

## REVIEWS & RESPONSES

**Book Review:** Chad Van Dixhoorn (ed.), *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly 1643–1652* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 5 vols., xxviii + 3136pp., hardbound, £630, cloth. ISBN 9780199206834. Reviewed by Rowland S. Ward, Th.D.

The publication of these volumes in September 2012 marked the conclusion of nearly 12 years work—eight of these full time—and is an astonishing achievement. Dr. Van Dixhoorn, now ministering in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Virginia, started on a Master’s program which soon became a seven-volume doctoral thesis (2004), as he ferreted out long-lost documents that enabled a much fuller understanding of the Westminster Assembly. Professor John Morrill states in his Foreword: “I cannot think of a modern editorial labour so extensive, so skilled, so effective”—high praise indeed. Assistant editors are Mark Garcia, Joel Halcomb, and Inga Jones.

These volumes demonstrate an extraordinary attention to detail with spellings, deletions, and corrections in the originals reflected in the editorial work. There are introductory summaries at appropriate points. Overall the editorial apparatus nearly doubles the 550,000 words of the originals. Except for lost material related to the first 44 sessions (which in measure can be recovered from John Lightfoot’s *Journal*, particularly in the much expanded form located by Dr. Van Dixhoorn and to be published separately in due course), and some 35 sessions in the period from December 21, 1643 to February 14, 1644, the rest of the 1163 sessions are transcribed, and cover August 4, 1643 to March 25, 1652 inclusive. There were also 50 or so sessions which extended beyond March 1652 for another year which are lost; but these are not of great significance.

The first and shortest volume (xxviii & 279pp) covers introductory matters and in practice is likely to be the one of most general interest. The minutes are contained in Volumes 2, 3 and 4, and although in this form of value principally to

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academics and specialists, are of great importance. They will be mined by scholars who are able to utilize their findings to popularize a better understanding of what the Assembly was about and what it did. The first major effort in this direction is Robert Letham’s volume on the Westminster Assembly issued by P & R Publishing in 2009. The first of Van Dixhoorn’s volumes also includes a register of citations (yes, Beza was cited slightly more often than Calvin), while Volume 5 (472pp) contains 141 papers produced by the Assembly and over 90 pages of indices covering Scripture texts, subjects, places and persons. A test of these suggests a high degree of accuracy.

In the first volume we have a succinct description of the calling of the Assembly by the English Long Parliament including reference to discussion about such a project preceding the beginning of the (first) Civil War in August 1642. The summoning ordinance stated that the existing Episcopal church government was to be abolished as evil, justly offensive, and burdensome, and worship was to be reformed in many areas not clearly specified. Church government was to be settled as might be most agreeable to God’s holy Word to procure and preserve peace in the Church and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed churches overseas. In addition the Assembly was to vindicate and clear the doctrine of the Church of England from “all false calumnies and aspersions.” However, the Assembly was not only the creature of Parliament, but Parliament retained the dominant position in so far as the acceptance or otherwise of the Assembly’s work. Parliament also appointed the prolocutor (chairman) and the scribes, and had parliamentary representatives present. Only the texts of the two catechisms escaped unscathed by Parliament.

The Assembly began on July 1, 1643, and initially concerned itself with reviewing the Thirty-nine Articles as a way of fulfilling the remit to vindicate the doctrine of the Church of England. In October the Scottish commissioners arrived, in line with the terms of the English treaty with the Scots and the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant. The pressing practical questions of church government and worship were then taken up. The minutes demonstrate that, while the Scots were influential as non-voting treaty commissioners able to participate in any committee, their contribution has often been over-estimated, not least by themselves.

Although over 120 theologians were appointed, the usual attendance was probably between 70 and 80. The hours were 9 to 5 preceded by sermon and prayer at 6am. It was a heavy grind in the midst of troubled times. The base pay was four shillings a day but was often behind, and some never recovered arrears. Most members were Presbyterian, a few were Erastian, and those politely called “the dissenting brethren” were Independents (although they disliked the term). It

appears that twelve men account for 55% of the speeches and appointments. Stephen Marshall topped the list. As well as the texts we commonly associate with the Assembly, for obvious reasons not printed in these volumes, the Assembly also functioned to examine and accredit ministers. It is thought about 5,000 examinations occurred, an astonishing number equal to about 50% of the ordained clergy in England at the time. The majority of the Assembly members were appalled at the execution of the King in 1649.

Most of the minutes were taken down by Adoniram Byfield, whose handwriting Morrill describes as the worst he has encountered from the 17th century (which is saying something). A small portion is in a difficult shorthand. It is important to note that the edition of the minutes previously available is defective at various points because of transcription errors. That edition, edited by Alex Mitchell and John Struthers and published in 1874, only covers sessions 324 to 1163, about a third of the written record, and thus omits much of interest.<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunately the case that the debates on the Confession and Catechisms, which are of such interest to many today, are in fact generally of the briefest character, as the minutes become quite short from November 1644 on. This fact contributed to the traditional view that church government was the dominant focus of the Assembly, a position now seen to be erroneous. In fact, doctrinal matters took a good third of the Assembly's time, while church government was only around 25%, with approving candidates and administration close behind at around 20% each.

These volumes demonstrate very clearly the robust debates on theological matters, and that consensus was sought among men united by their Calvinistic convictions but differing on various aspects of expressing the doctrine. Particularly interesting is the lengthy discussion of the imputation of Christ's obedience in the context of the 11th article of the Thirty-nine Articles (*Of the Justification of Man*), which was the main focus of sessions 45–68. The record of the debate covers 135 pages and we can see the key players, and the shifts in the argument. The majority was firmly of the view that the active obedience of Christ as well as his passive obedience is imputed; others argued for the passive obedience alone. The members were united in their opposition to good works as part of justification, but among other biblical arguments they were concerned to avoid giving encouragement to antinomianism, which was then a major problem. When the subject was debated much later in connection with the Confession and Catechisms the careful wording there suggests the desire to avoid offense to those who favored the minority view.

Others commentators<sup>2</sup> have argued strongly that the phrase in the Confession XI.1, which refers to imputing “the obedience and satisfaction of Christ” to those effectually called, includes the active obedience of Christ. But it

remains the case that the wording in the earlier revision by the Assembly of the eleventh of the Thirty-nine Articles, is “the whole obedience and satisfaction of Christ.” Further, the terms “whole obedience” and “active obedience” are carefully avoided in the later Confession and also the Catechisms, while in the Savoy Declaration of 1658, composed by John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, the equivalent section is explicit in removing the inadequacy or ambiguity perceived to be present in the Westminster Confession: “Christ's active obedience to the whole law, and passive obedience in his death.” These facts do not necessarily mean the Westminster Confession tolerates rejection of the imputation of Christ's obedience: the answer to that depends on the terms of subscription that might have been required upon the adoption of the Confession. However, they certainly indicate an avoidance of giving offense, and Gataker and Vines were not excluded from further participation the Assembly's deliberations.

Given the measure of ambiguity in the phrasing,<sup>3</sup> Strange is on more solid ground when he points out the importance of the intent of the framers of a document and of those who subsequently adopt it. Original intent of the Westminster Assembly in the present case may be somewhat uncertain, other than that we know over 90% of those voting in the Assembly argued for the imputation of Christ's active obedience. The intent of other Assemblies when adopting the Confession (*animus imponentis*—the intent of the imposing body) may be another thing. For example, the Scottish Church accepted the Confession as in no way contrary to the received doctrine of the Church. That would exclude a true Amyraldian position, for example, if there was any doubt on that matter. It may also allow rejecting the imputation of Christ's active obedience, but if so—and it's a big if—only in the sense of the Assembly's 1643 debate, and not with the connotations of Socinianism in the 17th century or the Federal Vision platform of the present day. Other Assemblies may have a different intent in adopting the Confession, and certainly the imputation of Christ's active obedience is a staple in the generality of Reformed theology and one trusts it remains so.

These volumes are essential for theological colleges desiring to understand the Reformed tradition correctly. ■

1. *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines ... (November 1644 to March 1649)*, ed. Alex F. Mitchell and John Struthers (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1874).

2. Alan D. Strange, “Affirmation of the Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ at the Westminster Assembly of Divines” in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Vol. 4, 194ff. Also, Jeffrey Jue, “The Active Obedience of Christ and the Theology of the Westminster Standards: A Historical Investigation,” in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Tain, UK: Mentor, 2007) 99–130.

3. A point recognized in Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 2007), 262.

**Book Review:** J. V. Fesko, *Word, Water, And Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010) xv, 454 pp., hardbound, \$35. ISBN 9781601781017. Reviewed by Ryan M. McGraw, with response by J. V. Fesko, Academic Dean, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Westminster Seminary California, Escondido, California.

**Is Roman Catholic Baptism Valid? A Review Of J. V. Fesko's *Word, Water, And Spirit* with a Friendly Debate over the Validity of Roman Catholic Baptism**

The purpose of this review is twofold.<sup>1</sup> First, the author desires to commend J.V. Fesko's book, *Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism*, as highly as possible. Second, this author takes a different position on accepting Roman Catholic baptism as a valid baptism (chapter fifteen). Fesko's work on baptism ought to become a standard modern textbook on the subject from a Reformed perspective. The debate over Roman baptism represents a debate among friends who agree over more than they disagree. Nonetheless, the validity of Roman Catholic baptism is an important question that has many practical consequences in the church. Both sides of the debate deserve a full treatment.

*General Review*

This is by far the most extensive and valuable treatment of baptism that has been written from a confessionally Reformed perspective. Fesko's material is well-argued and researched extensively. The book is divided into three sections. The first section—which constitutes roughly half of the book—traces the history of the doctrine of baptism in church, with special stress placed on the meaning, mode, and subjects of baptism. This section is useful for its broad sweep of church history, especially in relation to the neglected area of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy.

Section two examines baptism through the lenses of Biblical Theology. These chapters were highly valuable to this reviewer. Instead of rooting the origins of baptism in Jewish proselyte baptism, Fesko roots the sacrament in the waters of creation in Genesis one. The point is not that baptism originated at that time, but that the language of the Spirit hovering over the face of the deep and bringing order out of chaos in the first chapter of the Bible is the origin for the language and

significance of baptism. He traces the theme of new creation by water and Spirit through the flood, the exodus, the restoration from exile, and the new covenant. The parallels that he draws are breathtaking and tie the entire message of Scripture together. The treatment of baptism as covenant judgment is particularly useful.

The third and last major section of this book treats questions related to Systematic Theology. His treatment is rooted in Reformed covenant theology and ecclesiology. By the time Fesko introduces his chapter on infant baptism, the historical and biblical theological sections make the transition easy. His expositions of the meaning and the mode of baptism in particular are clear and simple.

This reviewer has read dozens of works on the sacraments. Fesko's volume is, without competition, the most important work that he has read on this subject. It is characterized by sound doctrine coupled with fresh biblical insight. Anyone who takes the study of the Sacraments seriously will need to grapple with this book from now on.

*The Validity of Roman Catholic Baptism: Preliminary Remarks*

In his last chapter, Fesko argues for treating Roman Catholic baptism as valid. Historically, this has been the majority position in the Reformed church. However, regarding the question of whether we should accept Roman Catholic baptism as valid Christian baptism, I am convinced that the Reformed majority view is inconsistent with Reformed ecclesiology. Advocates of the minority position include the Scots Confession of Faith, Franciscus Gomarus,<sup>2</sup> and others.

American Presbyterianism largely adopted this minority position. In 1987, a Presbyterian Church of America report on "The Validity of Certain Baptisms" observed:

In its historical survey, the Committee found that with one exception the General Assemblies of American Presbyterian churches ... have taken the position of non-validity for Roman Catholic baptism. This was done in 1845 by the Old School Assembly and the reasons given in the report have prevailed until today. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church took the same position in 1876. The United Presbyterian Church in North America, in various actions from 1869 to 1871, took the same position. The Presbyterian Church, U.S., commonly referred to as the Southern Presbyterian Church, had consistently taken the same position of the non-validity of Romish baptism. The Southern Church referred to the action of the General Assembly, Old School, of 1845, but took a full action of its own in 1871. The Assembly of 1884 reaffirmed the action of 1871 and the Assembly of 1914 declined to rescind its action of 1884. The one exception is the action of the 1981 Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, espousing and reiterating

1. Thanks to Ryan Speck, Bill Schweitzer, Matthew Holst, and Bill van Doodewaard for providing constructive criticism for this review.

2. Franciscus Gomarus, "Disputatio XXXIII: De Baptismi Sacrae Scripturae, et Ecclesiae Romanae Repugnata," *Opera Theologica Omnia, Maximum Parta Posthuma: Suprema Authoris, Vountate a Discipulis Edita* (Amsterdam, 1644), 105–107. A translation of this disputation is presented in *In Translatione* in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

the objections of Charles Hodge to the decision of the 1845 General Assembly.<sup>3</sup>

This review presents the core of the arguments against the validity of Roman Catholic baptism only. In summary: Baptism must be administered by lawfully ordained ministers of the gospel in order to be valid. Only the church has lawfully ordained ministers. The Roman Catholic Church is not a true church of Jesus Christ and she does not have lawfully ordained ministers. Therefore, the Roman Catholic Church cannot administer valid baptisms.<sup>4</sup>

This review addresses the contested points of this debate in the order that Dr. Fesko raises them. For this reason, it is helpful to begin by summarizing his arguments. After using Francis Turretin to outline his basic case in favor of Rome's baptism, he appropriately chose James Henley Thornwell and Charles Hodge to represent both sides. Though the debate over Catholic baptism did not begin here, the nineteenth-century controversy between Hodge and Thornwell largely drew the lines along which it has proceeded since that time. Hodge's (and Fesko's) basic argument for the validity of Roman Catholic baptism is that since Christ is the true administrator of baptism, and because the efficacy of the sacraments does not depend on the piety or intention of the person administering it, then Roman Catholic baptism is valid because it reflects the Triune God's gracious intentions towards His people. This is true even though Catholicism has distorted the meaning of the sacrament in its official theology. This reviewer contends that while it is true that the efficacy of the sacrament does not depend on him who administers it, appeals to this truth misrepresent the case against Roman Catholic baptism. The validity of Roman Catholic baptism must not hinge upon the subjective piety or the intention of the minister, but upon the objective validity of his ordination as constituting a part of Christ's institution.

Sound Reformed men have stood on both sides of this debate. One's position on this matter should not be a test of orthodoxy. Dr. Fesko and I are fellow-laborers and friends in Christ who value and pray for each other's work. This review is written in a spirit of brotherly love with the aim, by the help of the Spirit, to harmonize better the objective characteristics of valid sacraments with Reformed ecclesiology.

#### *A Partial Straw-Man Argument*

First, Fesko sets up a partial straw-man of Thornwell's position by indicating that it rests primarily on rejecting aberrant theologies of baptism (369). He argues that in Thornwell's view, "The question of what constitutes a true baptism hinges on who ultimately administers it." I will return to this point below. Fesko appeals to Turretin to outline his position (374). However, Turretin mistakenly revolves the entire discussion

around whether or not the efficacy of the sacrament depends on the piety or the intent of the minister. All Reformed theologians, including Thornwell, agree that sacramental efficacy does not depend on any subjective qualification in the minister, but this does not touch the question of sacramental validity. The validity and the efficacy of the sacraments are not identical matters, though they are closely related. Sacraments are valid when they meet the objective criteria needed to identify a sacrament as an institution of Christ. Sacraments are effective means of salvation when those who partake of them receive Christ in them through faith. A sacrament can be objectively valid without being an effective means of salvation to all who receive it. On the other side, a believer can possess the subjective benefits signified in a sacrament without necessarily partaking of a valid sacrament. The validity of a sacrament does not depend on the presence of subjective grace or intent in the heart of the one administering it, but the efficacy of a sacrament as a divinely instituted means of grace does depend on the objective validity of the sacrament. Fesko mistakenly roots the question in the subjective state of the minister rather than the objective identity of the minister as integral to Christ's ordinance. The debate does not regard the subjective state of ministers, but what the essential elements are that mark out a valid sacrament.

The question that should take center stage is whether the church in question is a true church with true ministers and ordinances (for the sake of space, I must assume here that readers agree that only lawfully ordained ministers should administer the Sacraments).<sup>5</sup> The efficacy of the sacrament depends on Christ's institution rather than on the piety or the intention of the person administering it, but this does not negate the fact that dispensing the sacrament through lawfully ordained ministers of the Word is part of that institution. In other words, the intent of the minister is not part of Christ's institution in baptism, but administration by a lawfully ordained minister is.

3. 15th General Assembly, Appendix B, pp. 416–422. Cited from <http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/2-078.html>. Fesko gives the impression that Thornwell largely developed this position. Thornwell strongly influenced the Assembly decision in 1845, but he was not the first to reject Roman Catholic baptism as valid.

4. The 1987 PCA Study report cited above gives the following summary of the 1845 General Assembly: "(1) The Romish communion is not a true church and therefore its sacraments cannot be true and valid sacraments. (2) The Romish priests are not ministers of Christ and therefore the rites administered by them cannot be regarded as the ordinances of Christ. (3) The doctrine or meaning of the sacrament of baptism is so corrupted by the Romish communion that it invalidates the sacrament of baptism." This review lays the primary stress on the first two of these points.

5. For a biblical case for this position with application to Roman Catholic baptism, see my sermon on 1 Corinthians 4:1 at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.aspx?SID=317121253434>.

Fesko largely omits Thornwell's argument concerning the nature of the church and ordination as part of Christ's institution (377). With Turretin, he has confused the question of the efficacy and the validity of the Sacraments. Fesko argues that the Roman Catholic view of sacramental efficacy was Thornwell's "line in the sand" (379). It is not the purpose of this review to defend Thornwell, but Fesko omitted the strongest aspect of Thornwell's argument. Sacramental efficacy was never the "line in the sand," but sacramental validity was. In Thornwell's view, the Roman Catholic Church had creedally redefined the Sacraments. In itself, this would not make their Sacraments invalid. Thornwell's point was that Rome's sacramental views were indicative of their entire system of salvation. This system of salvation led the Reformed largely to declare that Rome was not a true church. Interestingly, Turretin assumed that Roman Catholic Eucharist was invalid because it distorted the nature of the sacrament, but he argued for the validity of Roman Catholic baptism in spite of the radical distortion introduced into its meaning.<sup>6</sup> This reviewer does not desire to stress the church's understanding of the sacraments in connection to the question of their validity, yet Turretin's treatment of the validity of Lord's Supper is in tension with his conclusions regarding the validity of baptism. Westminster Confession of Faith 19.6 also declares that the Mass "overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament" on similar grounds to Turretin. Thornwell

6. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. George Musgrave Giger and James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1992–1997) 3:361, 398.

7. The Donatists argued that the apostasy of ministers proved the utter corruption and apostasy of the church as well, but Fesko and others ordinarily do not appeal to the ecclesiological dimension of the Donatist position in this debate. The point here is that the comparison to the Donatists regarding the piety or intent of the minister is not relevant to the question at hand.

8. The 1987 PCA report made this point as well: "That earlier Donatist controversy dealt with the question of a minister who succumbed momentarily to the pressure of persecution. The church in which he ministered was more or less pure in upholding the Gospel. His succumbing to the pressure of persecution did not thus invalidate the sacraments he had administered. The situation in view in the Roman Catholic priesthood is not that which our Confession and the Donatist controversy addresses. It is that of a ministry and a church which, in the words of Paul describing the false teachers of Galatia, preach "a different gospel, which is not another," "distort the gospel of Christ" and thus lie under the Apostolic judgment, "let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6–9). Therefore, inevitably, in this case, Romish church and Romish ministry are evaluated alike."

9. Readers can access this article here: [http://www.reformed.org/misc/index.html?mainframe=/misc/hodge\\_catholic.html](http://www.reformed.org/misc/index.html?mainframe=/misc/hodge_catholic.html).

10. This article is available here: <http://www.hornes.org/theologia/charles-hodge/do-rc-clergy-count-as-gospel-ministers>. The 1987 PCA General Assembly report treated valid ordinations as "a corollary" of the question of Rome's status as a church. These two points stand or fall together.

is consistent in applying the same criteria to and asking the same questions of baptism.

There is a tendency among Reformed proponents of Roman Catholic baptism to cloud the question at hand with references to the Donatist controversy in the early church. The Donatists taught that the efficacy of the sacraments depended on the piety and sincerity of ministers and that ministers who later apostatized had not administered true sacraments<sup>7</sup> The church at that time did not draw a clear distinction between the questions of efficacy and validity. In this regard, the Reformed debate concerning the validity of Roman Catholic baptism does not entirely parallel the Donatist controversy, since both sides agree that sacramental efficacy does not depend on the subjective state of the minister.<sup>8</sup> This reviewer largely agrees with Fesko that Thornwell laid too much stress on the Roman Catholic theology of the Sacraments. A church and an individual may misunderstand what the Sacraments mean and still participate in valid sacraments. The problem in this case is not with the Sacrament, but with those who administer or receive them. However, the heart of this debate regards the status of a church as a true branch of the visible church on earth and administration by lawfully ordained ministers as part of the objective criteria for Christ's institution.

#### *A Consistently Reformed Ecclesiology*

Second, treating Roman Catholic baptism as valid is inconsistent with Reformed ecclesiology. In the course of the Hodge/Thornwell debates, Hodge began to argue that the Roman Catholic Church was a true branch of the visible church on earth.<sup>9</sup> He recognized implicitly that if Rome was not a true church, then it did not have true ministers or true Sacraments. It is not surprising that Hodge subsequently argued that Roman Catholic priests are true ministers of the gospel.<sup>10</sup> A tension has always existed within the Reformed majority view of Catholic baptism. Reformed churches have denied that the Roman Catholic church is a true church and has true ministers while affirming that Rome has at least one valid sacrament. Hodge and Thornwell represent differing attempts at resolving this tension. Hodge resolved the tension by teaching that Rome was a true church with lawfully ordained ministers and valid sacraments. Thornwell resolved it by arguing that Rome was no true church with no lawfully ordained ministers and with invalid sacraments. While both of these positions are internally coherent, neither of them represents the historic Reformed position. The upshot of the Hodge/Thornwell debate is that it encourages us to adopt a position that harmonizes the question of valid sacraments with Reformed ecclesiology.

However, Fesko does not note that Hodge departed from the historic Reformed tradition by affirming that the Roman Catholic Church was a true church (381). The biblical case for this conclusion would be as long as this review. Therefore,

this reviewer must largely assume, for the sake of argument, that denying that Rome is a true church is a sound conclusion.<sup>11</sup> Several Reformed confessions treat the Roman Catholic Church as a “false Church.”<sup>12</sup> While explaining what constitutes a valid sacrament, the Scots Confession of Faith (1560) added, “The same affirm we of the Sacraments in the Papiſtical kirk; in which, we affirm, the whole action of the Lord Jeſus to be adulterated, as well in the external form, as in the end and opinion.”<sup>13</sup> The PCUSA General Assembly of 1845 developed their rejection of Roman Catholic baptism out of the confessional teaching on Rome’s status as a church:

Resolved, That this Assembly, in full accordance with the words of our Confession of Faith reſpecting the Church of Rome and its ſo-called ſpiritual head, do now reaffirm the deliverance, upon this ſubject, of the Assembly of 1835, as applying to that Roman hierarchy headed by the pope, fauſely claiming to be the Church; which, oppoſed abſolutely and irreconcilably to the doctrines of Holy Scripture, is corrupting and degrading a large part of Chriſt’s Church over which it has uſurped ſupreme control.<sup>14</sup>

If Rome is not a true church, then Thornwell’s position is correct. This appears to be why Hodge argued for more than his predecessors were willing to concede regarding the Church of Rome (383).<sup>15</sup>

The PCUSA General Assembly declared in 1835 that the Roman Catholic Church was not a true church. In a subsequent Assembly (1845), this church took the next logical step by denying that Roman Catholic baptism was a valid baptism. Hodge wrote largely in response to these events. Most Reformed theologians had previously been in the awkward position of teaching that the Roman Catholic Church was not a church while affirming that Roman Catholic baptism was valid. The General Assembly of 1845 rejected Rome’s baptism on the ground that, “It is the unanimous opinion of all the Reformed churches, that the whole papal body, though once a branch of the visible church, has long ſince become utterly corrupt, and hopeleſſy apoſtate.”<sup>16</sup>

We should agree with Hodge that baptism belongs to the church universal, and with the Reformed generally that “evangelical” elements remain in the Roman Catholic Church. However, it does not follow that Rome is a true church. Mormonism and seventeenth-century Socinianism (Unitarianism) contain “evangelical elements” as well, such as adhering to the authority of the canonical Scriptures. Socinianism had a high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Even John Owen (1616–1683), in his six-hundred plus page refutation of Socinianism (*Vindiciae Evangelicae*), virtually passed over the Socinian view of Scripture.<sup>17</sup> Scripture is one of the two most fundamental presuppositions of the Reformed faith

(the doctrine of God being the other). The presence of one or more fundamental doctrines of the faith does not constitute a true church. Moreover—without stating which doctrine takes priority—is it not arbitrary to argue that Rome is a true church because she upholds fundamental doctrines such as the Trinity, but that Socinian churches were false in spite of adhering to the inspiration and authority of the Bible?

When a church denies by public confession of faith one or more fundamental doctrines of the faith, then it is no longer a true church, even though true believers (wrongly) remain in it. It is important to note with William Dunlop (1692–1720) that we judge the status both of churches and of individuals by their public confession of faith.<sup>18</sup> A friend once met evangelical Mormons in remote parts of Montana who believed in Christ by reading the Scriptures but were largely detached from and ignorant of the fundamental teachings of Mormonism. If Hodge’s arguments are sound, then this would mean that the Mormon Church was a true branch of the visible church. It is not the presence of truth that constitutes a true church, but holding to what the Reformed orthodox called “fundamental articles” (see Muller, *PRRD*, I).<sup>19</sup> “Fundamental articles” relate to the pure preaching of the gospel, which is the first and primary “mark” of the

11. For a concise argument for this point, see Thomas E. Peck, *Notes on Ecclesiology* (Richmond, 1892; reprint, Taylors, SC: Presbyterian Press, 2005), 103–106.

12. *Second Helvetic Confession*, XVII.10. Among others, WCF 25–6, without stating so explicitly, implies that the Roman Church is a “synagogue of Satan.”

13. “The Scots Confession of Faith,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), III, 472–473.

14. *1st General Assembly (PCA)*, *Appendix P*.

15. Shockingly, the minority report of the 15th General Assembly of the PCA asserted that administering baptism “within the bounds of a body bearing the marks of a true church of Jesus Christ” was “regular and proper,” but not “essential” in order to determine the validity of the sacraments. This goes farther than Hodge was willing to go.

16. Cited in *PCA Digest 2003*, 90. This includes the full text of the 1845 declaration. This document anticipates and refutes virtually all of the arguments that Fesko uses. It is available at [www.pcahistory.org/pca/2-089.doc](http://www.pcahistory.org/pca/2-089.doc) [accessed: October 29, 2013].

17. John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae, or the Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated, and Socinianism Examined, in the ... Confutation of a Catechism ... Written by J. Biddle ... and the Catechism of Valetinus Smalcus, Commonly Called the Racovian Catechism. with the Scripture ... from the Perverse Expositions...* (Oxford: Printed by Leon. Lichfield, for Tho, Robinson, 1655).

18. William Dunlop, *The Uses of Creeds and Confessions of Faith*, ed. James Buchanan (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, and Co., 1857), 141. [Ed. Cf. “The Preface,” in *A Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, etc.* volume 1, ed. William Dunlop (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1619) v–cxlv. The preface was published separately in 1720 and in a second edition in 1724.]

19. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003).

church.<sup>20</sup> In his treatment of “fundamental articles,” Turretin recognized that it is as impossible as it is undesirable to provide an exhaustive list of them (Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:48–54). This means that determining what is or is not a true church is difficult. Churches must decide this question on a case by case basis (preferably denominationally rather than individually). However, the Roman Catholic Church is one of the only bodies that some Reformed churches have denounced in their confessions and in their church courts. While they are not infallible, the church should take these pronouncements seriously.

All Reformed Christians, including Fesko, must judge a church’s claim to be a true branch of the visible body of Christ by its public confession of faith. Even within the current climate of confessional laxity and ambiguity in many churches, the principle of judging a church by her confession is both sound and necessary. Even anti-confessional churches draw lines in the sand by stating what they do or do not want their ministers to teach. Calvary Chapel, for instance, which is purportedly “non-denominational” and has no church membership, defines clearly what they do and do not believe. Due to their anti-creedal stance, this means that each congregation effectively invents their own confession of faith, no two of which are identical.<sup>21</sup> Instead of having a well-prayed over, researched, and carefully formulated document such as the Westminster Confession of Faith, such churches have the disadvantage of making a new creed for each congregation. Judging the truth or falsehood of churches by their public confessions of faith will not always be easy. Yet what choice does the church have? Is this not how the church determines that groups such as Mormons are outside of the visible church? Somewhere along the way, the visible church needed to judge Mormonism in light of Scripture by virtue of its public beliefs. This is the same criteria that Reformed churches applied to Rome’s standing as a church. At least from the time of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), Rome has denied several aspects of the gospel by its public confession of faith. While rejecting Roman Catholic baptism goes against the historical grain of Reformed precedent, Thornwell’s position is alone consistent with the predominant Reformed position regarding the ecclesiastical status of the Roman Catholic Church.

If Rome is not a true Church, then she has no true ministers. If she has no true ministers, then she has neither the right nor the ability to administer true Sacraments. Hodge tacitly conceded this point by arguing that Rome was a true branch of the visible church and that Catholic priests are lawfully

ordained ministers. The majority view as represented by Fesko and Turretin requires Reformed Christians either to uphold historic Reformed ecclesiology at the expense of a Reformed view of the validity of the sacraments, or to uphold a Reformed view of the sacraments at the expense of the historic Reformed evaluation of the Roman Catholic Church. Regardless of their position, the Hodge/ Thornwell debate should lead Reformed churches to choose between two coherent views of Roman Catholic baptism rather than a popular view that is not entirely consistent.

#### *Baptism as an Objective Ordinance of Christ*

The third point in this debate relates to how the church defines the objective marks of true sacraments. One of Fesko’s primary arguments against those rejecting the validity of Roman Catholic baptism is that they make the criteria for judging the validity of the Sacraments subjective rather than objective (384). He notes that baptism “cannot be defined by man or any institutional church” (384). This is true in the sense that Christ defines the nature and identity of the sacraments in his Word and the objective criteria of the sacraments do not rest on the subjective understanding of the church. However, the administration of the sacraments by a lawfully ordained minister is part of the objective criteria of Christ’s institution. Fesko makes his case to the contrary by drawing an analogy from the public reading of the Word. He notes that Reformed believers would not say that the public reading of the Word was invalid when performed by a Roman Catholic priest. The objective nature of the Word remains intact even when read by an apostate man in a false church. If this is the case, he asks, then how can we reject the validity of the sacraments under such circumstances? (385).

Fesko’s charge of a quasi-Barthian position against those who deny the legitimacy of Roman Catholic baptism (385) does not hold true. He assumes that since none deny the objective nature of the public reading of Scripture regardless of who reads it, so none can legitimately deny the validity of the sacraments because of who administers them. This argument does not rest on a proper comparison. Certainly the Bible can be an effective means of salvation to those who read or hear it regardless of where and through whom they hear it. However, the Bible is always valid and effective because objectively it is the Word of God irrespective of what men believe about its nature. The sacraments are subordinate to the Bible and the Scriptures define the objective marks of a sacrament. Ordination is not necessary to make the Word of God effective, though it is necessary to constitute true preaching. In this respect, the validity of preaching provides a better parallel to the validity of the sacraments than does the public reading of the Word.

Lawful ordination to preach the Word and a commission

20. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 1:59.

21. For examples, see <http://www.cchavas.com/what-does-calvary-chapel-believe/> and <http://www.calvarychapelife.org/beliefs.html>.

to administer the sacraments go hand in hand. What is necessary for valid preaching is necessary also for valid sacraments. As the Directory of Worship for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church recognizes (Directory of Worship, D.2.c), there is no preaching without ordination. In Acts 8:5, Philip preached the Word (*kerusso*) while the church at large communicated the gospel (v. 4. *euangelizomai*). The difference between their actions lay in Philip's ordination as an evangelist. The Word of God inherently possesses divine authority, but preaching is a public authoritative proclamation of the gospel by an ordained ambassador of Christ who is a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1). Paul recognized this in Romans 10:14–17. People cannot believe without preaching, but he defines preachers as those who are sent. This falls in line with the New Testament pattern of ordination by the laying on of hands through the presbytery (Acts 14:23). Ministers have no inherent authority or efficacy in their labors. However, Paul asserts that when an ordained man preaches, then the people hear Christ (Rom. 10:14, 17). The Greek text does not indicate that people shall believe when they hear “of Him,” but when they “hear Him.” This is why the proper textual reading of verse seventeen is likely, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” In the Bible, preaching is never a self-appointed task. Preaching is bound to lawful ordination.

The sacraments are not simply tied to the Word of God in the abstract; they are wedded to the preaching of the Word. This is why the apostles and other ordained men administered baptism in the New Testament. Fesko's earlier chapters reflect clearly a proper relationship between sacraments and the preaching of the Word. If the Roman Catholic Church is not a true church, then it does not have true ordination. If it does not have true ordination, then it has no true ministers, since preachers must be sent by God (Rom. 10:15). If Catholic priests are not lawfully ordained ministers of the Word, then both their preaching and their sacraments are without divine warrant and are therefore invalid. Roman Catholic sermons are not true preaching and their sacraments are not true sacraments. There are only a few examples in the New Testament where a person who was not commissioned to preach went about preaching (*kerusso*). One example is a man whom Jesus healed yet expressly forbade from proclaiming what Jesus had done for him. The man proclaimed the Word in disobedience to Christ—he was not sent. He was a usurper and not a true minister of the Word (Mark 1:45). The efficacy of preaching no less than the sacraments does not depend on the piety or intention of the one preaching the Word, but the validity of both depends on lawful ordination in the visible church of Christ. Piety and intent are internal and subjective categories while ordination is an external and objective indicator of authentic preaching and sacraments.

#### *Is Rome an Objective Branch of the Visible Church?*

Fourth, the crux of this debate respects the status of Rome as a true branch of the visible church. This point is treated above, but Fesko reintroduces it at this juncture with a few additional considerations. He noted, “Where the boundaries of the visible church lie depends on how the church is defined” (387). Following Turretin, he argues that the Roman Catholic Church is formally part of the visible church, but that it is not materially a part of it. He asks how it is that anyone is effectually called to salvation in the Roman Catholic Church, since this happens occasionally. He answers that the institution of Christ in the Word and the sacraments is still present. In other words, he argues from effect to cause. He defines the institution of baptism here in terms of its external form as defined by Scripture, but not in terms of where and by whom it is administered. While some semblance of the content of the Word of God and the original meaning of the Sacraments is still present in Rome, this is not the same as saying that she has true ministers, true preaching, and true sacraments.

The Roman Catholic Church is like the ruins of some great edifice from antiquity. Those who see the ruins receive hints of what it once was. They may learn a great deal about its original state and founding. However, the ruins are no longer the original structure. The “Mormons” in Montana mentioned above came to faith in Christ by reading the Bible. They never heard true preaching or received true sacraments. Their conversion experience was extraordinary rather than ordinary. They were saved through the Word of God, but they were not saved through the divinely ordained public means of grace. They received the Bible because the false church to which they claimed to belong directed people to read the Bible. However, they came to saving faith in Christ in spite of the intentions of Mormonism as an organization. In spite of his objections to the contrary, this scenario is essentially parallel to Fesko's argument that Roman Catholic sacraments and preaching must be valid. This argument from saving effects to valid sacraments connects the saving effects to the wrong cause. The objective and instrumental cause of salvation in this case is the Bible rather than the sacraments of an apostate church. Fesko rejects Mormonism as a valid church on the basis of its settled beliefs while he refuses to do so with Roman Catholicism.

Both Dr. Fesko and this reviewer do not make the validity of baptism depend on the understanding of the minister or on those receiving the sacrament, but on Christ's institution. This point actually militates against accepting Roman Catholic baptism. Those who are saved in Roman Catholicism are not saved through Roman Catholicism. People may discern the gospel vaguely through a ruined edifice, but they have never received the public means of grace there. This reviewer agrees with Fesko's statement: “However, if the sacraments derive their meaning and benefit from God through His objective

revelation, then God can effectually call sinners even through the clouded, apostate ministry of the RCC. For those people who are converted under the ministry of the RCC, it is not the voice of the apostate church that they hear, and hence its erroneous theology of baptism. Rather they hear the voice of Christ speaking in the Scriptures, and it is the Scriptures that define what baptism means” (388). Where this reviewer disagrees is that this example testifies to the saving power of the Word and the Spirit of God instead of to the validity of Rome’s sacraments. The Scriptures objectify the sacraments in terms of their relationship to the visible church and her ordinances.

Fesko’s illustration on page 389 illustrates this reviewer’s position. He relates the story of a friend in the ministry who accidentally administered baptism in the name of the Father and the Son while omitting the Holy Spirit. Fesko states earlier on the page that a baptism that omits the trinitarian baptism is invalid. However, he adds that in spite of this “improper” or “defective” baptism, the person baptized could still benefit by observing the baptism of others. It seems to be implied that this person should not receive a proper baptism in the future, but either rest on the institution of Christ in spite of their defective baptism or take comfort from observing the baptism of others even though they have not been baptized. It is unclear which option is intended. Turretin would have considered such a baptism invalid because it omitted the Trinitarian formula (Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:355). But what if Fesko’s friend was not an ordained minister and the baptism had no connection to the visible church? Would he consider the baptism invalid because it was not a Trinitarian baptism, because it was not administered by an ordained minister of the Word in the visible church, or both? Recognizing that lawfully ordained ministers alone must administer baptism simplifies the question. His friend was in error, but his omission did not invalidate the sacrament because he was a lawfully ordained minister of the Word in a true branch of the visible church. Christ defined this baptism in terms of the Trinitarian formula even if the minister failed to do so. Even if the baptism was Trinitarian and outwardly performed by an unordained person more correctly than a baptism administered by a lawfully ordained minister, it would be an invalid baptism. The objective criterion of baptism does not only include the content that God “preaches” through the sacrament, but the fact that he gave the ministry of the Word and the sacraments to his church. The question is not what God can use to bring people to faith in Christ, but how we define his ordinances objectively.

Fesko again adds that Mormon baptisms are invalid because there is no sense in which a Mormon church can be called a church (390). This fact reinforces the vital point that Reformed believers must judge the validity of the sacraments by the truth of a church. Fesko must decide whether the Mormon Church is a true church based upon their public

confession of faith rather than on the presence or remnants of evangelical institutions. The status of a church is part of the objective institution of Christ as much as the fact that God himself is ultimately the agent of baptism. If this is the case, then we cannot retain Roman Catholic baptism without admitting that the Roman Catholic Church is a true church. This is the heart of the matter.

#### *The Necessity of Ordination*

Fourth, Fesko assume at times that administration by a lawfully ordained minister is part of the objective criteria of baptism. He asserts that an un-ordained person baptizing a friend in a swimming pool is not a valid baptism (390–391). He adds, “for an un-ordained person to administer baptism fails to account for the teaching of the Word in the administration of the sacrament. Moreover, such ‘baptisms’ manifest a failure to recognize that the sacrament is not the property of the individual but the corporate body of Christ.” This is precisely the grounds on which this reviewer has stressed the necessity of rejecting Roman Catholic baptism. The Roman Catholic Church is not part of “the corporate body of Christ.”

Fesko adds that adopting Thornwell’s position “creates more problems than it solves” (391) because it makes Reformed churches decide in every instance whether or not people applying for membership come from true or false churches. However, Fesko’s position does not escape this difficulty any more than Thornwell’s did. While deciding this question in light of a church’s public profession of faith is neither a perfect nor an infallible method, it recognizes that the Bible provides objective criteria by which to identify the church. Ministers and elders must decide whether a church is part of the visible church or not every time a new member comes from an autonomous congregation. It is best for denominations to decide these questions instead of the leadership of a local church, but in most cases this will not be possible. While it is true that baptism is not validated “by the theology of the administering body” (393), baptism is validated by Christ’s institution and administration of it through a legitimate branch of the visible church.

Fesko correctly roots the validity of the sacraments in Christ’s institution, but he has not defined extensively enough what that institution is. He concludes rightly, “To fail to acknowledge the objective character of baptism and its basic requirements opens Pandora’s box, and, however well-intended, moves the authority of baptism away from God, His authoritative revelation, and His covenant to man and the shifting sands of his subjective understanding and his created institutions” (392). However, it is not our criteria for determining the objective nature of the sacraments that has opened this “Pandora’s box;” it is the very nature of a fragmented visible church in a pluralistic age that has done so.

### Conclusion

In practice, the church always judges the validity of a baptism in relation to the public confession of a church. The question is not if the visible church must draw lines based on the public confessions of other bodies, but where and how she must draw them. This reviewer follows the Reformed tradition by placing Roman Catholicism outside of the line that marks out the visible church. Fesko follows the Reformed tradition by accepting Roman Catholic baptism as a valid sacrament. This review argues that these two strands within the tradition are incompatible and that both Hodge and Thornwell recognized that this was the case. If Rome is a true church, then she has true ministers and valid Sacraments, even if her ministers are apostate personally. If Rome is a “false church” (*Second Helvetic Confession*, XVII.10), then she has false ministers and invalid Sacraments. Reformed churches should be eager to accept the validity of baptisms from as many other churches as possible by applying faithfully the biblical marks of a true church. This is one of the most difficult practical questions in ecclesiology. This reviewer remains convinced that Rome is just as far from being a true branch of the visible church of Christ as she was at the time of the Reformation, if not more so.<sup>22</sup> True churches and lawfully ordained ministers are just as much a part of Christ’s objective institution as the preaching of the Word and observing the sacraments in accord with Christ’s instructions. The issue in this debate among friends is not which position makes it more difficult to identify valid sacraments, since I have argued that both positions cannot escape this problem. The question is which set of principles for determining the question is more consistent with Scripture and historic Reformed theology.

### Rejoinder by J. V. Fesko

I am grateful to *The Confessional Presbyterian* for inviting me to dialog with Ryan McGraw regarding his review of my book on baptism. I do not want to offer an extended response, as interested parties can consult my book where I address these matters at length. I would especially encourage people to investigate the sources I reference in the book on this particularly thorny issue of the validity of Roman Catholic baptisms. My brief response has three main parts. First, I want to make a few clarifications about several claims that McGraw makes in his review. Second, I offer some observations about the historical contexts of the sixteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, the periods in which the largest amount of dialog over this debated issue arose. Third, I present one very brief scriptural argument.

### Clarifications

There are several claims that McGraw makes in his review that I believe warrant a brief response:

1. I am not a proponent of Roman Catholic baptism as McGraw erroneously claims. It is one thing, in my mind, to recognize that a session can receive a person into membership who has been baptized by a Roman Catholic Church, and entirely another to be a proponent of the practice.

2. McGraw implies that I argue that Rome is a true church. I never make such a claim. Rather, I state that the true church exists in the midst of the Roman Catholic Church by virtue of the presence of true believers in her midst. Institutionally, Rome is a false and apostate church.

3. At one point McGraw draws attention to an illustration I used regarding a colleague who performed a baptism but did not correctly state the formula. He said, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son.” McGraw then draws an odd conclusion based upon my illustration: “However, he adds that in spite of this ‘improper’ or ‘defective’ baptism, the person baptized could still benefit by observing the baptism of others. It seems to be implied that this person should not receive a proper baptism in the future, but either rest on the institution of Christ in spite of their [*sic*] defective baptism or take comfort from observing the baptism of others even though they have not been baptized. It is unclear which option is intended.” First, McGraw draws this from a footnote (389 n. 71); it was not a chief part of my argument. In other words, I think he is picking at gnats. Second, I specifically write, “Had the elder—or anyone else—*not caught the error*, the child still would have benefited from the sacrament through the baptism of others—the continued visible preaching of the Word—in spite of his own defective baptism” (emphasis). In other words, what happens if someone does not receive a proper biblical baptism but *thinks* he has, and no one catches the error? Does this mean that this person, though technically not baptized, cannot benefit from the sacrament? I answer in the negative because, as I argue throughout my book, baptism is not merely for the person who “gets wet,” but is for the corporate body of Christ. Every time a minister preaches the visible word through baptism, the whole congregation benefits from the sacrament, not merely the solitary recipient of the water. McGraw’s analysis clearly misses my point.

4. McGraw’s attempt to pin on me some sort of implicit endorsement of Mormon “water events” because of my position on the validity of Roman Catholic baptisms is a desperate *ad hominem*. To compare the Mormon cult with the Roman Catholic Church is comparing apples to oranges, or better yet, apples to beets (I don’t like beets). Like it or not, we are Reformed *Catholics*—at one point Rome was our institutional home. The Mormon cult, on the other hand, at no time has

22. For a popular assessment of contemporary Roman Catholicism that comes to similar conclusions, see R. C. Sproul, *Are We Together?: A Protestant Analyzes Roman Catholicism* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012).

ever been part of the one true visible church. As the French Reformed Confession argues (see below), there are still some traces of the truth in Rome: she still professes the inspiration of Scripture, the Apostles' Creed, the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and the Ten Commandments. The same cannot be said of the Mormon cult. I do not know how McGraw can say that the "Mormon Church," a term I refuse to assign to the Mormon cult, has "remnants of evangelical institutions." He does not indicate what he means by this, but they never have been in possession of any "evangelical institutions" in my judgment. They may carry copies of the Bible, but doctrinally, they do not profess a pencil shaving from the great oak of Scripture. Rome was at one point on the tree of the one true catholic church but eventually broke itself off, but Mormons never were a part of the tree, ever. The Mormon cult is a weed growing off in the distance far away from the tree.

#### Historical Contexts

McGraw clearly embraces the position of Thornwell over and against the position of Hodge in the great debate over the question of the legitimacy of Roman Catholic baptisms. But one of the things he does not consider is the historical context of this debate. While the issue may have been brewing prior to the 1845 General Assembly as McGraw notes, we should certainly ask what caused the Presbyterian wing of the Reformed church to perform a complete 180-degree turn on this issue. Was it purely theological or were there other factors? A pressing factor at this point in American church history was the influx of Irish and German immigrants, who in the opinions of many were subversive to the American way of life given their loyalties to the Papacy. Lyman Beecher (1775–1863), a Presbyterian minister, wrote in his work, *Plea for the West* (1835), that these Papist immigrants refused to assimilate into American Protestant culture. They attended their own parochial schools, refused to attend Protestant Sabbath schools, and were actively seeking to increase their own numbers through procreation. Beecher ponders the question of what would happen if they began to mingle with Protestants:

If they scattered, unassociated, the attrition of circumstances would wear off their predilections and aversions. If they could read the Bible, and might and did, their darkened intellect would brighten, and their bowed down mind would rise. If they dared to think for themselves, the contrast of protestant

independence with their thralldom, would awaken the desire of equal privileges, and put an end to an arbitrary clerical dominion over trembling superstitious minds. If the pope and potentates of Europe held no dominion over ecclesiastics here, we might trust to time and circumstances to mitigate their ascendancy and produce assimilation.<sup>1</sup>

Beecher's statement represents a chief concern shared by many American Protestants at that time, namely, the ascendancy of Roman Catholicism in the United States. I suspect that many ministers at the 1845 General Assembly voted against the church's past practice of nearly three hundred years with matters of Roman Catholic immigration and influence on their minds.

Yet, why is it that in the context of sixteenth-century Europe where Roman Catholicism was dominant that the Reformed church accepted their baptisms? Were they helplessly conflicted and theologically confused as McGraw suggests? It seems that McGraw fails to employ the most virtuous of available tools in a theologian's grasp, the distinction. McGraw operates on an all or nothing premise: If Rome is a false church, then all that she does must therefore be false. But the Reformed tradition has instead offered a more nuanced approach. The French Reformed Confession (1559/71), written under the guidance of John Calvin (1509–64), rejects Rome as a true church: "Therefore we condemn the papal assemblies, as the pure word of God is banished from them, their sacraments are corrupted, debased, falsified, or destroyed, and all superstitions and idolatries are in them. We hold, then, that all who take part in these acts, and commune in that church, separate and cut themselves off from the body of Christ." The confession continues, however, and recognizes the following: "Nevertheless, as some trace of the church is left in the papacy, and the virtue and substance of baptism remain, and as the efficacy of baptism does not depend upon the person who administers it, we confess that those baptized in it do not need a second baptism. But, on account of its corruptions, we can not present children to be baptized in it without incurring pollution" (§ XXXVIII).<sup>2</sup>

Several observations are in order regarding the stance of the French Confession. First, they recognize and reject Rome's claim to be a true church. Second, just because it is not a true church does not automatically invalidate everything Rome does. The fact that they counsel people not to have their infants baptized in the Roman church demonstrates that the Roman rite is imperfect but nonetheless acceptable. In other words, a man may father a child out of wedlock, which means his son is a bastard, but the illegitimate means by which he fathered the child does not negate the fact that the child is still his son, legitimate or not. The French Confession takes this type of stance towards Roman baptisms. Third, contrary to

1. Lyman Beecher, *Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835), 117–18.

2. French Reformed Confession, in Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 382–83.

McGraw's interpretation of the applicability of the Donatist controversy, the French Confession applies the principle of sacramental validity (namely that baptism does not depend upon the person who administers it) to the Roman Catholic priest *qua* an ordained officer of the Roman Catholic Church. In other words, the Reformed church historically appealed to the principle of the Donatist controversy; it has not restricted the principle to the confines and terms of the original fifth-century debate, which centered upon individual ministers rather than entire church bodies. Along these lines, our own Westminster Standards are deafeningly silent on the matter of Roman Catholic baptisms. The original Standards do not blush in its claim that the Pope is the antichrist (XXV.vi) and the chapter on the Lord's Supper states: "the Popish Sacrifice of the Mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only Sacrifice, the alone Propitiation for all the sins of his elect" (XXIX.iii).<sup>3</sup> They have similar words of rejection for the doctrine of transubstantiation, which is "repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common Sense and Reason," and as such "overthroweth the nature of the Sacrament, and hath been, and is the cause of manifold Superstitions; yea of gross Idolatries" (XXIX.vi). Nestled in between these direct rejections of the Pope and the idolatries of the Roman Catholic practice of the Lord's Supper is the chapter on baptism, which is silent regarding Roman Catholic baptisms.

#### Biblical Argumentation

When we turn to the Scriptures on this matter, I want to draw attention to the broader narrative of the gospels to tackle this debated issue. While I may be guilty of walking a heavily trodden path, I have found the following argument persuasive in my own deliberations over this knotty question. What was the state of the church in Christ's day? Was it faithful or apostate? The institutional church, there was only one at this point in church history, rejected the Son of God, the gospel, and conspired with pagans to crucify Christ. Two definitive moments in the life of the institutional church was when it crucified Christ and when it threw the apostle Paul, along with the gospel, out of the temple and shut the doors behind him (Acts 13:21). Shortly thereafter God confirmed the apostasy of his people by destroying the temple and razing it to the ground in 70 ad. The key question is, was Christ's circumcision on the eighth day invalidated by the apostate institution that administered it (Luke 2:21)? The answer to this question is easy, and I suspect undisputed—no. The apostate priesthood did not invalidate Christ's circumcision. Why? Because circumcision, like baptism, was primarily, first and foremost, God's covenantal sign (Gen. 17:10). As Francis Turretin observes: "The Pharisaic church retained something of the true church in the time of Christ, nor yet on that account was she a

true church. The same is the judgment concerning the Arian, Donatist and other factions whose baptism and ordinations the Catholics never repeated."<sup>4</sup>

The main point of this argument is that God's Word has an objective character to it. In baptism, at a minimum, when the minister utters the baptismal formula, "I baptize you into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," God speaks through water and word. The same does not hold true, for example, with the Roman Catholic performance of the Lord's Supper, where they elevate the host, genuflect before the "altar," and only give the bread, or in some cases dip the bread into wine (intinction), to communicants. Should faithful Christians seek out Roman Catholic baptisms? No. Rome is a false church. Like the French Confession, I think there should be a one-way door, an exit, on the Roman Catholic Church. To use the analogy of an illegitimate son, people who come out of the Roman Catholic Church possess an illegitimate baptism, but it is a baptism nonetheless. This type of baptism is not optimal, nor should it be sought out, but Reformed churches can and should recognize that such individuals have a valid baptism, not because they wish to endorse the Roman Catholic theology, but because they recognize that God has spoken.

#### Conclusion

In the end, McGraw correctly states that we agree on most everything when it comes to the doctrine of baptism, indeed the whole system of doctrine to which we both subscribe as ordained ministers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Our respective opinions on this question, however, are polar opposites: I affirm and he denies the acceptability of Roman Catholic baptisms. This issue is one of the more difficult questions under the broader doctrine of ecclesiology. Despite his acknowledgement that his own view stands in the minority position, I sense that the majority view of the Reformed tradition now presently stands in the minority. Reformed churches and ministers now doubt and reject what once stood as an unquestioned conviction about the objectivity of God's visible word. Admitting people into membership with baptisms that Babylon the Great Whore, the seat of Antichrist (at least to seventeenth-century minds!), had performed, may seem unthinkable. But we should remember that sometimes truth is stranger than fiction. And in this case, what may seem unthinkable might have a solid biblical foundation. To admit a person with a Roman Catholic baptism does not legitimate or endorse their theology but simply recognizes that God's word (read or poured in water) takes priority over man's.

3. *The Westminster Standards: An Original Facsimile* (Audubon: Old Paths, 1997).

4. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3, XVIII.xiv.24.

**Sur-Rejoinder by Ryan M. McGraw**

In this concluding response, I intend to clarify some of Dr. Fesko's observations on my arguments. I hope to show that he has neither refuted nor evaded the force of my arguments. This reply follows the three-part structure of Fesko's rejoinder.

*Clarifications*

1. I did not argue that Fesko is a proponent of Roman Catholic baptism, but of accepting Roman Catholic baptism as valid. The object of our debate makes this clear.

2. I am grateful that Fesko and I agree that Rome is "a false and apostate church." I never intended to cast doubt on his position in this regard. The point of disagreement between us lies elsewhere. My point was that Hodge and Thornwell both responded to a tension inherent in Reformed Ecclesiology. At the risk of oversimplification, my basic argument with reference to the validity of a baptism is: true church + lawfully ordained ministers = valid sacraments. Conversely, a false church has no ordained ministers and no true sacraments. Both Hodge and Thornwell recognized and accepted this argument. Thornwell argued that because the Roman Catholic Church was not a true church, she had no lawfully ordained ministry and, therefore, no valid sacraments. On the other side, Hodge argued that Rome was a true church, her priests were lawfully ordained ministers, and, therefore, she administered valid sacraments. I argued that Hodge's line of argumentation is the only consistent means of accepting Roman Catholic baptism as valid. In other words, asserting that Rome is not a true church, that she has no true ministers, and yet to conclude that she administers valid baptisms is inconsistent. My argument with Fesko relates to applying inconsistently Reformed principles in relation to the sacraments. My contention against Hodge would be regarding whether or not Rome is a true church. Johannes Wollebius (1589–1629) spoke for the Reformed tradition when he stated, "The instruments through which the sacraments are administered are ministers legitimately called."<sup>1</sup> This followed immediately an assertion that the principal efficient cause of the sacraments is the entire Trinity, but especially Christ as the Angel of the covenant. This reflects the fact that while the Triune God is the true administrator of the Sacraments and that their efficacy does not depend on ordained ministers, yet administering the sacraments through ordained men is the instrument through which the Triune God administers the sacraments.

3. As for the example on page 389, fn 71, in which the minister unintentionally omitted the Holy Spirit in the administration of baptism, I am not "picking at gnats." The example illustrates the common difficulties that we share regarding

1. Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae ... Editio Novissima* (Amstelodami, 1655), 124: "Instrumenta, quibus Sacramenta administrantur, sunt Ministri legitime vocati."

the question of what constitutes a valid sacrament. Given the fact that this chapter addresses the validity of baptism, the reader will ask naturally whether or not this person has been baptized. I am unclear how Fesko answers this question. He seems to argue that this baptism is invalid, but still efficacious. However, if the error "was caught," then the person should be baptized properly. I selected this example for illustrative purposes in order to show that one's position on the validity or invalidity of Roman Catholic baptism does not ease the application of Reformed Ecclesiology on one side or the other. One charge that Fesko levels against those who reject the validity of Rome's baptism is that they make the criteria for the validity of sacraments subjective rather than objective. This gives the impression that all questions regarding the validity of a sacrament are easier for those who treat Rome's baptism as valid. However, this example found in the footnote (and footnotes are still fair game in a review) usefully shows that accepting Roman Catholic baptism as valid does not alleviate the difficult practical scenarios that church officers face. I have heard some say that rejecting Roman Catholic baptism as valid opens Pandora's Box to a host of sticky scenarios. My point is that the common Reformed ecclesiology that both sides of this debate share does not give one side an edge over the other in discerning the objective nature of the sacraments in such cases. The focus of the debate revolves around how consistently we apply Reformed principles to these cases. I do not disagree with Fesko's comments on the corporate nature of the sacrament and I find his observations on this point very useful.

4. With regard to Mormonism, I was not comparing this cult to Roman Catholicism in its origins. The point of comparison was restricted to Fesko's assertions that "remnants of evangelical institutions" in Romanism are a partial argument in favor of the presence of valid sacraments. If this is the case, then the question is how many "remnants of evangelical institutions" make sacraments valid? The specific point of commonality that I singled out was the Scriptures. I have provided examples of people being converted in the context of the Mormon institution through reading the Bible that the church gave them. This is precisely comparable to Christians who have been converted in the Roman Catholic institution. I want to avoid "picking at gnats" by quibbling over words. In spite of Fesko's objection, I use the term Mormon Church in the same way that I use the term Roman Catholic Church; both are ironic uses of "church" and both are, strictly speaking, improper. Some people are saved in the context of the Roman Catholic Church, but no one can be saved by believing Roman Catholic doctrine. The identical scenario applies to Mormonism. The fact that Rome was once a true church does not make a difference. To amend Fesko's analogy, Romanism is a dead and withered branch that has been cut off

from the true church of Christ. It lies dead in the midst of the weeds of Mormonism and other sects and cults. We have no more ecclesiastical relation to Roman Catholicism than we do to modern day Jewish synagogues, which are the distant descendants of the Scribes and Pharisees in Christ's day. As William Perkins argued in a famous book, we are "Reformed Catholics." At some point in the past, we share a common history with the Roman Catholic Church just as we do with the Jewish synagogue. While Mormonism may be the caricature of the true church, Roman Catholicism represents the ancient ruins of what once was a true church. The end product is identical and the situation is analagous.

#### *Historical Contexts*

Fesko's sketch of the historical background of American Presbyterianism clouds the matter of debate in several ways. First, this section comes close to committing the "root fallacy," which rejects a position due to its source of origin. He writes, "I suspect that many ministers at the 1845 General Assembly voted against the church's past practice of nearly three hundred years with matters of Roman Catholic immigration and influence on their minds." I cannot prove what was or what was not in the minds of the commissioners at the 1845 Assembly. This assertion attempts to blunt the force of the biblical and theological arguments against the validity of Roman Catholic baptism. It is true that historical circumstances can adversely affect our theological positions. However, the converse is true as well. Sometimes historical circumstances push us to rethink common questions in a new light. I have heard some argue that great statements of faith such as the Nicene Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon, various documents setting forth Reformed theology, and especially the Westminster Confession of Faith are unreliable because they responded to the controversies of their times. The Lord often uses historical settings and controversies to sharpen the church's understanding of the truth. History can help us understand why theological questions arise, but we cannot judge the strength or weakness of a position based on the circumstances surrounding its origins.

Second, some Reformed authors and churches rejected the validity of Roman Catholic baptism in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thornwell's position builds upon the same kinds of arguments that are present in seed form in sources such as the Scots Confession of Faith and Gomarus' Theological Disputations. It would be useful if someone traced the influences and development of this minority position within sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed orthodoxy. Fesko's historical argument could be turned on its head by arguing that the Reformers tended to accept Roman Catholic baptism because this was the context in which most of them were converted, ordained, and baptized. Could

we not argue that it took a few centuries for Reformed thinkers to reconsider this question more objectively and that the American context provided a helpful context in which to do so? Historical context is relevant, but its influences are often complex and rarely as straightforward as Fesko suggests.

Third, Fesko alleges that I fail to make important distinctions. He asserts that I teach, "If Rome is a false church, then all that she does must therefore be false." To my knowledge, I have not argued in this way and if I have then this was not my intent. My argument was that since Rome is not a true church, then she has no lawfully ordained ministers, and no valid sacraments. This argument is based on a distinction that Fesko often blurs. It distinguishes between the efficacy and the validity of the sacraments. The efficacy of the sacraments does not depend on the intention of him who administers them, but on the blessing of Christ on them that by faith receive them. However, the validity of the sacraments rests on the external and objective criteria by which Christ defines the sacraments. This involves the institution of Christ in the context of the church visible. The instruments by which He administers the sacraments are lawfully ordained ministers of the gospel. This does not make the validity of the sacrament dependent on the intent of the minister, but on the intent of Christ who determines the defining circumstances of such ordinances. Fesko does not distinguish between intent as a subjective criterion, which is excluded entirely by both of us, and ordination as an external and objective criterion. If Rome is a false church, then she has objectively lost the context in which valid ordinations and valid sacraments occur. This does not invalidate the Word of God, which remains objectively valid regardless of the institution in which we find it. His example of a father bearing an illegitimate child misses the mark. In the case of Rome, there is no father and there is no child. The father has died before he can father more children. Rome no longer produces valid baptisms because as an institution she is a cemetery instead of a church. Christians can be fathered and born in Rome, but they cannot be fathered and born through or because of Rome. Rome has signs and seals only to signify an apostate gospel and to seal the promises of an apostate church.

Fourth, the silence of the Westminster Standards on the validity of Roman Catholic baptism does not favor either side in this debate. Reformed authors generally agreed that the Mass was not the Lord's Supper. However, there were Reformed authors on both sides of the question of the validity of Rome's baptism. I am not necessarily arguing that the Westminster divines intended to accommodate both views. Yet it is interesting that the Scots Confession explicitly repudiated accepting Roman Catholic baptism while the French Confession explicitly affirmed the opposite. The silence of Westminster raises more questions than it answers.

*Biblical Argumentation*

We have both already given readers enough biblical arguments to sift through. The question of the validity of circumcision is ironic, since unlike baptism, circumcision could not be repeated even if it were invalid. Christ and his apostles lived in the period in which baptism replaced circumcision. The Jewish church was gradually cut off and treated as a false church, or to use Christ's words, "a synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 3:9). Perhaps the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD was the cutoff point for the life of this church. I would argue in the same way with regard to Rome following the Council of Trent. Before Trent, there were apostate teachers in Roman Catholicism. At Trent, she apostatized officially and confessionally. This is precisely how Turretin (ironically) distinguished between accepting baptisms by individual heretics versus heretical institutions. He wrote, "Undoubtedly, the public faith of the church is here to be considered, into which he (who is baptized) is introduced and the promises made to him by Christ. Since these do not depend upon the minister, he (however tainted with secret heresy) cannot render them useless and void" (Turretin, Institutes, 19.16.3, 3.397). In other words, the individual minister does not determine the status of an institution and its ordinances, but the status of the institution determines whether or not it truly has ministers and ordinances of Christ. The Council of Trent was the public execution and funeral of the Roman Catholic Church. Unless and until she repents of her confessional apostasy, she cannot rise from the dead to perform baptisms or to do anything else in Christ's name. Like the Jewish church in Christ's time, she is a "synagogue of Satan."

*Conclusion*

In spite of Fesko's suspicion that my minority position on Roman Catholic baptism is becoming a majority in Reformed churches, I still find myself frequently in a minority. We agree that we should not adopt a viewpoint based on minorities or majorities, but upon the Word of God. God's Word takes priority over man's word, which is why Rome is not a true church, has no lawfully ordained ministers, and no true sacraments. I am grateful to have John as a brother in Christ and I praise the Triune God for enabling him to write a superb book on baptism, even if we differ on this point of application. ■

**Review:** Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Logic: A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2013). 733 pages. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-1433532290. \$45. Reviewed by Dr. J.C. Keister, Ph.D. Georgetown University.

At 700+ pages, *Logic: A God Centered Approach to the Foundations of Western Thought* by Dr. Vern Poythress is indeed

an impressive tome. It is thus with some trepidation that I comment on this book, considering Dr. Poythress's credentials (6 academic degrees and 30 years of teaching!). My own credentials consist primarily in a 14 year teaching career at Covenant College, during which time I taught mathematics (from fundamentals of math up through advanced Calculus) and elementary logic. My academic training consists of an Engineering Physics degree from Cornell University and a PhD in physics degree from Georgetown University. I therefore approach Dr. Poythress's book from the perspective of one who has taught students how to reason at a basic level, trying to improve their ability to understand good arguments from bad ones, to help them to recognize fallacies when they see them, and to avoid committing such fallacies themselves.

I will begin with a brief outline of the book. Dr. Poythress has cast a "wide net" for his readership, as is implied in the preface. In Part I, he explores a biblical basis for logic, discusses the standard Aristotelian system of logic and explains the usage of Venn diagrams as a means for analyzing the validity of argument. In Part II, he expands the description of truth functions and their representations, discusses Boolean algebra, and introduces propositional logic. Part III deals with predicate logic, quantification theory, formal systems in computation and advanced, specialized logical systems. Part IV consists primarily of proofs of the various theorems (used in the main body of the book) as well as a discussion of the application of logic to philosophy. Indeed, this is a "wide net" of readership, ranging from logical neophytes to graduate students specializing in logical systems.

The biblical approach to logic developed by Dr. Poythress in Part I is long overdue. The Creator-creature distinction is critical to our understanding the basis of logic and why it works. Poythress argues that the Creator-creature distinction applies even to the thinking process itself. God's thoughts are not logical because they conform to the standards of our minds. Rather, our thinking is truly logical only insofar as it reflects the mind of God (34-44; cf. 150). The reason non-Christians can (at least sometimes) think logically is because they are made in God's image, and that image is not absolutely depraved (cf. the reference to common grace, 174-175).

Poythress points out that within any given form of a logical argument, there is the risk of ambiguity in the meaning of terms used therein (152-167). This is especially true in instances where we, as finite creatures, attempt to use logic to understand the meaning and connections of what God says about Himself and His nature in Scripture (166). God is infinite, we are not; God is holy, we are not; God is three persons, we are not, etc. Moreover, the *mechanism* of thinking clearly differs between God and man. In this regard, there is an excellent discussion of the distinction between logical sequence and temporal sequence (170-171). God does not exist

in time and space, so (unlike us) He does not “temporally” or “sequentially” think from premises to conclusions. Yet in His revelation in Scripture, God shows that logical sequence in arguments is necessary. The validity of our temporal, sequential reasoning comes from Him (God).

Poythress discusses a number of arguments for the existence of God (cosmological, ontological, etc.) and correctly concludes that ultimately such arguments must fail (176–186). His reason is simple: there can be no autonomous first principles or axioms that are above God and from whence God’s existence can be deduced. God’s existence is a first principle, attested to by Scripture (cf. 42–43) and reflected in the created order.

For all the virtues of this work, there are a number of concerns:

Firstly, though this book might be helpful as a reference work, it will not serve as a classroom textbook. The thought problems at the end of each section are few, and the sections dealing with the technical manipulation of logical systems require more examples.

Secondly, the average college student who takes logic as a means of understanding everyday arguments and logical fallacies would be completely overwhelmed by Parts III and IV and even by sections of Part II. Put together, these sections constitute more than half of the book. A combination of Part I and appropriately corrected treatments in, say, Copi’s introductory logic book<sup>1</sup> (a standard text used in most secular universities) would work well for the average student and indeed the average church goer. The latter sections in the book might well be good as a separate textbook for graduate students.

Thirdly, while there was an analysis of Boolean algebra, there was no mention of the issue of the Boolean interpretation of categorical syllogisms, which topic would be of far greater interest to someone who is attempting to become more proficient at understanding the validity of everyday discussions. In particular (no pun intended), the Boolean interpretation of the existential import of particular propositions (i.e., some A are B and some A are not B) means that there is at least one A which exists and that is B (1st case) or is not B (2nd case). Boolean interpretation also insists that universal propositions (i.e., all A are B and no A are B) do not necessarily imply that there are any actual A’s (i.e., A could be the null set). This stands in contrast to the original Aristotelian system that requires instances of A. The Boolean modification of the Aristotelian system avoids a number of potential inconsistencies and expands the applicability of the Aristotelian system. For example, on pages 230–231 in the 9th edition of Copi’s book, he gives the following problem: the two statements *All inhabitants of Mars are blond* and *Some inhabitants of Mars are not blond*. These two statements should be contradictory, meaning that they have opposite truth values. However, if

the traditional Aristotelian interpretation is maintained, both statements would be false, because there are no inhabitants of Mars, blond or otherwise. Allowing the category “inhabitants of Mars” to be the null set and then allowing the first statement to be true maintains the contradictory characteristic of the two statements, since the second statement is obviously false since there is no inhabitant of Mars, blond or otherwise. Also, if it were per chance the case that there was at least one Mars inhabitant and he was not blond, then the first statement would be false, because the inhabitant set is not null, and therefore the universal statement “All inhabitants of Mars are blond” would be false. Lest we think that such universal statements with antecedent null sets are unimportant, Copi gives the following statement: *All trespassers will be prosecuted*. Such statements are commonplace on the properties of farmlands. The statements are true regardless of whether or not there are any trespassers. In fact, the farmers who put up such signs surely wish that the trespasser category remains the null set. Likewise, most laws are written for the purpose of reducing the illegal activities of the criminal class, with the ideal objective of making each set of such activities the null set (!). This issue of Boolean interpretation is almost always addressed in elementary logic courses.

Fourthly, it would be good for Dr. Poythress to use more biblical examples to illustrate the Creator-creature distinction in logic to show instances where there is a distinct difference in the logical *outcome* of analysis between secular and biblical logic. For example on page 135 of the 9th edition of Copi-Cohen, problem 18 is used as an example of the *ad baculum* fallacy (i.e., think as I think or I will beat you up). This problem selects the passage in Revelation 22:18–19 in which God threatens judgment upon those who would tamper with Scriptural writings. Clearly, Copi and Cohen do not recognize that while as creatures we do not have the right to “beat up” other people with whom we disagree, God as Creator has every right to reveal exactly what He wants to reveal. As creatures, we have no right to change what He has said and then presume that God has said it. Such acts would be blasphemy, punishable (as God says) by eternal damnation. Biblically speaking, there is no fallacy at all, contrary to what Copi and Cohen suggest.

Another example from Scripture could be taken from Matthew 15:1–15. There the Pharisees ask why Jesus’s disciples break tradition by not washing their hands when they eat, whereupon Jesus retorts “And why to you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” If Jesus were only a man and not God, this could be considered an *ad hominem* retort on Jesus part (i.e., you have no business criticizing me since you break laws yourself). However, Jesus

1. Irving Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic*, 9th edition (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1994).

was both God and Man incarnate in the flesh, which meant: 1. The ceremonial cleansing laws were abrogated at his arrival; 2. Jesus knew what the Pharisees were thinking (more than a person who was just a man and not God), and therefore knew that they were not really interested in the violation of the ceremony so much as entrapping Jesus somehow and 3. The commandments were clearly far more important than the ceremony the Pharisees were trying to protect. Thus, Jesus went straight to the real issue, something a mere man (with finite knowledge, not knowing all the thoughts of men) could not reliably do. Thus, a secular person might find Jesus's retort an *ad hominem* fallacy while a consistent biblical Christian would not.

Fifthly, there are at least 80 fallacies made by men and recorded in the Bible. It would be good to treat these either as worked out examples in the text or as examples to be solved by the students as homework. In my experience, students typically need to work through a great many examples of fallacies in order to acquire the ability to recognize them when they occur. An example of *ad populum* (appeal to the masses) is noted in 2 Samuel 15:1–6 where Absalom steals the hearts of the people by his promises of justice that they (presumably) were not getting under king David's rule, which incident is a manifestation of God's judgment on King David for his sins involving Bathsheba and Uriah. *Ad Baculum* (argument of the club) is illustrated by Judges 18:21–26, where the people of Dan robbed Micah and then told Micah to depart or else he would be beaten up, which incident is an illustration of how bad things were in the days of the judges. Then there is an example at the very beginning, in Genesis 3:1, where Satan makes a fallacious extension of God's command (not to eat of the tree of good and evil) to cover *all* trees. Then Eve makes a fallacious extension of her own when she says that God told them not to eat or touch the fruit. After hearing Eve's extension, Satan knew he had her and trapped her with an enthymeme whose unspoken premiss was false (i.e., if you know good and evil experientially then you will be like God in the most important way). The first spoken premiss was "If you eat of the fruit then you will know good and evil experientially," which was true. The other spoken premiss (in effect) was "If you are like God in the most important way then you will not die," which also was true. Rather clever of Satan to have left unspoken the only false premiss of the bunch! Note that if all 3 premisses were true, the conclusion would logically follow, namely, "If you eat of the fruit then you will not die." In my experience, students benefit significantly by going through detailed analyses like these.

Finally, I would encourage Dr. Poythress to split up his book into at least two (if not three) books. If this were done, the first volume could be expanded with more illustrations and exercises for students to practice. Such a re-partition and

expansion would provide a valuable, biblically-oriented introductory logic book—one suitable for the average Christian college student. ■

**Review: Walter H. Conser Jr. and Robert J. Cain, *Presbyterians in North Carolina: Race, Politics, and Religious Identity in Historical Perspective* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012). xvii + 251. ISBN 978-1572338494. \$29.95 (paper). Review by Frank Smith, Ph.D., D.D.**

Over the course of the past century or so, numerous regional histories on Presbyterianism, often focusing on a synod level (which usually would coincide with state borders), have appeared. Sometimes they have been colorfully named: *Planting the Outposts: Thirty-Five Years Among the Children of the Plains* (1913), an autobiographical account by the District Superintendent of Presbyterian Sunday-School Missions for Minnesota and North Dakota; *Hoosier Zion: The Presbyterians in Early Indiana* (1963); *Presbyterian Yesterdays in Northern Idaho* (1964); *Buckeye Presbyterianism: An Account of the Seven Presbyterian Denominations with Their Twenty-One Synods and More Than Sixty Presbyteries Which at One Time or Another Have Functioned Wholly or in Large Part within the State of Ohio* (1968); *One Hundred Years of Challenge and Change: A History of the Synod of Texas of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (1968); *The Skyline Synod: Presbyterianism in Colorado and Utah* (1971); *Look Unto the Rock: A History of the Presbyterian Church, in West Virginia from 1719 to 1974* (1982). Often, the titles have been straightforward; a representative sampling includes *The History of Presbyterianism in Arkansas, 1828–1902* (1902); *History of the Synod of Minnesota, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.* (1927); *History of the Presbyterian Church in California, 1849–1927* (1927); *A History of the Presbyterian Church in Texas* (1936); *History of the Presbyterian Church in Michigan* (1950); *The Presbyterian Synods of Illinois* (1952); *The Story of the Synod of Georgia* (1961); *A History of the Presbyterian Church in Louisiana* (1961); *Founding Presbyterianism in South Dakota* (1963); *The Presbyterian Church in Alabama: a record of the growth of the Presbyterian Church from its beginning in 1811 in the eastern portion of Mississippi Territory to the centennial of the Synod of Alabama in 1936* (1977); and *Kentucky Presbyterians* (1983). There have also been books which have described the "task" of Presbyterianism within a particular state, such as *If Ye Know These Things: The Presbyterian Task in North Carolina* (1927) and *Of Our Own Household: Tasks of the Presbyterians in Kentucky* (1927). Books which recount the progress of Presbyterianism in multiple states include *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778–1838* (1952), with a spotlight on Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana; *The Presbyterian*

*Valley* (1958), which documents two hundred years of Presbyterianism in the Upper Ohio Valley (Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia); and *Presbyterian Missions and Cultural Interaction in the Far Southwest, 1850–1950* (1993), which deals primarily with New Mexico and Utah.

These regional studies perhaps reached their heyday several decades ago. However, recent offerings have included *Divided Hearts: The Presbyterian Journey through Oklahoma History* (2009) and *Presbyterians in Zion: History of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Utah* (2010).

This present volume, though continuing in a long line of this particular genre, stands out for its decidedly different approach. As the subtitle indicates, race and politics are the lenses through which the history of Presbyterianism is interpreted. This overemphasis on race and class and politics, along with a de-emphasis on ecclesiastical matters such as theology, constitutes a decisive weakness. In addition to the problematic viewpoint, there are numerous historical errors. We would add that its relative brevity has eliminated what has been a usual feature of many other such histories, viz., an extensive sketching out of the establishment of congregations and presbyteries. This overall lack of interesting information on the particulars diminishes the value of the volume.

The book has two major sections, each with four chapters: Part One: Beginnings, and Part Two: Conflict, Renewal, and Reunion. Chapters 1 and 2, “Old World Origins and New World Horizons” and “Atlantic World Bonds and Backcountry Settlers”, utilize one of the latest historiographical motifs—that of emphasizing the trans-Atlantic dimensions of American history. For example, the writers state, “In the First Great Awakening, members of both the Old and New Side in North Carolina worked the lines of communication to counterparts back in Britain in hopes of jockeying support for their faction in the controversy over revivalism. Finally, in the lead-up to the American Revolution, North Carolinian Presbyterians, particularly in their connections to fellow British Presbyterians and other non-Anglican Protestants, participated in the trans-Atlantic debate over the causes and significance of resistance to British policy and the ultimate decision to break with the Crown altogether. Consequently, though far from the Scottish homeland or the metropolis of London, these North Carolinian Presbyterians found the meaning of their religious identity recurrently involved with this wider Atlantic context” (11).

Other matters addressed in these first two chapters include the fact that Presbyterians were divided between Patriots and Loyalists (11); that upon the urging of a Presbyterian minister, David Caldwell, the North Carolina Constitution, adopted in 1776, did include a religious test that excluded atheists, Roman Catholics, and Jews from holding office (14); and that the church exercised discipline on matters such as a widowed

minister marrying his sister-in-law, and numerous instances of drunkenness (23–24). Indeed, card-playing, horse-racing, dancing, and intemperance were condemned by the church courts (24).

One cogent observation is that the formation of various benevolent societies in the early nineteenth century that were “nondenominational or pan-Protestant” coalesced with “the prevalence of evangelicalism in this era” to undermine “denominational identification” and move “toward a looser self-consciousness” (21). Another important point is that the plaudits attached to women’s purity led to the establishment of female missionary societies and women teachers in Sunday schools. Their employment in religious duties led to the unintended consequence of their exercising leadership roles—a harbinger of later feminism (24–25).

Less helpfully, and quite speculatively, the authors allege: “Given the multiplicity of motifs in the Bible, southern slave owners wished to restrict slaves’ access to the scriptures” (28).

The second chapter notes that in 1764, the Synod of New York, which had authority over various presbyteries, “recognized backcountry North Carolina as a mission field of considerable importance” (38). As a result, there were numerous attempts to send out ministers into this wilderness. The authors describe the situation this way: “Providing an adequate number of clergy was a serious problem in the state, as it had been from the beginning and as it would continue to be throughout the South for years to come. More positively, Presbyterians in the Piedmont of North Carolina became involved in activities that transcended boundaries of jurisdictions, and even sometimes of denominations—missions, both domestic and foreign; education; revivalism; and societies that focused on particular social concerns, such as temperance and African colonization. Paralleling these developments in the new century, women came increasingly to make their presence felt in the larger life of the church” (45).

Chapter 3, “Revivalism, Reform, and Rancor in the Antebellum Piedmont,” points out that by the dawn of the nineteenth century, the Tar Heel State’s place in Presbyterianism “had altered markedly in little more than a generation” (47). The changes revolved around the increasing number of ministers and congregations, and the establishment of Orange Presbytery and other presbyteries and the Synod of the Carolinas. At the same time, revivalism, as expressed in the Second Great Awakening, had the potential to divide the church. Overall, Presbyterians, including those in North Carolina, were sympathetic to revivals, so long as they did not get out of hand with a lack of decorum. But in terms of the Old Side/New Side split, North Carolinians were largely on the Old Side (10).

The authors observe that “interfaith” benevolent societies arose in the aftermath of the Great Revival of 1800: “Encompassing a geographical area more extensive than the purely

local, such interfaith organizations added an extra dimension to the life of faith, one that was additional to personal and family devotions and corporate worship. . . . It is also noteworthy that this movement coincided with the vast improvement in communications of all kinds during this period—railroads, steamships, the telegraph, canals, roads, improved postal service—all of which were pivotal elements in the transmission of thought and goods throughout the nation” (56).

Besides revivalism, another challenge was outright heresy, including infidelity, universalism, and Unitarianism. At least two ministers in North Carolina were deposed for heretical views. One of them, William C. Davis, organized the Independent Presbyterian Church, all of whose congregations were over the border in South Carolina (54–55).

Meanwhile, church courts—General Assemblies, synods, and presbyteries—expressed concern with regard to various social ills, including gambling, incest, usury, dancing, the theatre—but especially liquor (58). Various methods were to be employed in this battle. In 1815, the Synod of North Carolina resolved to utilize “Moral Associations for the suppression of vice and immorality” (57). “Concerts for prayer” were encouraged, as was education, including Sunday school and adult Bible study (59–60).

In the 1830s, there was increasing attention paid to doctrinal fidelity and denominational distinctives, which led to the establishment of a Presbyterian Board of Publication. In 1846, that Board reported that the Synod of North Carolina stood out among all the synods for its “zeal and success” in promoting Presbyterian publications (62).

Efforts to raise up institutions of higher learning and seminaries resulted in several schools being established, most notably Davidson College (64). One of the major controversies was whether to support financially men of lower classes who desired to study for the ministry. The 1845 report from the denominational Board of Education, addressing the fears of some about the socioeconomic status of the poor, bluntly reminded the church that the gospel “was ‘expressly designed for the poor,’ and the disciples were drawn mainly from that group” (65). Concern for the poor came to expression by means of alms-giving, and taking care of church members who needed help. “Orange Presbytery, according to historian Ernest Trice Thompson, was probably unique among presbyteries in calling the roll at each meeting specifically in order to determine the number of Presbyterian paupers on public relief in each congregation. The churches took care of their own. Usually, there were no reported congregants at the charge of the public, but sometimes there were one or two” (71–73).

There was also increased interest in the nineteenth century in missionary activity. Missionaries were sent overseas, as well as to American Indian tribes and into the frontier areas. Sometimes, the emigration to outlying areas, such as the Old

Southwest (the developing cotton belt states), was detrimental to existing congregations. For example, Grassy Creek Church in Caswell County, which “had spawned daughter churches in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky,” was decimated so that it could no longer sustain a resident minister without outside aid. Between 1821 and 1831, the number of communicant members among North Carolina Presbyterians fell by twenty-three per cent—from 8,283 to 6,408 (69).

Chapter 4, “Limited and Late,” has as its subject the westernmost portion of North Carolina—the mountains. The authors write that the “population patterns predominated by isolated farms, a few small towns, and, in Asheville, its largest municipality . . . shaped religious life in the region, with occasional preachers on foot or horseback sporadically searching for potential converts amidst the hollows and coves, while a handful of organized congregations emerged in some of the settled communities” (79). Despite the fact that English, Scots-Irish, and Germans largely settled western North Carolina, “these national heritages” did not lead, as expected, to “a robust religious life.” This was because of the isolation, the difficulties of farm life, and the lack of transportation (81). In this environment, Presbyterian congregations developed in two distinct patterns: small country churches and churches in county seats, such as Asheville, Morganton, and Rutherfordton (83f).

The relationship with the Cherokee Indians was a challenging one for America, and for Presbyterians in particular. One of those who ministered to the Cherokee was Rev. Gideon Blackburn, who sought to bring the gospel to them as he taught them the English language. He had a “comprehensive approach to education, and in turn Blackburn expected a commensurate level of commitment from his students and their families.” The authors state that Blackburn taught “a style of civilized life, one that ranged from etiquette to arithmetic, and one that probably surpassed that employed by some of the Cherokees’ frontier white neighbors, inculcated the values of hard work, thrift, and acquisition. The Cherokees, in short, were being taught to be good capitalists” (85f).

As is well known, the Cherokee were by 1836 forced by federal troops to travel the Trail of Tears. A few years prior to that, the Synod of North Carolina had condemned the arrests of two missionaries to the Cherokee, Samuel A. Worcester and Elizur Butler, for their declining to take an oath of allegiance to the state of Georgia (88f).

Conser and Cain mention that in the Synod of North Carolina, only in Morganton Presbytery, in the western part of the state, was there a protest against the support of the excision of the New School in 1838. This protest, by two ministers and one elder, focused on the constitutional issue of the guarantee given to every member to be heard in his defense before action

is taken against him. The authors refer to the scholarship of the late Harold Parker, who drew two conclusions: one is that there was no hope of a strong New School presence in western North Carolina, and the other is that this internal dissension precluded the development of Presbyterianism in this portion of the state (91–92). Dr. Parker would have also agreed with them on another point, viz., that any of these New School sentiments in the mountain regions of western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee were based on a sense of fairness guaranteed by the Church's constitution, rather than because of any sympathy with abolitionism.

Several pages, containing seventeen photographs, are found between the two major sections of the book. One of them is of an advertisement from a PCUSA publication in 1903, promoting the use of individual communion cups for the sake of hygiene.

Chapter 5, "Both Read the Same Bible and Prayed to the Same God," dealt with the separation of the Southern Presbyterian Church from the PCUSA in 1861. Here, the authors correctly understand that the issue is one of Biblical interpretation, with the specific occasion being that of abolitionism. The abolitionists held that slavery violated the spirit of the Bible, and that the specific historical context of various Bible texts must be understood "within the framework of the central principles of the Bible." Albert Barnes and other opponents of slavery also appealed to the American Revolution and the notion of natural rights. Those defending Southern slavery attacked the idea of natural rights theory, and equated the notion of total equalitarianism with socialism. More than that, slavery had proven to be a positive good for the slaves, most importantly because they had had opportunity in America to hear the gospel (113ff). Conser and Cain observe:

By the 1840s opponents and defenders of slavery in America had sketched out the major arguments of their positions. . . . southerners, and especially Presbyterians, felt that divine revelation in the scripture and in natural law as well as insistence upon the moral treatment of slaves within the context of familial relations vindicated their practice of slavery. Northerners, for their part, accused slaveholders of hypocrisy in suggesting that slavery was a benign institution and condemned any suggestion of biblical sanction for slavery as anathema (117).

The book briefly relates the ecclesiastical separation in 1861, triggered by the adoption of the Gardner Spring resolutions by the Northern-dominated General Assembly—resolutions which pledged the denomination to loyalty to the federal government in Washington, D.C. Parallels are drawn between the view of Southern politicians with respect to the power of the federal government and secession from it, and the secession

of Southern presbyteries because of a usurpation of authority by the General Assembly (122).

But with war comes hardship, and with it the issue of divine providence and the meaning of history. The logic of Southern churchmen was the same, whether in victory or defeat: victory was a sign of divine blessing, while defeat was indicative of sin in the camp, such as swearing, Sabbath desecration, drunkenness, and gambling (124). Also noted in this section is the role which women played in promoting purity, and the appeal to masculine values and honor (124f).

War brought out not only the best but also the worst in people, including the practice of extortion—a social evil which was condemned. To meet the spiritual needs of the troops, chaplains were employed, including twenty-three Presbyterians from North Carolina (131).

The end of the War was marked by disruption and devastation. The response by Southern Presbyterians included a reaffirmation of the notion of the "spirituality of the church" (that is, that the church should not handle anything that is not strictly within its unique purview as an ecclesiastical institution), and "the religion of the Lost Cause." This religion of the Lost Cause celebrated not the promotion of slavery, but "religious integrity and social purity"—matters which made the South's cause to be "righteous."

Just as Jesus had died for righteousness' sake, but would ultimately triumph, so too had the South experienced defeat; however, its cause would eventually win out. The South must continue its example of biblically based, religiously literal, and socially conservative living until that day when Jesus returns to Earth in his final triumph. This amalgamation of history and theology found ritual expression in the celebration of Confederate Memorial Day, the birthdays of Confederate veterans (above all, Robert E. Lee's and Stonewall Jackson's), and in the sermons and other religious literatures that invoked rosy and sentimental pictures of the good old days in the antebellum South. An oppositional identity counterpoising the South to the North—in matters religious as well as political—became the framework of this construction of past experience and future destiny. The upshot, as one Southern Presbyterian put it, was for Southerners to cling to their identity as a people in the hopes that the principles for which they had struggled would one day be vindicated (133f).

Chapter 6, "Out of the Gloomy Past", deals with the experience of black Presbyterians. It has been estimated that by 1865, there were 2,000 black communicants in almost 200 white Presbyterian churches in North Carolina.

But the question that was raised at war's end, with the reality of societal reconstruction, was whether separate black congregations should be organized. Complicating the answer

to that question was the presence of Northern interlopers in the South—outsiders whose presence was resented by many Southerners.

In the late 1860s, three former Southern Presbyterian ministers organized a Northern-affiliated Presbytery of Concord, which competed with the one affiliated with the Southern Presbyterian Church. This presbytery, along with the Presbytery of Catawba, ministered to blacks in North Carolina (142f). However, there were only two black ministers leading black congregations. This dearth of black leaders raised issues of qualifications for an educated ministry, and the extent to which those standards could be relaxed for the sake of ministry (144f). Various educational institutions were begun in order to train blacks for the ministry.

Southern Presbyterians at first required that ministerial candidates pass the ordination trials, including examination in foreign languages, mathematics, geography, and history as well as theology. By 1874, presbyteries were given the option of ordaining men with a waiver of examination in these non-theological areas. However, by 1880, most blacks had left the Southern Church (150f).

In 1876, the Presbytery of North and South Carolina was organized by the Southern Assembly—one of five black presbyteries that had no synodical membership. In 1897, the Afro-American Presbyterian Synod was organized, which twenty years later became the Afro-American Synod, and later known as the Snedecor Memorial Synod (151).

The authors suggest that the migration of talented, educated, and skilled blacks in the early twentieth century had a significant impact on black Presbyterian congregations in the South. However, over the long term, membership in most black Presbyterian congregations in North Carolina remained stable (158).

The authors conclude:

Indeed, the Presbyterian experience for black North Carolinians showed the church at its best and its worst. In planting new congregations and enriching the spiritual lives of its members, in establishing new schools for new lives and supporting them with teachers, budgets, and supplies, the Presbyterian Church aspired to achieve the highest ideals of its tradition. However, when it capitulated to racism and segregation, when it allowed itself to become a captive of the culture of which it was a part, then it pandered to its base instincts and defaulted on the claims of its faith (158f).

Chapter 7, “Rebuilding in the Era of the New South,” recounts the devastation which the Church faced in the post-war era. As the Church rebuilt congregations and formed new ones, it also established new presbyteries, such as Wilmington in the east and Asheville in the west.

An 1899 fund-raising appeal by Rev. Robert F. Campbell from Asheville’s First Presbyterian Church painted a colorful picture of the mountainous region and its people. Acknowledging that he was one of those mountain people, Campbell was candid in writing of the illiteracy and poverty and isolation of his native region. He wrote of how “a young man had reached the summit of ambition when he has learned to pick the banjo, owns a dog, and carries a pistol and a bottle of whiskey” (165).

New congregations were organized in western North Carolina. Helping to spark that work of church planting was the founding of Montreat (named after Mountain Retreat Association) and the Montreat Conference Center (166).

Presbyterians in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth demonstrated their concern for education. In addition to various colleges—Davidson, Flora McDonald (located in Red Springs), Peace (Raleigh), Queen’s (Charlotte), Lees-McRae (Banner Elk), and St. Andrews Presbyterian (Laurinburg), among others—there were numerous private high schools under Presbyterian auspices in North Carolina (167ff).

This chapter describes Southern Presbyterian missionary efforts (most notably, in China); ecumenical enterprises; and increased organized activity by the Women of the Church. Other topics handled include the heresy investigation of Ernest Trice Thompson, which was undertaken when Thomas Glasgow of Charlotte’s Myers Park Presbyterian Church brought charges of liberalism against the Union Theological Seminary history professor; the evolution controversy; and the Southern Church’s eventual abandonment of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church—that is, the idea that the institutional church should handle only distinctively ecclesiastical and moral matters, and not get involved in social and political matters.

The final chapter, “A New Church for a New Era,” deals with the post-World War II world in which North Carolina Presbyterians found themselves. The authors write of new ecclesiastical trends, and of conservative reaction, such as the founding of the *Southern Presbyterian Journal* in Weaverville, North Carolina, in 1942 by Dr. L. Nelson Bell, a publication which became known as the *Presbyterian Journal* in 1959 as Dr. G. Aiken Taylor became editor. However, the discussion appears in a section that concentrates on race, rather than theology. Another section is entitled “Debates over War, Gender, and Worship”—a rather odd combination. With regard to the role of women, the authors opine:

The authority of scripture continued to be touted by both sides; however, the significance of personal experience would also be acknowledged in the debate. Questions concerning the comparative importance of custom and tradition would be raised, particularly in the American South, as would

injunctions to live under the spirit or in the letter of the Bible. Clearly, the situation of females in the denomination was and would remain quite complicated, especially when it broadened out into other gender-related questions regarding the marriage and the ordination of homosexual and lesbian Presbyterians (204).

Though not using the standard term “regulative principle of worship,” Conser and Cain do correctly note that historic Reformed worship “had originally been shaped by John Calvin’s insistence that nothing be allowed in worship that was not enjoined by scripture. It has also been marked by a deep anti-liturgical view that opposed set forms and prayers in worship” (205). The authors discuss the deviation from that historic position over the course of a couple of centuries, including not only a man-centered approach but also experimental worship of the 1960s.

The final section, “Realignments, Reunion, and Restructuring,” states that the repudiation of the notion of the spirituality of the church caused a breakdown of consensus as to what it meant to be a Southern Presbyterian. This led to the “seeming paradox” of, on the one hand, reunion with the Northern Church, and on the other, the withdrawal of conservatives, particularly in the formation of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1973 and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in 1981 (212ff).

Positive lessons can be gleaned from this volume. One is the reminder of the necessity of flexibility in ministering in what Presbyterians have referred to as the “destitute parts of the church.” A willingness to use licentiates, rather than ordinands when such are not available, is an example. At the same time, there is a need to maintain high standards in both training and doctrine. Another lesson is the reminder that congregations usually start small and in humble circumstances. The church that was able eventually to build a wonderful Greek Revival building, often began in a log cabin or private home. And a third lesson is the fact that the church is negligent and misses opportunities for service when it neglects ministering to the lower and lower middle classes.

But as we mentioned previously, there are numerous flaws in this work. In some cases, there is fuzziness which lends itself to, at best, misleading statements; in other cases, there are statements which simply are not true.

For example, in speaking of the Associate Reformed Presbyterians, the authors write: “The denomination continued a modest but sustained growth in the state to the end of the eighteenth century and beyond. By the twentieth century they were formally organized as the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church” (40). However, that account totally glosses over the fact that the Associate Reformed Synod of the South, which included all of the Associate Reformed congregations in

the Carolinas, had organizationally separated from the main Associate Reformed body in 1822. Further, the name “Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church” was not adopted until 1936.

The authors write of Moses Hopkins, “the first black man to graduate from Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City” (145). However, he graduated from Auburn sometime prior to 1878, when it was still located in Auburn, New York—it was not until 1939 that the institution moved to New York City.

The authors write of the Synod of North Carolina forming Asheville Presbytery in 1896 and moving both it and Holston Presbytery (eastern Tennessee) to the Synod of Appalachia (165). However, the Synod of Appalachia was not formed until 1915.

At one point, the authors refer to “the Shorter Westminster Catechism” (145)—an unusual nomenclature, to be sure.

The authors refer to the Presbyterian Church in the United States as the “successor” to the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (161). However, the term “successor” implies a different organization, whereas in point of fact, it was the same body though with a changed name.

The authors also write: “The *Presbyterian Journal* ceased publication in 1987; however, many of its concerns had been taken over by the Presbyterian Lay Committee, a group founded in 1965. One year earlier another association, Concerned Presbyterians, began as an additional avenue for conservative action. Consequently, through the publication of the *Layman* and the unified energies of the Concerned Presbyterians, conservative Presbyterians acquired and maintained a strong voice in the denomination” (196). However, these sentences obscure the fact that the Presbyterian Lay Committee was focused on the Northern Presbyterian Church, while the *Presbyterian Journal* and Concerned Presbyterians were focused on the Southern Presbyterian Church.

However, more troubling than the set of factual errors is the whole approach of couching matters in terms of race and politics. These two categories spill over into themes of gender and class, at the expense of doctrine and ideology.

For example, take the snide comment about Gideon Blackburn teaching the Cherokees “to be good capitalists.” Is that really what motivated Pastor Blackburn? Was it not rather a religious motivation that not only sought the good of the Indians, but also the glory of God vis-à-vis things like hard work and protocol and doing all things decently and in order?

Another example can be found in the treatment of the attitude of Presbyterian clergy toward the Regulator movement, as contrasted to their attitude toward the American Revolution (42–44). The Regulators rose in rebellion in the 1760s in the backcountry of North Carolina (the Piedmont counties of Orange, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Granville, Edgecombe, and Johnston) because of the injustices inflicted by the colonial government in New Bern, on the Atlantic coast.

Small farmers constituted the demographic most representative of the Presbyterian population in the backcountry. Consequently, they might have reasonably expected Presbyterian clergy to be in the forefront of efforts to obtain redress for their grievances from higher authority in the colony. Such was not to be the case, however. Four backcountry Presbyterian ministers—Henry Pattillo, David Caldwell, James Creswell, and Hugh McAden—instead sent an ingratiating address to Governor Tryon, following mobilization of the militia during the scare in 1768. It contained no hint that the quartet considered the agitation anything other than an “infection” that they would “exert [their] utmost abilities, to prevent . . . spreading among the People of our charge, and among the whole Presbyterian Body in this Province.”

A pastoral letter sent by this foursome to fellow Presbyterians reminded them that the Westminster Standards prohibit rebellion, and warn that those who resist the authorities ordained by God “shall receive to themselves damnation.” Conser and Cain then write that these ministers’ support of the colonial government was in order “to win concessions for Presbyterians from the governor and General Assembly, and aware of recent sympathetic support from both, the concluding sentence of their pastoral letter urged ‘cheerful Obedience to Law and Government’ in order to ‘secure the continuance of your Civil and Religious liberties, and merit the future notice and indulgence of the Legislature.’” The authors then write of the American Revolution: “In stark contrast to the causes of unrest that had flared among the backcountry small farmers, the Stamp Act and later Townsend Duties threatened the economic interests of the merchants and gentry of the eastern seaboard. Despite their impassioned call for loyalty to lawfully established authority only a few years before, all four ministers now effortlessly shifted their allegiances from sovereign to independent state. . . . [A]bsolution was granted for breaking an oath, this time one of loyalty to the king, taken after the Battle of Alamance by Regulators. David Caldwell assured them that they could now with a clear conscience take up arms against that same king.”

Of course, the authors’ analysis does not do justice to a Calvinistic understanding of revolution, and its distinction from rebellion. Followers of Calvin and Knox realized that there are times when an overthrow of constituted authority is necessitated by the tyranny of that government, and is made feasible because of the lower magistrates interposing between the people and the tyrant. But Conser and Cain are so enamored with their *a priori* assumptions of the priority of economic factors, that they seem incapable of a theoretical, and nobler, explanation of these ministers’ position.

Overall, the book is virtually Marxist, as seen not only by the emphasis on class and economics, but also in terms

of its dialectic. Instead of understanding the foundational role of theology and its unchanging nature (at least ideally speaking), the authors approach their subject on the assumption that change is inevitable. Furthermore, changes that are good progress according to the latest fad—for instance, the extending of feminism’s demands to cover homosexual and lesbian perspectives.

This book is not the first one in Presbyterian historiography to reflect this fundamental misapprehension of ecclesiastical history. However, it is more blatant than most in reflecting the notion that it is the institution itself, rather than doctrinal truth, which is what is really important. It is this blindness which not only is leading to the irrelevance of mainline Protestantism, but which makes this book a less-than-ideal addition to the bookshelf, where it will reside along with other volumes on regional Presbyterian history. ■

**Review: Preston Graham, Jr., *A Kingdom Not of This World: Stuart Robinson’s Struggle to Distinguish the Sacred from the Secular During the Civil War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002). 316 pages. Hardcover. ISBN-13: 978-0865547575. \$35.50. Reviewed by Benjamin Shaw, Ph.D., Bob Jones University. Dr. Shaw is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary**

In the beginning, God created a people for his own glory. By his transgression, Adam brought that people under judgment and into an estate of sin and misery. However, when God pronounced judgment, he also announced the re-creation of a people for his glory. There would henceforth be two seeds—the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The former would be embodied in its head, *the seed of the woman*, who would crush the serpent under his heel. The seed of the serpent would, with the serpent as their head, suffer the judgment meted out by the seed of the woman.

These two seeds appear in Genesis 4 and 5 as the descendants of Cain (the seed of the serpent) and the descendants of Seth (the seed of the woman). As time passed, those two lines became intertwined. The power and corruption of sin took its toll on the chosen line, and the wickedness of man prospered on earth. The prosperity of wickedness diminished the glory of God as it was to be reflected in his chosen people.

By God’s judgment, the race was reduced to a remnant consisting of Noah and his family. By means of the ark, these eight were saved through the flood. However, again the power and corruption of sin made itself evident, and the surviving race was again divided into two: the line of promise through Shem and the line of judgment through Ham and Japheth.

At this point, the pronouncement of Noah to his sons in

Gen 9:27 becomes important. In the ESV it reads, “May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem.” This gives the impression that it is Japheth who is to inhabit the tents of Shem. This would then be an adumbration of the inclusion of the nations as part of the people of promise. However, the “him” dwelling in the tents of Shem may be God, rather than Japheth. This understanding makes it more explicit that the line of Shem is the chosen line. Properly and fully understood, the blessing that Noah pronounced not only sets out Shem as the father of the chosen line, it also foreshadows the inclusion of descendants of Ham and Japheth into the line of Shem.

Commentators differ as to the understanding of this oracle, but the following shows how I see it: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem. Let Canaan be his (the Lord’s) servant. May God enlarge Japheth. And let him (God) dwell in the tents of Shem. And let Canaan be his (the Lord’s) servant.

After the Tower of Babel and the scattering of the nations, corruption again becomes widespread. Once again, God selects a single man, Abraham, setting him apart as the head of the chosen line. Through Abraham the line continues in one man through each generation: Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau. With Jacob, God once again begins to build a people—by the unexpected means of making them a nation of Shemite slaves to the descendants of Ham.

This Shemite nation multiplies during the Egyptian exile until it becomes a great nation. This nation God then delivers from slavery and oppression (a picture of the oppression and slavery to sin) by means of a single man, Moses, a type of the seed of the woman who is still to come. Moses brings the people to Mt. Sinai to worship God (see Ex 3:12). There, God gives the nation a law: a constitution setting them apart from the other peoples of the earth. The law is given to the people as a guide to life, in order that, both as individuals and as a nation, they would be a people for God’s glory. As Deut 4:5–8 makes clear, the nation now known as Israel is to be an evangelistic nation, demonstrating the wisdom and glory of God to the surrounding nations by means of the character of their lives as individuals and as a nation.

Once again, sin and corruption best the people of God. They spend forty years in the wilderness due to their disobedience. But they remain a people distinct, set apart for God as his private property, his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Ex 19:5–6). While the nation does not grow in the wilderness, neither does it shrink significantly—as can be seen by comparing the census of Numbers 1 with the census of Numbers 26.

Moses dies and is replaced by Joshua, whose very name points to the seed of the woman yet to come, the one who would save his people from their sins. Under Joshua, the people enter the land and settle there. Soon, sin and corruption

bear fruit and the period from Joshua to Samuel becomes the wilderness wanderings writ large.

However, God is not yet done with his people. He continues to dwell in their midst by means of the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant. He raises up the prophet Samuel who serves to anoint the first king of Israel. Saul is not much more than a typical Near Eastern warlord, like the kings of the surrounding nations. Samuel then anoints Saul’s successor David, the man after God’s own heart. Being a man after God’s own heart does not mean, as many suppose, that David had strong affections for God, though that was no doubt the case. Instead, it means that David understood things from God’s perspective, thinking, as it were, God’s thoughts after him. Under David and Solomon, Israel became a great nation, displaying the glory and wisdom of God to the surrounding nations.

It is at this point in the history that a new title of Yahweh begins to appear in the record: Yahweh of hosts (armies). The common view of this title is reflected in the New Living Translation’s rendering of the title: the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. The idea is that the Lord is the head of the angelic host, with whom he wages war. However, certain considerations argue against that interpretation. First, the title first appears in 1 Samuel, which seems clearly to connect it with the rise of the Israelite kingdom, particularly under David. Second, the plural “hosts” is never used in connection with the angels, which are referred to as the heavenly host (singular). Third, the plural “hosts” is regularly used, from Exodus onward, to refer to the hosts or armies of Israel, made up of the various tribes. Fourth, the term appears frequently in the books of the prophets and the application is always more clearly to the people of God than it is to the angelic armies.

But the idolatry of Solomon and the natural unbelief of the people destroy the unity of the nation. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, looks more and more like the surrounding nations under a succession of unbelieving kings. In spite of the prophetic influences of Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea, Israel finally succumbs to Assyria. Israel loses its identity as its people are scattered among the nations of the Near East.

Judah, meanwhile, remained relatively faithful, governed by a continuous line of Davidic descendants. Though not all were good, not all were bad. Further, there was a greater prophetic presence in Judah, continuing to call the people to repentance and faith. However, Judah eventually succumbed to the results of its idolatry, and the nation went into exile in Babylon. Unlike Israel, Judah was not scattered among the nations, and did not lose its identity. God saw to it that the temple and the Ark of the Covenant, the visible signs of his presence with his people, were destroyed. But he did not abandon his people. Instead, he moved with them into exile. This is demonstrated both by Ezekiel’s visions of the glory of Yahweh in Babylon (Ezekiel 1–3, 8–11) and by Jeremiah’s vision of the two baskets

of figs (Jeremiah 24). In the former visions, God showed that he had left Judah in judgment, and that he was making his future with those who were already in exile. In the latter, the basket of bad figs represented those who remained in Judah, who were only good for being thrown out. The good figs were again those already in exile, who provided the future for the people of God. "I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.... I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord" (Jer 24:6-7).

The pre-exilic prophets served largely to call the people of God to repentance and faith. But they also began to emphasize the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God. They began to lay out a glorious vision for the future of the people of God. Such passages as Isaiah 40-66, Ezekiel 34-48, and Jeremiah 31 make it clear that even with the exile looming, the existence and purpose of the people of God was nowhere near its end.

After the exile, a relatively small group of Jews returned to Jerusalem and the surrounding area. They rebuilt the temple and the city of Jerusalem, and that land again became the central location for the people of God. Israel was no longer a separate nation. It no longer had a king. But it retained its identity under the ministries of Ezra, Nehemiah, and other like-minded men. The post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi continued to lay before the people the images of the glorious future of the people of God.

With the death of Malachi, at least according to the traditional reckoning, the prophetic voice was silenced. Four silent centuries followed. Israel continued its existence, first as a part of the Persian Empire. The Persians were succeeded by the Greeks, the Greeks by the Seleucids, and the Seleucids by the Romans. Then a new prophetic voice was heard: that of John, calling the people to a baptism of repentance. John was quickly followed by Jesus, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.

As is clear from the teachings of Jesus (summarized in the Gospels), the kingdom of God was not one more earthly kingdom contending for supremacy above the rest. Instead it is, as the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God" (WCF 25.2). It is a new and renewed version of the nation of Israel as that nation is described in Deuteronomy 4. It is a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city set on a hill. It exists to call the nations to repentance and faith, to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be attached to the people of God.

The seeming absence of kingdom language in the New Testament epistles should not be surprising, for the kingdom is the church. The apostles are teaching the people of God how to live as citizens of his kingdom. As Israel of old was to testify to the surrounding nations of the wisdom and glory of God, so the church is also called to testify. This identification

of the church perhaps reaches its apex in two New Testament passages. The first is Eph 3:10-11. There, Paul announces that "through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." This was God's "eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The other passage is the concluding chapters of Revelation. There the church is displayed as the New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven, a bride adorned for her husband. There, there is no night, and there is no temple, for the Lord is its light and the church herself is the temple, the habitation of God.

This is the glorious vision of the church set forth by the Scriptures. However, it is not the vision that the church has always had of itself. Over the centuries, through the vagaries of political and cultural change, and through unbelief in the church itself, the church has had different understandings of who she is. In some cases, she has seen herself as one earthly kingdom among many—the Holy Roman Empire. In other cases, she has seen herself as the highest earthly kingdom, to whom all other earthly kingdoms owe fealty—the late medieval church. But time and again the church must be called back to see her true identity as a kingdom not of this world, holding forth to this world the vision of the glory of the manifold wisdom of God, to which men come by repentance and faith.

The subject of Graham's book, Stuart Robinson, is one such voice. Robinson lived in the United States in the nineteenth century, spending much of his life in Kentucky—one of the Border States in the Civil War. Through his own study of the Scriptures and of the Reformed stalwarts who preceded him, Robinson came to appreciate the true nature of the church of God in a two-fold fashion. First, he recognized the church of God as a constitutive element of the gospel. In other words, the gospel was not purely preached without also preaching the church. Second, he recognized that the church was a kingdom not of this world. It owed no loyalty to earthly rulers, but only to God, the Supreme Ruler.

Many Christians today have little interest in the church, seeing it as simply one more voluntary organization, little different from any of the hundreds of parachurch organizations, and probably not as good as your neighborhood fellowship group. Others see the church as a convenient tool for producing political or cultural change, but otherwise lacking in real significance. These people need to hear about Robinson and to catch the vision of the church that he found in the redemptive-historical study of the Scriptures.

Graham has given here a fine and careful treatment of Robinson and his thought. The book consists of four chapters, one excursus, a conclusion, an epilogue and a collection of some of Robinson's shorter writings. The first two chapters establish Robinson's historical and social context. These chapters

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with a brother in Christ. But I do hope that debate produces sharpened formulation, correction, and increased proximity to the truth. I do not pretend to offer the definitive formulation of the relationship between the covenant of works and Mosaic covenant. I have tried, however, to learn from some of the Reformed tradition's greatest minds on this difficult and thorny subject.

Turretin's acknowledgment of the diversity of opinion on this question should certainly encourage all to be humble in their claims and especially careful in how they label other's views. I do hope that Venema will continue to investigate the issue. If he tires of it, then I would hope that he would moderate his claims that contemporary versions of republication are novel or that they are "remarkably similar" to Dispensationalism. Such talk, while rhetorically powerful, is destructive to the peace of the church. Given Venema's role as a respected senior churchman, people read such comments and walk away thinking that Reformed ministers in good standing are heterodox—or worse.

In the end, I hope that interested parties will engage the Scriptures in close exegesis and read many of the works I mention in my original essay as well as those cited here. I hope that all of us will wrestle and grow in our understanding of the knotty question of how Sinai relates to the covenant of works. ■

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These chapters are followed by an excursus about Samuel McPheeters, a contemporary of Robinson who shared many of his views, and who suffered for it. The third and fourth chapters place Robinson in his theological and ecclesial contexts. The conclusion summarizes Robinson's contribution, and so is in some sense, a fine place to start. The epilogue traces Robinson's life after the war.

The Appendix, subtitled "A Stuart Robinson Reader," presents some 85 pages of key short works by Robinson. These focus especially on the relationship between the spiritual and temporal powers. Graham's selection of this material is a particular help to the reader, because these works are not otherwise easily obtainable.

All in all, the book is a worthy contribution to the study of Robinson, who has been unduly neglected. It is also a fine addition to the subject of ecclesiology and the issues concerning the relationship between the church and the state. It is especially helpful in today's context, with the dispute over "Two Kingdom Theology." The only negative element of the book is that it was less than carefully edited. ■

*Psallo. Continued from Page 213.*

down even to modern times, have applied the expression, without observing that in the following part of the Psalm it is the *people* that complains that God does not appear to be keeping his promise, and that it is the *people* that prays that he *would* fulfil his promise."<sup>6</sup>

The Psalm itself is a wonderful recounting and explication of the temporal manifestation of the Covenant of Grace called the *Davidic Covenant*, where the Lord promises David, through the prophet Nathan, that He will build David a house, sure and steadfast, meaning that Christ will come from David's loins, and His Kingdom shall have no end. The original account of this covenant reads,

Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, 11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house. 12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: 15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. 17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.<sup>7</sup>

Note that the word covenant is not used in the original revelation of this promise to David, but this Psalm 89 uses this word in verses 3, 28, 34, and by way of complaint in 39. It is right to note that the Psalm then is an expansion and greater interpretation of that Covenant made with David, and the Psalmist uses this covenantal promise to comfort himself, and the people of God, at a time when the outward circumstances seemed to present the demise of it, to stir up by way of praise the peoples' affection and current mind toward the faithfulness of God, and all His promises. Most properly then, this Psalm begins in verse 1 with "I will sing of the *mercies* of the Lord." The word 'mercies' translates the plural of מְרֻמִּים *chesed*, meaning *covenant faithfulness*.

6. E. W. Hengstenberg, J. Thomson, & P. Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869) 106.

7. 2 Sa 7:10–17. *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. Electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version (1995).