse against Symbolizing with Antichrist in Ceremonies: Especially in the Signe of the Crosse* (Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1607) Book 1, 60; Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 362; Murray, "Pictures of Christ," 66; Kik, "The Reformed Faith and Worship," 9–12; Kik, "Pictures of Christ," 9–11; Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, 292; Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 27; Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism*, 27; Packer, *Knowing God*, 39; Barnes, *Seeing Jesus*, 3–5; VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 139–142; and Hyde, *In Living Color*, 60–65. This argument is thus much more common in the Reformed tradition than I previously indicated in my article, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 134.



The concern about will-worship is manifest, for example, in the inclination of many artists to portray Jesus as though he were a member of their own ethnic group or according to their own image of ideal humanity.<sup>25</sup> A second argument deals with another problem of authenticity. The reality of the incarnation means that the Son's divine nature has become inseparably united to a human nature. When artists seek to portray the human nature they are incapable of portraying the divine nature, so their creations are inevitably not true representations of Christ the God-man.<sup>26</sup> Though I return to this argument below, I note here that it can function as either an ontological or a practical-ethical argument.

25. E.g., see Barnes, *Seeing Jesus*, 5; and VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 140.

26. E.g., Ridgely, *A Body of Divinity*, 463; William Fulke, *The Text of the New Testament of Iesus Christ, Translated Out of the Vulgar Latine by the Papiſts of the Traiterous Seminarie at Rhemes. With Arguments of Bookes, Chapters, and Annotations, Pretending to Discover the Corruptions of Diuers Translations, and to Cleare the Controuersies of These Dayes. VVhereunto Is Added the Translation Out of the Original Greeke, Commonly Vsed in the Church of England, with a Confutation of All Such Arguments, Glosses, and Annotations, As Conteine Manifest Impietie, of Heresie, Treason and Slander, against the Catholike Church of God, and the True Teachers Thereof, or the Translations Vsed in the Church of England* (London: Christopher Barker, 1589) 224; Durham, *A Practical Exposition*, 95–96; Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, 62; Vincent, *An Explicatory Catechism*, 121; John Owen, "ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: or, a Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ," in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965) 159–160; Erskine and Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 60; John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *The Bright Star Which Leadeth Wise Men to Our Lord Jesus Christ, or, A Familiar and Learned Exposition on the Ten Commandments Gathered from the Mouth of a Faithfull Pastor by a Gracious Young Man, Sometime Scholler in Cambridge* (London: John Harison, 1603), cited from the first authorized edition, *A plaine and familiar exposition of the Ten commandments with a methodicall short catechisme, containing briefly all the principall grounds of Christian religion* (London: T. C[reede], 1604) 64–65; Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 362; Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, 292; Kik, "The Reformed Faith and Worship," 9–11; Kik, "Pictures of Christ," 9–12; Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 284; Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism*, 27; Barnes, *Seeing Jesus*, 6–8.

27. In this ontological sense I rejected the argument in "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 139, though in hindsight I believe that I significantly understated the degree to which previous Reformed theologians wrestled with the second commandment in light of the incarnation and did adopt reasoning that resembled the eighteenth-century iconoclasts.

28. See Vincent, *An Explicatory Catechism*, 121–122; and Durham, *A Practical Exposition*, 96.

29. For discussions related to pictures of Jesus and the sacraments, see, e.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.11.13; Horton, *The Perfect Law of Freedom*, 92; VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 146–147; Hyde, *In Living Color*, chapter 3; and Fesko, *The Rule of Love*, 38–39.

30. VanDrunen, "Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology," 142–145. Hyde has picked up this argument effectively; see *In Living Color*, 65–69.

As an ontological argument—namely, that visual representations of a person have to convey attributes that are inherently invisible, or else be false—it seems quite weak.<sup>27</sup> But as a practical-ethical argument—namely, that any encounter with the human nature of Jesus demands a reckoning with his identity as the Son of God and thus evokes worship—it is rather powerful. When presented as a practical-ethical argument it merges into a third argument: a person confronted by a picture of Christ is faced with an impossible dilemma. If he worships it he overtly violates the second commandment, but if he refuses to worship it and thus treats it like any common picture, then making the picture is "in vain" or even "wrongs Christ."<sup>28</sup> Fourth, Reformed theologians have argued that making images of Jesus compromises the sufficiency of Scripture and its preaching, especially in light of the new covenant emphasis upon preaching as a means of grace. For many of these theologians the new covenant sacraments also demand a negative evaluation of images of Christ. In the Lord's Supper specifically God has visibly and physically revealed the Lord Jesus to his people, thus leaving them without the need to represent him in other visible ways.<sup>29</sup> Finally, I have attempted to develop a redemptive-historical or eschatological argument to supplement and extend some of these other arguments. In the fullness of time God did reveal himself visibly, definitively, and uniquely in the incarnation of his Son. The Lord Jesus Christ, ontologically speaking, could be seen, and even could have been drawn or photographed like another human being. But the present age between his ascension and second coming is not the age for seeing, but an age of suffering in which we know him by faith, through the presence of the Spirit, the hearing of the word, and participation in the sacraments. The glorious day is coming when we will see him face to face, but until that day we should not force the eschatological calendar ahead of schedule by trying to make Jesus visible in our own way.<sup>30</sup>

Is there a common thread in these sentiments? Here too I believe that there is, and again it revolves around the sin of usurping God's prerogatives in the revelation of himself. God has revealed himself concretely in the incarnation of Christ, and pictures of Jesus can do justice neither to the human nature itself (in terms of accuracy) nor to the relation between the natures. Thus people seeking to depict Jesus visibly must turn to their own imagination to construct something that must either be treated as any other image (a Jesus who is not worshiped) or be used to foster divine worship (an obvious violation of the second commandment). It betrays discontentment with what God *has* given to us

in revelation, in the word and sacraments, and doubt about their sufficiency. Making pictures of Jesus fails to recognize or submit to God's inscrutable wisdom in requiring his people to live for a time by faith and not by sight as they wait patiently for the day when God will make himself fully visible to them through the true and authentic face of Christ. Receiving the Christ who is revealed (and in the way that he is revealed) rather than seeking to make Christ visible in our own way during his present absence, is at the heart of historic and contemporary Reformed concerns about portraying Jesus.

## II. THE CONTEMPORARY CASE FOR PICTURES OF CHRIST

Anecdotally it seems obvious that pictures of Jesus are common today among Reformed Christians. Some older Reformed theologians entertained rather lenient views on pictures of Christ,<sup>31</sup> but in recent years this line of thought has gained unusual momentum. A number of writers within Reformed circles have called for reconsideration of the traditional Reformed prohibition and in certain cases have presented rather enthusiastic defense of such pictures. To the extent that Reformed confession and Reformed practice seem to have increasingly diverged on this issue, the concern to realign our doctrine and life is certainly to be appreciated. But is it time to throw out our historic doctrinal position on images of Christ and to acknowledge the propriety of—and perhaps even encourage—the use of such images as is already common in the pedagogy, art, and personal piety of many in the Reformed community? In this section I first identify some of the people who have advanced an affirmative answer to this question. Then I provide a summary and initial analysis of their arguments.

In 1974 Donald Weilersbacher penned a short article in a symposium published by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Weilersbacher raised problems that he perceived with the traditional prohibition of pictures of Jesus and called for the RPCNA to clarify its interpretation of WLC 109 in light of the church's confusion about the issue.<sup>32</sup> To my knowledge his plea was not heeded. In 1981 a special committee of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod presented a report concluding that the absolute prohibition of representations of God in WLC 109 is not justified, on grounds of the second commandment or otherwise. This report argued that certain kinds of representations of Jesus are permissible and to be encouraged.<sup>33</sup> The RPCES merged with the Presbyterian

Church in America shortly thereafter, however, and no changes to WLC 109 were ever adopted. In subsequent years a number of writers from various locations within the Reformed community have articulated concerns similar to those of Weilersbacher and the RPCES special committee. The longest study is an unpublished manuscript by PCA pastor Jeffrey Meyers.<sup>34</sup> Several prominent writers address the issue briefly as part of broader considerations of the second commandment. Among them, Edmund Clowney and John Frame specifically argue for the permissibility of some visible representations of Christ and J. Douma does so implicitly.<sup>35</sup> Greg Bahnsen and Kenneth Gentry have taken similar positions to those mentioned above in publicly accessible lectures or sermons.<sup>36</sup> An enthusiastic review of the film

31. E.g., Andrew Willet is tolerant of portrayals of Christ "only historically," though he still warns strongly against portraying his "personal countenance, which cannot be but dangerous and offensive." See *Synopsis Papismi; or, a General View of the Papacy: with Confutations of Romish Errors from the Scriptures, Fathers, Councils, etc. etc.*, new edition (London: The British Society for Promoting the Religious Principles of the Reformation, 1852) 208–209. Another prominent example is William Perkins, who permits pictures of Christ so long as people remember that such pictures are only of his human nature and do not use them for "use of religion." Later he comments that the painting of the history of the Bible, "though otherwise lawful in itself, is not expedient in Churches: because danger of Idolatry may rise hence." See Perkins, "A Warning," 677.

32. Donald Weilersbacher, "Implications of Exodus 20:3–6 for the Doctrine of Worship," in *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship: A Symposium to state and clarify the Scriptural teachings concerning worship with emphasis on the use of the biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* (n.p.; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1974) 19–22.

33. "Report of the Special Committee of Synod on Pictures of Christ," in *Documents of the Synod: Study Papers and Actions of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod—1965–1982* (Lookout Mountain, Tenn.: The Synod, n.d.) 332–350.

34. Meyers, "Vere Homo, The Case for Pictures of Jesus: A Critical Examination of *Seeing Jesus* by Peter Barnes."

35. See Edmund P. Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007) 26–32; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008) 453–459; and Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, 66. I refer to Douma's position as implicit because though he never explicitly defends visible representations of Christ he makes the following comments about a "smooth, polished, saccharine portrait of Christ:" "Since this kind of portrait of Christ is controversial, people should not put it in a church. Representations of Christ are numerous. You should compare the subdued portrayals of the suffering Christ with the tearful expressions so often portrayed in religious art. Nevertheless, it would be good if both remained outside the church building."

36. Greg L. Bahnsen, "Book II: Chapter 8, 9, 10," Lecture 33 of *Calvin's Institutes*, Covenant Media Foundation. MP3, GB438. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Christmas and the Second Commandment," Sermon one of *Christmas and Christ*, KennethGentry.com. Bahnsen addresses the subject generally beginning at 16:11, and begins the topic of pictures of Christ specifically at about the 20 minute mark. Gentry addresses

*The Passion of the Christ* appearing in the web magazine of the PCA has also expressed these views.<sup>37</sup> Though not a large body of literature, this material challenges

the issue at length. At the 4:50 time mark, he begins speaking of nativity scenes and portrayals of Christ. At 5:20, Larger Catechism 109 is referenced. At 6:14, he makes reference specifically to the second commandment and representation of God by images, and then expounds the commandment with respect to images of God proper. At 19:00, Gentry returns to the subject of Christ and nativity scenes, and at 20:30 he declares his position in brief. The first main sub-section begins at 23:10, where he contends that pictures of Jesus Christ are not pictures of God proper, but representations of God's human body, and as such are not violations of the second commandment. At 31:45, a second sub-section begins which contends man is not making images of Christ—God did that—rather, men who make such pictures are just remembering what God has done. At 34:20, a third sub-section covering LC 109 begins, wherein, presuming on his first point, Gentry contends LC 109 only says no images are to be made of the second person of the Trinity. He claims his view respects LC 109, because the images are made only of the body of Christ, not the second person. At 39:00, a fourth sub-section contends the Christian faith should encourage art, and Calvin is cited in support (again, presuming on his first sub-section point).

37. See Brian Godawa, review of "The Passion of the Christ," from <http://www.alliancenet.org/CC/article/o,,PTID23682|CHID125099|CIID1712182,00.html> (accessed June 9, 2009).

38. E.g., see "The Report of the Special Committee," 345–346; Meyers, "Vere Homo," 1–2, 22, 73–75; Godawa, "The Passion of the Christ;" and Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments*, 31–32. See also the comments in John K. La Shell, "Imagination and Idol: A Puritan Tension," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (Fall 1987): 332–333.

39. Gentry says, "An accurate reading of the Larger Catechism 109 will show I believe that it's technically correct—although it may not have been intended to do this—I believe that it is technically correct and a proper interpretation of it will lead to a different conclusion than some have held." Gentry, 34:24–34:43. On Gentry's contention that a technical reading of LC 109 supports his position on the lawfulness of pictures of Christ's humanity, see the brief article provided by the editor following this one.

40. See Gentry, 34:10; Meyers, "Vere Homo," chapter 7; "Report of the Special Committee," 336–337.

41. For arguments in favor of this restricted reading of the second commandment, see, e.g., "Report of the Special Committee," 344; Meyers, "Vere Homo," 2, 12–16, 35–37; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 453–454, 459; and Bahnsen, 20.00. I also note briefly that the RPCES report insists that the second commandment only pertains to three-dimensional objects; see "Report of the Special Committee," 337–338, 343–344. This also has significant ramifications for debates about pictures of Christ, since the sorts of pictures that contemporary Reformed people defend are uniformly two-dimensional. In my judgment, the RPCES report fails to make its case. Even if the terminology of the second commandment refers to three-dimensional objects, it is not clear that Scripture uses this language *over against* two-dimensional objects, as if to say "you shall not make three-dimensional graven images [but two-dimensional graven images are fine]." The report fails to show why this reading is preferable to a reading that applies the principle underlying the prohibition of three-dimensional images to two-dimensional images as well.

an aspect of the Reformed confessional heritage from within, and those who embrace this heritage should take it seriously.

It is important to note what kind of pictures of Jesus these writers attempt to defend. Many of them specifically say that pictures depicting Jesus in the midst of historical narratives recorded in the Gospels, used for pedagogical purposes, are permissible, while attempts to create a portrait of Jesus, abstracted from historical setting, remain problematic. Contextless portraits, they reason, are in fact imaginative exercises that compromise the self-revelation of God and seem designed to mediate God's presence in worship rather than to serve the needs of pedagogy.<sup>38</sup>

The works cited in the previous paragraphs make arguments in distinctive ways, but work with an overlapping set of concerns. In what follows I identify five related claims that, taken together, constitute the contemporary case for a revised Reformed understanding of pictures of Christ.

The first claim involves a revised reading of history. This is not a constructive theological argument, but as the defenders of the traditional prohibition have often bolstered their case through historical appeal, so those challenging the prohibition have questioned whether the weight of history lies only on one side. For example, Gentry claims that WLC 109 technically does not prohibit pictures of Jesus (since such pictures represent only his human nature and do not represent God<sup>39</sup>), Meyers cites evidence that the early Reformed tradition was open to pictures of Christ for non-worship purposes, and the RPCES report describes WLC 109 as a bit of an (understandable) overreaction to a thousand years of abuse of religious imagery.<sup>40</sup> All together, such claims make Reformed history seem somewhat more complicated than traditional defenders of WLC 109 would have us imagine.

A second claim concerns interpretation of the second commandment itself. A number of writers argue that the second commandment has a more limited scope than traditionally understood: it only pertains to *worship*. In other words, the second commandment has no interest in the existence of religious images per se but only in prohibiting those which are *made* in order that people might *bow down and serve* them. This is a strategically important claim. Reformed theologians have traditionally defended the prohibition of pictures of Christ as an application of the second commandment. Restricting the commandment's applicability, therefore, undermines the rationale of confessional statements such as WLC 109 and creates space for making and utilizing representations of Christ provided that they are not used for worship.<sup>41</sup>



A third claim among contemporary defenders of pictures of Christ is that traditional arguments based upon the authenticity problem are seriously flawed. Meyers in particular skewers Barnes for his claim that because we do not know what Jesus looked like any attempt to portray him must be false. This radically misconceives the purpose of artistic representation, says Meyers. Artists do not seek to create exact reproductions of what they are portraying but draw upon their powers of imagination and interpretation, and this does not make their artistic products untrue. According to Barnes' requirements, he states, producing an authentic picture of Christ demands not simply *some* biblical description of Christ's appearance but an exhaustive description. In fact, Barnes' requirements make artistic representation of any sort false.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, defenders of pictures of Christ reject the assertion that the inability to depict his divine nature means that all portrayals of him separate his natures in Nestorian fashion and are therefore untrue. Since his human appearance was just like anyone else's, and the divine nature is inherently uncircumscribable, to demand that representations of Jesus must somehow depict his divinity is unjustified. To portray Jesus as simply a man, as the people of his day saw him, is not guilty of separating his natures.<sup>43</sup>

The fourth claim is the most common and often the most strongly asserted: forbidding pictures of Jesus suggests unease with the fact that Jesus had a true human body and sends Docetic vibes to the people (especially the children) of our churches. If our children constantly see pictures of Jesus' disciples and other biblical figures in their Sunday School classes and story books, but Jesus is always absent in the pictures even when he was present in the historical event depicted, what does this communicate except that they are not to think of Jesus as having a real human frame? For some writers, therefore, pictures of Jesus are not only permissible but even desirable, and serve as a confession of the incarnation.<sup>44</sup> Proponents of pictures seem chiefly concerned about pedagogy and art in the context of a material world that is inherently good. Forbidding pictures of Christ inhibits effective teaching about Jesus' physical human nature and squelches the flourishing of Christians' artistic talent.<sup>45</sup>

The fifth claim addresses the subject of mental images. Many traditional Reformed discussions of the second commandment have clearly taught that it prohibits forming mental images of God as well as representing him artistically. Both entail the triumph of human imagination over submission to divine revelation and thus produce images of the divine that are necessarily

false. Often these discussions focus upon images of God generally. They critique, for example, mental pictures of God as an old man sitting in the sky.<sup>46</sup> In other cases, Reformed writers address mental images of Jesus specifically.<sup>47</sup> The prohibition against forming any mental image of Christ is admittedly a difficult position to defend, and proponents of pictures of Jesus exploit their opponents' difficulty with great aplomb. For many of them the reality of human psychology is simply incompatible with forbidding mental images of Christ. When people read the Gospel accounts or hear a minister preach about events of Jesus' life, their minds inevitably and naturally form images of him. The proponents of pictures of Jesus are actually not quite unified on whether this is strictly inevitable. According to Weilersbach, for example, forming mental images of Christ happens "automatically" and Meyers says that it "surely" happens. Frame, on the other hand, asserts that it is psychologically impossible for "most" people not to form images (not specifying whether this means, say, 60% or 99% of people).<sup>48</sup> How they have come to such conclusions is

42. See Meyers, "Vere Homo," chapters 3–4.

43. E.g., see "Report of the Special Committee," 345; and Meyers, "Vere Homo," 34–55.

44. Nearly every contemporary defender of pictures of Christ makes this general point concerning Docetism, though they do so with differing degrees of confidence and various sentiments about whether such pictures should actually be encouraged. See Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments*, 31; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 459–460; "Report of the Special Committee," 346; Meyers, "Vere Homo," 9, 55–56; Godawa, "The Passion of the Christ," Gentry, 23:50ff, 40:10ff; Bahnsen, 20:00.

45. In regard to the demands of pedagogy, see, e.g., "Report of the Special Committee," 347; and Meyers, 1, 15. In regard to art, see "Report of the Special Committee," 347; Meyers, "Vere Homo," 1, 15, 47; and Gentry, 40:10ff. For related reflections on art and worship, without special attention to pictures of Jesus, see Harry Boonstra, "Of Images and Image Breakers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (November 1997): 430–431.

46. E.g., see Perkins, "A Warning," 686; à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 3, 115–116; Vincent, *An Explanatory Catechism*, 121; Erskine and Fisher, *Shorter Catechism Explained*, 60; Plumer, *The Law of God*, 212; and Packer, *Knowing God*, 42.

47. E.g., in the debate between James Robe and Ralph Erskine in the eighteenth century, which culminated in Erskine's large volume polemicizing against mental images of Christ, *Faith no Fancy: Or, a Treatise of Mental Images, Discovering the Vain Philosophy and Vile Divinity of a Late Pamphlet Intituled, Mr. Robe's Fourth Letter to Mr. Fisher* (1745; Philadelphia: William McCulloch, 1805). For discussion and analysis of the Robe-Erskine debate, see John K. La Shell, "Imaginary Ideas of Christ: A Scottish-American Debate" (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); a shorter version of some of this material appears in La Shell, "Imagination and Idol," 305–334.

48. See Weilersbach, "Implications of Exodus 20:3–6," 22; "Report of the Special Committee," 347; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 459–460; Meyers, "Vere Homo," 17, 29–30, 39–41.



not clear. They cite no Scripture for proof, nor do they offer social scientific studies to back their claims. Maybe they believe that it is simply common knowledge. One speaker states that the mind naturally thinks of Jesus as a baby or as hanging on a cross when certain biblical stories are read, and then says to his audience: “you know it does” (Gentry, 37:00).

This is another strategic issue. As defenders of the traditional Reformed position have reasoned from the impermissibility of visual images to the impermissibility of mental images, so gainsayers of this position have reasoned from the inevitability (read: permissibility) of mental images to the permissibility of visual images. From a broader perspective, if the foolishness of prohibiting mental images can be established, and thus one aspect of WLC 109 and the earlier tradition cast into disrepute, then the case for reexamining the larger issue is strengthened.

The six claims that I have identified in this section could undoubtedly be parsed and categorized in different ways. Though not every person defending pictures of Jesus makes recourse to each claim individually, all of these claims have garnered widespread approval and together, I believe, they constitute a fair summary of the internal Reformed case in favor of such pictures. What drives this case and distinguishes its impetus from the reasoning behind the traditional Reformed prohibition? All in all, I believe that it turns attention away from (while still theologically affirming) the divine sovereignty over revelation and the obligation of human beings to submit to that revelation, and puts in its place a new emphasis on the fertility of the human imagination and the goodness of the material world, a world into which Jesus has become incarnate and as such can be and (in some cases) should be portrayed in order to confess his humanity and to ingrain a robust incarnational theology into the lives of those being instructed in the Christian faith. While the two sides affirm both God’s sovereignty in revelation and the wonderful doctrine of the incarnation, they clearly do not agree about the bearing of these doctrines upon one another. A key issue that lies before us, then, is determining whether and how the second commandment and its demand to deal with God according to his own revelation and not according to our own imagination have been refracted and transformed through the stupendous historical acts of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### III. A CASE AGAINST PICTURES

In this section I present a brief, reconstructed case for the traditional Reformed prohibition of pictures of Jesus. I argue that the sovereign divine prerogative in revelation, established in the second commandment, continues to apply under the new covenant and provides the central reason why Christians should not make or use visual representations of Christ. Though I will engage critics of this position implicitly throughout, I save most of my specific critiques of their arguments for the next section.

Interpretation of the second commandment is obviously crucial for both the traditional Reformed position and contemporary critiques of it. In this commandment the Lord first tells Israel not to “make” graven images (Exodus 20:4) and then adds that they should not “bow down to them or worship them” (20:5).<sup>49</sup> What exactly is prohibited here? Though the commandment is stated generally, interpreters ordinarily understand that artistic work per se is not in view. The very words of the commandment indicate that images meant to represent *God* (or false gods) are the concern, for the images prohibited are those that might be worshiped and hence provoke the Lord’s jealous wrath. No one is tempted to bow down to images which he regards as having no connection with the divine, and there is no reason to think that such images would arouse divine jealousy. Deuteronomy 4:15–24, clearly an inspired commentary and expansion on the second commandment, confirms this point. God reminds the people that they “saw no form of any kind” at Sinai and that therefore they should not make an image of any shape (4:15–18). The concern is that someone might think of God and proceed to make an image in the form of a creature. Pondering a bird and then drawing a bird is not the problem. Pondering God and then drawing a bird is.

The relationship between making an image and worshiping an image in the second commandment is an interesting issue. On the one hand, in Exodus 20:4 making images is prohibited distinctly from bowing down and worshiping them. The same is true in Deuteronomy 4:15–18, which makes perfect sense without any specific reference to worship. Yet the whole thrust of the second commandment as well as Deuteronomy 4:15–24 points to acts of worship ineluctably. These texts do not give the impression that two separate and potentially unrelated laws are set before the people. The making and the worshiping, though distinct acts, are evidently aspects of a unified sin. Traditional Reformed expositions of the second commandment often grasped this

49. Scripture citations are taken from the New International Version.

point very profoundly. Reformed theologians have frequently spoken of the sinful human tendency toward idolatry. Images that may have been made with the best of intentions become objects which we worship or through which we worship. These theologians, I believe, were thinking along the right lines. In linking the manufacture of images with their worship, the second commandment does not say that making images is fine as long as we do not worship them. It indicates instead that making images and using them for worship are inextricably linked, and it cuts off the latter at the pass by forbidding the former as well. It is not as though making pornography is acceptable as long as a person does not use it for lustful purposes. Making pornography and using it for lustful purposes are inextricably linked and both should be avoided. The same is true with images under the second commandment.

Considering Deuteronomy 4:15–24 further, in its broader context, is helpful for interpreting and applying the second commandment. Deuteronomy contains a short statement that in many ways sums up the whole book and even the whole theological enterprise and the heart of religious devotion: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law” (29:29). God is infinite and therefore there are, theoretically, an infinite number of things to know about him. What we human beings do know about him, however, are the things that he has revealed, and these are the things that concern us. The task of our theology and practice is not to speculate about matters that may be true and good, but to affirm things that we know are true and to do things that we know are good because God has revealed them as such. Deuteronomy 4, though falling twenty-five chapters before this pithy and profound statement, is very much an exposition of its principle. Deuteronomy 4 begins: “Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you.... Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you” (4:1–2). These commands, the ones taught by God through Moses, are to be followed (4:5) and observed (4:6). Shortly thereafter, Moses reminds them of the meeting between God and his people at Sinai (4:10–11). God spoke to them and they heard the sound of his words, though they saw no form. He declared his covenant, wrote his ten commandments on stone tablets, and directed Moses to teach them to the people (4:12–14). They in turn were to teach these things to their children (4:9–10).

Though Moses may not have put it this way if asked,

Deuteronomy 4 has a subtext, and it is Deuteronomy 29:29. Deuteronomy 4 reminds them that God did *not* reveal his form, so they should not act as though he did and try somehow to represent it by means of images. God’s form and its visual representation are secret things that belong to him, and the people should leave such things alone. Moses emphasizes that God *did* reveal his law and thus the people should be diligent in observing it. God’s commands are not secret things but revealed things, and thus these must be their concern. They should neither add to nor subtract from it. Undoubtedly their imaginations could have concocted fascinating images of God and compelling elaborations on his law, but their wisdom would be shown not by such imaginative activity but by obeying what they received (4:6). It is worth noting that a speculative ontology is not at issue, but the concrete covenantal relationship between God and his people (see 4:13). Perhaps God does have a form and perhaps he could have given them other profitable laws, but the point is that Israel was to adhere to the terms of the covenant *as God revealed them*, adding and subtracting nothing to them.

Also worth noting in Deuteronomy 4 is the intimate covenantal connection among revelation, teaching, and worship. God reveals his law (but not his form), Moses is then to teach it to the people, the people are then to teach it to their children, and this should result in reverence for God (4:10) and rejection of making and worshiping images (4:19, 23, 28). In this interconnected chain, the covenantal revelation determines the nature of the pedagogy, and the pedagogy determines the nature of the worship. God’s revelation is *verbal* rather than *visual* (4:12–13), the teaching is verbal rather than visual (4:1, 5, 9, 14), and the worship is to be offered without visual props (4:15–19, 23–28). There are two significant implications for present purposes. First, teaching cannot be separated from worship. Teaching about God and his law ought to provoke proper worship as a response. Second, the teaching of children apparently did not require pictures (as “books for the laity,” to borrow from the Heidelberg Catechism). Parents were to instruct their children by communicating the *words* of Moses.

Under the new covenant much is exactly the same, and significantly so. The church is to adhere to and teach the word of God, and that alone. Her teachers are not to *add* the word of man to the word of God, in contrast to the Jewish authorities in Jesus’ day (Matthew 15:9) and to the troublers of the church in Paul’s day (Colossians 2:20–23). Neither are they to subtract anything from the word in their teaching, but must proclaim the whole

counsel of God (Acts 20:25–28). Ministers’ teaching is judged by its fidelity in handling the word (2 Timothy 2:15). The canon concludes with a warning like Deuteronomy’s about anyone adding to or subtracting from the word (Revelation 22:18–19). Undoubtedly there is so much that God might have revealed but did not (or did reveal to some but did not wish to preserve for all, such as Paul’s epistle to the Laodiceans—Colossians 4:16), but that is not our concern. What has been revealed is to be believed, obeyed, and taught. In teaching the word of God accuracy is of highest importance. Of course people must interpret the Scriptures and use their God-given creativity in organizing and explaining material, but it is all in the service of communicating what Scripture says and refusing to say what it does not.<sup>50</sup>

What is different about the new covenant (in comparison to the old covenant at Sinai) is that God initially revealed both his word *and his form*. Jesus delivered the initial new covenant revelation in person. Not only did he speak the word of God but his visual appearance itself was also special revelation. Because “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9), Jesus could say to his disciples: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). (Presumably Jesus’ bodily appearance revealed the Godhead only as accompanied with the revelatory words he spoke, since there was nothing inherently distinctive about his appearance—Isaiah 53:2). Jesus delivered this direct, personal revelation to his disciples and others who saw and heard him. The proper response was to receive it in faith and to come to the Father through him (see John 14:6–7).

It is crucial to recognize, however, that we today have not had this same revelatory experience. We have received no verbal or visual revelation directly from Jesus himself. God wills to give us a share in Christ and his salvation, but only through the mediation of the apostles’ ministry, which is itself divine revelation. Christ revealed

himself directly to his apostles and commissioned them to pass along revelation to us (see John 15:26–27; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Hebrews 2:3; 1 John 1:1–3). What Christ commissioned them to do specifically was to *proclaim* the message of Jesus and his work. They received both verbal and visual revelation, but Jesus only commanded them to provide verbal revelation to us. The Spirit enabled them to produce inspired Scriptures, not inspired pictures. Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus’ majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Peter 1:17), but he pointed the church to “the word of the prophets” as the lamp in a dark place to which they should “pay attention” (2 Peter 1:19).<sup>51</sup> This hardly meant that the incarnation was unimportant to them, as the Apostle John’s epistles exemplify. The antichrist is the person who denies that Jesus came in the flesh (2 John 7)—the incarnation was obviously of no small importance! But how was John as an apostle to communicate this to the next generations? “That which was from the beginning, which *we have heard*, which *we have seen with our eyes*, which *we have looked at* and *our hands have touched*—this we **proclaim** concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; *we have seen* it and **testify** to it, and we **proclaim to you** the eternal life, which was with the Father and has *appeared to us*. We **proclaim to you** what *we have seen and heard*, so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1–3). In other words, John and the apostles received visual as well as verbal revelation, and they testified to it by *proclamation*.

Where does this leave us today? We live in the age after the ascension, and we must reckon with the *absence* of Christ.<sup>52</sup> The apostolic testimony therefore defines us as people who do not see Jesus—yet. We live now as pilgrims under the cross rather than according to the glory of the new Jerusalem. The apostles saw Jesus, and one day we will see him too, but that time has not yet come. Until then we seek Christ’s presence in the way that he has ordained: by the Holy Spirit working through word and sacrament. We listen to the word, have it confirmed to our sight and touch in the sacraments, and respond with faith and worship. “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him *now*, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8). The visual appearance of Christ that we await is truly a glorious expectation for those who have believed now. On that day Christ will “be marveled at among all those who have believed” (2 Thessalonians 1:10). “When he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). The new heaven and new earth will come down out of heaven from God, and *then* “they will see his face” (Revelation

50. As an aside, perhaps the contemporary Reformed community has a harder time with the prohibition of pictures of Jesus because the whole idea of the church’s *ministerial* authority is so often obscured as people look to their pastors to opine about all sorts of things that go beyond the bounds of Scripture under the guise of application and relevance.

51. According to the Gospel accounts, Peter originally wanted to preserve the transfigured vision of Jesus by building tents in which Jesus, Moses, and Elijah could stay. But the transfiguration was only a sneak preview of the consummation, and Jesus proceeded to call them to a time of suffering rather than further seeing.

52. For very helpful discussion of the theme of Christ’s absence, see Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008) chapter 1. Horton picks up on the work of Douglas Farrow in *Ascension and Ecclesia* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999).

22:4). Truly “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Insofar as we have not seen the form, we are in the same basic position as the Israelites at Sinai. God did not reveal his form on Sinai and thus they were not to make an image to represent him. At the moment God has not revealed his form to us New Testament believers either, though we rejoice that we have heard and believed the message that his form was revealed in Jesus Christ and will be revealed again on the last day. Until then we should not make images to represent him. We believe, obey, and teach the revelation that has been given us, and do not meddle with what has not. Israelite parents did not need pictures to teach their children; the apostles who actually saw the form did not need pictures to teach the church; New Testament Christians, who have never seen the form, do not need pictures to teach their children. The revelation that God has given is sufficient. By the word and sacraments the church teaches the flock, including the children, that they are pilgrims who do not now see but wait eagerly for the day they will.

#### IV. A RESPONSE TO DEFENDERS OF PICTURES OF JESUS

In this final section I offer brief responses to the major arguments utilized in defense of pictures of Jesus by those within the Reformed community. The previous section emphasized the importance of God’s sovereign prerogatives in revelation, and this theme continues to play a significant role in the critique that follows.

The first point of response concerns the scope of the second commandment itself. As noted above, some defenders of pictures of Jesus seek to establish a fairly limited scope for this commandment, namely, that it does not have to do with making images per se but only images made for worship purposes. Narrowly stated this claim seems true. As I argued, however, the second commandment, as unpacked in Deuteronomy 4, does not communicate that some images are bad (those used for worship) and some are acceptable (those not used for worship). Rather, it communicates that making and worshiping images are intimately connected and that if we wish to avoid the latter we should avoid the former as well. The idea that people might make images of the divine for wholesome purposes that have nothing to do with worship is entirely absent in Scripture. For what other purposes might they be made? Defenders of pictures of Christ point to *education*. But is it really possible to separate education about God and his covenant from worship? In Deuteronomy 4 the teaching of God’s

revelation was to provoke certain sorts of worship and inhibit other sorts. To confront people with the true God and the terms of his covenant is to provoke a response to him. If we are truly confronting people (including children) with God and his covenant by means of pictures then how can those pictures not elicit acts of worship?<sup>53</sup> As I concluded from Deuteronomy 4 in the previous section, pedagogy and worship are inseparable. Murray is certainly correct to write: “A picture of Christ, if it serves any useful purpose, must evoke some thought or feeling respecting him and, in view of what he is, this thought or feeling will be worshipful. We cannot avoid making the picture a medium of worship” (Murray, “Pictures of Christ,” 66).

This point leads to a second response. Defenders of pictures of Christ object to traditional arguments that their position is inherently Nestorian (insofar as pictures are unable to communicate Jesus’ deity and hence they separate his human and divine natures). I suggested above that if the traditional argument is understood in an ontological sense it is not very effective. Scripture indicates that there was nothing distinctive about Jesus’ outward appearance. No one could have picked him out of a police lineup as the eternal Son of God. He could have been photographed or drawn and the product would have naturally and necessarily portrayed ordinary human features. But if this argument is presented in a practical/ethical sense—that is, in a biblical covenantal framework—it is a compelling implication of the second commandment. The more that defenders of pictures of Jesus emphasize that pedagogical pictures represent only his human nature and that this is fine, the more uneasy readers should feel. We must remember that Jesus’ human nature *reveals the divine*, and that the purpose of teaching about Jesus’ human nature and human action is to present God himself to the learners. Defenders of pictures insist that their pedagogical tools present Jesus’ human nature and this *alone*, and they must warn their students that they should not behold the divine in the Jesus they see. Could this possibly be the way that the church should teach about Christ? Our pedagogy about Christ is *supposed* to evoke faith and worship in him. Word and sacraments do this, by divine appointment. Visual representation of Christ’s human nature alone cannot and should not do this. And if they cannot do this, they are terrible teaching tools.

My third response is to the claim that our lack of

53. And if they do elicit acts of worship, they seem thereby to violate Meyers’ own concern: “Anytime an image or picture of anything is used as a *medium* through which to *communicate with* or *worship* God, such an image becomes a graven image and falls under the prohibition of the second commandment.” See “Vere Homo,” 2.



knowledge about Jesus' human appearance is no reason not to make pictures of him. Defenders of pictures have made much of this point, at times strongly critiquing traditionalists for naivete about art. Artistic representation always involves the artist's imagination, they say, and hence the concern about authenticity and accuracy in portraying Christ is misplaced. We must beware of false starts on this issue. Clearly it is true that art entails imagination. An artist could paint a picture of me in all sorts of different ways that I would regard as authentic representations of my appearance. Of course, there are limits. If an artist claimed to draw me and the picture looked like Tiger Woods or Margaret Thatcher, the fact that all three of us have ordinary human features such as two eyes, ears, and arms would not stop me from judging it a misrepresentation. So if a person knew what Jesus looked like he could certainly draw a picture of him in many different ways that could be considered authentic or true. But if the artist did not know what Jesus looked like, then simply portraying something with ordinary human features would not be an accurate portrayal of Jesus. And accuracy really is important. Jesus' human appearance is divine revelation, and those who teach divine revelation have an obligation to communicate all that God reveals and no more than God reveals. Thus again, if the purpose of pictures of Jesus is pedagogical, then the absence of accuracy is a crucial problem.

In saying that *portraits* of Jesus are not acceptable, but only pictures set in biblical historical contexts, defenders of pictures essentially admit the basic truth of the traditional argument. But what about the latter sort of picture? As defenders of pictures note, artists portray all kinds of historical events involving people whose appearances are unknown and whose portraits they do not claim to produce, and no one dismisses such pictures as false. A person could draw David facing Goliath, reflecting truths about the event that are known from Scripture and avoiding things that are obviously untrue (e.g., portraying David as taller than Goliath or wearing a business suit), and there is no reason to find this objectionable per se. But again, Jesus is not just any historical figure. Unlike everybody else, Jesus himself is supernatural revelation. If the purpose of historical portrayals of Christ is pedagogical, then such portrayals must teach people about Jesus himself. And, as discussed above, whenever we communicate God's special revelation to his people we have the highest obligation to convey nothing more and nothing less than that revelation demands. An artist's imaginative reconstruction of Jesus in an historical event is not the stuff of pedagogical precision.

The fourth point of response concerns the serious

charge that lack of pictures of Jesus communicates an implicit Docetism. In particular, what will our children think about Jesus' supposed manhood if he is always absent in their story-books when many other biblical characters are portrayed? The first response to this is simply to remind readers of what I observed above. Defenders of pictures of Christ offer no concrete evidence for their claim that lack of pictures of Jesus instills Docetic proclivities. I did my own little research and asked my eleven year old son, who has not been trained through pictures of Christ, some basic questions about the theology of the incarnation. I was grateful to find that his answers were perfectly orthodox, and he expressed puzzlement at the suggestion that he might think that Jesus was an ethereal spirit-person because his church and parents never show him pictures of Jesus. How could this possibly be? It appears as though the word of God—preached to him, confirmed to him through the sacraments, and reinforced through private and family Bible-reading and catechetical training—has been sufficient. Amazing in the eyes of the world, perhaps, but should it be surprising to those who profess that the “word of God is living and active” (Hebrews 4:12)? If pedagogy is the driving force behind having pictures of Jesus, as their defenders suggest, then they really need not worry. The word of God, ministered diligently and faithfully, will do its work and keep his people from Docetism.

The final point of response concerns the mental images issue. Is it inevitable that we form mental images of Jesus when we hear stories about him and does this make it acceptable (and is the extremism of WLC 109 thereby exposed)? Whether such mental images are inevitable I really do not know with certainty. Even the defenders of pictures of Jesus, though at times sounding confident about the matter, do not seem to know for sure either, since some claim that all people form mental images naturally and others claim only that most people do so. I noted above that they offer no biblical arguments or psychological studies to establish their varying claims. Speaking personally, I regularly read, teach, and preach about events of Jesus' earthly ministry, and while I cannot say that I never form mental images of these events, I am not particularly conscious of their intrusion into my thoughts. I suppose that I could sit around and contemplate whether I am constitutionally capable of blocking mental images of Jesus when reading the Gospels, but isn't the important question not *whether* I form mental images but *what I do with them* if I form them. If an image of Christ hanging on the cross or sleeping in a manger enters my mind, should I revel in it and cultivate it or should I strive to put it out

of my mind and focus my thoughts elsewhere? It may be similar to ask whether a man whose mind forms an image of a beautiful woman who is not his wife should revel in it and cultivate it or strive to put it out of mind and focus his thoughts elsewhere. Should he cultivate it (and perhaps even draw a picture of it), out of fear that otherwise he will become a Gnostic who denies that God has created beautiful women? Of course the Lord settled that question in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:28). In regard to a mental image of Christ, we may ask what the purpose of cultivating such an image would be. If we would cultivate it as an aid to worship (perhaps it would help us to keep our concentration during prayer), then the answer seems clear: we should not use created products of our own imagination to mediate our worship of God. If we would cultivate it as something other than an aid to worship—then what would be the point? What sort of relationship with Jesus could be wholesome that did not lead to worship? As the attempt to separate pedagogy about Christ from worship is troublesome, so is any attempt to separate our thoughts about Christ from worship. To think of Christ is to believe and adore. An imaginative mental image of him that intervenes should not be fostered.

#### CONCLUSION

Confessional Reformed Christianity has traditionally shunned the creation and use of pictures of Jesus, including mental images. The practice of many Reformed Christians in recent years has tolerated and participated in the use of such pictures, however, often without a sense that something might be wrong, and a number of writers and speakers from within the Reformed community have offered a defense of their use, for pedagogical purposes if not for purposes of worship. Having summarized traditional arguments against such pictures and contemporary arguments in support of them, I have concluded that the traditional position is correct and its supporting arguments still essentially sound. The divine revelation of Christ and his gospel is to be received with faith and worship and not added to or subtracted from by our own imagination, and is to be taught to the next generation with fidelity, and with confidence in the means that God has provided for doing so: word and sacrament. Instead of seeking out arguments to defend the easy route of fitting in with mainstream Christian culture, Reformed ministers do much better to buoy their flocks' confidence in the means of grace and to drive them to Christ faithfully week after week through the keys of the kingdom. ■

#### In Brief: The Intent of Larger Catechism 109 Regarding Pictures of Christ's Humanity

In the preceding article, Professor David VanDrunen notes that Kenneth Gentry contends that Westminster Larger Catechism 109 "technically does not prohibit pictures of Jesus (since such pictures represent only his human nature and do not represent God)..." (p. 220). Gentry's words were "An accurate reading of the Larger Catechism 109 will show I believe that it's technically correct—although it may not have been intended to do this—I believe that it is technically correct and a proper interpretation of it will lead to a different conclusion" [i.e. that Pictures of Christ's body are not proscribed] "than some have held."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Gentry's opinion of what the catechism's words may technically allow cannot withstand the testimony of history; it is very clear what the Westminster Assembly intended. Personal constructions of "an accurate reading" must give way to original intent and the intent of the confessing churches when it comes to interpreting historic doctrinal statements.<sup>2</sup>

Before adducing some facts, it should be noted that Larger Catechism 109 fits with the doctrine of the Westminster Standards as a whole in proscribing pictures of Christ's humanity. With the incarnation, "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person" (Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2), so that one may not depict the human nature exclusive of the divine nature and claim it is a representation of the *person* of Christ; and Westminster LC 40 richly indicates why no work that is proper to Christ's human nature should be viewed in isolation from the whole person. "Q. Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God and man in one person? A. It was requisite that the Mediator, who was to reconcile God and man, should himself be both God and man, and this in one person, that the proper works of each nature might be accepted of God for us, and relied on by us, as the works of the whole person."<sup>3</sup>

Facts of the period support this long held and almost unquestioned interpretation of LC 109, that it proscribes representations of Christ in toto. At his 1644 trial, according to Julie Spraggon, the Puritan archenemy William Laud, whose

1. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "Christmas and the Second Commandment," Sermon 1 of *Christmas and Christ*, 34:24–34:43.

2. "The concept of *animus imponentis* finds further significance in that the church is not only the authoritative interpreter of its constitution but that it imposes on its members the oaths and vows that they take to maintain and defend that constitution. *Animus imponentis* means, in this respect, that when an officer in the church subscribes to the constitution of the church, he does so with the explicit understanding that the valid intention as to its meaning is that of the church as a whole and not merely his own private opinion." *Minutes of the Seventy-First General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, cited in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, 4.208.

3. The author credits Matthew Winzer for noting to the author the internal consistency of the Standards on this subject.

reintroduction of ceremony and imagery to English churches was largely responsible for the Puritan uprising and the subsequent reforms, expressed the view that “representations of Christ who had been called the ‘express Image of his Father’ were allowed.” Spraggon notes, “He qualified this, adding, ‘I do not mean to say that the Picture of Christ as God the son may be made; for the Deity cannot be portrayed or pictured, though the Humanity may’”<sup>4</sup> The House of Commons made it clear in response that the Homilies of the English Church were against Laud’s view.<sup>5</sup> The *Homily against the Peril of Idolatry* was added to the authorized homilies in 1563, and calls representations of Christ lying images, and unlawful.<sup>6</sup>

The homily formally predates Puritanism; Larger Catechism 109 itself was crafted during the apex of the Puritan Iconoclasm period of the 1640s. The iconoclastic orders by Parliament to remove or destroy representations of any of the three persons of the Trinity were understood to include pictures of Christ’s humanity.<sup>7</sup> Such an order from the Parliament was issued in September 1641. Interestingly, an unauthorized draft was published on September 1, wording the order about images: “That all Pictures, and Images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the like, in Churches, Chappels, or Chancels, should bee taken away.”<sup>8</sup> The version released formally by the Parliament omits

Christ but more generally addresses images of any Person of the Trinity. “That all Crucifixes, Scandalous Pictures of any One or more Persons of the Trinity, and all Images of the Virgin Mary, shall be taken away and abolished. . . .”<sup>9</sup> The unauthorized draft was correct about the intent. Of the destructions carried out by William Dowsing recorded in his journal, the majority of images chosen for destruction were “pictures of Christ or crucifixes” (Spraggon, 126). And one of the notable results of Parliament’s iconoclasm was the destruction in March 1643 of Rubens’s *Crucifixion*, which was torn into bits and thrown in the Thames.<sup>10</sup>

The subject of picturing Christ’s “humanity” was actually addressed in a notable way before Parliament ventured to issue their iconoclastic orders. The House of Commons overruled a censor’s refusal to publish John Vicars’ *The Sinfulness and Unlawfulness of making or having the Picture of Christ’s Humanity*. It was published “with Authority” on February 20, 1641. Vicars held that “the simple and mere making and having of the picture of Christ, even for civil or morall uses, to be utterly unlawfull, and so absolutely sinful,” and he cited works such as the Homily on Idolatry and the long popular and often reprinted exposition of the ten commandments by Dod and Cleaver, as well as a 1639 work by Edmund Gurney vindicating the second commandment.<sup>11</sup>

As far as the Westminster divines themselves and pictures of Christ, prior to the Assembly in April, 1643, a report by four London ministers (who would later serve the Assembly) was ordered by the city, and appears to have resulted in widening the iconoclastic reforms beyond places of worship to public places. The four were William Gouge, Thomas Case, Lazarus Seamen and Edmund Calamy (whose name did not appear on the final report). Their task was to view the premises of the Guildhall (i.e. the London town hall) and report on monuments of idolatry. The report noted that among the monuments of idolatry found were depictions of the persons of the Trinity, and of Christ and the Virgin Mary in several forms (Spraggon, 157–158).

During the Westminster Assembly, Parliament requested the divines in 1645 to advise on what scandalous sins should bar one from the Lord’s supper. Accordingly, in June, the Assembly discussed at one point “Pictures of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Only a month later Parliament dealt with the pictures at York House. The Parliament ordered “That all such Pictures there, as have the Representation of the Second Person in Trinity upon them, shall be forthwith burnt.”<sup>13</sup> In October 1645, Parliament published their list of sins after getting input from the Assembly. The phrase “Pictures of Christ” did not show up in the final list; rather they used the same broader language as their previous ordinances which, as shown, were understood to include these. Parliament noted as scandalous “all that shall make any Images of the Trinity, or of any Person thereof.”<sup>14</sup>

*Continued on Page 323.*

4. Julie Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, U.K.: The Boydell Press, 2003) 23–24.

5. John Rushworth, “Historical Collections: 1634,” *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 2: 1629–38* (1721), pp. 245–286. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=74899> Date accessed: 15 July 2009.

6. *Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory. New edition* (London: Printed for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1839) 235ff.

7. Spraggon, throughout; see author’s Index at “Christ, Images of.”

8. *The Orders from the House of Commons for the Abolishing of Superstition, and Innovation, in the Regulating of Church Affaires. 1. Concerning the Communion Table. 2. Concerning the Sabbath day. 3. Concerning Images. September, 1, 1641* (London: B. Alsop, 1641) 4.

9. “House of Commons Journal Volume 2: 01 September 1641,” *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 2: 1640–1643* (1802) 278–280. See British History Online. House of Commons Journal entries accessed July 15, 2009. Hereafter CJ.

10. Albert J. Loomie, “The Destruction of Rubens’s *Crucifixion* in the Queen’s Chapel, Somerset House,” *The Burlington Magazine* 140.1147 (Oct., 1998) 680–682.

11. Spraggon, 34. John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Plain and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (1606). Edmund Gurnay, *Toward the Vindication of the Second Commandment* ([Cambridge]: Printed by Thomas Buck, one of the printers to the University of Cambridge, 1639).

12. Alexander F. Mitchell, and John Struthers, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1874) 101.

13. “House of Commons Journal Volume 4: 23 July 1645,” *CJ volume 4: 1644–1646* (1802) 215–216.

14. “House of Commons Journal Volume 4: 15 October 1645,” *CJ volume 4: 1644–1646* (1802) 308–310; emphasis added.

# The Sabbath Day and Recreations on the Sabbath

## An Examination of the Sabbath and the Biblical Basis for the “No Recreation” Clause in Westminster Confession of Faith 21.8 and Westminster Larger Catechism 117

By Lane Keister

### PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION

Wherein the wickednesse of this exceedeth, in that men commonly no day in the weeke followe so muche their own wayes, and delightes of their owne hart, as on that day, which is appointed to learne them how to cease from their owne wayes, workes, and delightes. For a great number (& those not the worst of all,) take that day to be ordeined only for ease of their bodie & to be a day of recreation after their trauels & labours that haue been the sixe dayes before, and vse it accordingly: whereas, the Lorde hath appointed it to the exercise of word and prayer, that beeing vnburdened of their worldly affaires, they mighte with free harts and mindes attend vpon the word, prayer, and meditation.... Thus the right vse and end of the Sabbaothe is cleane altered, and not that only, but chaunged into a practice moſte contrarie to the institution thereof. For beeing appointed to bee the market day of the soule, to make provision for the dayes following.<sup>1</sup>

Being on the Candidates and Credentials Committee of my Presbytery means that I look often at differences that candidates have with the standards of the church. We have even seen a few candidates who deny that the Lord’s Day is the Christian Sabbath at all. These, fortunately, are few. More commonly, however, the most often taken exception is to the “no recreation” clause in Westminster Confession of Faith 21.8 and Westminster Larger Catechism 117.<sup>2</sup> As an added bonus, I am usually treated to a description of “throwing a football” around on the Sabbath. Sometimes I wonder if it isn’t really that they want to *watch* football on the Sabbath! At any rate, I usually press them on their understanding of Isaiah 58:13–14 which is the biblical basis for the Puritan understanding of “no recreation” on the Sabbath day. If any answer is given, it is usually that the word

“pleasure” refers to business rather than to recreation. This article will attempt to provide a relatively cursory glance at the biblical evidence for the Puritan position on the Sabbath in general, and also that the Puritan understanding of “no recreation on the Sabbath” is in fact the biblical understanding of the Sabbath Day.<sup>3</sup> To do this, we must first examine the redemptive-historical unfolding of the Sabbath Day to show that the moral, unchanging, creational principle is that of one day in seven (not the Saturday Sabbath) to rest from all normal weekly activities (except works of necessity and mercy) so that we can worship God, which was in the Old Testament appointed by God to be the seventh day, and in the New Testament the eighth or first day.

THE AUTHOR: Lane Keister is a PCA pastor laboring out of bounds serving RCA and CRC churches in rural North Dakota. Rev. Keister’s sermons, book reviews, and critiques of the Federal Vision appear on his blog, Green Baggins, <http://greenbaggins.wordpress.com>.

1. John Knewstubb, *Lectures upon the twentieth chapter of Exodus* (1577) 72–73. Quoted in James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532–1700* (1983; Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2001) 29.

2. Hereafter WCF and WLC. WCF 21.8 says, “This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments, *and recreations*, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy” (emphasis added). WLC 117 asks “How is the sabbath or the Lord’s day to be sanctified?” The answer is that “The Sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments *and recreations* as are on other days lawfull...” (emphasis added).

3. The Puritan view may be summarized by the following points: 1. the Sabbath is a creation ordinance; 2. Saturday-Sabbath is not commanded in the Decalogue; 3. The Lord’s Day is the New Testament Sabbath; 4. the Lord’s Day is by God’s positive command on Sunday; 5. The Lord’s Day should be passed in suspension of recreations and rest from normal labor. See the excellent chart in Dennison, 177.



This must be done in order to show that Isaiah 58:13–14 applies not only to the Old Testament version of Saturday Sabbath, but also to the New Testament version of Sunday Sabbath. Then, finally, we will examine the exegesis of Isaiah 58:13–14 (the key text in the debate concerning recreations) in order to show that the Puritan understanding of the Sabbath is the best exegesis of the passage.

# I. OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT

One of the main issues involved in the discussion of Sabbath worship versus Sunday worship is the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament (hereafter abbreviated as OT and NT, respectively). How does the NT interpret the OT? Are there discontinuities between the testaments? If so, where do the lines fall? How do we know what continues and what does not? This is a huge question that rockets around the reformed world in the form of the issue of theonomy, a term that comes from *theos* (God) and *nomos* (law), which is an interpretation that sees only continuity between the testaments, such that we as a secular (!) nation ought to be going back to observe theocratic (!) Israel's laws; and the issue of dispensationalism, which sees almost complete discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. These represent the opposite poles on the question of continuity and discontinuity.

So exactly how does the NT interpret the OT? To sum it all up in one sentence: the OT is about Jesus Christ. Two passages are absolutely essential to this understanding of the OT. The first comes in Luke 24, after Jesus' resurrection when He is on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples. The two disciples are confused about what happened to Jesus; they do not recognize Him. Verse 21 says it all, "We had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel." This implies clearly that they thought that Jesus' death precluded Him from being able to redeem Israel. So the crucifixion/resurrection is a huge puzzle to them. Jesus then says (vv. 25–26), "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Notice the phrase here "all that the prophets have spoken." What

does this mean? Well, Jesus clarifies that in the very next verse. "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them *in all the Scriptures* the things concerning Himself" (emphasis added). If we are left in any doubt as to how Jesus interpreted the OT, here let us doubt no longer: Jesus thought that the entire OT was about His death and resurrection. Now, in verse 27, there is some question as to whether Jesus refers to *some* things in the Scriptures concerning himself, or that the *entire* Scriptures refer to Him. It must be the latter, because of verse 32, where the disciples (their eyes now open) ask this poignant question, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us *the Scriptures*?" and verse 45, where Jesus opened their minds to understand *the Scriptures*. This emphasized phrase means the entirety of the OT.<sup>4</sup> In fact, there is no place where this phrase is used in the entire Bible, where it does not refer to the entire OT (with the possible exception of Daniel 9:2, since the OT was not a closed canon at that time). This passage in Luke 24 clearly indicates that Jesus interpreted the *entire* OT to be about Himself. This would include the idea that the Sabbath is fulfilled in his death and resurrection. *All* the Scriptures (including the passages about the Sabbath) point to Jesus' death and resurrection (see especially 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). More on this later (especially about issues of what continues from the Old Testament into the New and what does not).

The second passage in this regard that is important is John 5:30ff. Jesus is talking about witnesses to Himself. In verse 39, he accuses the Jews of searching the Scriptures because the Jews want eternal life, and think that they can find it in the Scriptures. The irony is that they are right, if only they would see it! The Scriptures bear witness about Jesus, who *is* the light. Even more pointedly, in verse 46, Jesus says that Moses, on whom the Pharisees set their hope, wrote about Jesus. That means that when Moses was writing *about the Sabbath*, he was writing about Jesus: when Moses was writing *about creation*, he was writing about Jesus, and when Moses wrote *about Israel's redemption from Egypt*, he was writing about Jesus. Connecting this passage with the Luke 24 passage (the Reformation said that Scripture interprets Scripture), we can see that when the OT penmen write about Jesus, they are writing about his death and resurrection. So, when Moses wrote about the Sabbath, he was writing about Jesus' death and resurrection. When Moses was writing about creation, he was writing about Jesus' death and resurrection. And, when he was writing about redemption from Egypt, he was writing about Jesus' death and resurrection. *The Sabbath*

4. See also such passages as Matthew 21:42, 22:49, 26:54, etc. An important qualification must be inserted here. It is not my position that every detail of every passage is a type of Christ. Rather, every passage of the OT forms part of the organic unfolding story that climaxes in the person and work of Jesus Christ. So it is not an atomistic typology, but rather a connected whole that points to Christ, although there certainly are many details that do point to Christ.

is about Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the inescapable conclusion to which Luke 24 and John 5 lead.

## II. OLD TESTAMENT MEANING OF THE SABBATH

There are three main passages that tell us the significance of the Sabbath: Genesis 2:1–3, Exodus 20:8–11, and Deuteronomy 5:12–15.

### A. Genesis 2:1–3

This passage is well-known to everyone in the discussion. The Seventh-Day Adventists (who argue that we should still observe Saturday Sabbath) rightly note that this passage proves that the Sabbath was not just for Israel. The Sabbath is a creation ordinance. This has been hotly contested throughout the history of discussion on the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup>

The passage is remarkable when compared to the first chapter of Genesis. The first chapter (and 2:1–3) is extremely formulaic. That is, there are repeated formulas that occur over and over (“And God said,” “and it was so,” “there was morning and evening,” “God saw that it was good”). What is remarkable in 2:1–3 is that the very structure of morning and evening does *not* occur with the Sabbath. The text does not say that “there was evening, and there was morning, the seventh day.” There is something special about the seventh day. Now, the lack of the evening/morning formula has been taken in different ways by interpreters. Some say that the Sabbath was therefore meant to be seen as eternal (not being bound by the usual strictures of beginning and ending). Some say that it merely points out that this day was the end of the cycle of the week. In any case, the lack of the evening/morning formula must mean something. Moses has been much too careful with his words in the first chapter for us to think that he merely forgot to add the morning/evening formula. He intended to say something by the omission. I believe that He intended to say that the Sabbath pattern was started here for man, but that God entered into an eternal rest. That he intended this to be the rationale for man's Sabbath observance is clear from Exodus 20:8–11. (More on this passage later.) That Moses intended to indicate an eternal Sabbath is clear from two other passages that help us to understand Genesis 2.

### 1. John 5:16–17

Here the Jews are persecuting Jesus because He was healing on the Sabbath (why this fact added to Jesus'

example of Saturday worship before His death and resurrection does not hurt the Sunday Sabbath position will be explained later). Jesus' answer makes no sense unless God is in an eternal Sabbath. Jesus was addressing here an age-old problem that the rabbis had to deal with: if God rested on the seventh day, how come the world doesn't fall apart when He is resting?<sup>6</sup> They, of course, recognized that God preserved the world continuously, and that without that preservation, the world would immediately cease to exist. So Jesus answers them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” Admittedly, this could be understood to say that every time the Sabbath rolls around, God is still at work preserving the world. And yet, as a “work of necessity” (read here “grace”), God continues to “work” during this whole time that He enjoys the completion of the creation. Jesus then says that His own rest is of a piece with God's rest, just as His work is of a piece with God's work. The language literally means “continuously working.” There is no stop to it.

### 2. Hebrews 3:7–4:13

In this extended discourse on the meaning of the Sabbath, Hebrews says that there is yet a Sabbath rest for the people of God. That means that the older Sabbath did not exhaust the meaning of the Sabbath. The point I wish to make here stems from 4:4–5. Paul says that God entered His rest, and then that the Israelites shall not enter *that same* rest. In other words, the rest of God entered into at creation is the *same* rest He calls the Israelites to enter. Obviously, if they could enter such a rest, that rest must be eternal, or else they would only be able to enter it one day in seven. Just prior to these two verses, we find confirmation of this interpretation: Hebrews links the *finished* work of creation with the Sabbath of God (4:3). The finished work of creation means Sabbath for God. Since the creation continues to be finished, God continues in His rest.<sup>7</sup>

5. The very best historical treatment of the Puritan view of the Sabbath in conjunction with their argumentation against the Prelatical view and against the Anabaptist view is undoubtedly the Dennison book mentioned above. It is good to see that Reformation Heritage Books has made this work available again in a recent reprinting. I should also note that I am indebted throughout to Joey Pipa's treatment of the subject (though in more formative ways, and especially in practical ways). See Joseph Pipa, Jr., *The Lord's Day* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Scotland, reprinted 2008).

6. See Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) 185.

7. The best treatment of this passage remains Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.'s article, “A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God,” in *Pressing*

These two passages together confirm that we are to understand God as entering into a permanent rest in Gen 2:1–3. Several implications follow from this: Adam would have entered into that rest if he had remained obedient. This was the carrot held out to Adam. God said to him, “Obey me and live.” This would mean eternal life with God.<sup>8</sup> Since God was in an eternal Sabbath rest, then Adam would have entered that Sabbath rest. Adam failed to achieve this entrance into God’s rest. God immediately judged the world as a result. Adam was cursed in this very area: instead of getting rest, he would have to work hard, and get no rest. No longer would work be enjoyable, but would rather become a tiresome burden. Later on in redemptive history, God created the people Israel for Himself. This people became enslaved to Egypt. They had no rest. They were in a land that the Bible characterizes as the land of death. They were dead. God resurrected them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and brought them out into the wilderness (typological to what the church is today). The wilderness is where they failed to reach their Sabbath rest (the rest was the land of Canaan, as Hebrews 4:8–9 explicitly says). So no one, not even the OT messiah (Joshua, whose name is the Hebrew form of the Greek “Jesus”) was able to bring God’s people into that eternal rest of God (Hebrews 4:8–9). However, as the point of Hebrews as a whole is that Jesus is our great high priest (8:1), the point of Hebrews 3–4 is that Jesus, the greater Joshua, entered into the rest of God, enabling His people to do the same. This is confirmed by the context: “Since then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” (4:14). He says this because Jesus having entered that rest means that we can now enter that rest (see 4:11, where Hebrews tells us to strive to enter that rest: he would only say that if it were now possible to enter that rest). Jesus *has* entered into

that rest as the new Adam, Jesus *has* passed through the heavens (meaning that he has entered heaven, and *therefore*, into God’s rest).

From this it needs to be asked: *when* did Jesus enter into that rest, enabling His people to follow? The answer must be two-fold: 1. the weekly Sabbath is *not* when he entered that rest: nothing of such earth-shattering importance is ever mentioned about Jesus happening on the Sabbath; 2. the only possible times as to when he could have entered that rest are the resurrection and the ascension. Since the ascension would not have been possible without the resurrection, and since the resurrection is the ultimate victory over sin and death (sin and death are antitypological to Israel’s “work” in Egypt), and since resurrection is therefore the parallel to the Exodus, we must date Jesus’ entry into that rest by the resurrection.

One more issue remains in the interpretation of Hebrews 3–4, and that is the issue of eschatology. Does Jesus give us complete access to this rest, thus making our entrance into the rest fully eschatological when we come to faith? Or is our current entrance into that rest more of an inaugurated eschatology? If there still remains a Sabbath rest for God’s people, then some aspect of that Sabbath is still to come. This is why there is still a weekly celebration of the Sabbath today. It commemorates the “not yet” aspect of our Sabbath rest. To say that there is no Sabbath rest today is to have an over-realized eschatology. None of this should downplay the “already” aspect that is genuinely there in the text. The Sabbath has an “already, not yet” structure to it, as does the entire New Testament.

To conclude this section about the OT meaning of the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1–3: it points to Jesus’ acquiring of the Sabbath rest for the people of God. Jesus acquired it on Sunday, specifically, on Easter Sunday. That is why we should worship on Sunday. Jesus’ death and resurrection is nothing short of a new creation and new redemption.

#### B. Exodus 20:8–11

This passage interprets Genesis 2 for us. How or whether it does so is disputed. For instance, a recent treatment of this passage argues that the Sabbath day in the fourth commandment is not an explication of Genesis 2:1–3.<sup>9</sup> He says, “Genesis 2 does not mention the word ‘Sabbath.’ It speaks about the ‘seventh day.’ Unless the reader equates ‘seventh day’ and ‘Sabbath,’ there is no reference to the Sabbath here. Genesis 2 does not speak about a religious, cultic feast day or any institution at all” (Dressler, 28). He explains more fully:

*Toward The Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, edited by Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986) 33–51. He effectively dismantles the arguments of Andrew Lincoln’s article, “Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *From Sabbath To Lord’s Day*, edited by D.A. Carson (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1982) 197–220. Gaffin has expanded somewhat his argument in the equally excellent article in *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Volume One*, edited by Ligon Duncan, III (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003) 123–144.

8. For an excellent discussion of the Sabbatical principle as the principle of the covenant of works, see Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (1948; Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 2000) 139–140.

9. Harold Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, pp. 21–41.

We interpret the statement in verse 11b as an explanation of God's blessing activity in connection with the new institution of the Sabbath on the analogy of God's blessing activity with regard to the seventh day at creation (Dressler, 38 fn43).

Now, I am not arguing, as the Seventh Day Adventists do, that the aspect of Sabbath given at creation was the Saturday, or seventh-day Sabbath. Rather, I argue that the principle of one day in seven as rest in worship was given at creation. So, on one level, I agree with Dressler: the creation ordinance was not equal to Saturday Sabbath. Where I disagree with Dressler is that I affirm that the creation ordinance was equal to the Sabbath principle. The Puritan view is that the principle of one day in seven is what God inaugurated at creation, and that the Sabbath occurring on the seventh day was established by an *additional* command in the OT. This is a command that is not part of the moral law, but is rather a temporary positive injunction that can easily be changed in the NT to Sunday via the resurrection of Christ.

This can be shown from the passage. On the one hand, the Fourth Commandment, as given in Exodus, explicitly links the seventh day to the Sabbath and to God's creational pattern. Verse 11 connects the seventh with the Sabbath by means of the causal particle *כִּי-לָכֵן*, which means "therefore."<sup>10</sup> That the Israelites will rest on the seventh day is based on God's resting on the seventh day, which is now called the Sabbath. On the other hand, this does not make the seventh day as Sabbath part of the moral law, which was given at creation. The archetypal pattern is that of God working six days and resting one. The Israelites are to copy that, specifically making the seventh day the one of rest. But the only principle that is in common between Genesis 2 and Exodus 20 is that of one day in seven rest. We come to this conclusion because, in Genesis 2, the word "seventh" does not mean Saturday, but rather the seventh in a sequence of six other days (Genesis 1). We do not know, in other words, that God rested on Saturday. We know that God rested on the seventh-day-after-six-work-days.

The reason for the Sabbath observance in the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments is what we may call the "creation reason." The Israelites must keep the Sabbath, because God rested on the seventh day at creation. Now, from what I wrote above on Genesis 2:1–3, it follows that we must interpret this "creation reason" in the light of Jesus acquiring the ultimate, final Sabbath rest in his resurrection.

One further point must be noticed here: did Jesus, in

fact, usher in a new creation? Surely, nothing short of *new* creation and *new* redemption would be sufficient to change the day of an observance that got started because of the *old* creation and the *old* redemption. To answer this question, we will look at one particular new creation passage (though there are many). 2 Corinthians 5:17 says: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Most translations interpret the first part of the verse something like what is here. The Greek is actually a little more loosely connected. What I mean is that the Greek does not actually say, "*He* is a new creation." The Greek actually just says, "new creation" (*καὶνὴ κτίσις*). The translation could then be something like this, "If anyone is in Christ, then there is a new creation." The existence of anyone *in Christ* then proves that there is such a thing as the new creation. In fact, the new creation is of such an order as to supersede (in some way) the old. For that is what the second part of the verse says ("the old things have passed away; look, all things have become new").

One other passage (leading to yet one more) must be mentioned here by way of confirmation. What I am trying to say here is that Jesus ushered in a new creation; that creation had its beginning on Sunday; therefore, worship changed from Saturday Sabbath to Sunday Sabbath when that new creation was ushered in. The other passage I wish to discuss here is 1 Corinthians 15. Paul is answering the Corinthians' questions about the resurrection. Paul is talking about people that die, and their bodies go into the ground. What happens to those bodies? They are like seeds (vv. 36–37): they cannot produce a crop unless the seed dies. So also with the body. It cannot be raised in power, unless the body dies. Let us follow carefully his line of reasoning. First, he starts by contrasting the post-Fall body with the resurrection body. This is where the seed analogy comes in. What happens to believers is that their body dies, and their soul goes to be with the Lord, and their body rests until the last day, when it is resurrected in glory. This contrast comes to a climax in verse 44a: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. Note carefully that Paul uses "natural body" in the first part of this verse to refer to the post-Fall body of a believer that dies. But there is a shift that occurs in the second part of verse 44. The question might come up, "How do I *know* that there is a resurrection body?" Paul thinks of

10. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990; 1997) 11.3.2, 221. See also the Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon (BDB), 485.



this question and answers it. “If there is a natural body, then there has to be a spiritual body.” But notice carefully here in the second part of verse 44 that Paul uses the word “natural body” to refer to a *pre-Fall* body. How do we know this? Because Paul then quotes Genesis 2:7 about Adam as he was given life *before the Fall*. The NIV has very astutely put a paragraph break between the first part of vs. 44 and the second part of verse 44.<sup>11</sup> In what immediately follows, Paul compares Adam with Christ: God breathed into Adam (the word “breathed” is the same word as “spirit”) the breath of life, and he became a living soul; the last Adam (became) a life-giving spirit. The reason that there is a resurrection body is that there was a pre-Fall perfect body. In other words, the *first* body (Adam’s sinless, but changeable body) points inevitably to the last body (the body of Christ in glory). The question now is, what does Paul mean by the word “spirit?” I think it ought to be capitalized: Paul means that Jesus Christ became life-giving Spirit.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Jesus was resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, such that he became life-giving Spirit. God rewarded Jesus’ obedience by giving Him the Holy Spirit, which Jesus, in turn, gave the church on the day of Pentecost (also a Sunday, I might add!). How do we know that this is the correct interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15? Because of Romans 1.

Romans 1:1–6 says that the Gospel that God promised beforehand through the prophets was fulfilled in the death and resurrection *by the Holy Spirit* of Jesus from the dead. Verse 4 says that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus was declared (or proclaimed) with power to be the Son of God *by His resurrection from the dead*. This confirms that Jesus became life-giving Spirit, as 1 Corinthians 15 says. Just as the Holy Spirit hovered over the

deep in Genesis 1:2, so also the Holy Spirit “hovered” over Jesus Christ, giving Him life when He was in the grave. This is new creation. Remember, all of this part of the argument is to prove that Jesus ushered in a new creation. From 1 Corinthians 15 and from Romans 1 we learn that this new creation (or new aeon, as the NT also calls it) is the age of the Holy Spirit.

To summarize our reflections on Exodus 20:8–11: the new creation displaces the old (2 Corinthians 5:17), because the Holy Spirit ushered in the new creation (1 Corinthians 15) at the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 1). This proves that new creation started at Jesus’ resurrection. This is inescapable from the pages of the NT. Thus, the purpose of the fourth commandment is fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One small digression needs indulging here. What do I mean by the word “fulfill?” Does it mean fulfill so as to bring to an end, such that the fourth commandment no longer has any meaning (such as the Sabbath-worship people would charge)? It should be plain from the argument so far, that far from undermining its authority, Scripture rather increases the meaning of the Sabbath for us today. “Fulfilled” means that obeying Sabbath rest ultimately means believing in Christ, and rejoicing in His great salvation, which He accomplished on Sunday. This means that the force of the Fourth Commandment carries over to the Christian Sunday. We can now truly enter into God’s rest. We can paraphrase the Fourth Commandment’s NT meaning this way: “Remember Sunday, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the Sunday is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in thirty-three years Jesus prepared the new creation, and rested the first day of the new era. Therefore, Jesus blessed Sunday, and made it holy.”<sup>13</sup>

### C. Deuteronomy 5:12–15

This passage adds to Exodus 20 (the “creation reason”) what we may call the “redemption reason” for keeping the Sabbath. It is because God redeemed Israel out of Egypt (a land only associated with work-death) that Israel should now remember that great salvation *by* keeping the Sabbath. For now they did not have to work on the Sabbath. They had regular rest from their labors. As Paul says in Hebrews, the promised land was not the ultimate rest, though it pointed to the ultimate rest. We may see the parallels between Israel and the church:

11. For these insights on 1 Corinthians 15, I am entirely indebted to Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. in his class notes on Acts and Paul. The same argument is also found in Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption*, second edition (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1987) 78–92.

12. This should be understood in terms of economic equivalence of their work as due to Christ’s resurrection and ascension, not in terms of a conflation of the ontological persons of the Trinity, which would be heresy.

13. The main lines of argument here regarding creation and new creation are present in the seminal work of Jonathan Edwards, “The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath,” found in *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733*, edited by Mark Valeri (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 217–250. In the two-volume Banner of Truth set, the same material may be found in volume 2, 93–103. It should be noted, however, that the Yale edition has some very helpful additions noted in the footnotes, which Edwards made when he re-preached the three sermons later in his career.

Israel in Egypt points to the church before Christ makes it alive; Israel in the wilderness points to the church between Christ's first coming (the greater Exodus that Jesus provides) and second coming (the final judgment); Israel in the promised land points to church in final rest. Sharp readers will probably have noticed that there is a problem with this analogy: the final rest, by this analogy, does not come until Jesus' second coming. It does not seem to have anything to do with His first coming. But here it is easy: Jesus' coming should be thought of as one coming in two stages. At His first coming, the rest comes, but at the final coming, the rest will be consummated. It is exactly parallel with the coming of the kingdom: the kingdom is here, but is not here: it is here in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but is not consummated until the second coming. The bride is affianced, but the wedding is not yet. We have the first-fruits, but not the full harvest.

Joshua was to have been the final deliverer of the Israelites from Egypt into the promised rest. But as Hebrews says, there was a greater deliverance to come in the person of Jesus Christ. There was a greater rest. Israel did not enter God's rest, so there still remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. Jesus accomplished the attainment of that rest, and He did so at His resurrection.

The ultimate meaning of Deuteronomy 5:12–15 is then that Jesus has accomplished the greater Exodus out of sin and death. Thus, we celebrate that greater deliverance by worshipping the founder and architect of our faith (Jesus Christ) on the day on which it was accomplished (Sunday). In fact, *not* to worship God on Sunday now is to deny that the greater Exodus has come.

To sum up the OT meaning of the Sabbath: from Genesis we learn that the Sabbath is eternal, and that God has already entered it. From Exodus, we learn that Jesus brought about a new creation (on Sunday). And from Deuteronomy, we learn that Jesus has brought about the greater Exodus of His people. All of this points to the fact that Jesus fulfills the meaning of the Sabbath such that we must worship Him on Sunday, the day this fulfillment happened.

### III. THE NEW TESTAMENT ON THE SABBATH

#### *A. Jesus' examples*

Jesus worshiped God on the Sabbath prior to his death and resurrection. It was still officially the OT era. The new era had not broken in until Jesus' death

and resurrection. Therefore, it was natural that Jesus would worship God on the Sabbath prior to his death and resurrection. However, *after* the resurrection, *every* time Christ appeared to the disciples, it was on a Sunday. When Jesus rose from the dead and was preaching (!) on Sunday to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, having fellowship (!) with them, that was an act of worship. Later on, *that same day*, (see especially Luke 24:33 "that same hour they went to tell the disciples"), He appeared to them while they were discussing these things. Then he gave to them a mini-sermon (probably abbreviated to the few essential points by Luke), and furthermore, ate a meal with them (similar, though somewhat different, from the Lord's Supper). John is even more important in this regard. In John 20:19, John emphatically declares that "on that day, the first day of the week" the disciples were gathered together, and Jesus appeared among them. John is peculiarly emphatic about the fact that it was the first day of the week when this appearance of Jesus took place. This is probably because of the fact that John's gospel was written primarily to Jews (this is indicated by verse 31, which should actually be read, "these things (all of John) are written so that you may believe that the Christ is Jesus"). The question of the identity of the Christ is a question that Jews asked. Because he wrote to Jews, he wanted to explain to them the origin of the Christian Sunday worship. Even more plain is verse 26, where a pattern starts to emerge: the Christians worshipped on Sunday. The disciples were together again (the word "again" implies design on their part to meet) eight days later (counting inclusively, therefore meaning Sunday, as all commentators agree), when Jesus appeared to them again. Contrary to the assertion of some that there is no mention of Sunday worship in the NT, either in the worship of the early church, or in the example of Jesus, there is every reason to believe that not only did the early church worship on Sunday, but that the example of Jesus also shows the pattern of Sunday worship. This is clear from Luke and from John.

#### *B. The rest of the New Testament*

There are three more references in the NT that conclusively demonstrate (again, according to the plain sense of the passages, as well as the opinion of most "unbiased" commentators) that Sunday was the day of worship for the early church. The first passage is Acts 20:7. Not only were they gathered together on the first day of the week, but they broke bread together (most

commentators think that this is the Lord's Supper).<sup>14</sup> Paul also preached a very long sermon to them. So the Lord's Supper *and* preaching happened on Sunday. Furthermore, Eutychus dies, necessitating a resurrection on Sunday. This is probably not accidental reporting on Luke's part, but rather a backward reference to Jesus' own resurrection.<sup>15</sup>

The only difficulty to be mentioned here is the debate among scholars as to whether the evening of the Sabbath is mentioned, or the evening of Sunday is meant. It really does not matter. If Luke is using the Jewish method of reckoning, then the day started on the evening (thus meaning that Saturday night was the start of Sunday). If Luke is using the Roman/Greek method of reckoning, then he means the evening of Sunday (which the Romans/Greeks thought of as part of the daylight preceding). Either way, Luke means Sunday. Most commentators note that Luke elsewhere uses the Roman system of reckoning, and so Sunday is meant.

The Seventh-Day Sabbath position will object: what about all the references in Acts to the Christians worshiping on the Sabbath in the synagogue? This is answerable. Paul (along with all the other disciples/missionaries) always went to the Jews first in a given city before they went to the Gentiles. In order to witness to them, he would naturally have attended their synagogue service in order to be there when the Jews were there. That fact does not mean that the Christians worshiped *by themselves* on the Sabbath. There is no indication in the NT that the Christians worshiped on Saturday when there were no Jews present. Only when the Jews were there did they worship in the synagogue on Saturday, and only then for missionary purposes.

The second indication of Sunday worship is 1 Corinthians 16:2. Paul asks that a collection be gathered for the saints in Jerusalem. He wants it done on the first day of the week. Why would he mention this if the saints were usually gathering on Saturday for worship? Wouldn't it have been more convenient for Paul to ask them to gather it together on the Saturday Sabbath,

if that is when they met? It is objected that the collection being taken is private, thus giving no indication that the church body is meant. However, the letter as a whole is addressed to a church. In 1:1, Paul draws a parallel between the Corinthian churches and the Galatian churches. Thus, there is every indication that the individual offering was then collected by the church "on the first day of every week." There would be no need at all to mention the first day of the week were it not for the fact that the church worshiped on that day. Taking it (along with most commentators Protestant and Catholic) as an indication that worship happened on Sunday, we now have three of the elements prescribed for worship as having a clear precedent of happening on Sunday: preaching (Jesus' examples, and Paul), breaking bread, i.e. the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), and tithes and offerings (1 Corinthians 16:2).

The third clear indication of Sunday worship is found in Revelation 1:10. He says that he was in the Spirit "on the Lord's day." This term "Lord's day" means Sunday, not Saturday, as every commentator on the passage admits. It was used in the early (!) church to mean Sunday. Already by John's time the word had acquired a technical sense meaning that day on which Christians worshipped. Even today, the same Greek word means Sunday in the modern Greek language. So the argument from this passage is that the term had acquired a special meaning. It was a day commemorative of the Lord (of what could it be commemorative but the Lord's resurrection?). This was the day of the week set aside for commemorating the resurrection of the Lord from the dead.

The argument is not affected at all by the observation that the context does not specifically mention a worship service. The question is not about where John was at this point in time, but rather what the adjective *κυριακός* means in connection with the word "day" (*ἡμέρα*). Even in modern Greek, the word *Κυριακή* means "Sunday."

One common passage cited against the Puritan view of the Sabbath is Colossians 2:16. Most modern commentators simply assume that the weekly Sabbath is referred to by the plural *σαββάτων*. This is by no means clear.<sup>16</sup> The context seems to indicate matters of ceremonies, not the weekly Sabbath. One could argue that no judgment should be passed on those who argue for Saturday Sabbath. However, the Jews often observed special Sabbath Days that had no relation to the weekly Sabbath. It is much more likely that these special Sabbath days are in view rather than the weekly Sabbath, which principle is a matter of the inviolable moral law, not a ceremony. The same general line of argumentation

14. Barrett does not think that the Lord's Supper is here intimated. See C. K. Barrett, *Acts* 15–28 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998) 950. However, as Alexander notes, the Lord's Supper was originally attached to a fellowship meal, as in 1 Corinthians 11:20–22. See J.A. Alexander, *Acts* (1857; Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1991) 2.228.

15. See the slightly more guarded appraisal in David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 559.

16. Most modern commentators ignore the issue of the weekly Sabbath, or simply take the arguments of *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* for granted. The best modern treatment of the passage from the Puritan standpoint is undoubtedly Gordon Clark, in *Colossians* (Jefferson, Md.: The Trinity Foundation, 1979), pp. 94–97.

goes for Romans 14:5 as well, which does not describe the weekly Sabbath, but festival days.

In summary, the NT indicates that Christians worshiped on Sunday. This evidence, combined with what we have set out in the OT section, would indicate a redemptive-historical movement from Saturday Sabbath to Sunday Sabbath. All of this evidence is necessary to set out in order to provide conclusive proof that Isaiah 58:13–14 still provides normative directions for Sabbath observance in the NT era. This point is emphatically important, since a latent dispensationalism seems to infect candidates as they consider the Sabbath day. The continuity of OT Sabbath to NT Sabbath is important in its own right. However, it is also vitally important to the confirmation of the point concerning recreation. It is to the passage in Isaiah that we now turn, confident that whatever it says applies to the NT Sabbath day just as much as it did to the OT Sabbath day.

#### IV. ISAIAH 58:13–14

##### A. Contextual Considerations

This passage is certainly the key passage when it comes to the “no recreation” clauses in the Westminster Standards. The question is this: does the passage support the conclusions that have been based upon it? My thesis is that it does support the divines’ conclusion. First we will deal with some contextual issues, and then dive into the heart of the exegesis.

In the largest scope of the book, this passage occurs in the prophecies concerning deliverance which form the second main portion of Isaiah (40–66). I assume here, but will not attempt to prove, that Isaiah, son of Amoz, wrote the entirety of the book bearing his name. The second main portion of the book is concerned with preaching the good news of comfort to Jerusalem (40:1–2). The passage in question occurs in the sequence of 56–58, which deal with true worship as opposed to false worship. Westermann rightly notes that this passage forms an *inclusio* (envelope structure) with 56:1–8.<sup>17</sup> The people were profaning the Sabbath by doing their own desires (56:2, 6). The connection of 58:13–14 to 56:1–8 is established by several links: the house of prayer (56:5, 7 and 58:12), the mention of keeping the Sabbath (56:2, 4, 6 and 58:13–14), and the references to Jacob/Israel (56:3, 8 and 58:1, 2, 14).

The issues in chapter 58 are not limited to the Sabbath observance. Righteousness in general, true worship in fasting, the Sabbath, and social justice are all woven together (see Seitz, 500). It is important to notice here that the concerns of the prophet are not limited

to concerns about social justice. Verse 4 is clear: quarreling, fighting, and boxing are not legitimate parts of a proper fast. Verse 5 also supports this reading, since the concern in verse 5 is about outward observance of the fast, but no inward righteousness to go along with the outward fast. The contrast with verses 6–12 is quite pronounced, and says the same thing as Hosea: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (6:6). Here, it is “I desire righteousness, not fasting.”

However, the idea of the Sabbath is slightly different than the idea of fasting. With fasting, the problem was an outward observance without the substance of righteousness. The people were attempting to coerce God by means of outward fasting without inward righteousness.<sup>18</sup> The solution given was actually not directly related to fasting. However, with the Sabbath the commandment is plain that the people should observe the Sabbath in a better way. They were not keeping the Sabbath holy, but were profaning it with things better done on other days of the week.

##### B. The Meaning of עָשָׂה in context

The key exegetical issue of the passage with regard to the support of the confession’s understanding of recreation is undoubtedly the meaning of עָשָׂה. This noun has one of two possible meanings in this context: “business,” or “pleasure.” The difference between the two makes a vast difference as to whether recreations are allowed on the Sabbath day. If the scope of the word is limited only to business transactions, then the passage has nothing whatsoever to say about recreations, unless one finds it in the phrase “your own ways.”<sup>19</sup>

There are arguments in favor of taking the word this way. For example, the issue of oppressing workers is certainly in the context (the last part of vs. 3). This word can mean “business” elsewhere in Scripture, especially in Ecclesiastes.<sup>20</sup>

17. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) 340. See also Christopher Seitz, *Isaiah 40–66*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, volume 6, 307–352 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001) 499.

18. See H. G. M. Williamson, “Promises, Promises! Some Exegetical Reflections on Isaiah 58,” *Word and World* 19 (1999) 153–160, esp. 156.

19. For advocacy of the translation “business,” see G. Johannes Botterweck, and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. 4-5. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1980) 5.99. See also emphatically Jan Koole, *Isaiah III: vol. 3, Isaiah 56–66* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 156.

20. See the article by David Talley in Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).



However, the matter is not so simple as Jan Koole, for one, would have us to believe. The word can certainly mean “desire” or “pleasure.” Malachi 1:10 and Psalm 1:2 are certainly instances of the word meaning “delight” and not “business.” Furthermore, this is how the versions have translated the word. The LXX uses the word *θέληματα* (“desires”), and the Vulgate translates it “voluntatem” (“things of your will”). The verbal form is used in the context in verse 2 in a way that certainly points to “delight” and not to “business.” Furthermore, while the noun form is used in verse 3 in a context that is arguably favorable to the “business” translation, the later context of verse 4 broadens out the meaning of the word. The context of fasting holds together the oppression of workers and the “pleasure” being sought. Therefore, it could be the case that the “pleasure” of verse 3 includes both the oppression of workers and the quarreling and boxing in verse 4. These concerns would then be treated in the same order for the rest of the chapter: oppression in vv. 6–12, and proper Sabbath observance in vv. 13–14.

In the passage itself, the contrast is not between doing business or not doing business, but between delight in “your own things” versus delight “in the Lord” of verse 14. As E.J. Young puts it, “It is the pleasure of man in contrast to that of God that is brought to the fore.”<sup>21</sup> On the practical level of determining which actions are appropriate for the Sabbath Sunday, Motyer is helpful here:

The determining factor is whether this or that activity defiles or honours the holiness of the day, whether it is a mere indulgence of a personal pleasure (*doing*

*as you please*) or preference (*going your own way*) or whether it conduces to “sweet delight” in the Lord and his ordinances.<sup>22</sup>

The translation “business” is less natural in the context because of how the word is used in terms of the delight in the Lord in verse 14.<sup>23</sup> To say that one should “do business in the Lord” for verse 14 makes little sense.<sup>24</sup> However, to say “delight in the Lord” makes a great deal of sense. It should be noted here that the verb at the beginning of verse 14, while not the same verb as *נָחַם*, is nonetheless a synonym of it (the verb is *נָחַם* in the hithpael).<sup>25</sup>

### C. The Meaning of *נָחַם* in Context

The usual understanding of *נָחַם* in such circumstances is “conduct, way of life.” E.J. Young has the most helpful comment on this:

The “way” is a course of conduct and refers to all courses and actions that men choose in preference to the commands of God. These courses and actions may be right and legitimate on other days, but when they obtrude in the place of that delight, which is to find expression in the observance of the sabbath, they are to be refrained from (Young, 427).

In other words, the way of Sabbath-keeping which is forbidden here is “one’s own way.” The way of Sabbath-keeping which is commanded here is “the delight in the Lord.” This understanding of the phrase strongly supports the Puritan view of Isaiah 58: 13–14.

### D. Concluding Remarks on Isaiah 58:13–14

It is not merely the case that a good argument may be mounted for the Puritan view. The exegetical evidence here presented shows that the Puritan understanding of the Sabbath is the biblical understanding of the Sabbath when it comes to recreation, which would certainly fall under the category of “your own ways” and “your pleasure,” which are here proscribed. Therefore, the Puritan understanding of this passage, used to support the “no recreation” clause in the Westminster Standards, is the correct understanding of the passage.

## IV. CONCLUDING PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

One of the main problems I see among candidates for

*Continued on Page 323.*

21. E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: volume 3, chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 426. It should be noted that Young easily dismisses the caricature of the Puritan view in the immediately preceding context of the quotation in question. He says, “It is a gross misunderstanding to interpret as though the words meant ‘that which is pleasant’ and to conclude from this that the prophet’s only concern is that the sabbath be a day not of pleasure but of gloom” (ibid.). Indeed, the command is to delight in the Lord, not to be gloomy in the Lord!

22. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 483.

23. See J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 2 vols. in one (1867; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992) 2:362.

24. It could make more sense if one translates it “make the Lord your business.” However, this is not a natural way of taking the prepositional phrase *עַל־יְיָ*, which is more naturally understood as “in the Lord” or “over the Lord.”

25. Delitzsch helpfully comments, “Again, if thou call (i.e. from inward contemplation and esteem) the Sabbath a pleasure (‘ōneg, because it leads thee to God, and not a burden because it leads thee away from thine everyday life; cf. Amos viii.5).” Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2 vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1983) 2:394.

## “So Great a Love”—James Durham on Christ and His Church in the Song of Solomon

By Donald John MacLean

*It is as John Baptist among the prophets, other [Old Testament] scriptures speak of Christ as coming and afar off; this speaks of him, and to him, as near at hand.*

St. Athanasius

James Durham, echoing something of the spirit of Athanasius, exclaimed regarding the Song of Solomon approximately three hundred and fifty years ago, “Few can read this song but they must fall in love with it.”<sup>1</sup> And for two hundred years after he penned these words few Reformed believers would have disagreed with him. To take one example the great 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish Presbyterian Robert Murray M’Cheyne stated: “There is no book of the Bible which affords a better test of the depth of a man’s Christianity than the Song of Solomon.”<sup>2</sup> So important was the Song to Reformed spirituality for generations that if it was loved as an expression of Christ’s relationship to the Church, all was probably well; if it was not loved, much was definitely ill.

However, the views of Durham and M’Cheyne, would have few advocates today. The Song has largely lost its lustre, and its use as a litmus test of spirituality would be looked at with amazement.<sup>3</sup> Accompanying the decline of the popularity of the Song has been a transformation of understanding regarding its meaning. The whole idea that the Song speaks primarily of Christ and his Church (or individual believers), has been largely disregarded and the clear majority scholarly evangelical<sup>4</sup> view now is that the Song speaks primarily (even exclusively) about human marriage, and even more particularly about the physical intimacy of marriage. C.J. Mahaney serves as a popularising example of this change when he says of the Song of Solomon: “It’s about sex ... [it] is nothing less than an explicit and unblushing celebration of sex within marriage.... It’s an eight-chapter feast of unbridled, uninhibited, joyous immersion in verbal and physical expressions of passion between a man and

a woman.”<sup>5</sup> Reflecting this view, Tom Gledhill argues that the Song “bombards our hearts and minds, stimulates our imaginations and desires, and often leaves us gasping for breath, longing wistfully for the fulfilment of our private [sexual] dreams.”<sup>6</sup> As a specific example of the sexual reading consider Song 2:4, “He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love,” which would be read as describing “a night of sexual bliss, following an orgy of heavy drinking.”<sup>7</sup>

In view of this, regardless of whether the modern understanding of the Song or the traditional Reformed understanding espoused by Durham is favoured, it is clear that a ‘megashift’ has occurred in interpretation

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THE AUTHOR: Donald John MacLean is a member of Cambridge Presbyterian Church (UK) and is studying towards an MPhil at the Wales Evangelical School of Theology on the topic of James Durham and the Free Offer of the Gospel. Donald John has previously written for the Free Church Witness and is a Fellow of the Faculty of Actuaries.

1. James Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (1668; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) 24. [Hereafter, Song].

2. Andrew Bonar (ed.), *Memoir and Remains of R. M. M’Cheyne* (1862; repr. London: Banner of Truth, 1966) 480. To be clear—the point of this quotation is not to denigrate the spirituality of those who disagree with M’Cheyne’s understanding of the Song but simply to record his views.

3. It is perhaps anecdotal evidence of the Song’s decline in popularity, but compare the frequency of allusion to the Song in Rutherford’s letters to the frequency of allusion to the song in preaching and Christian literature today! The same point is made by Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 59.

4. Whether that term now has any real meaning is debatable given the diversity of viewpoints (not least regarding Scripture), that fit within the broad framework of “evangelicalism.”

5. C.J. Mahaney, *Sex Romance and the Glory of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004) 9–10. For another recent evangelical interpretation of the Song along similar lines see Mark Driscoll’s exposition at <http://peasantprincess.com/>.

6. Tom D. Gledhill, “Song of Songs” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T.D. Alexander and B.S. Rosner; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 215.

7. Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 159.

of the Song. Indeed Tremper Longman argues that “no other biblical book witnesses ... such a definite and universally recognised shift in genre identification” (Longman, 36). But why? Several reasons are usually given for the move from a spiritual to a sexual reading of the Song. The primary reason usually offered is the alleged (recent) liberation of the Church from a false “Greek inspired” philosophy which viewed the physical as unimportant (at best) and the spiritual realm as higher and more substantial.<sup>8</sup> For Gledhill this liberation means the Song can now be read through the lens of the “doctrine of creation” without falsely having to superimpose the “doctrine of salvation” on the Song (Gledhill, 216). Whilst not totally without foundation, this fails to fully account for the 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed interpretation of the Song of Solomon given their handling of texts such as Prov. 5:19.<sup>9</sup> A second important reason offered is the rediscovery of the literature of the Ancient Near East (Longman, 37–38). This showed that other cultures’ love poetry used similar imagery to the Song<sup>10</sup> and has been taken to indicate that the Song must be read in a similar manner to the literature of the surrounding cultures. Whilst these advances are not unimportant, and of course were unknown in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the force of this objection fades somewhat in view of the Reformed commitment to Scripture as the best interpreter of Scripture. A third objection is that an allegorical interpretation is inherently subjective,

without explicit Scriptural warrant, and varies wildly from commentator to commentator.<sup>11</sup> Whilst it is an undoubted historical fact that allegorical interpretations of the Song have on occasion produced somewhat luxuriant interpretations this objection is not new and Durham’s response will be considered below.

Whilst pervasive, this new reading of the Song has not been without occasional challenges. Iain D. Campbell and Hugh Blair, for instance, have both published scholarly articles defending a largely Christological understanding of the Song of Solomon.<sup>12</sup> Blair approaches the Song from the perspective of preaching and argues that “the literal interpretation alone gives us very little to preach” (Blair, 54). In place of a purely literal reading Blair proposes a “much deeper typological significance” as the key to preaching the Song (Blair, 54). This typological approach, as advocated by Blair, seeks to apply the Song “to the relationship of love between a man and a woman, and will go on from that to see that love as an analogy of the love of Christ for His people and theirs for Him” (Blair, 55). Gerald Bray noted that the literal interpretation of the Song “has failed to demonstrate [yet] that it is spiritually adequate” (Bray, 164) and this seems to be the driving force behind Blair’s article. Campbell also adopts a typological approach but is driven by more biblical theological concerns. He reads the Song in the light of the Davidic covenant and gives a prominent role to Solomon arguing that “Solomon himself, rather than the marriage theme, is the key to the interpretation of the Song” (Campbell, 26). It is Solomon as “the immediate consequence of God’s covenantal promise to David” and as “a type of the covenant’s ultimate focus: the Lord Jesus Christ” who “alone justifies raising the interpretation of the Song above a literalistic and exemplaristic demonstration of human, physical love” (Campbell, 26).

Whether the reasons for the rejection of the spiritual understanding of the Song are viewed as adequate or not, or whether the few defences of a more traditional reading are to be regarded as sufficient answers is largely beside the point of this essay. The thrust of this article, rather than seeking to determine the correct understanding of the Song, is simply to present the traditional view of the Song of Solomon to enable readers to understand why older Reformed theologians and commentators read the Song the way they did. This will be done by means of an examination of perhaps the most famous of the older commentaries on the Song—that of James Durham. Tangentially to this task, some of these objections to the traditional reading, as they bear on the views of Durham, will be examined.

8. On this see Longman, *Song of Songs*, 36.

9. “As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love.” [NKJV]. See Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 43–48.

10. Hector Patmore argues *pace* much modern scholarship that the common themes identified “are so generic as to be meaningless. They do not demonstrate that existence of any relationship between the Egyptian songs and Canticles.... This is a peril of the figurative expression: certain sets of themes and images lend themselves to the diverse and enigmatic experiences of love” (Hector Patmore, “‘The Plain and Literal Sense’: On Contemporary Assumptions about the Song of Songs” *Vetus Testamentum* 56.2 [2006] 245). In particular Patmore argues that “Wishes; Praise of the Beloved; Description of Love; and Love in the Garden” as features of love poetry are present in almost every age and location and so no indicator of literary dependency (Patmore, 243).

11. Longman, *Song of Songs*, 36–37 and Gledhill, ‘Song of Songs,’ 215. This is all well and good but the variety of ‘literal’ interpretations hardly gives confidence that it leads to much more in the way of uniformity.

12. Iain D. Campbell, “The Song of David’s Son: Interpreting the Song of Solomon in the Light of the Davidic Covenant,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 62:1 (Spring 2000) 17–32. Hugh Blair, “Preaching from the Song of Solomon,” *Reformed Theological Journal* 9 (November 1987) 47–58.

# JAMES DURHAM—A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The obvious question is—why examine Durham’s work as representative of the traditional Reformed view? What is particularly significant about him and his work on the Song?

In reference to James Durham himself, he was an important figure in mid 17<sup>th</sup> century British theology. His life (1622–1658) spanned some of the most tumultuous years for the Scottish Church—from the high point of the ratification of the Westminster Standards to the low point of the divisions in the Scottish Church over the protester/resolutioner controversy.<sup>13</sup> Noted historical theologians examining this period have recognised Durham’s significance, with James Walker declaring that “no Scotchman of that age was more profoundly venerated,”<sup>14</sup> and John MacLeod stating that “... among the mighties of his day ... [Durham] was among the mightiest of them all.”<sup>15</sup> Durham’s contemporaries also recognised his importance with the Westminster Divine Robert Baillie stating that Durham’s opinions were held to be “of exceeding great weight deservedly,” and that Durham was a man “of the greatest authority and parts among us.”<sup>16</sup> Durham’s contemporaries in England were of a similar opinion. John Flavel (1628–1691) regarded him as a “judicious expositor”<sup>17</sup> and John Owen (1616–1683) referred to the great “reputation, which the known piety and abilities of [Durham], have in the Church of God,” adding “and this he hath deservedly.”<sup>18</sup> In Owen’s opinion Durham was “one of good learning, sound judgement, and every way a workman that needeth not to be ashamed” (Owen, 19).

As far as Durham’s work on the Song goes, it has been rightly noted that his “exposition of the Song of Solomon, a book long influential in Scotland, gives insight into the allegorical method of Scriptural interpretation prevalent at the time.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed John MacLeod went so far as to say “Durham on *The Song of Solomon* has long been looked upon as the standard Scottish work on the subject. It is rich in its statements of experimental godliness...”<sup>20</sup> John Owen provided an introduction to Durham’s work and as well as stating his own convictions regarding the Song (namely that it was “sublime, spiritual, and mystical; and the manner of its handling universally allegorical”), was fulsome in his praise of Durham’s exposition (Owen, 19). He averred that “it will be hard for any to discover, either defect in judgement, or untruth in affection, or the omission or neglect of any rule, means, or advantages that might, or ought to be used in enquiry after the mind of God” (Owen, 22). In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Durham’s work was

highly commended by C.H. Spurgeon who stated that “Durham is always good, and he is at his best upon the Canticles. He gives us the essence of the good matter. For practical use this work is perhaps more valuable than any other Key to the Song.”<sup>21</sup>

As well as being generally commended, Durham’s introduction to his commentary (his “key” to the Song) has been identified as a major step forward in the history of Scottish exegesis. Marc Clausen credits Durham’s introduction with being “the first time a Scottish commentator or preacher has included a full introduction in which various preliminary contextual issues are discussed. In fact, we may rightly think of the introduction as, in a sense, a kind of hermeneutical manual.”<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Clausen believes that it would be wrong to dismiss Durham on the grounds that his reading of the Song is “unsophisticated.” He argues that, given Durham’s self conscious deliberation over whether the text is literal or allegorical (this will be discussed below), it is a mistake to ignore what he has to say, noting, “while Durham’s reasons may not be compelling, neither can they be dismissed out of hand” (Clausen, 129).

13. For accounts of Durham’s life see George Christie, “James Durham as a Courtier and Preacher,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* iv (1930) 66–80, and Nathan D. Holsteen, “The Popularization of federal theology: conscience and covenant in the theology of David Dickson (1583–1663) and James Durham (1622–1658)” (Ph.D. diss., Aberdeen University, 1996). On the protester/resolutioner controversy see Kyle D. Holfelder “Factionalism in the Kirk during the Cromwellian invasion and occupation of Scotland, 1650–60: the protester-resolutioner controversy” (Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1999).

14. James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560–1750* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982) 17.

15. John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 94.

16. Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie, A.M. Principal of the University of Glasgow M.DC.XXXVII.–M.DC.LXII*, ed. David Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Club, 1841–1842) 3:222; 3:179–180.

17. John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968) 4:19.

18. John Owen, *To the Christian Reader, The Song of Solomon*, by James Durham (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982) 19.

19. D.J.M Corbett, *The Moral Aspect of the Atonement from David Dickson to James Denny and H. R. Mackintosh* (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1965) 74. As will be considered shortly Durham would dispute that his method of interpretation was allegorical, except in the sense that he was interpreting an already allegorical book of Scripture.

20. John MacLeod, *Some Favourite Books* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988) 30.

21. Charles Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1893) 112–113.

22. Marc Clausen, *A Study of Scottish Hermeneutical Method from John Knox to the Early Twentieth Century from Christian to Secular* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004) 125.



INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SONG  
PRIOR TO DURHAM

Of course, Durham did not develop his understanding of the Song in isolation from the past and the credit given to him for his work on the Song must, in part, be shared with the Reformed tradition in general. Durham himself inherited an exegetical tradition within which he worked, and it is worth examining this before proceeding to his views. Recognising that British and continental Reformed theology were related and not isolated developments, consideration will be given to both continental and British thinkers.

Of continental interpretations of the Song Theodore Beza's is one of the most well known. Beza understood the Song in strictly spiritual terms. For instance he states at the outset of his sermons on the Song that it is "to bee taken and altogether to be understood in a spirituall sense."<sup>23</sup> It cannot be speaking simply of the marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter as that marriage is condemned in scripture (1 Kings 11). So under the "formes and phrases of speech" of a human marriage there is set forth "the most strait and spirituall bonde and alliaunce which is between Jesus Christ and his Church" (Beza, n.p.). For Beza there is nothing mysterious about using a marriage relationship to provide a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church—indeed it is a common metaphor in the Prophets and also "the Apostle hath likewise used the same, namely, Rom. 7.2 & 2. Cor. 11. and Ephs. 5" (Beza, n.p.). Beza states that he understands the Song as "altogether allegoricall and enigmatical, that is to say, deliuereth to our understanding thinges heauenly and spirituall, by a similitude and

figure of things naturall and corporall" (Beza, 2). Beza acknowledges that there have been some who have read the Song "as being a writing altogether profane, and compiled by Solomon in the midst of his wanton and licentious dissolutions" (Beza, 2). Beza's response is forceful and he states this opinion is "no more to be harkened unto or regarded than those, who desperately and arrogantly addresse and oppose themselves agaynst the Spirit of God" (Beza, 3). Besides this Beza refers as proof of the allegorical use of the marriage metaphor in Scripture to Ps. 45; Isa. 62:1,6; Jer. 3; Ezek. 16, 23; Hos. 1:2; Matt. 25; John 3:29; Rom 7:1; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph 5; and Rev. 17.

Another later continental work, the Dutch Annotations, takes a similar approach. The annotations in their introduction to the Song argue that it is "a dialogue between Christ, as the Bridegroom, and his Church, as his Spouse or Bride."<sup>24</sup>

Away from the continent in Durham's own more immediate milieu the same tradition of interpreting the Song is evident. In England the commentaries of Ainsworth, the English Annotations and Matthew Poole all follow the allegorical approach. It is evident that Ainsworth belongs to the same tradition as Beza from the very title page of his work (*Solomon's Song of Songs In English Metre*) where Ephesians 5 is referenced (as well as Psalm 45).<sup>25</sup> It is therefore no surprise that Ainsworth takes the Song to treat "of mans reconciliation unto God, and peace by Jesus Christ with joy in the Holy Ghost" (Ainsworth, *Comm in loco* 1:1). Indeed the Song is the most excellent song in Scripture, surpassing even the Psalms of David, "for this [the Song] celebrateth the mysteries of Christ and his Church, and the communion betweene them, more amply and excellently than any other" (Ainsworth, *Comm in loco* 1:1). Key to this interpretation, besides the expectation raised by the title *Song of Songs* that this will be about the greatest of possible themes, is the figure of Solomon. Solomon is regarded as a picture of Christ in the character of his Kingdom, his wisdom and his glory.<sup>26</sup> Additionally Solomon's name means 'peace' which should alert the reader to the likelihood of the presence of 'the Prince of peace' (Isa. 9:6). Again further, the biblical typology in Psalm 72 is also seen as evidence that there is warrant to see Solomon as none other than Christ. Although there are no specific comments in his introduction, it is evident that Ainsworth stands in the allegorical school of understanding the Song.

Another English commentary on the Song is that found in the *English* [or *Westminster*] *Annotations*.<sup>27</sup> For the author of the annotations on the Song of Solomon (attributed to a Mr. Smallwood<sup>28</sup>) it is "agreed

23. Theodore Beza, *Master Bezaes Sermons Upon the Three First Chapters of the Canticle of Canticles*, trans. John Harmar (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1587) n.p.

24. *The Dutch Annotations on the Whole Bible*, trans. Theodore Haak (London: Henry Hills for John Rothwell, Joshua Kirton, and Richard Tomlins, 1657), Introduction to the High Song of Solomon.

25. Henry Ainsworth, *Solomon's Song of Songs In English Metre: With Annotations and References to other Scriptures, for the easier understanding of it* (n.p., 1623).

26. Ainsworth, *Comm in loco* 1:1. An interesting aside is that Ainsworth refers here to "the Chaldee paraphrase".

27. *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament: This Third, above the First and Second, Edition so enlarged, As they make an entire Commentary on the Sacred Scripture: the like never before published in English. Wherein the Text is Explained, Doubts Resolved, Scriptures Paralleled, and Various Readings Observed*, by the Joint Labour of certain Learned Divines (London: Evan Tyler, 1657). Hereafter Annotations.

28. William Barker, *Puritan Profiles* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 1999) 242.

on all hands, that the Book is an entire Allegory, full of profound mysteries.”<sup>29</sup> There have been times when some had adventured to see the Song as “an hot carnal pamphlet,” but this “blasphemy” has long since “perished with the fathers of it,” and the reasoning of the “luxuriant wits” who proposed it has been subdued.<sup>30</sup> Despite the universally acknowledged allegorical nature of the Song, it had to be confessed that many attempts at allegorical interpretation were unsuccessful and had produced exegesis that could be regarded as simply fanciful. The path to a true understanding of the allegory lay in allowing that “allegories are not to be strained too much” that “similitudes answer not in all lines” and in observing the rule that ministers are “to open doubtful and intricate Scriptures with modesty ... according to the Analogy of Faith.”<sup>31</sup> Additionally, like Ainsworth the annotations see the title of “Song of Songs” as pointing to the excellence of the matter in the Song and providing an *a priori* expectation that the song will speak of Christ.<sup>32</sup>

But what is the allegory here? Well, “under the figures of Solomon and his Love, is shadowed the true Prince of peace, and his rich affections to his Church and people.”<sup>33</sup> The author notes another possible allegorical interpretation, namely that the Song is a prophecy of the future course of the Church “since the first breath of that distressed Virgin, to the very last.”<sup>34</sup> Whilst not dismissing this *a priori*, it is rejected as a suitable for the exposition of the Song as it is likely to lead to the “quick sand” of historical identification and it is preferable to stay away from this in safer spiritual grounds. The author also dismissed the “grosser vanities of the Jesuites, and Roman Parasites” who attempt to see the Virgin Mary in the Song.<sup>35</sup>

Before moving on from the annotations it is important to note that they do not allegorise Prov. 5:19. Indeed they see this verse as “requiring abundance of affection from the husband to the wife.”<sup>36</sup> They note that the direction “let her breasts satisfy you at all times” implies they are to give the husband “abundance of content[ment].”<sup>37</sup> All this goes to show that there was no *a priori* reason (e.g. a faulty “Greek inspired” philosophy) driving 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed commentators to allegorise anything remotely sexual in Scripture. Their exegesis of the Song can stand or fall on its merits but can hardly be rejected due to an aversion to the sexual.

Dovetailing with the Annotations the Westminster Standards, via their proof texts, evidently presuppose a Christological understanding of the Song of Solomon. The Song is cited 3 times in the proof texts of the Westminster Confession: Song 1:4 is cited in reference

to effectual calling;<sup>38</sup> Song 5:2–4,6 is cited in reference to believers being deprived of the comfort and graces of their calling;<sup>39</sup> Song 5:2–3, 6 is cited again in reference to believers having their assurance shaken.<sup>40</sup> Obviously these references are nonsensical on anything other than an allegorical reading of the Song.

Another leading English commentator was Matthew Poole. In his introduction to the Song Poole admits that “the design of the book in general is to describe the passionate loves and happy marriage of two persons, and their mutual satisfaction therein.”<sup>41</sup> However, the book is not to be understood “carnally, concerning Solomon and Pharaoh’s daughter ... but spiritually, concerning God, or Christ, and his church and people” (Poole, 2:208). For Poole, therefore, the book is to be understood allegorically (Poole, 2:208). Poole advances several reasons for his allegorical reading of this book. First, many other passages in scripture are allegorical. Although he gives no examples it is easy enough to do so by referring to Christ’s parables. Second, Christ was known to Old Testament believers. This is made clear by the Psalms and many other passages. Third, the image of God as a bridegroom and the Church as a bride is common in Scripture (e.g. Is. 54:5; Hos. 2:16,19,20; Matt. 9:15, 22:2; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23; Rev. 19:7, 21:2, 22:17). Fourthly, there is the even greater evidence of Psalm 45 which is “a kind of abridgement of this book” (Poole, 208). Poole whilst warning against “excessive use of the marriage bed” sees no need to allegorise Prov. 5:19. The reasons he offers for his reading of the Song of Solomon, like that of the English Annotations, should be taken at face value and provides further

29. *Annotations*, Introduction to the Annotations on the Song of Solomon, n.p.

30. *Annotations*, Introduction to the Annotations on the Song of Solomon, n.p.

31. *Annotations*, Introduction to the Annotations on the Song of Solomon, n.p.

32. *Annotations*, Comment *in loco* Song 1:1.

33. *Annotations*, Introduction to the Annotations on the Song of Solomon, n.p.

34. *Annotations*, Introduction to the Annotations on the Song of Solomon, n.p.

35. *Annotations*, Introduction to the Annotations on the Song of Solomon, n.p. Despite this dismissal, it is interesting to note that the introduction closes with an approving reference to Bernard.

36. *Annotations*, Comment *in loco* Prov. 5:19.

37. *Annotations*, Comment *in loco* Prov. 5:19.

38. WCF 10:1 in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994) 54. [Hereafter Confession].

39. WCF 17:3 in *Confession*, 75.

40. WCF 18:4 in *Confession*, 78.

41. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979) 2:208.

evidence that “Greek philosophy” was not to blame for the Reformed understanding of the Song (Poole, 2:223).

It should not be thought that this allegorical reading of the Song was the only option available to Durham. Another alternative reading of the book as a prophetic foretelling of the history of the Church has already been adduced. This prophetic understanding was propounded in some detail by Durham’s contemporary John Cotton, who viewed the Song as “historical prophecy.”<sup>42</sup> Whilst not alone in this view, Cotton’s was certainly the minority position.

#### DURHAM’S ‘CLAVIS CANTICI’ OR ‘A KEY TO THE SONG’

From the preceding survey it is clear that Durham inherited an existing tradition of interpreting the Song, which, while not entirely devoid of diversity, was universally allegorical and predominantly focused on the Song as an allegorical description of the love of Christ and his Church. As noted by Clausen, where Durham advances the tradition is his 38 page ‘key’ for opening the Song where he discusses in detail the hermeneutical principles which underpin his exegesis of the Song.

Durham begins his ‘key’ by admitting, with many before and after him, the difficulty inherent in understanding the Song. This difficulty lay for him, not in ascertaining whether the Song has a spiritual meaning or not, but in correctly discerning that spiritual meaning. This issue arose partly from the necessity of “acquaintance in experience with the things here spoken of” (Durham, *Song*, 23). This highlights a key

point of Reformed interpretation of Scripture—it is only through the testimony of Christ’s Spirit that any recognise the true meaning of Scripture. The cardinal testimony and experience wrought by the Spirit is of course regeneration. This is expressed well by Richard Muller who states that for the Reformed orthodox it is “Christ Jesus, who regenerates our souls and leads us to the right understanding of God’s word.”<sup>43</sup> Despite this difficulty Durham offers five reasons why the Song cannot be neglected. First, it is Scripture and therefore cannot be laid aside just because it is difficult. Secondly, because this book speaks about Christ, who ought to be the subject of believer’s thoughts, it is profitable to study it. Thirdly, reading the Song captivates and speaks to the affections. Fourthly, the poetic nature of the Song should highlight its significance.<sup>44</sup> Fifthly, as the Song is spiritual in meaning a thorough reading of the book should not leave the reader unchanged (Durham, *Song*, 23–24).

Having summarised his reasons for undertaking the study of the Song, Durham then proceeded in more detail to outline the characteristics necessary in a would be expositor of the Song. The first listed is the knowledge of the whole of Scripture, but especially the Psalms, other scripture Songs, and the gospel. This highlights the fundamental exegetical principle of the Reformed, that “the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself.”<sup>45</sup> However useful other aspects of learning may be (and they are), the primary appeal is not to the literature of Israel’s neighbors, but to the law and the testimony. This is not to downplay the importance of historical, chronological, geographic knowledge, but to highlight their secondary, rather than primary importance.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, Durham posits that a practical experience of the range of emotions and experiences undergone throughout the Christian pilgrimage, as well as continual fellowship with other believers, is necessary to be a qualified interpreter of the Song.<sup>47</sup> Once Durham’s approach to the Song as a description of the various conditions of the believers’ relationship with Christ is understood, it becomes clear why he thought this condition was necessary. Thirdly, it was not enough simply to be in the state of grace to understand the Song, it was necessary to be walking closely with Christ. Finally, much prayer was necessary to understand the book (Durham, *Song*, 24–25). Again Muller’s comments highlight that Durham is at this point speaking for the Reformed tradition in general noting, “the student of Scripture must pray for wisdom ... prayer is necessary for understanding” (Muller, 2:482).

42. Jeffery Hammond, “The Bride in Redemptive Time: John Cotton and the Canticles Controversy,” *The New England Quarterly* 56:1 (Mar., 1983) 79.

43. Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 2:482. See also with particular reference to John Owen—Jonathan Moore, “John Owen and Knowing the Mind of God,” in *Knowing the Mind of God: Papers Read at the 2003 Westminster Conference* (The Westminster Conference, 2003) 67.

44. Durham believed that “It is recorded of the Hebrews, that whatever scripture was delivered in a poetical frame, they accounted themselves specially bound to take notice of that, and to get it by heart” (Durham, *Song*, 63).

45. WCF 1:9 in *Confession*, 24.

46. Cf. with the views of John Owen explained in Moore, “John Owen and Knowing the Mind of God,” 73.

47. For an example of the experiences to which Durham here refers, see M. Roberts, ‘Samuel Rutherford: the Comings and Goings of the Heavenly Bridegroom,’ in *The Trials of Puritanism: Papers Read at the 1993 Westminster Conference* (The Westminster Conference, 1993) 119–134.

# THE SONG AND THE CANNON

Having made these preliminary points, Durham proceeds to lay down some propositions regarding the Song. The first, and briefest, is that the Song is canonical Scripture (Durham, *Song*, 25). Durham adduces two reasons for this belief. First, the Jews accepted the Song as canonical "and that the same hath been universally received by Christians, may appear by the records of councils, and writings of the fathers, where the catalogue of the books of the Holy Scripture is set down" (Durham, *Song*, 25). Second, echoing Westminster Confession of Faith 1:5,<sup>48</sup> Durham believed that "matter, manner of expression, divine style ... divine power and efficacy" of the Song meant that it, in the words of the Confession, abundantly evidenced itself to be the Word of God. Durham also insists that the author of the Song is Solomon who was the "amanuensis" of the Spirit (Durham, *Song*, 24). This is not to deny any role to Solomon's own personality, for according to Durham, it is likely that the Song was written after Solomon's recovery from his backsliding, and his corresponding realisation of the emptiness of all things apart from Christ. This according to Durham may account for the warmth and spirituality of the Song (Durham, *Song*, 24). In speaking of Solomon both as an "amanuensis" and yet somehow still involved in the production of the Song, Durham was following Calvin whose teaching is well summarised by Muller. "Calvin assumed both that Scripture was 'dictated' and that it was reflective of individual style and characteristic patterns of perception belonging to its human authors" (Muller, 2:237). Nevertheless, the Spirit is the "chief author" and Solomon the "penman" (Durham, *Song*, 26).

Durham considers two potential objections to the canonicity of the Song. The first is that the Song is nowhere cited in the New Testament. Durham's response is twofold. First, citation of a book by the New Testament authors is not a necessary condition for canonicity. Second, there are allusions, or "near resemblances," to the Song in the New Testament. Examples here include Rev. 3:20 and Song 5:2, John 6:44 and Song 1:4, as well as more general allusions to metaphors used in the Song such as Matthew 20 referring to the Church as a vineyard and Matthew 23 referring to the church's union with Christ as marriage.<sup>49</sup> The second objection Durham considers is that the name of God is not mentioned in the book. Again the response is twofold. First, mention of the name of God is not a criterion for canonicity—Durham references Esther. Second, the Song when understood spiritually does contain many titles of Christ—who is God (Durham, *Song*, 26–27). So far

was Durham from questioning the canonicity of the Song that he argued the Song was to be "preferred" to "all other scriptural songs" (Durham, *Song*, 63).

## A LITERAL ALLEGORY?

With the preliminary concern over canonicity taken care of, Durham moves to what is the central, and today in Reformed circles the most controversial, assertion of his key to the song, namely: "This Song is not to be taken properly ... or literally, that is as the words do at first sound; but it is to be taken and understood spiritually, figuratively and allegorically..."<sup>50</sup> This is not that Durham denies the Song has a "literal" meaning, it is just that he denies the "literal" meaning of the Song is to be determined in the same manner as, for example, the literal meaning of the historical books of Scripture. The literal meaning here is not the immediate sense of the words, but the intention of the Spirit in inspiring the words.<sup>51</sup> Durham illustrates his use of the phrase "literal sense" by coining two terms—"immediate literal sense" and "mediate literal sense." He explains these by reference to two examples. The first illustrates the immediate literal sense of Scripture—1 Kings 3:1, "Solomon ... married Pharaoh's daughter." Here the immediate meaning and the literal meaning coincide. This is simply a historical narrative. The second example illustrates the mediate but yet literal meaning of Scripture—Matt 22:2, "A certain king made a marriage to his son ..." etc. Here the literal meaning is not that an actual king made an actual marriage, but mediate, i.e. the text is an image to represent God's calling the world to have fellowship with Christ.<sup>52</sup> This distinction is designed to evade the

48. Particularly "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God." WCF 1:5 in *Confession*, 21–22.

49. In a section otherwise dismissive of a typological or allegorical approach to the Song, Tom Gledhill admits that these passages provide "some biblical justification for a moderately typological approach" (Gledhill, 215).

50. Durham, *Song*, 27. This is not to say Durham never comments on human marriage. For instance, he notes "when persons are married, it is most suitable that the wife should very pressingly long for, and express her desire after the husband" (Durham, *Song*, 74). These references are, however, rare.

51. Cf. the helpful discussion of this, in which Durham is considered, in Muller, 2:472–477.

52. Durham references Andre Rivet in defence of this distinction between the immediate and mediate literal sense.



force of the criticism, that Durham is engaged in the allegorical interpretation of scripture, by positioning his exegesis as interpretation of allegorical scripture. This distinction is explored in greater detail later.

Durham then considers whether the literal meaning of the Song is mediate or immediate. He advances several reasons why immediate literal reading is not appropriate (Durham, *Song*, 28–29). Firstly, Durham does not believe there is sufficient “edification” in setting out “human love” in such detail. Therefore, *a priori*, the Song must have a meaning other than the immediate literal reading.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, and perhaps somewhat weakly, Durham argues that the parties in the Song are not fitted to be understood literally of human love. Some of the metaphors used, are to him inappropriate, some are obviously not literal in any case—e.g. “paving a chariot with love.” Thirdly, Durham argues that the depth of love expressed in this song would be bordering on idolatrous if set forth as the pattern for Christian marriage. To, perhaps paraphrase Durham’s argument somewhat, if this is the ideal Christian marriage, where is the time spent in devotion together to the Lord? Fourthly, Durham argues that the Song is not a portrait of ideal human love as many things in the Song simply are not compatible with godly love—e.g. “as to propose him to others, to excite them to love him” (Durham, *Song*, 29).

#### ALLEGORY OR TYPE?

Having answered the question of whether the literal meaning of the Song is mediate or immediate Durham proceeds to discuss the nature of the mediate understanding of the Song, namely whether the Song is to be understood as typical or allegorical. He lists five differences between types and allegories (Durham, *Song*, 30–31). These differences overlap and can really be summarised under three differences. First, types have a basis in historical fact—e.g. Jonah’s three days in the belly of the fish and Christ’s time in the grave which allegories have no necessary basis in fact; e.g. the parables of Christ. Secondly, types only compare facts and see similarities, but allegories cover a broader range of positive

didactic doctrine and practice. Thirdly, types are restricted in their range to being Old Testament persons or facts who prefigured a New Testament reality, while allegories have no such limitation. In summary “allegories are much more expansive in their meaning and application, than types ... and so are much more doctrinal ... and may more warrantably be applied and made use of ...” (Durham, *Song*, 31).

Having laid down this distinction Durham proceeds to argue that the Song is an allegory and not a type; that is, the Song “is allegoric, not respecting Solomon, or his marriage, but aiming to set out spiritual mysteries in figurative expressions ... without any respect to that story or fact of Solomon’s” (Durham, *Song*, 31). Durham’s argument that this is an allegory rather than a type is sixfold. A selection of some of his arguments are, first, the Song, as it is poetic, looks like an allegory. Second, why should this marriage be more of a type than any other marriage? Thirdly, what is this a type of? The mystical union between Christ and believers was as much a present reality for Old Testament saints as it is for New Testament ones. Given a type is when an Old Testament figure represents a New Testament reality, the type cannot be the love and union of Christ to believers—so what is it? Finally, Durham argues that “it is hard to coin types without scripture authority” (Durham, *Song*, 32). He posits that if typology were to be let wild, then, for instance, a type could be made of anything—e.g. Solomon’s wives from many nations could be made a picture of Christ’s saving from every tribe and tongue. This, for Durham, would simply be unsound typology. As then there is no clear Scripture authority for making one of Solomon’s many marriages a particular type of anything, the avenue of typology is closed, leaving allegory as the only remaining option.<sup>54</sup>

#### AN ALLEGORY OF WHAT?

Having defined the Song as allegory, Durham’s third proposition follows by defining what that allegory is, namely, “the mutual love and spiritual union, and communion that is betwixt Christ and his church, and their mutual carriage towards one another, in several conditions and dispensations” (Durham, *Song*, 32–33). Durham’s key argument for this reading of the allegory comes from a comparison with other scriptures. He explicitly refers to the traditional protestant maxim that scripture is the best interpreter of scripture: “Scripture must agree with scripture, and one more obscure place, must be expounded by others more clear” (Durham, *Song*, 33). Durham argues that the assignation of Psalm

53. This is perhaps where there is some vulnerability against the charge of depreciating the physical at the expense of the spiritual. It is likely that Durham’s response would be that as it does not fit with the intention of Scripture to teach farming or science so it does not fit with the purpose of Scripture to teach in this level of detail regarding the physical side of marriage.

54. Having said this Durham does on occasion make reference to Solomon in the Song as a type of Christ—e.g. Durham, *Song*, 179.

45 to Christ in Hebrews provides clear warrant for taking the image of a marriage and seeing it as Christ and the Church. The language of the Psalm and the Song are similar; therefore the allegory in one (the Song) must match up with the New Testament understanding of the other (Ps. 45). Durham also sees keys to understanding the Song in the use of the image of the vineyard in Matt. 21 and the use of marriage in Matt. 22. Further, the many occasions in Scripture where marriage is used as a picture to represent spiritual truths (Jer. 3, Hos. 2:3, Ezek. 16; Matt. 22, Luke 14; 2 Cor 11:1; Rev 19:8) lead to the identification of the allegory in the Song of Solomon as the love between Christ and his Church (Durham, *Song*, 33). For Durham this glorious topic meant that the Song was to be “preferred not only to all human songs, but even to other scriptural songs.”<sup>55</sup>

Durham then considers the main allegorical alternative to his proposal that the Song speaks of Christ and the Church, namely that the Song is a prophecy of the future course of the Church in history. His main objection to the prophetic understanding of the Song is that it would leave the interpretation of the Song “wholly to uncertainty, or men’s pleasure, as their groundless conjectures, would lead them to apply it.”<sup>56</sup>

#### ‘THE KEY’ ON THE KEY FEATURES OF THE SONG

Having outlined his understanding of the correct interpretation of the Song, Durham proceeded to outline five key features of the book. First, the Song shows to us the various conditions of the church (both weakness and strength) and Christ’s care of the church in all these conditions (Durham, *Song*, 35–67). The conditions include the experiences of sinfulness, of persecution, of being in close fellowship with Christ, of being under faithful and also under faithless pastors (Durham, *Song*, 36). A summary of all these conditions and more form the basis for the Song, together with “the love and care of Christ to them ... in every condition.”<sup>57</sup> Durham pauses here to note the Song is unique among scriptural songs in that it is made up of a conversation between various parties. This he believes is necessary in this instance to make clear the variety and breadth of spiritual conditions covered in the Song (Durham, *Song*, 36–37).

Secondly, important in understanding the Song is the distinction between the visible and invisible church. The visible church<sup>58</sup> is held out in the Song by the images of the watchmen, a mother’s house, gardens of many believers together and the Daughters of Jerusalem. The invisible church, by contrast, is that which has “real” (and not only professed) “union with Christ” (Durham,

*Song*, 37). For Durham, many of the images and privileges in the Song only belong to members of the invisible church—such as true union with Christ. Durham does not believe he is here guilty of dividing the church into two different and mutually exclusive parts, but rather, he is simply looking at the whole church under two different considerations. He uses the image of a heap of corn and chaff to explain his position. If we look at the heap it is one heap, comprising corn and chaff. But the heap could also be considered only in its ultimate and useful form as corn. So the church may be considered as one, “having both renewed and unrenewed in it,” or, alternatively, as the renewed only “yet so as the renewed are a part of the whole, under one consideration, viz. as they are visible professors; and also, are the invisible church, being distinctly considered, as they have more than a visible profession” (Durham, *Song*, 37–38). This definition of the church as one, but yet as capable of consideration under the distinct purviews of visible and invisible, was, for Durham, vital in understanding, not only the Song, but also other significant passages of Scripture—for example the “Letters to the Seven Churches” in Revelation 3–4. Everywhere in Scripture it was important to bear in mind that things said to, and of, the Church could relate to it as either visible or invisible.

The third ingredient necessary for a sound understanding of the Song, for Durham, was a realisation that applying the Song to the condition of individual believers was difficult, that is, it was difficult to be clear whether the Song is speaking at any point of the church as visible or invisible, of true believers or only outward

55. Durham, *Song*, 26. It appears that Durham thought the Song appropriate for singing in the public worship of believers stating, “this Song, [is] intended to be made use of in the praises of God; and so composed, both for the matter and manner, as it might best attain to that end, and prove edifying and comfortable also to believers in their singing of it” (Durham, *Song*, 62). Thus while Durham believed that there is a restriction on the form of what may be sung in worship unlike prayer (see Durham, *Song*, 70), it appears that the restriction envisaged by Durham is to the songs of Scripture rather than to the 150 Psalms themselves. This may shed some light on the actions of the Scottish Church in 1647 in commissioning metrical versions of “other scriptural songs.” However, see the cautionary words of Matthew Winzer in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, 4 (2008) 259–60.

56. Durham, *Song*, 34. The irony, of course, is that exactly the same is said of Durham’s approach to the Song today.

57. Durham, *Song*, 36. Durham at this point references Bernard’s famous work on the Song.

58. Defined as “visibly professing Christ and worshipping him in ordinances” (Durham, *Song*, 37). Elsewhere Durham explains that “the visible church is the common mother, who hath children born after the flesh, as well as the Spirit” (Durham, *Song*, 95).

professors etc. Durham's key appeal is again to scripture as the interpreter of scripture. First, in applying any passage due regard must be given to the context and drift of the Song at that point. Secondly, judgement must be applied as to whether it is most likely that what is being said applies to the invisible or visible church, etc. Thirdly, other scriptures must be considered which use the same images and time must be taken to understand how they are applied and to whom. Finally, Durham returns to the context in the Song by noting consideration of who is speaking, in what emotional condition, to whom and for what purpose it will be easier to understand the intention (Durham, *Song*, 39–40).

The fourth important element to grasp in understanding the Song is that it is most appropriate to think of it as applicable to individual believers. The whole church, Durham argues, does not generally go through the same experiences at the same time. Rather, in any church there will be believers who are weak in faith, believers who are strong in faith, believers who are growing in grace, and believers who are backsliding. Similarly the experiences of the bride in the Song will apply to different individual believers as the whole Church will not be "sick of love" etc. at any one point in time (Durham, *Song*, 40–41).

The fifth and final foundational principle necessary to correctly understand the Song is to grasp that what is held out in the Song under an allegory, namely Christ's love and care for the Church, is held out clearly in other Scriptures. Thus there is nothing "new, strange or uncouth" in the song, but plain teaching found elsewhere in scripture. Indeed it is only "the folly and vanity of men's minds" that would draw any teaching from the Song not found elsewhere in Scripture. To be sure, the Song presents these same truths "in bright and lovely colours," but they are the same truths of Christ's love to his people and his people's experiences in this life that are found in other Scriptures.<sup>59</sup> This hermeneutical conservatism pervades Durham's approach to the Song.

59. Durham, *Song*, 41. Durham also observes that "if we look to the degree of warm affections that breath forth here, we may conceive that there is something odd and singular in this Song: but, as to the kind of doctrine here delivered, there is nothing new" (Durham, *Song*, 51.)

60. Durham, *Song*, 43. This approach would of course be contrary to the Westminster Confession of Faith which declares the sense of scripture to be one and not manifold. WCF 1:9 in *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 24.

61. Durham, *Song*, 44. This is entirely in keeping with the Reformed ideal of scripture. To reiterate a point made earlier, Scripture is given for a purpose and that is to reveal God's redemptive dealings to man. So, Durham would argue if he was speaking frankly, just as it is absurd to expect Christ to teach us about farming, it is also absurd to expect the Song to be teaching sexual technique. Both are beyond

#### EXPOSITION OF ALLEGORY OR ALLEGORIC EXPOSITION?

Having laid down these necessary principles for understanding the Song, Durham, draws some final conclusions. Some of these conclusions recapitulate points Durham has previously made in his introduction. Nevertheless, Durham does introduce significant new points in his conclusions which deserve consideration. One of these points relates to the distinction Durham makes between "an allegoric exposition of scripture, and an exposition of allegoric scripture" (Durham, *Song*, 43). An allegorical interpretation of scripture was for Durham, the practice of many of the church fathers and the schoolmen. Durham defines this approach to Scripture as "when they allegorize plain scriptures and histories, seeking to draw out some secret meaning, other than appeareth in the words; and so will fasten many senses upon one scripture."<sup>60</sup> For Durham that approach is "justly reprovably" and is guilty of making plain passages of Scripture largely unintelligible. The example he gives of an allegorical interpretation of Scripture relates to the incident of David and Goliath. Here an allegorical interpretation would be to ignore the actual events and expound the passage as the combat between "the flesh or the Devil" and "the Spirit, or Christ" (Durham, *Song*, 43). While Durham observes that this kind of interpretation may "have some pleasantness," the trouble is it has no "solidity" and interpretation becomes entirely at the whim of the interpreter (Durham, *Song*, 43–44). Durham singles out Origen as a representative of this school of thought. By way of contrast an exposition of allegorical scripture (such as Durham is proposing for the Song of Solomon) does not impose a false sense on the historical portions of Scripture. Rather, it takes a Scripture where the true meaning is hidden under images (e.g. the parables) and makes them clear.

Durham then proceeds to outline five ways to determine that a scripture is allegorical. First, if taking a scripture literally leads to "absurdity" then it is clear that the Scripture must be understood allegorically. Durham cites as examples the eating of Christ's flesh, the command to pluck out our eyes and the anthropomorphisms where God is said to have hands, etc. (Durham, *Song*, 44). Second, if taking a scripture literally does not tend to spiritual edification, then it is likely the scripture is allegorical. Durham's example here is the parable of the sower and the seed, where Durham believes *a priori* it is clear Christ "could not be [aiming] to discourse husbandry [farming] with them."<sup>61</sup> Thirdly, if a literal interpretation would make Scripture false, then it is clear

to Durham that portion of Scripture is allegorical. For instance, Christ's claim that he would destroy the temple and raise it in three days is obviously not speaking of a literal temple. It is of course important to note the clearly implied assertion of the infallibility and inerrancy of scripture—any interpretation which makes a scripture false is not admissible. Fourthly, it is clear that a scripture is allegorical, if a literal interpretation would make one scripture contradict another. Again the inerrancy of Scripture is affirmed—the bible cannot contain contradictions, there is no room in Durham's doctrine of scripture for "messiness." Fifthly, it is sometimes clear from the context of a speaker's words that he is speaking allegorically—e.g. Christ's parables (Durham, *Song*, 45).

Durham is also aware of the inherent danger of allegories, and so offers five rules to prevent people "coin[ing] what exposition they please of such scriptures" (Durham, *Song*, 46). First, some are just plain and require little interpretation, such as the command to take up the cross and follow Christ. Secondly, the general and common use of an expression can help to determine the meaning in an allegory. So when God is said to have eyes, it points to his knowledge of events. Thirdly, in interpreting allegorical scripture it is important to know how similar phrases are used in the rest of Scripture and to what purpose. Fourth, immediate context is vital—the general teaching of scripture and the analogy of faith is not enough to understand a particular passage. Finally, interpreting an allegory is easy when Scripture itself provides that interpretation, e.g. the parable of the sower (Durham, *Song*, 46–48).

Durham returns again at this point to his defence of identifying the Song as an allegory of "Christ's love to his church and people, and their [spiritual] exercises" (Durham, *Song*, 48). His main defence of this interpretation is again the similar use of the marriage metaphor in other Scriptures. He refers again to Isa. 5:2, Jer. 3, Matt. 22 and Rev. 19:7, as well as to the 45<sup>th</sup> Psalm. In reference to this Psalm Durham argues "that Psalm and this Song are to one scope, and of one style or strain ... [both are] a Song of love for the King, and a spiritual marriage is the subject thereof" (Durham, *Song*, 49). So then when Hebrews 1:8–9 fixes the meaning of Psalm 45 to Christ and his Church, it also implies that this is the true reference of the Song of Solomon as well.

#### OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

Having laid down his conclusions, he then considers some final objections to his views. First he posits the

objection that if the Song simply contains the same doctrines as other scriptures, then the allegory is pointless and the truths should simply be expressed in plain language (Durham, *Song*, 52). He responds by arguing for the usefulness of allegories in several ways. First, he believed that allegories were useful teaching tools which can instruct the mind in ways that plain teaching cannot. Durham also believed that allegories had a power to affect the emotions in a way that plain truth sometimes does not. He gave as an example the case of Nathan in convicting David of his sin with Bathsheba. He used a parable to arouse David's passions before bringing the plain truth before him. So it is with gospel truths on occasions as "Christ's love becomes thus more comfortable and our relation to him the more kindly-like, when it is illustrated by marriage, and the kindly expressions of a husband and wife" (Durham, *Song*, 53). Durham also argues that allegories are often more memorable than plain statements and so help us to retain truth in our minds. In scripture's use of allegories can be seen "both the wisdom and care of God, who taketh divers ways to commend his truth unto men" (Durham, *Song*, 53).

The second objection Durham raises is that some might argue that reading the Song as an allegory of Christ's love to his church is to "make this Song look more like the gospel of the New Testament, than a song of the old." Durham's answer to this objection is forthright and depends heavily on the underlying unity of the covenant of grace. He states that Old Testament believers had "the same gospel" as New Testament believers and that "their faith and communion with God stood not in outward ceremonies, which were typical; but in the exercise of inward graces, faith, love, &c. which are the same now as then." He goes on to argue that Christ was the "same" to believers in the Old Testament and in the New. They had "the same [S]pirit, covenant, &c. and so the same cases and experiences ... [as] are also applicable to us now." The fact that Christ had not yet come in the flesh did not mean that Old Testament believers had "another gospel, covenant, faith, yea, nor church; we being grafted in that same stock which they once grew upon, being by faith heirs of the same promises, which some time they possessed" (Durham, *Song*, 55).

The third, and related, objection Durham considered was that Solomon may not have intended, or understood, the Song to be speaking of the gospel and, therefore, neither should New Testament readers (Durham, *Song*, 55). Durham answers firstly by arguing that

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the purview of scripture and belong to the fulfilment of the creation mandate which is not the special sphere of the church.



it is not so much the intention of Solomon that matters but the intention of the Spirit. Even if Solomon, or Isaiah for another example, did not fully understand the gospel truths they were revealing, that is no bar, for Durham, to later believers looking back with the fullness of light from a completed revelation to see the gospel clearly in the Old Testament. However, be that as it may, Durham's main argument is that "there is no ground to think, but Solomon knew much of the mind of the Spirit in the Song, yea, more than any learned man now a-days."<sup>62</sup> He based this conclusion on several grounds. First, Solomon was a true believer who wrote elsewhere of Christ (e.g. Prov. 8).<sup>63</sup> Second, Old Testament believers knew first hand the experiences of Christ's love and were therefore equipped to write and understand such a book as this. Thirdly, the phrases of this book are so well suited to illustrate Christ and the Church that it would be almost inconceivable to think Solomon did not understand what he was doing.<sup>64</sup>

The fourth objection considered was that making the Song speak about the love of Christ and his people "would seem to say, that no doctrines may be drawn from it, for the edification of those who are unrenewed; and what use can it be of to them, who yet are the greater part of the Church" (Durham, *Song*, 57). This objection may seem strange to some today, but for a mid 17<sup>th</sup> century Reformed preacher this was a real concern. For Durham there were two great duties of a minister: "There are two great works that the ministers of the gospel have to do: One is to engage people to Christ, and to persuade them to receive Him and close with Him; the other is to induce them to walk worthy of Him."<sup>65</sup> If the Song spoke only

to the later end then Durham would have failed to fulfil the full duty of his office. It was therefore important to him that his understanding of the Song enabled him to address unbelievers as follows: "This is our commission to you today. We tell you that the King has made ready for the feast; yea, all things are ready. Come, then, and let there be no more debate about the matter ... Only deliver up yourself to Him, and, in the Lord's name, I tell you that you shall be dearly welcome" (Durham, *Unsearchable Riches*, 78–79). In response, then, to the objection Durham states that the Song speaks of the church not only as invisible, but also as visible, and therefore contains doctrine suitable for the unrenewed. In addition inferences can be drawn from truths applicable to believers that are relevant for unbelievers—e.g. the love of Christ to his people can be used to draw those who are unbelievers to see the beauty of Christ.<sup>66</sup>

Durham concludes his introduction by outlining the main parties in the Song and who they represent, and with some final rules for understanding the Song. The main parties are identified as follows: the bridegroom is Christ; the bride is the church; the bridegroom's friends are ministers (as are the watchmen); the virgins, children, daughters of Jerusalem are members of the visible church;<sup>67</sup> the mother is the universal visible church containing believers and unbelievers. His final rules contain one important addition to what has been previously discussed, namely, Durham's warning against pressing the allegories in too much detail and trying to turn every detail into something significant. He advises against "stick[ing] too much in following of every thing, which these allegories seem to bear" and "insisting too far upon the similitudes."<sup>68</sup> While Durham may not be entirely consistent in applying this rule it does prevent his commentary from having the luxuriant (to use Durham's description of Origen) exegesis found in some commentaries on the Song. An example of this can be seen in his handling of Song 1:10 "Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold." Here Durham states that "what is meant by neck, or cheeks, or chains, or rows of jewels, we think not necessary to be particularly enquired into" (Durham, *Song*, 109).

In all this, whatever may be said of Durham's approach to the Song, it cannot be claimed that it lacked thought.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF THE SONG

Durham did not give an outline of the structure of the Song. However from his commentary on the individual verses of the Song it is possible to piece together his outline of the Song as follows:

62. Durham, *Song*, 56. As an aside in this section of his introduction Durham references the commentaries on Ephesians 5 by Zanchius and Bodius as testimony to his understanding of the Song. He also refers again to Athanasius positively and to Origen who "in plain scriptures is too luxuriant."

63. For Durham's detailed arguments that Solomon was a true believer see Durham, *Song*, 64–66. Reference is made by Durham to the opinions of Bellarmine, Tannovius and Augustine.

64. This is of course an indirect refutation of the allegations that Reformed theology held to a "bare dictation theory" of Scripture. If Solomon had no part at all in the images chosen why should their suitability be an indication of the degree of his understanding?

65. Durham, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* (repr.; Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002) 80. [Hereafter *Unsearchable Riches*].

66. For one example of Durham's application of the Song to unbelievers see *Song*, 144.

67. For a detailed discussion of the identification of these "daughters of Jerusalem," see Durham, *Song*, 91–92.

68. Durham, *Song*, 61. Or again, "every similitude is not to be narrowly searched into" (Durham, *Song*, 132–133). See also Durham, *Song*, 295.

| OUTLINE OF THE SONG OF SOLOMON |                        |            |                                                        |         |                        |            |                                                    |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Section                        | Speaker                | Subsection | Detail                                                 | Section | Speaker                | Subsection | Detail                                             |
| 1:1                            | Introduction           |            |                                                        |         |                        |            |                                                    |
| 1:2–7                          | Bride                  | 1:2–4      | Addresses Christ                                       |         | Bride                  | 5:7        | Recounts treatment at hands of the watchmen        |
|                                |                        | 1:5–6      | Addresses the Daughters of Jerusalem                   |         |                        | 5:8        | Addresses Daughters of Jerusalem                   |
| 1:8–11                         | Christ                 | 1:7        | Addresses Christ                                       | 5:9     | Daughters of Jerusalem | 5:9        | Daughters of Jerusalem question the Bride          |
| 1:12–14                        | Bride                  | 1:8–11     | Addresses the Bride                                    | 5:10–16 | Bride                  | 5:10–16    | Commends Christ to the Daughters of Jerusalem      |
| 1:15                           | Christ                 | 1:12–14    | Addresses Christ expressing her love                   |         |                        |            |                                                    |
| 1:16–17                        | Bride                  | 1:15       | Commends the Bride                                     | 6:1     | Daughters of Jerusalem | 6:1        | Desire to seek Christ with the Bride               |
| 2:1–2                          | Christ                 | 1:16–17    | Addresses Christ praising him                          | 6:2–3   | Bride                  | 6:2–3      | Answers the Daughters of Jerusalem                 |
| 2:3–7                          | Bride                  | 2:1–2      | Addresses the Bride                                    | 6:4–13  | Christ                 | 6:4–10     | Christ commends the Bride                          |
|                                |                        | 2:3–7      | Speaks of Christ to the Daughters of Jerusalem         |         |                        | 6:11–13    | Invites the Bride’s return                         |
| 2:8–17                         | Bride                  | 2:8–9      | Christ at a distance                                   | 7:1–9   | Christ                 | 7:1–9      | Continues commendation of the Bride                |
|                                |                        | 2:10–15    | Bride recounts Christ’s past words to her              | 7:10–13 | Bride                  | 7:10       | Rejoices in her union with Christ                  |
|                                |                        | 2:16–17    | Bride comforted in Christ’s love                       |         |                        | 7:11–13    | Expresses desire for communion with Christ         |
| 3:1–5                          | Bride                  | 3:1–2      | Bride describes her condition without Christ           |         |                        |            |                                                    |
|                                |                        | 3:3        | Bride addresses the Watchmen                           | 8:1–4   | Bride                  | 8:1–3      | Desire for communion with Christ continued         |
|                                |                        | 3:4        | Bride finds Christ                                     |         |                        | 8:4        | Addresses Daughters of Jerusalem                   |
|                                |                        | 3:5        | Addresses Daughters of Jerusalem                       | 8:5a    | Daughters of Jerusalem | 8:5a       | Questions the Bride                                |
| 3:6                            | Daughters of Jerusalem | 3:6        | They commend the Bride                                 | 8:5b–8  | Bride                  | 8:5b–7     | Addresses Christ expressing undying love           |
| 3:7–11                         | Bride                  | 3:7–11     | Commends Christ to the Daughters of Jerusalem          |         |                        | 8:8        | Desires others would know Christ’s love            |
| 4:1–15                         | Christ                 | 4:1–7      | Commends the Bride                                     | 8:9     | Christ                 | 8:9        | Accepts Bride’s prayer                             |
|                                |                        | 4:8        | Invitation to the Bride                                | 8:10–12 | Bride                  | 8:10       | Confirms Christ’s answer to prayer in her own case |
|                                |                        | 4:9–10     | Expression of love to the Bride                        |         |                        | 8:11–12    | Gives thanks that Christ has built his Church      |
|                                |                        | 4:11–15    | Further commends the Bride                             |         |                        |            |                                                    |
| 4:16                           | Bride                  | 4:16       | Addresses her desire to Christ                         | 8:13    | Christ                 | 8:13       | Desires to hear the Bride                          |
| 5:1                            | Christ                 | 5:1        | Addresses the Bride                                    | 8:14    | Bride                  | 8:14       | Desires Christ’s permanent presence                |
| 5:2–8                          | Bride                  | 5:2–6      | Recounts her behaviour to Christ, loss of his presence |         |                        |            |                                                    |

#### KEY ASPECTS OF DURHAM’S TEACHING ON THE SONG

Having looked at Durham’s understanding of the Song and his understanding of its structure, it now remains to

highlight some of the key themes in his exposition. The key themes to be examined are his emphasis on the experiential aspects of Christian experience, his emphasis on the role of the Church in piety and his Christology as revealed in the Song.

## EXPERIENTIAL

Summing up the teaching of Samuel Rutherford on the Christian life, Maurice Roberts outlined the following key features: “the tender relationship between Christ and his Church as that of Bridegroom and Bride, the second coming of Christ as the marriage day to which both Christ and we look forward, the vicissitudes which must be experienced on earth by believers till the end of the world, the assurance of Christ’s love for us now as the love of a heavenly Husband, shortly to embrace us in his arms, and the believer’s yearning desire that time would make speed and hasten forward the longed-for Day” (Roberts, 120). A similarly rich and deeply experiential strain runs through Durham’s commentary—indeed Robert’s words are as true of Durham as they are of Rutherford.<sup>69</sup> Durham focuses, not so much on the objective truth of union with Christ, but on the subjective experience of communion with him, that is, the believer’s conscious enjoyment of all the privileges they have as a result of being “in Christ.”<sup>70</sup> It was his firm belief that “the great scope and desire of believers, if they had their choice, is to have sensible [i.e. felt] communion with Christ” (Durham, *Song*, 76). This desire for

69. “The term *experimental* comes from the Latin *experimentum*, meaning trial. It is derived from the verb *experior*, meaning to try, prove, or put to the test. That same verb can also mean to find or know by experience, thus leading to the word *experiential*, meaning knowledge gained by experience. John Calvin used experiential and experimental interchangeably, since both words in biblical preaching indicate the need for measuring experienced knowledge against the touchstone of scripture” (Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004] 425). Durham himself uses the term experimental—Durham, *Song*, 318.

70. This is not to deny the importance of the “mystical union” for Durham, just simply to highlight the balance seen in *this* work. The union between Christ and the believer is “always the same” but the communion varies and this experiential aspect is where the work on the Song focuses (Durham, *Song*, 135). For Durham on union with Christ see *Song*, 153.

71. Durham, *Song*, 82. Related to this desire is Durham’s teaching that believers may pray to the Spirit “considering the Spirit essentially as the same God with the Father and the Son.” Additionally “to pray to one person of the Godhead, is to pray to all three, who in our worship are not to be divided” (Durham, *Song*, 241.)

72. Durham, *Song*, 83. See also Durham, *Song*, 240–242.

73. Durham, *Song*, 284. On a pastoral note Durham argues that this is a far better use of time than spending time talking of “the faults of ministers, or miscarriages of others” (Durham, *Song*, 285).

74. E.g. Durham, *Song*, 159.

75. E.g. Durham, *Song*, 318.

76. Not that this is always the case. It is possible for Christ, in his sovereignty, to withdraw from communion with a believer “without any respect to any particular provocation, as having a sinful influence thereon.” Durham, *Song*, 133.

this communion comes from an appreciation, wrought by the Spirit, of who Christ is, of his beauty and desirableness. Advice on how to maintain and, if necessary, reinvigorate this communion with Christ is a leading feature of the commentary. Key to communion with Christ is the work of the Spirit. Even as the Bride desires communion with Christ “so she desires his Spirit, that he may by his powerful operations draw her near to him [Christ].”<sup>71</sup> Close communion with Christ is impossible apart from the operations of the Spirit, “none of which can be got at without the Spirit’s drawing.”<sup>72</sup> This lack of confidence in self and a dependency on the Spirit, was of course a key feature of Reformed spirituality. Indeed to be conscious of an “inability” to maintain union with Christ, will drive the believer to depend more on the Spirit, thereby enriching communion with Christ (Durham, *Song*, 242). It is only by faith resting on Christ that the believer “is sustained, and carried through the duties of a holy walk, and the difficulties in her way, till she come through the wilderness unto the land of rest” (Durham, *Song*, 413).

Fundamental to possessing the ongoing work of the Spirit is a life of prayer. Durham notes that “Prayer is a necessary and excellent means for stirring up one in a secure frame and for attaining the Spirit to revive and quicken the work of his grace” (Durham, *Song*, 242). Believers should not just pray for themselves, they should also seek the fellowship of God’s people and seek that they would also pray for them. This mutual prayer one for another “is a duty of . . . fellowship.”<sup>73</sup>

Communion with Christ was not thought of as all or nothing; rather, there were several degrees of closeness or communion with Christ, some more precious than others (Durham, *Song*, 124). It can range from experiences of desertion and distance<sup>74</sup> to great and overwhelming joy with which nothing is comparable.<sup>75</sup> Desolation can be caused by sin, which provokes Christ and drives him away (Durham, *Song*, 174)<sup>76</sup> Indeed it is possible for the believer to fall into a state of spiritual slumber where the calls of Christ are met with “indisposition” and “laziness” (Durham, *Song*, 249). This is part of the believers’ ongoing battle against sin. There is the “flesh” and there is the “spirit” and these contrary elements are both found in the believer “lusting” against one another (Gal 5:17). When the flesh is yielded to, though a true believer is never without some life, a state of slumber can overcome the believer’s spiritual life so as to be devoid of any sense of Christ’s presence. This is contrary to the will of Christ who “desires a place in their hearts” (Durham, *Song*, 256). When in this condition nothing but the power of Christ’s Spirit can waken

the heart from slumber and incline the believer to seek the Lord afresh (Durham, *Song*, 261–262). Of, course Christ could have kept the believer from falling into this state of sin but to show his sovereignty and to show believers what they are when they are without him, he does not (Durham, *Song*, 263). The believers' return is seen in repentance for sin, and then in an active seeking for Christ and his fellowship. Often Christ will make the believer seek hard for him following backsliding before revealing himself. This is not out of hardness on the part of Christ, but is to teach the believer the seriousness of sin and to encourage the believer to maintain fellowship when it is restored (Durham, *Song*, 273). This process of desiring the presence of Christ but not attaining it "will be a very sad exercise to the believer, and affect his heart very much."<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless by perseverance in the exercise of faith following use of private diligence, public ordinances and fellowship with the saints, fellowship with the beloved will be restored (Durham, *Song*, 276).

If the experience of having to seek a lost Christ could be a difficult one this paled in comparison with the great joy of communion with Christ. To experience the blessings of near communion with Christ is for Durham "a heartsome life" (Durham, *Song*, 87). The joy of communion with Christ is not the same as joy in the good things of this world—it is "the joy of the Lord" and therefore is not merely "carnal delight."<sup>78</sup> Believers are entitled to this joy because "Our Lord Jesus allows his people to be fully confident of his love, and of obtaining welcome from him ..." (Durham, *Song*, 359). Durham, while not making assurance of the essence of faith, was fully supportive of the teaching of the Westminster Confession that "such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed."<sup>79</sup>

Another key feature of the Christian's experience, and a fruit of communion with Christ, will be a desire to see others saved. For Durham "Those who love Christ and others truly, will endeavour nothing more, than to have Christ made known unto them...." Indeed Durham goes so far as to say that "this may be a mark of love to Christ, an earnest desire to have him esteemed of and loved by others."<sup>80</sup> The great means used by God to bring people to know Christ is the public preaching of the gospel by ministers (Durham, *Song*, 429).

Whatever the communion attained with Christ in this world, the believer always longs for a better day.

This desired day is the return of Christ—a day which "goes as far beyond what believers possess now, as day exceeds the night" (Durham, *Song*, 155). All in this world can be compared to a shadow, but on that day Christ shall be seen in full light; sin shall be no more, and all mediate communion with Christ will be replaced with immediate sight. And this immediate communion will not be subject to ebb and flow, will not be blighted by sin, but will continue for all eternity. The hope of this day can refresh and encourage believers in the midst of the difficulties of this life (Durham, *Song*, 156). Therefore "this glorious coming of the Lord Jesus is much in the thoughts of his people, and useth to be meditated on by them."<sup>81</sup> Indeed the Song closes with a prayer for the second coming of Christ, and Durham's exposition ends with the prayer "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Durham, *Song*, 460).

#### CHURCHLY

A key feature of Reformed spirituality for Durham is its churchly nature. In the quest for closer communion with Christ believers must not expect to find "any new way to heaven ... nor any new means, ordinances, or officers ... nor yet must ye expect immediate revelations; but walk in the light that shines to you, by the preaching of my word by my ministers" (Durham, *Song*, 104). It is only "in his own ordinances" that most sweet and comfortable communion "can be found."<sup>82</sup> Indeed there is "no living with Christ, nor fellowship with him" apart from "ordinances, word, sacraments, promises of the covenant &c." (Durham, *Song*, 123). Further there is, for Durham, no believer who may safely neglect the preaching of the gospel, or the "public ordinances;" even the strongest would soon find themselves as lost as sheep without a shepherd if they took that course of action (Durham, *Song*, 408–409). It is for Durham a good sign if the public ordinances are "frequented and esteemed" (Durham, *Song*, 452). The ministry and the preaching of the word is therefore a great means to keep

77. Durham, *Song*, 275. Indeed "it is much more difficult to win to enjoy Christ, than it is to lose him" (Durham, *Song*, 278).

78. Durham, *Song*, 87. Not of course that this joy is an end in itself but as it glorifies Christ in honouring his salvation (Durham, *Song*, 243).

79. WCF 18:1 in *Confession*, 75–76.

80. Durham, *Song*, 325. See also Durham, *Song*, 427.

81. Durham, *Song*, 458. This is their duty—it is the duty of a believer to long and pray for Christ's second coming" (Durham, *Song*, 459).

82. Durham, *Song*, 113–114. Not that the ordinances are to be trusted in as mere forms devoid of what they signify and to which they point—Durham, *Song*, 168.



“keep souls from error,” and is of primary importance in the Christian life.<sup>83</sup> Given the seriousness of this office none ought to enter it but those who have a clear commission from Christ (Durham, *Song*, 444).

As well as listening to the voice of the Church today through the gospel ordinances, Durham also advises believers to listen to the church in ages past and learn from that as well. In particular, Durham highlights two areas where the advice of the past should be sought. The first is in relation to new doctrinal ideas. Durham argues that “it is commendable, and often safe in times when new opinions and doctrines bear sway, to follow their way, who we are sure went to heaven before us” (Durham, *Song*, 104). The second is not so much doctrinal as practical. In considering the question “how then should we live” Durham urges believers to consider how preceding generations of Christians lived and not simply to be conformed to the standards of their present age (Durham, *Song*, 104). The advice to consider the past teaching and practice of the church is still subordinate to “the first pattern, Christ, 1 Cor. xi. 1” (Durham, *Song*, 104).

Durham is nonetheless realistic about the visible church. He recognises that “often in outward things, the profane members of the church have the pre-eminence; and the most godly, as to these things, are in the meanest and basest condition” (Durham, *Song*, 97). For the profane members, and particularly for false teachers, the ordinary course is the exercise of church discipline. False teachers are, for Durham, the greatest calamity that can overtake the church. He argues that “there is no hurt, nor hazard, that the church of Christ meets with ... more grievous and dangerous”

than propagators of error (Durham, *Song*, 149). Faithful ministers are charged with the exercise of this discipline, and for Durham, it is no small part of their calling. Indeed the very image of “watchmen” (Song 3:3, cf. Ezek. 33:7) implies that ministers are those who are to guard the church against false teaching. For Durham this is no easy task, but rather is “necessary, burdensome, and of great concernment to the safety of the church” (Durham, *Song*, 163). However, it is not always performed successfully as the watchmen in Song 5:7, whether “by malice, or want of affection, or through unskillfulness and want of experience ... did make the righteous sad” (Durham, *Song*, 280–281).<sup>84</sup>

Durham recognises the traditional designation of the church as “mother”—applying this to the visible church.<sup>85</sup> It is in the visible Church that believers are born again in newness of life, and it is there they are nourished. No matter what growth in grace believers experience, they are never to think they outgrow the church but are always to “honour their mother.” So “those who desire Christ should not run out of the church to seek him, or expect any way of finding him, which others have not found out before them ... but should seek after him in the ordinary means, in his church” (Durham, *Song*, 333).

#### CHRISTOLOGICAL

It would be impossible to summarise all that Durham has to say about Christ in his work on the Song. Instead all that can be done is highlight certain leading features of his teaching. The first striking feature is the depth of love that Christ has for his people. Expounding the phrase “ravished with love” (Song 4:9) Durham says this is an image borrowed from men to show in a picture the “unspeakable” and “inexpressible” love of Christ for his people. It shows Christ’s love is endued with “the passionateness of love, when it seizes deeply on a man, it leaves him not master of his own heart, but the object loved hath it, and (as it were) possesseth it, and commands it more than the man himself” (Durham, *Song*, 225). This staggering image is designed to teach that “Love in Christ to a believer, it is at a height ... it is love of the highest degree: there is no greater intensiveness thereof imaginable.”<sup>86</sup> Expressions of, and meditations in this love abound in Durham’s commentary as he sought to show the loveliness of Christ to his readers.

Another aspect of the character of Christ frequently highlighted is his tenderness in dealings with his people. For Durham “Christ is tender of fainting believers, and

83. Durham, *Song*, 105. Ministers are “the great means Christ hath appointed for preventing the hurt, and promoting the good and edification of the church” (Durham, *Song*, 281). See also Durham, *Song*, 443. Accordingly they are to be respected and submitted to by believers (Durham, *Song*, 450).

84. The whole area of how to handle error and the responsibility of ministers with regard to church discipline is handled in great detail by Durham in his classic work *A Treatise Concerning Scandal* entitled ‘Concerning Doctrinal Scandals’—James Durham, *A Treatise Concerning Scandal* (1680; repr., Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1990) 127–222.

85. Durham, *Song*, 171. See also Durham, *Song*, 348–349. This designation was a common place in Reformed theology—see e.g. John Calvin, Institutes 4.1.4. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 Vols. The Library of Christian Classics Vol XX. & XXI, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, n.d.) 2:1016. This visible church is “beautiful in her ordinances, external profession and order” (Durham, *Song*, 346).

86. Durham, *Song*, 225. Of course “The love of Christ is manifested in nothing more for his people than in his sufferings for them” (Durham, *Song*, 256).

of their consolation.... He is a sweet and gentle constructor of them and of their service; and is not rigid even when they have misconstructions of him.” This is seen in a number of different ways, but particularly how easily and quickly Christ answers his peoples desires. A phrase seen several times in Durham’s work is that Christ is “easily entreated” of his people.<sup>87</sup> That is he swiftly answers believers prayers and desires for communion—“Christ is easily invited and prevailed with to come to his people ...” (Durham, *Song*, 244). Durham sees this as one of the most common features of the Song: “It is observable that there is not one thing oftener mentioned in this Song than the wonderful expressions of Christ’s yielding himself to be prevailed over by them ... as if he gloried in this, that he is overcome by them, which is indeed the glory of his grace” (Durham, *Song*, 376). This tenderness is also seen in Christ’s faithful and sympathetic friendship with believers (Durham, *Song*, 322) and in his being “the sweetest passer-by of transgressions that can be” (Durham, *Song*, 341).

The Christ presented by Durham is not only tender and kindly but also kingly. In his Kingly glory Christ is seen as “God co-essential with the Father” (Durham, *Song*, 191). He is also seen as invested with “power, authority and glory” in his mediatorial office where he has a rod of iron to rule over his enemies. (Durham, *Song*, 191–192). Durham uses the image of Solomon to flesh out the characteristics of Christ’s kingdom, listing them as numerous subjects, power, glory, wisdom and peacefulness (Durham, *Song*, 179–180).

Another important facet of Durham’s Christology is his understanding of Christ as a covenanting party in the covenant of redemption. This covenant is “the old transaction, concerning the salvation of the elect betwixt the Father and the Son.”<sup>88</sup> In the covenant of redemption the Father promises to the Mediator a redeemed elect people on condition of his suffering on their behalf (Durham, *Christ Crucified*, 255). It is in this covenant of redemption “wherein most eminently the glory of his grace and love to sinners doth appear” (Durham, *Song*, 186). The covenant is so important for Durham, as it is only through the revelation of the covenant of redemption in preaching that sinners can come to know and experience the love of Christ.

Durham also uses the list of the Bridegroom’s features in Song 5:11–16 to draw out several attributes of Christ—divinity, mediatorial office, youth (i.e. vigour), omniscience, loveliness, omnipotence, love for and tenderness to his people (Durham, *Song*, 295–323). However, what comes across perhaps most clearly in the Song is the sheer beauty of Christ. For Durham Christ

is all in all, he is incomparably lovely and worthy to be loved. One of many examples is as follows: “Christ is the most lovely and excellent object that men can set their eyes on, that they can cast their love and affection on: there is not such an one as Christ, either for spiritual soul-ravishing beauty that is in him, or the excellent desirable effects that flow from him” (Durham, *Song*, 292).

#### CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this survey of Durham’s work has demonstrated that the traditional allegorical understanding of the Song of Solomon, whether ultimately found convincing or not, is worthy of respect and remains a viable option for Reformed believers. In addition, the key theological elements of Durham’s commentary need to be heard again. His teaching on the experimental piety of the Reformed tradition is a warning against an unfeeling intellectualism which is always a danger. His focus on the church as the source and sustainer of true piety is much needed in this individualistic age. His rich and tender Christology warms the soul and encourages the believer to love the one who first loved them. James Durham, being dead, yet speaks to the Church today!■

87. Durham, *Song*, 86, 226–227, 244, 411.

88. Durham, *Song*, 442. Here the Father is taken as shorthand for all three Persons of the Trinity, and the Son is considered as Mediator. Elsewhere Durham speaks of “the concurrence of all the Persons of the Trinity in promoting [advancing] the work of redemption of sinners” (Durham, *Christ Crucified: Or, the Marrow of the Gospel in Seventy-Two Sermons on the Fifth-Third Chapter of Isaiah* [repr.; Dallas: Naphtali Press, 2001] 375) and explicitly includes the Spirit as a covenanting party (Durham, *Unsearchable Riches*, 143). The covenant of redemption then is “the fruit of the ancient council of the blessed and glorious Trinity” (Durham, *Unsearchable Riches*, 312).

## REVIEWS & RESPONSES

REVIEW: J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: A Doctrine in Contention* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2007). 230 pages. ISBN 9780199211876. \$120. Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). 324 pages. ISBN 9780664231637. \$39.95. Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and the Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2009). 356 pages. ISBN 9781556358654. \$46. Reviewed by Jeff Waddington, teacher of the Calvary Presbyterian Church of Amwell (Ringo, NJ).

### Introduction

While we live in a day and age in which it seems that all doctrines are up for grabs and are being called into question,<sup>1</sup>

RESPONSES critical of articles and reviews may be submitted for consideration for publication by sending drafts to the editorial address. Please contact the Reviews editor, Lane Keister (ReviewEditor@cpjournal.com), beforehand to obtain submission requirements and preferences. When possible, the subject of a negative or possibly controversial review may be contacted beforehand for any appropriate response for publication along with the review, and the reviewer will be given an opportunity for a response. If required, responses and replies may continue in subsequent issues.

1. See Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, *Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) for incisive critiques of the evaporation of doctrinal certitude within the Evangelical movement.

2. For an especially clear statement to this effect, see Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1934) 320.

3. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, trans. William Montgomery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1998).

4. See the work of Guy Prentiss Waters on all three areas, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2004), *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2006), and his chapter, "The Theology of Norman Shepherd," in *The Hope Fulfilled*, ed. Robert L. Penny (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008) 207–231. Waters is currently working on a full length study of Shepherd which has yet to be given a working title. Waters has also co-edited with Gary Johnson a volume entitled *By Faith Alone* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007).

5. See Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) 41ff, for his assessment of the "New Perspective on Calvin."

6. I have contributed to this debate with my chapter, "Jonathan Edwards' 'Ambiguous and Somewhat Precarious' Doctrine of Justification" in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008) 478–498.

none seems more controversial than the doctrine of union with Christ. Why this is so would seem to call for investigation. After all, the doctrine has been an integral element in Protestant theology for many years. Why is it a problem now? As with so many things, the devil is in the details. That is, while most Protestant systematic theologies contain some sort of formulation of union with Christ (since the concept is biblical), the exact contours of the doctrine and its place within a given system vary greatly. For instance, it is generally recognized that for Lutherans, union with Christ is the *result* of justification. Justification *precedes and remains outside of* union with Christ and *leads into it*.<sup>2</sup> However, for Reformed theology, union with Christ embraces the whole of the application of redemption so that justification, together with all the other benefits of redemption, occurs *within* union. But even within the Reformed faith there are slightly different articulations of the doctrine of union with Christ and its relation to the redemptive benefits and their accompanying graces.

There is a virtual cottage industry devoted to wrestling with this issue and its related concerns. Not only is the doctrine itself intricate and demanding of firm commitment and careful formulation, but historical circumstances and controversies also color one's perspective on the subject. For instance, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was debate about the role of union with Christ and its relation to justification in the writings of polymath Albert Schweitzer. In his book *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul* he argued that justification was a "subsidiary crater" in the theology of Paul and that the center of the great Apostle's thought was union with Christ with its participatory nature. That is, union with Christ was all about transformation. The forensic nature of justification was hardly essential. Justification was, after all, a strategic polemical weapon in Paul's arsenal to be used against the so-called Judaizers.<sup>3</sup> In more recent times, disputes over union with Christ have arisen because of its relation to controversies involving the New Perspectives on Paul and the Federal Vision, along with the theology of Norman Shepherd.<sup>4</sup> Some have even contended that there is a "New Perspective on Calvin" in Reformed circles.<sup>5</sup> And historical theology has not been exempt in these rising and falling controversies. Such stalwart Reformed theologians as John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards have been summoned to the bar of contemporary judgment,<sup>6</sup> as has Martin Luther in the current "Finnish School" of Luther studies.<sup>7</sup>

I mention the current controversy about the doctrine of union with Christ so as to provide an overarching context for the following review of three of the more recent contributions to this ongoing scholarly and ecclesiastical discussion. The way

7. For one helpful Reformed response to the Finnish school of Luther interpretation, see Carl R. Trueman, "Is the Finnish Line a New Beginning? A Critical Assessment of the Reading of Luther Offered by the Helsinki Circle," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 231–244.

I will handle these reviews is that I will examine each book separately with material description and critical interaction as appropriate and then I will conclude the review with brief comments about how the three books relate to each other and the larger dispute concerning union with Christ. The three books I will be examining are: J. Todd Billings's *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, Michael Horton's *Covenant and Salvation*, and Mark Garcia's *Life in Christ*.<sup>8</sup>

### Calvin, Participation, and the Gift

J. Todd Billings, assistant professor of Reformed Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, has given us a fascinating book with this study of Calvin's doctrine of participation and union with Christ, given as it is, within the context of discussions going on in the larger theological community among so-called "gift" theologians. And among "gift" theologians, it is those within the Radical Orthodoxy school that act as conversation partners in this sophisticated, yet engagingly written work.<sup>9</sup> Radical Orthodoxy, a movement of primarily British Anglican theologians, seeks to counter the skepticism of postmodernism about metaphysics by going back behind contemporary thought to the work of Thomas Aquinas. In many ways, Radical Orthodox theologians remind me of the Cambridge Platonists, those men who reacted against their Puritan upbringing by embracing elements of Neoplatonism and a strong confidence in the human rational faculty.<sup>10</sup>

But why would Billings try to bring together Radical Orthodoxy and John Calvin? The truth is these theologians have already done that for him. His project is in reality an attempt to correct the typical misperceptions of at least some "gift" theologians about John Calvin. For many of these scholars, Calvin is the epitome of what is wrong with Reformation era theologians. Since they look at Thomas Aquinas as the standard by which all others are judged, they come to the conclusion that Calvin falls short of the glory of Thomas. Thomas understood man as created in the garden to be in a continuum with God (the so-called *analogia entis* or chain of being)<sup>11</sup> and the goal of man as created was to experience an unmediated beatific vision of God. Redemption is then understood in ontological terms.<sup>12</sup> Salvation *just* is transformation. John Calvin, with his strong Creator/creature distinction, nominalistic tendencies, and stress on divine sovereignty, has no room for reciprocity between God and man. For Calvin, God does all and man, being wholly passive, does nothing. There is no mutual gift exchange, in other words. Billings counters this reading of Calvin with a close examination of his doctrine of union with Christ, and his understanding of divine/human participation which is then traced out in the development of the various editions of the *Institutes* and other writings of the Calvin corpus followed by a careful look at how participation

grows in significance in Calvin's treatment of the sacraments and his understanding of natural law.

With only 197 pages of text, Billings offers a rich, contextualized look at Calvin and his progressively developing understanding of participation. The book contains six chapters which put Calvin in the context of the gift discussion, seek to ascertain his metaphysics,<sup>13</sup> track the development of his language about "participation in Christ," understand his view of the activity of believers in prayer and the sacraments, and attempt to grasp how Calvin understood natural law as God's accommodation to man so that man might be accommodated to God. All I can do here is touch upon some highlights of Billings' work.

Readers would understand that as a presuppositionalist, I might get a little nervous in the presence of theologians who actually appreciate Thomas Aquinas' theology of the *analogia entis*. It would be dreadful if it turned out to be the case that John Calvin was discovered to hold to this potentially pantheistic or panentheistic belief.<sup>14</sup> But facts are facts. Billings notes that John Milbank<sup>15</sup> sees Calvin's doctrine of imputation as incompatible with a Thomistic doctrine of participation (7–11). But Calvin does use the language of participation. Does he fall into the trap of transgressing the Creator/creature distinction? Billings argues that Calvin is both continuous and discontinuous with the Medieval tradition embodied in Thomas and in later Byzantine thinkers such as Gregory Palamas.<sup>16</sup>

An analysis of Calvin's theology of participation in Christ reveals it as a compelling, yet enigmatic, aspect of his theology.

8. Numbers in parentheses in the body of the text are page references to the books under review.

9. The book is not without its critics. Charles Partee, in his *Theology of John Calvin, 175–176*, offers some moderate criticism of Billings at points.

10. See Frederick J. Powicke, *The Cambridge Platonists: A Study* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1971) and the literature cited therein for more on the Cambridge Platonists. Interestingly enough, Michael Horton in his *Covenant and Salvation* discusses the Cambridge Platonists, especially their putative influence on Jonathan Edwards. See pp. 288–289.

11. For a helpful description of the chain of being, see the citation from Michael Horton later in these reviews on page 263.

12. Ontology is synonymous with metaphysics and has to do with what is ultimately real, what has being, or what exists.

13. See note 12.

14. Pantheism is the belief that God is everything or that everything is God. Panentheism is a slight modification so that God is in everything or everything is in God.

15. John Milbank (born 1952) is an Anglo-Catholic theologian who serves as professor of religion, politics, and ethics at the University of Nottingham in the U.K. Milbank along with Graham Ward and Catherine Pickstock makes up the triumvirate of Radical Orthodoxy.

16. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) served as archbishop of Thessalonica.



It is not Thomist or Palamite, or a straightforward example of 'gift exchange'. Calvin engages deeply with patristic and medieval theologies of participation. Yes, these theologies are radically recontextualized in his theology. Calvin's relation to earlier theological tradition on the issue of participation is a subtle combination of continuity and discontinuity (15).

Billings points out that Calvin departs from the earlier tradition with his doctrine of the *duplex gratia dei* or two-fold blessing of God: justification and sanctification are distinguishable yet inseparable. Justification, on the one hand, is by imputation, not impartation. However, imputation is "inextricably tied" to union for Calvin. Sanctification, on the other hand, is by impartation. And this occurs within the "communal context of the church and sacramental life" (16). The upshot of all this is that for Billings, "... Calvin's theology of participation emerges from a soteriology which affirms a differentiated union of God and humanity in creation and redemption" (p. 16, see also 20, 26 and 42–66, especially 61). While it appears that Calvin skates on a razor's edge in his language of divine/human participation, Billings notes that "... Calvin never suggests that humanity is assimilated into the divine" (65).

Readers familiar with disputes about the doctrine of union with Christ will be aware that the forensic nature of justification gets minimized if not altogether eliminated in many instances. One strength of Billings' study is that he clearly recognizes that Calvin affirmed that while justification occurs within union, it is irreducibly forensic in character. While justification and sanctification are inseparable, they are distinguishable. While they are distinguishable, they are also inseparable.

The wondrous exchange as imputation is not simply an externalized transaction that happens outside oneself, thus not requiring true transformation. As Calvin later states it, imputation and regeneration<sup>17</sup> constitute a double grace (*duplex gratia*) and are inseparable.... The wondrous exchange in imputation draws believers into a transforming union with Christ, even as the transformation of believers does not provide the *ground* for this union (71).

Interestingly enough, it appears that for Calvin, the language of participation is not limited to the transformative but also is applicable to the forensic.

Certain passages continue to reflect language of the wondrous exchange: 'You see that our righteousness is not in us but in

Christ, that we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ (*Christi sumus participes*); indeed, with him we possess all its riches.' But to ground his very close connection of justification and sanctification—and at the same time the distinction between the two—Calvin emphasizes the oneness brought about by participation. 'For in what way does true faith justify save when it binds us to Christ so that, made one with him, we may enjoy participation in his righteousness (*participatio iustitiae eius fruamur*)?' As in 1536, Calvin's argument is unapologetic regarding imputation. If one denies that we 'participate' in Christ's righteousness and not just our own, one also denies the true union and oneness of believers with Christ (81).

Billings denies that union with Christ is "central" in Calvin's thought. However, the doctrine does have "undeniable importance" (19). Billings continues, "Participation,' along with 'union,' 'engrafting,' and 'adoption,' are central images for Calvin's conception of what it means to be 'in Christ'" (19). Can one use the term "central" and mean by it "undeniably important"? I am not completely sure that there is any substantial conceptual difference between these two expressions, especially if one does not intend to suggest by the expression "central" a central dogma. This reader has not yet found a persuasive argument that central must mean "central dogma." A central dogma serves as the source of doctrinal deductions. No one that I have read who thinks union with Christ is central in Calvin would argue that the rest of Calvin's system of doctrine is directly deducible from the "undeniably important" doctrine of union. So I would suggest that we not trip up over words. I say the doctrine of union is central in Calvin, Billings says it is undeniably important. I think we both mean pretty much the same thing.

Billings also seeks to show that Calvin is a rich theologian who fails to be understood aright in disputes over the nature of union with Christ and the nature of justification.

In general, I see my approach lying between what I consider to be two battling alternatives. First, what we might call an 'Anti-Legal School' of Calvin's thought tends to downplay the forensic elements in Calvin's doctrines of union with Christ and justification, sometimes implying that the organic images of participation, adoption, and engrafting are alternatives to the forensic image of the divine decree. In the other side, some writers emphasize the irreducible legal dimension of union with Christ in justification in a way that may (however unintentionally) imply that the analogy of an external legal decree is sufficient in itself. While scholars on both sides of this divide have legitimate points to make, I argue that Calvin holds a position in the middle: his doctrine of justification, and hence part of his theology of participation in Christ, is unmistakably

17. Calvin uses the word "regeneration" as a virtual synonym for sanctification. However, the term can be used with reference to the initial work of the Holy Spirit as well as his ongoing activity in the life of the Christian.

'forensic,' a righteousness from outside ourselves (*extra nos*) is received both in being united to Christ and simultaneously through God's free and gracious pardon.... On the other hand, other scholars attempt to safeguard this distinctively Reformation doctrine by emphasizing the external nature of the divine decree. In contrast, I argue that one cannot simply label Calvin's doctrine of the double grace (*duplex gratia*) wholly forensic or simply reducible to a non-forensic account of 'union with Christ' (22–23).

With regard to the transformation that occurs within the believer in "regeneration" or what we would call sanctification, Billings suggests that for Calvin, it is an ontological transformation. "Thus, Calvin uses the language of engrafting to argue not only for the intimacy of the union between believers and Christ, but for the actual transformation that happens in this participatory, uniting act of engrafting" (94). It is not clear to me that Calvin's language, as realistic as it is, requires a view of sanctification as ontological transformation. Why can't it be an *ethical* transformation? After all, when Adam fell in the garden of Eden, he did not cease to be Adam. He was transformed from holy Adam to sinful Adam. But he was Adam all the same. So that in Christ, the believer is changed as to his ethical orientation. Undoubtedly more work needs to be done in this area.

Then there is the vexed question of the logical priority of justification to sanctification within union with Christ. This is not a "central" concern of Billings, although he does tip his hand in his discussion. In a section where Billings examines Calvin's relation to and interaction with the problematic Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander, Billings notes that Calvin holds both to imputation and impartation. "First, if salvation is to be truly a gift from God—and sanctification a life of gratitude—a forensic notion of pardon is the necessary prerequisite for such a life of sanctification" (58).<sup>18</sup> Billings is here picking up on what I myself have seen in Calvin. In order to make progress in the Christian life, to grow in the grace of sanctification in its progressive aspect, justification must be a settled issue. Billings reiterates, "In fact, Calvin claims that recognizing God's free pardon in justification is essential for participation in Christ through sanctification—so that the Christian life can be a life of gratitude and voluntary obedience to God" (61). So for Billings, there does appear to be some sort of priority of justification to sanctification in Calvin. However, this priority is with regard to sanctification in its progressive aspect and not its definitive aspect. Those who deny such a thing as definitive sanctification (admittedly a technical expression which does not seem to appear in Calvin, although whether the concept does is fodder for further consideration) still have to admit that progressive sanctification must *start at some particular point* in time. There

is a break with sin in principle. Whether the "settled-ness" of justification constitutes a priority, strictly speaking, over progressive sanctification is the question. I am willing to grant that there may be some kind of priority. Maybe we can say it is an *existential* priority. However, we must remember that the priority is only with regard to the relation of justification to progressive sanctification.

There is also a question about what Billings understands justification to involve beyond the forensic. On p. 114, he notes this: "Hence, in justification, believers become adopted children of the Father, new creations by the Spirit. In this first grace, Calvin is speaking not simply about a legal decree, but about an entrance into a new way of being and acting through union with Christ." And on the same page, in footnote 33 he also says that justification cannot be reduced to a forensic courtroom analogy. Is Billings here confusing all the blessings of union with Christ with the specific blessing of justification? Perhaps so.

Finally, Billings addresses the sticky wicket of Calvin's use of the category of natural law. I already noted at the beginning of this review that Billings sees Calvin understanding law as being God's means of accommodating himself to man so that man may accommodate himself to God. It makes sense, then, that Calvin would see the *tertius usus legis* as the primary use of the law. "Although it is known as the 'third' use of the law, the law's role as guidance for believers is in fact the primary role" (146). Billings goes on to note, "It gains this primary status through its place in Calvin's account of the economy of salvation as creation-Fall-restoration-fulfillment. The negative uses of the law function as they do because of the Fall. The third use of the law, however, is a primal gift from God, what Doweey calls a 'mode of relation' between humanity and God in the prelapsarian state" (146).<sup>19</sup>

It is Calvin's position vis-à-vis the idea of natural law that is problematic for many within the Reformed community. As Billings comments, "Concerning natural law, scholars like McNeill emphasize the Thomist tendencies of Calvin's thought, in contrast to Barthian readings which see only a negative use for the natural law. Between these two hermeneutical poles, scholars like Bohatec, Hesselink, Little, Grabill, and Backus have portrayed Calvin as taking a middle-ground position on natural law" (152). What is the problem with the idea of natural law anyway? The standard critique is that it is usually understood to be an autonomous law outside of God

18. Is sanctification *merely* fueled by gratitude? I would agree that gratitude must be a factor, from the human side. However, much more important is the work of the Holy Spirit which is the very basis of the "voluntary obedience" noted in the next citation.

19. Edwards A. Doweey was the author of *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*. 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). Billings cites p. 225 of Doweey's work.

to which even he must conform. It is also a wax nose in the secular world. Historically natural law has been whatever anyone wanted it be. But there are two questions at play here: what did Calvin hold and what is the theological assessment of Calvin's view? This is true for the overall discussion of Calvin and union with Christ as well. There is a tendency to allow our theological assessment of the concept of natural law to control what we see Calvin saying or not saying. Billings (and others like Stephen Grabill in his *Rediscovery of Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*<sup>20</sup>) see Calvin embracing a modified natural law.

So what does Calvin mean by natural law? Billings says,

... when Calvin speaks of the natural law, he is frequently speaking of the 'internal law' (*lex interior*) which is 'engraved upon the hearts of all.' Although this law is written on the human heart, human understanding of this law is greatly tarnished from the blindness and sin resulting from the Fall. What is the content of the 'internal' law? The 'internal' law, although perceived imperfectly, is the same as the 'moral law,' which is 'the true and eternal righteousness, prescribed for all nations and times, who wish to conform their lives to God's will.' The content of the moral law is summed up in the Decalogue, which can be fully understood only in light of Christ and the double commandment to love God and neighbor. Thus the 'moral law' is also part of the 'natural law,' even though humans have imperfect access to this natural, moral law apart from revelation (153).

It seems that natural law for Calvin is a form of general or natural revelation. However, the way Billings states it at the end of the immediately preceding citation may be a bit confusing. Natural law is a form of revelation. Perhaps Billings means by "revelation" special revelation?

For Calvin, according to Billings, natural law corresponds to the moral law or the Decalogue. The Decalogue, of course, has two tables. The first table refers to man's relationship to God and the second to man's relation to man. With the fall man is not able to please God by living a life of *pietas* but still has vestiges of understanding the first table that renders him inexcusable before the face of God. And man has knowledge of the second table. It is this that accounts for civilization.

... Calvin gives a paradoxical and quite original reading of Romans 1:18–32, arguing that natural knowledge of God is *offered* by God but not *received*. The blindness resulting from the Fall keeps the natural knowledge of God (related to the first table) to a minimal content: that God exists and that God is a judge.... However, the second table of the natural, moral law is a different story. Although fallen humanity has a distorted view of the second table until they have received God's revelation, humans nevertheless have an innate knowledge of good and evil that is reasonably reliable (154).

Once again, Billings sounds like he is reading Calvin as if natural law was not a form of revelation. That would be strange. Does Calvin really think men just read natural law off of creation by their own wits? This is hardly likely. It is *given* to men by God. It is *revealed* by him. So it would appear that factually, Calvin embraces a form of natural law. Theologically it looks like what we have called natural or general revelation.

I have not been able to delve as deeply into these issues as they demand. But I trust the reader has gotten an idea of the quality of the work in Billings' book. We have questions about some things, but overall, the book has been well worth the effort expended. We will return to further consideration of *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift* in the conclusion.

### Covenant and Salvation

Now we come to the second volume of our literary trilogy on union with Christ. Michael Horton provides us with a veritable theological feast in his *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ*. The third of a four part series, this volume covers what we would typically refer to as the application of redemption.<sup>21</sup> As with the other volumes in this series, Horton enters into detailed dialog with conversation partners from other theological traditions. In this case, the partners are primarily scholars in the New Perspectives on Paul school and the Finnish School of Luther interpretation (Helsinki Circle). Also, as with the other volumes, Horton attempts to bring the best of post-Reformation Reformed scholasticism and the more recent redemptive historical (i.e., Biblical) theology of Geerhardus Vos into the conversation as well. All of this makes for a rewarding and enjoyable theological discussion.

*Covenant and Salvation's* 324 pages is comprised of twelve chapters divided into two main sections: covenant and justification and covenant and participation. Beginning with the first chapter, Horton has provided a fascinating discussion of the various kinds of covenants that one finds in Scripture. The author points out that we find covenants of law and covenants of promise. These are also known in the literature as suzerainty treaties and royal grants respectively (2). This distinction provides the background for the second chapter of the book where Horton distinguishes between the covenants of Sinai

20. Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovery of Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*. Emory University Studies in Law and Religion series. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

21. The other volumes in this series are *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), and the final volume *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

and Zion building off of Paul's discussion in Galatians 3 and 4. More specifically there is a clear demarcation between the covenant of promise which God made to Abraham in Genesis 12ff and the covenant of law made with Israel at Mount Sinai.

In chapters three and four Horton enters into focused dialog with exemplars of the New Perspectives on Paul, specifically E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright. These chapters contain some of the best interaction with the NPP advocates from a biblical and systematic theological vantage point. In the second chapter Horton interacts with Sanders's covenantal nomism idea and meticulously demonstrates that when Sanders ascertains that Second Temple Judaism was gracious and therefore not legalistic or Pelagian, Sanders fails to note that, like medieval Roman Catholicism, Second Temple Judaism was quite likely semi-Pelagian and therefore legalistic after all. In the fourth chapter the author interacts with Dunn's thesis that "works of the law" in Paul's letters were not just any works done to merit God's favor but specifically "ethnic boundary markers": Sabbath keeping, kosher diet, and circumcision. Horton, building on the insights of others such as Stephen Westerholm,<sup>22</sup> amply demonstrates that works in Paul were not limited to these boundary markers although they certainly included them.

In the fifth chapter, "Law and Gospel: Contrast or Continuity?" Horton presents his form of the republication thesis.<sup>23</sup> Arguing against the common assumption that the Law/Gospel distinction is a specifically Lutheran abstraction, Horton notes

No less than Lutheranism, the confessions and formative theologians in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed churches strongly affirmed the law-gospel distinction. However, as federal theology flourished, the Reformed drew this distinction into the ambit of the various historical covenants. So, for example, specific questions such as to what extent the theocracy was a republication of the covenant of creation (and therefore, strictly speaking, a covenant of works) or the way the law functions in the Abrahamic as opposed to the Sinaitic covenants introduced more nuance (80–81).

What exactly is this republication thesis? In broad strokes it is the idea that the Mosaic administration was a two-layered covenant. That is, it was an instantiation of the covenant of grace in terms of personal eschatological salvation. Old Testament saints were justified by grace alone through Christ alone by faith alone just as much as New Testament saints. However, additionally, there was a national, typological works-oriented aspect to the Mosaic covenant as well. This layer of the covenant was meant to box Israel in until the coming of the Messiah (per Galatians 3 and 4). The physical blessings of possession of the holy land would be based upon obedience to the law as a people. This can be seen in the example of Daniel

and his compatriots Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These were godly Hebrews who found themselves in an ungodly land because of the exile. The Israelite people were punished by removal from the land, and among them were godly Jews. Daniel was personally saved but he still experienced national exile.<sup>24</sup> In other words, those who went into exile were a mixed group of the elect and non-elect in Israel.

In the sixth chapter the author addresses the nature of justification as the imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience. Here Horton interacts with N. T. Wright's recent criticisms of the traditional understanding of justification and his own creative alternative.<sup>25</sup> Wright criticizes the traditional Reformed doctrine of justification for misunderstanding Paul. Recalling the language of Sanders about covenantal nomism being about getting in and staying in the covenant, Wright notes that justification is not about getting in to the covenant community but about who is already in. As he says, it is not so much about soteriology as it is about ecclesiology. For Paul, Wright contends, instead of the boundary markers in the church being ethnic badges such as Sabbath observance, kosher diet and circumcision, now the badge is faith. Additionally, Wright contends that "the righteousness of God" noted by Paul in Romans 1:17 is not the righteousness imputed to those who trust in Christ but is God's covenantal faithfulness. Horton notes

Yet again Wright is refuting a position that confessional Lutheran and Reformed traditions do not hold. None of the Reformers taught that *God's righteousness* is imputed, although the one who fulfilled the terms of the law-covenant as the human servant is also the divine Lord. A third party, a representative, is left out of the courtroom in Wright's description.

22. Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). Westerholm has recently revised and substantially expanded this work in his *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran Paul" and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

23. A fuller explication of the republication thesis can be found in the recent publication, *The Law is Not of Faith*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko and David Van Druen (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2009). See also Michael Brown's essay, "The Covenant of Works Revisited: John Owen on Republication in the Mosaic Covenant," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008): 151–161.

24. Those readers who are familiar with Puritan theology should see an analogy here with the national covenant idea embraced in the old and new worlds. The national covenant was seen to relate to God's blessings on the nation apart from personal salvation.

25. Wright has offered his criticisms and creative alternative in his *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), his commentary on Romans in the *New Interpreter's Bible: Vol. 10/ Acts-First Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 2002), *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), and most recently in *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2009).



There is only a judge/plaintiff (God) and the defendant (Israel). However, Christ is both, and this complicates the picture. In fact, the mature Reformation doctrine of justification was articulated against both Rome's understanding of justification as an infused quality of righteousness and Andreas Osiander's notion of the believer's participation in God's essential righteousness. The Reformers and their heirs labored the point that it is Christ's successful fulfillment of the trial of the covenantal representative that is imputed or credited to all who believe. His meritorious achievement, not God's own essential righteousness is imputed (104).

Justification, which involves the forgiveness of sins and acceptance as righteous, according to Horton, is not a legal fiction. "In Christ as Lord-Servant, God's faithfulness to the covenant and human faithfulness to the covenant finally and fully converge. Yet it is the covenantal obedience that he has 'worked out' in his earthly trial that serves as the content of imputation. This is what keeps justification from being an abstract or legal fiction, since the justified do in fact possess 'in Christ' the status of those who have perfectly fulfilled all righteousness" (104–105). However, Horton is not quite clear here as we will soon discover. What I mean is that Horton, as the two part scheme of his book reveals, does not include justification *within* union with Christ. Even though he has just noted here that justification takes place "in Christ" it is not clear to me what he means by this expression. As much as I hate to say this, Horton offers us what looks like a basically Lutheran *ordo salutis* here.

Horton is right on target as he addresses Wright's idea that there is both a present justification by faith and a future justification based upon the believer's whole life lived. Horton responds to this undermining of the finality of justification in this life by saying, "While I would agree that the law gives life in one sense—namely, in pronouncing its vindication of Jesus in the resurrection, this is true for us only by covenantal

participation in Christ. Justification is indeed a final judgement on 'the entirety of the life lived,' as Wright suggests, but a judgement on Christ's life lived rather than on the believer's" (122).

Horton's second part of the book begins his discussion of union with Christ proper. As already noted, justification appears to occur *outside of* and *lead into* and *undergird the whole of* union with Christ. This makes sense if we assume that union with Christ is primarily or fundamentally transformative. That is, if we conceive of union with Christ as basically sanctification then we would want to preserve the forensic nature of justification by removing it from within the parameters of union with Christ. This Horton seems to do. But is that Reformed or something else? In the seventh chapter Horton argues that justification is "the forensic basis of union with Christ and is therefore the source of our calling, sanctification, and glorification" (129). He continues, "In this understanding, justification is not simply one doctrine among others; it is the Word that creates a living union between Christ, the believer, and the communion of saints" (138). In this sentence it seems pretty clear that the justifying Word *creates* union. It would seem to make no sense to say that justification occurs *within* union and at the same time be the *source* of that union.<sup>26</sup>

Tying justification in history to the eternal plan of the Triune God in the covenant of redemption, Horton draws upon the work of Kevin Vanhoozer and speech act theory. Here the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is said to ground speech act distinctions between locution, illocution, and perlocution (135).<sup>27</sup> The point of all this is that speech is seen to "yield its effect" or bring about what it says. Just as when the minister utters "I now pronounce you man and wife" and in the very utterance the deed is accomplished, so also when God declares a sinner justified he is so. This is one area where Horton provides a suggestive nuance to traditional justification doctrine. However, we shall soon see that there is more here than initially meets the eye.

In chapter eight Horton discusses Neoplatonic participation or *metathesis* (153–180). In this chapter the author covers some of the same territory as Billings by interacting with Radical Orthodoxy as well as the Finnish school of Luther interpretation. Here Horton offers an alternative to Radical Orthodoxy's participation with his covenantal *koinonia*.<sup>28</sup> There is, then, a covenantal form of participation which involves one being either in Adam or being in Christ (164). Radical Orthodoxy, like Roman Catholicism, views grace as a substance that can be infused into someone as over against understanding grace as God's favor extended to us in the face of our sinfulness. As Horton notes,

While Reformation theology understands grace as God's verdict (*favor*) and a gift (*donum*) of a new life, Milbank restricts grace to the latter and treats it as an infused substance. At the

26. A similar confusion arises in John Fesko's *Doctrine of Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008). I have raised a concern about this confusion in my review of Fesko at <http://www.reformation21.org/shelf-life/justification-understanding-the-classic-reformed-doctrine.php>.

27. These technical terms derive from the discipline of speech act theory. A *locutionary* act is an utterance. An *illocutionary* act is the utterance's intended meaning. A *perlocutionary* act is the intended or unintended effect of the utterance. Horton builds off of the work of Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2002). However, speech act theory finds its seminal articulation in the writings of J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) and John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

28. *Koinonia* is the Greek word for fellowship or communion.

heart of the notion of an infused grace lies an ontological dualism, which assumes that there is a substantial deficiency in nature that must be supplemented by grace. In Reformed theology, however, grace justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies creatures without adding anything substantial to their nature (169–170).

This seems quite right.<sup>29</sup> The Bible sees man's fall in terms of *ethical* rebellion, not in terms of *substantial* deficiency.

Here Horton also addresses the Finnish school of Luther interpretation regarding Luther's early understanding of union with Christ.<sup>30</sup> The upshot of the Finnish school's reading of Luther is that it reads Luther through the lens of the repudiated theology of Andreas Osiander. Osiander, who was opposed to Melancthon's forensic understanding of justification, taught a *justification-by-means-of-union-with-Christ-in-his-essential-divine-righteousness*. Because we will be discussing Osiander in relation to Calvin in the third segment of this review, we will keep our comments brief. Horton seems to be on solid ground when he says, "While it is quite possible that Osiander developed a full-blown theology of substantial union in part from some statements in Luther's earlier writings, it seems fairly clear that Luther's mature teaching was decisively opposed to any attempt to find a righteousness *in us* (even that which one had by virtue of union with Christ) that could stand in the divine judgment" (179).

In the ninth chapter Horton presents his alternative to Neoplatonic metathesis, covenantal koinonia. Horton grants that his covenantal ontology will be less sophisticated and speculative than the alternatives (182), but it is a biblical alternative all the same. It is at this point that Horton offers a useful critique of the Neoplatonic chain of being or *analogia entis*. Participation is a very biblical idea, but is that inasmuch as it is covenantal participation and not an ontological fusion. Horton unpacks for us the problem with this arcane and pervasive idea.

Especially through Origen and the Alexandrian school (with roots in Philo), Christian theology was influenced by the notion of the cosmic ladder of being, with lower forms of existence participating in higher forms, deriving ultimately from the absolute. Creation, in this scheme, is an emanation (for Origen, eternal) of divinity from the one God reaching all the way out to the extremities of being. Specific scriptural teachings challenged or qualified aspects of the metaphysical heritage, but the worldview was essentially that of Middle Platonism, Stoicism, and Neoplatonism (184).

Horton is not challenging the legitimacy of metaphysics (ala Kant), but arguing that the kind of metaphysics we

embrace must be consonant with Scripture. One can only offer a hearty amen to such sentiments.

However there is a fly in the ointment. Horton wants to eliminate the concept of the infusion of habits. The Reformers were correct to dismiss this idea from the realm of justification. But to dispense with the idea altogether seems problematic to me. I will readily grant that Horton knows that he is plowing new ground here. Here we get to the heart of his covenantal metaphysics. Moving away from the Reformed tradition regarding regeneration and sanctification, Horton calls for a rejection of the infusion of gracious habits altogether. In its place Horton calls for the understanding of justification as a declarative speech act providing the basis for the other benefits of redemption that form part of the *ordo salutis*. Horton believes that the infusion of gracious habits is a residue of the Thomistic notion of salvation as overcoming substantial deficiency. Before further interaction, let's get a hold on what we are talking about.

The Christian church has more or less adopted an Aristotelian metaphysics of human nature. This may be good or it may be bad, but to ascertain *that* we must know what it is we are judging. I am not convinced that this way of understanding human nature is *completely* wrong. The Reformed Scholastics didn't think it was wrong, nor did Old Princeton.<sup>31</sup> So what does this view of human nature entail? According to this model, human nature (and I am using "nature" here in a broad sense as we will soon see that we also use the word in a narrow sense) is comprised of three elements: the substance of humanity, the external acts or humanity and *intermediate* habits.<sup>32</sup> As I noted at the beginning of this essay, when Adam fell he did not become something else. He remained Adam. However, he changed from being holy Adam to being sinful Adam. What was it that changed? I would argue that the fall was *ethical*. That is, what was corrupted or changed was not Adam's substance. Nor was it the case that mere external acts changed. What the fall corrupted was what has been called the *habit* or *disposition*. Another way of putting this is that when Adam fell, his ethical orientation changed, not the substance of who he was. Instead of being holy and oriented towards God, he was now sinful and oriented towards himself in a selfish sense. Interestingly enough, when Old Princeton battled the

29. I should add that this is quite right as far as the Roman Catholic notion of infused grace goes. The same cannot be said about the Reformed use of the idea in the loci on regeneration and sanctification.

30. See note 7 referencing Trueman's article on the Finnish school and the literature cited there.

31. For instance, see Richard A. Muller's discussion of *habits* in his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Vol. 1/Prolegomena to Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 355–359.

32. For Aristotle's discussion of habits, see his *Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966) 95ff.

New Divinity and Charles Finney in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this very issue was in contention.<sup>33</sup> Finney and others influenced by the New Divinity/New England Theology, rejected the notion of habits and so accused Calvinists of holding to a notion of regeneration and sanctification entailing the physical change of the substance of human nature. So when Horton calls for the rejection of the infusion of a gracious habit in regeneration and sanctification, the significance of his innovative construction can be helpfully understood against this background.<sup>34</sup> So an infusion of a gracious habit in the Reformed tradition is not about ontological deficiency as it clearly was for Thomas. Here what was being argued was that regeneration and sanctification required an ethical reorientation brought about by the “secret energy” of the Holy Spirit.

So what does Horton suggest as a replacement for the infusion of a gracious habit in regeneration and sanctification? Horton is correct, I believe, to question the connection of infused habits with the doctrine of the *donum superadditum* (194–95).<sup>35</sup> There is much that could be said in criticism of this doctrine. For our purposes the problem of the superadded gift is that it entails that the essential problem with Adam was that he was ontologically defective. Of course this flies in the face of Scripture’s record of God’s own satisfaction with his

creation (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). However it is not clear to me that the doctrine of infused habits is dependent upon the *donum* at all. That it was connected in Augustine and others does not settle the issue. When the Reformers and their heirs take up the doctrine, significant changes occur and while Horton grants this, he does not seem to take these changes seriously enough. What Horton offers in the place occupied by the infusion of habits is the constitutive (i.e., creative) forensic speech act of God. God speaks a new reality into existence. Inasmuch as some formulations of the doctrine of the infusion of habits look like they reduce the work of the Spirit to the natural workings of the already existent human nature, then the doctrine of infusion is problematic (190). Building on the insights of Bruce McCormack, Horton believes that infusion should be replaced by a declarative speech act that also brings into question the ordering of the reception of the benefits of redemption. Unfortunately space does not allow me to interact with Horton’s dependence on McCormack in great detail. At least one concern that I have is that when Horton describes the divine speech act as “creative,” that is, bringing about what it declares, is that not the same as saying that the single speech act has forensic and transformative elements fused together? Is that not the same as confusing or blurring the distinction between justification and sanctification? The upshot of the whole discussion is that regeneration, sanctification, and glorification grow out of justification and seem to me to be emptied of their distinguishing characteristics. Yes, Horton affirms that there are differences between justification and the transformative benefits. However, inasmuch as they grow out of justification and are grounded in a declarative speech act themselves, I find it hard to distinguish them.

At this point (from 211 onward) Horton offers a discussion of the Palamite essence/energies discussion drawn from the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Gregory Palamas argued that we do not have direct contact with God’s essence, but that God’s acts in history are his energies. This reminds me of the Creator/creature and archetype/ectype distinction and so may be a helpful theological development. Horton notes that the Western tradition, with its infusion of gracious habits, tends to blur the distinction between God and the creature. Inasmuch as this is a tendency connected with the doctrine of infusion, I think Horton offers a welcome corrective.

In the tenth chapter Horton offers a critique of the distinction in some circles within the Reformed community between regeneration and effectual calling. I would affirm that these should be simultaneous. However, regeneration might better be understood as the *result* of the effectual call. In the eleventh chapter the author offers further exposition on the nature of the divine declarative speech act. Here Horton argues anew for the logical priority of justification to transformation (244). “If union with Christ in the covenant of grace is the matrix for

33. See the book *Princeton Versus the New Divinity: The Meaning of Sin, Grace, Salvation, Revival* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2002) for evidence of this. I should also note that Horton is in this argument setting up the context in which to criticize and reject Jonathan Edwards. Horton is apparently dependent upon the Korean-American school of Edwards interpretation which reads Edwards in a nearly Neoplatonic pantheistic/panentheistic fashion. This school, owing to the ground-breaking scholarship of Sang H. Lee in his *Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) who argues for Edwards radically reworking the metaphysical tradition of the West with a dispositional ontology, has been countered in the recent work of Stephen R. Holmes, “Does Jonathan Edwards Use a Dispositional Ontology: A Response to Sang Hyun Lee,” in *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004) 99–114. More and more I am persuaded that Holmes is basically correct about Edwards and that he can be interpreted more than adequately within the confines of a traditional ontology.

34. The distinction between the substance of human nature and habits may be behind Albert Wolters’ distinction between the *structures* and *direction* of creation. According to Wolters, who writes from the Kuyperian perspective, the fall did not obliterate the structure of God’s creation, but it did change its direction. See *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

35. The doctrine of the *donum superadditum* is the teaching, standard in Roman Catholic theology, that Adam was created in natural state without holiness and righteousness and that these attributes were supernaturally bestowed after his creation. Protestantism has usually rejected this doctrine, affirming that holiness and righteousness were part of Adam’s nature as image of God. One implication of the doctrine of the *donum* is that man can function quite adequately subsequent to the fall.

Paul's *ordo*, justification remains its source, even for adoption. We do not move from the topic of justification to other (more ostensibly interesting) ones, but are always relating the riches of our inheritance to this decisive gift" (247). Here, as I have noted before, there seems to be some confusion. Is justification the *source* of union with Christ or is union with Christ the matrix for "Paul's *ordo*"? The last time I checked, justification was *one aspect of the order of salvation*. Horton has, as I have already noted, removed justification from *within* the *ordo* and now placed the remaining benefits of redemption in relation to (and apparently subservient to) justification. This seems to be an entailment of making justification the foundation of union with Christ. This may be correct (I do not think so), but it is not what the Reformed tradition has taught.<sup>36</sup> And why does a concern for the other benefits of redemption reduce to thinking they are "more important"? To me that is like suggesting that my right leg is more important than my left. Horton's comments only make sense if one *reduces* salvation to justification. And this seems to result from Horton's failure to reckon with the full nature of sin. Sin is about guilt, but not only about guilt. Sin is also about corruption or pollution. And it does not seem to me that guilt produces corruption or vice versa. They occur as simultaneous results of the fall. I would also note that grounding transformation in justification may create an unintended consequence. Depending upon one's understanding of causation, by making justification *the ground* of transformation, one is including within justification itself (which ought to be purely forensic) a transformative element. How is that possible, you ask? Here's how. In some forms of causation, the nature of the effect must be reflective of the nature of the cause. So that if the effect of justification is transformative, then justification itself must possess a transformative nature itself.<sup>37</sup>

In the twelfth and final chapter, Horton discusses the Eastern Orthodox notion of *theosis* or divinization. In its standard treatment by Eastern Orthodox theologians this is problematic due to its assumption that the basic problem with humanity is ontological deficiency rather than ethical rebellion. Horton believes that the Palamite distinction between God's essence and energies may make *theosis* a legitimate option (269). Horton argues that "Reformed theology comes closest to the classic category of divinization when it takes up the topic of *glorification* as both final vindication and restoration of the image" (279). Horton is quite right that the beatific vision, which is how glorification has been traditionally understood, as the East stresses, involves the whole person and not just a disembodied spirit. Glorification is the culmination of the eschatological process of redemptive history. It is not the culmination of mental/spiritual ascent. God has been at work in history saving his people for himself and this does not avoid the physical. It is here that Jonathan Edwards experiences a

"drive-by" critique. Unfortunately I do not have the space to engage Horton at length. I can simply say that while Edwards may be problematic with regard to his idealism, Horton seems to make a connection between this and Edwards on justification as if Edwards has been demonstrably shown to have compromised his doctrine in this area. Suffice it to say that current scholarship has called into question the work upon which Horton builds his comments.<sup>38</sup> I would recommend three dissertations that Horton should read and digest by Brandon Withrow, Michael McClenahan, and the recently published book *The Infinite Merit of Christ* by Craig H. Biehl.<sup>39</sup>

So what shall we say about *Covenant and Salvation*? For my part, I think Horton is mistaken on the relationship of justification to union with Christ. However, on the other hand, he offers us some very intriguing options for further consideration. I think the republication thesis if properly formulated and nuanced is probably the best way to understand the Mosaic administration. And while the application of speech act theory to justification looked promising, in Horton's hands, there appears to be a confusion of declaration and creation. I think the speech act model fails as an architectonic structure for union with Christ as a whole because of the confusion aforementioned. I also think there is some benefit to further exploration of the essence/energies distinction.

### Life in Christ

We now turn to the third and final book of this review. Like Billings, Mark Garcia examines the theology of John Calvin on union with Christ. However, unlike Billings (and Horton), Garcia is attempting to look at Calvin in his own theological and historical context. Billings does this to a certain extent, but the questions he brings to Calvin arise from his interaction with Radical Orthodoxy and gift theology. This is, of course, not to say that Garcia has no concern for the contemporary scene. Anyone who claims to do historical theology in total

36. As one example, see the comments on the relation of the *ordo salutis* to union with Christ in John Murray's *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 161.

37. One such discussion of causation can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (London: Burns, Oats, & Washburne, Ltd., 1920–1942) 1a.75–79. See my previous comments about making the divine speech act not only declarative but creative.

38. See my chapter on this very topic in *Resurrection and Eschatology*, especially p. 482 n 10.

39. Brandon Withrow, "Full of Wondrous and Glorious Things": The Exegetical Mind of Jonathan Edwards in His Anglo-American Context" (PhD diss. Westminster Theological Seminary, 2007); Michael G. McClenahan, "Jonathan Edwards' Doctrine of Justification up to the Period of the First Great Awakening" (DPhil diss. Oxford University, 2006); and Craig Biehl, *The Infinite Merit of Christ: The Glory of Christ's Obedience in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Jackson: Reformed Academic Press, 2009).



abstraction from the contemporary scene is only fooling himself. However, I think it is fair to say that Garcia's overarching concern is with Calvin as he was in his day more so than with Calvin as he has been received in the church today. Having said that, I would hasten to add Garcia's work is certainly useful for the church today. After all, we benefit most from past theologians when we actually understand them rightly. It would be surprising if Garcia's work was not beneficial to the church as of the three authors surveyed here, he is the only one who currently serves in the pastorate. Garcia is pastor of Immanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in West Allegheny, PA.

Garcia's book, *Life in Christ*, seeks to examine the nature of Calvin's doctrine of the *duplex gratia dei* within the context of union with Christ which he shortens to the *Unio Christi*/*duplex gratia* model. This 356 page book contains a forward by the late historical theologian David Wright, a preface, introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and two appendices. Garcia eases us into the subject matter with a helpful introduction (1–7) which is followed by one chapter (11–46) which situates his study within the history of Calvin studies, especially those concerned with Calvin's understanding of union with Christ. Here Garcia also outlines his methodology and explains why he narrowly focuses his work on three specific case studies. This is all standard fare for doctoral dissertations. Like the work of Billings, but unlike the work of Horton, this volume is a revised edition of Garcia's doctoral work at the University of Edinburgh. In the second chapter (47–86) we have a discussion of the precursors to Calvin on union along with the theology of union in other reformers. In the third chapter (89–147) Garcia introduces the first of three case studies where he actually traces out how the doctrine of union with Christ and the *duplex gratia dei* functioned in Calvin's overall theology. In this chapter Garcia traces out how Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ developed over the various revisions of his *Romans* commentary and how these revisions reflect a replication principle with regard to good works in the life of the believer. In the fourth chapter (149–195) we discover the multi-layered nature of Calvin's theology (actually of theology in general) and how his soteriology and his sacramentology interfaced and how his doctrine of union with Christ played itself out in the disputes Calvin had with Lutheran scholars Westphal and Heshusius over the matter of the *manducatio impiorum* ("impious eating") in the Lord's Supper. The fifth chapter (197–252) is perhaps the center piece of the whole book where Garcia details for the reader the theologically rich

interchange between Calvin and Andreas Osiander and here we see the nature of Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ and the *duplex gratia dei* and how his formulation differed from that of Osiander. Garcia then provides a helpful summary conclusion (255–268) followed by two appendices, one showing the marginal references to Paul in Calvin's chapter on justification in the second edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* from 1539 and the second appendix discussing the correspondence between Calvin and the Italian reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli on the nature of union with Christ.

Now we may return to the basic question of what Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ was and what, if anything, that has to do with the *duplex gratia dei*. Calvin, following the apostle Paul, argues that all the benefits of redemption are obtained and possessed by means of Holy Spirit created faith uniting the believer to the person of Jesus Christ. Only as the believer is "in Christ" does he benefit from the work of Christ. Calvin sums up this point in an oft-cited passage from book three of the *Institutes*, "First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."<sup>40</sup> Further, the so-called *duplex gratia dei* has been properly translated as the "twofold grace of God." This twofold grace is comprised of justification and sanctification (or, as Calvin would say, regeneration). According to Garcia, these accrue to the believer, says Calvin, *simultaneously* as soon as a person is united to Christ by faith. In other words, there is no chronological priority of one aspect of this grace over the other. Neither is there a logical priority. Just as sin results simultaneously in guilt and corruption, so union with Christ results simultaneously in justification and sanctification. Calvin's *Chalcedonian* instinct manifests itself here. The reader may be asking himself how a discussion about the one person of Jesus Christ and his two natures relates to this discussion. Here is how: the Chalcedonian formula exemplifies the *distinct yet inseparable* principle. Just as the divine and human natures are united in the one person of Christ, yet not separated or confused, so also in union with Christ, the distinct redemptive benefits of justification on the one hand and sanctification on the other accrue simultaneously (that is, unitedly) all the while retaining their own integrity. Justification and sanctification come to the believer together but that does not mean that they are the same benefit or that they should be confused or blended. So we can say that the *unio Christi*/*duplex gratia* principle tells us that justification and sanctification are distinct yet inseparable benefits of redemption that the believer enjoys only as he is joined to the person of the redeemer. The Christian cannot be justified without also being sanctified nor can he enjoy the benefits of redemption apart from the Benefactor of redemption, Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup>

40. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1961) 3.1.1. Cited in Garcia, *Life in Christ*, p. 1.

41. Please note that what is not being said is that the two natures of Christ are parallel to the *duplex gratia dei*. What is operative in the two cases is the principle of *distinction, yet inseparability*.

The third chapter, which is the first of three case studies that show how Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ actually functioned, not only details how Calvin typically revised his writings (the *Romans* commentary and the *Institutes*), but we also see the development of Calvin's "replication principle." This principle, drawn from the "golden chain" of Romans 8:27–30, is that the ends for which God has elected his people—namely eternal fellowship with him in the new heavens and new earth—account for all the previous steps in the chain. Sometimes this is stated in terms of the Aristotelian maxim, the last step in execution is the first in intent.<sup>42</sup> That is, while glorification is the last link in the golden chain of redemption, it is the reason God elects a people for himself. The ultimate goal of salvation is that God will have a people conformed to the image of his Son with whom he will dwell. What this means is that what goes before in the golden chain is often in Scripture called a cause. Since good works precede the final judgment and the open vindication (justification in an *evidentiary* and not in a declarative or salvific sense) of the saints, they are sometimes called "causes" of the vindication. Calvin clearly explains that these "causes" are not meritorious. In fact, we might not even call them causes in a technical sense.

Additionally, the principle gets its name from a redemptive-historical dynamic. Not only are good works considered in an "improper" sense as causes of vindication at the last day, but there is a dynamic that is manifested in the life of every Christian that is a replication of the life of Christ. Just as Christ had to experience humiliation before he could enter into his exaltation, so the believer experiences humiliation before entering into his glorification. The believer certainly experiences suffering in this world. Sometimes this happens simply because Christians live in a fallen world, and like the rest of humanity they experience the vicissitudes of life. But as this principle makes clear, the Christian also suffers because he is united with Christ and experiences humiliation before entering into glorification. A Christian, united to Christ, will both suffer humiliation before entering into glory and has been fore-ordained to perform good works to the glory of God the Father. Because a man is justified and sanctified at the same time, good works must follow, although these have no part in justification. Calvin's doctrine of the *unio Christi/duplex gratia* informs his understanding of good works. Unlike Melancthon, who argued that good works were the necessary outgrowth of justification, Calvin argued that good works were the necessary result of union with Christ and its replication principle (205–207).

In the fourth chapter, which is the second case study, Garcia recounts Calvin's disputes with the Lutheran theologians Joachim Westphal and Tilemann Heshusius over the nature of the Lord's Supper. In this case study we see how Calvin built off of Augustine's *res* and *signa* distinction in his explication of

the supper and how this distinction with regard to the supper mirrored a similar distinction in his soteriology. What is that principle? It is that the sign and the thing signified are *distinct yet inseparable*. It would not be right to confuse the bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ. However, the one points to the other and when rightly entered into they will be experienced together. Additionally, Calvin incorporated his understanding of the reality of the distinct persons of the Son and the Holy Spirit who are nevertheless functionally inseparable in a redemptive economic sense. The risen Lord is at the Father's right hand and by definition a human body is localized somewhere and cannot be everywhere (as was argued in the Lutheran *ubiquitarian* doctrine). But because the Son of God is not limited to the human Jesus (the so-called *extra-Calvinisticum*) and because he is so closely related to the Holy Spirit, the Son is able to descend to fellowship with the saints in worship and conversely the saints are lifted heavenward by the Spirit Who then enables the saints to feed spiritually on Christ by faith.

The specific bone of contention in this dispute was Calvin's denial of the Lutheran doctrine of the *manducatio impiorum*. That is, Lutheran teaching on the ubiquity of the physical body of Christ entailed that (unsaved) sinners also ate the body of Christ when they partook of the elements in the Lord's Supper. Christ's body was located wherever the elements of the bread and wine were, regardless of the presence of faith in the participants. Calvin was able to affirm the real presence of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit while denying his local physical presence. And he was able to deny that the unsaved actually partake of Christ when they eat the bread and drink the wine. How was he able to do this? Calvin was able to do this because of his doctrine of *unio Christi/duplex gratia*. Given the close functional unity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, no one could partake of the Lord's Supper without experiencing the enlivening presence of the Holy Spirit. Just as one could not be justified without also being sanctified, so too one could not partake of the bread and wine (feeding on Christ) without experiencing the Holy Spirit as well. Calvin could not countenance an unbeliever enjoying the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The third case study is perhaps the most interesting. Anyone who has read the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* knows that Calvin spends a fair bit of time countering what he perceived to be the horrific errors of Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander. The author helps us to understand why Calvin would devote so much space to a dead man's teaching. The main reason is that Osiander's teaching on justification bore some

42. This is related to Aristotle's four causes: efficient, formal, material, and final. The expression reflects the nature of final causation. Readers can find a discussion of this in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a.2 & 3.

formal similarities to Calvin's own views and so he needed to clearly differentiate his views from Osiander's. Confessional Lutherans clearly rejected the teaching of Osiander and tarnished Calvin's reputation with remarks about the similarity of his views to Osiander's. Scholars prior to this work have already noted that Calvin's understanding of justification and union with Christ differed significantly from Osiander's, so what is new here? Garcia's contribution, which is also potentially discomfiting in some Reformed quarters, is that Calvin focuses on Osiander not only to distance himself from Osiander but also to show that Osiander is the *only thoroughly consistent* Lutheran. In other words, Garcia argues that Osiander was not accidentally in error but that his error arose from his specifically Lutheran theological commitments to the ubiquitarian fallacy.

How so, you may ask? It will help to explain what Osiander held. Osiander apparently was never happy with Melancthon's forensic formulation of justification and so sought to bring together the Lutheran theology of the ubiquity of Christ's body and the centrality of justification. In other words, Osiander argued that the Christian was united to Christ (and so he looks similar to Calvin here) but that the righteousness imputed to the believer's account is the essential righteousness that Christ possessed as the second person of the Triune God. What happens here is that, among other things, Osiander undermines the Creator/creature distinction. Calvin reminds readers in the *Institutes* that believers are united to Christ by faith and have the righteousness he acquired by his perfect obedience imputed to them. It is not Christ's inherent divine righteousness that is imputed to believers but his righteousness as the divine-human Mediator that is credited to the believer.

Calvin went further, says Garcia, by arguing that Osiander was not so much a rogue Lutheran theologian, but in fact the only truly consistent Lutheran! By stressing the Lutheran understanding of justification as the source of sanctification and the ubiquitarian denial of the Chalcedonian formula, Lutheranism was guilty of contravening the Chalcedonian formula by mixing the divine and human natures in Christ (by saying that his human body is everywhere present, i.e., ubiquitous) and it was guilty of undermining its own concern with justification by following Melancthon in grounding sanctification/good works in justification. So, as Garcia notes, while the Reformed and Lutherans agreed in their basic definitions of justification (for which we all ought to praise God!), they differed greatly in understanding the context of that doctrine and its relation to sanctification and union with Christ.

*Life in Christ* is a richly and densely packed study. There is much to commend in it. But I do have two concerns. The first is this: does the stress on the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed understanding of justification undermine the definitional agreement? Is there an implicit belittling

of confessionalism by suggesting that the agreement between the Reformed and Lutheran communities on justification is definitional and only on the basic confessional level? It seems to me that Garcia has pointed out real and significant differences between the two communities. Traditionally, for the Reformed, justification occurs within union with Christ. For the Lutheran it occurs outside of union and leads into it. Those are very different contexts. My other concern is Garcia's discussion of justifying faith and its relationship to faithfulness at the end of his study. It seems to me that this comes too close to the Roman Catholic doctrine of formed faith for my comfort. Perhaps I can offer this suggestion: why not extend the *duplex* model to faith itself or extend it explicitly? Rather than saying that justifying faith is itself faithfulness, would it not be better to say that faith contains within itself (like union) a justifying aspect and a sanctifying aspect? Just as we say that union has a duplex gratia, can we not say that faith can be distinguished into its justifying aspect which is passive and receptive and its sanctifying aspect which is active and which yields faithfulness? Is it not more faithful to the replication principle to note that sanctifying faith yields good works? Perhaps an imperfect, homely illustration would help here. I am a son, a husband, a father, a minister and a student. While I am one person (I am *inseparable* from my various roles), every role is not significant in every situation. For instance, all other things being equal, my school is concerned about my role as student. It is not concerned (or *as* concerned) with my role as son. In other words, my role as son does not enter into my performance as a student (or with the assessment of me as a student). Again this is not a perfect analogy as I am a student at a Christian seminary and the school will undoubtedly take some interest in my treatment of my parents, wife, and children, etc. But the point is more than adequately made. These criticisms do not undermine my great appreciation for the stellar scholarship of Mark Garcia.

### Conclusion

So we have come to the end of this review essay. What shall we say? Two of the studies deal with Calvin's doctrine of union and the other deals with the doctrine of union within contemporary Reformed theology. More importantly, it is wise to note that Billings and Horton have written from the perspective of systematic theology and Garcia has written a historical theological study. It seems to me that we have three models of union with Christ: (1) The Billings model with the twofold blessing of justification and sanctification within union but with a *logical priority* of justification to sanctification; (2) The Horton model which has justification occurring *outside of, leading into and undergirding the whole of* union with Christ; and (3) the Garcia model which has justification and sanctification *simultaneously accruing*

to the believer in union with Christ with neither logical nor chronological priority. How does one settle between these models? They cannot all be correct. I will attempt an assessment which ultimately would have to be brought to the judgment bar of Scripture.

It seems to me that Mark Garcia captures the greatest amount of truth. At least I can say that I think he has demonstratively shown that for Calvin, the *duplex gratia* come to the believer simultaneously in union. And I agree with him that there is no logical or chronological priority between justification and sanctification. However, would it be right to say (with a nod to Billings) that there is an *existential* priority to justification over sanctification? What I mean by this is that, just as Calvin taught, there cannot be any growth in grace, no progressive sanctification, without knowing that God the Father is favorably disposed toward oneself. That is another way of saying that justification must be a settled matter. Whether this settledness can be called a “priority” will have to be sorted out at another time. There is no distinction in terms of the outcome between justification in the experience of the Christian and the judgment at the last day. There is, however, a public unveiling of the present justification at the last day, but that is to vindicate God himself, not Christians as such. I think that Horton’s concern with a forensic speech act with regard to justification is worth further consideration. I would even agree with him that justification is never out of sight when we consider the other blessings of union with Christ. However, his formulation is, how can I say it otherwise, Lutheran. Grounding union in justification just is not the Reformed (and I would add, biblical) way of seeing things. And while I do appreciate what speech act theory brings to the table as we consider justification, I find that extending it to the whole of the order of salvation evacuates the other blessings of their essential significance. At the end of the day, if we ground regeneration and sanctification in a forensic speech act and at the same time jettison some notion of the infusion of a gracious habit within the loci of regeneration and sanctification, what exactly, I might ask, is it that distinguishes regeneration and sanctification from justification? Is it the case that all we can say is that the first two are transformative and third is forensic? I fail to see the adequacy of that answer and would hasten to point out that even on Horton’s terms it does not work. After all, justification grounds the *ordo salutis*.

The Reformed community quite clearly has work to do in this area. At present there is no consensus on the details. Perhaps now is the time to call for an ecclesiastical council (of all NAPARC churches?) to wrestle with this issue. Of course I will argue for the essential accuracy of the Garcia model, but each of these volumes has brought clarification to the discussion. ■

**Review:** Cornelius P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ. The “Twofold Grace of God” and the Interpretation of Calvin’s Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). 296 pages. ISBN 978-3525569108. €54.90 (cloth). Reviewed by Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Emeritus Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

1. For me reading this book has been somewhat like becoming reacquainted with a friend not seen in a while. I first met its substance as the author’s 1985 Princeton Seminary doctoral dissertation, which was helpful to me at a time when I was studying Calvin’s soteriology in greater depth. Now that substance “has undergone considerable revision” (7). This includes a restructuring of the whole as well as some re-writing with particular attention to the considerable body of important studies of Calvin’s theology that have appeared in the past two decades. These revisions make the book all the more useful as a clearly written, in-depth guide into elements most prominent in Calvin’s understanding of the application or personal appropriation of salvation.

These key elements are reflected in the book’s title, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*: justification, sanctification and union with Christ and how in Calvin’s view they are related. While the *Institutes*, especially Book 3, is appropriately prominent, considerable data from the commentaries, sermons and other materials, reflecting the author’s wide reading in Calvin, are also introduced or referenced.

The book has three main parts with a couple of introductory chapters. The latter set the stage for Venema’s own treatment by surveying major approaches to Calvin’s theology since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Three are identified: the “central doctrine” approach, the formal approach focusing on structure and method, and the neo-orthodox or radically Christological approach (these three approaches are helpfully summarized in the concluding chapter, 262). In contrast to these approaches, Venema undertakes to show, quite successfully in my view, that, without subscribing to the failed notion that everything in Calvin’s theology derives from a single idea, like predestination or divine sovereignty, his understanding of justification, sanctification and their relationship is nonetheless coherent and without fundamental tensions within his overall understanding of God and his purposes not only as redeemer but as creator.

The three main parts, reflected in the titles of each, are structured around the “Twofold Grace of God” (*duplex gratia Dei*). Part One deals with the place of twofold grace within Calvin’s theology as a whole, primarily in the interests of making the important point that for Calvin that grace is not narrowly soteriological but functions for the realization and consummation of God’s original purposes in creation forfeited



by the fall and human sin. In terms of the basic structure of the *Institutes*, the knowledge of God the Creator (Book I) and God the Redeemer (Book 2) must be distinguished but not separated or left unrelated.

Part Two, the heart of the book, has separate chapters, as follows: on union with Christ and twofold grace, justification, sanctification (or repentance), the relationship between justification and sanctification, union with Christ and the imputation of his righteousness, double justification (the justification or acceptance of the believer's works along with his person), and several related issues not yet discussed (sanctification as an "effect" or "inferior cause" of justification, justification and the necessity of good works, Paul and James, covenant and kingdom).

Part Three broadens the discussion by relating twofold grace to larger interpretive issues in Calvin's theology: the Trinitarian and Christological basis of twofold grace; church and sacraments; law and gospel; the role of the "practical syllogism." A concluding chapter helpfully draws together in several subsections the major threads of the study as a whole. An extensive selected bibliography and a full author-subject index are provided.

2. This brief overview hardly does justice to the book or to the value to be gained from reading it carefully. A measure of the high level of its scholarship is its inclusion as Volume 2 in the *Reformed Historical Theology* series. A major strength is its primary concern, sustained and addressed in various ways throughout, to show that for Calvin justification and sanctification constitute a twofold grace (note the singular). Accordingly, "distinction without separation" (137–145, *passim*) best captures their relationship—on the analogy of the way Christ's two natures are united in his person, a Christological analogy that Calvin himself uses. "The Twofold Nature of the Gospel in Calvin's Theology," the title of the dissertation, is pervasively in view throughout the book. As justification is "the main hinge" of the Christian religion (*Institutes*, 3:11:1), sanctification for Calvin is a no less integral component of *the gospel*.

With this integral bond between them always in view it seems fair to say that Venema is primarily intent on showing how on various issues Calvin, without ever compromising or losing sight of their inseparability, clearly maintains the distinction between justification, as purely forensic/declarative and definitively settled, and sanctification ("regeneration" often and interchangeably for Calvin) or repentance, understood as a life-long process of personal renewal. How then are they related? "Calvin acknowledges an order between justification and sanctification." And, just prior to that statement, "the question of the order, sequence, and interrelation between justification and sanctification is one that Calvin often addresses and for which he provides a definite answer" (172). Specifically, the former is "the basis or presupposition"

for the latter; the latter is "the *telos*, consequence, or effect" of the former. Further, as the two are "invariably conjoined, this order or sequence is not chronological but theological" (172).

3. Does Calvin then consider justification to be the cause of sanctification? Here, Venema is not entirely clear (at least to me). To speak of sanctification as the "effect" of justification, as he notes Calvin does, suggests that the latter is its "cause" and why, in part, Calvin speaks of "justification as the 'first' or 'principal' part, and of sanctification as the 'second' part, of the gospel, ..." (172–173). And, subsequently, for Calvin, "Together, justification and sanctification comprise the manifold way in which God's grace in Christ appears to us, as we distinguish between its cause or foundation, on the one hand, and its effect, purpose, or consequence, on the other" (175).

It should be noted, however, that these statements are in a context where Venema is occupied specifically with how Calvin refers to sanctification not only as an "effect" but also as itself an "inferior cause" of justification. He explains that the latter expression has its sense "on the principle that a 'necessary consequence' is a kind of condition" (172). This serves, by the way, as a reminder that in Calvin's day, as well as presently, the language of "cause" (and "condition") has various senses that need to be distinguished as carefully and clearly as possible. Not to do so runs the risk of causing confusion.

Earlier, in discussing the distinct-yet-inseparable relationship between justification and sanctification, Venema speaks of "Calvin's insistence on a distinction between them in order to exclude any *causal* connection between them ..." (143, original italics) and, again in discussing his doctrine of double justification, "Calvin nowhere admits a causal relation between justification and sanctification, ..." (167). This, from my own study, admittedly not as extensive as Venema's, is a fair overall assessment. Calvin is clear: the cause of sanctification, in the sense of what or, better, who produces sanctification is not justification but Christ's Spirit at work in believers as they are united to him. Throughout Venema is concerned to keep clear that Calvin is emphatic that justification is prior to sanctification; the latter can only take place in those already justified, in those toward whom God is now propitious and who therefore are also confident of that mercy. Even as, on balance, it is "with equal emphasis his corollary conviction that God is only propitious toward those who repent, since repentance is a necessary and invariable accompaniment of justification" (143). This is surely a correct assessment.

4. At one point in discussing the inseparability of justification and sanctification Venema takes issue with the way Peter Lillback and Mark Garcia stress the difference between Calvin and Luther on justification, particularly on the place of good works (167, note 13). He finds Lillback's language "incautious" and "somewhat misleading" and Garcia's "equally misleading." This is so—the specific reason Venema gives—"since Calvin

clearly insists that the justification of the believer's works can only occur within the context of a prior justification of the believer's person."

I'm puzzled by this criticism. I hope not to be missing something but as I read not only what Venema cites from both (for Garcia from his 2004 Edinburgh dissertation, now available in *Life in Christ. Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* [Paternoster, 2008], 74–78, 258–264), as well as what both have written elsewhere, I find nothing that even suggests anything other than their full and clear agreement with Venema's reason just quoted. Similarly, both fully and clearly agree that for Calvin justification is the prior, absolutely requisite precondition for good works, that for him there is no ongoing sanctification without settled justification.

I raise this point because the view of Garcia and Lillback has been subjected to the same sort of misplaced criticism elsewhere, and Venema contributes, even if only in a passing comment, to this misunderstanding. As to the difference between Calvin and Luther, I'm prompted to add here that I'm fairly confident in saying that a Lutheran reviewer of this book (I haven't checked to see if there are such), given Venema's own accurate portrayal of Calvin on the relationship of justification and sanctification/good works, would come away about as unhappy with Venema as he would be with Lillback and Garcia!

5. Calvin's understanding of sanctification and its relationship to justification raises a question that warrants further discussion, sketched briefly here. No doubt his doctrine of justification can be fairly approached from a number of angles but surely as good a place as any to begin is where he begins his lengthy, multi-chapter treatment of justification in Book Three of the *Institutes*, chapter 11. There, in section 1, he offers this opening summary (*summa*):

Christ was given to us by God's generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by his Spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life (Battles translation, 1: 725).

In view here "principally" is "a double grace" (*duplicem ... gratiam*) as that grace stems from being united with Christ "in faith," that union being described as "grasping" and "possessing" Christ and, again, as "partaking of him." This double grace, in turn, is delineated by two purpose clauses:

that being reconciled to God through Christ's blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father;

that being sanctified by his Spirit, we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.

Each of these clauses, syntactically parallel to each other, contains a participial clause, likewise clearly parallel. In each the controlling participle is a perfect passive (*reconciliati ... sanctificati*): "having been reconciled ... having been sanctified."

What is noteworthy here is that not only reconciliation (here equivalent to justification) but also sanctification is definitive and settled. While elsewhere Calvin no doubt regularly treats sanctification (regeneration) as an ongoing, life-long process in the believer, here it appears to be otherwise. The sanctification in view does not take place through that process, expressed here as "to cultivate blamelessness and purity of life." Instead, having been "sanctified by the Spirit" is not only antecedent to that process but initiates it.

This squares with Calvin's understanding in his Romans commentary on the death to sin in 6:2ff. as referring not to the guilt of sin and justification but rather to a decisive break with the power of sin, a once-for-all break with sin's enslaving dominion at the inception of Christian life that gives rise to ongoing sanctification and growth in personal holiness. This prompts the question whether here and perhaps elsewhere Calvin anticipates subsequent Reformed teaching that more recently has been termed "definitive sanctification" by John Murray (*Collected Writings*, 2: 277–293). Venema, unless I have somehow missed it, does not discuss this instance of "sanctified," but the question seems worth exploring by him or someone else with a similar broad and in-depth acquaintance with Calvin.

6. Venema's basic approach in terms of the distinct-yet-inseparable relationship between justification and sanctification yields a particularly helpful treatment of the much-debated question of Calvin's understanding of law and gospel and their relationship (227–247; summarized, 271–273). Among the points Venema makes, there is "fundamental unity between the law and gospel in Calvin's theology" (272). One can only grasp this unity by recognizing the various functions or uses of the law he distinguishes, particularly between a "first" and "third" use. In terms of the former—the role of the law in pronouncing and sealing condemnation and revealing the need for justification—there is antithesis, specifically the unrelieved antithesis of justification by faith and justification by works (of the law). But, even here, "in free justification," the law-gospel antithesis is "not absolute" (272). This is so because for believers justification "as a free gift of God's grace" is based on Christ's fulfillment of the law's demands on their behalf.

The law's third use, what Calvin himself calls its "principal use" (*Institutes*, 2:7:12), is its role in sanctification, as it guides believers in doing, by the power of the Spirit, what actually

pleases God, however imperfectly. Here, the fully gracious character of the law and its entirely positive functioning is evident. Here there is only harmony between the law and the gospel, a harmony that excludes all antithesis and leaves no place for an uneasy tension between faith and good works as the fruit of faith. In the words of the closing sentence of Venema's treatment, to which I have hardly done justice here, "Therefore, to borrow the phrase used by Calvin to describe the relation between justification and sanctification, it is permissible to say that law and gospel are distinct yet inseparable elements in the administration of the gospel in the lives of those who through faith are united with Christ" (247). Just so.

7. Other strengths of this book could be pointed out. There is one respect in which, I think, it could have been even stronger and which prompts rounding out this review with the following reflections. Venema, it seems to me, could have been clearer and more emphatic about the integral place of union with Christ in Calvin's thinking on the application of salvation. I hope not to overstate this point. Certainly, he recognizes that union has a primary place, indicated already in the title itself ("in Christ"). But, it seems fair to say, the focus of the book as a whole is on "Accepted" and "Renewed" and their proper relationship in a way that leaves union more or less in the background, or at least its role less clearly in view. At one point Venema faults those who "overstate the extent to which union with Christ 'coordinates' its two benefits of justification and sanctification, ..." (136, note 9). But it could be asked whether he, for his part, does not understate that "coordination."

On this point, coordination is present, for instance, in the opening statements of the treatment of justification in the *Institutes* (3:11:1; quoted above). There Calvin is clear that justification, settled and definitive, is theologically (as well as, by the nature of the case, temporally) prior to the ongoing process of sanctification in the life of the justified believer. But he also indicates (see point 5 above), definitely if not so clearly, that the definitive reality ("having been sanctified") that gives rise to that process is coordinate with justification ("having been reconciled"), as both, together inseparably as twofold grace, stem from union with Christ. Here, it seems fair to say, a) both aspects of twofold grace are theologically coordinate, as b) union is theologically and effectively (though not temporally) prior to both.

Again, it is not as if Venema is uncertain or even unclear that union has a place in the application of redemption. He appropriately begins his lengthy exposition of twofold grace in Part Two with a helpful chapter on union with Christ by the Spirit through faith and throughout provides accurate statements relating union and twofold grace such as the following, "The burden of Calvin's doctrine of the 'twofold grace of God' is to hold these benefits together as distinct yet inseparable

consequences of the believer's union with Christ through the office of the Spirit, ..." (268); "... justification and sanctification are inseparable benefits of our incorporation into Christ ..." (259); "... the believer's union with Christ and its twofold benefit, justification and sanctification" (161). Instances of such statements and phrasings could be multiplied.

Where one might most expect an accent on union, however, it is missing. So, for instance, the Summary (148–149) to the (important and helpful) chapter on the relation of justification and sanctification states that "these two aspects of God's grace in Christ ... remain inseparably joined by virtue of their common foundation in Christ's redemptive work through the power of his Spirit." That, of course, is true as far as it goes. But for Calvin, especially by way of summary, it is true only as union with Christ is indispensable for mediating that common foundation and only as the inseparability involved exists as an integral consequence of that union; justification and sanctification (in its initiation and continuation) are inseparable (as well as distinct) only as they are, coordinately, the immediate fruit of union.

This criticism is similar to that William Evans makes of the dissertation in his recent *Imputation and Impartation*, and Venema, I suspect, would see his response to him as applying to me as well: "... I believe Evans has misread my argument. The inseparability of justification and sanctification is rooted not only in the saving work of the Triune God, but also in the unity of Christ's redemptive office and the believer's union with him through the bond of the Spirit" (152, note 6). I take this fair and balanced summary statement at face value. And I recognize that it is quite unreasonable to expect everything to be said to be repeated at every point. Yet I cannot escape the impression that at points, in statements where the inseparability of justification and sanctification is in view, expressions like "their common source in Christ's person and work" (147), "their common basis within the redemptive purposes and activity of the Triune God," "rooted in the redemptive economy of the Triune God" (266), are seen as adequate without any reference to union with Christ.

I would be prepared to withdraw the preceding sentence as overdrawn, were it not for the following statement, in fact a fairly sweeping concluding generalization: "In his exposition of justification and sanctification, Calvin does not subordinate these aspects of the application of Christ's work of redemption to a more basic, governing theological doctrine" (265). I recognize and agree with the point that Venema is concerned for in the immediate context, namely that twofold grace is not "a subsidiary doctrine" in the sense of "being derived deductively from a single, originating principle" (266); there is no "central dogma" in Calvin. However—and this, it seems to me, is unmistakable in Book Three of the *Institutes* and elsewhere—Calvin is emphatic that God's twofold grace is

in fact absolutely dependent, fairly stated, on a “more basic, governing theological” reality, the gracious reality of union with Christ. This is so in the sense that twofold grace derives directly from that union as the integral and necessary source of twofold grace; without union twofold grace does not and would not exist. The theological and controlling (though not temporal) antecedence of union seems clear in 3:11:1, for one (cited in 5 above).

This assertion can be tested further in a couple of other places.

a) Book Three of the *Institutes*, which deals with the application of salvation, begins as follows:

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ’s own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us (3:11, **bolding added**).

Venema cites this passage (84) but, unless I’ve missed it, he does not comment on or give particular attention to the sentence I’ve bolded. In my view it is difficult to exaggerate its importance for Calvin’s applied soteriology as a whole. Emphatic as it is both by its positioning and strongly charged language, it provides the immediate answer, the very “first” thing needing to be said, to the question posed in the sentence that precedes it (see above). That question is the crucial question that drives all reflection on the application of salvation and may be fairly read as an equivalent to Luther’s, “How do I obtain a gracious God?” Calvin’s answer here stipulates what is primary, what controls *everything* said throughout Book Three about the application of redemption. That single most decisive factor is union: Christ must not remain “outside us,” we must not be “separated from him.” Or, to express it positively, as he presently does, it is necessary that “we grow into one body (*in unum*) with him.” Everything depends on that all-or-nothing reality. I must have Christ or I have nothing, Calvin is saying. Absent that union, his work for me, in all of its finished perfection, is—the sweeping, unrelieved language is striking—“useless and of no value.” Without union, the benefits that flow from it, including, as he will subsequently make clear, both aspects of God’s twofold grace, are simply nonexistent.

And, we may add, from the specific vantage point of faith and its role in justification, the determinative priority of union is clear when Calvin subsequently writes (3:11:7, *italics added*), “faith of itself does not possess the power of justifying, but *only*

*in so far as it receives Christ.*” In fact, “*before his righteousness is received Christ is received in faith.*” “Before” here is striking. It is hardly to be taken temporally, as if to say that one is united to Christ for a time without being justified, but it surely makes the *theological* and *effective* priority or antecedence of union plain.

In this regard, when Calvin says (3:11:1) that justification is “the main hinge on which religion turns,” that statement may not be lifted, aphoristic-like, out of context, as some do (Venema does *not* do that). Calvin has just made clear that this “hinge” is a component aspect of the twofold grace that stems from union with Christ. In other words, the “hinge” of justification, like any hinge, must be anchored if it is to function effectively and with stability. Justification has, and can only have, its pivotal significance as it is and remains fixed, and what provides that anchorage is the union that is the indispensable foundation and proximate source of everything in the application of salvation.

b) The chapter (10) “Union with Christ and the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness” provides a timely and very helpful discussion in the interests of showing that in Calvin there is not an irresolvable tension between them nor does union exclude imputation or make it redundant. In the course of that discussion (159) Venema quotes from *Institutes*, 3:11:10, the fullest single passage in Calvin and certainly the most arresting that I’m aware of in expressing the relationship between union and justification/imputation.

I confess that we are deprived of this utterly incomparable good [imputed righteousness; justification] until Christ is made ours. Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him (**bolding added**).

What is puzzling to me is that Venema quotes only the light-faced sentences; the bolded sentences are omitted. But just these bracketing sentences, particularly the last, give this passage its full force; without them the positive, integral relation between union and imputation is not as pointed and clear. Unmistakable in the first is the echo of the second sentence in 3:11 (“Christ ... outside of us, and we ... separated from him, ... useless and of no value to us”). Union – note: Spirit-worked “mystical union” – is not the merely extrinsic setting



for imputation. For the absence of that union would involve a “deprivation” of such magnitude that not only would imputation be a legal fiction, it would be nonexistent. Because that is the case union is to be “accorded ... the highest degree of importance.”

The last sentence brings everything just said to a focus with the most happy expression “fellowship of righteousness” (*iustitiae societatem*—apparently only here in Calvin). Imputed righteousness is the “utterly incomparable good” that it is specifically in the form of this fellowship. Here Christ’s righteousness imputed may be said to be alien or other (*extraneous*) in the sense that it is his doing, his obedience, not the believer’s. But in another sense, in union with him, as by his Spirit he is in us (*in nobis*) and we are in him (*in eo*), it is not alien at all. Union, “this spiritual bond” (just beyond the passage quoted), brings with it justification as forensic fellowship, a sharing in Christ’s righteousness by imputation.

As I am writing this review I have just finished reading N. T. Wright’s recent book on justification in Paul (*Justification. God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision*) with its emphatic rejection of any notion in Paul of Christ’s righteousness as imputed to the believer—a polemic, I can’t escape the impression, that has for him an unmistakable edge of religious antipathy; imputation, in his view as he has famously put it elsewhere, is “a cold piece of business” (*What Saint Paul Really Said*, 110).

Wright clearly wants in some sense to maintain that justification is forensic. But his polemic against imputation nonetheless evidences all too clearly the sad polarity that has continued to plague biblical and theological studies over the past several centuries in considering the Creator–creature relationship and matters of salvation: the alleged incompatibility of legal and relational considerations, the diminishing or even denial of the forensic in favor of what is personal. In the face of this polarization, as disastrous in its consequences as it is unnecessary, Calvin’s forensic “fellowship of righteousness” seems so wonderfully and satisfyingly pointed in capturing the harmony of the legal and the personal in the matter of our justification. And in this, “our sharing in Christ, which justifies us” (3:16:1), he is only reflecting faithfully the apostolic aspiration “to gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God for faith” (Phil. 3:8–9). I have no doubt that Venema would share this assessment.

With these reflections on union with Christ in Calvin, I thank Dr. Venema for his fine work and commend it heartily to pastors, teachers, students and others. Reading this book is bound to deepen their understanding not only of Calvin but also, and more importantly, in this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of his birth, of the biblical soteriology that he was granted to express in such a peerless fashion. ■

**Review:** Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). 325 pages. ISBN 978-0-664-23071-5. \$34.95. Reviewed by Wes Bredenhof, Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

This is the fourth and final volume in an effort to give a fresh exposition of several theological loci through the lens of covenant theology. Previous efforts by Michael Horton covered prolegomena/eschatology (*Covenant and Eschatology*), christology (*Lord and Servant*) and soteriology (*Covenant and Salvation*). In this work, the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) is the focus and the author argues for the integration of two themes often considered to be antithetical: people and place. While assuming a specialist knowledge in many places and tightly written throughout, *People and Place* will prove to be the most accessible volume in this series.

In the first chapter, Horton develops the relationship between Christ and ecclesiology by explaining his real absence and real presence. At his ascension, Christ became absent from the church in a real and meaningful way. However, with Pentecost, he also became truly present with his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one through whom the church has union with Christ.

Word and sacrament are the focus of the next four chapters which explain how the church is created and sustained. The church is “*creatura verbi*,” a creature of the word—and that word is covenantal in nature, according to Horton. This conception of the church naturally has a bearing on questions of canon as well. In this connection, Horton shares with Stanley Grenz who “reverses the word-faith relationship” and asserts that “Scripture is the record of the faith-community’s encounter with God” (86).

As one would expect, sacramentology is developed with an understanding of the sacraments as covenant signs and seals. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper ratify the covenant of grace in a manner analogous to the ratification of ancient treaties. In harmony with the Reformed confessions, Horton argues for an understanding of baptism which stresses the divine activity in this sacrament. A corollary to this argument is his advocacy of the baptism of the infant children of believers.

An entire chapter (5) is dedicated to explaining a Reformed, covenantal view of eucharistic theology. Once again, Horton speaks the language of confessionally Reformed theology—the Lord Jesus is not present in the elements of bread and wine, but he is *really* present at the Lord’s Supper. As he has done elsewhere, Horton argues in this chapter for more frequent (ideally weekly) communion.

In the second part of the book, the attributes of the church (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) are explicated. Horton’s purpose is to explain the “identity and mission of the church as a result

of the circumstances of its location and origin” as well as “to reintegrate the marks and mission of the church” (155). Here he interacts with Roman Catholic theologies which posit an essential identification of Christ and the church, as well as those Protestant theologies which go in the other direction, privileging the many versus the one. Horton takes catholicity and holiness together, drawing out the covenantal bonds between these two attributes. He also explains the invisible/visible distinction, insisting that it does not arise from any sort of platonic conception, but rather from Scripture itself. Horton maintains that “presbyterian polity is the most appropriate expression of a covenantal ecclesiology” (212). Finally, in chapter 8, he builds a “case for identifying the marks of the church (preaching and sacrament) as constitutive for a covenantal theology of mission” (222).

The third part of the book tackles the eschatological dimension of a covenantal ecclesiology. Here Horton builds mostly on the biblical theological work of G.K. Beale and Meredith Kline to argue that God’s purpose is to establish his temple on earth in the age to come. The temple typology and themes of holy land and holy war are unfolded in helpful summary form, or what passes for a summary in these volumes. The final chapter “argues that a covenantal theology is necessarily a liturgical theology and that the eucharistic economy is not only the heartbeat of ecclesial fellowship, but of reality itself” (289). In the age to come, we will see a perfect, restored liturgy with all fulfilling their proper, God-ordained roles. In this age, we see a glimmer of this scene among God’s people gathered in worship. In this age, believers are “passive receivers of the gift of salvation, but they are hereby rendered active worshipers in a life of thanksgiving that is exhibited chiefly in loving service to our neighbours” (303).

Generally, *People and Place* is a challenging, yet rewarding read. Reformed theologians will appreciate the manner in which Horton creatively stakes his theological ground while at the same time respecting the traditional principles and structures of our theology. Both Reformed and non-Reformed theologians will welcome the abundant interaction with other theologians. In this vein, Horton also endeavours to apply the essence/energies distinction of Eastern Orthodoxy to Reformed theology—whether one agrees or disagrees with this effort, it is a stimulating line of thought and one which was worked out in more detail in *Covenant and Salvation*. Pastors with the patience for a difficult read (in places) will also find much of value in *People and Place* for their preaching and teaching, as also with the other volumes in this series.

For instance, Horton inveighs against the “identification of Christ’s person and work with the historical development of the church” (12). This is typically spoken of in terms of incarnational mission or ministry. The classic text for such a view is John 20:21 where the Lord Jesus says, “As the Father

has sent me, I am sending you.” Later Horton quotes Lesslie Newbigin, “There is in truth no ‘extension of the incarnation,’ for His incarnation was in order to make an offering of Himself in the flesh ‘once for all.’” (224). Unfortunately, Newbigin’s view of things is uncommon today and it has become a sort of received orthodoxy in Protestant missiology that the church’s mission is robustly analogous to the mission of Christ.

As another example, Horton builds on the work of Jon Levenson to work out the progression from hearing to seeing in Biblical theology. At Sinai “the ear is central, while at Zion it is the eye” (64). While hearing took priority over seeing in Old Testament times, at the Temple this role was reversed and Horton argues that this was because of the typological relationship of the Temple to Christ: “more than the energetic word that must be heard, the incarnate Word became the object of other senses as well” (64). Horton unfolds how this dialectic continues to exist in this age, to be resolved fully in the age to come. Today is primarily a time for hearing, though our other senses are also addressed in the sacraments. Pastors should be able to make fruitful use of these insights, especially when teaching about the means of grace.

Although there are other items that could be mentioned, one last one has to do with the missional character of worship. “Missional character” does not mean seeker-sensitive, but the church simply doing what the church has been called to do in the way it has been called to do it: worshipping according to God’s Word, including the faithful administration of the means of grace. Writes Horton, “The orderly worship of the saints gathered in weekly assembly for preaching, teaching, and witness is missional (1 Cor. 14:23–25)” (254). This is an excellent point and the author develops it further to include not only the preaching of the Word, but also the administration of the sacraments, especially the Lord’s Supper: “This means that a genuinely missional church should not only provoke a disrupting encounter with a holy and gracious God in its preaching and teaching, but also in the regular celebration of the Supper. Why should the Supper be celebrated so infrequently and, in many cases, at an evening service where visitors are less likely to attend (and therefore to be offended, perplexed, convicted, or intrigued)? (255).” No gimmicks are needed for a church to be missional in its worship—it only need be receptive to what the Lord has instituted in terms of the means of grace.

While as a whole this book can be recommended, there are a number of caveats, a number of places where question marks must be placed. For example, a curious oversight exists in chapter 5 dealing with the Lord’s Supper. Horton asks the question, “How is Christ received in the sacrament?” Horton’s answer is that it is simply through the agency of the Spirit (128). Reformed theology has not been that interested in the mechanics (129). This answer is correct, but not as full-orbed

as it could be. For instance, the Heidelberg Catechism concurs that we share in Christ's true body and blood through the working of the Spirit (QA 79). But the Catechism also states that eating the crucified body and shed blood of Christ means accepting "with a believing heart all the suffering and death of Christ ..." (QA 76). *Faith* is also part of the agency. Undoubtedly, Horton would agree with that and traces of that perspective can be detected.

Another concern has to do with the distinction between the true and false church. This distinction is mentioned several times. In fact, in a footnote at one point, Horton quotes a large section of Belgic Confession article 29 on this distinction (222). However, the author never really fleshes this out to any real degree of depth. When one discusses the issue of identity in ecclesiology, it is necessary to be clear on the norms of Scripture with regards to what is a true church and what is a false church. Horton mentions the three marks of the true church in several places, but does not exposit or apply them in a meaningful way. While there is a place for the distinction of the Westminster Confession of more pure and less pure churches, it seems to this reviewer that equal, if not greater, attention should be given to the distinction found in the Belgic Confession. This privileging of a certain understanding of the more pure/less pure distinction might be the background to this questionable statement of Horton: "... we should not speak of a Reformed faith or an Orthodox theology or a Lutheran confession, but of a Christian faith, theology and confession, from a Reformed, Orthodox, or Lutheran perspective" (210). Relating the marks to mission, historically the Reformed churches have regarded Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox to be objects of mission because they are members of false churches. This historical and confessional perspective sounds muted in *People and Place*.

Earlier the influence of Meredith Kline was mentioned—in fact, his fingerprints are all over each of the volumes in this series. Sometimes this is to salutary effect, but not always. In *Lord and Servant*, Horton had already indicated his appreciation for Kline's framework interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. That appreciation returns in *People and Place* and becomes even more explicit: "God speaks creation into being, and against the backdrop of the 'void and darkness' in Genesis 1:2, there are the six days of creation, meant to be understood, I believe, not as literal twenty-four hour periods but as day-frames that correlate the creation of each domain with its ruler" (290). There is a footnote at the end of that sentence to Kline's *Kingdom Prologue*. Now this is not the place to interact in a comprehensive way with the framework hypothesis, but it should be noted that Horton does hold to this position, one which this reviewer finds unpersuasive. It does not even appear necessary to have been stated at this particular point in Horton's argument.

More disconcerting is Horton's appropriation of Kline's view of the imprecatory psalms. Horton writes, "They may be spoken, even sung, by the royal psalmist who prefigured the messianic judge of the earth. Yet they are out of place on the lips of Christians today, guided as we are not by the ethics of intrusion, but by the ethics of common grace" (276). Books have been written dealing with this subject (James Adams' *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace* springs to mind) arguing that Christians may and should sing these psalms in a christological fashion. Christians are in a holy war, albeit this war is not for a physical plot of land. It is the holy war of Christ himself and the imprecatory psalms are his inspired war songs and as those who are united to Christ, it is appropriate that we sing them.

As serious as some of those concerns are, *People and Place* is a recommended read. The word on the street is that Michael Horton is preparing a systematic theology. If this series is any indication, we have much to look forward to. Horton has proven himself as a creative communicator on both the popular and academic levels. It's also readily evident that he is committed to the Reformed faith as expressed in our confessions. With God's blessing, may he continue to be of service to believers in the English speaking world and elsewhere. ■

**Review: Daniel R. Hyde, *In Living Color: Images of Christ and the Means of Grace* (Wyoming, Mich.: The Reformed Fellowship, 2009). 192 pages. ISBN 978-0979367731. \$13. Reviewed by Rev. Ryan M. McGraw, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Conway, SC, and president of the alumni association of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, from which he holds a M.Div. and a Th.M.**

In this book, Daniel Hyde has taken an extremely unpopular and outdated stance upon a controversial area of Reformed theology. For this I give hearty thanks to God, since the stand he has taken must be taken, and because the future strength and vitality of the Church hinges at least partly upon the matter that he has treated. As Hyde wrote,

The simple purpose of the book you hold in your hands, then, is to give a pastoral explanation from Scripture and our confessions for the classic Reformed prohibition of images of God and Jesus Christ from Scripture and our confessions. We will do this by looking at man's desire for the visual in his relationship with God, but then we will show how God rejects man's efforts to image him. Instead of images, God has given the new covenant church the Word and sacraments as manifestations of his presence among us until Christ comes again, visibly and corporeally—in living color" (27–28).

The importance of the question of images of Christ has often been downplayed or undermined in most modern discussions. However, what is viewed as a peripheral matter often proves to be a symptom of a firmly established and deadly disease. It is instructive to observe that the historic Reformed position on images of Christ is now being discarded almost as universally as it was once upheld. It is even more instructive to learn *why* the change has occurred. This does not insinuate that all who accept images of Christ are leading the Church into apostasy. However, Hyde has correctly identified the fact that the modern *rejection* of the historic position on this subject is closely connected to the modern *emphasis* upon films and artwork as means of grace. The “Reformed” authors Hyde interacts with are very bold. Some of them not only deny the prohibition of images, but they virtually *require* the use of images of Christ *in place of preaching* for the purposes of evangelism and of educating children. Hyde even cited one author who asserted that the Reformed prohibition of images of the Godhead was virtually a forgotten relic of the past (19). In light of such a purportedly universal shift away from the unanimous historic position of the Reformed confessions, the question arises: “What does it mean to be ‘Reformed’?” Hyde answers, “To have a ‘Reformed theology’ means so much more than believing in the acronym TULIP. To be Reformed means to be confessional” (22).

The book begins with a gripping introduction presenting the significance of the problem, followed by three lengthy chapters, and a conclusion. The foreword by Joel Beeke is noteworthy, in which he states, “I . . . believe that this book has far-reaching implications for all of worship” (9). *In Living Color* is well organized, thoroughly conversant with both old and modern sources, and is well argued. For a small book written on a popular level, Hyde’s bibliography is impressive. The first chapter examines man’s media, which has always consisted of images. The latter two chapters demonstrate that God’s chosen media consists of Preaching and Sacraments, respectively. The downside to this organization is the inordinate length of each chapter (sixty pages, forty-five pages, and twenty-five pages, respectively). However, clearly marked divisions with wide margins and small pages compensate for this feature. Hyde has treated his subject with tact and sympathy towards those who desire to use images as media without compromising his own position. The tone of the book is predominantly positive rather than polemic, and the author’s winsome manner adds to the value of the work.

Hyde begins by rejecting images of any or all three Persons of the Godhead (Westminster Larger Catechism 109), first from Scripture and then from the primary historic Reformed Confessions (this is the pattern followed in every chapter). His use of Scripture is thorough and profound. Hyde demonstrates by way of a biblical-theological tour of the Bible that Satan

has most often led people into sin and idolatry by appealing to *sight*, in contrast to *faith* in God’s Word. Sight is a gift from God that is designed to culminate in the *beatific vision* of God himself (32–33), but this vision must wait for the life to come. In the Old Testament, Hyde carefully highlights the repeated manner in which Satan tempted man into sin by examining Genesis 3 and 6, Exodus 32, and Numbers 21 with 2 Kings 18 as prominent examples (33–39). By the time Hyde provides a thorough exposition of the Second Commandment (42–49) and many other Old Testament passages before moving on to the New Testament evidence, his biblical-theological progression has been so well constructed that his conclusion that images of the Godhead remain prohibited in the New Testament is quite natural. His exegesis of Acts 17 is particularly valuable, especially in answering the biblical claims of Jeff Meyers, among others (53–56). The shift to an image-driven culture has been used by Satan to inflict harm upon the Church. Hyde furthermore cites Neil Postman as implying that the shift from a Word-centered to an image-centered culture has endangered people’s ability to think abstractly in general (41).

With regard to the historic Reformed position, Hyde notes the astonishing claim by Jeffrey Meyers that there is no “train of published works stretching back to the Reformation” against images of Christ (70). Hyde responded to this with an impressive array of citations from early Reformed authors and confessional statements, as well as several fathers of the early church (70–88). This section is highly valuable in many respects. It should be noted as well that Hyde thoroughly dispels the assertion (that many are currently making) that the Reformed Confessions prohibit *worshipping* images of Christ, but not *making* images of him (84–85). One thing that could have been expanded usefully in this chapter is the passing reference to the prohibition in the Westminster Larger Catechism against making images inwardly in the mind. This is a continually recurring obstacle to the entire teaching in the minds of many. The sum of the chapter is that we must walk by faith and not by sight, until we are blessed with the *beatific vision* in glory.

Chapter two demonstrates the fact that popular culture and philosophy has gradually become the modern philosophy of ministry (91). By contrast, the Church must return to the philosophy of ministry established by the New Testament, which centers upon the Christ-centered preaching of the Word of God. This chapter on the preaching of the Word is the longest chapter in the book and may stand as a useful summary of the heart of Reformed preaching in its own right. When the Word is preached truly, the people hear Christ speaking through his Word (Rom. 10). When Christ is lifted up in preaching, he is more clearly represented to the faith of those who hear than any image can achieve (Gal. 3). Seeing Christ’s death in actuality could not have been more efficacious than receiving him



through the preached Word (110). Of course, this demands that all true preaching be Christ-centered (99). If this method is unpopular, the Church must imitate Christ in being willing to lose followers (as he did in John 6) for the sake of obedience to the truth (96). In other words, the question of the primacy of preaching is not determined pragmatically, but dogmatically; not by experience, but by Scripture.

One thing that highlights the importance of obedience to the command to preach is that drama was also popular in the days of the apostle Paul (101–102). Based primarily upon 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Hyde demonstrates that the rejection of art as a medium for communicating the gospel has never been a pragmatic consideration. Through a careful exegesis of this passage, he concludes that the method, messenger, manner, and message of art and films are contrary to the gospel (106). The question is not what God may or may not use for the good of souls, since God uses all things, including evil, to produce good. The confidence of the Church must rest only upon what God has commanded. According to Hyde, Christ speaking through the preaching of the Word is what ought to truly “move” souls (102). With regard to the manner of preaching, this implies that preaching is not merely a doctrinally sound theological lecture, but that preaching must be lively (120, 110). There is a “real presence” of the Spirit of God in biblical preaching (121).

Towards the end of chapter 2, Hyde includes an interesting discussion of catechetical preaching (122–125). This section demonstrates the historical reasons behind catechetical preaching as well as the practical value of such preaching. Hyde noted, “The practice of Heidelberg in holding a second service on the Lord’s Day in which public catechesis was conducted was a feature of all Reformed churches” (123). This may be overstating the case. I am not aware, for example, of Reformed churches in England or Scotland that required catechetical preaching at that time. If “Reformed” refers exclusively to denominations with “Reformed” in their name, then this might be true, but if so, then this should be clarified. That being said, Hyde has done an excellent job in this chapter of returning preaching to its rightful place in Scripture, history, and the Church. He has argued decisively that communicating the gospel through visual media cannot stand alongside of the preached Word as an additional or alternate means of grace.

The last chapter expounds the biblical and Reformed view of receiving the sacraments as the only “visible word” instituted and permitted by God. Hyde’s exposition of the Sacraments is useful in itself, but it is less profoundly tied to the primary thesis of his book. His full exposition of the sacraments goes somewhat beyond the thesis of rejecting images of Christ for the sake of using God’s means of grace. However, Hyde’s citations of confessional documents and various Reformed authors is very illuminating and useful.

The Sacraments are the only visual media *permitted* by God to communicate the gospel because they are the only visual media that have been *prescribed* by God to communicate the gospel. Even in the case of the Sacraments, however, the Word of God is always the root of their efficacy.

The book concludes with the assertion that by resting in the prescribed means of Word and Sacrament in the face of our image-driven culture, “we are led to becoming a contented people. As pilgrims in the wilderness without an ultimate resting place in this life, we must not covet that which God has not given us nor what the world tells us that we need. Instead, as children of our heavenly Father, we are to be content with his means of creating faith in us and confirming us in faith” (161).

Finally Hyde adds,

If this sounds foolish to you, then you are right. God has determined to work in foolish ways. Accordingly, no one can say our religion is about us, is about great crowds, or is about money. It is about Christ, who, though we have not seen him, will reveal himself in glory from heaven and take us to his side for eternity. Let us not attempt a sneak peek on canvas, in clay, on paper, or on the silver screen, but let us with great anticipation await the day when we will see him as he truly is, in living color (163).

*In Living Color* is much more thorough than most other works on images of Christ. It is profoundly Scriptural, rooted in historic Reformed Christianity, and thoroughly conversant with a broad range of scholarship. Hyde has accomplished all of this without sacrificing readability. From now on, this shall be the first book that I direct people to who have questions regarding images of Christ. If you have questions regarding images of Christ, you must read this book. If you are connected to the Reformed or Presbyterian Standards in some manner, then read this book to foster the conviction that the teaching of these Standards is rooted in Scripture. And above all, read this book if you desire to have a greater appreciation for the Preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. ■

**Review: J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2008). 922 pages. ISBN 9780875525778. \$59.99. Reviewed by James E. Dolezal, Ph.D. candidate in systematic theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia**

*Concise Reformed Dogmatics* is the English translation of the original Dutch edition (*Beknopte Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*) published in 1992. Inasmuch as the authors are relative unknowns to English speaking students of theology the

appearance of this translation has had little fanfare. But this should not lead us to conclude that this volume is insignificant. Indeed, it is a fresh and refreshing piece of scholarship. The authors both previously taught at the Theological University of the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in Apeldoorn. J. van Genderen (now deceased) was professor of dogmatics, the history of doctrine, and symbolics (creeds) while W. H. Velema (currently professor emeritus) taught apologetics, ethics, and homiletics. All but three chapters of *CRD* were written by van Genderen. The tome is ordered following the plan of a traditional systematic theology covering the whole range of theological *loci* through its fifteen chapters including: revelation, Scripture, God, creation, man in God's image, sin, the person and work of Christ, the Covenant of Grace, salvation, the Church, the means of grace, and eschatology. Given the breadth of discussion found in this book this review intends only to offer a general appraisal with a few specific observations on a particular strength and weakness.

Van Genderen and Velema define dogma as, "*doctrine that the church, under appeal to the Word of God, holds to be normative*" (1, emphasis theirs). That is, "*Dogma expresses succinctly what the church views as central and essential in the biblical message. Dogmatics analyses, presents arguments, and elucidates*" (5, emphasis theirs). While many would agree with these basic descriptions of dogma and the task of dogmatics the challenge is to strike a proper sense of balance and proportion. What should systematic theology aim to accomplish? What should mark its treatment of the various topics? The authors propose six characteristic features of dogmatic theology: it should be ecclesiastical, confessional, systematic, critical, timely, and practical (6–12). These six emphases well represent the tone of the entire volume. For that reason we will consider each in turn.

### Characteristic Features Of Dogmatics

1. *Its ecclesiastical character.* "Without the church there would be no dogma. Actually there could be no dogmatics either, but only strictly personal statements of doctrine" (6). By this the authors mean that the work of systematic theology is a ministry demanded by the church. Though doctrine certainly speaks authoritatively to the church, the work of the theologian is to *serve* the church. Systematic theology "needs indeed to be reminded from time to time that its function is to minister" (6). The authors qualify this point by observing that, "This does not mean that the task of dogmatics should always be viewed in such a narrow ecclesiastical sense that all questions not directly affecting the church should be ignored by it" (6). The more apparent needs of the local congregation, denomination, or present generation are not the final measure of what dogmatics should aim to address. It may be that

there are doctrinal challenges the church will face in the future that she does not currently experience. Notwithstanding the fact that dogmatics often attends to questions of doctrine extending beyond the church's more apparent and immediate concerns, it is still an ecclesiastical ministry.

2. *Its confessional character.* This characteristic is implied by the churchly quality just mentioned (6). Dogmatic theology invariably reveals the confessional, or non-confessional, viewpoint of its authors. This is why these authors have purposely chosen to qualify their dogmatic tome as "Reformed" as opposed to the fuzzier (because non-confessional) appellations, "Evangelical," "Christian," or "Protestant." Inasmuch as "Reformed" indicates "confessional," the authors openly avow their commitment to the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dordt). References to these ecclesiastical standards abound throughout the volume (e.g., 3–4, 47–48, 112–114, 129–130, 220–222, 231–233, 483–845, 502–503, 747–748, 872–873, etc.). This conspicuous attachment to the familiar doctrines of the Three Forms of Unity is especially useful for lay readers who may be unfamiliar with many of the special or technical aspects of traditional theological *loci*. It gives them a recognizable point of theological reference. Additionally, it serves as a good reminder to theological students and ministers of the adequacy of the Reformed standards in approaching a host of theological issues and controversies. Our churchly standards are a lively source for our more technical and critical theologizing. Even so, the authors point out, dogmatics must go beyond the confession: "It must go to Scripture itself in order to 'bring forth' out of that 'treasure things new and old'" (6). By going "beyond" the confession the authors certainly do not mean to imply a dogmatics that opposes the confession. Their point seems to be that dogmatics simply aims to say *more* than the confession may say on a given point.

3. *Its systematic character.* Dogmatics attempts, so far as is humanly possible in this life, to speak of God and his ways in an orderly fashion. Van Genderen and Velema are hesitant to follow Herman Bavinck in denominating dogmatics as a "scientific system" of the knowledge of God. In their view, to call such knowledge "scientific" appears to suggest that we may have a comprehensive knowledge of God. They write, "Even if we take a systematic approach, a scientific system of the knowledge of God does not lie within our reach" (7). In truth, their fears are misplaced in this instance inasmuch as Bavinck, in following the Medieval and Reformed scholastics in his use of the term "scientific," never aims for a creaturely comprehension of God. Anyhow, the authors seem more favorable toward Hendrikus Berkhof's depiction of dogmatics as "the systematic thinking through the relationship that God in Christ has established with us" (6). From the present reviewer's perspective this anti-scientific portrayal of the systematic

character of dogmatics is too reductionistic if one aims to treat the full range of theological *loci*. In placing relationship at the center there follows the risk of being overly anti-metaphysical, and indeed these authors fall prey to this in places (esp. in their doctrine of God). In all fairness, though, this amounts only to a minor detraction from the overall quality of the volume.

4. *Its critical character.* “The critical task of dogmatics follows directly from the nature of dogmas” (7). Theology that is “critical in a responsible way” is constantly testing the church’s doctrine by the standard of Scripture. This entails a careful reading of one’s own tradition as well as the positions staked out by other traditions and theologians. In this connection the authors specifically identify Karl Barth and Hendrikus Berkhof as their two primary interlocutors. Other theologians who figure prominently in the volume are John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Klaas Schilder, G. C. Berkouwer, H. M. Kuitert, and A. A. van Ruler along with a host of lesser Dutch luminaries. Also, there is extensive critical interaction with various confessions (Protestant and Roman Catholic) and some of the more recent Dutch Reformed synodical productions in the Netherlands. The critical nature of the volume is not entirely of the negative or destructive sort. There is a charitable tone that is willing to recognize elements of truth even in those documents and personalities with whom the authors sharply disagree.

5. *Its timely character.* Though “continuity must take precedence over currency,” dogmatics must not shirk its responsibility to engage new questions and face current problems (8). The authors profess, “In our dogmatics we try to formulate what Scripture teaches us and the church confesses in such a way that it is intelligible to our contemporaries” (9). In this task the authors succeed admirably, striking a fine balance between listening to and appropriating the Reformed and catholic tradition and bringing that testimony to bear on modern theological concerns. Some examples of the latter include: their exposition and critique of Hendrikus Berkhof’s and H. M. Kuitert’s concept of divine revelation as human encounter with God (33–40); their organic theory of inspiration as opposed to the mechanistic, dualistic, dynamic, and actualistic theories (78–83); their insightful analysis and rebuttal of Barth’s and Berkouwer’s conception of election and reprobation (222–228); their critical survey of various Christian approaches to evolution and creationism (265–276); their argument for a more redemptively-oriented notion of common grace in culture and mild criticisms of both Kuyper’s and Schilder’s positions (294–297); their criticism of the universalist tendencies in Barth’s, H. Berkhof’s, and Kuitert’s understanding of the Covenant of Grace (542–545); their confutation of some recent defective views of justification including those proffered by the 1963 Lutheran World Council, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, H. Berkhof, and H. Wiersema (631–640);

a fine analysis of diverse Dutch Reformed views on the nature of the Church including those of Kuyper, Schilder, J. C. Hoekendijk, and H. Berkhof (689–693); and finally, an assessment of some recent eschatological positions including A. Schweitzer’s “consistent” eschatology, C. H. Dodd’s realized eschatology, Barth’s transcendental eschatology, Bultmann’s existential eschatology, Moltmann’s eschatology of hope, and Karl Rahner’s contrasting of eschatological futurism and actualism (824–826). These examples are merely samples of the many timely discussions interspersed throughout the volume. It should be observed that these discussions of recent views inevitably reflect the authors’ own place and time as continental Dutch Reformed churchmen and theologians of the second half of the twentieth century. Given their desire to engage the issues most relevant to Reformed theology in the Netherlands the tome manifests a distinctly provincial character. One finds little interaction with either British or North American controversies and authors. Furthermore, some of the positions that are of immediate concern to these writers are virtually unknown to the English readership of this translation. And though this provincial quality may be a source of discouragement to some readers, the upshot is that van Genderen and Velema have given us a fine model of how Reformed confessionalism can engage current and relevant theological disputes while retaining a solid commitment to historic orthodoxy. Furthermore, their treatment of uniquely Dutch controversies and denominational disputes can only serve to broaden and enrich the outlook of those of us unfamiliar with the particulars of these debates.

What emerges in the authors’ attempt to be “timely” is often a fresh articulation and nuance of the Reformed faith that avoids novelty. It also drives them back to the biblical text as that ever-fruitful source of dogmatics: “Exegesis repeatedly confronts dogmatics with questions and continually opens up new perspectives” (8). This conviction of the timeliness of the timeless Word results in extensive interpretation of biblical passages that advance well beyond supplying needed proof-texts. In this connection the authors warn of attempts to be relevant at the expense of being biblical: “Dogmatic theology is always in communication with the thought patterns of its time, but by simply taking over a philosophical way of thinking one runs the great risk that the biblical content loses in significance” (9). Thus they alert us to the dangers of Neo-Platonism, Aristotelianism, Cartesianism, Hegelianism, Neo-Kantianism, and modern existentialism. If Reformed dogmatics is to be current and relevant it must speak intelligibly to these philosophies without succumbing to their anti-Christian methods and presuppositions.

6. *Its practical character.* Van Genderen and Velema endorse the conclusion of the *Leiden Synopsis* that theology is both theoretical and practical, concerning both knowledge

and the service of God. It is theoretical insofar as it is a scholarly pursuit and practical in that its aim is to serve the church and the life of faith. "We may never," they remind us, "lose sight of the connection between doctrine and life" (9). But they hasten to add, "[W]e must, however, oppose the notion of the *primacy of praxis* that has a large number of proponents in newer theology" (9). In placing the premium on *praxis* many moderns, even some professing the Reformed faith, have fallen under the sway of Immanuel Kant who "judged that only that which is acceptable and useful from a practical point of view can be considered to be appropriate for faith in modern times" (10). The danger is that "usefulness" abandons its place as a consequent of theology and, instead, asserts itself as a source and criterion for dogmatics. Matters are further complicated by the fact that what is truly useful is conceived differently by various theologians: "The particular kind of praxis may vary from political decisions to mystical experiences" (10). The authors fault H. M. Kuitert, along with Pannenberg and Moltmann, for abandoning the *principium* of Scripture and replacing it with anthropology and sociology. The practical side of dogmatics is not the principle of theology, but the consequent.

It follows, then, that the authors are opposed to subsuming ethics under dogmatics. On this point they cite Karl Barth disapprovingly: "Dogmatics itself is ethics; and ethics is dogmatics" (11; in Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1.2.793). Of course, "There is no such thing as nondogmatic ethics, or ethics without a definite doctrinal content. Neither is there nonethical dogmatics or dogmatics without a certain ethical import" (11). But, formally considered, dogmatics is about right *understanding* drawn from Scripture. So how is it that the authors still insist at all upon the *practical* character of dogmatics? Are they simply sneaking ethics in the back door? We must conclude that this is not the case. Van Genderen and Velema are merely concerned to remind us that all truth to be believed is "truth for us personally" (9). This translates into a discernable pastoral tone. Throughout the various *loci* they engage numerous practical concerns by attempting to clarify what are, for some, troubling or confusing dogmas. Some examples include: whether or not one's name may be blotted out of the book of life (216); their judicious and encouraging treatment of the relation between election and the proclamation of the gospel (236–239) and between election and assurance (240–243); salient insights on the relationship between the law and the gospel in preaching (433) and their reminder that "we ... may not systematize the way in which the Spirit brings someone to repentance" (434); the pastoral reminder that the necessity of Christ's satisfaction "is related to a deep awareness of the reality of the wrath of God over our sins" (524); their explanation of how the Sermon on the Mount radicalizes the Decalogue (656); a lucid account of the place of

the Word in the church (757–779); and their helpful explanation of worthy participation in the Lord's Supper (813). This is not a volume of pastoral theology, but the obvious pastoral concern of the authors is one of *CRD*'s distinguishing assets.

These six characteristics, identified by the authors themselves, fairly well describe what readers can expect throughout the volume. The sheer size and sophistication of this work defies any attempt at a single comprehensive review. For that reason we now proceed to consider a representative strength and a weakness.

### Comment On A Strength And A Weakness

Undoubtedly, one of the outstanding chapters in *CRD* is chapter 8: "Man as the Image of God" (314–384). Richard B. Gaffin writes of this chapter, "[T]he entire treatment of the image of God ... is most penetrating" (from "Epistemological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2:6–16," in *Revelation and Reason*, eds. K. Scott Oliphint and Lane G. Tipton, p. 36). Their treatment begins, as we would expect, with an investigation of the relevant biblical passages (316–332). From these they conclude that the *imago Dei* is both lost and retained in fallen man: "There is simultaneously complete discontinuity and continuity. We formulate this complex situation as follows: sinful man displays the image of God in a negative mode. The fallen child cannot renounce its descent, even though it seeks in every possible way to blot out the memory of the Father. Sin is the refusal to display the image of the Father and to make the image visible in relation to fellow humans and creation" (332). The image is both ontological and moral. The authors declare, "We reject the separation between ontic, structural, substantial aspects on the one hand and functional, relational aspects on the other hand" (332). Rejecting the separation does not mean they reject the validity of the distinction. They simply intend to maintain that the obligations (as children and servants of the King) attendant to the *imago* remain in force upon the man *as man*.

Furthermore, they insist, both aspects of the *imago* have been impaired. Thus, man continues in the image of God, but only, as they say, "in a negative mode" (359). As image, man still has an implanted desire for relationship that only God can satisfy. The authors identify this as an ontic inclination: "Man is inclined to this relationship with God. He cannot undo his structural disposition, even if he breaks this relationship. In man as human being created in relationship with God there is a yearning to fill the empty place resulting from his rebellion against God" (359). We detect in this explanation of man as image in the negative mode something of Calvin's notion of the *semen religionis*. No matter how hard he tries fallen man cannot divest himself of this image. The image is a constant reminder to him of his origins and his intended purpose: "Even when man does not honor his Creator, he cannot live



outside this structure, apart from this relationship" (361). The authors do a fine job establishing that the *imago Dei* is the basis for natural man's *sensus divinitatis*, though one unfortunate misstatement in this connection should be noted: "This knowledge is not done justice. It is rejected before it reaches man" (362). At the risk of petty critique it is simply observed that the knowledge is not rejected *before* it reaches man, but *after*. The knowledge of God that sinful man suppresses is knowledge that he actually possesses (Rom. 1:18–21). Indeed, it is the actual possession of this knowledge of God that leaves them without excuse. The authors seem to accept this elsewhere in their discussion when they describe this suppression of knowledge as "the negative mode of the knowledge of God" (363). Their identification of sinful man as image in the "negative mode" is helpfully applied to other aspects of the *imago* such as human freedom (364–368), man's social relationships (368–374), and his relation to the environment (374–381). All said, this chapter is a bracing piece of scholarship overflowing with fresh ways of articulating the Reformed understanding of the *imago Dei*.

In spite of its generally superior quality and scholarship, *CRD*, as one might expect with any comprehensive study of dogmatics, is not without its shortcomings. One liability in particular is the authors' infrequent disparagement of metaphysics and philosophy. Their warnings against allowing abstract philosophy to undermine the primacy of the biblical witness are well taken (13–14), though it occasionally leads the authors to devalue some of the more technical scholastic formulations that the church has historically found highly useful (we might even say *necessary* in the Christological and Trinitarian controversies) for articulating the faith in a clear and relevant way. On this account the authors are mildly critical of the Reformed scholastics, and even of Herman Bavinck, for their supposed allowance of philosophical abstractions in their theologizing. On Bavinck's treatment of the divine attributes, for instance, they write, "But here and there in the sections that are devoted to the attributes of God, their biblical-theological content risks being crowded out by metaphysics, which renders the doctrine of God too abstract. Although Bavinck was on his guard against this danger, he did not altogether escape it" (135). Must metaphysics invariably tend toward abstractions? Could it not, in service to biblical revelation, be a conceptual and linguistic tool by which we carefully nuance what Scripture teaches? The authors do appear open to this positive use of philosophy when writing of the Trinity: "Trinity (*trinitas*) is a word that does not occur in the Bible, but that the church began to use because it saw a need for it. Originally Being and person were indeed Greek concepts, but subsequently acquired biblical content" (153). And yet within the space of a few pages they return to plying the false antithesis between philosophy as abstract and

theology as dynamic and concrete. They write, "The doctrine of the Trinity gives us an impression of the richness of God's life. He is not Being itself or the Ground of Existence. Neither is he the Highest Good or the Supreme Being. He is the living God, who is compassionate in himself. In himself he is a God of communion. God is love. Behind his acts of love and grace in time stands his eternal love" (160). The juxtapositions in this passage are unhelpful and confusing. To speak of God as Being itself (*Ipsium Esse*), the Ground of Existence (*principium essendi*), the Highest Good (*summum bonum*) and Supreme Being in no way undermines the fullness and richness of his divine life. But to deny these grand realities in order to amplify their emphasis on God's living fullness is counterproductive. It undercuts the absoluteness of his simple self-subsistence to make him appear more relational and personal and it wrongly assumes that "being" as such must always indicate something abstract. Rather, it seems to this reviewer that the genius of the catholic and Reformed tradition is in taking over Greek notions of being and essence and loading them with biblical presuppositions so that the triune personal God is at once the ground of all being and the dynamic source of love and compassion. These notions are not in tension in God. Understanding God as Absolute Being entails understanding Absolute Being as thoroughly personal. It follows, then, that metaphysics need not have an abstracting tendency that detracts from God's love and his redemptive grace.

In sum, the authors seem to have imbibed a non-lethal dose of the "Calvin versus the Calvinists" tonic which motivates their anti-metaphysical outlook. Additionally, it may be their relative approximation of G. C. Berkouwer's theological method that leads them down this path (e.g., their pitting of theological doctrine against Scripture, 189; cf. their rejection of the *via eminentiae*, the *via negationis*, and the *via causalitatis* as valid approaches to theology, 165), though Berkouwer is much more viciously anti-metaphysical than van Genderen and Velema. All things considered, this is a minor shortcoming in light of the immense insight, originality, and orthodoxy of these authors.

#### A Brief Comment On Editing And Format

Through the entire volume *CRD* alternates between two different font sizes. The purpose is to present the main points in the larger font and the more technical discussions in the smaller. In this way readers can forego the more technical or polemical sections if so desired. It may also help the lay reader who might otherwise be discouraged by these more difficult sections. The text reads smoothly either way. The sections of smaller text are fitted quite naturally into the main discussion presented in the larger font.

Another benefit is that the editors have replaced some of the volumes originally cited in Dutch and German (e.g.,

Bavinck and Barth) with the accessible English translations, giving up to date editions and page numbers. Unfortunately, this updating has left out some volumes which have been translated to English (including volumes by W. Pannenberg, H. Ridderbos, K. Schilder, and others). A more complete updating to available English editions would have been useful. The book includes a comprehensive scripture index and an extensive name and subject index.

*Concise Reformed Dogmatics* should prove to be a boon to ministers, elders, theological students, and interested laymen and will almost certainly attain a place on the short list of preferred single-volume studies in Reformed dogmatics. ■

**Review:** Charles E. Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp: Identifying Irenaeus' Apostolic Presbyter and the Author of ad Diognetum*. Vol. 186, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). 207 pages (incl. index). ISBN 978-3161486999. 49€. Reviewed by Rev. Dr. R. Scott Clark, Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Westminster Seminary California, and an ordained minister in the United Reformed Churches.

The treatise *ad Diognetum* (to Diognetus) written anonymously by Mathetes (the disciple) is one of the most fascinating of the works included in the standard collections of the Apostolic Fathers.<sup>1</sup> One supposes that Johannes Quasten's account of the "epistle" (more on that below) of Mathetes to Diognetus fairly represents the view accepted for most of the twentieth century. First, he treats the treatise as if it were an epistle by an unknown author dependent upon Irenaeus. Some of the possible authors reviewed by Quasten include Hippolytus of Rome and Quadratus.<sup>2</sup> He concludes his survey of the treatise by saying the

epistle deserves to rank among the most brilliant and beautiful works of Christian Greek literature. The writer is a master of rhetoric, his sentence structure is full of charm and subtly balanced, his style limpid. The content reveals a man of fervent faith and wide knowledge, a mind thoroughly imbued with the principles of Christianity. The diction sparkles with fire and vitality (Quasten, *Patrology*, 1.251–252).

Hubertus Drobner's 1994 survey reflects some of the developments in modern scholarship, including an acknowledgement that it was probably not an epistle at all. It was an apologetic treatise the textual history of which is complicated by the fact that the only known exemplar of the treatise, which was discovered in a Constantinople fish shop in the fifteenth century, was destroyed in a fire in Strasbourg in the nineteenth century (Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 75). Drobner,

however, does not comment on the authorship of the work. The 1995 survey by Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli explains that it was Henri Estienne (1592) who first described *ad Diognetum* as an epistle,<sup>3</sup> but that designation, despite its popularity,<sup>4</sup> is inaccurate. Neither is it an apologia. It is, they argue, a "protreptic," i.e. "an invitation to accept the Christian faith" (*Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, 1.210). They locate the work in Asia Minor or Rome and assign it to the period before Constantine. They too are impressed with the quality of the rhetoric and of the author's command of Greek: "it is certainly the best Greek to be found in the writings of the apologists" (ibid.)

For the reader not intimately familiar with the work it may be helpful to observe that *ad Diognetum* is in twelve chapters. Chapters 1–10 contain five major themes: against paganism (chapter 2), against Jewish worship and customs (chapters 3–4), Christian distinctiveness (chapters 5–7), God's Son as the revelation of God and Savior (chapters 8–9), and a call to imitate God.<sup>5</sup> Chapters 11 and 12 are usually identified as a distinct section of the treatise. Holmes describes this section as a "Homily on the Word" (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 715).

Who wrote this powerful, elegant, this "boldest and most self-aware undertaking in second-century Christian apologetics" (*Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature*, 1.212)? This is the basic question that Charles Hill, Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando) and well-published patristics scholar, undertakes to answer in a brief but dense and closely argued monograph.

He argues that the author of *ad Diognetum* is none other than Polycarp († c. 155–160) (Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 272). He draws upon Polycarp's biography and teaching through Polycarp's epistle to the Philippian congregation (c. 120). He also appeals to the Martyrdom of Polycarp, from which we

1. It has been included among the apostolic father since the 1592 edition of Henri Estienne. See Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, Mass. Hendrickson Publishers, 2007) 75. See also Oscar de Gebhardt, et al., eds., *Patrum Apostolicorum Opera, Editio Post Dresseliiannam Alteram Tertia ed.*, 3 vols., vol. 2, *Patrum Apostolicorum Opera* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1887); Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers. Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); A. Cleveland Coxe, ed. *The Apostolic Fathers*, 9 vols., vol. 1, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950).

2. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 4 vols. (Utrecht and Westminster, Md.: Spectrum and The Newman Press, 1962) 1.248–249.

3. Claudio Moreschini, and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, 2 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005) 1.210.

4. E.g. Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 686–687 describes *ad Diognetus* as an epistle.

5. These themes are adapted from the chapter headings in Holmes, ed. *Apostolic Fathers*, 695–714.

have a detailed account of Polycarp's death. There are other sources for our knowledge of Polycarp including Irenaeus' recollections which, Hill argues, are reflected in *Adversus Haereses* (2–3; hereafter AH).

His argument is in two somewhat distinct (and distinguishable stages). First he identifies the "Presbyter" to whom Irenaeus referred and to whom he appealed and identifies him as Polycarp. In the second part of the work, Hill makes his direct case for Polycarp as the author of *ad Diognetum*. On the face of it, identifying the author of *ad Diognetum* is a formidable task. In 1965 H. I. Marrou presented no fewer than fifteen possible authors. Hill recognizes this problem and says, "I do not myself present the case with quite the same degree of certitude as I believe is warranted by the argument of Part One, for the identification of Irenaeus' elder in AH 4.27.1–32.1.... Yet I am bringing forward Polycarp's name because I believe the evidence presses us to consider it seriously" (97). Even if one does not agree with Hill's identification of Polycarp as the author, Hill is surely right to say that "a fresh examination of the form and character of the *ad Diognetum*, and an exploration of the parallels between this document and Polycarp of Smyrna can yield valuable results for a sociological and historical understanding of this important document and its environment" (98). The author begins by building the connection between Irenaeus and Polycarp. He writes,

In Irenaeus' view the presbyters, indeed are the essential links between the apostles and the apostolic teaching, on the one hand, and the faithful churches of Irenaeus' day on the other. Even the notion of apostolic succession as held by Irenaeus has to do first of all with the presbyters, and not simply with those presbyters who are bishops, for it is the presbyters who are the guardians of apostolic teaching (AH, 3.2.2; 4.26.2; 32.1; 5.20.2; Proof 3). And for Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, there is no one in the body of the church's presbyters since the apostles as prominent as his former teacher, Polycarp of Smyrna (7).

According to Irenaeus, Polycarp "knew and was ordained by apostles" and Hill argues that Polycarp is an important but unidentified source for Irenaeus' knowledge of the Apostolic doctrine (7–8). He builds his case for this connection by analyzing Irenaeus' use of oral teaching from an unidentified ancient presbyter who knew the apostles. He addresses some text-critical questions in Irenaeus' AH (4.27–32), which, when resolved properly favor identifying a single presbyter as the source (8–10). He identifies several connections and correspondences between Polycarp's teaching and that of the presbyter mentioned by Irenaeus (e.g. anti-Marcionite

themes; 11–17). The author argues at length from connections between the Letter to Florinus and AH to establish further the connection between Irenaeus and Polycarp. He answers the most obvious question, namely, if Irenaeus had contact with Polycarp and the latter had connections to the apostles, why did Irenaeus withhold Polycarp's name? Hill gives a few reasons: Irenaeus habitually withheld names of respected ecclesiastical authorities when he knew them (23). Irenaeus seems to have assumed that the reader would make the connection for himself (23). Third, he had just identified Polycarp in a previous treatise *On the Sole Sovereignty* (23). Fourth, it was not Polycarp's person but his office he wished to emphasize (24).

Among the other connections cited by Hill are the order and arrangement of lists of heretics in AH with the way similar material is presented in the Martyrdom of Polycarp (27). He notes a particular connection between the critique of Cerinthus in both documents (28–30) and the treatment of Marcion in both (30–31; 32–71). Among the more fascinating arguments is Hill's analysis of the function of the "descendit ad inferos" in the anti-Marcionite arguments of Irenaeus and Polycarp (e.g., pp. 85–94). They were responding to the Marcionite corruption of the descensus whereby Christ was said to have gone to Hades in order to save people "like Cain, the Sodomites, and the Egyptians" while "men like Abel, Enoch, Noah, the patriarchs, and prophets ... did not partake in salvation" (42). To respond to this account, the presbyter (Polycarp) "accepted the concept of Christ's descensus ad inferos so widely known in the early church" (42). It was an adaptation of Paul's language in Ephesians 4:9 and possibly by the "Jeremiah apocryphon cited earlier by Irenaeus in [AH] 4.22.1" (43). More likely, Hill acknowledges, is the influence of 1 Peter 4:6. The language used by Irenaeus in these places resonates with the language of Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians (44). The benefit of re-assessing the connection between Irenaeus and Polycarp is that, in this light, we now have greater access to and knowledge of Polycarp's teaching (70–71). Irenaeus did not reproduce the ipsissima verba of Polycarp but there is evidence that Irenaeus memorized Polycarp's anti-Marcionite teaching (71, see also pp. 80–82). This line of argumentation clarifies the chronological relations between Irenaeus and Polycarp so that we may be more certain that the date of Polycarp's martyrdom was 155 or 156 (73). This connection also illumines Irenaeus eschatology (77–80, 83–85). Hill argues that Irenaeus' chiliasm was a response to the Valentinian heresy. Because of the extreme anti-materialism of the dualists, Irenaeus adopted a materialist, this-worldly, eschatology. For more on this see his work on early Christian eschatology.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it appears that Irenaeus' eschatology in the first four books of AH was non-chiliasitic. He speculates that it may have been the influence of Papias that helped to lead him to chiliasm in book 5

6. Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Future Hope in Early Christian Eschatology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Second edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

(77–78). Significantly, Hill traces Irenaeus' earlier, non-chiliasm eschatology to Polycarp's influence (85).

The heart of the work, however, is the direct argument for Polycarp as the author of *ad Diognetum*. He begins by surveying possible dates for the origin of *ad Diognetum* (98–101). The predominant views tend to locate the work either c. 140–150 (which favors Polycarp as author) or 190–200 (e.g. Marrou et al.). He analyzes the form of the work not as an epistle, as frequently thought, but rather as a “transcript of an oral address” given “outside a judicial context” (101–106). Notably, there is no appeal to stop persecution. “The only plea it contains is a plea for conversion to Christianity” (102).

If it is difficult to identify the author of *ad Diognetum*, how much more difficult is it to identify Diognetus? Some have conjectured that he might even have been a purely literary creation. If, however, *ad Diognetum* is a transcript of an address, it seems most likely that Diognetus was an actual person. Since “there is no obvious reason to question the self-presentation of the work” (105), Hill concludes that he was a probably a contemporary of Polycarp, in Smyrna (162). The evidence for this is an inscription which has been overlooked by other scholars (162–164).

Hill next turns to the literary unity of the address (106–114). There is not space in this review to work through his arguments here except to say that he concludes that “the most realistic and promising approach” to the text-critical problems is to think that we are missing one sheet of a unified work (113–114).

As to the stylistic differences between the first section (chapters 1–10) and the second (11–12) Hill argues: “The consistent impression in both parts is that we are dealing with an oral address explaining Christianity given by a Christian teacher in the presence of one who has requested it, probably a man of some high social rank named Diognetus” (116). The change in tone in the last two chapters is accounted for by the nature of protreptic address. “It should not be surprising, then, to find in a work such as this a certain progression or even a transition in the attitude of the hearer assumed or hoped for by the speaker/author” (118). In other words, Polycarp's tone changes as he anticipates the conversion of Diognetus (118–120). Hill shows that early Christian authors in this period routinely assumed rather significant knowledge of Scripture on the part of non-Christian readers (121–127). If Hill's hypothesis about the identity of Diognetus is correct, it appears that “the protreptic efforts of the author of *ad Diognetum* did not meet with their intended results” (165).

The penultimate chapter is devoted to the case for Polycarp as the speaker and Diognetus as the hearer of a semi-public discourse delivered before Diognetus and his entourage (128). To make his case Hill appeals to parallels in the Martyrdom of Polycarp in which Polycarp spoke “as if delivering an oral

address even before a respected public official would not at all be beyond his ability or custom” (128). He argues that Polycarp should not be considered a “rustic” who could not have aspired to such oratory (130). The negative evaluation of Polycarp depends mainly upon an evaluation of his much earlier Epistle to the Philippians. To counteract this perception, Hill appeals to Polycarp's relationship with Florinus as a case where a “member of the ruling class” approached him for an explanation of Christianity (131). There is evidence that Polycarp was known to “others in the upper classes” in Smyrna by c. 108. He was pastor to the children and servants of one high-ranking official (131). There are other names of people with social standing connected to Polycarp (131–133).

The speaker in *ad Diognetum* expressly connected himself to the apostles in 11.1 where he described himself as “a disciple of apostles” (133). “The speaker is at least staking-out a firm place in succession of what he regards as authentic apostolic tradition” (133). According to Irenaeus, when Polycarp went to Rome he “caused many to turn away from the ... heretics to the church of God” (134). He did so by “proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles...” Polycarp appealed to his direct connection with the apostles as part of his attempt to persuade those who had embraced heresy. He also defended his quartodeciman view of Easter (i.e., the custom of always observing Easter on the 14th of Nisan, whatever the day of week and not necessarily on Sunday) partly on the basis of his connection to the apostle John. According to Hill, if “the speaker of *ad Diog.* 11.1–4 is not Polycarp, one could almost say that he is impersonating Polycarp, as the latter is presented by Irenaeus. Could it be that we are reading here from an actual speech made by Polycarp?” (135).

To press home this part of the argument he appeals to correspondences to his only known literary work, the Epistle to the Philippians. He notes the rather unimpressive style of the earlier epistle but accounts for the differences in style by noting the different genres and decades to which the documents belong. The epistles is probably 40 years before the speech (137). Hill notes a similarity of “Paulinism” between the epistle to the Philippians and *ad Diognetus* (138), which was also noted by Pier Franco Beatrice (1990). He also surveys the parallels with 1 Peter and the various Petrine qualities of both documents (139–140) and especially their doctrine of the substitutionary atonement made by Christ.

There are also striking parallels between the Martyrdom of Polycarp and *ad Diognetus*. Both knew of Christians being executed by fire and wild beasts (142). Both teach that entrance into the Kingdom is through the Son (143). Both have a pronounced doctrine of Jesus as the  $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  (143–147).

Alongside literary parallels which point to Polycarp as the author of *ad Diognetum*, is a line of evidence drawn from the history of the transmission of the treatise/speech. The closest



parallels with the document include, he says, “probable literary relationships ... first in Asia Minor, then in Lyons, and then in Rome” (158). It seems to have been known in Smyrna at the time of Polycarp’s death (159).

The last chapter of the work is a helpful survey gathering up the several and various strands of evidence. By this point it is as if the reader has been watching a detailed legal presentation and the author is making his summation before the jury. A reader expecting an airtight case dispensing with all ambiguity will be disappointed. If, however, the reader enjoys procedural dramas, is interested in broadening his learning in patristics, and is willing to entertain a circumstantial case then time invested in this dense work will be rewarded.

As valuable as the substance of the argument is, perhaps equally valuable is the author’s excellent handling of evidence and of competing arguments. This is the sort of research and presentation of research that one’s teachers told one to write way back when. Good historiography is about getting the facts (remember those pesky things?) right, about interpreting them in context, and from such an interpretation to draw judicious conclusions. The goal is to be led, as much as is possible in this life, by the evidence to a sound and reasonable conclusion. One must constantly die, as it were, to one’s own expectations of how things should “turn out” and give oneself over to the evidence and to following where it leads. This does not happen very often so it is a pleasure to see a historian doing history the way it is meant to be done, even (or perhaps especially) when the evidence leads to conclusions that, because of the circumstantial nature of the evidence, must necessarily be somewhat tentative.

Thus, the author is painstakingly patient with the evidence and with other interpretations. The reader never has the sense that straw men are being set up or that the author is being anything but fair. This way of making his case has the effect of strengthening rather than weakening his argument.

A couple of brief notes in closing. 1) This is a work for specialists to be sure but those who are interested in patristics or in good history, if they are patient, will also benefit. 2) This reader spotted three typos (pp. 42, 77, 99). Perhaps these can be repaired for the second edition. ■

**Review:** Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) xxix + 930 pages. \$59.99. ISBN 0801026148. Reviewed by Dr. Guy Prentiss Waters, Associate Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, MS.

Harold Hoehner, late Distinguished Professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary, has produced a substantial commentary on the Greek text of Ephesians. Even

a casual glance at the work is sufficient to impress the reader with the meticulousness of Hoehner’s scholarship. *Ephesians’s* extensive interaction with the literature on this epistle over the last century and a half renders it one of the most thoroughly researched commentaries on Ephesians in print.

These features of *Ephesians* highlight a certain dilemma for the contemporary pastor. Ours is an era of commentaries known for their girth, extensive bibliography, and cost. But the pastor has limited time and limited resources to invest in commentaries for sermon and lesson preparation. He must ask himself certain questions of any new commentary: Is this a work that merits the attention of a Reformed pastor? Is it helpful for purposes of sermon preparation? Does it deserve a place alongside the limited amount of commentary literature that he will be able to study?

With respect to *Ephesians*, the answer to these questions is “yes.” Hoehner’s work has earned its right to a place on the pastor’s study shelf. How, then, may this work be most profitably used? To answer this question, we will ask throughout this review two further questions: What are the strengths or merits of this commentary? What are its shortcomings?

One of the most visible strengths of this commentary is its unapologetic commitment to Pauline authorship of Ephesians. Although Pauline authorship of this epistle was undisputed for nearly 1,800 years, historical-critical scholarship has since called it into question. Hoehner makes a reasoned and substantive case that Paul has authored Ephesians (2–61). In its range of scholarship surveyed and its organization of presentation, this discussion is well suited for the pastor concerned to give a cogent defense of the letter’s authenticity.

One of the most striking features of Hoehner’s discussion is his chart delineating the positions of 279 scholars concerning the authorship of Ephesians (9–18; see the full bibliography at 114–130). One objective of his chart is to demonstrate that, until 1960, “more scholars favored the Pauline authorship of Ephesians than denied it,” and that, only between 1971–2001 has even a slight majority (51%) of scholars denied that Paul wrote Ephesians (20). In other words, contrary to the claims of some historical critical scholars, “acceptance of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians has had a long tradition” (20).

Hoehner devotes extensive attention to refuting claims that the vocabulary, phraseology, and style of Ephesians are incompatible with Pauline authorship (24–29); and that Ephesians is dependent upon Colossians and other letters of Paul (30–38). Hoehner also helpfully responds to David Meade’s argument that what is said to be NT pseudonymity “had its basis in OT and Jewish writings” (41). Not only is there no warrant for positing OT pseudonymity, but the NT itself, followed by the early church, rejected pseudonymous writings as morally fraudulent (40–49). Finally, Hoehner demonstrates that what are alleged to be theological inconsistencies between

Ephesians and the undisputed Pauline letters should instead be understood as “differences in emphasis possibly due to differences in circumstances . . . a phenomenon [that] can also be observed in the undisputed Paulines” (58).

The greatest strength of *Ephesians* is its thorough lexical, grammatical, and syntactical analysis of the Greek text of Ephesians. While Hoehner supplies most pastors with more lexical information than they will likely use, and often fails to synthesize that data for the reader’s benefit, the lexical data are important in at least two regards. First, they assist the reader in tracing Pauline themes or concerns across the letter. Hoehner reminds us that when Paul describes the church as a “holy temple in the Lord” (2:21), the word “holy” has already surfaced at 1:1, 1:4, 1:13, 1:15, 1:18, and 2:19. Second, they assist the reader in tracing Pauline themes or concerns across the whole of Paul’s letters. When Paul commands the Ephesians to be “imitators of God” (5:1), Hoehner calls our attention to Paul’s use of the word μιμητής on six other occasions in his correspondence. The preacher who is interested in calling attention to themes in Scripture that are sometimes signaled lexically, and who is careful to let context and not lexical history determine the meaning of a word in any given instance, will find these data a mine of information.

Hoehner’s grammatical and syntactical analysis is first-rate. Why is such analysis necessary or helpful to the pastor? There are at least two reasons. First, most pastors address audiences who have before them a multiplicity of English translations. Hoehner’s commentary demonstrates that contemporary translations frequently resolve grammatical and syntactical questions in Ephesians differently. One celebrated example is Eph 4:11–12 (ESV, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”). Hoehner shows that there are no fewer than four options in relating the main verb of v.11 (“he gave”) to the three Greek prepositions of v.12 (547–549). These four options are represented in (1) the AV, RSV; (2) the RV, ASV; (3) the NEB, NASB, NRSV; and (4) the TEV, JB, NIV, NJB. After weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each view, Hoehner settles on the view represented in the NIV. Pastors will doubtlessly refrain from overwhelming congregants with the detailed and specialized argumentation that Hoehner offers. They will, however, undoubtedly wish to be aware of the range of renderings of Eph 4:11–12 available, to form their own reasoned judgments, and to frame their own exposition accordingly.

Second, Hoehner’s grammatical and syntactical analysis is helpful to the pastor attempting to explain Paul’s statements to hearers most of whom lack access to or knowledge of the Greek text. For example, Paul addresses the church in 1:1 as “the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (ESV). The English translation could lead some readers to

two misunderstandings. First, does Paul establish two groups within the church: “saints” and “those who believe”? No. Paul’s use of a single article (τοῖς), rather, indicates that “holy” and “faithful” define all Christians by profession. Paul has in mind a single group—“the holy-and-faithful-ones.” Second, does Paul, as he elsewhere does, here represent “Christ Jesus” as the object of the believer’s faith? No. The phrase “in Christ Jesus” qualifies the one group (the “holy-and-faithful-ones”). Instead of saying here that Jesus is the one whom believers trust, Paul is saying that believers are holy and faithful, in union with Christ.

Hoehner’s work is also helpful to the minister in digesting recent scholarship concerning the background to certain of Paul’s statements and themes in Ephesians. He offers a helpful survey of the debate concerning the background of “adoption” (υἱοθεσία) at Eph 1:5. Concluding that “adoption” in Ephesians has its background in “Roman law and practice,” Hoehner proceeds to show how that background illuminates the close Pauline connection between predestination and adoption (1:4–5); believers’ deliverance from “responsibility and/or obligation to their old father the devil,” and the “status, privilege, and property” that Paul claims are the possession of believers (196, 197). Hoehner’s brief but wide-ranging survey of slavery in antiquity (800–804) will help pastors explain to contemporary audiences Paul’s admonitions to slaves and masters with care and nuance. His discussion of Roman weaponry and military practice will likewise bring to life Paul’s descriptions of the Christian armament at 6:10–20 (817–866).

Hoehner also provides guidance concerning the structure of Ephesians. Following the familiar division of Ephesians into doctrinal (chaps. 1–3) and hortatory (chaps. 4–6) halves, Hoehner points to themes and terminology that help to stitch the two sections together: “walk,” “love,” “the Spirit,” “body,” “mystery,” and “the evil one” (62–64). Hoehner recognizes and even charts (64, 173–174) the pervasiveness of the phrase “in Christ” (and related phrases) in Ephesians. Regrettably, he does not take the opportunity to develop at any length the importance of this observation. Since union with Christ is at the heart of both the structure and message of Ephesians, Hoehner has missed an opportunity to highlight this foundational component of Pauline theology, and to explore the ways in which Paul has related union with Christ to the other themes and concerns of Ephesians.

Nevertheless, Hoehner’s helpful recognition of the elements that link the two halves of the epistle serves as a reminder that, for Paul, theology and application may be distinguished but never separated. A necessary precondition of biblical application is the Christian’s appropriation of biblical doctrine. The structure of Eph 4:1–6:9 affords an example of this relationship between doctrine and application. Hoehner observes that some form of the phrase “walk therefore” (περιπατεῖν οὖν)

surfaces at 4:1, 4:17, 5:1–2, 5:7–8, and 5:15. He thus entitles the resulting sections “walk in unity (4:1–16), “walk in holiness (4:17–32), “walk in love” (5:1–6), “walk in light” (5:7–14), “walk in wisdom” (5:15–6:9). This structure not only helps the reader understand the continuity of the exhortations within 4:1–6:9, but also the rootedness of these exhortations in Paul’s earlier discussion at Eph 2:1–10, where believers, who “once walked ... in trespasses and sins” (2:1,2) now “walk in ... good works, which God prepared beforehand” (2:10). The walking of believers that Paul describes in Eph 4:1–6:9 is the outworking of the sovereign grace of God in Christ.

Hoehner helps the pastor understand the structure of smaller portions of the letter as well. Eph 1:3–14, for instance, is Trinitarian in its structure. Eph 1:3 declares that the blessings the believer has received are the “provision” of the triune God. Eph 1:4–6, 1:7–12, and 1:13–14 reflect upon the activity of Father, Son, and Spirit, respectively, in purposing, securing, and applying these blessings to the believer (153–161). Eph 4:4–6, in its seven appearances of the word “one” (εἰς, μία, ἓν), serves to reinforce Paul’s call to unity throughout 4:1–16. The invocation of Father (4:6), Son (4:5), and Spirit (4:4) remind the reader that “all seven components [of 4:4–6] are united in the Trinity” (521). These two passages underscore for the reader that, for Paul, there is a decidedly Trinitarian shape not only to the grace of God in the gospel, but also to the unity that the church is called to cultivate and to pursue.

Hoehner’s exegetical conclusions frequently confirm what Reformed theology has found the Scripture to teach. He defends, from the text of Ephesians, the divine election of believers (1:4) as determined solely by the sovereign decree of God, as a pre-temporal choice, and as grounded upon nothing seen or foreseen in the creature (174–180). He fails to see, however, that Paul’s statements about divine election have direct bearing on the doctrine of reprobation. Hoehner asserts “[in election] there is no indication of any dislike towards those not chosen. It is not a rejection with disdain ... Nowhere is election contrasted with reprobation. It speaks only of those who are chosen and nothing of those not chosen” (175). But does not God’s choice of some entail the passing by of others? Election necessarily entails reprobation.

*Ephesians* also affirms the sovereignty of divine grace in the salvation of the sinner. Hoehner understands Paul to teach at Eph 2:3 that our sinful actions derive from the sinful nature that we have inherited from Adam (324). The “calamity of sin” is “not something undeserved.” Sinners are “helplessly entrapped in their own snare.” The love of God in the gospel is “given irrespective of merit and to those who are undeserving” (326–327). “Salvation is totally of grace and nothing of human effort” (339). The good works of the believer are not “a work for God but God doing a work *in* and *through* the believer.” They

are an “evidence” of salvation, and “proceed from” salvation, so that salvation is of “grace from start to finish” (349–350).

Hoehner argues that Paul, in Eph 2:20 (cf. 3:5–6, 4:11), affirms that the offices of apostle and prophet would come to an end at the close of the apostolic age. The revelatory gifts exercised by apostles and prophets have therefore ceased. Wayne Grudem, however, understands Paul at Eph 2:20 to be referring to a single group of New Testament “apostle-prophets.” Since it is this group that constitutes the “foundation” of the church (2:20), Grudem argues, Paul does not therefore preclude the continuation of what is said to be the separate office of New Testament prophet. Grudem further sees the NT prophet as distinct from “NT apostle-prophet” in this important respect: the utterances of NT prophets are fallible. Consequently, Grudem understands revelatory gifts, so defined, to continue in the life of the church.

Hoehner helpfully defends the view that Paul has in mind two groups (“apostles” and New Testament “prophets”) as the “foundation” of the church in Eph 2:20 (402–403). Grudem’s proposal is syntactically possible but unlikely and without parallel in the New Testament. Further, Paul at Eph 4:11 distinguishes “apostles” and “prophets” as groups, indicating that such a distinction is in view at Eph 2:20. Paul is saying, then, that the offices of apostle and prophet, constitute the once-for-all-laid foundation of the church, with Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone. In other words, the Scriptures of the New Testament, given by Christ through his apostles, constitute the foundation upon which the church is built. Christ builds the church through ministers whom he has appointed to proclaim this completed and infallible Word of God (2:21; 4:7–16).

*Ephesians* is also strong in its exposition of Paul’s understanding of role relationships in the home (Eph 5:22–33). The equality of every believer before God (Gal 3:28), Hoehner argues, “does not exclude lines of authority,” nor do these lines of authority imply that “those in authority are better ... than those whom they rule” in the way of being “qualitatively superior” (726, 740). “More importantly,” Hoehner continues, the Trinity affords us a preeminent “example of equality and yet subordination” (726).

How ought husband and wife to relate to one another? Believing wives are commanded to submit to their own husbands, not to men generally (732). Paul’s statement in Eph 5:21 (“*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*”) does not warrant husbands’ submission to their wives, any more than it does parents’ submission to their own children (733). Paul, rather, explains his statement in Eph 5:21 by demonstrating throughout Eph 5:22–6:9 that “specific roles of submission are related to certain lines of authority” (732).

Some have argued that when Paul denominates the husband the “head” of his wife (Eph 5:23), he does not mean to

say that he has authority over her. Hoehner rejects this view and gives reasons for concluding that Paul intends to teach that the man “has authority over” his wife (739). First, Paul has already commanded wives to submit to their own husbands. Second, the overall concern in Eph 5:22–6:9 “is ... lines of authority” (740). Third, while Paul does affirm Christ to be “head” over the church as both the church’s “source” (Eph 4:15) and “ruler” (Eph 1:22), Paul expressly relates the latter to the husband’s role in the home (Eph 5:24).

Hoehner stresses that the authority entrusted to the husband is constructive not destructive. The husband is to protect his wife (743–744), and to love his own wife in emulation of Christ’s sacrificial and sanctifying love for his church (746f.). Christian marriage is not to be a theater where two hostile parties vie for domination of one another. “The primary goal of marriage is not to please oneself but to see the purposes of God work in and through each partner individually and corporately” (785).

For the Reformed pastor, *Ephesians* has a multiplicity of strengths. It is not, however, without its shortcomings. Hoehner’s exegetical conclusions do not always conform to the teaching of Scripture. One example merits extended consideration. Paul, at Eph 3:4–6, speaks of the “mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Hoehner understands the “mystery” of which Paul speaks to be “believing Jews and Gentiles united into one body.” Under the OT, Gentiles “had to become Jews in order to belong to ... the company of God.” Under the NT, “Gentiles do not become Jews nor do Jews become Gentiles. Rather, both believing Jews and Gentiles become one new entity, Christians” (433–434).

For Hoehner, then, the church is *tertium quid*. It is neither a Gentile body *per se*, nor is it to be identified with Israel of old. To “make the church the ‘new Israel,’” Hoehner argues, “is contrary to the whole point of Eph 2:11–22 where the ‘new person’ is distinct from the nation Israel” (447).

How, then, are the promises of the Old Testament to be related to the New Covenant? We must take them “literally,” Hoehner claims. “Only those promises restated in the NT apply to the church and those that are not mentioned apply to the nation Israel and are yet to be fulfilled. There is no indication in the NT that the land promises made to Israel are for the church’s possession” (447–448).

There are, for Hoehner, two distinct peoples (Israel and the church) with two distinct sets of promises belonging to each. The problem with this dispensational reading of these verses is that it runs counter to Paul’s claim concerning believers in Eph 2:19–22. Gentiles, formerly “alienated from the commonwealth

of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise” (2:12), are now “no longer strangers and aliens, but ... fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (2:19). Paul claims, then, that Gentiles have been now granted citizenship (“fellow citizens”), having formerly been excluded from citizenship in “the commonwealth of Israel.” The continuity of the metaphor of citizenship to describe God’s people across redemptive history suggests that God has not created an entity (“the church”) altogether separate from Israel. He has, rather, reconstituted the one commonwealth of God to consist of Jews and Gentiles who profess faith in and obedience to the crucified and exalted Messiah of God, Jesus. This reconstituted commonwealth, formerly denominated “Israel,” the New Testament calls the “church.”

Further, Paul elsewhere indicates that he understands God to have had a single people across redemptive history. He describes the people of God in Rom 11 as an olive tree. Certain branches (unbelieving Israelites) are broken off for unbelief. Other, wild branches (Gentiles) are grafted into the tree. Paul’s description of the people of God as “the household of God” (2:19) also calls to mind the way in which Scripture elsewhere speaks of the people of God across redemptive history as a single house (Heb 3:5–6). Moses was a “servant” in this house, but Christ is “over God’s house as a son.” In Eph 2–3, as elsewhere, the Scripture affirms a single people of God across redemptive history.

What, then, is the “newness” of the mystery of Eph 3:4–6? In what sense were the realities of Eph 3:6 cloaked from Old Testament saints, but only revealed through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament? The mystery is not that God has incorporated Gentiles into the people of God alongside Jews. The pervasive prophetic expectation of the Gentiles being brought into the Messiah’s kingdom is evident from the Old Testament. What was not clear to Old Testament believers is that Gentiles would enter into the people of God in such a way as to enjoy full equality of spiritual status and privilege with their fellow Jewish believers. The mystery, Paul says, is that when God reconstituted his people after the appearing of his Son, he neither consigned Gentile believers to second-class standing in the kingdom nor required them first to become Jews committed to observing the Mosaic ceremonial laws.

In summary, *Ephesians* merits the careful study of any Reformed student of the Greek text of *Ephesians*. It should not, however, be the only resource that one consults. *Ephesians* is primarily concerned to address lexical, grammatical, and syntactical questions posed by the text. Its strength is not in addressing and satisfactorily resolving the full range of systematic-theological and historical-theological questions that many Reformed ministers will want to address when they teach *Ephesians*. For this reason, the reader should give Hoehner’s *Ephesians* a prized place on his study shelf ... right



next to the expositions of John Calvin, Matthew Henry, Paul Bayne, James Fergusson, John Stott, Sinclair Ferguson, and others. ■

**Review: Sinclair Ferguson. *In Christ Alone: Living the Christ Centered Life* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007). 243 pages. ISBN 9781567690897. \$18.00. Reviewed by Christopher A. Hutchinson, Senior Pastor of Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, Blacksburg, Virginia.**

The first thing one must know about *In Christ Alone* is that it is not a monograph. It is a collection of fifty short articles which Sinclair Ferguson, currently Senior Minister of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC, penned over two decades for two publications, *Eternity* magazine and *Tabletalk*. Ferguson has arranged them topically into six different sections, and while the structure helps provide some framework, the fact is that these remain fifty distinct essays. In essence, *In Christ Alone* is a compilation of Ferguson's exegetical theology over a period of twenty years.

However, this is what makes the book so useful, especially for use in personal or family devotions. For Ferguson is the same throughout: always sound, and always, as the title signifies, Christ-centered. As Jerry Bridges puts it on the book cover, *In Christ Alone* serves as a small systematic theology in the form of a very readable book. If one were to commit fifty days to reading this book, one chapter per day, then one will indeed learn better how to live a Gospel-centered life. And that is simply because every chapter is chock full of Scripture, pointing the believer to the greatness and grace of his Savior.

But quoting lots of Scripture does not guarantee Christ-centered thinking. Another well known Christian book boasts almost one thousand Biblical quotes, and even begins with the promising statement, "It's not about you." But Rick Warren's best-selling *The Purpose Driven Life*, with its forty day program, turns out to be all about you and what you can make of your life, with God's help. Of course, this fits perfectly with Warren's Arminian theology, and so we are not too surprised that in the forty chapter summaries, Warren mentions Jesus Christ only three times, and in two of those cases, what you must do for Him. No resting in Christ there. It is not that Warren doesn't have good things for us to ponder and to do, but without that total, robust reliance on Christ alone, he offers little more than a moralism cloaked in evangelical-sounding language.

I only bring this up because of the complete contrast one will find with *In Christ Alone*. I will admit that I allowed my mind to fantasize what might have been had Ferguson and Reformation Trust published this work under the title, "The Christ-Driven Life: fifty days to discover life's true purpose."

Not that Ferguson would advocate explicitly such a simplistic fifty day program as if that could guarantee a closer intimacy with Christ. Indeed, he seems to recognize that such an approach would undermine the very premise of the collection. For instance, Ferguson bemoans the idea of gaining Christian contentment by programmed means, such as "five steps to contentment in a month." Rather, he writes, "Christians must discover contentment the old-fashioned way: we must learn it" (187–188). Likewise, regarding contemporary approaches to mortification of sin, he writes that keen young Christians can be vulnerable to quick fixes, "but that in our evangelical subculture quick fixes do not solve long term problems." Thus, the reason that Christians today turn to Paul to tell them *what* to do, but then run to the local Christian bookstore to discover *how* to do it is that "we do not linger long enough over what Paul is saying" (218, 220). We are impatient and pragmatic and want *our* lives to have purpose *now*.

But Ferguson offers a different program, one that reflects the older, grittier and more patient devotion which used to mark reformed piety before it was annexed and homogenized by the larger neo-evangelical subculture which took form in the middle of the last century. In Ferguson, one finds no self-focused and self-empowered program which offers a quick path to greater godliness. Rather, when one reads these essays, one is caught up in the author's own Christ-centered thought. One gets the sense that it would never occur to Ferguson to suggest such a fleshly approach to growing in grace as a fifty day program, since such a thing almost inevitably takes one's eyes *off* the Savior and onto oneself as the one completing the preset formula.

Indeed, it is the hallmark of these essays that they are instead Christ-focused and thus the collection is aptly named. Perhaps this is best epitomized in the chapter introducing Hebrews, when Ferguson asks whether Hebrews "does anything for us?" He then explains how there is no letter in the New Testament that tells us more about Christ and His work: how it is Hebrews which reveals how Jesus is the key to understanding the Old Testament; how Hebrews displays the greatness of Jesus Christ while emphasizing the importance of His humanity; and how it emphasizes the nature of true faith, a faith which values the Lord Jesus Christ above all things. Ferguson then concludes, "If studying Hebrews had that effect on us, it would be time well spent, don't you think? How do you feel about Hebrews 'doing' that for you?" (45–48).

This is Ferguson at his best, reminding us that the most practical thing we can do is to study and meditate upon the person and merits of our Lord Jesus. We see this also in his explication of the Sabbath when he states that the key is not so much to ask what is OK to do on a Sunday or not, but *internally to cease* "from all self-sufficiency in order to rest in God's grace" (228–229). Likewise, this pure resting in Christ

allows us to enjoy the “greatest of all Protestant heresies”—the grace of assurance, that we might know beyond doubt that our souls are saved eternally simply by looking to Jesus alone (149–152). And if we in the Reformed world seek revival and the power to witness, our first step is not to study and discuss much as we tend to do, but to “wait” on the Spirit’s anointing (95). This is another way of saying that in order to be truly useful we must *first* rest in Christ.

Moreover, this resting in Christ is not just for the new believer but for all Christians their whole life long. If we wish to decrease our worldliness and grow in our affection for Christ, the way to do that is no different then when we first believed:

What was it that created that first love? Do you remember? It was our discovery of Christ’s grace in the realization of our own sin.... Forgiven much we loved much (Luke 7:47).... The way in which we maintain “the expulsive power of a new affection” (for Christ) is the same as the way we first discovered it. Only when grace is still “amazing”—when we return to Christ and the cross where God’s love for us was demonstrated to us (Rom. 5:8)—does it retain its power in us. Only as we retain a sense of our own profound sinfulness can we retain a sense of the graciousness of God (225).

And so a major theme of *In Christ Alone* is indeed taking our eyes off ourselves and our own efforts by thinking less pragmatically and more theologically—of meditating upon the Gospel. And the very fact that this theme emerges from fifty distinct essays rather than an agenda driven monograph serves to make it all the more authentic. This Christ-centeredness emerges from Ferguson in every essay simply because he is Christ-centered as a pastor, a theologian and a Christian. These essays are simply his meditating upon Scripture with *his* need for Christ in view—and that naturally leads him to the Gospel, that we may rest in it.

Not that Ferguson is a quietist by any means. He stays firmly in the mainstream of Reformed thought by insisting that true faith issues forth in good works. Assurance of salvation leads to love and good works, attendance to the public and private means of grace, and faithfulness to Christ until the end (152). In a chapter on personal holiness, Ferguson emphasizes secret piety and challenges us to embrace the word “duty” once again and see it as a delight (159–162).

Indeed, one of the most valuable aspects of *In Christ Alone* is Ferguson’s realistic assessment of the Christian life, that true Christian piety involves suffering and not just triumph. In this, once again, reading Ferguson takes one back into an older and deeper piety that the evangelicalism of our day has forgotten. For instance, in the chapter entitled, “Struggles,” Ferguson describes the apostle Peter’s growth in grace not in terms of triumph, but in Peter learning, bit by bit, what it means

to take up the cross (in his case, literally). Ferguson writes, “Perhaps we are so used to thinking about the infallibility of what the apostles wrote that we fail to take seriously enough the failures in the way they lived” (180). This is a sobering view of sanctification, but one that is ultimately encouraging, for if Peter could so struggle and fail, and yet remain justified and useful to God, so can we.

Likewise, Ferguson goes on in the next chapter to describe how real Christian character is shown not in one’s own recognition, but in the ability to “play the second fiddle well” (183–186). That the mark of a growing Christian is that he encourages others and serves the Church behind the scenes, not caring who gets the credit. In this way, we reflect the spirit of Barnabas, and more importantly, of Christ.

In these things, Ferguson seems to “get” what was once common among our forefathers and yet forgotten in our day: authentic Christian faith involves sacrifice, service and suffering. That enjoying the benefits of Christ requires sharing in His sufferings—not so much that we need to be persecuted outwardly on a daily basis, but that following in the way of Christ *means* dying to self, becoming a servant to those around you, and enduring hardship with the sobriety, hope and joy that only the Gospel can provide. This is clearest in the chapter entitled, “Growing Strong in the War Zone,” in which Ferguson suggests that suffering actually be considered a mark of the Church, along with the Word, sacraments and prayer. He speculates that the only reason it was not listed in the classic formulations is that our forefathers simply took it for granted! And so we should not long for the glory of the “golden days” of Calvin’s Geneva, or Knox’s Scotland, or Edwards’s Northampton, for all these men and the people of these ages knew that true glory belongs not only in the future hope of heaven, but is “part of the ‘here and now’ of suffering” (201–204).

Ferguson even has a “word for the Reformed” in this regard in a chapter on what it means to have true Pentecostal power. After asking why it is that we Reformed lack power in our evangelistic witness, and suggesting that we are too prone to study, discuss and run ahead without “waiting” for the Spirit’s anointing, Ferguson then makes a deeper point. He writes:

Those who received power in the apostolic days had to settle the related issue of the crucifixion. They grasped that the risen Lord was the One who had first become a crucified Savior. Following Him meant a mark across their shoulders, a piercing of their hands and feet, and yes, a gashing of their sides, too. *Waiting* without *emptying* will not lead to *going* with the fullness of the Spirit (95–96).

In other words, we will never have spiritual power to

evangelize (or anything else) unless we first embrace the crucifixion for ourselves—to take up our crosses of sacrifice, suffering and service in the way of Christ. He then concludes:

So, how about the *empowered* Reformed church? How about the *Spirit-filled* Reformed church? Is the Reformed church these things by definition? Only if there is first the *crucified* Reformed church (96).

A quote such as that needs no further elaboration.

I will admit that when I first began *In Christ Alone*, I was somewhat skeptical of its usefulness as a *book*, and even a little cynical. Why republish fifty different articles under one cover? But here is the usefulness: in this collection, we have an example of sound, consistent, Christ-centered thinking penned over a period of two decades, all without any resort to gimmick or fad. We are encouraged by getting a glimpse into the heart of a man captured by Christ alone. As Alistair Begg puts it in his foreword, the reason this simple Gospel focus is so needed today, is that “with the prevailing emphasis on ecology and poverty, many (evangelicals) would be hard pressed to agree with George Smeaton that ‘to convert one sinner from his way, is an event of greater importance, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from temporal evil’” (2). Sinclair Ferguson needs no such convincing.

So if you want a welcome break from the shallow, pragmatic, self-focused devotional literature of our day, and want to read truly Christ-centered reflections, Ferguson and Reformation Trust have done us a favor to gather all of these articles under one cover. The next time someone suggests a forty day devotional program, consider giving them *In Christ Alone*, and suggest to them that therein lie fifty great chapters about the real purpose of life—knowing, loving and resting in Jesus Christ. ■

Edward T. Welch, *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest* (New Growth Press, 2008). Paperback. 314 pages. ISBN 978-0978556754. \$15.99. Reviewed by Rev. Daniel F. Patterson.

We live in a fear-driven culture. From analysts announcing the economic doom of our country to movies depicting a long and horrific death at the hands of a merciless madman, we are fed a constant diet of worst-case scenarios of apocalyptic proportions. Combine this with the fear that naturally resides in our hearts and we begin to realize that, even as Christians, to live is to fear.

It is in this cultural and spiritual context that Dr. Edward Welch provides us with a book that surgically exposes what

lies beneath our fear and anxiety and then points us to the One who promises peace and rest.

*Running Scared* is, most broadly, divided into two sections. The first section looks at our fears and worries, “with an unaided eye” (pg. 13). In typical fashion Welch masterfully describes both what fear looks like and what fear feels like. Fear is described as the “background noise of everyday life” (pg. 21). Worriers are insightfully described as those who are immune to reason; live in the future; see that future in minute, gory detail; but are ultimately false prophets.

In this section Welch also touches briefly on the possibility that such anxiety points to a genetic cause. Rather than dismissing such a possibility, Welch encourages his readers to dig deeper. He says, “But whether there is a genetic contribution or not, don’t let the first hint of a genetic link abort all other promising leads. Don’t let the rationale, ‘Mom worried a lot,’ be the end of your examination of worry. When you listen to worry and witness its stubborn grasp, you find something that is most assuredly *you*. You have your *reasons* for worrying. You have purposes in your anxieties” (emphasis original, pg. 53). This is where Welch and much of the literature from the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation shines. Many battles have been fought in Christian counseling circles over the issue of psychotropic medication (medicine used to treat mental health disorders). Rather than entangling themselves in this battle, however, CCEF literature pastorally calls its readers, regardless of what side of the fence on which they find themselves, to deep self-examination. This is wise not only because of its respect for what seems to be an area of Christian liberty, but also because self-examination is part and parcel of the Christian life.

The second section “adds the glasses of Scripture to the study of fear and anxiety,” because, “without them we might have insights but no firm answers” (pg. 57). The first three chapters of this section review those things which are most foundational to address fear and anxiety. To accomplish this Welch employs what he calls “the manna principle” in which he examines God’s provision of manna for the Israelites. Because this principle is employed as a foundational element throughout the book a word of explanation is in order.

The manna story of Exodus, Welch contends, is the story for all worriers. In it we catch a glimpse of God’s perfect provision for us in our wilderness of worry. When things seem abysmal at any given moment, God is not distant or silent. Things are not always as they seem. Instead, at such a time is when God is especially close, teaching his people to call out to him and trust him in the midst of their fear. Key to the manna story is that God is not only the One who hears, delivers and draws near, but he is also the one

who tests. God tests us not in order to bring us down, but graciously to expose our mixed allegiances so that we might turn back to God and receive his grace. Welch confidently asserts, “God is not playing mind games with us; he is forging a relationship” (pg. 75). The next thirteen chapters deal with fear as it relates to (1) money and possessions; (2) people and their judgments; and (3) death, pain, and punishment. In all of these topics, the “manna principle” is the backdrop, setting before the reader the God who provides for his people. Welch then spends the remaining nine chapters pressing home the peace that God brings and how that peace is appropriated.

Having given a brief outline of the book, several observations will serve to highlight why this book will prove valuable to pastors and layman alike.

*First*, the book is realistic. Many readers are familiar with the Bob Newhart Mad TV skit in which a woman enters the counselor’s office filled with fear and anxiety. The counselor confidently tells his client that she will not need more than five minutes of therapy and it will cost her no more than five dollars. Pleasantly surprised, the woman begins to tell of her fears and worries. After she is done, the counselor informs her that he has two words for her that will clear up all her problems. As she readies herself for these profound words the counselor blurts out, somewhat impatiently, “STOP IT!” Shocked, the woman asks, “excuse me?” Again, the counselor replies, “STOP IT!” The rest of the skit continues this back and forth, highlighting the counselor’s noticeably unrealistic expectation that this woman will simply stop worrying.

Though certainly a caricature, the skit exposes what is the tendency of a large sector of pastors and counselors in the church today. Fear and worry are expressed, the demands of God’s Word to stop worrying are pressed upon the person, and the counselee is expected simply to stop it. The problem with this approach is that it is unrealistic. Fear runs deep in us all and the mission of mortification is a life-long battle. Welch seems to understand this as he provides, at the end of each chapter, a “personal response” section in which he reveals his own responses to fear and the promises of God’s Word. Though the goal is to stop worrying, Welch maintains that the road there is long and difficult. It is by no means automatic. For example, in response to the story of Abraham’s faith that God could raise Isaac from the dead in Hebrews 11:10, Welch says, “These words *sound* good—a son resurrected, a much better home—and they were more than enough for Abraham. But they might not seem like enough for you. They may fall short of comfort, at least for now” (pg. 89). Welch’s answer, of course, is not simply to give up, but rather to focus on how God has already delivered us in numerous ways. In his “personal response” section he

states, “The God of suspense is delivering left and right.... But these after the fact deliverances? ... What if you actually went through your worst nightmare—sexual violation, death of a loved one, divorce? What then? Where was the deliverance? What difference does the after-the-fact deliverance make then? It means there will be lots of sorrow as we walk through life, but we aspire to know sorrow that is mingled with hope. For subjects of King Jesus death and tragedy are never the last word. The goodness of our God is certain. He has given up his very Son for our redemption. There is no reason to doubt him” (pg. 92).

The realism of the book is further highlighted as Welch tackles the issues of money, pain and death. Unlike many of the health and wealth preachers of today who promise what they can never deliver, Welch reminds us that we live in a fallen world. Though he maintains that God gives us grace for today, and will grant us grace in the future, “God does not promise grace that removes hardships” (pg. 142). In fact, those who are in the kingdom of Christ will be familiar with hardships. We will not escape the difficulties of this life. However, we can be assured that if we are called to a death that is terrible, or suffering that seems unbearable God will grant us grace when that time comes. “It is enough to know,” Welch declares, “that I will receive grace. I will know the presence of the Spirit and I will die, or be rescued, in a way that pleases the Lord.” Again, this approach is a far cry from the hedonistic philosophy of so many preachers today. Welch is to be commended for steering clear of this theology of false promises and self-serving interests.

These examples briefly highlight the pastor’s heart which lies beneath just about everything Welch has put into print, namely, the realism that is to mark those who struggle with debilitating fear as well as those who counsel them.

*Second*, the book is revealing. When the person in the pew is struck with fear it is counterintuitive to slow down and listen, “but,” Welch contends, “fear is speaking and we should listen” (pg. 37). Not only is this approach to fear counterintuitive to the person in the pew, but often to pastors and counselors. Listening to fear is often equated with indulging in fear. However, Welch says that we should listen to what fear is telling us because fear and worry reveal us. They reveal the things that we love and value. Though there are times when fear says that something is just plain dangerous and we should be afraid, Welch says, “my goal in listening to my fears is to learn how to decipher what else they are saying. When I pause and listen, I might find that fear says a lot and speaks clearly. What it says can provide me with immensely helpful direction” (pg. 47).

Again, Welch’s insight here is immensely helpful to pastors and parishioners alike. Our natural tendency is to ignore fear because (1) fear is simply no fun and (2) our fears are often



the result of a lack of trust in the Lord and thinking about them can seem like wallowing in them. Yet slowing down and listening to what fear tells us reveals our allegiances. Fear and worry are not mere emotions, then; they are expressions of what we hold dear. If we are constantly worried about money and possessions this reveals a heart that is storing up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

Furthermore, Welch contends, another way to reveal our allegiances is to follow our fear back to what others think about us. Because fear often deceives us into thinking we *need* something that actually we only *want*, our perceived need of people's approval controls us. Though there is nothing wrong with wanting to be loved, when we want these things too much, we want them for our own glory rather than God's (pg. 178). Welch's simple, yet profound answer to our fear of another's judgments is that the Lord calls us to love others more than we need them (pgs. 181–190).

Again, Welch's insight here is keen. Contrary to the psychological gurus of our day who tell us to avoid difficult people and love ourselves more, Welch calls us to be outwardly focused, rebalancing the scales of love so that when others reject us, such rejection doesn't control us. This rebalancing of love has a further benefit for evangelism. When it comes to speaking to others about the gospel of Jesus Christ, if my first concern is loving them rather than being liked by them, such love will outweigh my self-serving desire to be liked.

*Thirdly* and finally, the book is redemptive. In saying that *Running Scared* is a redemptive book, we mean that Welch is constant in reminding the reader that the antidote to fear and anxiety is the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is seen no more clearly than in the section entitled, "God Speaks on Death, Pain, and Punishment." For many Christians it is not death or dying that scares them as much as what comes after death. Fear of eternal condemnation haunts a large portion of the Christian church. Much of this fear comes from a lack of faithful, Christ-centered preaching. However, much of the fear comes from our own hearts, which tend to focus more on the Christian than on the Christ. This is what Welch refers to as "the scrupulous conscience" (pg. 219). Though those with seared consciences rarely think about eternal matters and final judgment, those with scrupulous consciences *always* do. Their minds dance with scenarios in the great courtroom before the judgment seat of Christ. However, Welch contends that at this point, the scrupulous conscience finds itself not in the real courtroom, but in the Devil's counterfeit courtroom. In the real courtroom we know that our deeds are not enough; we know that our hope is in Christ alone for deliverance; we know that when we are convicted of sins we are pointed past our sins and

on to Christ. The last word in the real courtroom is always hope. However, in the false courtroom, the attention is all on our sins; we stand and fall on our own behavior; we are alone without an advocate; and questions are raised about the extent of God's forgiveness (pg. 221).

It is at this point, Welch contends, that we must cry out, "Christ alone, Christ alone.... When you are feeling weak, ask for the Spirit to teach you more about how righteousness is not inherent in you but has been given to you by the righteous acts of Jesus (Rom. 5:15–21)." Still, he says, a scrupulous conscience will always question whether it has enough faith. "Faith," he responds, "says, *I need Jesus*. It is not a work, it is an act of desperation, and you are certainly familiar with that" (pg. 221). As if this is not enough, Welch continues, the scrupulous conscience is called to rest in the judgments made by its pastors and elders who have judged our faith to be credible and have been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

This redemptive aspect of pastoral counseling has been neglected for far too long in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. Much of Christian counseling in the past three decades has focused on correcting sinful behavior at the expense of calling counselees to rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Such Christian behaviorism has done more to foster fear than to fight it. What fearful Christians need is for their pastors and counselors to drive home the wonderful and precious promises of God that are made to them in the Lord Jesus Christ, calling them to faithfulness in light of that foundational truth. Again, Welch accomplishes this in his last set of chapters under the title, "Peace Be With You." On the cover page of this section Welch pens these words: "If we still feel slow to really grasp what God says to fearful and anxious people, we can take heart. As he has already shown us in the Sermon on the Mount, when he exhorted us not to worry, God is patient and willing to walk slowly with us, all the while speaking even more persuasive words to our fearful hearts" (pg. 245). Our God is longsuffering with fearful sinners like us. Therefore, those who are called to minister in Christ's name to those filled with fear and anxiety must exhibit much compassion and longsuffering.

With these things said, there is just one thing with which to quibble. Conspicuously absent is any emphasis on the public use of the means of grace (the Word, sacraments, and prayer). We live in a day and age in which the proclamation of God's Word in the context of public worship on the Lord's Day is held in low esteem. The *Larger Catechism*, however, reminds us that, "the Spirit of God maketh the reading, *but especially the preaching* of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of

conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation" (emphasis mine, Q&A 155).

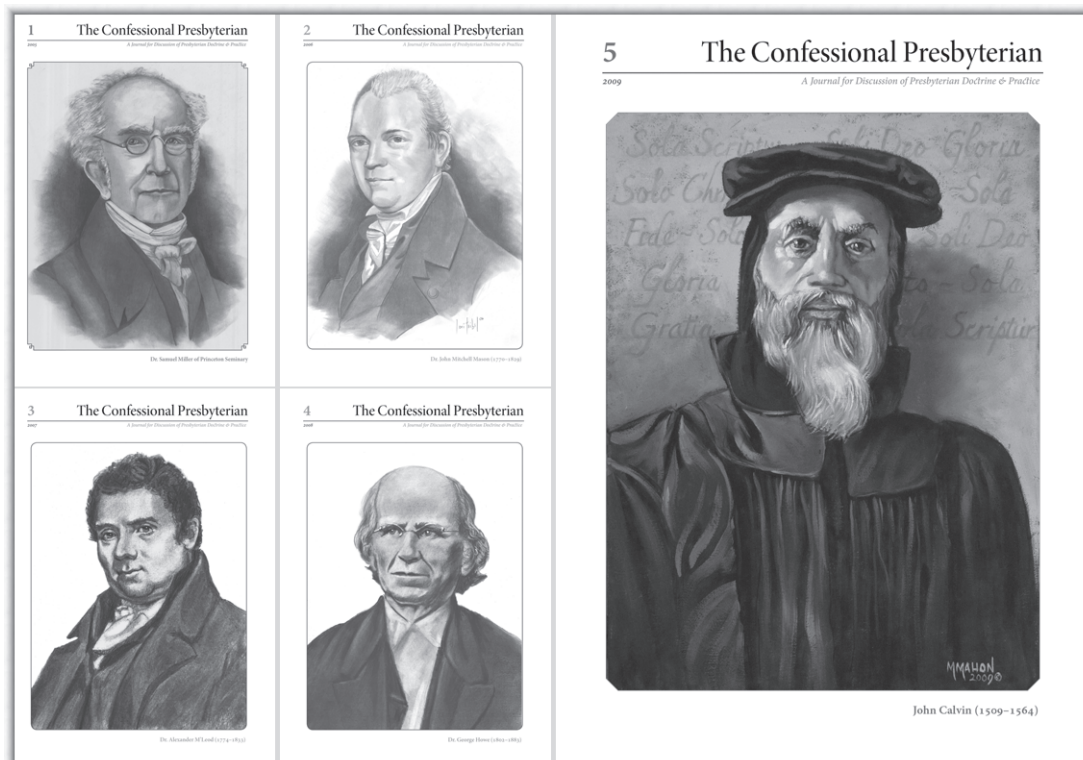
Furthermore, in the *Confession's* chapter on the Lord's Supper the divines state that the Lord's Supper is, "to be observed in [Christ's] church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe to him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body" (emphasis mine WCF, XXIX.I).

The point in citing these references is to highlight that any mortification of fear and anxiety in the life of the believer must necessarily include a vigorous and ordinary use of the public

means of grace. If in the preaching of God's Word He speaks, and by His Spirit acts upon the hearts of believers, convicting them of sin and encouraging them in the gospel promise; and if in the sacraments He preaches that gospel visibly to us, the antidote to fear does not include simply reading God's Word and meditating on it. It must include hearing God's voice in preaching, and by faith knowing the love of God, which casts out fear displayed in the sacraments.

There is little doubt that Dr. Welch would agree with the sentiments above, yet in a culture that is growing increasingly hostile to a high view of the Word and sacraments, this is exactly where we need to be the clearest.

Though the above criticism is substantial this reviewer hopes that it will not detract from the gap this book fills in the field of Christian counseling. The redemptive, revealing, and realistic nature of *Running Scared* demands that those who live in fear, as well as those who walk alongside of them in counseling, make this book part of their library. ■



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## PSALLO

### Psalm 42:1–11

The Psalm begins with a title, verse one in the Hebrew. Many Old Testament scholars agree that the titles are inspired, and not without good reason. These scholars speak of the obvious antiquity of the titles, the fact that some speak of details not related in the historical books of Scripture, etc.<sup>1</sup> The title of Psalm 42 first tells us that it is a *Maschil* Heb. מִשְׁכִּיל that is a song of instruction. Further, the song is written by a writer among the sons of Korah. This title ought to warm the heart of every Christian, for it speaks of the mercy and forgiveness of the Lord. These were men, whose ancestral father challenged the authority given to Moses by the Lord and suffered capital punishment for it at the Lord's own hand. The family was not wholly consumed, and the sons of Korah became Temple Ministers (See Numbers 16:1–49; 1 Chronicles 9:19–31).

Most Old Testament commentators and scholars place this Psalm as a companion Psalm to the following portion of the Psalter, Psalm 43. There is good reason to hold this view as well, seeing that Psalm 43 is an “orphan” Psalm, that is, it has no title in the Hebrew text, and contains the same refrain as its predecessor: “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*” Note that in the first instance of this refrain (42:5) the final “*and my God*” is absent from the text. It is the opinion of this writer that the final phrase closes the Psalm lyrically, as it does in Psalm 43, and that the absence of it in 42:5 is fitted to the continuation of Psalm 42 as its second portion.

As for the translation itself, there are no really difficult words or constructions. The most difficult part was setting the translation in a meter that might be sung, and still keep faithful to the Hebrew phrasing. Further, the Psalm has portions which are plaintive, and others speak of praise and thanks. So the tune ought to have portions where there is a more somber minor, and also musical strains of gladness. The meager

effort you have before you reflects the translator's attempt at both an accurate translation, and a tune and a meter which fits the instruction of the Psalm.

Being then a *Maschil*, what wisdom or instruction ought we to glean from this Psalm? First, we see here, as with many of the Psalms, the devotional nature of the Psalter. Along with many others of these inspired hymns of praise, this Psalm breathes of a devout and inspired affection which the human author keeps toward the Lord. He is pressed by that prophetic Spirit into likening his desires for the Lord as to the thirstings of a deer for that necessary, life-sustaining substance, water. This allusion teaches us that life apart from the Lord is parched, dried, barren, needy, and nigh unto death. He repeats that his soul *thirsts* for God. This devotional spirit teaches us to bewail our distraction and satisfaction with other things, competitors to the Living God, and causes us to remember that our only life-giving sustenance is truly God alone.

The Psalmist augments this desire for God in that he points himself toward God in days of distress, when his soul is “cast down”. The word he uses here is a word which can mean to be cowed down, beaten down, even bowed under a heavy burden. It is in such times of difficult providence that the Psalmist confesses that the Lord is his sustenance—and that a life-giving one. His desire for God and the comfort and hope He gives is not optional. It is necessary.

There is another point of wisdom to be learned in this Psalm which is found in the answer to the question, “Why is the Psalmist so bowed down, why so disquieted and troubled?” Once again the entire Psalter, not just here in Psalm 42, gives the answer. The Psalmist is somehow prevented, kept from the public ordinances of worship. Perhaps captivity, perhaps the triumph of an unspecified enemy, and the taunts of that enemy, along with absence from the public worship of God—these are the sources of the Psalmist's soul-trouble. It would be superfluous to write of the great value the Psalter places on the public worship of God. Any student of the Scriptures, and especially of the Psalter, would be able to show with little effort how public worship is extolled, valued, prized in these sacred hymns. Note that in the Psalmist's present state he comforts himself by remembering the more halcyon days of free concourse with others of like precious faith going up to the house of the Lord to worship together. It could even be said that his longing for the living God is one and the same with worshipping God with the multitude of those that kept the Holy Day.

Further, as the Psalmist is able even in this afflicted estate to worship God privately, we may rightly understand that this is not enough for him. So highly does he prize the public ordinances of worship that his private worship, and the comfort he takes therein, will not be truly complete until such time as he is able once again to join the worshippers in the house

*Continued on Page 323.*

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THE AUTHOR: The Rev. Todd L. Ruddell is pastor of Christ Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCGA) in Wylie, Texas.

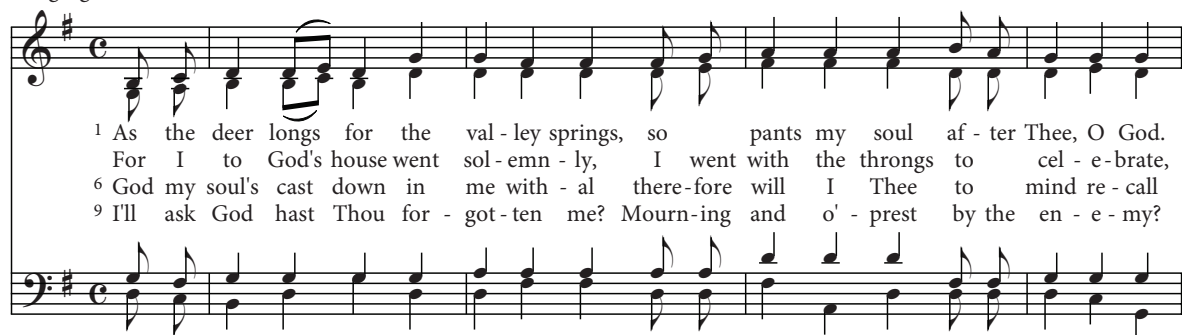
1. Among the many scholars who support the antiquity and veracity of the Psalm titles, see E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977) 300; and G. L. Archer *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998) 491–492.

# Psalm 42:1-11

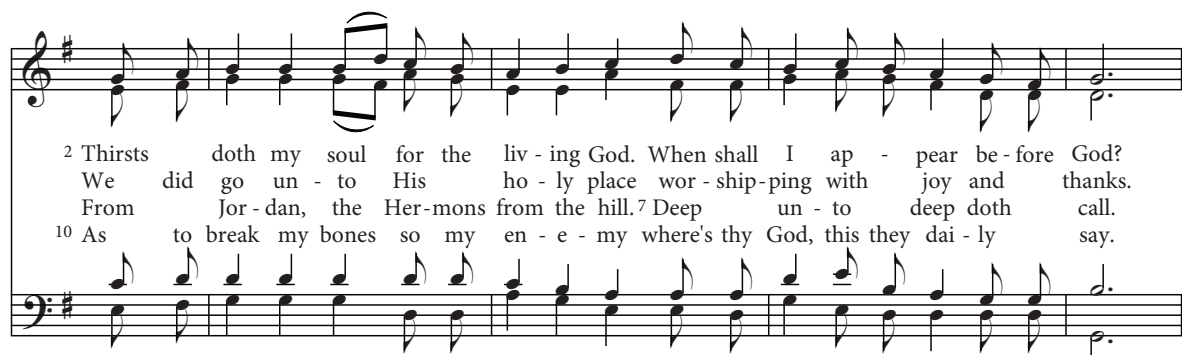
To the chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.

Longing Deer

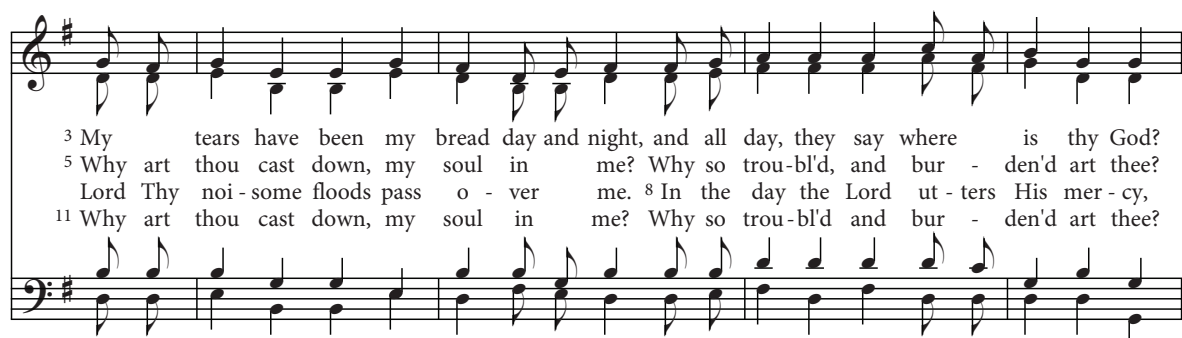
Todd L. Ruddell



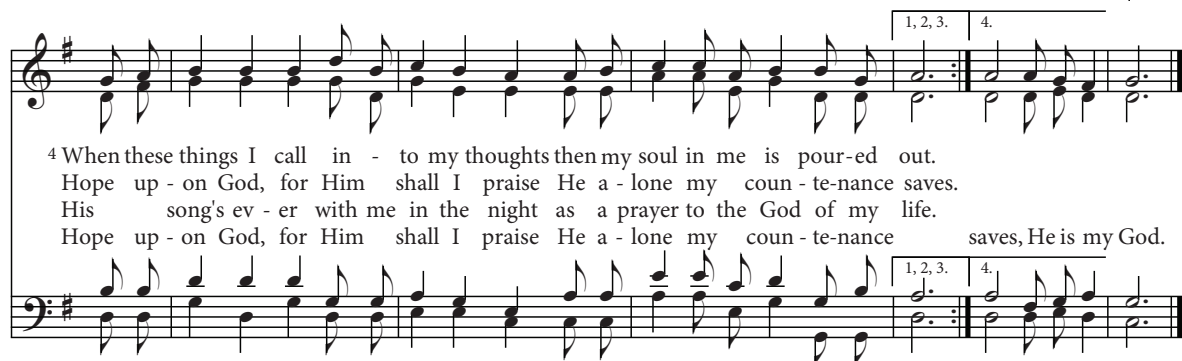
<sup>1</sup> As the deer longs for the val - ley springs, so pants my soul af - ter Thee, O God.  
 For I to God's house went sol - emn - ly, I went with the throngs to cel - e - brate,  
<sup>6</sup> God my soul's cast down in me with - al there - fore will I Thee to mind re - call  
<sup>9</sup> I'll ask God hast Thou for - got - ten me? Mourn - ing and o' - prest by the en - e - my?



<sup>2</sup> Thirsts doth my soul for the liv - ing God. When shall I ap - pear be - fore God?  
 We did go un - to His ho - ly place wor - ship - ping with joy and thanks.  
 From Jor - dan, the Her - mons from the hill.<sup>7</sup> Deep un - to deep doth call.  
<sup>10</sup> As to break my bones so my en - e - my where's thy God, this they dai - ly say.



<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my bread day and night, and all day, they say where is thy God?  
<sup>5</sup> Why art thou cast down, my soul in me? Why so trou - bl'd, and bur - den'd art thee?  
 Lord Thy noi - some floods pass o - ver me. <sup>8</sup> In the day the Lord ut - ters His mer - cy,  
<sup>11</sup> Why art thou cast down, my soul in me? Why so trou - bl'd and bur - den'd art thee?



<sup>4</sup> When these things I call in - to my thoughts then my soul in me is pour - ed out.  
 Hope up - on God, for Him shall I praise He a - lone my coun - te - nance saves.  
 His song's ev - er with me in the night as a prayer to the God of my life.  
 Hope up - on God, for Him shall I praise He a - lone my coun - te - nance saves, He is my God.



## IN TRANSLATIÖNE

### Part II: John Brown of Wamphray *Singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs in the Public Worship of God*

FROM DE CAUSA DEI CONTRA ANTISABBATARIOS

(9) The Apostle prescribes for us the matter of the songs in Ephesians 5:19 [and] Colossians 3:16. For *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual songs* are the very titles of the Psalms of David and the other psalmists; for those, as it is proven from the titles of a great many, are called *תהלים* (Psalms), *תהלים* (hymns), and *שירים* (songs). Indeed, that volume of Psalms and Songs is called *תהלים*, that is, *praises, hymns*, and specifically in the New Testament, *The Psalms* (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20; Luke 24:44). It does not move us that they are not explicitly called the Psalms of David by the Apostle; for neither are they explicitly called Psalms invented and composed by a private spirit, and sometimes that book is cited without the name of David annexed, as in Luke 24:44 [and] Acts 13:33, as sufficiently well-known from the title itself. When, therefore, the Apostle names *Psalms, hymns, etc.*, it is sufficiently evident that he understands those Psalms and hymns that were marked with these titles, and were known by all these names.

[EXCEPTION ONE.] In vain do they take exception, 1. by saying, *It is not necessary to sing those Psalms "to the end that we might be filled with the Spirit;" which nevertheless the Apostle urges in Ephesians 5:18, nor to the end that "the word of Christ might dwell in us abundantly," which is required in Colossians 3:16.*

RESPONSE. It is required to the end that we might be filled with the Spirit, and so that the word of Christ might dwell in

us abundantly, so that we might rightly speak to one another, in Psalms, etc., and sing and psalm them to the Lord in our hearts, and so that we might teach and admonish others, by singing Psalms and hymns, etc.; and so that anyone might be able to select a Psalm adapted to the present condition of the Church, so that, moreover, anyone might sing with the Spirit and in the Spirit, although singing, melody, pitch, or tune charm all carnal men, and are able to distract even the spiritual men, except they attend cautiously. It is not, therefore, so easy, as many conclude, to sing even one of the Psalms of David to God, with the spirit lifted up to glorify God, and with an aroused spiritual sense of the blessings of God.

EXCEPTION TWO. *Those Psalms of which the Apostle speaks, are the word of Christ, not the words of David, Asaph, etc., that is, they have regard unto the Gospel, not the law.*

RESPONSE. Inspired by the Spirit of Christ, those men of God composed these Psalms; and they are much more to be called the word of Christ, than Psalms composed now by any private person whatsoever, for that Spirit was infallible, who was urging the former; but fallible, who teaches and leads the latter. In addition, the Spirit, who was urging David and the other psalmists, was the Evangelical Spirit, for the Gospel was proclaimed under the Old Testament (John 5:46; Heb. 4:2).

REJOINDER. *Although those Psalms and hymns were the word of Christ, as they were composed and arranged by David and the other psalmists, who were urged by the Spirit of Christ; yet they were not the word of Christ, as they are recited or sung by us.*

RESPONSE. They are in the same way the word of Christ when they are recited by us, as they were the word of Christ when they were sung by the master of the musicians and other members of the Old Church; or as the Gospel of Christ is Christ's Gospel when it is read by us. Indeed, it is required (which was also required formerly) that we sing them with the spirit of Christ; but this defect in us, when the situation is otherwise, does not change the matter of the Psalms, neither does it render them some private word, and not the word of Christ.

EXCEPTION THREE. *The Apostle calls the entire word of Christ dwelling in us, Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and not the words of David, etc., only.*

RESPONSE. We nowhere read that all the words of the Prophets and Apostles are called Psalms or hymns; but we know that a certain, particular part of the Word of God is marked by this title. Indeed, the Apostle desires that the word of Christ dwell in us abundantly, so that we might be made better prepared and fit to edify others by singing Psalms, etc. In any event, it is conceded that we are able to sing those Psalms of David; for also these Psalms are hymns and spiritual songs.

OBJECTION ONE. *The Apostle commands the Ephesians to be intoxicated and filled with the spirit, so that they might be*

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JOHN BROWN OF WAMPFRAY (c.1610–1679). The extract presented here is translated from Joanne Broun, *De Causa Dei Contra AntiSabbatarios Tractatus* (Rotterdam: Apud Henricum Goddaeum, Bibliopolam. Anno [1674; 1676]). The selection translated appears in volume 2, pages 954–966. TRANSLATED BY Dr. Steven Dilday. Dr. Dilday is an ordained minister serving Liberty and Grace Reformed Church, a Presbyterian congregation located in Northern Virginia. He holds a Ph.D. Degree in Puritan History and Literature from Whitefield Theological Seminary. Dr. Dilday is currently translating Matthew Poole's *Synopsis Criticorum*, available at <http://www.matthewpoole.net>. The first portion of this translation by a different translator appeared in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007). The editor extends his thanks to Dr. Dilday for taking up and completing the work.

able to frame and form new spiritual songs, like those who are intoxicated with wine contrive and sing carnal songs.

RESPONSE. [1.] The Apostle does indeed allude to those drunk with wine, and urges that the Ephesians show that they are filled with the Spirit by singing Psalms, hymns, etc., in their hearts to the Lord. But he says nothing of the invention and composition of new songs; and neither are those who are intoxicated with wine wont to devise and compose new songs, obscene and carnal; but to sing those committed to memory previously. 2. We do not deny that a private individual, filled with the Spirit, is able to compose new hymns, for his own edification and that of others; but it does not follow that a song of this sort ought to be sung in the public assemblies of the Church.

OBJECTION TWO. *The Davidic Psalms were limited to the Jewish form of worship, which was practiced in the Temple; for they were delivered to the proper officers, and they were to be sung with the musical instruments.*

RESPONSE. [1.] Although those Psalms were recited in the Temple, which is yet not evident concerning all, for a great many have no titles; they are able also to be sung under the Gospel, for it is not proven that they were limited to that form of worship. Indeed, the matter of certain songs in the Temple appears more properly to regard the time of the New Testament, for example, Psalm 44:11 compared with Romans 8:36. And nowhere do we read that the Jewish people were in such a condition as is mentioned in Psalm 44:17, etc. 2. Concerning the musical instruments, they were indeed peculiar to that economy; yet it does not follow upon this that the Psalms themselves were peculiar to that economy. Prayers were made in the temple with frankincense and incense, which manner was typical, and peculiar to that form of worship; yet it does not follow from this that the very prayers are now abolished.

OBJECTION THREE. *The Psalms of David were types of the spiritual songs of the New Testament.*

RESPONSE. [1.] This is said without justification, without the authority of Scripture. 2. The carnal types were both literal, and less spiritual than the antitypes; but the Psalms and scriptural hymns are much more spiritual than the ones we see composed now by anyone whatsoever.

OBJECTION FOUR. *The arguments by which we prove that it is unlawful to write in advance and employ forms of prayers, prove also that it is unlawful to make use of the Psalms written beforehand.*

RESPONSE. This is denied; for the arguments which prove that it is unlawful for men to write out beforehand forms for others, or to make use of forms written beforehand by men, do not likewise prove that it is unlawful for God to write out beforehand forms for us; or that it is unlawful for us to make use of forms written beforehand by God. Although the forms written out beforehand by men quench the Spirit and

the gifts of the Spirit; it does not follow that the forms and means prescribed by the Spirit of God do the same, since it was seen by God that by the means established by Himself He works spiritual effects in His own. Moreover, we pointed out above that the reason for Psalms and for forms of prayers is far different.<sup>1</sup>

OBJECTION FIVE. *The edification of the Church under the New Testament ought to be advanced by the proper and personal gifts of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:7, 8, 11, 16; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11; Rom. 12:4, 6; 1 Cor. 12).*

RESPONSE. [1.] It is true that our gifts ought to be exercised for the edification of the Church. But Scripture does not say that the edification of the Church is not to be advanced otherwise than by the personal gifts of those who now live; indeed, it says the contrary, that the Church is to be edified now by the gifts of the Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists, who died formerly in their own day. Why not also by the gifts of David, and of the other psalmists, who were endowed with a special gift for composing Psalms and hymns, and also with the infallible Spirit[?] 2. God gives various gifts to the members of the Church: yet not all those gifts are held to exercise in the public assemblies of the Church. Most gifts are to be exercised privately and for the edification of private individuals.

OBJECTION SIX. *There are those who are strong in the gift of spiritual poetry, and that gift ought to be exercised for the good of the Church, according to the commandment of the Apostle (1 Pet. 4:10).*

RESPONSE: [1.] Indeed, anyone who has received a gift ought to dispense that; but not all in the same way. For all gifts are not suitable for the public edification of the Church; neither are they to be administered in the public assemblies of the Church. 2. Under the Old Testament it is probable that there were others who had the gift of poetry; yet the hymns of all those were not sung publicly in the Temple. 3. Even if we grant this, nevertheless it would not follow from thence that therefore the Psalms and hymns were to be eliminated, having been dictated by the infallible Spirit.

OBJECTION SEVEN. *The Spirit is no less able today to make us fit for devising Psalms, than formerly David and Asaph and the other psalmists.*

RESPONSE. This is not denied. But what can be concluded from that? He is also able to make us fit for composing prophecies, and for writing scriptures infallibly; are the scriptures of the prophets and Apostles, therefore, to be rejected? God forbid.

OBJECTION EIGHT. *We have an example of this sort of exercise in the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 14).*

RESPONSE. That gift was extraordinary, conjoined with the

1. Brown addressed forms of prayer in the section previous to this one on psalm singing, the end of which was in part one of the translation, which appeared in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, 3:276.

gift of tongues. Indeed, as it appears, as some spoke, prayed, etc., in an unknown tongue (vv 2, 14, 17), so others sung Psalms in an unknown tongue (v. 15).

OBJECTION NINE. *In the first three centuries, Christians made use of their own private hymns, not scriptural, as Pliny, writing to Trajan, testifies.*

RESPONSE. Pliny only says that Christians recited a song to Christ as if to their God;<sup>2</sup> but not that they composed those songs. And Tertullian, in his *Apology*, chapter 39, testifies that Christians sang from the *Sacred Scriptures*, and not only from their own talent.<sup>3</sup>

REJOINDER. *Nepos is praised because of his gift for composing Psalms; and after his death his Psalms were sung publicly.*<sup>4</sup>

RESPONSE. At that time Psalms were sung, not by individuals according to the gift conceded to them; but according to the forms written beforehand by men; but who will say that it is better to use the forms of men than the forms dictated and prescribed by the Holy Spirit?

OBJECTION TEN. *In many reformed Churches, besides scriptural Psalms and hymns, others are used. In the German Church, besides the Psalter, they make use of Psalms and many other hymns composed by Luther. The Bohemian and Moravian Churches have a hymnal, containing 743 Evangelical songs.*<sup>5</sup> *The*

*Polish Church has some of this sort in their own book of songs.*<sup>6</sup> *and in the Belgic Psalter is annexed a song of Jan Uttenhove, to be placed before sermons,*<sup>7</sup> *which even today, as Voetius testifies (ubi supra, 528),<sup>8</sup> is sung in many Churches, as for many years elsewhere had been sung a hymn, "O Christ, who art light and the day,"<sup>9</sup> in the evening assemblies.*

RESPONSE. 1. This still does not support the opinion of my adversaries, who maintain that we always make use of Psalms, dictated and suggested afresh to us by the Holy Spirit, composed either by individuals, or by certain ones, furnished with that gift. 2. *In that very place*, the most illustrious Voetius testifies that by ecclesiastical statutes any other songs whatsoever were excluded, as Article 62, of the Ecclesiastical Synod of Gravenhage in the Year 1586, which is thus: *in the Churches the Psalms of David will be sung, with song set aside which are not found in Sacred Scripture.* And I indeed do not see by what right we might be able, in the public songs of the Church, to make use of Psalms or hymns dictated by a private spirit, while we have others dictated and prescribed by the infallible Spirit; while those fruits, which in the singing of the latter the pious secure and oftentimes partake of, in the former are not to be expected in faith. Neither do I see that it is more permissible to make use of the forms of human songs, than the forms of prayers prescribed by men.

OBJECTION ELEVEN. *In the Psalter, and the few other scriptural songs, are not had so many and such forms of prayers, hymns, supplications, confessions, etc., which would be able to be accommodated evidently enough to whatever state of the Churches under the New Testament and to the treatment of whatever matters for the meeting; unto these things, for the celebration of the Lord's supper, of public fasting, for the confirmation of Ministers, for Excommunication, for Reconciliation, etc.*

RESPONSE. [1.] Although the more remote material of the hymns or Psalms is sometimes prayer, supplication, confession, etc., yet the proximate matter is always hymn, and praise. And that more remote matter, when it is come unto a song, puts on the rationale of the hymn, and is specifically to be sung unto the praise of God. 2. If the scriptural hymns are not able to supply appropriate material, the hymns invented by men will accomplish less. 3. He who is trained in the scriptural Psalms is easily able to find a hymn for whatever state of the Churches under the New Testament, and for the treatment of whatever sound theological matters, and what things have regard unto edification, so that it might be evidently enough accommodated to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, of public fasting, etc.; that they appropriate the experience of all Churches, where all hymns, except the scriptural ones, are excluded, it is sufficiently evident, and it is easily able to be shown.

OBJECTION TWELVE. *Why would it be less acceptable to do*

2. Pliny the Younger's *Letters* 10:96.

3. "After hand-washing, the lights are brought in, and a general invitation is given to sing to God as each one is able, either from the Holy Scriptures or from his own natural capability; it may be gathered from this how little one has drunk." T. Herbert Bindley, M.A., *The Apology Of Tertullian For The Christians, Translated with Introduction, Analysis, and Appendix containing the Letters of Pliny and Trajan respecting the Christians* (Oxford: Parker and Co., 1890).

4. Nepos (fl. 244 AD) was Bishop of Arsinoe, Egypt. He is remembered for his hymns and his chiliasm. See Eusebius' *Church History* 7:24.

5. "The first Bohemian Hymn-book appeared in 1504; the second, which was the masterpiece of the Brethren's hymnology, containing 743 hymns, in 1661. This latter passed through a number of editions." McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, vol. 6, 584.

6. A small Polish hymnal was published in 1547. In 1556, a Polish translation of a Bohemian hymnal was published, the first large books of songs to appear in Polish with printed music.

7. Jan Uttenhove (1516–1566) was a Flemish writer associated with the Dutch Church in London. He translated the Psalms and the New Testament into Dutch. His Dutch Psalter (*De Psalmen Davidis, in Nederlandischer Sangs-ryme*) was superseded by Petrus Dathenus' translation of Clement Marot's Genevan Psalter. Uttenhove wrote "Prayer-song before the Sermon" ("Bedezaang voor die Predikatie"), first published in Emden in 1557.

8. See F.L. Rutgers, and Ph.J. Hoedemaker, eds. *Gisberti Voetii Tractatus selecti de politica ecclesiastica*, 2 vols. (Amstelodami: Kruyt, 1885, 1886) 2:38.

9. "Christe qui Lux Es et Dies" was composed by Erasmus Alberus (c. 1500–1553), a German Reformer and poet. The hymn was published in 1566, and was later used as an evening hymn.

this, than to sing to God the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed, and the Ten Commandments converted into meter?

RESPONSE. Not even this am I able to approve, since those were never dictated by the Holy Spirit for this purpose, while I leave unmentioned that that Apostolic symbol was merely written down by men, not dictated by the infallible Spirit. The Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments were given by the Spirit for a far different end, and from that proper end they ought not to be diverted by us. The Prayer is a divine exemplar, according to which we ought to form our prayers, but as matter of song it was never prescribed by God. And the Decalogue is the law received from God. In it, therefore, God addresses us, but in songs we address God. Therefore, the nature of the Decalogue is entirely subverted when it is made the matter of song.

CAVIL. But to reduce those to rhythm and meter is not foreign to the use of scripture, where we see prayers, supplications, complaints, lamentations, historical relations of events, promises, exhortations, predictions, rebukes, threats, reproaches, indeed even the doctrines of the faith, in the Psalms as didactic sayings, reduced to the form of song.

RESPONSE. I do not deny that the matter of the song is of a more remote kind; but the proximate matter of song, which is especially attended to in songs, is always praise, thanksgiving, and doxology. And that more remote matter was dressed in the nature of thanksgiving and doxology, before it was prescribed by the Holy Spirit to be sung in the Church; therefore, those Psalms were not prescribed to the Church inasmuch as they were petitions or supplications or entreaties, etc., but insofar as they were *Psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs*.

Again, there is another question here moved: Namely, whether those Psalms are to be sung in the Church by one only; with the others, when the song is finished, adding *Amen*? Or by the whole Church? There are those who assert the *former*, and deny the *latter*. But those Psalms of David and the other Psalmists were delivered to the master of musicians to be sung; not to him alone, but to him as the master of musicians, that is, so that they might be sung publicly by him and other members of the Church. The Disciples sang the hymn with Christ. Paul and Silas sang together; thus Moses and the sons of Israel (Exod. 15:1); it was commanded that Moses teach the people of Israel that song, which he sang in Deuteronomy 32. See Deuteronomy 31:19. Moreover, the commandment is given, not to one, but to many, indeed to all (Jam. 5:13; Pss. 96:1, 4; 68:32; 145:21; 150:2, etc.; 107:6–32). Likewise, when the Apostle commands that the Ephesians and Colossians sing Psalms, hymns, etc., he laid this duty not upon one only, but upon all, so that in this way, no doubt, they might teach and admonish one another. This also was the practice of the primitive Church, as Chrysostom testifies in Homily 36 on 1 Corinthians 14, saying, *when they were singing hymns, there was*

*a sound, as if offered from one mouth.*<sup>10</sup> The first Christians were reciting alternately to each other, as Pliny testifies, to Christ as to God. To this question, “Who then is able to sing in Church?” thus responds the Reverend Doctor Voetius, in *Politica Ecclesiastica*, 538, 539:<sup>11</sup>

We say that this was forbidden to no one, that no one was to be excluded, but rather all are to be summoned, to be trained, unto this divine office: for all with a distinct voice are able at the same time, not to pray, not to speak, but to sing, as it is taught by common sense, and common experience in joint exercises of piety, in families, on ships, in military watches, and in any other assembly whatever—testimonies from Scripture contribute to the joint singing of the people in the Church. And concerning the singing of the Ancients, Section 1 above was adduced. Where it is especially to be noted of the zeal of Socrates and Augustine, Chrysostom and Ambrose, in calling forth their people to the sacred songs; which, just how much it agrees with today's papacy, binding the divine praises to the choirs of Canons and Monks, they themselves saw. Cornelius à Lapide, in his Commentary on Sirach 50:12 [sic],<sup>12</sup> is compelled to approve joint singing, which sort is received in our Churches, since he relates, out of 2 Corinthians 14:10 [sic],<sup>13</sup> and Jerome (Book 2 on the Epistle to Galatians),<sup>14</sup> and Ausonius<sup>15</sup> (in *Ephemeris*), that all Christian people formerly had sung with the Priests.

10. See Saint Chrysostom, “Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 12 (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898) 221.

11. See Gisberti Voetii *Tractatus selecti de politica ecclesiastica*, 2.46, 47.

12. This reference is incorrect and should be to à Lapide's comments on Ecclesiasticus 50:19: “Then all the people together made haste, and fell down to the earth upon their faces, to adore the Lord their God, and to pray to the Almighty God the most High.” See Cornelius Cornelii à Lapide, *Commentarii in Scripturam Sacram*, vol. 5 (J. B. Pelagaud, 1875) 1074. “Simili modo totus populus Christianus olim succinebat sacerdotibus, respondendo: Amen, teste S. Paulo 1. Cor. 14. v. 10. Unde S. Heiron. praesat. in epiſt. ad Galat. lib. 2: Ad similitudinem, inquit, caeleſtis tonitruſ Amen reboat. Et. Ausonius in Ephemeride: Consona quem celebrant modulati carmina David, Et responsuris serit aera vocibus Amen.”

13. This reference is in error. It should be 1 Corinthians 14:10.

14. Jerome, *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Galatas Libri Tres*, in Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae*, 26.355B.

15. Ausonius (c. 310–395) was a Latin poet and rhetorician. *Ephemeris id est Totius Diei Negotium*, The Daily Round or The Doings of the Whole Day: “79 These prayers of a soul devout, albeit trembling with dark sense of guilt, claim for thine own before the eternal Father, thou Son of God who mayest be entreated, Saviour, God and Lord, Mind, Glory, Word and Son, Very God of Very God, Light of Light, who remainest with the eternal Father, reigning throughout



[OBJECTION ONE.] Nevertheless, some object, 1. *That in the Corinthian Church one had a Psalm (1 Corinthians 14:26), who was commanded by the Apostle to Psalm with understanding (vv. 15, 16).*

RESPONSE. By a peculiar and extraordinary gift some were psalming, even in an unknown tongue; but Paul wished that rather those would psalm with understanding, who had been furnished with this gift. But that extraordinary gift is now ceased, and the scriptural Psalms, dictated by the Holy Spirit, are to be sung by all.

OBJECTION TWO. *To psalm is to prophesy; but those prophesying ought not to speak at the same time, but two or three, so that the others might judge, and if anything be revealed to another sitting by, the first ought to be silent (1 Cor. 14:29–31).*

RESPONSE. Although to prophesy, with the word taken broadly, is any declaration whatever of spiritual men, let it be made in whatever manner, whether by praying, as in Genesis 20:7, or by singing (1 Chron. 25:1), nevertheless the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 14 takes it in the stricter sense, as it is distinguished from prayers and from Psalms (1 Cor. 11:4, 5 and 14:1).

OBJECTION THREE. *Would it not beget confusion, if all should psalm together?*

RESPONSE. Indeed, they are not able to psalm together many diverse songs without confusion: yet many are able to sing together the same Psalm or song without any confusion, as it is evident from daily experience, and proven out of 2 Chronicles 5:13.

OBJECTION FOUR. If all members of the Church ought to sing, they will be teachers; for the Apostle commands that we teach and admonish one another with Psalms, etc. (Col. 3:16).

RESPONSE. From that place it is proven that private individuals ought to teach and admonish one another from the word of Christ, and from the Psalms; and additionally to sing Psalms and hymns for mutual edification; however, he does not speak here of the public proclamation of the Word, but of the duty of private individuals.

OBJECTION FIVE. *Women are excluded from this exercise (1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 1 Cor. 14:34).*

RESPONSE. Indeed, it is not lawful for women to teach in the Church, for this would be to usurp authority (1 Tim. 2:11, 12). Neither is it lawful to set forward questions (1 Cor. 14:35); yet it is lawful to respond to things asked in the Church, as Sapphira did in Acts 5:8, and to sing together with others, as Miriam had done formerly under the law (Exod. 15:20, 21). And therefore the law did not demand such subjection; but concerning the subjection, which the law did require, the Apostle speaks (1 Cor. 14:34). Nothing appears in song, which is incompatible

with the subjection required in the case of women, since it is a duty common to all to praise God.

OBJECTION SIX. *The multitude of the carnal and worldly and profane is excluded, with whom it is not lawful for the pious to sing.*

RESPONSE. [1.] To sing the praises of God is a moral duty, common to all, as it is to pray to God; and it is enjoined upon all (Psalm 96:1; 100:1, 2; 68:32; 107:6–32). 2. When the Psalms of David and the other psalmists had been delivered to the Master of musicians, the multitude of the congregation was admitted unto the singing of them.

REJOINDER. *Those are not able to sing with grace.*

RESPONSE. Neither are they able to pray out of faith.

REJOINDER TWO. *Many do not know what is sung.*

RESPONSE. Neither perhaps do they know what is sought in prayers. Ignorance does not exempt from duty.

OBJECTION SEVEN. *The matter of the Psalm to be sung is not accommodated to the condition of individuals.*

RESPONSE. The matter of the Psalm is always accommodated to the condition of all in such a way that it is able to be sung by all; for the benefits of God conveyed unto others ought to supply for us matter of praise and of thanksgiving. And every Psalm ought to supply to us matter of thanksgiving, and also of instruction and admonition. God is always to be praised, whatever He might do to us and others, whether good or ill.

In addition, it is doubted by some, *Whether it is now lawful publicly to psalm and to sing the Psalms of David and others, translated into rhythm and meter, by cadence and measure, with our musical notes.* The reasons of which are these.

[REASON] ONE. *Because those rhythms and tones are not from God. It was not formerly permitted to the Levites to form the notes of melody.*

RESPONSE. Those rhythms and notes are from God, not less than our vernacular translation of the Bible. If the Levites did not form them, the reason was that, together with the Psalms, to them were delivered the musical accents, and other notes necessary for singing. And since that method of singing used by the Jews is entirely unknown to us, why is it not permitted thus to translate those Psalms into rhythm and into poetical paraphrase, so that they might be sung by us? And why is it not permitted to make use of those musical notes, which are in use among us, and carry a sense of gravity, in the singing of them?

[REASON TWO] REPLY. *But such a gift is not spiritual, but merely poetic. But God has committed nothing in His worship to our corrupt nature to be formed.*

RESPONSE. It is no more a spiritual gift, to translate the Scriptures into the vernacular tongue, but it is grammatical gift. Yet all these are gifts of God, given to further the edification of the Church. And if it be not lawful to make use of

all ages, whose praise the harmonious songs of tuneful David echo forth, until respondent voices rend the air with 'Amen.' Hugh G. Evelyn White, M.A., *Ausonius with an English Translation* (London: William Heinemann, 1919) 25.

meters and notes, contrived by corrupt nature, in the worship of God, neither will it be lawful to make use of words, and phrases, or our vernacular prose, which also are contrived by corrupt men, in the worship of God.

[REASON THREE] REPLY. *But to sing according to musical rules is not any spiritual gift of Christ.*

RESPONSE. Neither is it any spiritual gift to read the Scriptures according to grammatical rules; yet it furthers edification. Therefore, since it is lawful to translate the Scriptures out of the original tongue into our own (indeed is necessary that they be thus translated, so that thus they might be able to be read by all and understood); why will it not also be lawful thus to translate spiritual songs into the meter used by us, so that they might be able to be sung by all with understanding and for edification? If those precepts that command that we read and understand the Scriptures consequently command, or suppose, that the Scriptures are to be translated into a tongue known to us; so also the precepts that command that we sing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs suppose that those Psalms are to be translated into the measure and tune of singing, so that they might be tastefully sung by us with gravity.

I do not deny that those Psalms were sung formerly, and that they had their own meters and rhythms, a great many assert, with Jerome in the *Prologue to the Chronicle of Eusebius*, and in the *preface to the book of Job*.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Gomar is to be considered in the *Epistle Dedicatory* in his *Lyre of David*.<sup>17</sup> That the Jews also had a method of psalming and singing, and of accentuation, by which they modulated the voice, it is manifest; and it is certain that that poetry, and the music is uncertain to us, and the greatest part is unknown, and among us not at all practiced. It is necessary, therefore, that we make use of the poetry and music, which obtains among us, or we will not be able to sing; for, as cadences and meters especially agree with a song, so also musical pitches; for it is one thing to read, another to sing. All things ought to be decided for edification, especially in the public worship of God; wherefore it is proper that the spiritual songs be reduced to the meters and modulations used by us, if only they be grave and simple, so that thus they are able to be sung by us easily and happily, for the common edification of the Church.

Nevertheless, concerning a metrical paraphrase, this is to be held, that in those rhythms and metrical paraphrases, which are employed in the public worship of God, whether in the Churches, or in families, attention is to be given, that it departs as little as possible from the pure text of Scripture, lest too large an opening be supplied to those who say that those are not the holy and divine songs, but rather his, who is the author of the paraphrases, especially if, with the text neglected, other things be mixed in, added, or certain things be removed, for the keeping of the cadence or meter and rhythm. For this reason our Scottish Church made the decision to change the

old Paraphrase,<sup>18</sup> and to compose another, with the common and easiest meter kept, and that uniform throughout all the Psalms, which agrees most closely with the very text of Scripture, with the fewest words interjected or added for the observation of rhythm and meter, except what things the emphasis of the original text might be able to bear, or the nature of paraphrases might require for the comprehension even of coarser expressions. Neither was it put off from this so necessary work by that hindrance, which, as I hear, puts off other Churches from undertaking similar work; as, that the old paraphrase was already held in memory by a great many. For they were seeing with sufficient clarity that the common good is to be preferred to any convenience of a few. And so, that this inconvenience might also be lifted, as far as it concerns the public worship of God, or singing in an ecclesiastical assembly, it was established that each line to be sung was to be read beforehand distinctly and by a precentor, if there be one sufficiently able for that, or, even especially, by the Pastor himself.<sup>19</sup> And thus all things had been established for the greatest furthering of the common edification of all.

And concerning melody, or the type of music here to be used, effeminate and theatrical music does not satisfy, which, as Dr. Voetius [writes] (*Politica Ecclesiastica*, 534),<sup>20</sup> is composed more for the stirring of carnal affections, than for furthering spiritual devotion; neither chromatic or figural music, which is adorned with semi-tones, prolonged and drawn out diminutions, fugues and jumps, and large intervals; for this is not sufficiently grave, nor is it able to be learned easily by all. But a simpler melody is more appropriate, of one tone; the

16. See Jerome, "The Principal Works of St. Jerome," in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff. Second Series, Volume 6 (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892) 483, 491.

17. Franciscus Gomar, *Davidis lyra, seu Nova hebraea S. Scripture ars poetica* ... (Lugduni Batavorum: ex officina Ioannis Maire, 1637).

18. Brown is referring to the 1650 Scottish Psalter, which began as a revision of Rouse's Psalter by the Westminster Assembly, as part of the uniformity of practice aimed for by the Solemn League and Covenant, which then was painstakingly honed and revised by the Church of Scotland.

19. The Westminster *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, in the section on "Of Singing of Psalms," states, "That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book; and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read. But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof." See "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God," in *The Confession of Faith; the Larger and Shorter Catechisms ... Directories for Publick and Family Worship ... of Publick Authority in the Church of Scotland* ... (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855; repr. Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990) 393.

20. See Gisberti Voetii *Tractatus selecti de politica ecclesiastica*, 2.43.

notes of which, according to the common musical scale, are written on five lines. Nevertheless, this melody is able to be varied in many ways, in such a way that each Psalm is able to be sung with a different and distinct melody, or voice, as they say. But, because at this point some musical knowledge would be required, and because it would be necessary that all, or at least a great many, would understand exactly all those distinct tones (otherwise confusion, or dissonance, would disturb the order and harmony), and because such knowledge of music is not everywhere, our Church also made the decision that all the Psalms be reduced to one modulation, or the same number of feet or syllables; so that thus by the common people, to whom were known those tunes, called common, with a skilled precentor going before in these (although otherwise quite ignorant in the matter of music), all might be able to be sung aptly enough and beautifully: with other paraphrases occasionally added; so that, to whom it is preferable to make use of another melody differing from the common, it is possible to exercise themselves in this. To this question, whether our Psalms (that is, the Belgic) are to be reduced to a few melodies or voices (as they say), thus responds Dr. Voetius, *Politica Ecclesiastica* 535,<sup>21</sup> “Reason is not wanting, on account of which this is wished by some, indeed is called into subtle deliberation: that is, so that for this reason attention might be paid to the understanding and memory of the ruder sort, and the Psalms be sung *ἐντάκτως*, in a more orderly fashion.”

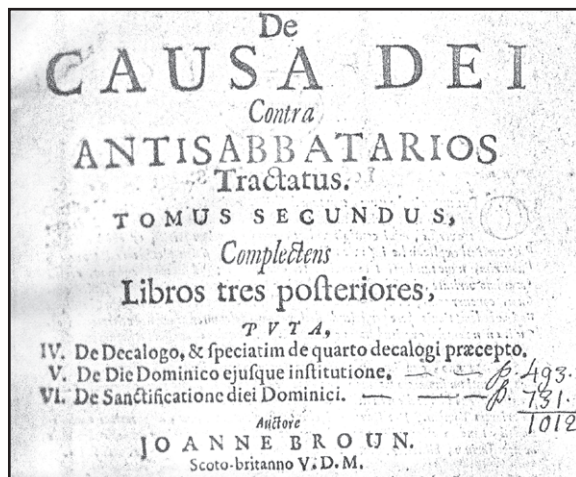
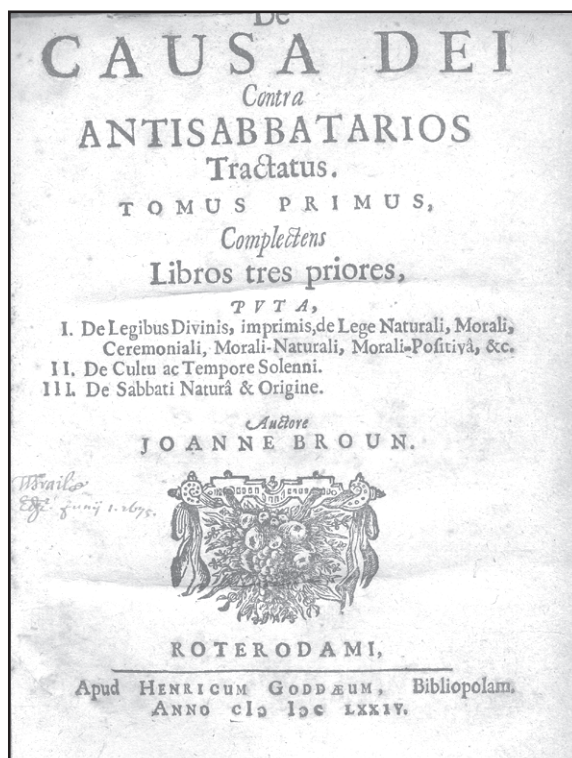
Concerning the method of singing by *antiphonal responses*, and concerning the use of organs in ecclesiastical singing, it is not that we would say anything, since enough concerning this matter has been said by David Calderwood in his *Altare Damascenum* (490, 491, etc.),<sup>22</sup> and by Dr. Voetius, *Politica Ecclesiastica* (537, etc., and in 3:544),<sup>23</sup> where he made a full disputation concerning *instrumental singing in sacred things*, and by many things proves that to be unlawful, and confutes the contrary arguments. And thus enough is said concerning ecclesiastical singing.

STEVEN DILDAY ■

21. See Gisberti Voetii *Tractatus selecti de politica ecclesiastica*, 2.44. By Belgic Psalms, Voetius means the metrical Psalter of Petrus Dathenus, a Dutch translation of the Genevan Psalter.

22. David Calderwood, *Altare Damascenum seu politia Ecclesiae Anglicanae obtrusa Ecclesiae Scoticae* (1623).

23. See Gisberti Voetii *Tractatus selecti de politica ecclesiastica*, 2.44–45, 51.



JOHN BROWN OF WAMPHRAY (c.1610–1679). Joanne Broun, *De Causa Dei Contra AntiSabbatarios Tractatus*, 2 volumes (Rotterdam: Apud Henricum Goddaeum, Bibliopolam. Anno [1674; 1676]). Reproduction of the title page from the first volume and detail from the title page of the second volume. Reproduced with permission of the Reverend Sherman Isbell. Brown's work is very rare and has not been reproduced on microfilm in any collection as far as is known to the editor. We extend our thanks to Mr. Isbell for making scans of his copy available for this translation of Brown's thoughts on psalmody.



## ANTIQUARY

### The James Durham MSS

Held by Glasgow University Library

In this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian* Donald John Maclean examined James Durham's commentary on the Song of Solomon, which had been until recently the only work in modern guise that was generally available by this leading light of mid 17th Century Scottish Presbyterianism. Happily, since the 1990 publication of his *Treatise Concerning Scandal*, Durham's other valuable sermons and commentaries have been rediscovered as new editions have been produced. Naphtali Press is currently working to bring the remaining sermons out in a new edition, and this raises a question. Is there anything else that remains unpublished?

It was long noted by old biographers of Durham that valuable sermons remained in manuscript in private hands.<sup>1</sup> Some of these have found their way into the rare book collections of major libraries, such as Glasgow University, and these are detailed below. Some items remain or have passed into private hands. I know of three such volumes.<sup>2</sup> One volume devotes about 60% to Durham's lectures on the ten commandments, the rest being apparently non Durham material. It is all written in difficult to read handwriting. The lectures on the ten commandments made up one of Durham's published works.<sup>3</sup> Two other volumes contain unpublished material and are noted to be in Durham's own hand; but this has not been verified. A 736 page volume contains sermons on Matthew chapters 11–16, and a 639 page volume contains sermons on Isaiah chapters 40, 53–59. Both of these volumes are in small difficult to read mid 17th century handwriting. These volumes have yet to be carefully checked to see if any of the contents match up to the MS sermon series noted in the old biographies. Otherwise, they may contain previously unnoted material.

The bulk of this article is devoted to the two volumes of MS material held by Glasgow University Library, and are here cataloged for the first time (the library itself has not detailed the contents). I would like to thank the Rev. John J. Murray who agreed to take the time and pains to examine these volumes and describe the contents as best he could make out. Comments or notices in square brackets are mine. A question mark (?) notes illegible text and if possible a best guess is provided. I have numbered the items consecutively.

### JAMES DURHAM MSS, GLASGOW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY (Special Collections)

#### I. MS Murray 38.

Description of volume: A leather bound large notebook that had a clasps now gone. Size: 16 x 10.5 cm. 4 cm thick. The main section runs from the front, and a short section runs from back.

#### From Front of the Book

- Inside of the cover binding there is paper with printed metrical Psalms.
- Owner Label: "David Murray Collection 1928"
- Previous ownership:
  - Page 1. Two names, the last with the first name hard to make out. "William Thornton, (?) Thornton."
  - Page 2 David Murray Collection
- Page torn out

1. No Date. Sermon 2 Jeremiah 50:4, 5 Mr James Durham (14 pages).
2. April 14 1657 Jeremiah 50:4,5 (24 pages). Note: At page 15 there is a line and "Jer 50:4,5 Ser 3." [Three sermons on Jeremiah 40:4-5, and two sermons on Jeremiah 40:5 appear in *Unsearchable Riches of Christ*].
3. No Date. A sermon by George Hurtheson(?) [Hutcheson]. Psalm 77:7 (14 pages).
4. 2 Cor 13:5 June ? 21 1656. Mr Gray for Mr Wm Guthrie? [Andrew Gray apparently preaching for William Guthrie] (15 pages) [There are three sermons on the assurance of faith on 2 Cor. 13:5 in Gray's works].
5. No Date. No attribution. Rom 7:4 (18 pages).
6. No Date. Matt 11:28 A Gray ? [Andrew Gray] (15 pages) [Not published in Gray's works].
7. No Date. Rev 3:27 Carstairs ? [John Carstairs] (11 pages).
8. No Date. Rev 3:21 J. Carstairs [possibly Rev. 3:27 as above] (16 pages).
9. No Date. Matt 22:11 a sermon on Thursday before Communion(?). [Durham preached a sermon on Matthew 22:2-4

1. See Howie's life of Durham in his *Scots Worthies* (numerous reprints and editions) and a life affixed to the 1740 edition of *A Treatise Concerning Scandal*, reprinted in the Naphtali Press edition of the *Sermons on Isaiah 53 (Christ Crucified: Or, the Marrow of the Gospel in Seventy-Two Sermons on the Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah* [Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 2001; 2007]).

2. The owner of these volumes wishes to remain anonymous.

3. James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (1675; Naphtali Press, 2002).



before a Communion which is printed in *Unsearchable Riches of Christ*. A nine page sermon by Durham noted to be on Matthew 22:4 appears in the Gen 230 MS, and an unattributed sermon on the same appears below.] (12 pages).

10. No Date. No attribution. 1 Thess. 5:19. (11 pages) [A sermon on 1 Thess. 5:19 was noted to have survived in MS by early biographies of Durham].

11. No Date. 2 Cor. 7:1 J Durham (13 pages) [This sermon is not noted in early biographies as existing in MS].

12. No Date. 2 Cor. 5:20 H Gray(?) [Andrew Gray] (21 pages) [There is a communion sermon on 2 Cor. 5:10 in Gray's works].

13. No Date. John 17:17 Sanctify Carstairs? [John Carstairs] (11 pages).

14. No Date. John 17:17 Thy Word is truth [likely Carstairs as well] (13 pages).

15. No Date. Cant. 8:5 Sermon (18 pages).

16. June 7 (?) 1658. A sermon by Mr N Carstairs(?) [John Carstairs] (12 pages).

17. 17 August 1662. Sermon by Mr Wilson. Matthew 14:24, 25, 26 (12 pages).

18. Sermon 2 Matthew 14:25 (14 pages).

19. Matthew 22:4 July 15 1655 (36 pages) [See note on item 9 above].

20. No Date. [No heading. No attribution]. (12 pages).

■ End Mrs Mary Hamilton.

■ sister of the laird of Bardonie.

■ aught the book 1698.

### From Other End of the Book

■ page 1 scribbles.

■ page 2 an exhortation in person's handwriting. "God is not the God of the dead but the living....."

■ page 3 ex libris David Murray.

1. Page 4. No Date. Unattributed. John 7:37 (9 pages). Small handwriting.

2. No Date. Unattributed. Rom. 7:4 (5 pages). [See item 5 above. After the 5 pages, there is a quarter of a page left in with no writing on it and after another two pages one can see that two pages are torn out by the stubs left. The pages that are left have writing on them].

[a page  $\frac{3}{4}$  torn no writing].

2 [blank] pages.

[2 pages torn out].

3 [blank] pages.

## II. Gen 230.

■ Binding: "Sermons on Isaiah CH liii etc. 1656." Size 21.5 x 16 cm. Good condition quarter leather.

■ Inside cover: MS Gen 230.

■ Condition of Contents: Written on good paper in ink. Though there is variation in the strength of the ink, it is all readable.

■ Recto [1] AM 01322.

■ Verso [1] blank.

■ Recto [2] blank.

■ Verso [2] (Latin) Ex Libris..purchased 1700.

■ [The bulk of this volume contains what looks to be a full set of Durham's sermons on Isaiah 53 which appear in his *Christ Crucified: or, The Marrow of the Gospel in 72 Sermons on Isaiah 53*].

|                |           |               |           |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| Isaiah 53:1    | Sermon 1  | 15 March 1656 | 11 pages. |
|                | Sermon 2  |               | 12 pages. |
|                | Sermon 3  |               | 8 pages.  |
|                | Sermon 4  |               | 10 pages. |
|                | Sermon 5  |               | 12 pages. |
|                | Sermon 6  |               | 10 pages. |
|                | Sermon 7  | 27 April 1656 | 10 pages. |
|                | Sermon 8  | 4 May 1656    | 13 pages. |
|                | Sermon 9  |               | 10 pages. |
|                | Sermon 10 | 18 May 1656   | 10 pages. |
|                | Sermon 11 | 25 May 1656   | 11 pages. |
|                | Sermon 12 | 15 June 1656  | 16 pages. |
|                | Sermon 13 |               | 15 pages. |
|                | Sermon 14 |               | 14 pages. |
|                | Sermon 15 | 6 July 1656   | 12 pages. |
|                | Sermon 16 |               | 12 pages. |
|                | Sermon 17 |               | 12 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:2, 3 | Sermon 18 |               | 12 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:3, 4 | Sermon 19 |               | 13 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:4, 5 | Sermon 20 |               | 9 pages.  |
|                | Sermon 21 |               | 12 pages. |
|                | Sermon 22 |               | 14 pages. |
| Isaiah 53      | Sermon 23 |               | 14 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:5    | Sermon 24 |               | 14 pages. |
|                | Sermon 25 |               | 12 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:6    | Sermon 26 |               | 15 pages. |
|                | Sermon 27 |               | 15 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:7    | Sermon 28 |               | 13 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:8    | Sermon 29 |               | 12 pages. |
|                | Sermon 30 |               | 14 pages. |
|                | Sermon 31 |               | 14 pages. |
|                | Sermon 32 |               | 12 pages. |
|                | Sermon 33 |               | 15 pages. |

|                  |                    |           |
|------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Isaiah 53:9      | Sermon 34          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 35          | 12 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:9, 10  | Sermon 36          | 10 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:10     | Sermon 37          | 9 pages.  |
|                  | Sermon 38          | 14 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 39          | 11 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 40          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 41          | 9 pages.  |
|                  | Sermon 42          | 10 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 43          | 7 pages.  |
| Isaiah 53:10, 11 | Sermon 44          | 11 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:11     | Sermon 45          | 11 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 46          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 47          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 48          | 11 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 49          | 9 pages.  |
| Isaiah 53        | Sermon 50          | 12 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:11     | Sermon 51          | 11 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 52          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 53          | 14 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 54          | 14 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 55          | 13 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 56          | 16 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 57          | 14 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 58          | 11 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 59          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 60          | 13 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 61          | 10 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 62          | 13 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 63          | 14 pages. |
| Isaiah 53:12     | Sermon 64          | 13 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 65          | 13 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 66          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 67          | 14 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 68          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 69          | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 69 [sic 70] | 12 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 70 [sic 71] | 13 pages. |
|                  | Sermon 72 [sic 72] | 13 pages. |

Finis.

[The additional contents follows, numbered consecutively].

■ No blank page.

1. No Date. Portion on chapter 19 of Genesis (6 pages). First page poor quality.

Two blank pages.

2. No Date. John c 4 v 7 (8 pages). Fairly poor quality.

Six pages blank.

3. No Date. Matthew 22.4 (9 pages). Top of page cut with "James D" and the rest removed in the cut. [See note on item 9 and item 19 in MS 230].

■ One blank page.

4. No Date. Revel. 3.10 Sermon 3 by Mr PG (9 pages). Slightly smaller page size, rough edge at foot, and the last two pages discolored and not easy to read. [This is likely a sermon by Patrick Gillespie, and this and items 6 and 7 may be part of a series.].

5. John 11.4. Mr Jo Mantel (10 pages). Some pages fading and losing letters by close cutting.

Two blank pages.

6. Rev. 3.8 Sermon 1 (10 pages).

7. Rev. 3.9 Sermon 2 (10 pages).

8. No title new writing style (14 pages).

verse 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 .

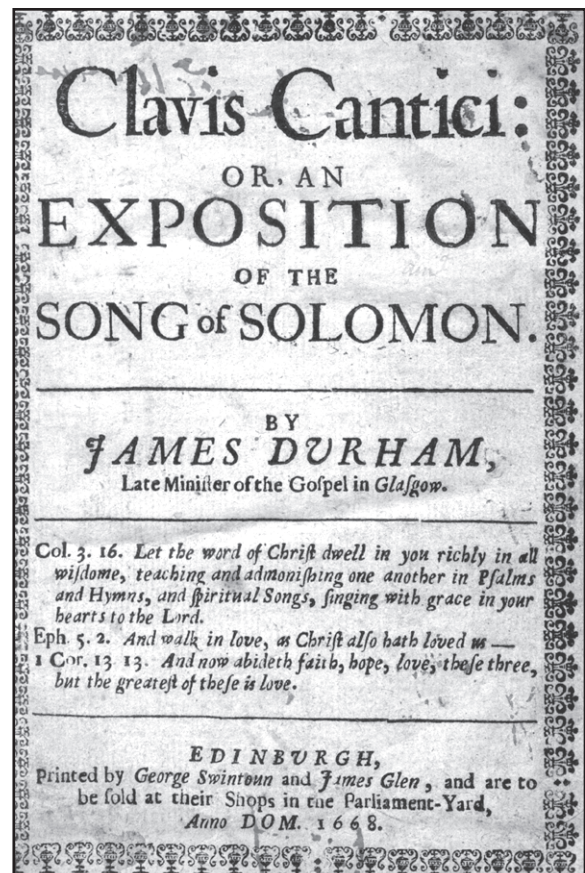
Sermon 2.

Verse 2.

Sermon 3.

last page poor.

CHRIS COLDWELL ■



ABOVE: Title page from the first edition of James Durham, *Clavis Cantici: or, An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (Edinburgh: Printed by George Swintoun and James Glen, 1668).

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**Editorial. Continued from Page 2.**

church government. Dr. Smith explores why and how this concept was adopted by Southern Presbyterianism, and solving the mystery entails the interplay of church history with politics, culture, and science. C. N. Willborn has provided *The Deacon: A Divine Right Office with Divine Uses*, and sets “forth the biblical basis of the office of deacon, the biblical nature and duties of the office of deacon, and the relation of the diaconate to the eldership.”

In other articles, Dr. W. Gary Crampton surveys John Calvin’s doctrine of divine revelation, and D. Patrick Ramsey assesses Samuel Rutherford’s contribution to the development and establishment of covenant theology in Scotland. James Cassidy examines Turretin’s doctrine of the covenant of works as it is found in his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, and Karl Barth’s disposition towards Turretin and the doctrine of the covenant of works in his *Church Dogmatics*.

Donald John Maclean explores the old reformed view of a spiritual interpretation of Canticles by examining James Durham on the Song of Solomon. Wes Bredenhof provides a glimpse into the life and work of “the chief apostle to the Indians under the Dutch regime,” Johannes Megapolensis (1603–1670). And Anthony T. Selvaggio examines redemptive historical preaching in *An Answer to the Challenge of Preaching the Old Testament: An Historical and Theological Examination of the Redemptive-Historical Approach*.

We are pleased to continue the various departments begun in prior issues as we provide a rendering of Psalm 42, complete the translation of John Brown of Wamphray on Psalmody (begun in volume 3), and detail the contents of two volumes of James Durham MSS held by Glasgow University Library.

The journal now has a dedicated editor for the Reviews section, the Rev. Lane Keister, who brings an orderly and systematic approach to this important portion of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

CHRIS COLDWELL

As the new *Reviews & Responses* editor for *The Confessional Presbyterian*, I would like to express my thanks to Mr. Chris Coldwell for inviting me to fill this position. I am very glad to take up this post. It has been extremely rewarding this year. We have some great reviews, focusing some distinct attention on books about John Calvin, for obvious reasons. In addition to this, I have sought (and will seek to do in future as well) to provide balanced reviews in each of the following categories: historical theology, systematic theology, exegesis, and practical theology. I have also sought to provide some reviews of books that will be well-known already. However, there are some books reviewed here which ought to be better known, but are not. Enjoy what we have to offer this year.

LANE KEISTER ■

*The Westminster Assembly & the Judicial Law: A Chronological Compilation and Analysis Part Two. Continued from Page 88.*

CONCLUSION.

There can be no doubt that the Christian Church needs to give more serious attention to the law of God and its application to modern society. Those churches that subscribe to the Westminster formulary have less excuse than others for not being more active in this regard, when it is considered that their subordinate standards amply testify of the social responsibility of Christians. It may well be that the theonomic movement has helped to create a greater awareness of the need to develop a biblical social ethic, but theonomy itself falls too far short of the wisdom and balance of the Westminster formulary to be a useful ethical system.

The theonomic view of law does not have its roots in Puritanism but in the separatist ideals of Brownism. It rejects the natural law tradition which was fundamental to the Puritan system of ethics and fails to distinguish between moral and situational commandments. The theonomic view of the civil magistrate has more in common with Erastianism than with the Presbyterianism of the Assembly of divines. Although it follows the modern separation of Church and State, theonomy ascribes to civil power a commission under Christ to nurture and advance His kingdom by means of the sword. There is no recognition of the distinct spheres of nature and grace nor any acknowledgment of the Christian constitutionalism which is evident in the writings of the Westminster divines.

The only appearance of similarity between the two systems is in the formal appeal to the Old Testament punishments, but there is no substantial agreement. When the divines of the Assembly appealed to these punishments it was for the purpose of preventing the slide of a Christian commonwealth into atheism and schism. Their only concern was to show that a Christian civil magistrate has the power to suppress blasphemy and heresy by means of the sword, and they left room for the free use of reason and prudence to determine how this might be best accomplished. Theonomy, however, presents the civil punishments as a cure to the immorality of modern non-Christian States, and insists the magistrate is bound to enforce these punishments because they are revealed by God.

Do the Westminster Confession and Catechisms teach “the abiding validity of the law in exhaustive detail?” If the system of doctrine as a whole is observed, and the original intention of the divines is respected, the answer must be a definite “no.” ■

***Francis Turretin and Barthianism: The Covenant of Works in Historical Perspective. Continued from Page 213.***

To again invoke the impression of à Brackel mentioned in the beginning of this study, only when we understand aright the covenant of works will we understand aright the covenant of grace.<sup>55</sup> Only when we first understand what Adam failed to do, can we fully appreciate—to the glory of God alone who is abundant and rich in mercy—what Christ succeeded to do on our behalf. For if we are to be justified, and justification is to truly be by grace alone, it must be on the basis of a righteousness that is not our own. It must be on the basis of a perfect righteousness that is imputed to us by faith alone because of Christ alone. Perhaps ironically, only with *this* understanding of the covenant of works can the covenant of grace be truly gracious. ■

***In Brief: The Intent of Larger Catechism 109 Regarding Pictures of Christ's Humanity. Continued from Page 228.***

The wording of public ordinances and subsequent widespread destruction of depictions of Christ, the Parliament's authorization of views such as those held by Vicars and others, Laud's view contrary to the Homilies noted in his trial, and the involvement of the four London ministers in identifying idols for destruction which included pictures of Christ, as well as the work by the Assembly on Parliament's list of scandalous sins, all indicate that if indeed the Westminster divines were of a mind to omit pictures of Christ's humanity from their proscriptions in Larger Catechism 109, they would surely have needed to have stated this explicitly. Clearly, subsequent generations of Presbyterians understood this to be the intent of the Westminster Assembly, which can be traced in the many sources cited in Dr. VanDrunen's article.

CHRIS COLDWELL ■

***The Sabbath Day and Sabbath Recreations. Continued from Page 238.***

the ministry is a failure to engage the Puritan view of the Sabbath. One is tempted to think that no exegetical or historical work has been done by these candidates. It behooves candidates coming into a confessional church to examine the reasons why the standards say what they say. If they plan to take an exception to the "no recreation" clause, they need to have a better understanding of what Isaiah 58:13–14 mean in the context, and in the overall scope of redemptive history, and not simply argue that "pleasure" means "business," when the context of the passage does not lend itself to this interpretation.

On what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath, there is endless debate, stretching all the way back to Talmudic times (the Talmud has an entire treatise on the Sabbath). Rather

than asking about a specific activity, as to whether or not it is lawful (and usually with the mindset of what the person can get away with), it is more helpful to remember that the rest in view is not simply physical rest, but rather a rest of worshipping the Lord. Therefore, if the activity is conducive to worship, then it is lawful. We cannot ignore the human conscience here either, since an activity that might be conducive for worship to one person may not be conducive to worship for someone else. To take one example, it is certainly wise to let small children let loose some of their excess energy on the Sabbath (contrary to Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Farmer Boy*!). Otherwise, they will not be able to sit still and pay attention in worship. One does not have to take the attitude of Almanzo Wilder's father in order to have a Puritan view of what is acceptable on the Sabbath! It is certainly a work of necessity to do something about the energy of small children. We must avoid both extremes of legalism and antinomianism here, as well as everywhere in our treatment of the law. ■

***Psallo: Psalm 42:1–11. Continued from Page 296.***

of God. In the companion Psalm which follows, he asks for that deliverance which results once again in joining in those public ordinances. In a day when the lightest or slightest things become excuses for missing the public worship of our day, this is indeed a refreshing encouragement not only to be diligent in attendance upon those ordinances, but to count them as the precious gifts that they are from the Lord.

Let us then learn from this "Wisdom Psalm". Let us, with the Psalmist, confess that the Lord is our necessary sustenance, and that we are indeed dried and parched apart from Him. Let us confess that our affections are not as they ought to be, and bewail, and confess our indifference and coldness toward the Lord. Let us also confess that the public ordinances of worship are our necessary food, and turn away from the pietistic notion that we can be content in private and secret worship. Let us prize the Day the Lord has set apart for Himself, and those ordinances by which He communes with us. Let us prepare to meet the Lord week by week, and have a proper sense of anticipation which befits the greatness of His blessing in these signal benefits. Let us long for Him as the thirsty deer long for the valley springs!

TODD L. RUDELL ■

55. And therefore we cannot agree with the points of agreement that McGowan has with Barth on the covenant. McGowan argues that Barth's rejection of the covenant works/grace distinction and denial of the priority of law over grace was a helpful critique of traditional covenant theology. He therefore concludes that to advocate these things is potentially "fatal." However, as for us, it appears to be just the opposite; the preservation of the gospel depends upon the priority of law and the distinction between covenant of works and grace. "Karl Barth," 130.

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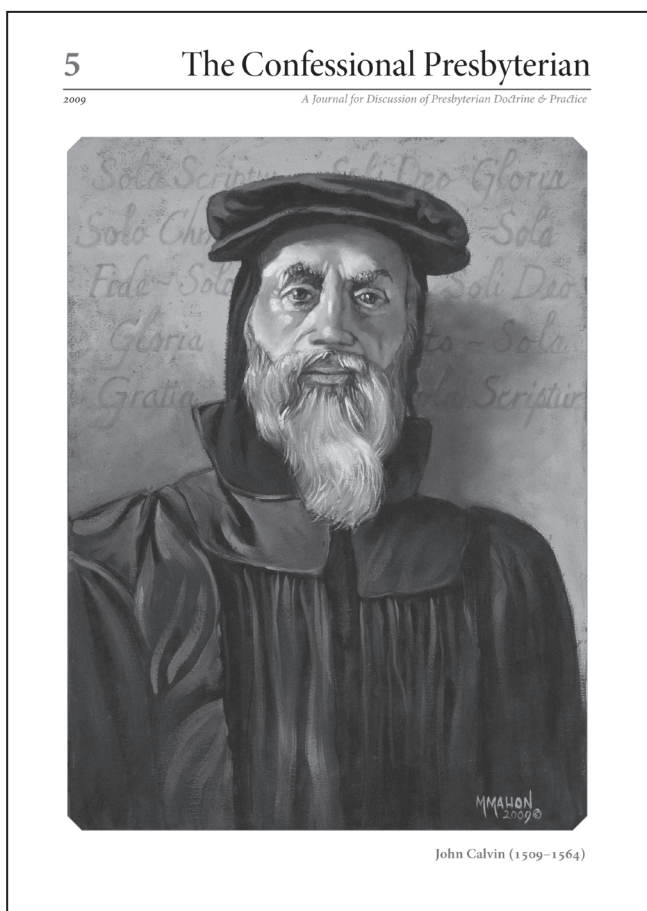
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**Contributing Editors:** Dr. Richard E. Bacon (RPC-Hanover). Dr. Bacon is pastor of the Faith Presbyterian Church, Reformed of Mesquite, Texas. He has written many articles and books, including *What Mean Ye By This Service: Paedocommunion in Light of Passover, The Visible Church & the Outer Darkness*, and *Revealed to Babes: Children in the Worship of God*.

Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, Ph.D. (PCA). Dr. Duncan is Senior Minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Miss. He is the author of numerous articles and books, including, *The Westminster Assembly: A Guide to Basic Bibliography* (with David W. Hall), *A Short History of the Westminster Assembly* (with William Beveridge), and William Cunningham's *An Introduction to Theological Studies* (edited and introduced). He is general editor of the book series, *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*.

John T. Dyck (BPC). John Dyck is the pastor of the Edmonton Bible Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, Alberta. He is also the website manager for the Westminster Shorter Catechism Project ([www.shortercatechism.com](http://www.shortercatechism.com)).

Dr. David W. Hall, Ph.D. Dr. Hall is the Senior Pastor of Midway Presbyterian Church (PCA), Powder Springs, Georgia, and is the author or editor of many books, including *Paradigms in Polity* (1994), *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (1997), *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding* (2003), *Legacy of John Calvin: His Influence on the Modern World* (2008), and *Calvin in the Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights and Civil Liberties* (2009). Dr. Hall has also co-edited with Peter Lillback, *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (2008). He previously served as Pastor of the Covenant Presbyterian Church and the Founding Director of the Kuyper Institute in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

R. Sherman Isbell (FCSC). Mr. Isbell is minister of Westminster Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, Maryland, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), which has a presbytery in North America.

Ray B. Lanning (RPCNA): Mr. Lanning is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia (M.Div., 1977) and served as Student Assistant from 1973–1977 to Dr. James M. Boice, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia. He has served churches in various Presbyterian and Reformed denominations, and presently is minister of the First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Grand Rapids. He is also instructor at Puritan and Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, and editorial assistant to the seminary's president, Dr. Joel R. Beeke. He is the editor, coauthor and author of numerous articles and chapters in books, periodicals and reference books.

John R. Muether (OPC). Mr. Muether is Library Director and Associate Professor of Church History at Reformed

Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. He also serves as the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Thomas G. Reid (RPCNA). Mr. Reid is Assistant Professor, Librarian and Registrar at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh.

Dr. Frank J. Smith. Dr. Smith is author of *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Silver Anniversary Edition*, and co-edited with Dr. David C. Lachman, *Worship in the Presence of God: A collection of essays on the nature, elements, and historic views and practice of worship* (1992). He is Stated Supply of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America mission work in Forsyth County, Georgia.

Wayne Sparkman, M.A.R., M.Div. (PCA). Mr. Sparkman is director of the PCA Historical Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

Alan Strange (OPC). Mr. Strange is Associate Professor of Church History, Theological Librarian, and Registrar for Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and he is Associate Pastor for New Covenant Community Church, New Lenox, Illinois.

C. N. Willborn, Ph.D. (PCA). Dr. Willborn is Adjunct Professor of Historical Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Greenville, South Carolina, and pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

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**General Editor:** Through Naphtali Press, Chris Coldwell has edited and published new editions of classic Presbyterian and Reformed books since 1987. He has focused particularly on the works of James Durham, in an effort to bring all of that Scottish theologian's books back into print with new critical texts. In 2004, as a research associate of the Westminster Assembly Project, Mr. Coldwell completed a draft transcription of the two surviving manuscripts of the Westminster Larger Catechism. This text was refined and published via Westminster Letter Press in 2009. Also in 2009 through Westminster Letter Press, Mr. Coldwell edited the text and provided critical comment for a limited hand-printed broadside edition of the *Solemn League and Covenant*. Other ongoing projects include new editions of the remaining works of James Durham, *Fast Sermons of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly*, and a new critical text of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. The last builds upon the work of Dr. S. W. Carruthers. Chris Coldwell is a member of the Lakewood Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Dallas, Texas. ■