

REVIEWS & RESPONSES

REVIEW: Joseph C. Morecraft, III, *Authentic Christianity: An Exposition of the Theology and Ethics of the Westminster Larger Catechism*, 5 volumes (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, and Minkoff Family Publishing, 2009). xxix+927, 954, 897, 973, 855 pages (4635 pages total). ISBN 978-0-9840641-3-7 (5 Volume set, cloth). \$199.95. Chris Coldwell, *The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly: A Transcription of the Surviving Manuscripts with Notes* (Dallas, TX: Westminster Letter Press, 2009). 140 pages. ISBN 978-0-941075-50-3 (Regular edition, cloth), 978-0-941075-51-0 (Deluxe edition, cloth), 978-0-941075-52-7 (Limited Slipcase edition, cloth). \$65 (Regular edition), \$225 (Deluxe edition), \$750 (Limited Slipcase edition). John R. Bower, *The Larger Catechism: A Critical Text and Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). xii+287 pages. ISBN 978-1-60178-085-0. \$40. Reviewed by Lane Keister.

After a monumental dearth of activity on the Westminster Larger Catechism (the last significant publishing on the Catechism was Johannes Vos's commentary, published in 2002, but written in the late 1940's), a veritable flurry of publishing activity has arisen on this vitally important, but usually neglected, document of the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649), and all in the last two years. Dr. Joseph Morecraft III has published a five-volume commentary on the Catechism (hereafter abbreviated LC). Chris Coldwell has issued a foray into the world of fine book publishing with beautifully deluxe editions of the two manuscripts of the LC. Finally, John Bower has given the world the first fully critical text of the

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1. Joseph Morecraft, III, "An Introduction to Authentic Christianity," unpublished paper, p. 1.

2. The bibliographic information for Vos is given above. For Ridgely, see Thomas Ridgely, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993, from the 1855 edition, and originally published in 1731).

LC. It is unfortunate that all these wonderful publications could not always take one another into account, although, as we will see, there is some helpful interdependence of sources here. Morecraft's work, by virtue of how it arose, could not take into account the work of either Coldwell or Bower; but Coldwell made use of an earlier dissertation form of Bower's work, and Bower, in turn, consulted Coldwell's work. I will examine Morecraft's work first, followed by a comparison and contrast of Coldwell and Bower.

My overall impression of Morecraft's offering is that this is a very impressive and informative (not to mention enormous!) work. It encompasses all the *loci* of systematic theology, and so will certainly be regarded as Morecraft's *magnum opus*. Dr. Morecraft kindly provided to me an additional introduction to the work not included in the work itself, wherein he explains the title: "The reason for its title—Authentic Christianity—is to identify biblical and historical Christianity in its purest human expression in contrast to all the counterfeit and synthetic expressions of the Christian Faith that swirl around us today, deceiving so many."¹ The subtitle helpfully delineates the two main spheres in which the work moves: theology and ethics. The ethics of the Catechism are treated primarily in the exposition of the Ten Commandments, which runs from the end of Volume 3 all the way through Volume 4 and partway into Volume 5.

It is important to mention that Dr. Morecraft is comfortable calling himself a theonomist. However, this should not make anyone hesitate to use this work. Unlike other theonomists I have read, Morecraft is anything but ingrown, only quoting other theonomists. He has greatly increased the usefulness of his work by drawing from most of the major Reformed authors throughout history. *Authentic Christianity* feels much more mainstream Reformed than many other theonomic writings.

Thirdly, a word about how this commentary came about is in order. Morecraft writes that these volumes grew "out of four hundred sermons on the Larger Catechism preached at Chalcedon Presbyterian Church from the early 1990's to mid-2006. I have yet to preach on the second through the tenth commandments at this date in late summer of 2008. (paragraph break, LK) The following chapters were not originally given as lectures in a classroom, but as sermons before a congregation on Sunday evenings" (xxvii–xxviii). Because this commentary arose from catechetical preaching over a period of approximately twenty years, it is an expository rather than a technical commentary.

How does this work compare to those by Vos and Ridgely, the only other commentators on the LC?² *Authentic Christianity* is quite a bit more detailed on the actual text of the LC than either Vos or Ridgely. Morecraft comments on every single phrase in the LC, whereas Vos will often skip phrases

he thinks are clear. Ridgely's work is not actually a phrase-by-phrase commentary on the LC, but rather a body of divinity based on the LC (see its original title). So Morecraft fills a very large gap in the literature on the LC: a comprehensive, phrase-by-phrase commentary that takes into account the proof texts (especially in his treatment of the Ten Commandments, which features a commentary on every proof text). Morecraft takes both Vos and Ridgely into account, in addition to the major commentaries on the Shorter Catechism and the Confession.

Morecraft gives his outline of the LC on pp. 73–99 of Volume 1. He delineates three major sections: questions 1–5 are foundational principles, questions 6–90 are the revelation of God's perfections and works in creation and redemption, and questions 91–196 are the revelation of God's perfect will (see the helpful chart on p. 73). Of these sections, Morecraft spends 119 pages on the first, 2156 pages on the second, and 2215 on the third. In addition to this general outline given in the introduction, each volume is outlined extensively in its table of contents. This reviewer found this feature exceptionally helpful, as it enables the reader to locate a subject quickly. More specific searches can be done using the cd-rom (included with the set), which contains the entire work and serves in the place of indices. Rather than going into great detail on this work, I will attempt to highlight some things from each volume that would be of interest. Any criticisms I have (these are relatively small) I will note as we go along.

The first volume contains an introduction by William Potter (of whom Dr. Morecraft spoke very highly to me in terms of his knowledge of church history) on why the LC is important. He mentions that "every Christian has a creed" (p. xxiii.). He quotes Thomas Watson, who said that "one reason why there has been no more good done by preaching, has been because the chief heads and articles in religion have not been explained in a catechetical way" (p. xxv). This is a good argument for at least using the LC in church, regardless of whether a preacher agrees that one ought to preach on it.

Morecraft gives a very detailed history of the Westminster Assembly. It should be noted that this history is not designed to be neutral history writing. Rather, it is intended to show the believer why he should study the LC. The impact of the LC on the family, the individual, and on society is noted. One could have wished for slightly more than two lines on how the LC can function as an evangelistic tool, a rather intriguing idea (p. 15). But even a five-volume commentary on the LC cannot address everything!

While he does not place the LC on the same authoritative level as the Bible, Morecraft nevertheless makes the salutary emphasis, often forgotten or ignored today, that "the Church's creed may not be separated from the Bible. The Bible is the inerrant truth of God, the Church's creeds, confessions and catechisms are the accepted interpretations of that Divine truth.

The Bible is interpreted by the confession and catechisms of the church. The real standard is not the confession or the catechisms but the Bible as interpreted by the confession and catechisms" (emphasis original, p. 17). He draws an analogy between the creeds and sermons, concluding that the "confession is no more guilty of adding to the Word of God than the sermon" (pp. 17–18). What follows is a history of the Westminster Assembly that gave rise to the LC (pp. 18–59). One can detect a hint of theonomy here and there in Morecraft's account, although this does not diminish the helpfulness of this section in setting the LC in its historical context.

Volume 1 examines the following areas of doctrine: the ultimate purpose of man, divine revelation, the perfections and trinitarian nature of God, the plan of God, angels, creation, providence, the covenant of works, sin, the covenant of grace, and the Holy Spirit.

The commentary is very helpful on the first question of the LC, noting that our purpose in life has a much more elevated and comprehensive scope than merely the *locus* of salvation. If we start with the question of salvation, "we place ourselves in danger of assuming that God exists for our benefit" (p. 116). He also notes that the first question presupposes God's revelation to humanity (p. 118). The glorifying of God is what leads to the enjoying of God as a means to an end (p. 117, quoting Alexander Paterson). The two clauses of the answer to question 1 can also be explained this way: "Our ultimate purpose with reference to God is to glorify Him. Our ultimate purpose with reference to ourselves is to enjoy God" (p. 130).

Questions 2–5 have to do with the concept of revelation, a doctrine that Morecraft spends a great deal of time and care explaining. This is especially timely today, given the recent attacks on the biblical doctrine by those who call themselves evangelical. His treatment is vanilla Reformed theology, though insightful. He especially stresses the sufficiency of special revelation in the Word (rejecting continuing revelation). His treatment of the canon in relation to the church could have been expanded in the light of Roman Catholicism (p. 198), although he points in the right direction (especially by referencing William Whitaker, whose *Disputations* on the subject every minister needs to read), and he provides an appendix addressing some of the points of controversy between the Reformation and Roman Catholicism on the doctrine of Scripture (pp. 207–234). He ties faith in God to belief in the Word in a helpful way: "*Our faith in the Bible is inseparable from our faith in Jesus Christ. The faith that receives Christ is the same faith that receives the Word of Christ. Believing in Christ is inseparable from believing Christ*" (emphasis original, p. 199).

Morecraft offers some very helpful insights on the nature of the covenant of works. After briefly explaining the three mandates of the covenant of works (dominion, marriage, and Sabbath), he explains the nature of this covenant. He prefers

the term “covenant of life,” though he does not reject the idea of works. He plainly says that “Adam was placed in a position in which he might have secured everlasting life by obedience” (p. 633). However, Morecraft also wants to distance himself from the Klinean position, and so he argues that “*The reward promised to Adam’s obedience was far more generous than his obedience deserved*” (p. 632, emphasis original). In fact, Morecraft partially overstates his case when he says that “even the Covenant of Life, commonly called the Covenant of Works, is a covenant of Divine grace” (p. 634). The Westminster Standards prefer the term “voluntary condescension” (WCF 7). Even so, Morecraft has preserved the understanding that the means of justification is by works in the covenant of works, and by faith in the covenant of grace (with Christ having earned our salvation, as he says on p. 640). He ably explains the necessity for *justification* and *representation* in the covenant of works. He says that the former is “probation limited by time,” while the latter is “probation limited as to persons” (pp. 630–631). Otherwise, *all* humanity would be in a state of probation, and every human being would be on probation *forever*, which would not be consistent with the goodness of God. These two factors operate in the life of Christ, who “*has accomplished for us the same blessings (same in kind, greater in degree), which Adam would have accomplished for his posterity had he passed the test*” (p. 633, emphasis original).

In the last appendix in Volume 1, Morecraft turns his attention to the Federal Vision controversy and the New Perspective(s) on Paul (pp. 884–927). This is a very helpful treatment in general. It is marred by one small problem, which is that the benefits the FV claims belong to those who eventually fall away are not said by the FV to be the same (qualitatively speaking) as those enjoyed by the elect. This does not affect the cogency of his arguments, as the difference between what Morecraft believes about the FV and what I believe about the FV is rather inconsequential. FV proponents have never been able to identify what the qualitative difference is between the benefits that the elect enjoy and the benefits the non-elect enjoy. The best they have come up with is a qualitative difference based on whether the set of benefits perseveres or not. However, as was said, Morecraft’s understanding of the FV’s teaching about these benefits does not impair his arguments against the position. He makes several points in connection with this controversy that I have not seen before. He notes that “union with Christ involves a reciprocal action” (p. 894). This would preclude union with Christ happening at baptism, since the union has to be “consummated on both sides” (Dabney’s expression, quoted on the same page). Also, in relation to Titus 3:5, a much debated text in the controversy, he argues that “Some adherents of this new view of the objectivity of the covenant use Titus 3:5 to support ‘baptismal regeneration’ because it speaks of ‘the washing of regeneration.’ However,

in order for their interpretation to ‘hold water,’ it would have to say ‘the regeneration of washing,’ presuming that ‘washing’ refers to baptism” (footnote 58 on p. 904).

However, this reviewer cannot agree with Herman Hoeksema’s definition of covenant, which denies that it is an agreement between two parties, and argues instead that covenant is relationship. Morecraft appears to agree with Hoeksema on this point, while issuing the caveat that he does not agree with those views of Hoeksema that are distinctive to the Protestant Reformed Church (p. 913).

In Volume 2, Morecraft treats the doctrines of the Mediator, redemption accomplished and applied, the church, union and communion with Christ, and justification. His discussion of justification by faith alone (pp. 719–954) is worth highlighting. It is fuller than many treatises on the subject. He states, “You and I are not what we *think* we are, nor what we *say* we are, nor what we are even *convinced* we are. WE ARE WHAT GOD SAYS WE ARE” (emphasis and caps original, p. 722). This fact underlines the importance of the declaration of God in justification, since it is His declaration regarding our state that makes us what He declares us to be. Furthermore, Morecraft’s statement concerning the relationship of God’s declaration to our actual state underlies his entire discussion of the doctrine.

This reviewer is not convinced that Morecraft expressed himself in the clearest way possible with regard to the dispute with Rome. He says that “Roman Catholicism emphatically rejects the doctrine that the righteousness of Christ is the righteousness imputed in justification” (p. 745). While it is certainly true that they reject the doctrine of imputation, Rome does not reject the idea of Christ’s righteousness becoming ours. I would phrase it this way: both Rome and the Reformation believed that we obtain Christ’s righteousness (although whether that alone is sufficient for justification is of course another subject of debate between the two parties). The difference is that Rome believes we get Christ’s righteousness through infusion, thus producing in us works of righteousness, which, together with the infused righteousness of Christ, results in our justification on the final day. The Protestant view is that the righteousness of Christ becomes ours by imputation, and is not mixed with our works in any way, shape or form, and that justification happens at the time-point of faith, not on the last day. Morecraft would, of course, agree with all this (and indeed he states these doctrinal elements elsewhere, even hinting at them immediately after making the above statement). It is a mere lack of clarity here that I point out.

Morecraft approves of the idea of Christ’s active and passive righteousness being imputed to the believer, although he argues that the “language can be misleading” (p. 758). As Dabney points out (quoted on pp. 758–759), it is not so easy to separate out the strands of what is active and what is passive, given that Christ was actively engaged in His suffering,

and that His active obedience to the law involved a passive acceptance of suffering.

Morecraft is careful to distinguish between the instrument of justification (faith) and the cause and basis of justification (Christ's blood and righteousness, see pp. 770–771). This careful distinction makes it easy to contrast the Reformed position with that of Rome, which teaches that baptism is the primary instrumental cause, and penance the secondary instrumental cause (p. 779).

The age-old difficulty of situating Pauline theology of justification next to the statements in James 2 is something Morecraft addresses helpfully in the context of Roman Catholic objections to the doctrine (pp. 781ff). He uses the standard two-fold definition of “justify” to help us understand the difference: Paul is talking about the *declaration* of God concerning the state of the believer, while James is speaking of the *demonstration* of true faith (p. 784). Paul is arguing against legalism, while James is arguing against antinomianism (p. 83). Morecraft offers exegesis of many passages to support the Reformed doctrine of justification, including Romans 4, James 2, Romans 3:19–31, and Galatians 2:15–3:14 (the last named passage in direct opposition to and dialog with the New Perspective(s) on Paul).

Volume 3 treats adoption, repentance, sanctification, preservation of the saints, assurance, communion in glory with Christ, biblical law, the Decalogue in general, and the first commandment (Volume 4 continues the exposition of the Ten Commandments).

Readers will want to know at this point how Morecraft approaches the subject of law. He does argue for the continuing validity of OT case law for today (pp. 626ff), although this claim receives some nuance later on, as he grants that “the case-laws are to be applied wisely and progressively as the historical situation allows” (p. 640). He is careful to exclude the ceremonial laws from consideration, although he does say that even the ceremonial laws have “underlying gospel-principles” (p. 626), surely something with which all can agree. Some of the ‘theonomists’ named here will raise a few eyebrows. This reviewer is not convinced that Morecraft has distinguished carefully enough between people who think that modern societies should govern themselves in accordance with the Ten Commandments (but not according to the theocratic case law of the OT), and people who think that the case law of the OT still applies as well. I am also not convinced that the former class of thinkers can be used in support of the latter. For instance, he says that the validity of case-laws continues today, and quotes R.C. Sproul as an example of a theonomist (p. 640). Sproul does use the word “theonomy” (see the quotation on p. 640), but only in the broader sense of adhering to God's law (by which Sproul means the Ten Commandments), not man's

law. Sproul would not agree with theonomists who hold that the case-law of the OT applies today.³

Morecraft's reading of WCF 19.4 is evidence of differing interpretations of the phrase “general equity.”⁴ Theonomists, Morecraft included, tend to define general equity as including all the case-law of the OT (though they may sometimes state this in a more nuanced fashion). Morecraft quotes Bahnsen at this point, who says that general equity refers to “the underlying moral principle which is illustrated by the particular cases mentioned in the judicial laws” (p. 629). Bahnsen further states that “[e]xpired’ cannot mean, in Confessional context, that modern Christians are free from obligation to the judicial laws.... Their equity was taken to be perpetually binding” If this is true, then the word “expired” is incorrect in the Confession, and the phrase “do not require of us any further obligation than the general equity thereof may require” has no meaning. The plain intent of the phrase is to limit the applicability of the case-laws to the principle of general equity, which must, in turn, be narrower than the judicial law itself. In fact, the general equity must be tied to the moral law.⁵

With this caveat in mind, Morecraft's treatment of the Ten Commandments is still masterful and helpful, and those who are non-theonomic would be foolish to ignore his insights. One of the most helpful features of his treatment is his exegesis of every phrase of the LC questions, and also of every single proof text the divines attached to the questions.

Volume 4 is an exposition of the second through ninth commandments. Since every phrase is listed in the table of contents, as is the location of the beginning of the treatment of each question, it is a very simple thing to find his discussion on any given point. As some of his treatments are exceedingly lengthy (the second commandment alone is 238 pages!), this is an added boon.

On the second commandment, Morecraft is thoroughly confessional, arguing against images of any person of the Trinity, even mental images. His thoughts on mental images are helpful: “Mental pictures of images of God are idolatrous. God is to be perceived in His perfections and works, not in terms

3. For confirmation of this interpretation of Sproul, see Sproul's own careful distinctions in *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2007), vol 2, pp. 266–267.

4. The best treatment of this phrase is now that of Chris Coldwell and Matthew Winzer, “The Westminster Assembly & the Judicial Law: A Chronological Compilation and Analysis,” in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 5 (2009), pp. 3–88, especially pp. 70–72. Chris Coldwell wrote the chronological compilation, and Matthew Winzer wrote the analysis.

5. Cf. Matthew Winzer, who says, “general equity is connected in a specific way to the moral law of the ten commandments” (p. 69). Winzer's conclusions are easily proven from the original sources he quotes, thus showing that this was the general view of the Westminster divines.

of a specific form or shape, even mentally” (p. 130). He argues for the regulative principle of worship in its standard form, although this reviewer was somewhat disappointed not to find any treatment of Psalms and instruments. He rejects all holy days (including Christmas and Easter) except the Sabbath.

His treatment of the Sabbath Day is also right in line with the Puritan understanding of the fourth commandment. He argues, as do the Puritans, that “in light of the change of day in the New Testament from the seventh to the first day, that the fourth commandment does not speak of the seventh day ‘of the week,’ but of the seventh day of a rhythmic cycle, beginning at creation, after six days of working” (p. 462). In arguing for the abiding nature of the fourth commandment, he argues that no ceremonial ritual carried with it a capital punishment, unlike the breaking of the Sabbath, which shows the Sabbath to be abiding in nature. He writes, “If God has abolished the Sabbath principle, the era of the New Testament is less blessed than the era of the Old Testament!” (p. 464). The Sabbath has changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week, based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (pp. 466–473). He includes some careful exegesis of Hebrews 4 (pp. 478–479), and answers objections to this doctrine (pp. 480–491). He takes no exception to the “no recreation” clause either, and his interpretation of Isaiah 58:13–14 is very similar to mine.⁶ Morecraft does not forget to inspire us to appreciate the Sabbath in its Puritan rigor as freeing, not inhibiting. The quote from Alexander Whyte is helpful here: “Wear off by meditation [on Christ] any worldly soil contracted in the week” (quoted on p. 498). Furthermore, Morecraft makes the important connection between rest and worship (p. 499).

Volume 5 finishes the treatment of the Ten Commandments, and also examines man’s inability to save himself, the saving power of the reading and preaching of God’s Word (summarized below), the Sacraments (262 pages), and prayer, including the Lord’s Prayer (his treatment of the Lord’s Prayer is about 250 pages).

Morecraft has a high and exalted view of the preaching of the Word of God, in line with the Reformers, and not so much in line with many modern opinions concerning preaching, which often regard it as out of date and irrelevant. He starts his treatment (pp.155–222) with the importance of a true understanding of sin, for without such an understanding, a true appreciation of the need for preaching is impossible (p. 158). From there, he emphasizes the significance of the connection of Word and Spirit (pp. 161–162). Later on, he will say that

6. See Lane Keister, “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,” in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 5 (2009), pp. 229–238.

the preaching of the Word is the Word, but only if the Spirit is working (p. 215). In this way he exalts preaching, and yet puts safeguards in place lest the preacher think too highly of himself. He is but the emissary. Unless the Spirit should anoint his preaching, it is but empty words. The application of the preached word is very helpfully explained (pp. 172–173). The most helpful section of all is his exposition of question 160, where he spells out how people are to prepare to listen to the Word preached, as well as how to use the preached Word. We must be diligent in listening to good preaching, prepare ourselves to hear it, listen prayerfully, examine what is preached, receive the truth with faith, hear it with love, meekness, and readiness of mind, meditate on the preached Word, converse about the preached Word, hide it in our hearts, and bring forth the fruit of the preached Word in our lives. When the Holy Spirit works in the Word, a weapon of indescribable power comes into being, one that destroys sin and strongholds erected against the gospel.

In conclusion, Morecraft’s set is an exhaustive commentary on the Larger Catechism. This reviewer had, in fact, been contemplating writing a commentary of similar scope and depth, given that nothing of the kind had ever been written before. I will refrain from embarking on this project and will instead make grateful use of Joseph Morecraft’s labor of love, and will recommend it to pastors and students of the Word, who wish to have an excellent explanation of every phrase of the Larger Catechism. Even when disagreeing with Morecraft’s conclusions, as I did on occasion, I did not feel that the usefulness and magnificence of the accomplishment was in any way diminished. There is much profitable gold here to be mined.

Chris Coldwell has long been working on projects relating to the Westminster Assembly. He has now combined that passion with another passion of his, namely, fine book-binding and production, in order to produce heirloom quality transcriptions of the two surviving manuscripts of the Larger Catechism. Coldwell used the Rialto typeface family and the letter press method on Mohawk Superfine paper to produce these editions. The Authors’ edition of ten numbered copies sold out quickly. The other three editions will be reviewed here. The text is the same in all three editions.

The binding on all three editions is in signatures with durable boards. The regular edition is bound in archival quality boards, while the deluxe edition has the feel of silk moire sheets. The limited slipcase is similar to the deluxe, except that it has a quarter leather spine, as well as a slipcase made of the same silk moire boards as the deluxe edition. The binding is a rich emerald green, with brown leather also, in the case of the slipcase edition.

The foreword is by J. Ligon Duncan, III. He gives some helpful bibliographical information on recent scholarship on

the LC, as well as some thoughts on the importance of the LC for today. He writes:

[T]he *Larger Catechism* provides a helpful complement to the *Shorter Catechism* in its stress on the public and ordinary means of grace, and the doctrine of the church. Interestingly, the *Larger Catechism* also more closely approximates the proportions of Calvin's *Genevan Catechism* (than either the *Heidelberg Catechism* or the *Shorter Catechism*) in its treatment of the person and work of Christ, and the law of God, and exceeds it in questions pertaining to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the church. It also in many instances confirms or makes clear the full intent of the Divines on topics also covered in the *Confession of Faith*. This is why in interpreting the Assembly's intent, all their productions must be consulted and treated as a whole, rather than looking at each in a vacuum without regard to one another (pp. viii–ix).

We may ask why these manuscripts have been printed. For one thing, they have never been transcribed before the work of Coldwell and Bower. Indeed, they were only recently rediscovered. Secondly, they are important in the establishment of a critical text of the Larger Catechism, which has also not been done until recently (see below on the work of Bower).

The text is based on the two surviving manuscripts of the Larger Catechism, found in the Bodleian library by Chad Van Dixhoorn. They are called manuscripts A and B, and the text is printed with one manuscript on each facing page in a parallel fashion. A second foreword by Chad Van Dixhoorn tells us the exciting story of how he rediscovered these manuscripts in the Bodleian library at Oxford University in “the winter of 2002, or perhaps the autumn of 2001” (p. xi). The discovery of these manuscripts led to his recommendation to Chris Coldwell that he produce a transcription, with this production being the result. Van Dixhoorn commends this production as “carefully produced” (p. xvi).

In the introduction, Coldwell explains the provenance and historical context of the manuscripts. He argues that there “were probably at least as many as four official manuscript copies” (p. xviii). The Assembly retained a copy that was distinct from the two they sent to Parliament (presumably one to the House of Lords, and the other to the House of Commons). He writes that “where the two differ, the printed text sometimes follows one, and sometimes the other, which may indicate the existence of this Assembly master copy, unmarred by the unique variants in each copy not appearing in print” (ibid.). Coldwell also explains the relationship of his work to that of Bower: “Mr. Bower is working to refine his work for publication, for which he has gone back to the originals. Such work may well clear up a few issues of punctuation raised in the notes of this present work: for example, evaluating what

may be discolorations in the original, and what may be inks of a different color or by a different hand” (p. xix). Further on he says, “Since, at this writing, Mr. Bower's thesis contains the only other text work on the catechism MSS, these differences and notations on what I consider may be errors in his text, have been given in the footnotes” (p. xx). Coldwell has thus been able to supplement and correct Bower's original thesis, and the results are evident in Bower's published work (see below).

Holding Coldwell's beautiful productions in my hands feels like holding history in all its splendor. My favorite version is the deluxe edition with the feel of silk moire. Seeing the original punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and grammar helps me to feel more connected to the tremendous heritage that all adherents to the Westminster Standards possess. These productions are heirlooms to help people pass on the heritage of the Westminster Standards to their children and grandchildren. Highly recommended!

In comparing the work of Coldwell to Bower, we must notice one odd thing from the start: the name of the manuscripts is reversed going from Coldwell to Bower. To be clear, manuscript A in Coldwell is manuscript B in Bower, and manuscript B in Coldwell is manuscript A in Bower. Bower explains his reasons for doing this: “The order of the manuscripts used here is reversed from Coldwell arising from an earlier form of this critical edition, as well as the order of their appearance in Nalson 22” (footnote 3, p. 47). Nalson 22 is the name of the folio which is the provenance of these manuscripts in the Bodleian Library. Bower describes Coldwell's work in general as follows:

A transcription of the two manuscripts has been recently published in a letter press edition by Christopher Coldwell, *The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly* (Dallas: Westminster Letter Press, 2009). Coldwell's work on the Larger Catechism and its manuscripts is also discussed in Coldwell “Examining the Work of S.W. Carruthers: Justifying a Critical Approach to the Text of the Westminster Standards & Correcting the 18th Century Lineage of the Traditional Scottish Text,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005): 43–64. While very accurate, Coldwell's transcriptions relied on manuscript facsimiles. For the purposes of this critical text the manuscript transcriptions (sic) are new and collated with the original documents at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The manuscript designation used here follows the order of their folio numbering and appearance in Nalson MSS 22 and is reversed (sic, “reversed”) from Coldwell's order.

This reviewer carefully compared the texts of the manuscripts in both Coldwell and Bower. Almost all of the differences between Coldwell and Bower had to do with

capitalization of words (difficult to discern even in the best of circumstances). Furthermore, in almost every instance where Coldwell had noted an error in Bower's original thesis, Bower had corrected the error for publication. This is due, however, not only to Bower's use of Coldwell, but also Bower's continual recourse to the original manuscripts, access to which Coldwell, unfortunately, did not have.

Bower's work is surely salutary in its production, at last, of a critical text of the Larger Catechism, the first ever to be produced. The critical edition is, mercifully, printed with the proof texts, although these are not printed out in full, but only by reference. The critical edition retains the spelling, punctuation and grammar of the originals.

Regarding the question of authoritative published texts of the Larger Catechism, Bower's opinion is that only editions 1 and 4 (1647 and 1648, respectively) are acceptable as authoritative editions. His criteria are clear: "Designating a text as authoritative requires strong circumstantial evidence that the Assembly scribes were involved in its production" (p. 51). These two authoritative editions are then reproduced in parallel with the two manuscripts for the reader to compare.

Included in this edition is a substantial history of the making of the Larger Catechism (pp. 3–45). This information is exceptionally valuable in putting the work in its historical context. It should be noted that this work is the first published volume in a new series being edited by Bower and Van Dixhoorn, entitled "Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly." Their aim is to produce critical texts of the WCF, WLC, WSC, the Directory for Public Worship, the Directory for Church Government, and the Psalter. These texts will not be included in Van Dixhoorn's publication of the minutes of the Westminster Assembly (to be published by Oxford University Press).

This reviewer has only two small criticisms of the work. Firstly, there are a number of typos, two of which were noted in the same footnote above. These typos fortunately do not create any serious confusion anywhere, although it is to be

hoped that more careful editing will prevent future errors, especially in a work designed to be a definitive critical edition of the work in question. Secondly, an index of names would perhaps have helped increase the usefulness of the work.

However, these shortcomings do nothing to hinder the timely influence of this work. This text should be used by the church to create a new edition that will be adopted by Presbyterian churches. I would like to see Bower's text used as the basis for a new edition that would have modernized spelling and the proof texts written out in full. Until then, this critical text should be the basis for all future scholarship on the Larger Catechism. Bower is to be commended for his work. ■

REVIEW: Jay E. Adams, *Keeping the Sabbath Today?* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2008). Paperback, 103 pages. ISBN 978-1-889032-61-0. \$13.99. Reviewed by W. Gary Crampton, Ph.D.

Jay Edward Adams was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1929. He received his formal training in Christian theism at Johns Hopkins University (AB), Reformed Episcopal Seminary (B.D.), Pittsburgh-Xenia Seminary, Temple University School of Theology (M.ST.), and the University of Missouri (Ph.D.). He has pastored several churches and taught at Westminster Theological Seminary. He was the founder of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation in Philadelphia, the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors, and Timeless Texts (which now publishes his writings). Dr. Adams is a distinguished scholar, author, and speaker, who has written and lectured extensively on biblical, "nouthetic" counseling as well as a number of other subjects. He is unapologetically devoted to defending the Reformed faith against all gainsayers. The present reviewer has profited immensely from Dr. Adams' theological labors, through reading many of his books and listening to numbers of his taped lectures.

It is with this in view that the present reviewer finds it somewhat extraordinary that Jay Adams has written *Keeping The Sabbath Today?*,¹ a book in which the author takes a stance outside of the confessional Reformed faith. In this review/essay *Keeping The Sabbath Today?* will be used as a foil, as well as a springboard alongside of the Westminster Standards,² the subordinate standards (allegedly) adhered to by Reformed Presbyterians such as Dr. Adams, to study the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath.

In the year 1853 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA declared that "A church without the Sabbath is apostate."³ Modern day theologian Robert Reymond refers to the Sabbath as one of those "lines in the sand that strengthen the church," wherein neglect of the Sabbath is seen as perilous.⁴ The Sabbath intended by both the nineteenth century Presbyterian Church and Professor Reymond is the

1. Jay E. Adams, *Keeping The Sabbath Today?* (Stanley, South Carolina: Timeless Texts, 2008). The pagination found within the body of this review is from Dr. Adams' book.

2. All references to the Westminster Standards, comprised of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, along with the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*, are from *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994). The English has been modernized.

3. Cited in Ryan M. McGraw, "Jay E. Adams, *Keeping the Sabbath Today?*," *Puritan Reformed Journal*, edited by Joel R. Beeke (July 2009), Volume 1, Number 2, 275. Mr. McGraw's analysis of Jay Adams' book has been very helpful to the present reviewer.

4. Robert L. Reymond, "Lord's Day Observance: Mankind's Proper Response to the Fourth Commandment," in *Contending For the Faith: Lines in the Sand That Strengthen the Church* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 165–186.

one expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21:7–8) as follows:

As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding on all men, in all ages, He has particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture is called the Lord's Day, and is to continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

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.

The essence of the Puritan teaching on the Lord's Day taught in the *Confession* is summed up by Patrick Collinson as follows:

[It] was the conviction that the Fourth Commandment is a perpetual moral law originating with creation in Genesis 2, predating the Mosaic law. Recognition of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath was reputed to be of divine and apostolic appointment, not church tradition. Observing the Lord's Day as a Sabbath Day entailed the conviction that the entire day should be set aside for the public and private exercise of religion, with no time devoted to labor, idleness, or recreation.⁵

This Puritan view of the Sabbath is what Jay Adams seeks to refute in *Keeping the Sabbath Today?* He claims John Calvin's view of the Sabbath as "essentially that which I espouse" (x). But in this book he shows that this is not the case. He goes far beyond Calvin. Dr. Adams is not merely attempting to tell his readers "how" they should keep the Sabbath; he is telling them that in the New Testament age, keeping the Sabbath is not a necessity at all. *Keeping the Sabbath Today?* consists of an "Introduction," followed by twenty-one chapters, each of which denies the teachings of the Reformed faith regarding the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath. The chapters will be studied *seriatim*.

In the "Introduction" (vii–xi), the author assures the reader that he has written this book "with some trepidation," with full knowledge that he is going against the grain of Reformed

thought as set forth in the Westminster Standards. Dr. Adams has "throughout the years . . . devoured every book about the Sabbath that he could get [his] hands on," hoping to find a way to adopt the Puritan view of the Lord's Day. Time and time again his hopes were "dashed." The result of his search to find the truth concerning the Sabbath Question is *Keeping the Sabbath Today?*

In chapter one (1–4), "Why Some Do Not Observe the Sabbath," the author adduces Romans 14 and Colossians 2 to aver that the Sabbath is a Jewish holy day which is no longer a part of the New Testament community. He believes that Romans 14:5 ("One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind") in particular has to do with the abrogation of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was an Old Testament "shadow" which has passed away. "The Christian is no more obligated to keep the Sabbath than to observe the Feast of the New Moon."

Certainly this is not the view of mainline Reformed thought. Matthew Henry, for example, comments that the "one day" being spoken of in Romans 14:5 is not the Sabbath. Paul is speaking about the special Jewish days, such as "Passover, Pentecost, new moons, and [the] feast of tabernacles," days that are no longer of religious significance since the coming of Christ and the New Covenant age.⁶ John Murray is in agreement. In an Appendix to his commentary on the book of Romans, Murray deals specifically with this verse. He concludes that Romans 14:5 should not be understood as if Paul were speaking about the weekly Sabbath; rather, the verse should "be regarded as referring to the ceremonial holy days of the Levitical institution," which are "clearly abrogated in the New Testament."⁷ And John Calvin, whose view Adams claims to endorse, comments that what Paul is speaking about in this verse has to do with the "days" which "arose from Judaism."⁸

As to Colossians 2:16–17 ("Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival of a new moon, or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ"), Adams is convinced that the "sabbaths" being spoken of has reference to the Jewish weekly Sabbath. Therefore, with the coming of Christ the Sabbath has passed away. William Hendriksen correctly comments, though, that what Paul is referring to in these two verses is

5. Cited in Wayne Rogers, "The Recovery of the Lord's Day," *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (Issue 2, 2010), 18.

6. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), VI:473.

7. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968, 1980), II:257–259.

8. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Volumes I–XXII (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), *Commentary on Romans* 14:5.

the Jewish abuses of the Old Testament laws; the Jews were quick “to impose restrictions in connection with festivals ... new moon ... and Sabbath.” There was “a distinctly ascetic tendency” that was part and parcel of the “Jewish aspect of the Colossian heresy,” and this is what Paul is denouncing, not the Sabbath itself.⁹ Jonathan Edwards also believed that these verses have to do with the Jewish “holy days,” not the weekly Sabbath, which is to continue in the New Testament age.¹⁰ John Calvin is cited again to confirm that in Colossians 2:16–17 the apostle is addressing “the observances of rites” which the Jews practiced, “which Christ has by His death abolished.”¹¹

Chapter two (5–11), “Wasn’t the Day Changed?,” and chapter three (13–16), “A Code Dissembled,” both argue that the Sabbath in the New Testament era was not changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day (the biblical evidence for a change of days will be studied below). We are assured of three things in particular: 1) there is no biblical evidence of a Sabbath institution prior to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai; 2) the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance; and 3) in the New age the Decalogue in its entirety is irrelevant. In each case he is in error.

Adams’s assertion that there is no biblical evidence of a Sabbath institution prior to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai is preposterous.¹² It is patently clear that when Jesus Christ says that “the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27), He is referring to the original creation week, when both man and the Sabbath were “made.” In Hebrews 4, where the author deals with the subject of Sabbath rest, we also have a clear teaching that he refers to the Sabbath as a creation ordinance when he states “for He [God] has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’”

(verse 4). Both of these New Testament passages point to the fact that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance.¹³

When Dr. Adams denies that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance he again differs with John Calvin.¹⁴ He also differs with the Westminster Standards and Reformed theology in general. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (19:1–2) claims that the law which “God gave to Adam” in the Garden of Eden, “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 tablets.” The *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Q. 120) teaches that one of the reasons that the Fourth Commandment is to be kept as a Sabbath day is from “the example of God, who in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day ... wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Then too, says the *Catechism* (Q. 121), “the word *remember* is set at the beginning of the Fourth Commandment [Exodus 20:8], partly ... to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption [Genesis 2:2–3].”

Matthew Poole also recognized that the word “remember” in Exodus 20:11 at the beginning of the Fourth Commandment has to do with the fact that the Sabbath commandment is rooted in God’s work of creation: “The word remember is here emphatical.... It reminds us of a former delivery of the substance of this command, to wit, Genesis 2:3.”¹⁵ And John Murray insisted that “the Sabbath institution is a creation ordinance. It did not begin to have relevance at Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given to Moses on two tablets.”¹⁶ Finally, Scripture itself teaches that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance in Exodus 31:16–17, where we read “Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.” Then to show the Israelites how this Sabbath day is related to God’s creation ordinance, the passage continues: “It [the Sabbath] is a sign between Me [God] and the children of Israel forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.” It would seem that the overwhelming weight of biblical evidence is that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance.

Further, the word “remember” at the beginning of the Fourth Commandment points to an earlier Sabbath keeping of the Israelites, such as is found in Exodus 16. Commenting on this chapter Calvin taught that the “Sabbath” was practiced by the Israelites prior to the law-giving at Mount Sinai. He wrote: “Thus the seventh day [Sabbath] was really hallowed before the promulgation of the law [Sinai].”¹⁷ Jonathan Edwards agreed with the Geneva Reformer. He wrote: “This expression, ‘remember the Sabbath,’ probably was the rather used because this was not the first institution of the Sabbath. It had been too much forgotten, especially while the children

9. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1964, 1979), 123.

10. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 24, *The “Blank Bible”* edited by Stephen J. Stein (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 1114.

11. Calvin, *Commentary on Colossians 2:16–17*.

12. Later in the book the author seems to contradict himself when he refers to the Exodus 16 “manna incident” as a “preview Sabbath” (89–90).

13. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Biblical Perspectives, 1985, 1990), 42–46.

14. Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis 2:3*. See Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1998, 2008), 31, 141.

15. Matthew Poole, *Matthew Poole’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Mc Clean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 1:158.

16. John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), II:257–258.

17. Calvin, *Commentary on Exodus 16:5*.

of Israel were in Egypt. The Sabbath had also been renewedly commanded (Exodus 16). God here charges them to take notice of His institution of the Sabbath, and not to forget it, as they formerly had done.”¹⁸

Then too, in Genesis 4:3–4 we read that Cain and Abel came to offer sacrifices to God “in the process of time.” The literal rendering of verse 3 is, “at the end of days.” The brothers brought their sacrifices to God “at the end of days.” The question is, at the end of what days? It is likely, as expressed by Matthew Poole, that the words refer to “the end of the days of the week, or upon the seventh and last day of the week, Saturday, which then was the Sabbath Day, which before this time was blessed and sanctified (Genesis 2:3)” by God.¹⁹

The author employs another line of reasoning in chapter two to support his supposition that the Sabbath was not practiced before Sinai, which he refers to as the “failure to reprimand” (10–11). The argument is that since God did not reprimand the Jews (or the Gentiles) for not keeping the Sabbath prior to Sinai, then *ipso facto* the Sabbath was not in force prior to Exodus 20. This is a logical fallacy. The fact that God did not reprimand persons for not keeping a particular law during a particular time period does not (necessarily) imply that the law was not in force. As stated by Ryan McGraw, in *reductio absurdum* fashion, neither did God reprimand people for polygamy during much of the Old Testament period, but this does not mean that it was not a violation of His precepts. As Christ teaches in Matthew 19, from as early as Genesis 1–2 marriage was to be a monogamous relationship between one man and one woman.²⁰

Moreover, Adams’s teaching found in this chapter that we may set aside any Old Testament teaching unless it is repeated in the New is an exegetical principle found in New Covenant Theology²¹ and Dispensationalism,²² two systems of belief that are radically opposed to the Reformed, covenantal system set forth in the Westminster Standards. As Walter Chantry correctly comments, “Dispensationalism” maintains “that a Christian may dismiss any Old Testament teaching or commandment unless it is also repeated in the New Testament. A more unsound principle for interpreting the Bible cannot be imagined.”²³ And sadly this is the “principle for interpreting the Bible” adopted at this point for Jay Adams (more on this below).

Chapter four (17–21) is titled “But a Sabbath Remains: Christians Must Keep the Sabbath.” In this chapter the author contends that Hebrews 3–4 assert that the only Christian Sabbath that remains is the heavenly rest that was won for the people of God by the cross work of Jesus Christ. “In these chapters [Hebrews 3–4],” writes Adams, “there is no command to observe an earthly, weekly Sabbath. Something far greater is in view. This rest is the ‘homeland’—‘the heavenly one’—that is better than the land of Canaan.”

What shall we say to this argument? First, Dr. Adams is correct that Hebrews 3–4 do speak of the heavenly rest that the saints have already entered into, in seminal form. But, second, although the people of God have entered into the “already” stage of that heavenly Sabbath, there still remains the “not yet” stage, i.e., heaven itself. Therefore, as the believer awaits the final phase of his heavenly rest, “there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9). In the words of Simon Kistemaker, the earthly Sabbath that Christians now enjoy is “an emblem of eternal rest!” Hence, “during our life span on earth, we celebrate the Sabbath and realize only partially what the Sabbath-rest entails. In the life to come, we shall fully experience God’s rest, for then we will have entered a rest that is eternal.”²⁴ The book of Hebrews does not speak of the abrogation of the weekly Sabbath; it stresses the importance of practicing it while believers wait for the final rest in the eschaton.

In chapter five (23–33), “The Sabbath and the Ten Commandments,” Dr. Adams boldly asserts that “the Bible does not teach that the Ten Commandments—as given at Sinai—are for the church to observe.”²⁵ Nowhere is there any such

18. Edwards, *Works* (Yale), 24:235.

19. Poole, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, I:12. See also Walter Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 26; and Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. I:37.

20. McGraw, “Jay Adams, *Keeping the Sabbath Today?*,” 276.

21. For a biblical critique of New Covenant Theology, see Richard C. Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology* (Enumclaw, Washington: Winepress Publishing, 2001).

22. For a thorough refutation of Dispensationist theology, see John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Wolgemuth and Hyatt Publishers, 1991); and Keith A. Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1995).

23. Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, 53.

24. Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984), 111–112. Walter Chantry correctly points out that the word used in Hebrews 4:9 (*sabbatismos*) for rest, is a different word than he uses in the other portions of Hebrews 3–4. This is significant. The usage of *sabbatismos*, comments Chantry, “refers obviously to a Sabbath keeping or Sabbath observance of the Sabbath Day to be kept by the people of God. There is a New Covenant Sabbath Day!” Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, 93. Although the word *sabbatismos* is found only once in the New Testament, it is used as a technical term for Sabbath keeping in post-canonical writings. Also, the cognate verb *sabbatizo* is used in the Septuagint with reference to Sabbath observance or celebration in passages such as Exodus 16:23; Leviticus 23:32; and 2 Chronicles 36:21. See Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament*, 75.

25. In an earlier book Dr. Adams taught that in “the Sermon on the Mount,” rather than “abrogating or substituting something else for” the Ten Commandments, Jesus Christ rebutted the Pharisees and “restored the true meaning of God’s commands.” See Jay E.

command. Quite the contrary ... they were exclusively for Israel to keep.”²⁶ This being so, the argument often used to rebut the teaching of anti-Sabbatarians, that it would be strange for God to eliminate one of the Ten Commandments while the other nine remain binding, does not apply to Adams. He goes on to comment that “the church has made too much of the Ten Commandments. She has given this code undue prominence in her catechisms and teaching.” The Puritans are the culprits here, says the author. They are the ones who have exalted the Decalogue. They are also the ones who erred with their threefold division of the law, i.e., moral, judicial, and ceremonial.

The author is correct that the Puritans did emphasize the law of God in their writings. In chapter 19 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* the Westminster Assembly distinguishes between the Ten Commandments (the moral law), the Mosaic judicial laws, and the ceremonial aspect of the law. Also, they taught that the same law “God gave to Adam” in the Garden of Eden continues “to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments, and written in two tablets: the four first commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six our duty to man.” One of the proof texts used by the Westminster theologians to support their teaching is Romans 2:14–15: “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them.” In other words, Paul is saying infallibly, and the *Westminster Confession* is confirming, that the Decalogue was given prior to Sinai, and that although the Gentiles in the Old Testament era did not have the Mosaic law codified and given to them as was the case with the Jews at Mount Sinai, nevertheless, they did have the same Ten Commandments written in their hearts. Paul and the Westminster Standards are correct, and Jay Adams is wrong.

In the same chapter of the *Confession* the Westminster theologians claim that “the moral law does forever 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.” Then, citing the teaching of Christ in Matthew 5:17–19 as biblical proof text for their statement, the Westminster men

continue by saying “neither does Christ in the gospel [NT], any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.” This is an unquestionable endorsement of the moral law’s continual binding nature in the New Testament era. We are every bit as obligated to keep the moral law as were those under the Old Testament economy.

This was also the belief of John Calvin, who in his *Commentary* on Matthew 5:17–19, wrote: “With respect to the doctrine, we must not imagine that the coming of Christ has freed us from the authority of the law [of Moses]: for it is an 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.” The Genevan went on to say that “the design of Christ ... was to teach, that the truth of the law, and every part of it, is secure, and that nothing so durable is to be found in the whole frame of the world.... Those who pour contempt on the doctrine of the law, or on a single syllable of it, will be, rejected as the lowest of men.... Christ banishes from His kingdom all who accustom men to any contempt of the law.” Elsewhere Calvin taught that God wrote the Ten Commandments “on stone, in order that the perpetuity of its doctrine should be maintained in all ages.”²⁷ Stronger words regarding the law’s continual binding relevance in the New Testament age would be hard to find. Let the reader beware of those who reject the law of God; one does so to his peril.

Then too, in Luke 16:16–17, Jesus distinguishes between the Old and the New Covenants when He states that “the law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is pressing into it.” But He then goes on to say that this distinguishing in no way abrogates the Old Testament law when He claims that “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.”

Among other passages, the author adduces Galatians 3 to make his point about the abrogation of the Ten Commandments in the New Covenant age. In verses 24–25 of this chapter Paul says that “the law was our tutor [*paidagogos*] to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor [*paidagogos*].” But as Calvin shows, Adams has missed Paul’s point. Says the Reformer, although the moral law of the Old Testament does act as a tutor in the sense that it “displays the justice of God,” which convinces persons “that they in themselves [are] unrighteous,” it is principally the ceremonial aspect of the law which Paul has in mind when calling the law a tutor. It is the Jewish “administration” of the law that was “temporal” and no longer binding on the New Testament church.²⁸ New Testament scholar William Hendriksen is in agreement. It is particularly the “ceremonial” aspect of the law that is being addressed here by Paul. This part of the law “had become an oppressive burden, a galling yoke, from which no mere man

Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 70.

26. In a later chapter the author denies that the Mosaic law functioned prior to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai (94).

27. Cited in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *God’s Law Made Easy* (Draper, Virginia: Apologetics Group, 2010), 10.

28. Calvin, *Commentary* on Galatians 3:19, 24–25.

offered any way of escape.” The Jews were “locked up, shut in from every side” with this pedagogue. This is the portion of the law that has been done away with by Christ’s cross work.²⁹

The same teaching is found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (7:5–6):

This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law [OT], and in the time of the gospel [NT]: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come: which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory; yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

Undaunted, the author finds solace in 2 Corinthians 3 to support his supposition. Here the apostle teaches that the Old Testament has been replaced by a “spiritual covenant,” where we are no longer under the Mosaic law. The problem with this argument is that even though the Old Covenant as given at Sinai has passed away, that does not mean that the Old Testament law is no longer obligatory. As taught in 2 Corinthians 3, the same law which was written on tablets of stone in the Old era is internalized in the New.³⁰ In the words of Ken Gentry, the “major distinction between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is *not* that the ethical standards have changed.” The problem “in the Old Covenant was that the law was written only on tablets of stone, whereas in the New Covenant it is written directly on the tablets of the heart.”³¹

According to the teaching of the Reformed church, as expressed in the Westminster Standards, the Reformed faith maintains that the Fourth Commandment, as a part of the Ten Commandments, is still in force in the New Covenant age. One cannot divorce one of these commandments without doing despite to the balance of them. This is why, as taught by Robert Reymond, the “desacralizing” of the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath “is dangerous to the extreme, for

not only is proper Lord’s Day observance undercut by such teaching, but also, by implication, the normativeness of God’s entire moral law of for Christ’s church and society is rendered suspect inasmuch as the Fourth Commandment is a tenth part of God’s ‘royal law,’ itself a unitary whole.”³²

In chapter six (35–37), “The Ark of the Testimony,” the author correctly asserts that the law was specifically given to the Jews at Sinai: “the Sinaitic covenant was, in essence, the Ten Commandments.” But he then goes on to state, incorrectly, that it therefore “had to do with Israel alone.” This is both bad logic and bad theology. Just because the Ten Commandments were codified at Mount Sinai, this does not mean that it was solely for the Jews.³³ In fact, it was not. We have already seen that the law was given to Adam in the Garden, it is written on the hearts of every person (i.e., it is innate), and it is salvifically internalized in every Christian.

Chapter seven (39–43) is concerned with “What was Abolished?” Following on the heels of his errant conclusion in chapter six, in this chapter Adams insists that in Ephesians 2:14–15, the “law of commandments” that was “abolished” with the breaking down of the “middle wall” in Christ’s cross work is the entirety of the Old Testament law (39–43). This is more bad theology. As Hendriksen comments, that which was abolished by the breaking down of the middle wall was “the many rules and regulations of the Mosaic code, stipulations with respect to such matters as fasts, feasts, foods, offerings, circumcision, etc.” It was the ceremonial aspect of the law that was abolished, not the moral law.³⁴ This was also Calvin’s view. In his *Commentary* on Ephesians 2:14–15 the Reformer wrote that it was “the ceremonies by which the distinction [between Jew and Gentile] was declared [that] have been abolished through Christ,” not the Ten Commandments; “for the moral law is not a wall of partition separating us [Gentiles] from the Jews, but lays down instructions in which the Jews were not less deeply concerned than ourselves.”

29. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968, 1979), 145–148.

30. Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology From Adam to Christ*, edited by Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, California: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 331–332; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, general editor, F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 94.

31. Gentry, *God’s Law Made Easy*, 11.

32. Reymond, “Lord’s Day Observance: Mankind’s Proper Response to the Fourth Commandment,” 165–166.

33. Just because I may give a gift to one of my daughters, that does not necessarily mean that it is not to be equally shared with my other daughter.

34. William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967, 1979), 132–135.

Chapter eight (45–49) is titled “Jesus and the Sabbath.” In this chapter the author attests to the fact that Christ kept the Sabbath, but He did so as a good Jew under the Old Testament economy. When the destruction of Jerusalem occurred in A.D. 70, the Sabbath was permanently terminated. Jesus Christ, therefore, cannot be “our example of Sabbath keeping” in the New Testament era.

Dr. Adams is correct in saying that Jesus was a good example of Sabbath keeping as a Jew, but he errs with his false assumption that the Sabbath ended with the Jewish “church-state.” Jesus Himself taught that He is “the Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). As eternal Deity He commanded it and He is the one who determines what is and what is not to be abolished or continued. There is no biblical evidence that Christ declared the Sabbath Day to be null and void in the New age. The opposite is the case. Rather than adhering to the Dispensational view of hermeneutics (as noted above) that unless an Old Testament teaching is repeated in the New Testament it should be considered abrogated, the Reformed, covenantal approach to hermeneutics, as taught in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Q. 3), assumes the opposite: “The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.” Therefore, unless we have an Old Testament teaching specifically abrogated by the New Testament, it should be considered as still valid in the new era. As “Lord of the Sabbath,” both in His teaching and in His actions, Jesus remains our perfect “example of Sabbath keeping” in the New Covenant community.

Chapter nine (51–54) is on “Rest from Labor among the Thorns.” Here the author maintains that the Jewish Sabbath was given to Israel so that they would remember God’s work of creation (Exodus 20:11) and His work of redeeming them from slavery in the Exodus (Deuteronomy 5:15). It was specifically and solely a Sabbath for His own special Old Testament people. In the new age, he concludes, “there is no requirement for Christians to set aside any specific day for worship, service, and rest.” The only rest required in the New Covenant age is a physical rest. Christians, however, are required to “assemble together with other believers for worship at a time most convenient for all,” and although it is not a biblical mandate, “preferably” they should meet “on the Lord’s Day.”

As a rejoinder one would ask: Is not the church to remember God’s work of creation, and especially His work of recreation through the cross work of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)? Is the church not to remember that she has been redeemed from slavery, not from Egyptian taskmasters, but from sin itself (Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:3–14)? Is the church not God’s own special people (1 Peter 2:9–10)? Is the church not the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16)? Why then should the New

Testament people of God not be obliged with the privilege of honoring the Sabbath as her Old Testament counterparts were? This is simply bad reasoning on the part of Jay Adams.

Since the author does believe that we are bound by “apostolic precepts” (96), and then denies that the church is under biblical mandate to gather on the first day of the week for worship, it is somewhat strange that he does not see that apostolic example and apostolic teaching for gathering for worship on the first day of the week, as found in Acts 20:7 (“Now on the first day of the week [Sunday], when the disciples came together to break bread [i.e., take the Lord’s supper], Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight”) and 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 (“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: on the first day of the week [Sunday] let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collection when I come”) respectively, function as “the sanction of the apostles as spokesmen of Christ” for the church to meet on Sundays for worship.³⁵ By Adams’s own admission (63), this is clearly what was being practiced in the early church. Why then would we not see this as biblical warrant for the necessity of a first day worship service?

Chapters ten (55–58), “Sign Language” and eleven (59–62), “The Change of Symbolism,” expand on the theme begun in chapter nine. In these chapters Dr. Adams argues that since Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15 give two reasons for Israel to keep the Sabbath (creation and rest respectively), the Fourth Commandment is really “two Fourth Commandments,” thereby differing from the other nine; it is a “changeable” commandment (60). He also contends that the “sign language” and the “change of symbolism” of the Jewish Sabbath (see Ezekiel 20:12, 20), whereby Israel was set apart as God’s special people, has passed away. Thus, the need to keep the commandment is null and void.

A partial response has already been made (see under chapter nine above) concerning the issue of the “two” reasons for the Sabbath in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. It should further be pointed out that the author’s assumption that God would only have one reason to implement a commandment is also in error. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 45–81), for example, overviews all of the Ten Commandments, relating various requirements and prohibitions for each one. Here we see that not only is the Fourth Commandment not “different” from the other nine (as Adams suggests), but that God has a number or reasons for enforcing the entire Decalogue.

As the title indicates, chapter twelve (63–66), “The First Day—A Sabbath?” has to do with the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day. In an earlier chapter the author asserted that “there isn’t the slightest indication that the Sabbath was ever changed from one day to another”; this

35. Reymond, “Lord’s Day Observance: Mankind’s Proper Response to the Fourth Commandment,” 168.

notion “cannot be found in the Bible” (5). Chapter twelve continues and expands on this subject. Dr. Adams recognizes that “Christians assembled on the first day from the beginning.” The church chose this day “to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus.” This is “not in dispute except by Seventh Day Adventists Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists.” Yet those who celebrated the first day of the week as the “Lord’s Day” did not treat it as a Sabbath. Adams goes on to cite numerous historical writings to strengthen his claim, e.g., Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and the Council of Laodicea.

Once again we find Jay Adams’ teaching in stark contrast to the Reformed faith as taught in the Westminster Standards. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21:7) maintains that God “appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture, is called the Lord’s Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.” In this statement the Westminster theologians take the covenantal approach to the interpretation of Scripture, understanding that if an Old Testament teaching is not abrogated in the New Testament then it should be considered as still binding. According to this view, since there is no biblical warrant for seeing an abrogation of the principle of one day in seven as a Sabbath, we should recognize the continuing necessity of a Sabbath Day. The congregational *Savoy Declaration* (1658) and the *London Baptist Confession of 1689* are both in full agreement with the Westminster Assembly.

Several comments need to be made at this point. First, Jonathan Edwards taught that the seventh day of creation, in which God “rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:3), was Adam’s first full day of life. Therefore, said Edwards (along with other Puritan theologians), “being the first day of Adam’s life, and so the first day from whence he began to reckon time, was the first day of his week: and so, that the first day of the week was the day that God sanctified to be kept by all nations and ages, excepting the change was made of the day of the Sabbath for the Israelitish nation after the coming out of Egypt, until the resurrection of Christ.” Thus, from the beginning the first day of the week was to be considered the Sabbath Day. Sunday, being the New Covenant Sabbath day, is a return to what God had purposed from the beginning of creation.³⁶ If Edwards is correct (and there is much to commend this “covenantal” view) then the issue of Sunday being a Sabbath is fully established, i.e., it was the Sabbath in the beginning and is now restored to its rightful place as the Christian Sabbath.

Second, it should also be recognized that Jesus fulfilled the seventh day Sabbath in His own death, burial, and resurrection. He was crucified on a Friday; He then “rested” in

the grave over Saturday (the seventh day Sabbath, thereby fulfilling the “rest” the Jews anticipated with the coming of the Messiah); then He was raised from the dead on the first day of the week (Sunday), wherefore the New Covenant Sabbath is now Sunday—the day of Christ’s victory over sin and death.³⁷ This being so, the Puritans taught that “there is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy under the gospel [NT] but the Lord’s Day, which is the Christian Sabbath.”³⁸

Third, as Robert Reymond has appropriately commented, in Exodus 20:8 the Fourth Commandment does not say “Remember the seventh day”; rather, it says “Remember the Sabbath Day.” Professor Reymond’s point here is that from the beginning God commanded, not the seventh day, but a Sabbath Day, to be kept holy. In the Old Covenant administration, as stated by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21:7), the Sabbath “was the last day of the week,” but “from the resurrection of Christ [the day] was changed into the first day of the week.” Yet in both ages it is still the “Sabbath” that is sacred. Professor Reymond concludes that this “incontrovertible fact” assures us “of man’s universal and perpetual obligation respecting Sabbath observance,” to include the “divinely instituted and authorized change of the day of Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week.”³⁹ If Dr. Reymond is correct, and he is, this alone should remove from our thought any idea that the Sabbath is merely an Old Testament doctrine. The Sabbath has been with us from the beginning of time. It is every bit as relevant in the New Testament age as it was in the Old.

Fourth, these things being so, 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 and Acts 20:7 (mentioned above), as well as John 20:19, 26, speak, not only of the church gathering on the first day of the week, but of a New Testament Sabbath observance.

And fifth, as the *coup de grace*, the prophet Isaiah (58:13–14), prophesying concerning the coming the New Covenant age commissions the church to call the New Testament “Sabbath a delight”:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My [God’s] holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

36. Edwards, *Works* (Yale), 24:131.

37. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), II:99.

38. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 394.

39. Reymond, “Lord’s Day Observance: Mankind’s Proper Response to the Fourth Commandment,” 176–178.

That Isaiah is referring to the “Lord’s Day” as the Christian Sabbath is reflected in the language of verse 13, where the Sabbath is referred to as “My [the LORD’s] holy day.” This teaching is buttressed in Revelation 1:10, where the apostle John speaks of being “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.”⁴⁰

Chapter thirteen (67–70) is titled “Can the Sabbath be Kept Today?” In this chapter the author lists several reasons to make his “main point,” which is that “in a worldwide society, like the Christian church, a Jewish-like Sabbath simply cannot be observed.” There is a sense in which his assumption is correct, but not the way he intends it. The correctness of it is that the “Jewish-like Sabbath” that Israel was enjoined to keep was a part of the Old Testament law that was to be carried out in the promised land. The Jewish-like Sabbath, for instance, was to be kept remembering “that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 5:15). The land of Canaan was never meant to become “a worldwide society, like the Christian church.” This in no way, however, means that the Sabbath cannot be kept as God intended it be kept as the Christian Sabbath.

In his argument Dr. Adams makes the errant assumption that, due to Exodus 35:3 (“you [Israel] shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day”), the Old Testament people of God were not permitted even to light a fire on the Sabbath. How, asks the author, could such a commandment be kept today in climates such as “Alaska, Scandinavia, or Afghanistan?” How could it even be kept in “South Carolina?” This has the appearance of a straw man argument, and when one builds a straw man it is easy to tear it down. The author’s assumptions, though, are erroneous. In his commentary on this verse John Gill points out that the “straw man” restrictions of Exodus 35:3 that Adams has erected are fallacious. Gill wrote:

It can hardly be thought that this is to be taken in the strictest sense, an entire prohibition of kindling a fire and the use of it on that day, which is so absolutely useful, and needful in various cases, and where acts of mercy and necessity require it; as

40. Reymond, “Lord’s Day Observance: Mankind’s Proper Response to the Fourth Commandment,” 167. That the expression “Lord’s Day” found in Revelation 1:10 refers to “Sunday” is supported by three second century writings: the *Didache*, Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Magnesians*, and the *Gospel of Peter*; Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament*, 184. The Westminster divines also used this verse as a biblical proof-text for their teaching that Sunday is the Lord Day and the Christian Sabbath; see *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21:7). See also Lane Keister, “The Sabbath Day and Recreation on the Sabbath,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* (2009), edited by Chris Coldwell, 229–238.

41. John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (Paris, Arkansas: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), I:529.

42. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 394.

in cold seasons of the year, for the warming and comforting of persons who otherwise would be unfit for religious exercises and on the account of infants and aged persons, who could not subsist without it; and in cases of sickness and various disorders which necessarily require it; and even for the preparation of food, which must be had on that day as on others, the Sabbath being not a fast, but rather a festival, as it is with the Jews.⁴¹

Better exegesis of the verse gives us a more plausible meaning.

Chapter fourteen (71–75), “What of the Lord’s Day?,” returns to the subject of the first day of the week studied above, and argues for the importance of the church’s meeting together for worship on the Lord’s Day. Dr. Adams cites Hebrews 10:25 (“nor forsaking the assembling together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching”) to support his supposition. This should be done, we are told, even though “we have neither a command to meet on the first day nor a prohibition from meeting on some other day.” This is a very sad comment. Why should we do something without biblical precedent for it? This is not the kind of biblical exegesis we have come to expect from the pen of Jay Adams. As already studied (under chapter nine above), the apostolic example and apostolic teaching given in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 respectively would appear to militate against the author’s view at this point. These passages do not merely suggest, but they prescribe the church’s obligation to gather together on the Lord’s Day.

Is the Lord’s Day to be considered a “holy day,” asks the author? The answer: “yes and no”; “yes” in that every day ought to be considered holy, but “no” in that in the new era all days are alike. Adams’s statement here is once again seen to be in contradiction to the teaching of the Reformed faith as expressed by the Westminster theologians. This is the case both in the *Confession* (21:7–8): the “Lord’s Day,” which is “the Christian Sabbath . . . is [to be] kept holy unto the Lord”; and the Appendix to “The Directory For the Public Worship of God”: “There is no day commanded in Scripture to be kept holy under the gospel [NT] but the Lord’s Day, which is the Christian Sabbath.”⁴²

Chapters fifteen (77–79), “That Passage in James” and sixteen (81–83), “Matthew 5:17–20,” have to do with potential objections that may be raised against Dr. Adams’s view of the Sabbath. The “passage in James” that the author refers to is James 2:8–13, which reads:

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.”

Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

After taking a “look at the context of the passage,” we are told by the author that when James tells us that to love our neighbor as ourselves we must do so in accordance with the “royal law” of the Old Testament Scripture, “James turned to the Ten Commandments only as an illustration.” We are further told that it is “obvious” that “the passage understood rightly [has] nothing to do with the survival of the Ten Commandments.” As Ryan McGraw appropriately comments, “this does not seem so obvious ... since James did not cite the law to illustrate his teaching, but to enforce his teaching.”⁴³ John Calvin’s comments on this passage show agreement with McGraw. The Reformer contended that in this passage James is telling us that God requires of us a “universal obedience” to the entire law.⁴⁴ Dr. Adams does not seem to realize that if the Ten Commandments are no longer relevant it would no longer be possible for us to “fulfill the royal law.”

We studied the Matthew 5 pericope above (under chapter five), where we saw that according to the Westminster Standards and John Calvin, the words of the Lord of the church do indeed present an insuperable problem for Dr. Adams’s view of the abrogation of the Sabbath and the entirety of the Ten Commandments. As maintained by Samuele Bacchiocchi, “Matthew sees in Christ not the termination of the law and the prophets, but their realization and continuation.” In Matthew “the law and the prophets live on in Christ who clarifies ... their teachings.”⁴⁵ The comments of John Murray on “the Lord’s words” in these verses buttress this conclusion. In his recapitulation of the teaching of Christ on Matthew 5, Murray writes that there are “three main lessons” that are to be learned. First, “Jesus did not come to abrogate the law”; second, “the kingdom of heaven demands the most meticulous observance of the law of God”; and third, “there is a complete contrast between the righteousness which the kingdom of heaven requires and that exemplified in the scribes and Pharisees.” Those who are not concerned with “meticulous” obedience “to the minutiae” of the law of God are not fit for the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁶ These are strong words from Professor Murray; they provide us with a strong warning against denying the abiding relevance of the Old Testament law in the New Covenant age.

Chapter seventeen (85–88) is on “Living Like a Gentile.” Here the author uses Paul’s rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2:14 (“But when I saw that they [Peter, Barnabas, and others] were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to

Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in a manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?’”) to show that in the New Testament age Christians are to live like Gentiles and not like Jews. This being so, they need not be concerned about keeping the Sabbath holy, because the Sabbath was for the Jews.

Dr. Adams’s attack on Sabbatarians in this chapter is a bit caustic. He asserts that such persons (which would include the Westminster Puritans) are attempting to adopt “a blend of New and Old Testament requirements for their lives.” He refers to them pejoratively as “Jewtiles.” The desire of these “Jewtiles” is “to retain ... most of the Jewish elements of the Sabbath observance so that, by keeping it intact, they may be able to live like Jews.” Although they would not “express it that way...that is precisely what they are doing.” These are not careful comments. Dr. Adams has once again erected a straw man, and he has slain him with a “fiery tongue” (James 3:5–6).

As Ryan McGraw has rightly stated, however, the author has greatly “oversimplified the issue.” The Apostle Peter himself teaches that “we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles” (1 Peter 4:3). “The matter of primary importance” writes McGraw, “is maintaining a standard for holiness that is required by God, not whether that standard matches the lifestyle of Jews or of Gentiles.”⁴⁷

In chapter eighteen (89–92), “Was the Sabbath Set Aside for Corporate Worship?” Adams denies that the Jews met for corporate worship during the pre-Sinai wilderness wanderings. Leviticus 23:3 (“Six days work shall be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings”), however, teaches the opposite. Commenting on this verse, John Gill wrote that the “Sabbath rest” enjoyed by the Israelites, took place, not only in the tabernacle, but also “in their synagogues ... and in private houses.”⁴⁸ Second Kings 4:23 (“So he [the Shunammite’s husband] said, ‘Why are you going to him [the prophet Elisha] today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath.’”), a verse which describes the custom of Sabbath keeping by faithful Israelites, is another example of the Jews meeting for corporate worship on the Sabbath Day. Contrary to Dr. Adams’s statement, this verse teaches that the Jews were to meet regularly for weekly worship in early synagogues and in church houses.

In chapter nineteen (93–96), “What About Antinomianism?” even though he denies it, Dr. Adams’s “doctrinal”

43. McGraw, “Jay E. Adams, *Keeping the Sabbath Today?*” 278.

44. Calvin, *Commentary* on James 2:10.

45. Bacchiocchi, *The Sabbath in the New Testament*, 35.

46. John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 154–157.

47. McGraw, “Jay E. Adams, *Keeping the Sabbath Today?*” 279.

48. Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, I:669.

antinomianism⁴⁹ clearly seen. In an earlier chapter he writes: “When you look at commandments in the New Testament they no longer appear as a code of laws. There is no longer a unified body of laws like the ‘Ten Commandments.’ The code, as such, is gone” (13). In this chapter he avers that in the New Covenant “we are not obligated to keep the Ten Commandments as they were written on the stone tablets constituting the essence of the Jewish national covenant.”

These are sad statements. Yet they are found throughout this book (23, 35–37, 46, 68, 102–103). Furthermore, the author’s rejection of the entirety of the Ten Commandments has serious consequences with regard to the Westminster Standards—those Standards that B. B. Warfield considered to be “the richest and most precise and best guarded statement ever penned of all that enters into evangelical religion and of all that must be safeguarded if evangelical religion is to persist in the world;”⁵⁰ and that which Alan Cairns maintained is “the quintessence of Protestant theology . . . [and] the truth of God in its fullest expression.”⁵¹ For example, the *Larger Catechism* has one hundred and ninety six questions and answers, and the *Shorter Catechism* has one hundred and seven questions and answers. Between these two *Catechisms* approximately one-third of the questions and answers have to do with the proper understanding of the Decalogue. If one were to adopt the view espoused by Dr. Adams, he would be disavowing a large portion of perhaps the finest Reformed teaching of the Christian faith that has ever been penned. The fact is, however, as stated by Chantry, that the Ten Commandments are referred to in the New Testament as continually binding. “The New Testament never abandons the moral law revealed in the Old Testament.” Christ and His apostles “return over and over again to the Ten Commandments, quoting them and alluding to them.”⁵²

Undaunted, Dr. Adams goes on to tell us that in the New Testament age the law of love has replaced the now irrelevant Ten Commandments (13, 68, 87, 95). Again we find the author’s denial of the teaching found in the Westminster Standards.

49. There is a difference between “doctrinal” and “practical” antinomianism. The former teaches it; the latter practices it.

50. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, edited by John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), 660.

51. Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, South Carolina: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 520–521.

52. Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, 63.

53. The term “general equity” is from chapter 19 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, where we read that in the New Testament economy the Ten Commandments and the “general equity” (i.e., the underlying principles) of the Mosaic judicial laws are still binding on all peoples and nations.

54. Gentry, *God’s Law Made Easy*, 37.

55. Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, 17.

56. Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 21–23.

As taught by the *Shorter Catechism* (Q. 42): “The sum of the Ten Commandments is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves.” The text used as Scripture proof given by the Westminster theologians is Matthew 22:37–40, where the Lord Jesus Christ quotes two Old Testament passages: Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, both of which are from the Mosaic law. According to the Westminster Assembly, the law of love is the sum total of the law of Moses. This being so, the very heart of the law of love is the keeping of the Ten Commandments and the “general equity” of the judicial law that God gave to His Old Testament people.⁵³

This is the teaching of the Apostle Paul in Romans 13:8–10:

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Notice that the apostle states that to love someone is to treat him biblically; it is to keep the “second table of the law” with regard to one’s fellow man. Said another way, “love is defined by God’s law.”⁵⁴ The Ten Commandments “define what loving activity is.”⁵⁵ Therefore, if the Ten Commandments are no longer binding, as asserted by Dr. Adams, then it would not be possible to fulfill the law of love. Referring to this passage, John Murray comments that “among students of Christian ethics no datum is more universally admitted or regarded as more incontrovertibly established than this, that love is the fulfilling of the law [of God].” We are, writes Murray, “commanded” by the law to love God and our neighbor. Without the law of God, there would be no command; there would be no reason to love God and our fellow man.⁵⁶

Chapter twenty (97–99) is titled “Rest Isn’t Optional.” In this chapter we are told that although the Christian is no longer obliged to keep the Sabbath Day, he is still enjoined to rest. The Lord of the church told us that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath was for man’s benefit. Rest, “isn’t optional.” In the Old Testament community the “idea of rest” was “rest in the land of Canaan.” It was a typological rest, pointing to rest that is found in Christ alone. Now that Christ has come, the people of God have entered into that rest. This does not mean, however, that there is no longer a need for physical rest. “Rest is essential to a well-functioning body through which the Spirit may carry out His sanctifying and edifying purposes.” Sleep “is necessary.” Not to take time off to rest may result in a “failure

to treat sickness or injury.” The author suggests that “periods of rest may be interspersed in a one-day-in-seven manner, or in ways that are equally appropriate to a different schedule.” But “the believer must rest; rest isn’t optional.”

That which Dr. Adams has said in chapter twenty is true. Physical rest is essential to a healthy body. But as the Bible also makes clear, “spiritual rest” is more essential. The rest spoken of in the Old Testament land of Canaan is indeed typological of the rest the believer has already found in Christ, but as taught in Hebrews 4, there is still the “not yet” aspect of this spiritual rest. Until the Christian enters into the final stage of this rest, he is still obliged to honor the Sabbath day as an emblem of the final heavenly rest. “There remains, then, a Sabbath rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9).

Chapter twenty one (101–103) gives us the “Conclusion.” In this final chapter Jay Adams summarizes his arguments against Sabbath observance in the New Testament age. His concluding words are that the “total biblical evidence for Sabbath keeping by Christians is zero.” This review has demonstrated that the author’s conclusion is wrong. We have seen that Dr. Adams has adduced numerous passages to undermine the Sabbath which do not apply to the Sabbath at all. Poor reason and poor theology on the part of the author are further issues. Various competent scholars have been cited throughout this essay to make this clear. In the opinion of this writer, the “biblical evidence” abundantly favors the Sabbath keeping principle set forth in the Westminster Standards.

In this book Jay Adams claims to hold to Calvin’s view of the Fourth Commandment. This, in fact, is not so. In his *Institutes* John Calvin does espouse a different view of this commandment than we find in the Westminster Standards. He claims that not only the ceremonial aspect of the Fourth Commandment has been set aside, but that the entirety of it is no longer binding in the New Covenant community.⁵⁷ But when it comes to his sermons on the book of Deuteronomy, the Geneva Reformer has a different focus regarding this commandment. In these sermons he clearly advocates a form of “practical Sabbatarianism.”⁵⁸ This being so, Adams is not the “Calvinist” he claims to be when it comes to his doctrine of the Sabbath ordinance.

Further, even though the Genevan Reformer does not appear to have adhered to the Puritan view of the Fourth Commandment, when it comes to the remainder of the Ten Commandments, unlike Jay Adams, he stressed the binding nature of the Mosaic law. As already noted, in his *Commentary* on Matthew 5:17, he wrote: “With respect to doctrine, 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.” A more clear refutation of doctrinal antinomianism (as found in the teaching of Jay Adams) could hardly be imagined.

At the beginning of the article the declaration of the 1853 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA was cited: “A church without the Sabbath is apostate.” We also noted that Professor Reymond spoke of proper Sabbath keeping as a line in the sand that the church will move away from to her peril. Sadly, the early twenty-first century church bears witnesses to these assertions. The Sabbath, as taught by the Westminster Standards, is seldom practiced in otherwise orthodox churches. Perhaps this is one reason that we see such a level of apostasy taking place in the church. French philosopher Voltaire once asserted that “if you want to kill Christianity you must abolish Sunday.”⁵⁹ We have the assurance from the Lord of the church that Christianity will never be destroyed (Matthew 16:18), and for that we are everlastingly thankful. But we do see real Voltaire-like attacks upon “Sunday” even from those within the church of Jesus Christ. This ought not to be. Sunday, as the Lord’s Day and Christian Sabbath, must be practiced. May God help His church to return to the biblical view of the Sabbath so well articulated by our Puritan forefathers! Then, by His grace, we may see the revival of the Reformed faith so missing and yet so necessary in our own day. ■

Review: Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2009). xvi & 399 pages. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-087552-612-6. \$24.99. Reviewed by Rowland S. Ward, Th.D., Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, Melbourne.

Robert Letham is well-known as the author of a number of valuable works including *The Work of Christ* (1993) and *The Holy Trinity* (2004). If you’ve read his books you will know that Letham is a good scholar, can be pointed in criticism yet irenic overall, and is catholic in the best sense of the word. Letham is a minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church who transferred to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales after taking up a lectureship at the Evangelical School of Theology in Wales in 2008. This new book is to be welcomed. It is the third in the series ‘The Westminster Assembly and the Reformed Faith’ sponsored by the Craig Center

57. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volumes I & II, Library of the Christian Classics, John T. McNeill, editor, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II:8:34.

58. John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), *Sermon* on Deuteronomy 5:12–14 and *Sermon* on Deuteronomy 5:13–15. See Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath*, 109–117. [Ed. Cf. also Coldwell, “Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines,” in this issue, and Stewart E. Lauer, “John Calvin, the Nascent Sabbatarian: A Reconsideration of Calvin’s View of Two Key Sabbath-Issues,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007), 3.

59. Cited in Rogers, “The Recovery of the Lord’s Day,” 17.

for the Study of the Westminster Standards at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

There are three parts to the book covering respectively the historical context, the theological content and the theology of the Confession itself. The particular significance of the book is that it is the first book to engage the theology of the Westminster Assembly in depth since Chad Van Dixhoorn's 2005 Cambridge Ph.D. thesis on the subject. It is thus able to give a fuller description of discussion in the Assembly than was possible previously.

Historical context

The section on historical context (pages 9–44) is clearly set out, and aims to remove misunderstandings.

The Assembly was originally established by Parliament to provide a constitution for the Church of England, and so commenced by beginning a careful revision of the Thirty-nine Articles. However, the Civil War situation was such that the help of the Scottish kingdom was considered necessary, and so the Solemn League and Covenant was subscribed, as required by the Scots, with a view to securing a conformity of religion in England, Ireland and Scotland. Work on a fresh statement of faith as well as directories for worship and church government was therefore commenced. However, neither the Thirty-nine Articles, the initial revision nor the fresh efforts are to be thought of as other than genuinely Reformed endeavors.

The Assembly was not a true Synod but a creature of the English Parliament to provide it 'humble advice'. Further the Scottish representatives were not members of it but treaty commissioners representing the interests of the Scottish nation, and therefore able to be involved in all debates and committees although they had no vote. Nor should it be supposed that the Scottish Church was to be the model to which England should conform. Not only was the Scottish Church of the 1640s impacted by worship practices associated with English Independents, it is also worth noting that the Scots Confession of 1560 was not a well arranged and crafted document. Written in the heat of battle, it served its purpose; but much had occurred since that made a fuller confession desirable, and in the event the Assembly's Confession was readily accepted by the Scottish Church 1647.

Theological context

The second section gives the theological context (pages 45–98). In this section Letham very properly shows the thoroughly Reformed character of the Church of England from the Reformation. A major misunderstanding arose because the English abandoned the Westminster Standards at the Restoration in 1660 while the Scots retained them. History tends to be the politics of the victor and the restorationists were at

pains to portray the Westminster Assembly as unrepresentative of the Church of England which they aimed to reposition as a *via media* between Rome and Protestantism. They were so far successful that only of recent years has mainstream scholarship exploded the spin and shown the pre-Restoration Church of England to have been essentially Reformed in theology, and the Assembly's theology in continuity with that of a century before. In their turn Scottish commentators have often bypassed the English context and the attention has focused on the Scottish commissioners.

Letham then details the sources of the theology of the Westminster Confession. There is nothing markedly new here but again all is well arranged and detailed. The connections between the Thirty-nine Articles of 1562/63, the Lambeth Articles of 1595, Ussher's Irish Articles of 1615 and the Westminster Confession are noted, and more detailed comparison of the first and last of these documents is provided. The only real difference noted by Letham is that concerning the traditions of the church (Article 34 cf. WCF 20.2; 21:1).

Letham also helpfully sets the Confession in the international Reformed context. Discussion among Reformed communities in Europe and Great Britain was facilitated by the universal use of Latin in scholarly discourse. The Assembly itself corresponded with Reformed churches in Europe, and was constantly citing Reformed writers and theologians from beyond Great Britain. The notion that Westminster represents a departure from the mainstream Reformed tradition or from Calvin himself is nonsense. The Torrance school is rightly criticized, but so are conservative commentators who ignore this bigger context (Letham cites the militant advocacy of 6/24 creation days as an example, p. 85).

Further, the debates show how questions were debated exegetically but with a full awareness of the history of exegesis from the earliest times. In other words, it is necessary to recognize that the Reformation did not throw out all that had gone before, but rejected or reformed that which was not in accord with Scripture.

The Theology of the Confession

The third and longest section (pp 99–367) covers the theology of the Confession. An introductory chapter notes that the Assembly was not preoccupied with church government. In fact, Van Dixhoorn's work shows that debates and committee meetings on theological issues easily exceeded those where church government was the main focus. T. F. Torrance is again critiqued; more interestingly, Tim Trumper's proposals on adoption discussed in two articles in the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* in 2005 (pages 60–80, 194–215) also come under fire. Trumper wants to see more focus in the Confession on the redemptive-historical to bringing out the centrality of Christ; he wishes it to be more explicit about union with Christ and

he wishes to develop the doctrine of adoption and to see more emphasis on the work of the Spirit. I think Letham's criticism is overly strident at this point. He concedes much yet he seems to infer that Trumper wants to substitute biblical theology for systematic theology which, he avers, will amount to the deconstruction of Calvinism. That's not how I read Trumper and others like Richard Gaffin that Letham has in view. Any critique needs to be more nuanced and properly argued.

Letham importantly reminds us that the Assembly documents are of necessity the result of compromise among the parties and individuals who drew them up. This is strikingly seen in the different emphasis on the *ordo salutis* and on the covenant of works in the Confession and in the Larger Catechism. The former is stated in logical order in the confession but chiefly in terms of union with Christ in LC 65–90 (and cf. LC 22). Covenant theology had not yet fully matured and in the Confession imputation is based on natural generation (6.3) but in LC 22 on representative headship. Thus even within the productions of the Assembly different ways of stating a doctrine are evident. There are also examples of compromise wording designed to allow different viewpoints within a generic Calvinism. Nevertheless, the distinctive teachings of Rome, the Arminians, the hypothetical universalists, the Anabaptists and particularly the Antinomians are clearly excluded.

Succeeding chapters of Letham's book progress chapter by chapter through the Confession although the treatment is not equally detailed. In this review I will only comment on particular chapters that seem to me to be particularly important, but the whole is stimulating and worthwhile.

Scripture

The longest chapter is that on Scripture. Letham suggests it comes first because of the 'immediate and pressing issue' of debate over the vowel points in the Hebrew text. I rather doubt this given that the Irish Articles of 1615 also begin with Scripture. Westminster follows their structure quite closely, and of course it is never inappropriate to begin with Scripture. This is what the First and Second Helvetic confessions of 1536/66 did. The chapter proceeds quite lucidly with interaction with modern misinterpretations that, for example, reject verbal inspiration, drive a wedge between Scripture and the Word of God or insist that the purity of the text of Scripture requires belief in the Majority Text as the pure text.

One area that is not generally discussed concerns the debate over the three ecumenical creeds in 1643, and Letham gives it attention utilizing Chad Van Dixhoorn's research. It is evident that when initially discussing Article 8 of the Thirty-nine Articles, which refers to the three ecumenical creeds (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian), there were those who had a separatist mentality with little regard for creeds and a somewhat confused understanding of the relationship of

creeds and Scripture. Ultimately matters were harmoniously resolved with the assistance of Guilielmus Apollonius from the Dutch churches, but reference to the early creeds does not appear in the Westminster Assembly documents, although (overlooked by Letham) the Apostles' Creed was appended to the Shorter Catechism.

God the Trinity

In the chapter on God and the Holy Trinity Letham, rightly in my view, understands 'passions' in the phrase 'without body, parts or passions' as equivalent to the limitations of creaturely existence. He faults the chapter in the Confession which makes an 'almost perfunctory' statement on the tri-unity of God in 2.3, in this instance agreeing with Tom Torrance's comment that 'the doctrine of the Trinity was tacked on to a doctrine of God.' Still, noting that this order of discussion was typical of the Western Christian tradition, Letham observes that the arrangement in the Larger Catechism is different and rather better. In any event, despite the ill-founded criticism of Robert Reymond in the first edition of his *New Systematic Theology* (1998), there is no doubting the Nicene Trinitarianism of the Westminster Standards. If one understands the historical context of reconstituting the British church in a situation of war the lack of specific focus on the Holy Spirit and the missionary task of the church is not surprising, but on the other hand the Confession is replete with references to the Holy Spirit and his work in the world and in grace.

God's decree

In discussing chapter 3 of the Confession (God's Eternal Decree) Letham utilizes Jonathan Moore's work to point out the generally overlooked distinction to be drawn between English hypothetical universalists, such as Calamy, and the Amyraldian view, which had arisen only in the 1630s and which went further along the path. There had long been discussion of the logical order of the decrees in the mind of God (and the discussion is still not over!). (1) The general infralapsarian viewpoint was that in the order of logic the decree of election contemplated men as fallen, thus: creation, fall, election, grace. (2) The supralapsarians thought of election as preceding the decree to create and permit the fall, thus: election, creation, fall, grace (atonement for elect, gift of Spirit to apply). (3) Arminians held the order: creation, fall, grace, election, thereby placing salvation in the hands of the individual. (4) Early English hypothetical universalists considered Christ had made an atonement absolutely for his elect and conditionally for the non-elect if they should believe, thus: creation, fall, election, grace (atonement absolute for elect, conditional for non-elect). (5) Amyraldians held that Christ had died to secure salvation for all but in view of their unbelief decreed to elect some, thus: creation, fall, grace (conditional universal

atonement), election. The Confession specifically excludes view 3, but there is debate about 4 and 5. Letham (p. 182) agrees with Warfield that they are ruled out too, but Calamy, who argued for position 4, was not excluded from the Assembly in consequence but continued to participate. This reflects the view in the 17th century that hypothetical universalist views varied. They were generally not regarded as heretical however much the orthodox Reformed mainstream may have opposed them. The continued inclusion of Calamy would seem to have implications for the view of the Assembly as to subscription to the Confession, probably allowing certain private views so long as the public confession was not contradicted.

Interestingly Letham (fn. 33, p.183) appears of the common view that the Confession reflects an infralapsarian position without condemning the supralapsarian one. However, given Derek Thomas' excellent article in J. Ligon Duncan (ed.), *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century* Vol. 3 (Fearn: Mentor, 2009) 267–289, it must be held that, while most of the divines were infralapsarian, the wording in 3.6 'fallen in Adam' was chosen so that proponents of each viewpoint could give it a sense consistent with their position.

Covenant

Letham rightly notes that the covenant theology of the Confession is not fully developed and cautions against the anachronistic notion of central dogmas that some have alleged control the Confession. The discussion of the covenant with Adam is sound and the position of the later Kline (from around 1980) is rightly rejected as 'historically inaccurate and theologically too blunt' (p. 232). More controversially, Letham recognises there are nuances in the Westminster Standards suggesting the existence of the covenant of redemption, but he himself rejects this as a position tending to tritheism, and apparently holds that a covenant of redemption as such is excluded from the Confession. While the formulation must be made carefully, since the eternal relationship between the persons is not constituted by covenant, to my mind it does not follow that the three co-equal and co-eternal persons in their plan and purpose of redemption cannot be described as relating by way of covenant. One cannot ignore the implications of the Scripture witness that the Son came in accordance with the will of the Father to do what the Father had given him to do.

Other items

There are several important excurses. One relates to the early debates on justification (pp. 250–264) and the question of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. The Assembly overwhelmingly held to this but several members, concerned about antinomianism, objected. They were not thereupon excluded from the Assembly. Letham's discussion is helpful also in showing that contemporary denial of the imputation of the

active obedience of Christ is really in a category that was not admitted by any in the Assembly because the divines on no account would allow good works to enter into justification instrumentally or otherwise.

On worship Letham is not quite precise in understanding the Directory for Public Worship as containing 'model prayers' (p. 304) and leaves the impression that they were to be used without being imposed. The 'model prayers' are in fact outlines of appropriate content for public prayer and are in any case not in a form that can be immediately used as actual prayers. An interesting comment is made (pp. 314–317) concerning the meaning of 'papiſts' in 24.3 which forbids marriage to such. Letham notes that the threat to civil order posed by Roman Catholics—regarded as agents of a foreign power—needs to be remembered, as well as their idolatry.

There is a lengthy section on the Sacraments. In regard to baptism Letham seems to rely on the late David F. Wright's material and appears to endorse (p. 332–333) the idea that baptismal regeneration is taught in the Confession. I do not believe this is well founded and Letham himself does not elaborate. The rest of the discussion on baptism is to the point. The Supper receives shorter treatment. Incidentally, the assertion on page 351 that no one has the right to change the elements of bread and wine does not entirely represent the Reformed tradition where writers as early as Guilielmus Bucanus of Lausanne (English translation *Institutions of the Christian Religion*, London 1606, pp.756–757) note that where bread and wine are not available the cultural equivalent may be used. On eschatology Letham does not seem to appreciate that all Protestants in the 17th century thought Rome was the predicted Antichrist (they were not futurists on this point), and he does not give quite enough weight to the generally optimistic views of the future progress of the Gospel largely current since the Geneva Bible New Testament of 1557. The use of the term 'amillennial' (p. 364) is really anachronistic at this point in history. Nevertheless Letham's overall discussion is mostly correct.

Conclusion

Summing up one can see that there is a real concern by Letham to place the Confession in its context, a real concern to be awake to its catholic Trinitarian character. The writing is vigorous and sound, the prejudices of its author evident enough, and the whole a stimulating and useful volume which will be essential for theological students and ministers, in order to grasp the historical context more adequately in the light of the important recovery of the documents of the Assembly by Dr. Van Dixhoorn. The only slip of consequence noted was that the page reference in footnote 91 on page 158 should be 43 and 187, not 71. ■

REVIEW: Garnet Howard Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation: The Majority Puritan Viewpoint on Whether Extra-biblical Prophecy is Still Possible* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007). 334 pages. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-84227-521-4. £24.99. Reviewed by Donald John MacLean, Ph.D. student (Wales Evangelical School Of Theology/University of Wales Lampeter).

Are these former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people now ceased? Yes ... The ways and manner of old were: first, by inspiration (2 *Chron.* 15:1; *Isa.* 59:21; 2 *Pet.* 1:12); second, by visions (*Num.* 12:6, 8); third, by dreams (*Job* 33:14–16; *Gen.* 40:8); fourth, by Urim and Thummim (*Num.* 27:21; 1 *Sam.* 30:7–8); fifth by signs (*Gen.* 32:24–32; *Exod.* 13:21); sixth, by audible voice (*Exod.* 21:1; *Gen.* 22:15). All which do end in writing (*Exod.* 17:14), which is a most sure and infallible way of the Lord's revealing his will unto his people.¹

So wrote the eminent Scottish theologian David Dickson (1583–1662) in his exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith, *Truth's Victory Over Error*.² It might therefore appear at first sight that a study, such as Milne's, examining whether 17th Century Reformed theology was cessationist or not is superfluous; it asks a question which really needs no answer: Reformed theology is cessationist, nothing else to say or see, and we can move on. However, that response would be a mistake. First, because the resurgence of commitment in contemporary evangelical circles to what are commonly termed the "five points of Calvinism" has been accompanied by a continuationist position with respect to the *charismata*. This position is exemplified by C. J. Mahaney, John Piper, Wayne Grudem and Mark Driscoll. As the ministries of these men undoubtedly impact on Reformed churches, it is vital that Reformed believers have a good understanding of their own heritage on this subject. Secondly, as the book demonstrates (more on this later) numerous reformed theologians have held a position which, on the face of it, looks staunchly cessationist, yet combines with that an openness to some kind of prophecy or foretelling. An example here may be Dickson's close friend, and another eminent Scottish theologian of the Second Reformation, James Durham (1622–1658). In an essay considering prophecy, and after stating that there "is now no gift of prophecy either for the bringing forth of any truth not formerly delivered, nor any gift to warrant one in a particular simply condemned in the Word," Durham goes on to state that it is "not altogether to be denied, but that the Lord may ... reveal himself to some by foretelling events before they come ... for although God hath now closed the Canon of the Scripture, yet that He should be restrained in His freedom, from manifesting of Himself thus, there is no convincing ground to bear it

out."³ Clearly the position of 17th century Reformed is not as easy to delineate as a cursory review of selected writings might indicate. Milne's work, then, does not simply have contemporary relevance but also has the opportunity to clarify what is undoubtedly a valid question arising from the primary source material—"Is it fair to say 17th century Reformed theology was cessationist?"

More particularly then, what of the work before us? It is, as the title indicates, a study of the meaning of Westminster Confession I:I, and in particular of the phrase "those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased." Milne seeks in essence to make the case that the Westminster Confession is indeed a cessationist document. At the outset it is important to say that this is an exceptional work of historical theology, demonstrating a master of the primary sources which few would be able to equal. Milne does, as Joel Beeke states, "for cessationism in Puritan thought what Ernest Kevan has done for Puritan thinking on the use of the law" (p. xiii). To quote Beeke again the book is indeed "fascinating" and "groundbreaking" (*ibid.*). Therefore, where questions are raised in this review, this overarching appreciation of Milne's work should be borne in mind.

Setting the Context

After the introduction, which argues the case for the relevance of his work, in chapter one Milne seeks to contextualise the Assembly by placing it in its broader historical and theological context. Milne rightly begins with the wider European context before focusing more closely on the English and British political situation. Although nothing particularly original is

1. David Dickson *Truth's Victory Over Error* (1684, Repr., ed. John R. DeWitt: Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2008), 3–4.

2. Dickson, along with James Durham, did most to codify the Scottish understanding of the Westminster Standards, penning the *Sum of Saving Knowledge (The Sum of Saving Knowledge or a Brief Sum of Christian Doctrine, Contained in the Holy Scriptures, and Holden Forth in the Foresaid Confession of Faith and Catechisms; Together with the Practical Use Thereof in Westminster Confession of Faith &c.* (repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994), 321–343) which has been described as "a more or less official interpretation of the Westminster Standards." See L. I. Hodges, "The doctrine of the Mediator in classical Scottish theology, from John Knox to James Durham" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1975), 499.

3. James Durham, *A Commentarie Upon the Book of the Revelation* (repr. Willow Street, PA.: Old Paths Publications, 2000), 597–8. Examples given of those with this gift included Athanasius, John Huss and John Knox. It would be wholly unwarrantable to suppose a disagreement between Dickson & Durham on this subject. In the interests of full disclosure I grew up in the Highlands of Scotland where a deep commitment to the worship, doctrine and practice of the Westminster Standards (including exclusive *a capella* psalmody) and a profound antagonism towards the charismatic movement was united with an openness to what can only be called prophecy along the lines of what Durham speaks of here.

advanced in this historical introduction, it serves a valuable purpose, for, as Bob Letham has noted, too many studies of the Westminster standards read as if the documents fell from the sky with no historical context whatever.⁴ Having set the political context of the Assembly (the English Civil War) Milne then outlines the established theological tradition within which Assembly was operating by considering the views of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Perkins, William Whitaker, James Usher and John Ball. Both Augustine and Aquinas are considered by Milne to be “continuationalist” with respect to the *charismata* and although the space devoted to their views is short (a recurring problem in this chapter⁵) their views are mostly adequately summarised. Calvin’s views are helpfully outlined next and Calvin is established as a member of the “cessationist” camp. This section includes a helpful discussion of how various definitions of “prophet” and “apostle” were used by Calvin through the course of his writings. Milne uses this to clear away any confusion this may cause regarding Calvin’s views. At the end of this section Milne mentions Peter Martyr Vermigli as a Reformed theologian belonging to the “continuationalist” camp (as far as predictive prophecy is concerned). However, he does not go on to tease out the influence that Vermigli’s teaching career at Oxford University may have had on English Reformed theology, and hence the Westminster Confession. It would have been interesting to see this area explored more. As an aside at this point, one of the Scottish Westminster Assembly commissioners, George Gillespie, saw no difference between Calvin and Vermigli on the *charismata*.⁶ The sections on Perkins, William Whitaker, James Usher and John Ball are generally too short to provide an adequate appraisal of their views, and therefore leave the reader wanting more. Perkins is presented as “continuationalist” while Whitaker, Usher and Ball are presented as “cessationist.” Chapter one ends with a helpful methodological

summary: namely that Milne will not simply concentrate on the leading figures of the Assembly but will seek to establish a consensus view across the full body of divines.

General and Special Revelation

Chapter two examines the first clause of Westminster Confession I:1⁷ by studying the distinction between general and special revelation in the thought of the divines. The survey of the teaching of the divines on general revelation, namely “creation, providence, and the light of nature” (68), is very helpful. Milne notes that for the divines general revelation conveys “authentic information about the Creator” and that by natural revelation “every person is rendered inexcusable, since although people know about God’s ethical demands they fail to respond to them in an acceptable and appropriate manner” (69). Thus while general revelation was a “natural and universally accessible unveiling of the divine will” and therefore was accorded “an important place in ... religious epistemology” (71) it was insufficient for salvation, necessitating “special revelation.” Milne spends the rest of this chapter clarifying what the Westminster divines meant by the “salvation” which special revelation was designed to accomplish. At first reading this may seem strange, but it is actually a vital component in Milne’s thesis. In essence Milne is trying here to test whether the following logic is appropriate: “Westminster Confession I:1 is only concerned with salvation, namely justification, so although, yes, there is no further non-canonical revelation with respect to salvation I may still expect immediate revelation (dreams, visions, still small voices etc.) on other topics.” With substantial documentary support Milne concludes in favour of a broad definition of “salvation,” namely one which included “personal, national, and international temporal deliverance and reformation, and was not therefore confined to personal redemption from sin and the wrath of God” (98). Milne then further expounds the necessity of special revelation, observing that a “willingness to make the Scriptures the rule of faith and life for all of life was a common Puritan idea” (106).⁸ This broad scope of Scripture militates against any narrowing of the scope of Westminster Confession I:1 to be dealing only with matters of personal individual salvation.

Cessationist Puritan Exegesis and “Immediate Revelation”

Having examined the scope of Westminster Confession I:1 in chapter two Milne proceeds in chapter three to examine “what exactly did the Assembly mean to say had actually ceased and why were these other modalities no longer operative?” This question, as Milne notes, is “the heart of the subject on this thesis” (108). He seeks to lay out Westminster’s answer to this question by considering the exegetical tradition behind the proof text attached to the “cessationist” clause of Westminster Confession I:1, namely Hebrews 1:1–2, and two

4. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburgh, NJ: P&R, 2009), 5–6.

5. Here over the space of 19 pages seven separate theologians are discussed. They range in time from Augustine (354–430) to John Ball (1558–1640) leaving little time for contextualisation. Perhaps here less would have been more.

6. George Gillespie, *The Works of George Gillespie* (1846, repr., Edmonton: Still Water Revival Books, 1991), 29. Milne highlights this himself.

7. “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 unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation.”

8. However, whilst this is undoubtedly true, this statement needs to be clarified. While scripture speaks to all of life, it does not give specific direction for all of life. It does not speak for instance, of the specifics of how to farm, but it does speak of the attitude of a farmer to his work, and the spirit in which his work is to be conducted.

other key texts used in this debate, Ephesians 1:17–18 and Acts 2:17–18 (Joel 2:28).

Discussing the exegesis of the Eph 1:17–18 in the Reformed tradition, and by the divines themselves, Milne brings into focus the distinction which is fundamental to his whole thesis, the difference between “immediate” and “mediate” revelation. He argues that immediate revelation, defined as “an act occurring directly without an intervening agency and apart from all human means of cooperation” (113–4), for the Puritans was an impossibility. Ample documentary evidence is provided, and to give one example, Thomas Goodwin is cited as stating: “to have an immediate light thus from heaven: to be able to say, This I know by divine revelation ... there is no such revelation now” (119). While the Spirit works directly he does so through existing revelation, i.e., mediately. This is one of the most important distinctions in Milne’s work and it clearly distinguishes any Puritan position from that of the “enthusiasts” of their day or from any genuine “continuationist” position. Nevertheless, this distinction is open to question as a boundary marker between “cessationists” and “continuationists.” For instance, according to Milne, revelation through an angel would be mediate and not immediate. Would someone who believed that angels reveal the future be “cessationist”? (“There will be a worldwide revival in 2014 because an angel told me.”) Or would someone who believed the Spirit gave them insight by assuring them of a particular application of Scripture to a contemporary situation (“England will defeat the French in war because I read this morning of David’s victory over Goliath”) be a cessationist as this is still mediate revelation? These examples are not farfetched for, as will be considered soon, these kinds of “prophecy” were not unknown among the Puritans.

Milne’s survey of Hebrews 1:1–2 demonstrates that “the Puritans ... understood Hebrews 1:1–2 to be a cessationist text” (125). Amongst the ample evidence provided are David Dickson’s comments that the Quakers “err who maintain that the Lord hath not ceased to reveal his will as he did of old ...” (125). The discussion of the divines’ understanding of Acts 2:17 (Joel 2:28–32) is very interesting. Milne highlights an exegetical tradition which saw Acts 2:17 as relevant for the whole New Testament age (the “last days”) but which argued that the specific gifts mentioned had ceased and were simply “typical” of the gifts that are now found in the Church. Milne quotes Calvin: “... the words spoken then for the Jews are true for us today for, although the visible gifts of the Spirit have ceased, God has not yet withdrawn his Spirit from His Church” (137). More contemporary with the Assembly, Thomas Manton stated: “These are but figurative expressions, to signify the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which we receive by virtue of Christ’s ascension, abundance of knowledge, faith, and holiness” (138).

Milne concludes this chapter by marshalling other citations

from the Westminster divines showing that “extra biblical modalities were simply regulated to the past.” Among the most interesting are Sydrach Simpson’s comments that miracles served to authenticate new doctrine, and as there is now no new doctrinal revelation, no miracles are required (142–3). More is made later of the teaching of the Divines as to the original purpose of the *charismata*, but this is an area to which Milne could have devoted more space as part of the development of his “cessationist” argument.

They Shall Dream Dreams?

Having built a case for the overarching cessationism of the divines, in chapter four Milne nuances his presentation by first examining the teaching of some “continuationist” Puritans, particularly related to dreams; then examining some specific Puritan claims to extra-biblical revelation; and finally by examining the Quaker polemic against Reformed Orthodoxy.

On the topic of revelatory dreams Milne identifies a number of positions he identifies as “cessationist”: 1) As exemplified by William Gouge, a complete denial of continued revelation through dreams (147); 2) As exemplified by Samuel Rutherford, a position where dreams are not revelatory, but may be used as a means of blessing by God (148–9). But surely Gouge and others would not deny this? 3) As exemplified by the Scottish commissioner to Westminster Lord Archibald Warriſton, a belief that dreams were still used by God to provide guidance. An example given was Warriſton’s belief that his dream of receiving financial support would come true as his wife had read a scripture passage previously where God supported his servants in need (151). Milne argues that, despite appearances, Warriſton’s position is actually “cessationist” because Warriſton’s experiences were due to his “belief that an omnipresent God constantly attended to the minute detail of his daily existence” (150). In reality what separates Warriſton’s views from those that Milne labels “continuationist” is not clear and this is, perhaps, the one major weakness in the whole thesis. Can such experiences as Warriſton’s genuinely be consistent with cessationism? Is this how cessationists would have believers receive guidance from God? Would this use of Scripture satisfy a cessationist? Perhaps Milne would argue that Warriſton’s “revelations” were not regarding any new doctrine, worship or practice. That is undoubtedly true, but Milne has argued in chapter two that cessationism involved more than the cessation of any new doctrinal revelation; it involved the end of all miraculous revelation on the basis that Scripture was sufficient for *all* of life.

Milne then lists a number of “continuationist” positions regarding dreams. Some were open to angelic revelations (Amyraut, Owen, 154). Edmund Calamy was open to the dying receiving revelations about heaven (155). Others appeared to recognise the validity of revelatory dreams in Church history,

e.g., that Augustine's mother Monica had genuine revelatory dreams (Westminster divines John Hacket and John Ley were of this opinion, 156–9). Milne regards these positions as “cautious continuationists.” He goes on to consider two individuals who he regards as clearly continuationist. The first is Richard Baxter who stated that “It is possible that God may make new Revelations to particular persons about their duties, events, or matters of fact, in subordination to the Scripture...” However, this is no different to the experience of Lord Warriſton, and so it is not apparent why Baxter is “continuationist” and Warriſton “cessationist.” William Bridge is also consigned to the “continuationist” camp as he stated “... may not God ſpeak by extraordinary visions and revelations, in these days of ours ... Yes, without all doubt he may: God is not to be limited, he may ſpeak in what way he please” (163). For Bridge “It is not so much ... that Scripture renders visions and dreams obsolete, as Scripture has replaced them as the ſtandard, formal and normative vehicle of God's will, although God may ſtill reveal his mind occasionally through these now uncommon and subordinate methods” (164). This appears a fair summation of Bridge's position. But again, where is the practical difference with Warriſton? And where is the difference with the quote from James Durham in the introduction?⁹

On surer ground than his segmentation of the Puritans into differing camps is Milne's summary of the Quaker opposition to the “cessationist clause” in Westminster Confession I:I. This demonstrates that the Quakers felt the confession to militate against any ongoing revelation be it mediate or immediate. This is the clearest section of the chapter, but the overall impact of chapter four is undoubtedly to muddy the waters of an otherwise clear case that the Confession is cessationist. This trend continues in the next chapter on prophecy.

And Prophecy Shall Cease?

Chapter five begins with the surprising assertion that Wayne Grudem's position “that there is a [continuing] lower order of prophecy was also the position of the Reformed orthodox in the seventeenth century” (179). However, Milne goes on to say that “Unlike Grudem ... these theologians denied that the revelation in question was extra biblical” (179).¹⁰

After a brief excursus on Puritan attitudes to astrology, lots and satanic/angelic influence, Milne turns to examine the Puritan view of prophecy more directly. He first notes that the Puritans made some important distinctions regarding New

Testament prophecy, namely the division of prophecy into “an extraordinary office” and “extraordinary gifts” in distinction to “an ordinary office” and “ordinary gifts” (189). Some New Testament texts spoke to the former, others (e.g. Rom 12:6) to the latter. Whilst lessons could still be learnt from texts dealing with extraordinary prophets,¹¹ it was a common Puritan view that “we have no [extraordinary] Prophets, or Revelations amongst us” (192). Milne buttresses his claims that there are no extraordinary prophets by noting several Puritan assertions of the denial of miraculous gifts in general (193–194) and then by documenting the views of various Assembly members who held that “extraordinary” prophecy had ceased (193–200). To quote Milne, “Since no more doctrine will be revealed (a premise unquestioned by the orthodox), miraculous gifts are obviously no longer needed to authenticate a standing ministry, for such validation is only necessary when a teacher brings new revelation” (196). However, as is often the case in historical theology, things are not so simple as they often seem, for as Milne admits, the “Westminster divines accepted the validity of predictive prophecy which fell outside the definition of prophecy by immediate revelation” (198).

Milne spends the rest of the chapter trying to clarify this puzzling situation. He understands the dilemma caused by his admission that “belief in predictive prophecy was widespread amongst the Reformed orthodox” and goes on to ask the question: “How do we resolve this paradox?” (208). He argues that belief in predictive prophecy was consistent with cessationism as Puritan prophecy was really just an application of the general word of God to future events. For example, when ministers see sins being committed they can state that God purposes to send judgement to that people (212). If this was all the Puritans intended by prophecy there would be no problem with labelling their position as “cessationist,” but the case of Warriſton seems to go beyond this. Indeed, Milne quotes Westminster divine Anthony Tuckney as stating “I deny not, but that sometimes possibly there may be some more ... [than] ordinary intimations of God's will to some of his servants ... it may be they may be helped to apply some general word in Scripture to a particular case. But never thereby put upon others either to believe or do anything, much less contrary to Scripture...” (216). This seems to allow for exactly the practice of Warriſton. At this point Milne turns his full attention to the Scots.

Prophecy and the Scots

This chapter begins with a confession that “Any enquiry into the colourful lives and views of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scots ... cannot but conclude that these Northern Presbyterians firmly believed that God still revealed secrets” (219). The first of these “colourful” figures examined is John Knox. This section is disappointingly short, and does

9. Milne suggests that Bridge quoted Luther in his support because he had could find no contemporary theologians who held his views. In view of Durham's position, this is an unreasonable supposition.

10. It must be said again that it is hard to defend this distinction. How can Warriſton's dreams be anything other than “extra biblical”?

11. Rutherford argued the two kinds of prophets differed “not in *ſpecie* and in nature” (191).

not list any of the “prophecies” attributed to Knox.¹² Still, that Knox regarded his predictions as tied to an application of the word of God, is a reasonable summation of Knox’s understanding of his own actions. So Knox’s prophecies were “mediate” rather than “immediate” (223). Again, while this may be the key that prevents Knox being classified as an “enthusiast,” or a modern “continuationalist,” this does not seem to me to place him within what would be regarded as cessationism today. For instance Knox states that “God hath revealed unto me secrets unknown to the world, and also that he hath made my tongue a trumpet, to forewarn realms and nations, yes, certain great personages, of translations and changes, when no such things were feared, nor yet was appearing, a portion whereof cannot the world deny (be it ever so blind) to be fulfilled....”¹³

Milne then moves on to the Westminster Assembly commissioners but it is unfortunate that prior to this the position of the Second Book of Discipline is not considered.¹⁴ This vital document for understanding the theology of the Scottish church states that the office of Prophet had “now ceased in the Kirk of God; except when it pleased God extraordinarily for a Time to stir some of them up again.”¹⁵ This Second Book of Discipline was agreed upon by the General Assembly in 1578, was included as part of the National Covenant and was approved by the famous reforming “Glasgow Assembly” of 1638. It may be said as closely as anything to represent the mind of the Second Reformation Church of Scotland. Therefore, its admission that God may raise up Prophets is surely worthy of evaluation.

The first three Scottish commissioners considered are Robert Baillie, Archibald Johnston and Samuel Rutherford.¹⁶ Most space is devoted to Rutherford who according to Milne was “undoubtedly a cessationist” (226). Again this all depends on the agreed definition of cessationist and whether this is broad enough to allow for “contemporary foretelling.” Milne ably demonstrates that for Rutherford “contemporary foretelling was something quite distinct from the New Testament gift of extraordinary prophecy” (230).¹⁷ Nevertheless, that Rutherford accepted contemporary prophecy as genuine (e.g., the prophecies of Hus, Wycliffe, Luther, George Wishart, John Knox) should give pause as to whether Rutherford really was cessationist. Yes, he tied foretelling to applications of the word of God by the Spirit to the mind of the one “prophesying” the future so as not to separate Word and Spirit—but is that really a cessationist handling of the word of God?

Milne then considers Alexander Henderson and Robert Blair. Henderson is quoted as stating that the Scottish Reformers “were not only learned and holy men, but had somewhat in their calling, gifts and zeal to God more than ordinary ... some of them had a prophetic Spirit manifested in diverse particular and wonderful predictions” (234).

Milne, rightly, does not see this as contrary to the position of Rutherford. But it does again question in my mind the utility of “cessationist” for categorising their position. Robert Blair

12. The area of Knox and prophecy is considered by Thomas M’Crie. He raises the point, “There is one charge against him which I have not yet noticed. He has been accused of setting up for a prophet, of presuming to intrude into the secret counsel of God, and of enthusiastically confounding the suggestions of his own imagination, and the effusions of his own spirit, with the dictates of inspiration, and immediate communications from heaven.” After noting the same material from Knox that Milne does, M’Crie notes that Knox “insisted that he had merely declared the judgment which was pronounced in the divine law.” However, M’Crie rightly goes on to state that “There are however, several of his sayings which cannot be vindicated upon these principles, and which he himself rested upon different grounds.” Amongst these M’Crie includes “... his confident hope of again preaching in his native country, and at St. Andrews, avowed by him during his imprisonment on board the French galleys ... the intimations which he gave respecting the death of Thomas Maitland, and Kircaldy of Grange.” M’Crie further states that: “It cannot be denied that his contemporaries considered these as proceeding from a prophetic spirit, and have attested that they received an exact accomplishment.” M’Crie himself defends Knox’s foretelling: “The canon of our faith is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament; we must not look to impressions or new revelations as the rule of our duty; but that God may, on particular occasions, forewarn persons of some things which shall happen, to testify his approbation of them, to encourage them to confide in him in peculiar circumstances, or for other useful purposes, is not, I think, inconsistent with the principles of either natural or revealed religion. If this is enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm into which some of the most enlightened and sober men, in modern as well as ancient times, have fallen. Some of the reformers were men of singular piety; they walked with God, they were instant in prayer; they were exposed to uncommon opposition, and had uncommon services to perform; they were endued with extraordinary gifts, and, I am inclined to believe, were occasionally favoured with extraordinary premonitions, with respect to certain events which concerned themselves, other individuals, or the church in general. But whatever intimations of this kind they enjoyed, they did not rest the authority of their mission upon them, nor appeal to them as constituting any part of the evidence of those doctrines which they preached to the world.” Thomas M’Crie, *The Life of John Knox*, Volume 2 (3rd ed., Edinburgh: John Ogle and William Blackwood, 1813), 2:262–7.

13. John Knox, *The Works of John Knox* (ed. David Laing; 6 vols., Edinburgh: The Bannatyne Club, 1856) 3:176–7. Spelling has been modernised.

14. It is only considered in reference to the trial of Edward Irving, and not in its historical context. (254).

15. *The Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Form of Church Government, Discipline &c. of Public Authority in the Church of Scotland* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1764), 71.

16. An interesting account is given of Johnson’s acceptance of one of his friend’s “prophecies of the overturning [of] the papistical religion and party in 1666” (226).

17. It is not by any means certain, given the teaching of the Second Book of Discipline, that Rutherford would have held that there was “no possibility that contemporary inspired prophets may be raised up.” The issue is of course what exactly is meant by “inspired” prophets (231).

(who never actually sat at the Assembly) even more clearly calls into question the utility of “cessationist” as a designation. For example, Blair is recorded as prophesying that a ship he was in during a storm would reach land safely and that the Prince of orange would “deliver” Scotland—neither of which strike as immediately obvious applications of scripture. (235). Blair defended his own position by stating that “if an angel of from heaven should reveal anything contrary to the Scriptures, or offer to add anything to that perfect rule of faith and manners, he ought to be accursed, and much more if any man on earth should do the same . . . But in the meantime, it ought not to be denied that the Lord is pleased sometimes, to his servants, especially in a suffering condition, to reveal some events concerning themselves and that part of the Church of God in which they live” (236). Significant time is spent by Milne arguing that it is likely George Gillespie’s views were also consistent with Samuel Rutherford. Again, it is obvious Gillespie believed in modern prophecy, as he called, among others, John Knox and John Welsh “holy prophets receiving extraordinary revelations from God, and foretelling diverse strange and remarkable things, which did accordingly come to pass punctually” (239). The survey of Gillespie’s writings presented justify Milne’s conclusion that Gillespie was talking of mediate prophecy rather than immediate. However, there are a number of caveats to add. First, it is an overstatement to say that “Gillespie’s views are often inconsistent or fluid.” Second, contrary to Milne’s assertion, it appears that William McKay is correct when he stated that Gillespie’s views “do not fit into any contemporary camp” (243). It is not self-evident that many “cessationists” would be comfortable with Gillespie’s views. Third, it does not immediately appear that it would have been a contradiction for Gillespie to affirm the Form of Presbyterian Church Government which stated that the office of prophet was extraordinary and had ceased (234) and also to hold with the Second Book of Discipline that God may “extraordinarily for a Time to stir . . . them up again.” Fourth, again, it does not seem clear that this tying of a prophecy to a verse of scripture is enough to make one a “cessationist.”

In conclusion, Milne considers other influential Scottish figures, James Durham (1622–1658), Robert Flemming (1630–94), James Hog (1658–1734), Edward Irving (1792–1834) and John Kennedy (1819–1884). Durham and Flemming are

rightly shown to have held positions compatible with Rutherford, although it would have been interesting to see Milne comment on Durham’s statement quoted in the introduction to this review.¹⁸ Hog is taken, again correctly, as a representative of the continuing “Knoxian” tradition into the eighteenth century. John Kennedy is also seen to continue the tradition of Knox with respect to prophecy in the nineteenth century. Milne, again correctly, uses the disciplinary proceedings against Edward Irving as evidence that the Scottish Church understood the Westminster Standards to militate against a simple continuation of the *charismata*. The only problem with this section is the lack of space to properly contextualise each individual’s views.

Subscription to the Standards

Milne’s final chapter deals with how the Westminster Confession was intended to function in the seventeenth century. Was it necessary to affirm the confession in exhaustive detail or was leeway given to allow for personal (re)interpretation? Milne believes a loose subscription meant that a “continuationist” would not have been too concerned by a cessationist Confession, while under strict subscription they would have pushed hard for there to be no “cessationist” clause in the confession. Milne argues that the English never intended a “strict subscription” to the Westminster Confession and that they saw it as “a standard of teaching, but that it did not expose an individual to sanctions if they departed from this confession at specific points” (261). Milne presents significant evidence that suggests this indeed was the case. The Scots, however, are presented as representing a much more “strict subscriptionist” position. Again the evidence is well marshalled to support this. Milne argues, though, that there is no evidence that the Scottish church in practice required subscription to the Westminster documents until the restoration of their position in 1690. On the other hand, here is no doubt that the leading Scottish ministers regarded the Westminster Standards as “their” confession. James Durham, for instance, speaking of the Westminster Shorter Catechism simply calls it “the catechism.”¹⁹ This means that Milne’s contention that “non subscription to the WCF between 1647 and 1690 could mitigate the view that Scottish mysticism and acceptance of dreams, visions and other revelatory operations of the Spirit give evidence that the cessationism clause of the WCF still allowed for such things” is highly improbable.

Conclusion

Robert Letham, in his work on the Westminster Assembly, stated that “Recently Garnet Milne has argued that a number of divines held to the continuation of dreams and vision as conveying God’s will in a non-redemptive sense. . .” (Letham, 126). Letham proceeds to dismiss the contentions of Milne,

18. “For although God hath now closed the Canon of the Scripture, yet that He should be restrained in His freedom, from manifesting of Himself thus, there is no convincing ground to bear it out.” Durham, *Revelation*, 597–8. It is strange that this statement is not discussed as Milne interacts extensively with Durham’s essay on prophecy.

19. James Durham, *Christ Crucified Or the Marrow of the Gospel in Seventy-Two Sermons on the Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah* (ed. Chris Coldwell; Dallas, TX.: Naphtali Press, 2001), 96–7.

stating that “any hint of continuing revelation would have undermined the Protestant and Reformed polemic against both Rome and the Quakers” (Letham, 127). Whilst this is a valid theological stance, it is simply not credible to dismiss the historical evidence in this way. Garnet Milne is to be applauded for his open and honest survey of the teaching of the Westminster Confession. On the one hand, he has clearly demonstrated that Westminster Confession I:I is an anti-enthusiast (e.g. Quaker) document and that the divines did not believe in the continued presence of the *charismata* of apostolic age. However, whilst affirming this, Milne does not suppress the overwhelming evidence of a belief in a continued gift of “foretelling.” Such historical honesty is the hallmark of any good historical theologian.

However, at the end of his book there is a surprising twist where he states that his “analysis of the Puritan view of revelation critiques the two standpoints [cessationist and continuationist] evident in the Protestant church today” (290). There may be some merit in this viewpoint, but again, it begs the question of why Milne labored so hard to label the confession and its authors “cessationist” throughout the book? Further, it would be incorrect to present the views of the Westminster divines as a *via media* in the current debates over the *charismata*. For them the apostolic gifts had ceased and were simply not present in the ordinary experience of the church. James Durham’s openness to foretelling has already been noted, and yet he cautions, “this is not habitual or ordinary to any, but is singular at some few times and in some few cases” (Durham, *Revelation*, 598). Again, any prophecy was subservient to the doctrine, worship, and practice revealed in Scripture and could not be contrary or add to it in any way. Prophecy was largely derivative application of the Word to the ongoing activities of ordinary providence. Therefore the divines were much closer to the “cessationist” camp than the “continuationist” camp. Indeed, they might with propriety be labelled “soft cessationists.”

So where does that leave confessional Presbyterians today? Well, “cessationism” is certainly consistent with the Confessions and “continuationism” is certainly inconsistent with the confession. But those who hold to views similar to the Puritan and Scottish divines considered, and have an openness to the kind of experiences they believed in and went through, should not be charged with violating the original intent of the confession.

Addendum

There are a number of minor points to note and some typographical errors:

- It is stated (p. 80 fn. 48) that “in Mark 16:15–16, salvation is offered those who believe and are baptised....” Aside from the missing “to” the phraseology here is unclear. To rephrase

it, as the Westminster divines would have, “in Mark 16:15–16 salvation is offered to all, on condition that they believe and are baptised.”

It is strange to see the works of Clifford and Armstrong²⁰ (135 fn 11) referred to as authorities without question, given the critiques of their works by Muller, Trueman et al.²¹ Further, for Milne to infer that the Assembly expressed a “moderate Calvinism” (presumably including within its bounds hypothetic universalism) due to the influence of Amyraut without acknowledging that this is a controversial claim is puzzling. Whilst this thesis is supported by many respected scholars (e.g. Muller²²) it is also a position critiqued by others (e.g. Letham²³) (135).

There is an unnecessary comma on page 73. On page 153 the heading should be 4.3 but it is 1.1.

On page 219 Robert Wodrow (1679–1734) is wrongly cited as belonging to the “nineteenth century.” This was probably because of the printing of many of his works by the Wodrow Society in the nineteenth century. ■

Review: Paul Helm, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) Hardcover, x + 368 pages. \$99. ISBN 0199532184. Reviewed by James E. Dolezal, Ph.D. candidate in systematic theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

In *Calvin at the Centre* Paul Helm aims to build on his earlier work, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford University Press, 2004). In that previous volume, he tells us, he “attempted to demonstrate that though superficially different in the way that they were presented, Calvin’s ideas owe a significant debt to ancient and medieval thought, and that he consciously employed various philosophical concepts and doctrines, even when treating them eclectically” (1). That approach is revived in *Calvin at the Centre* though Helm adds a new twist to his interpretation inasmuch as he is now concerned with “not only finding sources but also heirs” (1). The point is to situate Calvin into a more global understanding of the history of Christian thought. Compared to more tightly contextual studies of Calvin, such as David Steinmetz’s *Calvin in Context* and Richard Muller’s

20. Alan Clifford, *Atonement and Justification, English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790. An Evaluation.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

21. Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998); R. A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

22. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I:76.

23. Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, 119.

The Unaccommodated Calvin, Helm's project is much more expansive and sweeping in scope.

Calvin at the Centre is comprised of ten stand-alone chapters. The unifying element is, as Helm explains, "not ... a general thesis about who or what influenced Calvin, or who or what he influenced" (3), but, rather, the *manner* in which the Reformer is approached. The chapters are organized more philosophically than theologically with the following approximate categories: epistemology (chs. 1–3); metaphysics (chs. 4–6); and anthropology (chs. 7–10). In keeping with these divisions we will consider each chapter in sequence.

Calvin's Epistemology

Chapter 1. In his treatment of Calvin's epistemology Helm gives considerable attention to the relation between Augustine, Calvin and Descartes. He offers in chapter 1 a discussion of the knowledge of God and ourselves—a dominant theme in Calvin's *Institutes* from the very first section. Calvin is considered in relation to Augustine and the medieval schoolmen on the one side and to Descartes on the other. The knowledge of God that Calvin regards as the aim of true religion is not God as he is in himself (though Calvin endorses the notion of God *in se*), but God as he is in his operations as Creator and Redeemer. Helm observes, "This does not mean that Calvin is a reductionist or pragmatist in his religion, for how God has revealed himself, his 'nature,' according to Calvin, is a fitting expression of his essence which is incomprehensible to us—we cannot fully grasp it—because we cannot know God as God knows himself" (11). With Augustine, Calvin argues for the intuitive immediacy of man's knowledge of God, though he disagrees with Augustine's rejection of the world as a source of that knowledge. While secondary to the redemptive knowledge of God in Christ, Calvin still regards secular institutions as meaningful and valid sources for our knowledge of God. Helm also points out that Calvin and Descartes share an Augustinian common denominator in their support for an immediate and intuitive knowledge of God. The striking difference between Calvin and Descartes is that the latter does not teach the immediate *reciprocity* of the knowledge of God and ourselves. Helm notes, "For Descartes, the one leads to the other, but does not involve the other" (35). That Descartes is involved in a philosophical and not theological inquiry explains his emphasis upon logical consequence in this knowledge rather than, like Calvin, on the mutuality of the knowledge of God and ourselves.

Chapter 2. In chapter 2 Helm poses the question of whether or not the eclectic nature of Reformed Orthodoxy could have allowed it to include a form of modified Cartesianism rather than Aristotelianism; he concludes that it could. In support of his conclusion Helm tenders evidence of Cartesian-friendly Reformed theologians who taught at Leiden University and

were opposed by other Reformed luminaries (45–48). The reason such conflict could arise among equally committed Calvinists is due in part to Calvin's own ambiguity regarding the Aristotelian ideas of essences and substantial forms. Due to certain elements of Descartes's thought that were entirely inimical to Calvin's views, even those parts that could have been harmonized were ultimately rejected by the Reformed scholastics. Descartes seemed to leave no room for the knowledge of God as Spirit-taught wisdom or for the priority of the *sensus divinitatis* which was so central to Calvin's outlook on man's knowledge of God.

Chapter 3. Helm rounds out his epistemological focus in chapter 3 with a study of the relation between Scripture, reason, and grace. He highlights certain similarities and differences between the views of Aquinas and Calvin. Both seem to agree on the place of internal and external testimony to the authority of Scripture though Calvin goes beyond Thomas in his unique emphasis upon the internal witness of the Holy Spirit to the believer and upon faith as *fiducia* and not merely *assensus* (69). Helm concludes the chapter by comparing the Reformer with some of his lesser known successors such as Bayle, Tuckney and Whichote.

Calvin's Metaphysics

Chapter 4. Helm takes up matters metaphysical in his three chapters dealing with the visibility of God, providence and predestination, and the atonement. Chapter 4 explores the doctrine of God's incomprehensibility as a question of his "visibility." Calvin seems committed to the notion of a hidden God in such a way that "we cannot so easily read off what God is from what God does" (98). This stands in contrast to many recent proposals from certain evangelicals, such as Stanley Grenz (in *The Named God and the Question of Being*, WJK, 2005), which seem to argue that God's essence is ontologically identical with his actions in history and with the words of Scripture in which he has chosen to reveal himself. Calvin, in contrast to the recent obsession with theology as narrative, maintains a prominent place for understanding revelation as divine accommodation and God's essence as incomprehensible. Helm is interested in situating Calvin's brand of "agnosticism" between that of Augustine before him and Immanuel Kant after him. Also, Helm discusses Karl Barth's charge that Calvin's hidden God is insufficiently Christian. Such hiddenness, according to Barth, engenders theological speculation even if Calvin himself was not a speculative theologian. Colin Gunton, himself a Barthian, charges that the Trinity as explained by Augustine and the West is unknowable because for them the "doctrine of the Trinity is logically dependent upon the doctrine of God, particularly the unity and simplicity of God, whereas in the East the Trinity is what the doctrine of God is" (99). Gunton thinks that Augustine

and Calvin held to an *absolute* unknowability of God. Helm carefully dismantles Gunton's errant interpretation of Augustine in which Gunton charges the Bishop of Hippo with holding to an absolutely unknowable substratum underlying the three divine persons and by which they receive their divinity (99–108). Augustine denies that such Aristotelian notions apply to the Godhead even if they are helpful for our understanding of material things. The unknown essence does not produce or cause the divinity of the three persons. If that were so the essence would be a fourth "something" in the Godhead. Anyhow, Helm shows that Augustine (as with Calvin who followed him) is not nearly so agnostic about the divine essence as Gunton maintains. Helm also rejects Edward Dowey's thesis which purports that Calvin was something of a proto-Kantian in his epistemology (111). Incomprehensibility and divine hiddenness do not mean absolute unknowability for Calvin. Such a view, Helm argues, suffers from the same substratum theory that Gunton ascribes to Augustine. Both Gunton and Dowey assume that Augustine and Calvin held the invisibility of God to refer to his divine *essence* and not to his three-personed existence. But Helm argues that Augustine and Calvin allow for a "visibility" of God's divine nature in which he makes himself truly known through accommodated revelation and that his three-personed mode of existence is what is more properly invisible to us (114). In short, it appears that Augustine and Calvin agree with Aquinas that God's divine nature is more readily accessible to man's mind than is his subsistence in three persons. This stands in stark contrast to the Eastern tradition which assumes that the three persons are more "visible" than the divine essence. Helm's observations in this chapter highlight some of the problems with reading Calvin as though he were easily amenable to an Eastern conception of God.

Chapter 5. Chapter 5 examines the doctrines of providence and predestination with special emphasis upon Aquinas, Calvin and the Westminster divines (especially John Arrowsmith). Against much of the popular wisdom, Helm avers, "Predestination was most certainly not an invention of the Reformers" (133). Throughout the chapter the author is sensitive to the different emphases given the doctrine of providence by Aquinas, Calvin, and the Westminster divines. The last two are conspicuously more pastoral in their treatment of it though substantially in agreement with Thomas on the doctrine itself. While Thomas treats providence as a scholastic doctrine, deducible from his doctrine of God, Calvin and the Westminster divines are concerned to present the doctrine as biblical (though they apparently would not deny Thomas's line of deduction). Helm concludes the chapter by showing that the English Puritans were less scholastic in their treatment of divine providence than were their continental Dutch counterparts. The Dutch were much more inclined to explain

providence in terms of Aristotelian physics than were the English. In this sense, then, the English appear closer to the explanations of Calvin than do the Dutch. Helm suggests that this is due in part to the fact that the Dutch felt the need to controvert the implicit occasionalism of Descartes, whereas the English were fairly well insulated from that intellectual milieu. Anyhow, the identification of these differing emphases among the Reformed Orthodox is a helpful feature of Helm's chapter. One conclusion is that Reformed Orthodoxy is not a monolithic movement, but one permeated with diversity. Perhaps we witness this same diversity today in the friendly contest between the more metaphysically minded and more biblical-theologically minded in the Reformed community.

Chapter 6. In chapter 6 Helm considers various views on the necessity and contingency of the atonement. The discussion revolves around the modal concepts of absolute necessity, contingent necessity, and absolute non-necessity. Calvin affirms the middle position which Helm formulates as: "Necessarily, given the fact of sin, if there is to be reconciliation, then it will be via the God-man" (166). Looking backward, Helm assesses Calvin's position in relation to that of Anselm (167–71). Calvin agrees with Anselm that if there is to be a reconciliation of sinners to God it must be by an incarnation and by a divine person. But he disagrees with Anselm's further insistence that the incarnation would be necessary even if God chose not to reconcile sinners to himself. Calvin does not allow for an incarnation without a reconciliation. For Anselm, God's freedom in atonement lies in his liberty to apply it to whomever he will; but, for him, the *fact* of the atonement is not where God's freedom lies. In this sense Calvin is decidedly non-Anselmian in his understanding of this doctrine.

Looking forward, Helm compares and contrasts the views of John Owen with those of William Twisse and Samuel Rutherford (182–93). The main point of difference among these seventeenth century heirs of Calvin is their understanding of God's justice and his freedom (or lack of freedom) to satisfy that justice against sinners in ways other than atonement. Was the atonement *absolutely* necessary for the reconciliation of sinners or was it *conditionally* or *suppositionally* necessary on account of God's decree to reconcile sinners in that manner? Twisse and Rutherford, both famous supralapsarians, affirm the latter, while Owen, an infralapsarian, argues the former. But all agree with Calvin against Anselm that reconciliation itself is not absolutely necessary. For all the disagreement among Calvin's Puritan successors, there is one aspect of their approach to the atonement in which they all stand together against Calvin: they begin their approach to the atonement with the doctrine of God whereas Calvin begins with the doctrine of atonement itself and then draws conclusions for his doctrine of God. Of the Puritans, Helm notes, "The approach is much more obviously scholastic in method. The

atonement features only secondarily, as illustrative of the attributes and powers of God, and of their exercises, issues which are logically prior to the consideration of the atonement" (183). Helm goes on: "There is an obvious methodological difference between Calvin and the participants in this Puritan debate. By the mid-seventeenth century more of the subtleties of scholasticism had become a part of Reformed dogmatics than in Calvin's day. The intellectual machinery had become more nuanced and complex. There is also, in the case of this particular discussion, a difference of method, a willingness (also characteristic of scholasticism) to discuss the doctrine of God in abstraction from what God had in fact done: to raise hypothetical possibilities" (193). In these sorts of observations, which can be found throughout the volume, Helm is careful not to portray Calvin as if he were committed to the philosophical methods and subtleties of previous or later generations. Indeed, Calvin is fascinating in that he stands as an important transitional figure between medieval scholasticism and Protestant scholasticism while himself resisting the scholastic method and jargon. Helm's point is not to portray Calvin as somehow more pious on this account, but simply to demonstrate that even as a non-scholastic figure Calvin brings substantial influence to bear even on his scholastic heirs, causing later Protestant scholastics to incorporate the biblical redemptive record into their theologizing in ways that are lacking in their medieval forerunners. Another way of putting this might be to observe that Calvin leavens the Christian theological enterprise with a humanistic attention to the text of Scripture that is underdeveloped in many of his predecessors.

Calvin's Anthropology

Chapter 7. Turning his attention in the final four chapters to anthropological themes in Calvin's thought, Helm offers in chapter 7 a scintillating study of the great Genevan's doctrine of the *duplex gratia* and its place within his soteriology. Calvin's view is compared to that of Augustine before him and the Protestant scholastics (especially Francis Turretin) after him. Even though Augustine erred in treating sanctification as though it grew organically out of justification, Calvin is attracted to his emphasis upon the inseparability of justification and sanctification. Their inseparable yet unmixed coupling is established not merely in a divine fiat, but in their mutual grounding in the believer's union with Christ. Helm opines, "Had these features [of distinct yet inseparable benefits] been observed, then the torturous discussions of the relation between justification and sanctification which have been a feature of the Reformed tradition down to the present day might have been eased, if not avoided" (198). Calvin's heirs did not, according to Helm, fare so well in perceiving the significance of union with Christ in his doctrine of

salvation. Helm observes, "The unique and (for Calvin) the characteristic place that union with Christ plays was lost (or to be kinder) became muted in later Reformed Orthodoxy. So while the Reformed Orthodox discussed justification by faith alone with some sophistication . . . the *locus* treatment of doctrine which became prevalent after Calvin tended to lose Calvin's synoptic view: the double grace, the fruit of union with Christ" (198). The saving union in which the forensic and transformative benefits are conveyed to the believer is one single mystical union (208). It is not as though there is a legal union and a separate spiritual or transformative union. Though Calvin denies that justification *causes* sanctification there is still a sense in which justification is logically prior to sanctification as the necessary condition for any who would be sanctified (213).

The perspective on justification and sanctification as two distinct yet inseparable benefits issuing from the mystical union with Christ tended to be obscured by the *locus* method employed by Calvin's Reformed descendants, Helm contends. Turretin, for instance, affirms the inseparability of justification and sanctification, but because he treats them separately it is not clear in what the inseparability is grounded (i.e., the believer's union with Christ). In addition to the *locus* method of theology Helm also faults the developing covenantal focus on the economic division of salvific work among the three persons of the Godhead for stifling the role that Christ plays in the application of salvation; redemption applied tended to be expressed almost exclusively in terms of the Holy Spirit's work, thus eclipsing the vital union with Christ that grounds and accounts for the inseparability of justification and sanctification. One might be surprised to hear that such an exegetically driven development as covenant theology could possibly obscure some of Calvin's most penetrating exegetical insights regarding the role of Christ in redemption's application; yet such is Helm's conclusion. The *locus* method of the Reformed Orthodox has unique strengths and weaknesses. On matters such as Calvin's *sola fide* principle it allows the Protestant tradition to arrive at greater clarity and precision than is to be found in the Reformer himself. But on the matter of union with Christ the *locus* method tends to obfuscate Calvin's most penetrating and useful insights. Helm writes, "We have noted the sophisticated, analytic approach to the understanding of 'justification by faith alone,' which surely adds to our understanding, and seems fully in accord with Calvin's *duplex gratia*. On the other hand, the *locus* method of theological organization, while also having the virtues of analytic strength, allowing each *locus* to be considered in its own right, means that there is no longer a controlling motif, such as Calvin's motifs of the knowledge of God and of ourselves, and of union with Christ, which provides unifying, synoptic themes binding together the various issues discussed" (220).

Helm has long been a champion against the half-baked Calvin-versus-the-Calvinists theories of Armstrong, Kendall, McGrath and others; yet here he offers us a careful evaluation of important differences (I do not say discontinuities) between Calvin and his theological children. One conclusion that might be drawn from Helm's study of the *duplex gratia* is that modern Reformed theologians should not feel forced to choose between a biblical-theological approach, on the one hand, and a more scholastic *loci* approach on the other. Rather, we derive most benefit from the tradition as a whole when we incorporate the strong suits of both approaches into our overall theology.

Chapter 8. In chapter 8 Helm examines the nature of Calvin's compatibilist view of the relation between God's will and man's will. Notable continuities with the medieval Dominican view can be demonstrated though Calvin tends to construct his account of man's free will from quite a different set of concerns. He does not conceive the question of human free will in terms of the metaphysics of agency (as so many medieval schoolmen did), but in terms of his Christian anthropology and the effect of sin upon man's mind and will. Helm is keen to point out some of the strong continuities between Calvin's view and that of the ancient Stoics. His point is not that Calvin was a neo-Stoic, but that his eclecticism allowed him to incorporate Stoic elements into his "broadly deterministic outlook" (230). A central feature of Calvin's compatibilism is his belief that determinism does not necessarily entail coercion of the one determined. Helm observes that, "... even when discussing free will at length ... Calvin does not enter into much discussion of the complexities and subtleties of voluntary action or the variety of ways in which action may be coerced" (230). Calvin holds that even when a person wills something necessarily, as in the unbeliever's willing of those things that contradict the glory of God, he may still will without coercion. Necessary willing is not itself a sign of coercion. "The importance of this distinction for Calvin," Helm remarks, "is that while, in general, acting out of necessity—both the metaphysical necessity of determinism and the moral necessity of a will in bondage to sin—is consistent with being held responsible for the action, and being praised or blamed for it, being coerced is inconsistent with such praise or blame" (230). Though a sinner sins of necessity it does not follow that he is coerced, that is, forced from without, in his voluntary actions and thoughts. Helm offers an extended comparison and analysis of the similarities and differences between Calvin and the Stoics, concluding that Calvin's doctrine of God's absolute determinism is a form of modified Stoicism (232–56). The leading difference is that Calvin's is not a doctrine of abstract fatalism, but one in which an all-wise and all-loving personal God wills and bring about exactly what he desires (256).

Chapter 9. In chapter 9 we are treated to a study of Calvin's doctrine of intermediate states with a particular focus upon how his anthropological dualism is derived from his opposition to "soul sleep". Calvin's position is painstakingly laid out through a penetrating analysis of numerous writings (271–87). At one point Helm explains that Calvin's view of the body's mortality led him to maintain that eventually the soul and body must necessarily be separated: "[Calvin] tended to think, in hierarchical fashion, that though the body was created good and while it is like the mind, corrupted by sin, being mortal it is destined to die and to be separated from the soul ..." (274). Helm's discussion could have been enhanced at this point by a consideration of Calvin's commentary on Genesis 3:19 in which he states, "Truly the first man would have passed to a better life, had he remained upright; but there would have been no separation of the soul from the body, no corruption, no kind of destruction, and, in short, no violent change" (Calvin Translation Society). Clearly, then, Calvin did not take the body's mortality *per se* to be tending toward separation from the soul. Anyhow, Helm pays no attention to Calvin's teaching on Adam's prelapsarian body. Further on, Helm accurately deduces that Calvin was more Platonic in his understanding of how the soul and body relate while his fellow reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli was more Aristotelian (287). Calvin takes the soul to be the principal part of man while Vermigli does not assign priority to either part. Helm concludes the chapter with a discussion of Calvin's view of Christ's intermediate state between his death and resurrection and his view of the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper (293–307). Here he establishes that the *extra-Calvinisticum* is rooted squarely in the medieval *totus-totum* distinction which Calvin uses to argue that the whole Christ can be present in the Supper without being there wholly.

Chapter 10. In the final chapter Helm explores Calvin's view of pure nature and common grace and concludes that Calvin's doctrine of common grace was not as original as many nineteenth and twentieth century Calvinists have thought. In particular, he singles out Herman Bavinck for extended criticism. Helm carefully compares the positions of Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin and discovers that they all shared a similar view of nature and grace (309–28). A crucial piece of this argument is Helm's insistence that the nature/grace dualism of Bellarmine, Cajetan, Suarez and the Counter-Reformation was not that of Augustine and Aquinas. The Counter-Reformation held to two clearly distinguishable layers of nature and supernature (312). This position, Helm explains, "came to be regarded as *the* Roman Catholic view, for instance by nineteenth-century Reformed theologians. So the organic Augustinian view, to which ... Calvin adhered, and Aquinas subscribed, came to be eclipsed" (312). It was their failure to recognize this change in the Roman view that led

theologians such as Bavinck to develop the idea of a *uniquely* Calvinistic doctrine of common grace, Helm charges. Indeed, Calvin regards nature and common grace as simply two valid perspectives on the same phenomena: that goodness of some sort can still be found even in the fallen world of nature. He does not, however, replace the medieval Roman Catholic view of nature with a new doctrine of common grace. Rather, these two are complementary perspectives in his understanding of nature. Nature for Calvin, as for Aquinas and Augustine before him, is depraved but not destroyed by Adam's fall into sin. Insofar as nature remains it still retains elements of its original goodness. In this understanding of nature God's goodness is conceived as implanted in nature *as nature*. Given this outlook nature and common grace are simply two ways of looking at the same reality (333). Bavinck's mistake, per Helm, is that he anachronistically read the stronger nature/grace dualism of the Counter-Reformation into the medievals and assumed that Calvin must have rejected that schema with his doctrine of common grace. Bavinck is correct that Calvin's notion of common grace contradicts the newer Roman view of nature, but he is wrong in assuming that there is only one Roman Catholic view of nature. In fact, as Helm concludes, the real doctrinal innovation of the sixteenth century is not Calvin's notion of common grace but, rather, Rome's new non-gracious notion of "pure" nature. Helm's chapter adds considerable historical fuel to the current fiery debate within Reformed circles about the possibility of a Reformed doctrine of natural law.

Throughout *Calvin at the Centre* Helm has sought to persuade Calvin "to speak to us afresh" (3). In many places the Genevan's thought is expertly recast in an idiom that he himself did not choose and yet which remains faithful to his dogmatic concerns. Some, no doubt, will think that Helm has left the real Calvin behind in making him undergo this idiomatic permutation, but a careful read of this volume should put most of these fears to rest. Even if Helm has not gotten Calvin just right at every turn the tale he tells of "Calvin at the center" will certainly enlarge the reader's understanding and appreciation of Calvin's critical role in the progress of Christian thought. ■

REVIEW: Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God: Vol. 1, God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009). xxxiii+718 pages. Cloth. ISBN 9780875521916. \$49.99. Reviewed by Jeffrey C. Waddington.

One of the drawbacks of the specialization of knowledge is its fragmentation. Now the theological encyclopedia (which is the whole "circle" of theological knowledge) has recognized

different sub-disciplines within the theological enterprise, and the twin goals were a familiarity with the general contours of each area: exegetical theology, biblical theology, systematic theology, apologetics, church history/historical theology, and practical theology; and a familiarity with how each related to the others. With overspecialization the comprehensive grasp of the whole has been lost.¹ Moreover, the systematic and thematic interrelations between, say, exegesis and apologetics, have not only been forgotten, but in many instances are outright denied. Gone is the ideal of a Bavinck, Vos, or Warfield.

Enter onto the stage Dr. Richard C. Gamble and the recent publication of his *The Whole Counsel of God: Vol. 1, God's Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*. The author, who is currently Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh and Senior Pastor of College Hill Reformed Presbyterian Church in Beaver Falls, PA, comes well qualified to treat this subject. In the past he has taught church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, systematic theology at Reformed Theology Seminary in Orlando, FL, and formerly served as director of the H. Henry Meeter Center for Calvin Studies.

Why is *The Whole Counsel of God* so significant? Is it because it bucks the trend toward intellectual isolation and fragmentation of knowledge so common in our day? Is it because the work swims against the tide? In a word, yes. However it would be misleading to portray Gamble's work as if it had a polemic edge. It does not. It simply goes against the grain in trying to draw upon the whole theological encyclopedia by allowing these different streams to converge when and where they will. In other words, *The Whole Counsel of God* is not so much about talking about overcoming theological fragmentation as it is an actual attempt to do so. This attempt by itself is worth our attention.

The Whole Counsel of God will be a projected three volume work. The first volume, reviewed here, covers the Old Testament. Volume two will cover the New Testament and volume three will treat the church's historically developing understanding of the Bible (xxix–xxxiii). Strictly speaking, Dr. Gamble is explicitly attempting to weave a strong cord from three of the theological disciplines: biblical theology, systematic theology, and historical theology. The other branches of the encyclopedia make appearances now and then, and so the author really has made a valiant attempt at an integrated theological analysis of Scripture.

The first volume of *The Whole Counsel of God* is comprised of thirty chapters divided into five major sections. Part one, the "'Magnalia Dei,' 'God's Great Deeds'" (5–142), is what can best be described as a theological prolegomena. Here Dr. Gamble discusses the nature and method ("way through") of theology and specifically addresses the relationship of biblical and systematic theology at some length. Rather than being in

1. This is not to deny the finitude of human knowledge.

opposition, the author finds these two disciplines as complementary. Biblical theology is the tracing out of the historical unfolding of God's revelation in history with a focus on the development of themes. While exegesis proper is concerned with specific passages and books of the Bible and their local contexts, biblical theology examines how, for instance, typology works between earlier and later portions of the Old Testament, and between the Old and New Testaments (inner and inter-testamental exegesis).

While biblical theology is concerned with the historical progression of God's revelation, systematic theology is concerned with the logical interrelations of the teachings of the Bible (i.e., the various doctrines of Scripture) as a whole. While it is true that foreign philosophical grids have often been forced upon the Scriptures and have so vitiated various systematic theologies, this problem is not inherent to the discipline. Nor, one must say, is the imposition of a philosophical Procrustean bed limited to systematic theology. Many a biblical commentary or Old or New Testament theology has been infected with unbiblical philosophical presuppositions. Dr. Gamble is not unmindful of the history of systematic and biblical studies and attempts to steer a *via media* between a philosophically-driven systematics and a hermeneutically and theologically naïve (not to say ignorant) biblical exposition. It is especially refreshing to read an Old Testament theology which recognizes that the New Testament is the intentional completion of the Old. For instance, it is *not* illegitimate to allow Hebrews 11 to color one's understanding of Genesis 22. There is here an intentional interpenetration of the Old and New Testaments which is faithful to the whole.

With part two, "Revelation from Adam through the Flood" (145–309), we begin what looks like the traditional Old Testament introduction and commentary. However, the reader will encounter theological discussions one might not expect to find in a typical (atheological) introduction or commentary. For instance, the author discusses God and the origin of evil, the imputation of Adam's sin, the image of God, the nature of humanity, and the use of reason in theology (post fall) in the context of the flow of the biblical text. Dr. Gamble's approach to formulating an Old Testament theology is reminiscent of an earlier approach to exegesis and commentary. For instance, while John Calvin is known for his separating exegesis and systematic theological formulation (these were two genres, the commentary and the *Institutes*), at least some of his Reformation colleagues took a different tack. For instance, Peter Martyr Vermigli, the Italian Reformer, would often in the midst of a biblical commentary digress into a discussion of a particular systematic theological locus as the topic arose in the flow of the biblical text. And Peter Martyr was not alone.² It should be noted that these various topics are discussed in the context of an unfolding exposition of the biblical text (in this context

the first eleven chapters of Genesis) and strike this reader as legitimate concerns.

Part three, "Revelation from Abraham to Moses," (313–473) deals with the Abrahamic covenant, theology and ethics before the giving of the law through Moses, the Mosaic covenant, a thoroughgoing analysis of the Decalogue, an examination of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and *interestingly* (and pleasantly) a consideration of ecclesiology in the Pentateuch.

Part four, "The Prophetic and Wisdom-Poetic Era of Revelation," (477–665) examines the former prophets (Joshua through Nehemiah), the theology of the Wisdom-Poetic literature (where the author offers a defense of exclusive psalmody), the major prophets, the book of the twelve (e.g., the minor prophets), theology in the prophetic era, and God's being and works in the Old Testament. For this reviewer, this section was the richest and choicest in the book. The author reveals his study of and meditation on the text in being able to whet the appetite of this reader to go back to the sources! The church deprives itself of so much blessing and edification (and correction too) when it ignores the Old Testament as a whole and the wisdom and prophetic books in particular. It is in the prophetic literature that we are reminded (peradventure it was possible to forget, and *regrettably* it is!) of God's faithfulness and long-suffering patience with his continually and constantly wayward and stiff-necked people. God is a God of holiness and wrath, but he is also a God of grace. The prophets remind us of both points and we would do well to pay attention.

Part five concludes the book with "God's people respond to the Magnalia Dei" (669–683). Here the author discusses the life of God's people in a very unholy world and he concludes the study with a consideration of "Adam and the Covenant and Us." Dr. Gamble reminds us that there is both continuity and discontinuity to the life of faith in the Old and New Testaments. Faith as trust in God is basic. Old Testament faith was anticipatory and New Testament faith is retrospective. There is greater clarity, especially with the specifics of the person and work of Christ, but faith is faith. For those who long to see the practicality of theology, this concluding section is a must read.

Richard C. Gamble has given us a helpful reintroduction of integrated exegesis and theology. Given that this is the first of three projected volumes, any evaluation offered here must keep that fact in mind. For this reviewer, *The Whole Counsel of God* was an enjoyable and refreshing read. It was this for many reasons. (1) The text is written in a clear and understandable style. This is a book that can be heartily recommended as a theologically and confessionally articulate introduction to the study and understanding of God's Word. (2) The author is not

2. It should be noted the Dr. Gamble serves on the editorial board of the Peter Martyr Library.

afraid to draw theological implications from the biblical text. One gets the impression from some (even conservative evangelical) biblical scholars that the Scriptures are *atheological* and that theology is, by definition, an illicit imposition on the text. Or that the text of the Bible is the material from which theology, as a *second order* discipline, can build its doctrines. On the contrary, following the insights of Geerhardus Vos (and so disagreeing with Abraham Kuyper), Gamble understands the Scriptures themselves to be theological and that the theology of the text ought to be determinative of our theology. (3) This text treats Scripture as what it is. The Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God and it is therefore authoritative. Dr. Gamble is not afraid to side with Scripture against culture and (a sometimes) erring church. More could be said, but this should give the reader a sense of the volume.

There are some shortcomings as well. None of these criticisms vitiate the value of the book. (1) The author's clarity of expression sometimes comes across as patronizing. This is undoubtedly not intended by the author and may just be the skewed subjective reading of this reviewer. As someone has said, every silver lining has its cloud. (2) There are numerous typographical errors throughout the book.³ For instance, on page 540, paragraph three, there is a repeated *en toto* in the midst of paragraph four. (3) There is an occasional rejection of a viewpoint without the necessary discussion of the matter. For instance, the traditional *loci* method of systematic theology is criticized for being based in Greek philosophy (46–47) as if it is obvious why being of Greek provenance is enough to condemn it. Parenthetically, the author also affirms the traditional (as this reviewer heartily does) discussion of the foundations of theology being God (the *principium essendi*) and revelation (the *principium cognoscendi*) without any discussion of how the idea of *principia* (principles or foundations) arises in the work of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. (4) With regard to the assessment of the Reformed Scholastics, there is a notable pre-Muller perspective.⁴ In other words, it would seem that the revolution in Reformation and post-Reformation studies fueled by the work of Richard Muller and his colleagues and students, which is, to this reviewer, while not infallible, at least definitive, ought to be reflected in the pages of such a significant volume as this. Or at least we should get a sense of where and why the author differs from this reassessment of Scholasticism. The upshot of this is that we are long past the point where we can use the term "scholastic" as an epithet of criticism which we all share. Perhaps more will be forthcoming in the third volume on church history.

3. I note this with trepidation as I am myself an all-too-fallible human author and editor.

4. It should be noted that the author does cite Muller in three footnotes.

Again, none of the criticisms are intended to subtract from the benefit of this work. My appetite has been whetted for more. We can only encourage the publisher to release the remaining volumes in a timely fashion. I would encourage church officers to obtain this book and its companions as they become available. ■

REVIEW: John Currid, *Deuteronomy—An Evangelical Press Study Commentary* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006). 607 pages. ISBN 978-0-85234-627-3. \$44.99. Reviewed by Rev. Jody Lucero, pastor of Providence Reformed Church, URC, Des Moines, IA.

Because he perfectly fulfilled the righteousness required by the law throughout his whole life just as he did in his desert temptation (Matt. 4:1–11), because he also suffered the curse of the law due to our sins especially when he died on the cross (Gal. 3:10–14), Jesus truly is "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4–9). While certainly not among the most cited books of the Old Testament in the New, Deuteronomy (six passages of which are directly quoted in the three cited above from the NT) is clearly foundational for understanding the gospel of our Savior. Christians need good commentaries to help us get more deeply into the text of Deuteronomy, and this commentary by John Currid succeeds in doing just that.

Currid, a professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, has been busy at work in the Pentateuch. Besides this commentary on Deuteronomy, he has also written in the last decade a two volume work on Genesis, two volumes on Exodus, one on Leviticus, and another on Numbers – all together, six volumes, totaling 3000-plus pages, as part of the EP Study Commentary series. For pastors, Sunday school teachers, and any lay person wanting a good grasp of the fifth book of Moses, Currid's 607 page commentary will give an adequate understanding of virtually every verse and pericope, and it will do this without getting the reader bogged down in a single higher critical debate.

In a refreshing way, Currid's commentary approaches Deuteronomy as the finished book of Moses we find in our Bibles, and yet he is not afraid at the outset to argue that its structure reflects the suzerainty treaties of the second millennium BC. His commentary's lack of typical "introduction" material, its avoidance of any actual Hebrew, its negligible engagement with technical higher critical matters, and its simple use of secondary literature (almost entirely through end notes), plainly reveal that this commentary was not written primarily for scholars. Currid's scholarship, however, is not in question. His expertise in biblical languages, archaeology and history were clearly a great asset in the production of

this work, particularly when it comes to making sense of the many covenant stipulations (laws) of Deuteronomy through illumination of the original social context. This commentary's treatment of each and every pericope, its many comparisons of Deuteronomy with other politico-religious texts from the ancient near east, as well as its frequent observations regarding Hebrew grammar and syntax, well suit it for a pastor's study. While it will probably go largely unnoticed within critical scholarship, it will nonetheless admirably serve the church of Christ for years to come. In the remainder of this review I address a few particular strengths of Currid's commentary as well as a few of its weaknesses.

In the first place, this commentary was written in a clear, easy-to-read style, and should be quite accessible to any serious student of the Bible. Not all non-technical commentaries have this quality. While Currid occasionally delves into matters of Hebrew grammar and syntax, the reader will also find sufficient explanation to make sense of things (there is even a glossary of linguistic and literary terms included at the start of this volume). Adding to the accessibility of this commentary is its formatting. While there are some minor drawbacks here (e.g. the unclear correspondence of end notes with chapters/subsection; the strange choice of fonts that only slightly distinguish the translated biblical text from comment sections), this commentary's formatting has made it rather simple for the reader to track down each verse and its explanation in two ways. (1) Instead of having long translated texts that open each pericope section, followed by running commentary that rarely reproduces the translated text (as in the NICOT series), the formatting here has translated biblical text interspersed with comments on the text in bite-size pieces that make for better reading comprehension. (2) Instead of comment sections that have quoted words of a verse set off merely by quotation marks or italics (again, as in the NICOT series), this commentary's comment sections contain quoted biblical words in very bold type. For this reader at least, these two formatting items made the commentary even more accessible.

Currid's *Deuteronomy* has a second strength of being remarkably thorough in its treatment of the biblical text itself. Of its 607 pages, Currid devotes 537 pages to actual commentary on the text of Deuteronomy, skipping not one single verse. He does not often engage in lengthy debates over the meaning of particular passages, but if he has an especially difficult passage in view (one where his opinion may not be settled), he will at least expose the reader to a couple of the more plausible opinions on the matter. An example of this is found in connection with the much-debated passage in Deuteronomy 24:1–4, a passage which appears to address a sinful case of divorce-remarriage, and therefore would seem to fall under the seventh commandment (“You shall not commit adultery”). Currid suggests the theory (of Heth and Wenham, *Jesus and*

Divorce) that this legislation may not have anything to do with adultery *per se* but rather with theft—a case of a woman being financially exploited by a previous husband—thus falling under the eighth commandment (389–90). This commentary may not be thorough in its engagement with critical scholarship, but Currid does a very good job of bringing his readers up to speed on many important developments related to the interpretation of Deuteronomy. In the end, it would seem he has left no major stone unturned, so that readers should come away with an adequate understanding of the vast majority of this portion of scripture.

A third strength of this commentary is that Currid's brief “Application” sections at the end of every pericope are truly evangelical. These sections are not without some flaws, but for the most part, they are genuine attempts to have the reader consider Deuteronomy in the light of the New Testament, whether that means noting how Christ and his apostles maintained the laws of Deuteronomy, how they might have changed or even abolished those laws, or how Christ himself is, in fact, the fulfillment of the law who gives to believers the righteousness of the law. On a number of occasions, Currid turns his commentary application into something more akin to sermon application, even calling for repentance toward God and faith in Christ. “We need to understand that all the curses . . . in Deuteronomy 28 have been taken care of at the cross of Jesus Christ. But He has done this only for the believer. If you do not know Christ, then you are still under the judgment of the curses of the law. Will you not turn to Him today and receive the true blessings that come from being in Christ?” (452). One might think that a 600-plus page commentary on Deuteronomy (including a linguistic glossary at the start) would not be the typical read of an unbeliever, and that these occasional evangelistic appeals are therefore a bit out of place. Pastors like myself, however, know that scenarios like the above *do* happen, perhaps far more often than we realize. Currid is to be commended for turning his application at points into direct appeals for the possible unbelieving reader to turn to Christ in faith. When that does not happen, at least pastors are reminded here and there that they are in the business of making such direct evangelistic appeals. Readers will sometimes find Currid's applications to lack textual legitimacy, and there are a couple facile tack-on jobs (a maneuver I call “pin the gospel on the sermon”). But for the most part, these application sections should get pastors thinking not only of NT connections to Deuteronomy, but more importantly of opportunities to proclaim Christ crucified and risen for our justification.

There are in Currid's commentary a few weaknesses of greater prominence than those minor issues of formatting and such mentioned above. For one thing, Currid's content can have a stale, pedantic flavor at times. This is largely due to

his frequent use of linguistic terms to explain items of Hebrew grammar and syntax. The problem is, these observations are rarely helpful for gaining a better understanding of the text, and in many instances only make the reading a bit cumbersome. In commenting on Deuteronomy 9:7 (“Remember, and do not forget, that you made Yahweh your God irate in the wilderness...”), Currid explains that this exhortation of Moses “is emphatic: it opens with two verbs, an imperative followed by a vetitive (i.e. a negative imperative), which accentuate the demand” (212). Now, is all that fancy Hebrew grammar and syntax really necessary or even helpful? Is it not patently the case that when someone says, “remember” followed immediately by “do not forget” that he is being emphatic? To show how frequent this sort of thing is in this commentary, I use another example from the very next page. Commenting on the next verse, Deuteronomy 9:8 (“And at Horeb you made Yahweh irate”), Currid writes:

Thus far Moses has spoken in general terms regarding Israel’s rebellious nature. Now he describes a specific act of defiance in the desert. The move from the general to the specific is confirmed syntactically in this verse. First, the verse begins with the word ‘and’, which is a consecutive that ties this verse specifically to the general statement of verse 7. In addition, the same verb, ‘to make irate’, is used in both verses. (213)

Readers will have no trouble understanding Currid’s points here or virtually anywhere else in this commentary. As noted above, he is a very clear writer and quite accessible. But all of this comment above on Deuteronomy 9:8 could be reduced to one simple sentence, unburdened by all the “syntactical” material—Moses now gives a specific example of the general point he made in the previous sentence. Most readers could understand this point without having to gain any deeper understanding of the consecutive use of the word “and”! Seminary professors for Old and New Testament courses will often have students keep exegetical reading logs as they read through portions of scripture in the original languages. Currid’s comment sections read like this in many places. However true his comments on grammar and syntax might be (and I am sure they are in most cases), they often strike one as the sort of “padding” that does more to lengthen explanation than to improve it. For an already thoroughgoing treatment of the biblical text in a large, unwieldy package such as this book, readers would probably have appreciated less detailed explanation of Hebrew grammar and syntax.

There is a particular theological weakness of this commentary as well, at least as far as this reader is concerned. The book of Deuteronomy presents the Christian with a question that begs for an answer. National Israel was freely given the Promised Land but repeatedly warned at the same time that

their tenure in the land with blessing, prosperity, safety, etc., depended on their full obedience to the law of God (Deut. 4:40; 5:16, 31; 6:3, 18, 19; 7:12–16; 8:1; 11:8–10; 28:1–14; et al). This conditionality of the Old Covenant is all over the OT, but especially in the book of Deuteronomy. But how do we Christians apply this covenant conditionality to our inheritance of the true Promised Land? Do physical blessings come to us because of obedience to God’s law, or was that a unique aspect of theocratic Israel’s covenant with God from Mt Sinai? In connection with Deuteronomy 28:1–2, Currid writes, “Obedience as a necessary requirement for blessing was an essential element of ancient Near-Eastern treaties” (432). Clearly; but how does that work in the Covenant of Grace? A couple pages later, Currid comes close to answering this in the application section:

The bestowal of blessings is certain if the conditions attached to them are met. Indeed, if the Israelites had not committed wholesale idolatry but had remained true to Yahweh, then they would have remained in the land. The same is true for us; if we are obedient to God’s Word, then blessing will certainly follow. It may not be material prosperity, but blessing can be measured in many different ways. (436)

Do the covenant blessings and curses, then, revolve especially around the issue of idolatry rather than all the other commandments? If so, we can heartily concur with Currid at this point. However, since Moses so often threatens curses for the Israelites should they fail to keep the whole law, how does the Christian relate this fact to our own way of inheritance? Might we be cursed in some way if we fail to keep all of God’s laws? There are, of course, a number of ways to clarify this matter, and here is not the place to propose all of them. But Currid seems to leave us asking these questions of covenantal theology, and more particularly of conditionality; and at times he will make his readers rather uncomfortable with his routine affirmations of covenant continuity, even in terms of conditionality. At one point, Currid notes that he has explained how the Sinai law applies to the Christian, but he provided that explanation in his second volume on Exodus. What he strenuously maintains here is that God’s law does apply to the Christian, even though it does not save us (123–24). Reformed Christians will find much soteriological orthodoxy in these pages, and virtually nothing that is theologically suspect. But saying we are not saved by law-obedience, and saying that we live according to the law of God as a way of gratitude, does not exactly explain how the precise matter of the *conditionality* of the Sinai covenant, renewed on the plains of Moab, applies to the Christian life or to the churches of Christ. The apostle Paul has a great deal to say on this score (Gal. 3–4; Rom. 3–5, 10), but Currid almost completely ignores that material.

Finally, while some will appreciate Currid’s full embrace

of the Decalogue of Deuteronomy 5 as programmatic for the layout of the covenant stipulations in Deuteronomy 6–26, others may occasionally be annoyed with how uncertain it is that a particular piece of legislation actually fits with the commandment that supposedly serves as its heading. Currid does not present us with much argumentation in the way of defense in this regard, and at times leaves us short of persuaded. For example, the passage addressing a case of divorce and remarriage from Deuteronomy 24:1–4 would seem to fall under the seventh commandment. Upon further inspection, however, this law seems to prohibit a form of financial finagling which would be related to the eighth commandment. This can be demonstrated to some degree by the verses in question, but also finds support in context—surrounding laws relate even more clearly to forms of theft. While this particular instance of applying the programmatic Decalogue to the detailed stipulations is rather persuasive, the argument that kosher dietary laws fall under the third commandment is much less so. Currid might have engaged in more argumentation to support this programmatic Decalogue proposal; alternatively, he might have mentioned it at one point, and not tried to structure his whole commentary around this less than certain theory.

These weaknesses noted above are mostly idiosyncratic aspects of this commentary that certainly do not outweigh its strengths. Currid's volume on Deuteronomy will not replace works such as those by Craigie and McConville, but it will make a nice addition to a pastor or church's library. This pastor has certainly benefited from this EP study commentary while preaching through the rich book of Deuteronomy. ■

Review: Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press and Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2008). 296 pages. ISBN 978-0-915815-55-5. \$24.95 (cloth). Review by W. Gary Crampton, Ph.D.

In the Preface of Greg Bahnsen's *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*,¹ the editor, Joel McDurmon, contends that in this book Dr. Bahnsen (1948–1995) has provided the Christian community with “the most clear, systematic, and rigorous statement and defense of Van Tillian presuppositional apologetics written to date” (vii).

There is a sense in which what is said in this paragraph is true; and there is a sense in which it is false. It is certainly the case that Dr. Bahnsen was a faithful advocate of Cornelius Van Til's apologetical system, and that he faithfully expounded it. Prior to going on to earn his Ph.D. at the University of Southern California, Bahnsen received his M.Div. and Th.M. degrees at Westminster Theological Seminary, where Van Til taught for over 40 years. Dr. Bahnsen was a distinguished

scholar, author, and debater, who wrote and lectured extensively on the subjects of biblical law and apologetics. He earnestly sought to defend Christianity against the worldly systems so prevalent in our day, using and amending the apologetic strategy of Dr. Van Til.

But, as noted, there is also a sense in which the editor's statement is not true. In his theological, philosophical, and apologetic endeavors, Dr. Bahnsen championed the use of logic. He correctly adhered to the need for a rational Christianity. He believed that a rational defense of the faith was essential to defending the faith. His mentor, Cornelius Van Til, on the other hand, did not. This is not to impugn Van Til's character, for every indication is that he was a good and godly man; he was a man who greatly desired to see the furtherance of God's kingdom on earth. He was a man who was “valiant for the truth” (Jeremiah 9:3).

At the same time, Dr. Van Til was not averse to speaking disparagingly of logic; he believed and taught that logic was a part of creation (rather than being intrinsic to the essence of God), and he rigidly held to the idea of logical paradox found throughout the entirety of the Word of God. Several scholars have documented this in their analyses of Van Til.² Here is where Drs. Bahnsen and Van Til would differ in their systems. In his own system, Bahnsen clearly and properly deviates from Van Til's philosophical perspective.

Shortly before his death, Greg Bahnsen completed a major work that attempted to promote an understanding of the apologetic methodology of Cornelius Van Til: *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis*.³ According to Joel McDurmon, the editor of the book currently under review, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended* “presents the systematic counterpart to Bahnsen's earlier publication” (viii). This present volume, however, is not complete. Dr. Bahnsen intended a third part to his “*magnum opus*,” which, due to his untimely death, he never finished. The plan is to publish as much of Part 3 that was finished, after some additional editing.

After the Preface, *Presuppositional Apologetics* is subdivided into two parts. Part 1 is titled “Presuppositional Apologetics Positively Stated.” It consists of three chapters: Chapter One, “Introduction: God in the Dock?” (3–23); Chapter Two, “The

1. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, edited by Joel McDurmon (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision Press & Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, 2008). The pagination found in the body of this review is from this book.

2. On this subject, see John W. Robbins, *Cornelius Van Til: The Myth and the Man* (The Trinity Foundation, 1986); Robert L. Reymond, *Preach the Word* (Rutherford House, 1988), 16–35; and Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Zondervan, 1982), 99–101.

3. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998).

Christian Mind and Method” (25–75); and Chapter Three, “Neutrality and Autonomy Relinquished” (77–131). Part 2 is titled “Consistency Applied: Critiques of Incomplete Presuppositionalism.” It consists of four chapters: Chapter Four, “Gordon Clark” (137–196); Chapter Five, “Edward J. Carnell” (197–240); Chapter Six, “Francis Schaeffer” (241–260); and Chapter Seven, “Conclusion to Part 2: The Critical Quintessence” (261–268).

In chapter one, the author gives us the epistemological basis for a Christian apologetic: “The task of apologetics must be exercised upon the infallible and presupposed authority of the Word of Christ in Scripture” (p. 3). Such an apologetic system must be carried out with “a total dedication to the wisdom of the *Logos* as expressed in His in-scripturated Word” (ibid). Any other form of apologetic will put “God in the dock” rather than the creature, man. The Bible is the sole standard by which all is to be judged. It stands in judgment over all and is to be judged by no one or no thing.

Chapter two follows directly on the heels of what has already been stated. “The Christian mind and method” must be governed by Christ’s infallible Word. Only a “Christ-centered apologetics” will pass muster according to Scripture. Biblical revelation is a “prerequisite for the Christian apologist” (26, 36). A biblical view of apologetics presupposes the “veracity” of God and His Word. This means that “regeneration, faith, and repentance” are essential to do the work of apologetics in a God-honoring fashion (57, 64).

Overall, the first two chapters of the book are well done. In them the author has laid the groundwork from which he will evaluate and assess the philosophical issues addressed in chapter three, the other presuppositional apologetical systems critiqued in chapters four through seven, and the three appendices that conclude the book. The difficulty that the author faces here (and the only flaw that the current reviewer finds in these two chapters), is that he sets forth Cornelius Van Til as a strong adherent to what is asserted in chapters one and two. As already noted, this is not the case. What is true of Dr. Bahnsen is not true of his mentor Dr. Van Til.

In chapter three, which is perhaps more philosophical in nature than many readers will be comfortable with, Dr. Bahnsen informs his readers that “neutrality and autonomy [must be] relinquished.” He explains the “necessity of coordinating epistemology and metaphysics.” The author believes that the disciplines of epistemology (the “theory of knowledge”) and metaphysics (the “theory of ultimate reality”) must be taken together as the first principles of a Christian worldview (77–84). He contends that “epistemology and metaphysics [are] interdependent” (84). This being so, Bahnsen has a “difficulty” with those apologetes, such as Gordon Clark, who hold to the view that epistemology must logically precede metaphysics as the first principle. What Dr. Bahnsen does

not seem to understand here is that philosophers like Dr. Clark who hold to the preeminence of epistemology do not separate this discipline from metaphysics; rather, they distinguish between them.

Dr. Clark would agree with Bahnsen that these two tenets of philosophy are “interdependent,” because they are necessarily so. In the Clarkian view, however, epistemology must logically precede metaphysics, because it is patently obvious that until one establishes “how” he knows, he cannot possibly know “what” it is that is known. This point cannot be overstressed. Clark asserts that it is not sufficient to maintain “that” we know without first ascertaining “how” we know. Only then can we determine “what” we know. Bahnsen himself implicitly admits this when he writes that the Christian’s “ultimate metaphysical commitment” to the triune God of Holy Scripture is “derived from God’s clear revelation” in the Bible. We must always begin, he writes, “with God’s Word as the most certain truth available to man,” because we “would never arrive at the truth about God [metaphysics] independent of [biblical] revelation” (282, 284). The author here is affirming Dr. Clark’s position. The two elements of epistemology and metaphysics are never to be separated, but they must always be distinguished.

When we come to Part 2, the author tell us that “the second half of this book grows out of the convictions stated in Part 1; in particular Part 1 sought to present the case in favor of presuppositional apologetics, specifically the apologetical writings of Dr. Cornelius Van Til, for in his system is found the most consistently biblical presuppositional defense of Christianity” (135). Dr. Bahnsen begins Part 2 by stating that the “presuppositional defense of Christianity” presented by Van Til is the “most consistently biblical” presuppositionalism that is found in the discipline of Christian apologetics. We are told that there are several other systems of presuppositional apologetics besides the system presented by Van Til, each of which has “made contributions to the cause of Reformational apologetics.” But the alternative systems, says the author, who has “attempted to read all the major publications of these men in the best possible light,” are “defective” (135–136). As noted, the three flawed systems mentioned and critiqued in this book are those of Drs. Clark, Carnell, and Schaeffer.

Chapter four is on Gordon Clark. Dr. Bahnsen begins his critique by showing the many places where Dr. Clark’s apologetic methodology “parallels the thrust of Van Til.” Clark’s presuppositional system, however, says the author, “does not take Scripture as its unreserved, unconditional, and absolute presupposition,” thus leaving open the “possibility” that the Bible is not the sole standard by which everything is to be judged. “He does not presuppose the certain truth of the Bible at the very start of his apologetic” (142, 146).

Here we have a problem, because in the earlier section of

this chapter Dr. Bahnsen quoted Gordon Clark wherein Dr. Clark states that only by recognizing that the Bible is God's infallible Word "can we hope to have a sound philosophy and a true religion." A "rational life is impossible without being based upon" the divine revelation we find in Holy Scripture. Further, Dr. Bahnsen states that Gordon Clark denied that there is any such thing as neutrality when it comes to world-views: "Methodology is never neutral." The entirety of the Christian life is to be guided by "our acceptance of the Bible as the very Word of God" (139–140). Certainly, then, whatever else Dr. Clark may be saying when he speaks of "possibility" and Scripture, it could not mean that he is denying or questioning that we must presuppose the certain truth of the Bible at the very start of apologetics.

What Dr. Bahnsen has failed to understand at this point is that Dr. Clark frequently used *ad hominem* arguments in dealing with non-believers in apologetics, wherein, in accordance with Proverbs 26:4–5, he would "answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes." Then too, when Dr. Bahnsen claims that Dr. Clark is too much of a rationalist because he posits "the priority of logic" to test "the veracity of God and His Word" (149, 153), he does not realize that Clark is once again using *ad hominem* tactics.

Gordon Clark did not teach that logic was superior to revelation. What he maintained is that logic is embedded in Scripture. This most fundamental of the laws of logic cannot be proved. For any attempt to prove the law of contradiction would presuppose the truth of the law and therefore beg the question. Simply put, it is not possible to reason without using the law of contradiction. In this sense, the laws of logic are axiomatic. But they are only axiomatic because they are embedded in the Word of God. Further, since logic is embedded in Scripture, Scripture, rather than logic as an abstract principle, is selected as the axiomatic starting point of Christian epistemology.

At the end of this chapter, when the author concludes that although Dr. Clark "has made good points of presuppositional analysis in his writings from place to place, we have found that as a whole his system is not genuinely presuppositional and his presuppositions are not biblical" (196), he is sadly mistaken. Even as affirmed by John Frame, another Van Tilian apologete, Gordon Clark "has an appreciation for the need of presupposing the Word of God in all of thought."⁴ Professor Frame is correct here and Dr. Bahnsen is incorrect. As Dr. Kenneth Talbot, President of Whitefield Theological Seminary, correctly pointed out in conversation with this reviewer, the criticisms that Dr. Bahnsen posits in this book against the apologetics of Gordon Clark are basically the same that were registered by Cornelius Van Til years ago. They were unfounded then, and they remain unfounded.

Chapter five is on Edward J. Carnell. As was the case with

Gordon Clark, writes the author, E. J. Carnell's writings "reflect accurate presuppositional analysis in places" (197). The problem with Dr. Carnell is that he has an "autonomous starting point" in his apologetic endeavors (201). He does not recognize the stark antithesis that exists between Christianity and all other religious systems. Dr. Carnell appears to see Christianity as merely "the highest stage or form of religion" instead of the only genuine religion. Further, in Carnell's system of thought the Word of God is not self-verifying, thereby leaving open the mere possibility that the Bible is the very Word of God (197, 201–202, 207). In conclusion, writes Dr. Bahnsen, even though Dr. Carnell has given us some excellent "insights and analysis at points in his writings we must refrain from embracing his apologetic as a whole." His "autonomous philosophy" will not pass muster according to "God's clear self-attesting revelation as transcendental of all thought" (240). Even though Dr. Bahnsen may be overly hard on Dr. Carnell on some of these points, the present reviewer tends to agree with Dr. Bahnsen's conclusion. E. J. Carnell was not the apologist that Dr. Clark was.

Chapter six is on Francis Schaeffer. In the words of the author, "over all Schaeffer has been more consistently presuppositional in his outlook than Clark and Carnell." Once again various quotations are cited to support this conclusion. Nevertheless, writes, Bahnsen, Dr. Schaeffer's system is "not so much [presuppositional] so that he escapes their [Clark and Carnell] fundamental shortcomings" (241). Simply stated, Francis Schaeffer does not presuppose the Word of God as fully as he should. Several of Dr. Schaeffer's writings are quoted which, according to Dr. Bahnsen, would seem to "cut the heart right out of the presuppositional position" (247). Then too, Dr. Schaeffer leaves open the "possibilism" concerning the Word of God which is found in Drs. Clark and Carnell. Schaeffer also believes that the discipline of "materialistic science is perfectly fine as far as it goes; its problem is that it is simply incomplete," which undermines a presuppositional view of biblical Christianity. The conclusion is that "while appreciating his ministry, we must decline Schaeffer's un-Reformed apologetic method" (254, 268).

Having overviewed three of the twentieth-century's most well-known apologetes, in chapter seven Dr. Bahnsen concludes that all three "have 'foolishly' erected their apologetic edifices upon the ruinous sands of human autonomy. . . . Theirs is not a distinctly Christian apologetic through and through" (268). In the opinion of the present reviewer, the author is correct with regard to Drs. Carnell and Schaeffer, but he could hardly be more incorrect when it comes to Dr. Clark.

Presuppositional Apologetics concludes with three Appendices: Appendix 1, "The Necessity of Revelational Epistemology"

4. *History of Epistemology* 2. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6904232/John-Frame-History-of-Epistemology-2> (Accessed Nov. 22, 2010).

(269–278); Appendix 2, “The Pragmatist’s Rejoinder and the Christian Alternative” (279–286); and Appendix 3, “The Possibility of Argument” (287–290). In each of these Dr. Bahnsen demonstrates his theological and philosophical prowess, rationally debunking the non-Christian systems which are so prevalent in the world in which we live. The reader will benefit much from a thorough reading of this section of the book.

Dr. Greg Bahnsen was a scholar extraordinaire, who, as one of the twentieth-century’s finest exponents of the Christian world and life view, labored diligently to defend the faith against all gainsayers. He did so in both written and verbal form. Apart from the various glitches (with regard to Gordon Clark) mentioned in this review, this book should be recognized as another segment of Dr. Bahnsen’s fine work. Readers of this monograph will find it very helpful in defending the Christian faith. The book is highly recommended. ■

Review: Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008). 214 pages. ISBN 1556356560. \$27 (paperback). Reviewed by Rev. Ryan M. McGraw, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA), in Conway, South Carolina.

This is a very insightful book that seeks to fill a large vacuum with regard to the subject of personal piety, namely, a model for piety that is rooted in the historic doctrine of the Trinity. For most believers, the doctrine of the Trinity is an obscure fact lying at the root of orthodox Christianity that possesses no further practical significance. Developing a biblically rooted “Trinitarian spirituality” is a tremendous need of the Church at the present time. Unfortunately, since this book was originally a doctoral dissertation, it is unlikely that it will receive a widespread readership among the average members of the Church. It is incumbent, therefore, upon ministers of the gospel to digest books such as this one and to learn how to develop and communicate a robust Trinitarian piety in the context of their regular pulpit ministries.

In this work, Kay has set forth viable criteria by which to promote a genuine Trinitarian spirituality. It is somewhat misleading to regard Owen as the subject of this book, as the title might otherwise indicate. Owen is referenced for illustrative purposes as well as for his peculiar contribution to the notion of distinct communion with all three divine Persons (6). Kay’s thesis is as follows: “a robust doctrine of the Trinity is able to shape a quality of spiritual response to God that is not otherwise possible” (2). He added, “In this

work ‘spirituality’ is used narrowly to speak of the personal response to God of someone who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and is thus united to Christ and on that basis restored to the Father” (10). Kay’s two tests of Trinitarian spirituality are an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity coupled with personal experience of the unfolding “drama” of redemption, or *historia salutis*. Unfortunately, he limits his discussion to “private worship” whereas Owen, who is Kay’s primary model, regarded *corporate worship* as the climax of his own Trinitarian theology. Hopefully the importance of the topic treated in this book speaks for itself. Without undermining the great value of this book, I intend to focus on some significant areas of criticism in addition to areas of praise.

Kay’s thesis and criteria are introduced in chapter one. Kay assumes that his readers have an extensive knowledge of historic Trinitarian theology and terminology as well as of contemporary debates (e.g., p. 22). Chapter two traces the historical growth of Trinitarian orthodoxy as well as the divorce of Trinitarian theology and personal piety in the Middle Ages. In chapter three, he “searches” for a true Trinitarian Spirituality through the Medieval period, finding few positive contributions along the way. His critical analysis of Thomas à Kempis’ still popular work, *The Imitation of Christ*, is highly insightful. Kay takes into account the curious fact that while à Kempis’ theology and particularly his views of absorption into the divine nature are contrary to both Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies, yet the work has continued to be popular in both traditions. À Kempis, along with several others who are examined, also fails to take the Trinity into account in any meaningful way in his system of piety.

Turning to Owen briefly by way of anticipation, Kay then argues that Owen took a “bolder approach” than the Medieval scholastics (35), creating some “tension” between his developments and the Western tradition in that he focused more on the personal distinctions of the three persons *ad extra* than *ad intra* (36).¹ He added, “I believe Owen represents the closest pastoral appropriation of the theological Trinitarianism of the Reformed scholastics of the prior stage, but Owen’s emphases are somewhat unique when compared with other famous devotional writings of the period” (54). On pages 68–71, Kay addresses insightfully the manner in which Owen focused communion with the Trinity in the person and work of Christ. In particular, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ and the union of believers with the divine-human Christ establish a pattern of what it means to be in communion with God as Triune. Owen’s covenant theology rooted this Trinitarian piety in history, rather than in a mystical self-negation. In other words, rather than leading to an absorption into the divine nature resulting in a loss of individual self-consciousness, Owen’s Trinitarian piety was rooted in looking back to and participating in the historically

1. *Ad extra* refers to anything outside the Godhead, while *ad intra* refers to the Godhead.

accomplished facts of a covenant transaction in God's unfolding plan of redemption.

Chapter four serves as a transition to Kay's extensive treatment of Owen's important work on *Communion with God*. Here Kay seeks to set the stage for further discussion by establishing the "general features of Trinitarian spirituality" (98). There are some significant problems with this chapter. First, Kay does not accurately reflect the Reformed concept of the incomprehensibility of God. Incomprehensibility does not mean, as Kay asserts, "the unknowability of God in himself" (99), but that man cannot know God *exhaustively* as he is. In the classic Medieval distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology, a difference was made between God's knowledge of himself versus man's knowledge of God. God is perfectly comprehensible to himself. Man's knowledge of God is derivative, finite, and a dim reflection of God's knowledge of himself. There is both a qualitative and a quantitative difference between our knowledge of God and his knowledge of himself, yet this does not negate the fact that believers do know God as he is in himself in some measure. Eastern theology teaches a kind of agnosticism regarding the essence of God, so that believers know nothing of God's essence. In Western theology, the Eastern distinction between God's essence and attributes has not been maintained so sharply. To know the attributes of God is to know something about his essence, albeit in a limited way that is appropriate to creatures. Kay's definition of incomprehensibility does not accurately represent the theological tradition in which Owen participated, and it calls into question the genuineness of the Christian's knowledge (and thus his communion) with God.

Another difficulty is Kay's representation of the western Trinitarian formula. He asserts that Owen's construction of communion with all three Persons was "a somewhat novel emphasis in the West" (106). He then refers to the Western conception of the Trinity as the "unfortunate and explicit development of the indivisibility of the actions of the persons" (107). This conception of the undivided actions of the divine persons *is* explicit, but it *is not* unfortunate. Moreover, regardless of whether one concludes that Owen is in harmony with the western Trinitarian tradition at other points, there is no question of his historical grounding on this point. The assertion of the undivided or unified action of the three divine persons (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*) is the foundation upon which Owen built his entire theology of communion with the three Persons distinctly. This is the entire force of the first chapter of *Communion with God* and this principle is frequently reasserted throughout the book. If this doctrine is "unfortunate," then Owen's entire model for Trinitarian Spirituality crumbles at its foundation. Kay further supports his criticism of the Western tradition through a partial distortion of Augustine's views (via Alan Spence). Two

major problems with his treatment are that Augustine did not deny the distinct operation of the three persons in God's works *ad extra* (which is pervasive in *de Trinitate*) and that Karl Barth is not an appropriate representative of the views of Augustine (108). Barth had his own peculiarities that should not be imputed to Augustine. It would be more accurate to state that Owen's *emphasis* upon communion with the three persons is unique, than to say that Owen's *construction* of the doctrine of the Trinity is unique.

In chapter five, Kay moves into an extensive analysis of Owen's *Communion with God*. Most of this analysis is useful and accurate, but a few features should be mentioned:

Kay assumes that *natural revelation* legitimates the use of *natural theology* (125). This is a common position today, but it cannot justly be imputed to Owen. In *The Claims of Truth*, Carl Trueman distinguishes Owen's views of Natural Theology from post-Enlightenment conceptions of the same doctrine. It is always a danger concomitant to historical theology to impute our own views to our subject of study. On other occasions, Kay imposes anachronistic terminology upon Owen, which procures the same results (for instance, "God loves the sinner but he hates the sin," 131).

One insightful feature of this chapter is that Kay refers to Owen's exposition of Proverbs 8 as an "undiscovered" aspect of Owen's Trinitarianism (136). The reason for this is that Owen highlighted the Father's delight not only in the Son, but in the Son *because* the Son delighted in the children of men whom the Father determined to save. This is a potentially fruitful insight into the study of Owen's Christology.

There is a significant problem with Kay's treatment of Owen's views on assurance of the Father's love. After setting forth the standard Puritan syllogism on assurance (i.e., induction from the effects of sanctification, to the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, to the assurance of justification), Kay formulates what he calls the "Owenian Syllogism." The Father promises to set his love upon anyone who is willing to believe that he loves them; I believe that the Father can love me and I seek to receive his love; therefore, the saving love of the Father rests upon me (143). Although, in one sense, this argument resembles the close of chapter four of *Communion with God*, Kay has lost sight of Owen's overall emphasis in the first four chapters, creating a catastrophic problem. The primary ingredient missing in this syllogism is the Lord Jesus Christ! Although Kay expounds the importance of union with Christ earlier in this book, it is inappropriate at best to omit all references to Christ in a syllogism that purports to aim at assurance of salvation. Owen was emphatic throughout *Communion with God* that it is in union with Christ only that there is any possible knowledge of the love of the Father. It is not believing that the Father can love me and that I desire to be loved by him that produces assurance; it is believing that he

can and has loved me *in Christ*. It seems to this reader, that in light of the bulk of *Communion with God*, Owen would have been appalled by Kay's "Owenian Syllogism."

In addition, Kay has not accurately represented Owen's emphases regarding communion with Christ. Owen divided this section into Christ's "personal grace" and his "purchased grace." Although Kay acknowledges that "personal grace" was a distinctive contribution from Owen (146), he has virtually omitted its significance from his discussion. This has significant ramifications for Kay's ability to reconstruct accurately Owen's views. For Owen, the "personal grace" of Christ meant the "grace" that Christ possessed in his Person as the God-man (see the relevant chapter in part two of *Communion with God*). Part of "personal grace" included Christ's participation in the gifts and the graces of the Holy Spirit. This means that union with Jesus Christ is the foundation of communion with the Holy Spirit, providing the grounds for sanctification. Kay does discuss the work of the Holy Spirit in distributing Christ's benefits to believers (156–157, 178–179), but instead of explaining communion with Christ in his "personal grace" in terms of *union* with Christ (which is central to Owen's theology), he construes this communion with Christ as the *delight* that we have in his Person (163). However, Owen treated delight in Christ as the *result* of communion with Christ in his "personal grace." Delight is not the *substance* of communion with Christ in his "personal grace." This omission is probably the most conspicuous fault of this book. Not only does it misrepresent Owen, but it undermines Kay's own quest to root Trinitarian Spirituality in the *historia salutis*, since the "personal grace" of Christ in Owen's thought places a stronger emphasis on participating in the historical aspects of the life and work of Christ than perhaps any other consideration.

In addition, there is a massive missing ingredient with regard to the criteria of Kay's thesis. Kay searches for a "spirituality" based upon Orthodox Trinitarianism coupled with the *historia salutis*, but he virtually neglects the *ordo salutis*.² The *ordo salutis* was as essential to Owen's views of communion with God as were his Trinitarianism and his covenant theology. This omission results in a lopsided spirituality that allows for no more than *contemplating* the "drama" set forth in the historical facts of the gospel. The reader almost wonders if Kay's "spirituality" allows room for the imperatives included in Paul's epistles. Kay has gleaned some useful insights from Owen, but by neglecting the *ordo salutis*, he presents only two thirds of what is necessary for a true "Trinitarian Spirituality"

Lastly, one stylistic feature of this book should be mentioned: Kay consistently replaces the generic "he" with "she." This is somewhat agitating and smacks of reverse

discrimination or mild feminism. Moreover, one of the endorsements on the back of the book is from a female minister. If the Scriptures themselves use "he" in a generic sense, and if its use does not in the least impair clarity, then why make the change? In theological terms, is it really appropriate for mankind to be represented by a "she" instead of a "he" when the entire human race is under the representation of either one of two important men: Adam or Christ? Can we not avoid demeaning the value of women while not simultaneously acting as though we are embarrassed by the male headship set forth in Scripture?

In spite of the criticisms mentioned above, this book partially fulfills the vital need for the Church to be more self-consciously Trinitarian in her worship and piety. If Kay's treatment is incomplete, at least he sets us on the right track. This book provides many potential building blocks to build an explicitly Trinitarian view of communion with God. If this book is read and digested so that the places where its emphases are correct are disseminated in local churches, then Brian Kay has offered the Church an invaluable service. ■

Review: Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R Publishing Company, 2010). 240 pages. ISBN 9781596381315. \$17.99 (paperback). Reviewed by Tom Deatsch, ruling elder in Des Moines, IA.

Before you ask, why read another book written about the responsibilities of elders, I want to encourage you that this book really is different. It goes to the heart of how to care for the flock. Witmer carefully and diligently presents a very encouraging and engaging picture of the work that both teaching and ruling elders must do, and the compassion and kindness that should guard their thoughts and words.

Timothy Witmer is very qualified to write this book because he pastors a PCA church in PA where he has served for 21 years, and is also a Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. He has founded the Shepherd's Institute, which is an "organization advancing the cause of shepherding among church leaders." This book was personally recommended by one of his students who stated that Witmer's class was one of the best he took while in seminary.

The Shepherd Leader is based on the biblical foundation that God directs and chooses the leaders of His church. He calls them according to His will, and gives them the authority to care for His flock. Witmer shows these biblical and historical foundations for shepherding. He takes some time to explain the true meaning of authority and the source of that authority in God. Then he outlines what these shepherds are supposed to be doing. Lastly, he offers helpful suggestions

2. *Historia salutis* refers to salvation accomplished in history, while *ordo salutis* refers to salvation applied to the believer by the Holy Spirit, to use John Murray's terminology.

to implement the directives that Scripture gives for the work of the elder. Throughout the book, Witmer lays out helpful charts for practical use, and questions for further reflection and discussion about shepherding.

Witmer begins with the metaphor given in the Old Testament of the shepherd as the caregiver of the sheep. He shows that God is the True Shepherd of His people, and that He has appointed men as under-shepherds for His people. There are many Old Testament examples of under-shepherds, such as Moses and David, who were both leaders and caregivers for the people. Witmer shows the weaknesses of under-shepherds as seen in the sins of these men. Sometimes, while the frailty of men cannot deflect the perfect care given by the True Shepherd, the under-shepherds can scatter the sheep and create difficulty for them. Also, the weakness of under-shepherds can leave voids which are sometimes filled with the strong-willed bully who deals harshly with the sheep. However, the deficiencies of men cannot eliminate the Old Testament promise of the coming Christ, who is the perfect shepherd.

This reviewer especially liked the first section because Witmer identified so clearly some of the frailties of elders. He pointed out some of the consequences of neglect in shepherding, from scattering the sheep to having them suffer under the harshness of a bully. But, he pointed to the true shepherd, Christ, who is able to care and tend the flock perfectly, and the hope that we all have in knowing that God is caring for His people and will keep them in His hand.

The first part of the book presents a biblical and historical foundation for the plurality of elders and Witmer places his shepherding leadership arguments in the context of a Presbyterian form of government. While there are many different forms of church government from the single-elder led church to the congregation-led church, all leadership can benefit from the principles taught in this book.

Witmer then unpacks the rich shepherd imagery in the Old Testament, starting in Genesis and going through the Psalms. He explains, “The Lord’s self-revelation as ‘shepherd’ of his people is not merely a metaphor with which his people could clearly relate, but it is one that describes the comprehensive care He provides for his people” (p. 13). This description of God’s faithfulness to His people is very encouraging, as He remains faithful even as we stray. Witmer quotes Isaiah 40:11, “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young”

Witmer also gives Old Testament examples of men such as Moses and David, who as shepherd-leaders showed the fallible weaknesses that leaders can have. One very sobering example comes from Ezekiel 34, which shows how the sheep suffer because of the bad behavior of their leaders. As the failure of men creates suffering and sorrow, Witmer turns to

Jeremiah 23:5–6 to remind the reader of the hope found in Jesus Christ, the promised Davidic shepherd-king.

Moving on to the New Testament, Witmer shows how Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of a Shepherd, and how He graciously gave His church under-shepherds to care for them. From the Gospel of John, Jesus is the only door for His sheep to enter salvation and protection. He is the consummate Shepherd who provides comprehensive care for His sheep. Quoting Matthew 9:36 Witmer states, “Seeing the people, He (Jesus) felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” Passages like this show that “the Lord would continue to provide care for his people through Spirit-filled-gifted-and-called under-shepherds” (p. 34).

At this point, references are given from Peter and Paul showing the “centrality of the work of shepherding when addressing the elders of the churches” (p. 39), and Witmer includes a discussion about church structure. On a personal note, I have encountered various church governments including Roman Catholic, Baptist, Congregational, and lastly Presbyterian, and am convinced of both the biblical mandate and the practical need of elders shepherding the flock. But when Witmer quotes a couple of my favorite reformed leaders, John Murray and Mark Dever, it is easy for me to cheer wholeheartedly for the ordination of elders in local congregations who are chosen “not only as decision-makers, but who are personally involved with the sheep” (p. 41).

While favoring neither a two-office nor a three-office view of church leadership, Witmer is careful to emphasize the equality of the elders in ruling and shepherding. Quoting John Murray, he states, “There is not the slightest evidence in the New Testament that among the elders there was any hierarchy; the elders exercise government in unison, and on a parity with one another” (p. 41). Witmer does go on to make distinctions of service: “All elders, including teaching elders (pastors), are called to shepherd the flock, but not all elders have the gift of teaching, though they should be apt to teach” (p. 43). And ruling elders should be helping teaching elders such that ministers of the word “should have less responsibility in some shepherding functions so as to have sufficient time to carry out his responsibilities in preaching and teaching the flock” (p. 43). Witmer suggests that this kind of shared leadership could also help keep pastors from “burning out” or giving up the ministry altogether. Witmer does indicate that ruling elders may be compensated monetarily in order to give them more opportunities to serve. He says that I Timothy 5:17 “implies that those who ‘rule well’ might also be compensated for their labors” (p. 42).

Witmer then gives attention to the history of present-day churches that use a plurality of elders. He explains the corruptions that came with Cyprian’s writings (c. 200–258), with

bishop-led church government and a growing number of sacraments, which held sway until the Reformation. An excellent quotation by Alexander Strauch, in his book *Biblical Eldership*, states, “Due to the deceitful light of human authorities which replaced the New Testament teaching on eldership, the Christian doctrine of eldership was lost for nearly fourteen centuries.”¹ With the Reformation, men like John Calvin and John Knox reintroduced biblical doctrines that are present in Reformed catechisms and confessions and the ecclesiology of the church was also transformed back to the elder-led church. Many examples are given from Scottish Presbyterianism and men like Thomas Chalmers and David Dickson.

Perhaps one weakness of Witmer’s book might be that he neglects to mention the very rich and full Reformed history of the Dutch and Germans in this section. One particular book on shepherding to note is written by John Sittema of the Dutch Reformed tradition, called *With a Shepherd’s Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder*.²

To conclude part one, Witmer looks at the authority that the elder has been given and the responsibility that incurs. Elders have “both the right and responsibility to exercise shepherding care” (p 75). Witmer clearly explains that the God-given authority of the elder is designed to enable the elder to do the work he has been given. Being derived from God, the elder’s authority should serve the well-being of the flock, be directed by God’s Word, and ultimately be accountable to God.

The flock is called to submit to the elders, which is never easy. The depravity of man and cultural norms affect the church and can suggest an attitude of independence and self-sufficiency on the part of the flock, along with a prideful self-exaltation of the elders. However, the submission of the flock would probably come more easily if the elders were careful to be kind, compassionate, and approachable.

Part two of Witmer’s book delves into the practical aspects of what biblical eldership should look like at the micro and macro-levels. The macro-level is the public, corporate ministry, and the micro-level is the personal, relational ministry. Prayer and the ministry of the word undergird both levels. He creates the four categories of knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting to help direct the duties and responsibilities of the elders to the flock.

Knowing the sheep at the macro-level includes maintaining accurate membership roles and knowing the flock’s corporate strengths, weaknesses, traits and opportunities. At the micro-level, knowing the flock is organizing which elders care

for which sheep and having a strategy for regular, personal contact. In this section, one very helpful suggestion was for elders to make regular phone contact with members, checking on their spiritual well-being and asking for prayer requests. Certainly Witmer has conveyed wisdom from his personal experience and relayed how this consistent contact and care builds respect and trust.

Feeding the flock on the macro-level includes worship, the preaching of the Word, sacraments and Christian education. The micro-level involves discipleship, mentoring, and small groups.

It is interesting to note Witmer’s strong defense of expository preaching here. His intention is to encourage ministers to present the whole counsel of God to the congregation. His quote states, “The best way to provide this balanced diet is through the systematic expository preaching of the Scriptures” (p 142). While this is certainly one way to do this, it isn’t the only method of preaching the whole counsel of God. The United Reformed Churches of North America preach through the Heidelberg Catechism each year. This insures that the congregants hear the important doctrines contained in Scripture each year. Iain Murray wrote an article titled “Expository Preaching” located on *The Gospel Coalition* blog, which shows several disadvantages to the expository method of preaching.³

Leading the flock addresses setting the vision, mission and purpose, ministry decision, and committee leadership at the macro-level. The micro-level includes leading by example, personal godliness, family life, church commitment and counseling.

The last category is protecting the flock, which involves public instruction and warning from the Scriptures. The congregation should be aware of “cultural wolves.” The elders become involved in the process with the “tell it to the church” step of Matthew 18. At the micro-level, the protection of the flock would include private warnings and using the steps outlined in Matthew 18:15–16 to restore wandering sheep.

Witmer helpfully reminds the reader that often wandering sheep show evidence of dereliction in a change of attendance patterns. It is something that elders can notice and respond to quickly. John Murray says, “How much of purity and peace would have been maintained in the church of Christ and will be maintained if elders are sensitive to the first steps of delinquency on the part of people and bring the word of tender admonition and reproof to bear upon them before they reach the by-paths of open and censurable sin! A shepherd, when he sees a sheep wandering does not wait until it reaches the well-nigh inaccessible precipices” (*Collected Writings*, vol 1, p 266).

Witmer concludes part two by reminding elders that shepherding the flock must be grounded in Word of God

1. Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1997), p. 11.

2. John Sittema, *With a Shepherd’s Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder* (Wyoming, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1996).

3. http://thegospelcoalition.org/Expository_Preaching_Iain_Murray.pdf.

and prayer. “We are completely dependent on the Lord for effectiveness as we work with his sheep for his glory” (p 187).

The last section of the book is where Witmer shines. He imperatively states the necessity of developing a plan for shepherding the flock, and for guiding poor benighted elders who might offer excuses against it. Chapter nine gives seven essential elements of an effective shepherding ministry. It must be biblical, systematic, comprehensive, relational, include the four shepherding functions, accountable, and prayerful.

Samuel Miller’s quote here is excellent: “The deeper his (the elder’s) own sense of his own unfitness, the more likely will he be to apply unceasingly and opportunately for heavenly aid; and the nearer he lives to the throne of grace, the more largely he will partake of that wisdom and strength which he need” (*The Ruling Elder*, p 264).

Witmer acknowledges that developing a shepherding ministry will have implications for the ministry of the church. It affects the training of potential elders, the ministry of the current elders and the implementing of change necessitating patience and prayer.

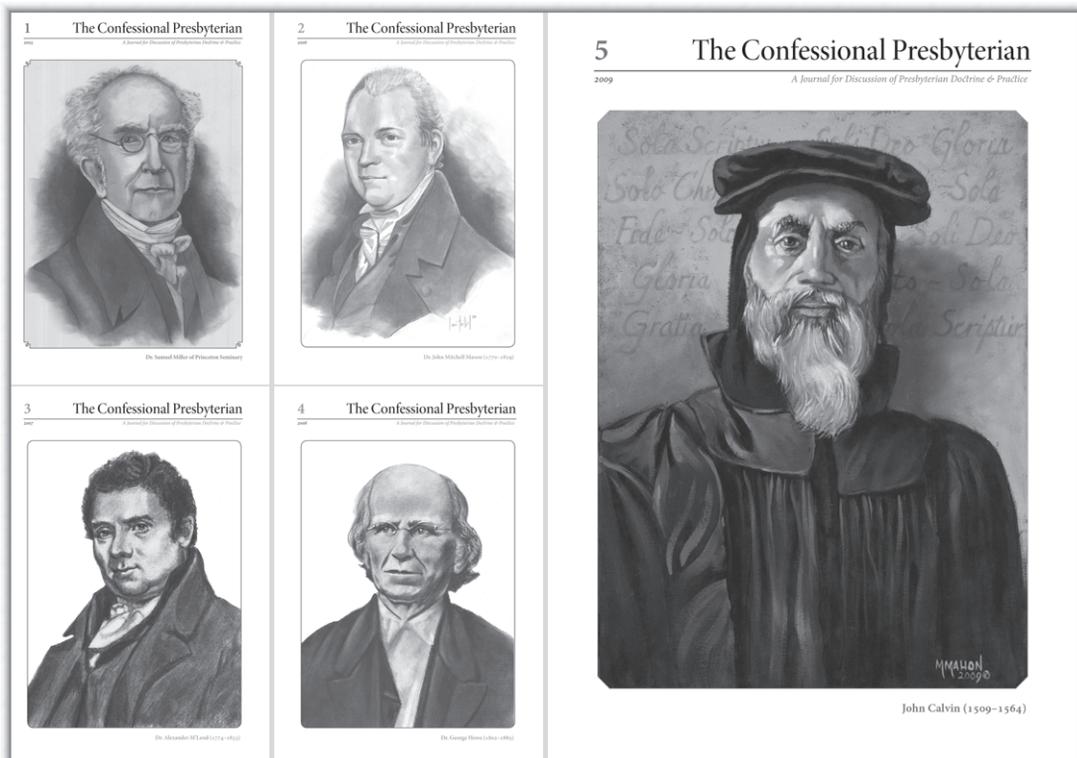
Witmer does spend a few moments at the very end of the

book addressing term eldership, instruction for new members, “Let’s Get Started” instructions for the elders, and preparing the congregation.

He is opposed to term eldership and directs the reader to John Murray’s treatment on this subject in his appendix. He states, “This system (the class system or term eldership) is contrary to the nature and function of the office of elder, both biblically and practically. Biblically speaking there is no warrant for terms in office” (p 230).

He gives practical suggestions for teaching new members and information on how this affects church planting and other church ministries. To the officers of the church, he suggests setting a specific date on which to implement a shepherding ministry. Lastly, Witmer reminds elders that they are not a board of directors. They are shepherds. Elders can also expect to be encouraged as they see the Good Shepherd graciously working in their lives and in the lives of the congregation.

This book is an excellent source for elders and potential elders. It encourages them to shepherd the flock lovingly, biblically, and practically. It offers a new sense of personal direction for elders in caring for members. ■



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