19 The Confessional Presbyterian

2023 *A Journal for Discussion of Presbyterian Doctrine & Practice*

Table of Contents

2 Editorial

Articles

3 Obedient to the Great Commission: The Presbyterian Church in America at Fifty
By Zachary Groff

23 A Plea for Confessional Integrity in the PCA regarding the Second & Fourth Commandments
By Geoff Gleason

37 "Like a Box of Chocolates": Experiencing PCA Worship
By Frank J. Smith

61 The History of the Formation of the Standing Judicial Commission
By Scott Cook

75 An Historical Study of Witnesses and their Oaths in the Courts of the Presbyterian Church in America
By Thomas E. Rickard

85 Morton Howison Smith: A Brief Sketch of His Life
By Joseph A. Pipa, Jr.

105 The Not-Quite Founding Father: J. Gresham Machen and the Origins of the PCA
Sean G. Morris

125 Machen's Other Warrior Children: Conservative Presbyterians in the OPC & PCA
By D. G. Hart

135 Southern Presbyterian Ecumenism: The PCUS–RCA Merger Plan, Northern Reunion, and the Formation of the PCA
By Zachary M. Garris

151 Ecclesial Unity and Creation Doctrine
By William VanDoodewaard

163 God's Not-So-Ordinary Providence: Evaluating the Framework Hypothesis "Because It Had Not Rained Argument" from Ordinary Providence
By Zachary Groff

181 William Perkins on Conscience and Casuistry: Puritan Foundations for Reformed, Scriptural Ethics
By Jacob D. Gerber

195 Recovering and Re-evaluating the Historical Interpretations of the Anti-Christ
By Ottavio Palombaro

203 We've Been Dating It All Wrong: Richard Denton (1603–1662) & the Arrival of American Presbyterianism
By Ryan Denton

(Contents continued on page 2).

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Editorial

Welcome to this nineteenth issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal! Two firsts: An abundance of riches has caused the detailing of our articles to spill onto this secondary page for the first time in 19 years, and our cover theme, which many of our writers canvas, is not a person but the commemoration of an event, the fiftieth year since the founding of the Presbyterian Church in America. In addition to the other material, the editors believe the articles marking this event with various studies will be of significant interest to readers. A concluding *In Memoriam* marks the passing of David C. Lachman, who contributed to the inaugural issue of this journal in 2005, and earlier was helpful to this writer's fledgling imprint, Naphtali Press, with the ambitious publication of James Durham's *A Treatise Concerning Scandal* in 1990. That and other Antiquarian books, had a profound influence on your editor's Presbyterianism. Many have much to be thankful for David's labors. Enjoy this issue!

Chris Coldwell▪

Table of Contents Continued

209 The Doctrine of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ in the Writings of James Durham (1622–1668)
By Colin Dow

227 Who Was William Young? And What Did He Do for the Presbyterian Church
By Robert McInnes

243 James Durham: A New Biography, Part Two
By Chris Coldwell

261 Can a Christian Be an Objective Professional Historian? An Unorthodox Autobiographical Review Article of Ian Hugh Clary on Arnold Dallimore's Historiography
By Ryan M. McGraw

271 *Reviews & Responses:* Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart, *Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America* (Sean G. Morris) 271 ▪ David W. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America* (Ryan Biese) 273 ▪ *Warfield's Works, A Review & An Appreciation* (Jeff A. Stivason) 274 ▪ Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Benjamin Shaw) 276 ▪ Lyle D. Bierma, *Font of Pardon and New Life: John Calvin and the Efficacy of Baptism* (Ryan M. McGraw) 278 ▪ Gregory David Soderberg, *As Often As You Eat This Bread: Communion Frequency in English, Scottish, and Early American Churches* (Ryan Speck) 279 ▪ G. K. Beale, *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* (Roland Matthews) 286 ▪ Willem van Vlastuin, *Catholic Today: A Reformed Conversation About Catholicity* (Thomas Haviland-Pabst) 290 ▪ Alasdair J. MacLeod, *John Kennedy of Dingwall, 1819-1884: Evangelicalism in the Scottish Highlands* (Lane Keister) 292 ▪ Mark D. Liederbach and Evan Lenow, *Ethics As Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship* (Lane Keister) 294 ▪ L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Zachary Groff) 296 ▪

303 *Psallo:* Psalm 83:1–18

305 *Antiquary:* Did George Gillespie embellish his Notes recorded during the Westminster Assembly?

310 *Bibliography*

325 *The Editors / Errata for Previous Issues*

326 *In Memoriam:* David C. Lachman (1939–2023): A Tribute

In Brief: In Brief: James Durham on the Unlawfulness of Making Images (35–36) ▪ *In Brief:* The Regulative Principle of Worship (60) ▪ *In Brief:* A New Denomination (1,974 years old!) (120–124) ▪ *In Brief:* Personal Remembrances of Dr. J. L. Girardeau from Two of His Students (134) ▪ *In Brief:* In Fifty Years Another Division? (150) ▪ *In Brief:* Division, The Great Enemy of Edification and Reformation. (180) ▪ *In Brief:* The First Beast is Antichrist in his kingdom (202)) ▪ *In Brief:* Calvin to Knox on Baptism (208) ▪ *In Brief:* "Your Sins Do Not Surprise God" (226) ▪ *In Brief:* "Save Our Sabbath" (242) ▪ *In Brief:* The PCA and The Federal Vision (260) ▪

Obedient to the Great Commission: The Presbyterian Church in America at Fifty

By Zachary Groff

The fifth chapter of Acts presents a series of conflicts between apostles and apostates in the early church. The chapter opens with the bone-chilling deception and demise of the apostates Ananias and Sapphira (vv. 1–11), who sought to defraud God and His nascent apostolic church. Following a fearful purging of the church membership rolls, the apostles proceed to perform miracles in the very heart of Jerusalem, teaching in the Name of Christ Jesus the Risen Lord (vv. 12–32). The boldness and fruitfulness of the apostles' ministry incurred the murderous wrath of the Jewish authorities (v. 33), apostates of a different variety—and with much more power—than Ananias and Sapphira.

Into the proceedings at this point enters "a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people" (v. 34).[1] His contribution to the tense deliberations is nothing short of fascinating. Not only does he stay the hands of his bloodthirsty colleagues in the Sanhedrin, but he does so by appealing to two examples of false starts among the Jews. He cites the failed projects of Theudas (v. 36) and Judas of Galilee (v. 37) as he persuades his fellow Council members to disregard the apostles who were stirring up so much enthusiasm for Jesus. His closing words are telling. "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God" (vv. 38, 39). Behind Gamaliel's slick political calculus, there lies either a latent interest in the apostolic mission or a skeptical—even sardonic—dismissal of their signs and wonders.

When the Steering Committee for a Continuing Church was nearing the completion of its work in the early 1970s, the result of which would be the separation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), certain of their colleagues in the PCUS skeptically dismissed their project as doomed to failure and obsolescence. Their rationales were many and varied. The personalities of the leading men of the conservative movement were too big—they would surely trample over each other in their zeal to wield influence in a new and untested denomination. Temperaments were too hot and ungovernable among the rank-and-file, and the new Church would never hold together. Their resources were too poor and their men too inexperienced to bring such an ambitious effort to lasting fruition. However, what Gamaliel said either snidely or sincerely of the apostles proved true for that first generation of the PCA: "if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." A half-century on from the May 1973 Convocation of Sessions and first General Assembly in December of that same year, God has blessed the PCA with vitality, vigor, and a great deal of fruitfulness in shared ministry.

The PCA is a lot of things. Some have described our ecclesial society as a big tent, a denominational thought-leader, a warm evangelical church, a staunchly Presbyterian body, and a whole slew of less pleasant monikers which do not merit acknowledgement in print. Whatever the PCA is, its founding generation aspired for it to be an "intensely Presbyterian"[2] denomination committed to historic Presbyterian polity, the doctrine of the

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1. All Scripture citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (1995).

2. This phrase figures prominently in the *Message to All Churches* published by the denomination at its formation, which was in turn a republication of the 1861 *Message to All Churches* published by the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCCSA/PCUS) at its initial formation.

Westminster Standards as adopted by American Presbyterians, and the extension of Christ's kingdom at home and abroad. With earnest energy and a sober estimation of the difficulties that attend the mandate which Christ has given to His church, the PCA is devoted to fulfilling the Great Commission to the glory of the one, true, living, and triune God. At 50 years young, it is proper to reflect on what exactly God has accomplished through the PCA, for it is the work and blessing of God that describes what the PCA was, is, and shall be as its churches "hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering" (Heb. 10:23) in the years to come. Our biblical fidelity grounds us, our confessional commitments identify us as distinct from our brothers and sisters in other branches of the visible church, and our obedience to the Great Commission definitively characterizes the unique place which the PCA occupies in Christ's kingdom.

In what follows, this article presents a survey of the 50–year history of the PCA in a series of five decades, focusing not on conflicts between apostles and apostates, but primarily on the work in which every resource of the PCA is invested: the Great Commission to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). A brief conclusion considers several challenges likely to face the Church in the near future.

As the continuing expression of the Southern Presbyterian Church, the PCA maintains a strong commitment to the proclamation of God's Word and fervent prayer, and it shares with its Southern Presbyterian forebears an emphasis on ministering in Christ's Name through personal evangelism, discipleship, missions, and church-planting. These positive and constructive efforts of the PCA occupy a central place in denominational life. Though individual people and places are mentioned throughout this article, in no way can an historical survey include a comprehensive roster of all the influential leaders and self-sacrificing servants who have contributed to the PCA and its ministries. Those who are mentioned in the following pages are merely representative of the various personalities and officers who have contributed to what has made—and continues to make—the PCA a "Great Commission" Presbyterian Church.

1973–1982: A New Beginning in an Historic Mission

Even prior to the birth of the PCA, outspoken missionaries and evangelists were champions of theological renewal and missional revitalization in the PCUS. Such men had recognized that by 1970, the PCUS as a denomination had abandoned its historically biblical ministry in terms of both gospel message and spiritual mission. The task at hand for theologically conservative Presbyterians in the American South was to secure the future of the Church's historic mission of God-glorifying ministry, even if that meant leaving the PCUS. In what "began as a research project for the Steering Committee [for a Continuing Presbyterian Church], which was to have served the purpose of providing the Committee with reliable references to the deviations by the Presbyterian Church in the United States from the scripture and from her doctrinal Standards,"[3] Southern Presbyterian luminary and founding Professor of Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) Dr. Morton Howison Smith (1923—2017)[4] documented the theological and missional decline of the PCUS as evidenced by the actions of the General Assembly through the course of the mid-twentieth century.

While Dr. Smith's intended readers were the men on the Steering Committee, and his research was not published for a broader audience before 1973, there were others who vigorously and widely promoted the cause of a Continuing Presbyterian Church. One of those early proponents was PCUS missionary to Japan William A. McIlwaine (1893–1985). It was his personal appeal in 1953, for example, that convinced a young Morton Smith of his duty to pursue biblical "reform in the Southern [Presbyterian] Church" [5] (whatever it would end up looking like, over time). McIlwaine would serve as the moderator of the fourth General Assembly of the PCA in 1976. Another proverbial watchman on the wall was founder and first executive director of Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF), William E. "Bill" Hill, Jr. (1880–1983). In 1969, Hill published a catalytic article in the *Presbyterian Journal* entitled "Go Along Or Go Forth." Referring to Hebrews 13:13, Hill called for ecclesiastical separation from the PCUS for the sake of faithfulness to Christ.[6] He later echoed

3. Morton H. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim: The Decline of the Presbyterian Church, U.S. As Reflected in Its Assembly Actions,* Third Edition (Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1998 [1973]), p. iv.

4. Dr. Smith would go on to serve as the PCA's first Stated Clerk (1973–1988) and founding professor and Dean of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

5. Morton H. Smith, quoted in Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., "Morton Howison Smith: A Brief Sketch of His Life," in *Confessing Our Hope: Essays Celebrating the Life and Ministry of Morton H. Smith on His Eightieth Birthday,* ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and C. N. Willborn (Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2004), p. 14. N.B. An updated and expanded version of the biographical essay cited here appears as an article in the present issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian.*

6. Otto Whittaker, *Watchman, Tell It True: The life and Here-I-Am-Lord times of Bill Hill—pastor, evangelist, and one-time liberal who*

this call in the opening address to the May 1973 Convocation of Sessions held at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA, "The No-Compromise Man and the No-Compromise Church."[7] Though examples drawn from the founding generation could be multiplied to fill many volumes, these two representatives—McIlwaine and Hill—suffice to establish a precedent pattern for the vigorous reformer-missionary spirit with which the PCA was endued in the first decade of her existence.

At the PCA's beginning in 1973, its domestic and foreign missions efforts were inherited not from any official denominational organ or presbytery of the PCUS, but from PEF. Kennedy Smartt recalls that the first General Assembly received "with gratitude all the funds, records, correspondence, and equipment which were being turned over to the National Presbyterian Church[8] by the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship"[9] for the work of the nascent denomination's domestic missions efforts. For its foreign missions, the denomination absorbed the full organizational infrastructure and resources of PEF's Executive Commission on Overseas Evangelism (ECOE) (pronounced "echo"), including its thirteen missionaries engaged in five works around the world.[10] From these humble beginnings, the PCA has sent forth hundreds of missionaries under the auspices of Mission to the World (MTW).

But what was the aim of these missionary efforts? Being obedient to the Great Commission meant then and means now that the mission of the Church's outreach around the world must be distinctly spiritual and ecclesiological. As per a statement adopted and published at the third General Assembly in 1975, it was the express desire of the Assembly in these early years "that the primary thrust of Mission to the World continue to be the establishment and strengthening of Presbyterian and Reformed churches in other countries, keeping a high proportion of church-planting-oriented missions over service-support missions, with constant effort towards improving the current proportion" (*M3GA,* p. 115).[11] Missions exists for the Christ-exalting increase of visible churches constituting a worldwide society of God-worshippers. Service projects, however important and at times necessary, are ever and always ancillary to the church-planting efforts of missionary endeavors. This was the expressed intention and missionary desire of the PCA's founders from the earliest years of the denomination's existence.

Beyond the purview of MTW, congregations and presbyteries have sent ordained men to engage in focused church-planting efforts in other countries, in much the same way that congregations and presbyteries plant churches domestically. Taken together with the PCA's constitutional openness to partnership with voluntary parachurch organizations for kingdom-extension,[12] foreign missionary efforts pursued outside of—or alongside of—MTW's organizational apparatus are expressive of the PCA's so-called "grassroots Presbyterianism," a value and cultural trait of the PCA present from the start of the denomination. Jared Nelson helpfully writes, "The phrase generally communicates the understanding that the PCA has been a bottom-up denomination that was formed with a conscious effort to give more power to the presbyteries rather than to the General Assembly as the locus of authority and power."[13] Unlike the more centrally directed Mainline denominations (e.g., the PC(USA) and the PCUS before it), the PCA operates in such a way so as to discourage centralized administrative bloat while allowing the lower courts (i.e., local church sessions and regional presbyteries) to do the work of the Church without the bureaucratic impediments and political intrigues that attend massive organizational apparatuses. Denominational decentralization of power wedded together with the aim of being—in the words of Ruling Elder Jack Williamson (1919–2009), Moderator of the first General Assembly—"intensely Presbyterian in form of government"[14] sometimes resulted in missional confusion, as indicated by the Assembly's failed multi-year

came back to every jot and tittle of the inerrant Word of God (Manassas, VA: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1981), p. 407.

7. Whittaker, *Watchman, Tell It True*, pp. 444–451.

8. Note that the PCA initially bore the name 'National Presbyterian Church' before enacting a change at the second General Assembly (1974) in deference to a Mainline Presbyterian congregation in Washington D.C. bearing that name.

9. Kennedy Smartt, *I Am Reminded: An Autobiographical, Anecdotal History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Chestnut Mountain, GA: Self-Published, n.d.), p. 109.

10. For more background on ECOE, including its similarity to J. Gresham Machen's Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions, see Whittaker, *Watchman, Tell It True,* pp. 414ff.

11. Presbyterian Church in America, *Minutes of the Third General Assembly*, Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, Lawrenceville, GA, 1975, p. 115; heretofore, all references to the *Minutes* will imitate the parenthetical reference above.

12. See *Book of Church Order (BCO)* 14–1.6. Note that all *BCO* references are to the version incorporating all amendments approved through the 50th General Assembly (2023).

13. Jared Nelson, "Grassroots Presbyterianism & Amending BCO 34–1," Presbyterian Polity (blog), October 13, 2022, https://pcapolity.com/2022/10/13/grassroots-presbyterianism-amending-bco-34–1/.

14. W. Jack Williamson, "To God be the Glory," *Addresses Delivered During the First General Assembly* (Birmingham, AL: The Continuing Presbyterian Church, 1973), p. 11. Note that the speaker was echoing the language of the *Message to All Churches.*

attempt to adopt a constitutionally binding Directory for Public Worship.

One method which the PCA's founders used early on to ensure administrative decentralization was the geographical separation of the denomination's permanent Committees across different cities. Dr. David W. Hall observes, "Decentralization was still so important that the Assembly originally located its four permanent Committees in four different cities: Jackson, MS; Montgomery, AL; Columbus, GA, and Decatur, GA."[15] The Church eventually abandoned its commitment to geographic decentralization in the 1980s. However, formal authorization to investigate how best to consolidate denominational office space was not granted until the ninth General Assembly in 1981 (*M9GA,* p. 156). Incidentally, this was the last PCA General Assembly to be hosted by a local church (Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, FL) until 1991. It was also the last Assembly before the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) folded into the PCA through a process called "joining and receiving" (J&R).

Before the coming together of the PCA and the RPCES, the PCA was the decidedly larger denomination with a strong conservative evangelical (and Southern) culture. As a theologically evangelical denomination, the PCA rejected continuationism, a central conviction of the charismatic movement gaining traction in American Christianity in the 1970s. In the original (and unchanged) language of *BCO* 7–1, the PCA affirmed that extraordinary officers in possession of extraordinary "gifts related to new revelation have no successors since God completed His revelation at the conclusion of the Apostolic Age." This was a live issue at the first General Assembly, but a committee appointed at that Assembly produced a pastoral letter approved at the second Assembly reaffirming the *BCO*'s language (*M2GA,* pp. 170–175). That committee included RTS Old Testament professor Jack Brown Scott (1928–2011) and Westminster Theological Seminary professor O. Palmer Robertson, both of whom taught generations of PCA pastors. As a culturally conservative group, the PCA adopted the theologically biblical moral stance of condemning abortion as murder. Hall appropriately connects this development with a powerful and informative presentation by Ruling Elder and physician Dr. William P. Thompson (1944–2021) at the sixth General Assembly in 1978.[16] After J&R, the PCA's commitment to protecting the lives of children otherwise unwanted by society found high-profile public representation in the work of another Ruling Elder, U. S. Surgeon General under President Ronald Reagan, C. Everett Koop (1916–2013).[17]

On the eve of the PCA's reception of the RPCES, the PCA had grown since 1973 from 260 to 519 congregations, 17 to 25 presbyteries, and 40,614 to 91,856 communicant members.[18] By comparison, the RPCES had 189 congregations across 17 presbyteries and comprised of 25,673 communicant members at the time of its joining with the PCA (*M9GA,* p. 156). Though the RPCES in 1982 was much smaller than the PCA was even in 1973, the 1982 merger was significant in terms of both numbers and geographic footprint. With the ratification of J&R, what began as a Continuing Southern Presbyterian Church became a truly national American Presbyterian denomination, reporting a total of 803 congregations across 36 presbyteries, and comprising 150,322 members, including 130,376 communicant members and 19,946 non-communicant members (*M11GA*, p. 173). The first decade of the PCA's existence proved that the fledgling denomination had staying power and momentum for growth, surely by the grace of God alone.

1983–1992: Adjusting to a Newly Nationwide Scale

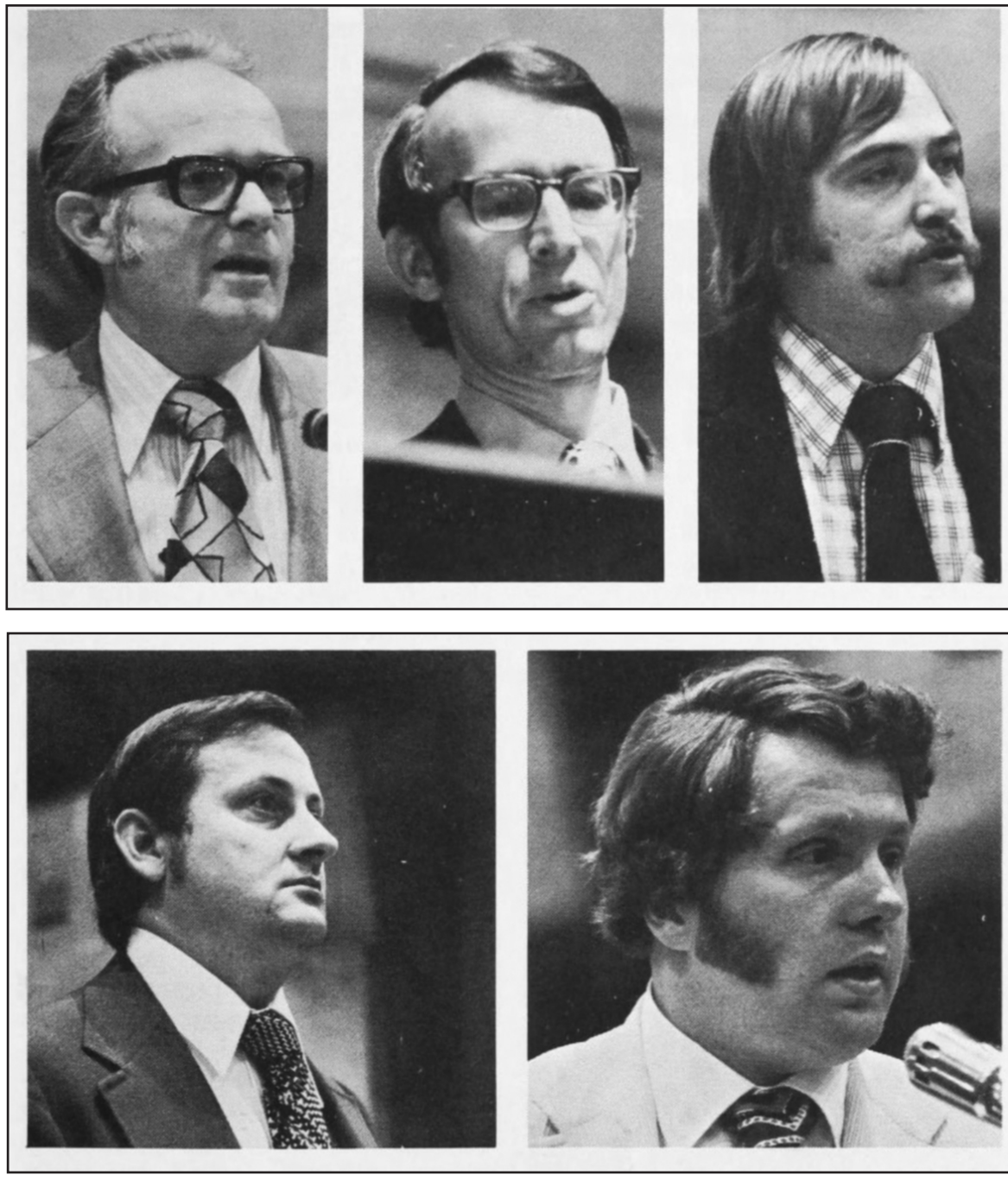
With the absorption of a smaller but nationwide denomination came the expansion not only of the PCA's geographic reach, but also of its leaders' ambitions for the extension of that visible expression of Christ's kingdom. Somewhat ironically, 1983 also marked the merger of the liberal Mainline Presbyterian Churches in the American North and South to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The sheer size of the resultant Mainline Presbyterian body (over 3.1 million members in 1983) made any kind of statistical comparison between the PCA and the PC(USA) farcical. That did not discourage denominational leaders in the PCA from setting audacious goals for denominational growth as they looked forward to the new millennium (nearly two decades away), now with the resources of a denominational college and seminary at their disposal.

15. David W. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America* (Powder Springs, GA: Covenant Foundation 2023), p. 56.

16. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* p. 72.

17. For example, see Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* p. 113. Note that Koop collaborated closely with Dr. Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984) in the production of the 1978 film *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* Hall further remarks that Dr. James Montgomery Boice (1938–2000) of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia notably supported Dr. Koop and his public stands in the field of medicine.

18. Note that total membership (including non-communicants) was not recorded in 1973, but that the total membership in 1981 was 104,218, inclusive of 12,362 non-communicant members (*M10GA,* p. 134).



PCA First General Assembly: "BCO Monopolizes Assembly Attention". "Ralph Didier, [upper] left, of Anaheim, Cal., thought the wording of 7-1 was too categorical, but Palmer Robertson, center of Philadelphia, Pa., supported the statement, which denied present-day miraculous gifts. So did Joey Pipa of Tchula, Miss. who said extraordinary gifts ceased with the apostles. Host pastor Frank Barker, [see next page], thought such an epochal view was dispensational, and urged acceptance of extraordinary gifts. And Don Dunkerly, [lower] right, said he would support the possibility of special gifts, though the canon was closed and the apostolic office had ceased. On his feet for this and many other discussions was Charles Dunahoo [left], chairman of the constitutional documents committee. By the way, host pastor Barker is [shown next page] during the opening program, when he 'ordered' the choir to stay for the whole thing." These photos originally appeared in the Dec. 19, 1973 issue of *The Presbyterian Journal*. Used with permission from WORLD News Group.



PCA First General Assembly and the Miraculous Gifts of the Apostles. Frank Barker. See the descriptions on the prior page. Used with permission from WORLD News Group.

The 11th General Assembly, by way of a recommendation from the Committee of Commissioners on the newly acquired Covenant Seminary, directed the Administrative Committee of the denomination to study what it would take to grow to one million members by the year 2000. The recommendation reads as follows:

> That in view of the denomination's aim to reach one million members by the year 2000, and to continue our missionary emphasis, a systematic analysis be undertaken by the Committee on Administration to assess how many new pastors and missionaries can be projected to be needed per year to replace retiring ministers and to provide church planters, pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and other ordained ministers during the coming ten years, and to ascertain how many candidates for the PCA ministry are currently being generated from the presbyteries, in seminaries and colleges, or from other denominational backgrounds; and that the results of the study be reported back not later than the 1985 General Assembly, with a progress report made to the 1984 General Assembly.[19]

Though the hopes of these optimistic churchmen did not come anywhere close to realization in the intervening years, their zeal was admirable. In service to King Jesus, may the lofty goals of those early generations of PCA elders remind us that "in a multitude of people is a king's glory, but in the dearth of people is a prince's ruin" (Prov. 14:28). There is no shame in desiring church growth, so long as such growth is not pursued at the expense of biblical fidelity and doctrinal integrity. Without maintaining faithfulness to the Scriptures and true commitment to the Reformed faith, whatever may be growing will be something entirely other than a Presbyterian church! In fact, the rapid swelling of the ranks with the receiving of the RPCES put a strain on the PCA's ministry at precisely these two points of biblical fidelity (in worship) and doctrinal integrity (in discipline) in the second decade of her existence.

Throughout the 1980s, the General Assembly, meeting in conference centers and ballrooms rather than churches and college campuses, revisited—again and again—the matter of the Directory for Worship's constitutionality. The 11th General Assembly in 1983 opened the PCA's second decade on a high note with the ratification of three chapters of the Directory for Worship as constitutionally authoritative. However, there remained a divide in the denomination on what to do with the rest of the Directory. Some presbyters wanted to complete the work left unfinished by the Church's founders and ratify the whole Directory for Worship (either as received or as amended) as fully constitutional. Still others seemed content, or even insistent, to leave the Church without a constitutionally defined set of principles for worship beyond what had already been adopted. Agreement on the matter eluded the denomination as it continued to grow—albeit at a slower pace than previously enjoyed—in its second decade. At the 16th General Assembly in 1988, the Assembly approved—"after considerable discussion, with various motions" and strenuous objection—the following recommendation during the report from the Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business: "That we leave the Directory for

19. *M11GA,* p. 75; cited in Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* p. 93.

Worship in its present status in the Church and dismiss the entire matter" (*M16GA,* pp. 169f.). As the years progressed and General Assembly worship services grew more elaborate, the issue became urgent for men who objected to the increasingly performative nature of Assembly worship.

During the report of the Committee of Commissioners on Administration at the 19th General Assembly in 1991, for instance, the following motion was narrowly defeated by a vote of 308–384: "Until such time as there is greater unanimity within the PCA re. the subject of worship, local arrangements committees are encouraged to include in their Assembly worship services only those elements outlined in the Directory of Worship" (*M19GA,* p. 136). One might justly inquire as to the practical use of a Directory for Worship which cannot authoritatively determine the bounds of what is and is not acceptable at the Assembly's worship services, much less in the worship services of local churches and regional presbyteries. Though the tension over standards in worship was left unresolved, the question of how to pursue doctrinal integrity in the exercise of discipline in a "grassroots" nationwide Church received a more constructive answer before the end of the PCA's second decade.

The Standing Judicial Commission (SJC) of the PCA was established at the 17th General Assembly in 1989. This important and unique commission of the General Assembly hears and decides disciplinary cases that make their way through the appeals process from the lower courts of the Church. The creation of the SJC addressed a major inefficiency of the Assembly's business, for thorny discipline cases had begun to take up a disproportionately (and inconveniently) large measures of time during the first two decades of the Church's existence. Attempts to restructure the General Assembly as a delegated body better suited to handle complex cases of church discipline failed, and so the Church chose a different solution. With the problem only getting worse after the RPCES was brought into the PCA *en masse*, the Assembly created the SJC to take on the caseload.

The importance of the SJC to the PCA's witness and order cannot be understated. Whether or not its existence can be deemed to comport with biblical Presbyterianism does nothing to diminish its significance for the life of this expression of Christ's Church.[20] As of the writing of this article, the Standing Judicial Commission "shall consist of twenty-four (24) members divided into four classes of three teaching elders and three ruling elders in each class. Each class shall serve a four-year term and each subsequent Assembly shall declare the Standing Judicial Commission as a whole to be its commission" (*BCO* 15–4). Though space limitations prohibit anything approaching an exhaustive survey of the key decisions of the SJC, an illustrative example from the early years of the Commission's existence will serve to demonstrate its importance to (and in) the PCA.

Within just two years of its creation, the SJC proved its significance to the denomination in its far-reaching decision in Case 90–8 of *T. E. David Bowen vs. Eastern Carolina Presbytery.* At the 19th General Assembly in 1991, the SJC presented for approval its decision affirming "the judgment of Eastern Carolina Presbytery in that Infant Baptism (WCF 28–4) and Limited Atonement (WCF 3–3, 8–5 and 11–4) are to be considered fundamentals of the system of doctrine and that there can be no exceptions given in the case of officers in the church" (*M19GA,* p. 84). With the Assembly's adoption and approval of this decision by the SJC, the Church established a precedent for disallowing either anti-paedobaptists or those who deny definite/limited/effectual atonement from occupying ordained office in the PCA. This precedent remains in force today, upholding the historic Presbyterian position that while a credible profession of faith in Christ as offered in the gospel is all that is required for adult church membership, yet theological adoption of the confessional Standards of the denomination—represented metonymically in this case by certain "fundamentals of the system of doctrine"—as one's own statement of faith is required for all those who would serve in ordained office. Further deliberation about confessional subscription awaited the courts of the Church in the future.

The decision of the SJC in *Bowen vs. E. Carolina Presbytery* further clarified that *BCO* 43–10 empowers higher courts to annul the election, ordination, and installation of officers even after said officers have assumed the functions of their office. Thus, if a church member or members file a complaint with a presbytery against the action of a local session in ordaining and installing technically ineligible individuals to office, and the presbytery finds the complaint in order, it can (by sustaining the complaint) reverse the action of the lower court and annul the ordination and installation of the officer(s) in question. *Bowen vs. E. Carolina Presbytery* is but one example among many important decisions made, and precedents set, by the SJC over the years.

The enlarged scale (and potential) of the PCA

20. See Scott Cook's article in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*, "The History of the Formation of the Standing Judicial Commission."

brought about certain cultural changes by the end of its second decade, especially at the national level of the Church's denominational life. In the first place, the second decade witnessed a shift away from local church facilities for meetings of General Assembly. In place of spacious worship halls, the Assembly preferred—or needed—to meet in hotel ballrooms and convention centers. This change in typical practice increased the cost of General Assembly participation year-to-year, but it also led to a marked professionalization in the conduct of denominational business. This change of typical venue represented a shift in the Assembly's character, and this shift was reflected in both the worship and the business of the Assembly.

In the second place, by the end of the second decade there emerged definable factions, if not organized parties and interest groups, operating within the PCA. A trend of open advocacy of certain positions and sometimes-private caucusing for specific ecclesiastical aims increased over time, and especially as means of electronic communication became ever more prevalent. David Hall writes,

> Several significant meetings took place in September of 1990. One group met in the Johnson City, Tennessee, area under the leadership of Dr. Morton Smith, who spoke about the original distinctives of the PCA; in so doing, this group was looking for ways to keep the PCA conservative. Another group, consisting mainly of 25 of the largest churches, met in Atlanta under the guise of attempting to help implement a specific committee's directions. However, more in the church realized that this [large-church] group was a powerful voting caucus which had successfully approved most of its concerns at the recent General Assembly. It was thought across the church, unfortunate as it was, that two alternative and conflicting groups were beginning to caucus behind the scenes, if not overtly.[21]

As the years wore on, the PCA would play host to various named groups, networks, partnerships, and extra-ecclesiastical organizations that expended time, money, and energy to influence the Church in one direction or another.

A third—and far more quantifiable—trend was the solidifying of a preponderance of Teaching Elder participation in General Assembly over against a waning proportion of Ruling Elder participation. Whereas Ruling Elders made up anywhere between 36.1% and 53.7% of commissioners to each of the first ten General Assemblies (1973–1982), that range dropped down to anywhere between 27.6% and 34.7% in the second decade of Assemblies (1983–1992). The Assembly was becoming more professional, more clerical, and more contentious in the years that the men and churches of the RPCES settled into their new denominational ecology within the PCA.

The PCA as a nationwide American Presbyterian denomination going into its third decade reported a total of 1,226 congregations (including mission works) across 54 presbyteries, and comprising 242,560 members (including 2,239 ministers, 195,352 communicant members and 44,969 non-communicant members). While the denomination's advance to the new millennium in its third decade would not yield the desired four-fold increase in membership, the PCA would make important strides in exploring how to be "obedient to the Great Commission" considering the emergence of factions in its second decade. In fact, the PCA's focus on the Great Commission would give the two factions an important arena for their ecclesiastical wrangling in the conduct of the Church's foreign missions efforts through MTW.

1993–2003: Church or Parachurch? Presbyterian or Evangelical (*or Fundamentalist*)?

The 21st General Assembly in 1993 opened the PCA's third decade with a shot across the bow. David Hall writes, "Retiring Moderator Wilson Benton, one of the finest and most esteemed preachers in the PCA, challenged those in the minority or supportive of the Old School past to feel free to withdraw from the PCA."[22] Hardly a conciliatory gesture, the conflict it revealed was but one of several recurring difficulties grimly threatening the unity of the denomination as it approached the turn of the century. One of those difficulties was the matter of who reserved the right to report denominational news.

The denomination's administration, under the leadership of Stated Clerk Dr. Paul R. Gilchrist since Dr. Morton H. Smith's retirement from the role in 1988, struggled to keep up with emerging communications technologies. The Administrative Committee disavowed at least one grassroots publication incorporating the "PCA" name under the oversight of a local church session rather than under the management of denominational authorities. Eventually, the 28th General Assembly in 2000 resolved the controversy over news organizations covering the PCA when the Assembly decisively

21. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* pp. 172f.
22. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 226.

protected the right of "an independent press" (*M28GA*, p. 290).[23]

Over the course of the 1990s, Dr. Frank J. Smith's "PCA News Service, Inc." was funded and managed entirely apart from any coordination with or support from the Administrative Committee based in Atlanta. The matter of propriety in use of the "PCA" name in this case was resolved at the 24th General Assembly in 1996 when the publisher agreed to change the name of the publication in response to a formal request from the Assembly.[24] The fact that it took an action of the General Assembly to persuade the publisher to acquiesce to the demands of the Administrative Committee reveals a far more serious struggle in the denomination than the relatively superficial matter of rights to an acronym.[25]

Of greater significance was the matter of how the growing denomination would direct its work. Would the PCA order its cooperative and nationwide ministries primarily through boards or through the Assembly? This question would (and continues to) manifest itself in a variety of mission-critical issues encompassing everything from educational institutions, denominational publications, administrative operations, judicial processes, and missions efforts. In keeping with the focus of this article, what follows is a brief treatment of how this issue affected the PCA's denominational missions efforts from 1993 to 2000.

The PCA's vigorous enthusiasm and efforts in both domestic and foreign missions became in many ways more of a central preoccupation in the 1990s than they were even in the expansionist early years of the denomination. It was at this time that Redeemer Presbyterian Church experienced its explosive growth in New York City under the ministry of founding pastor Timothy Keller (1950–2023). Biographer Collin Hansen recently described Keller as a church-planter who "sought to translate for the local church the best parachurch insights he had seen and experienced himself."[26] Keller published his approach in the popular church-planting manual and textbook, *Center Church*.[27] This book has become one of the most popular church-planting resources available among urban church-planters in the PCA and in other denominations around the world, with the *Redeemer City to City* church-planting network promoting its approach among many church plants that are not an organic part of the PCA.

It was also in this period that the 26th General Assembly in 1998 cautioned the growing denomination, "Presbyteries should take care that they do not divide prematurely, causing one or more of the resulting presbyteries to lack the resources necessary for their future growth. On the other hand, a presbytery may become so large that it cannot give adequate attention to the needs of the churches and ministers within its own membership, and may find even its efforts at church planting and other growth in ministry difficult" (*M26GA,* p. 180). The growth of the denomination itself through church-planting and the multiplication of presbyteries was no mere potentiality, but a live issue in the PCA's third decade. Yet, the alluring methods and freedom from ecclesiastical strictures available in voluntary parachurch organizations became—as in Keller's approach—something that church-planters and denominational administrators wanted to emulate.

The draw to extra-ecclesiastical avenues of obedience to the Great Commission is a phenomenon with deep-rooted historical vintage in American Presbyterianism. The Church's imitation of voluntary societies for church-planting hearkens back to the nineteenth century Old School Presbyterian controversy over partnership with independent agencies and boards for missions efforts in contrast to entrusting the Church's missionary endeavors exclusively to commissions of the Church courts.[28] During the twentieth century, voluntary societies for evangelism and discipleship became known as "parachurch" organizations, for they presented themselves as operating alongside (para-) and in support of churches. Whereas domestic church-planting and foreign missions were largely one and the same during the westward

23. Quoted in Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* p. 289.

24. See Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* pp. 264–266.

25. *Editor's Note:* No one, including Dr. Morton H. Smith, who until 1988 was the Secretary of the officially registered "Presbyterian Church in America" corporation (by virtue of his being Stated Clerk of the General Assembly), other than the denominational administrator who filed the request, knew that someone had applied for registering the "PCA" acronym as a service mark in the mid-1980s. The Committee on Administration acting as the Board for "Presbyterian Church in America (A Corporation)" had sought to register the denominational name, but not the initials. The name was granted service mark status, but that was rescinded after the PC(USA) objected. The action of the 1996 Assembly to protect the service mark effectively ratified the registration. However, that was about a decade after the fact. Nonetheless, the original authorization to file the paperwork with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office only mentions the full name, not the acronym initials.

26. Collin Hansen, *Timothy Keller: His Spiritual and Intellectual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), p. 197.

27. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).

28. See D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2007), p. 140f.

expansion of the Presbyterian Church into the American frontier during the nineteenth century, the more recent history of the PCA divides these into two distinct spheres of missionary endeavor. The controversy in the courts of the PCA over how to be obedient to the Great Commission during the 1990s was most heated in connection with foreign missions.

With the collapse of communism and fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe—dramatically signified by the removal of the Berlin Wall in late 1989—a long-closed door for missions opened anew into the former Soviet bloc. For the still-young PCA, this was an unprecedented opportunity for the expansion of the Church's missionary efforts. By the end of the 1990s, MTW dramatically expanded its missions efforts in places such as Ukraine and eastern Europe, while involving more of the PCA than ever before in short-term and summer missions excursions. However, the decade had opened with contested plans, heated debate, and close votes regarding MTW's cooperative agreements with other organizations, administrative costs, and a previously undisclosed transfer of funds from MTW to the Administrative Committee for the stated purpose of procuring and furnishing suitable office space for the denomination's administration.[29] Through the 1990s, presbyters complained that the administrative fees which MTW levied on its missionaries were were excessively burdensome, and commissioners to General Assembly made proposals for the fees' amelioration or avoidance altogether. In these discussions and debates, the idea of a local or presbytery-centered model of missionary oversight and support became increasingly desirable, even as MTW sought to rebuild trust as the PCA's official sending agency. In these efforts, MTW's administrative structures and communications more and more resembled those prevalent in parachurch missions agencies.

In the run-up to the 23rd General Assembly, MTW experienced a set-back in efforts to win support from skeptics within the denomination. Two veteran and well-respected missionaries to Spain—Rev. Jack Campbell and Rev. Manuel "Tito" Padilla, now with Reformed Ministries International and Equipping Leaders International, respectively—resigned from MTW, claiming that their agency team leaders directed them not to administer baptism to infants in public worship services in their mission work in Madrid.[30] Around the same time, MTW Coordinator Dr. Paul Kooistra wrote a brief article entitled "Missions with a Capital 'R'" distributed through MTW's *Network* newsletter.[31] The "R" stood for "Reformed." One of the underlying questions that would bubble up to the surface by the end of the decade concerned what being "Reformed" meant to the PCA as its missions programs grew and the denomination approached the year 2000.

The closing years of the 1990s were significant for the PCA as the denomination continued to grow numerically and mature into a settled identity and praxis. At the 26th General Assembly in 1998, the PCA elected its third Stated Clerk, and founding father Dr. L. Roy Taylor stepped into the role as Dr. Gilchrist's successor. Dr. Taylor brought an unprecedented degree of stability and administrative professionalism to the position, ably serving well into the 21st century. The final General Assembly of the decade was relatively uneventful, though in retrospect, certain actions taken by the 26th and 27th Assemblies portended important developments in the PCA's identity to-come in the opening decades of the new millennium.

The 26th General Assembly erected an "Advisory Committee" to examine various interpretations of the Bible's account of God's creation of the world "in/within the space of six days"[32] and to advise the Assembly as to how best to understand and evaluate the several views most common among PCA elders. The impetus for the creation of what became known as the "Creation Study Committee" was a hotly debated case decided by the SJC and—in a rare instance—voted upon by the Assembly. Over the course of two years, the Committee advised the denomination that while four views on creation—the so-called Calendar Day, Day-Age, Analogical Day, and Framework Hypothesis views—could be deemed acceptable (at the discretion of each individual presbytery), any view countenancing some theory of theistic evolution is to be ruled out of accord with the PCA's doctrinal Standards (M28GA, pp. 119–212). No presbytery since the adoption of the committee's report has approved a man for ordained office who holds to the theory of molecules-to-man or theistic evolution.

In a significant move, the 27th General Assembly clarified to the Church (and to the world) how to determine the official identity of the PCA. This decision addressed a decade-long contest over the denomination's identity. Since the late 1980s, a group known as

29. For brief, but illuminating, commentary on issues facing MTW and the 18th and 19th General Assemblies which opened the decade, see Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* pp. 133f, 158f, 189–191.

30. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* pp. 246f.

31. Paul Kooistra, "From the Coordinator: Missions with a Capital 'R,'" *Network* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 8.

32. WCF 4.1, WLC 15, WSC 9.

the Vision 2000 Caucus had rallied the interests of an ambitious and influential subset of the PCA.[33] In response to this caucus, a smaller group calling itself the Concerned Presbyterians (adopting the name of one of the four groups that organized the initial formation of the PCA) began activities to advocate for a more truly Reformed expression of Presbyterianism in the PCA. In 1999, the General Assembly formally settled the question of who—or what—defined the identity of the PCA in rejecting the Vision 2000 Caucus "Statement of Identity" circulated in 1995. The Assembly approved the following:

> The Presbyterian Church in America affirms that the only binding statement identifying this denomination is the Constitution of the Church as defined in the Preface of the *Book of Church Order,* Section III. All other statements are simply individual statements of opinions and are to carry no authority nor to be binding guides to practice within the churches, committees and courts of the church.[34]

Though affinity networks, secret caucuses, and well-meaning public groups will come and go with their particular platforms, agendas, and hopes for the PCA, the official statement of the Church's identity is contained in one place: the Church's published Constitution. The following year, the 28th General Assembly elected Dr. Morton H. Smith as Moderator, and the body received the *Report of the Creation Study Committee* with thanks and appreciation, shoring up one aspect of the Church's denominational identity while also leaving open to the presbyteries how best to enact the Committee's recommendations.[35]

By 2000, the PCA had grown to 1,206 congregations, 58 presbyteries, and 299,055 members.[36] By 2002, the PCA's college ministry Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) matured to the point of having its own Assembly-elected board apart from Mission to North America (MNA), which had stewarded this important outreach and discipleship ministry of the Church since its founding by Teaching Elder Mark Lowrey (1945–2023) on the campus of the University of Southern Mississippi in 1973. With such remarkable numerical growth since 1973 (nearly six times as many churches and approaching eight times as many members), the PCA certainly appeared to be maintaining obedience to the Great Commission as a Presbyterian and Reformed denomination with a commitment to evangelism, missions, the inerrancy of Scripture, and ecclesiastical order. At the same time, such rapid expansion invited predictable problems of maintaining both the theological integrity of a fast-growing church and the all-important humility of a truly Christian body.

Between 2000 and 2003, situations in local churches and circumstances in the surrounding culture tested the PCA's humble submission to Scripture and the body's unity of practice as a denomination in two important areas. These tests have had long-lasting ramifications on the subsequent life of the Church. In the first place, the denomination had to address an increasingly insistent push for the expansion of women's involvement in public worship and teaching in mixed groups of men and women. As the PCA reaffirmed its biblically reasoned commitment to male-only ordination, worship leadership, and adult instruction in the Church, it came under fire from those taking an egalitarian position on the issue. From this point forward, the most significant (but certainly not all) ministerial and congregational transfers out of the PCA made their moves after coming to settled egalitarian convictions. These departing brethren typically left for some form of independency or theologically egalitarian Presbyterianism (e.g, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church).

Around the same time, the General Assembly in the years straddling the turn of the century heard repeated calls to condemn the involvement of women in combat roles with the nation's armed forces. After the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks of 9/11 instigated the United States' global war on terror in 2001, the Church's position on the fundamentally moral issue of women's roles in war became more important. Deliberations on the issue paralleled the Church's fierce debate over women's roles in worship and teaching. One important result of

33. For fair-minded, but critical, descriptions of the Vision 2000 Caucus and its activities, see Jared Nelson, "Secret Caucuses & the PCA," Presbyterian Polity (blog), January 28, 2022, https://pcapolity.com/2022/01/28/secret-caucuses/; see also, Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: Silver Anniversary Edition* (Lawrenceville, GA: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999), p. 460; Paul Settle, *To God All Praise and Glory* (Atlanta, GA: 25th Anniversary Celebration Committee of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1998), p. 61; Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 237–45.

34. *M27GA,* p. 173; quoted in Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* p. 284.

35. Note that even when recognized and received by the General Assembly, study committee reports are merely *in thesi* deliverances communicating pious advice. They are not constitutionally binding. For more on this subject, see C. N. Willborn, "The 'Ministerial and Declarative' Powers of the Church and *In Thesi* Deliverances," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005): 94–101.

36. Note that total membership is inclusive of communicant members, non-communing covenant children, and ordained ministers, *M28GA*, p. 353.

these deliberations about women serving in the military was the PCA's official declaration of support for "the decision of any of its members to object to, as a matter of conscience, the conscription of women or the use of women as military combatants" (*M30GA,* p. 286).

In the second place, the PCA at the Assembly level began to turn its attention to an old issue that had become more pressing in light of the debate over creation views. At the very end of the PCA's second decade, formal considerations of confessional subscription began to take shape as organized speeches and published arguments from those describing themselves as advocates of either strict (full) or loose (system) subscription.[37] At the 20th General Assembly in 1992, Dr. Morton H. Smith (full) and Dr. William S. Barker (system) presented the opposing views in a cordial presentation-and-response format. These occasions were in response to ongoing conversation following inconclusive General Assembly deliberations in the years after J&R.

In 1995, Dr. David W. Hall brought together a diverse group of contributors for a book of essays entitled *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* to compile various views into one published volume.[38] In 2003, Dr. Smith published a thick pamphlet entitled *Holding Fast to the Faith: A Brief History of Subscription to Creeds & Confessions with Particular Reference to Presbyterian Churches*, including a chapter on "The Presbyterian Church and Subscription," indicating that the discussion had not passed into obscurity over the intervening years.[39] In this booklet, the first Stated Clerk of the PCA bemoaned the 30th General Assembly's adoption of a new position on confessional subscription in 2002, convened once more at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, AL (this was the last time an Assembly was held in a church-owned facility). At this Assembly, the PCA passed a constitutional amendment to incorporate "Good Faith Subscription" into *BCO* 21 containing the subscription vow which candidates to gospel ministry swear upon their ordination as Teaching Elders (*M30GA,* pp. 212f, 218–238).[40] Under these terms, accepted by the requisite 2/3 majority of the presbyteries and ratified by the 31st General Assembly the following year, the PCA formally approved the adoption of 'Good Faith Subscription.'

Under the PCA's terms of "Good Faith Subscription" proposed at the close of the Church's third decade and ratified at the opening of its fourth, a candidate standing for ordination in or transfer into a presbytery of the PCA may declare his differences (if he has any) with the doctrinal Standards of the Church and profess that he holds to all remaining material in "Good Faith." Thus, such a candidate adopts the system, though with some declared differences. It is then incumbent upon the examining body (i.e., the presbytery) to determine whether the candidate's stated differences are merely formal (i.e., scruples with how a doctrine is expressed), truly substantial (i.e., disagreements with a doctrine), or immaterial (i.e., no actual difference). If a presbytery determines that the candidate holds a substantial difference with a doctrine contained in the Standards of the Church, then the presbytery must judge whether or not the declared difference is "out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine" (*BCO* 21–4.g).

In one sense, the adoption of "Good Faith Subscription" meant that the PCA incorporated into its constitution the expectation that all candidates will hold to the entirety of the doctrinal Standards of the Church in "Good Faith." In another sense, the PCA has reduced its confessional standard to an undefined system of "fundamentals" determined on an *ad hoc* basis by the various regional presbyteries of the denomination. In terms of historical reflection, Dr. Smith astutely drew the connection between the early 20th century Fundamentalists' principled platform of reducing creedal Protestantism to five fundamentals to the PCA's formal adoption of "Good Faith Subscription" in the early 21st century. He then responded, "May God graciously guard us from the errors of our forefathers, which lowered the doctrinal standards of the Church, and ultimately resulted in schism in the Church."[41] With the ratification of "Good Faith Subscription" in 2003, the PCA formalized its fundamentalist identity inherited from the RPCES in 1983, bringing into question its founders' stated aspiration to be "intensely Presbyterian" published in 1973.

2004–2013: A Unified Church in Fractured Times

The PCA found itself at something of a crossroads going into its fourth decade. While it seemed that the difficult contests over confessional subscription, creation views, and denominational identity had found

37. For the relative merits and rationale for the use of these admittedly imprecise terms, see Morton H. Smith, *The Subscription Debate: Studies in Presbyterian Polity* (Greenville, SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, n.d.), esp. pp. 5–7, 12–15, 17f.

38. David W. Hall, ed., *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).

39. Morton H. Smith, *Holding Fast to the Faith: A Brief History of Subscription to Creeds & Confessions with Particular Reference to Presbyterian Churches* (Brevard, NC: presbyterianintegrity.org, 2003), pp. 54–68.

40. See Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* p. 302.

41. Smith, *Holding Fast to the Faith,* p. 68.

reasonable resolution, the times were rapidly changing. Would the Church be able to maintain a unified scriptural witness while also enjoying numerical growth? What would it take to be united in obedience to the Great Commission in the 21st century? Did the flexibility promised (and honesty promoted) by "Good Faith Subscription" represent progress toward a more transparently Reformed and confessional American Presbyterianism? Or did such innovations introduce even greater confusion into the Church's navigation of theological developments in American Christianity?

More intensely than at any point in the first 30 years of the PCA's history, the Church's first full decade in the new millennium tested the unity of what Sean Michael Lucas has judiciously termed "a conservative mainline Protestant body in a postdenominational world."[42] Online weblogs (hereafter referred to simply as "blogs") took on an increasingly important role in the dissemination of information and hashing out of theological controversy across the denomination and into broader evangelicalism. Established organizations such as the PCA's joint publishing house with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) named Great Commission Publications (GCP), Ligonier Ministries founded by Dr. R. C. Sproul, Sr. (1939–2017), the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals founded by Dr. James Montgomery Boice (1938–2000), Evangelism Explosion founded by Dr. D. James Kennedy (1930-2007),[43] and Third Millennium Ministries under the leadership of Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr. developed new means of reaching church leaders and church members alike. Around the world, more people were discovering biblical Christianity through traditional and non-traditional media as a result of PCA ministers' creative publishing efforts, sometimes undertaken in partnership with colleagues outside of the denomination.

Churches and individuals committed to Reformed theology (as well as adherents of every other theological creed, philosophical position, or hastily concocted opinion known to man) had new avenues for rapid distribution of their beliefs in the technology age. It was during this time that the so-called "Young, Restless, and Reformed" (YRR)[44] movement swept through American Christianity, cutting across denominational boundaries with input from and effect upon the PCA. Pastor and author Dr. Kevin DeYoung even maintained a blog with The Gospel Coalition entitled "DeYoung, Restless, and Reformed" which ran on the TGC platform from January 24, 2009[45] until a post announcing the creation of a new site (without the clever play on his name and the YRR movement) on March 7, 2022.[46] But the YRR movement was simply that: an organic, unorganized, and impossible-to-contain *movement* of those with a loosely construed affinity for certain Reformed theological distinctives. While parachurch organizations like TGC could provide a platform for expression and exploration, the church alone could provide an institutional vehicle for young believers to express their newfound Reformed convictions and commitment to Reformed worship.

Concurrent to the YRR phenomenon, interest in the ministries of the PCA grew alongside attraction to Reformed theology. For example, Collin Hansen reported on RUF in his 2008 book *Young, Restless, and Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists,* "I tagged along with RUF to learn about the Reformed approach to college ministry… RUF attracts a unique blend of students…. But if they stick with RUF, they're sure to get a heavy dose of Reformed theology, starting with the Westminster Confession."[47] From 2004 to 2013, the PCA's presence on American college campuses expanded from 89 campuses (*M33GA,* p. 636) to over 145 campuses in 39 states and 60 presbyteries (*M42GA,* p. 298). The college ministry of the PCA increasingly became a port-of-entry into the denomination, both for church members and future ministers. In the same period, Mission to North America (MNA) would report in 2014 that from 2004 through 2013, the organization placed an average of one new church planter into the field every week (*M42GA,* p. 235).

Before the end of the PCA's fourth decade, the Church grappled at the denominational level with long-lasting and significant theological debates surrounding matters as centrally important as the place of sanctification in the Christian life, ecclesiology, and missiology (i.e., what it looks like to be obedient to the Great Commission). DeYoung noted that the challenges related to these issues convinced him to care less about the future

42. Sean Michael Lucas, *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America,* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2015), p. 327.

43. It is worth noting that Dr. Sproul, Dr. Boice, and Dr. Kennedy (among other PCA ministers) were original signatories on the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* in the fall of 1978.

44. Collin Hansen coined this phrase in his September 22, 2006 article "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism is making a comeback—and shaking up the church," published in *Christianity Today*.

45. Kevin DeYoung, "Like a Hole in the Head," The Gospel Coalition (blog), January 24, 2009, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/like-hole-in-head/.

46. Kevin DeYoung, "A New (Old) Blog," The Gospel Coalition (blog), March 7, 2022, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/a-new-old-blog/.

47. Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), p. 64.

of the YRR "label" and instead to give more attention to "the committees, assemblies, and machinery of the church."[48] Between 2004 and 2013, study committees and intradenominational groups addressed each of these areas in different ways.

The 34th General Assembly held in Atlanta, GA in 2006 was notable for several reasons. In the first place, it elected Teaching Elder Dr. Dominic Aquila, a longtime denominational newsman, theological educator, and devoted PCA churchman as Moderator. In the second place, the Assembly appointed a committee to look into how best to make the business of the Assembly more efficient. This committee's work led to the creation of the Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC) and adjustments to reporting mechanisms for the denomination.[49] This Assembly also appointed a committee to study a nebulous theological trend known as the Federal Vision. Among other things, proponents of the Federal Vision promoted a view of Scripture and biblical theology derived from the New Perspective on Paul, particularly as mediated through the writings of Anglican bishop and scholar N. T. Wright. Popularized in large measure by Dr. Peter Leithart (a PCA minister in the Pacific Northwest Presbytery at the time) and Moscow, Idaho-based pastor and author Doug Wilson, the Federal Vision movement was difficult to define. Its relatively small group of vocal supporters covered a broad spectrum of adherents united by two things: opposition to moral laxity in American culture, and a commitment to administering communion to all baptized members of the church, regardless of age or mental competence.[50]

The 35th General Assembly held in Memphis, TN in 2007 received the *Report of the Ad Interim Study Committee on Federal Vision, New Perspective, and Auburn Avenue Theologies*, defending a biblical and historically Presbyterian understanding of justification (*M35GA*, pp. 68f, 509–567). During the floor deliberation over the Assembly's reception of the *Report*, no less a figure than Dr. R. C. Sproul, Sr. rose to speak against a procedural motion to postpone accepting the critical findings of the *Report* and to add Federal Vision proponents to the committee for their perspective, and thus arguing in favor of effectively ruling the Federal Vision to be theology out of bounds in relation to the PCA. Sproul's colleague, biographer, and fellow PCA Teaching Elder Stephen J. Nichols records the content of the speech:

> Yes, R. C. Sproul, Central Florida Presbytery, speaking against the motion. I think we're all aware of Luther's evaluation of the doctrine of justification where he says it was the article upon which the church stands or falls. Calvin added to that, "It's the hinge upon which everything turns." And in our day, we've had an unprecedented attack on the Reformation understanding of *Sola Fide*, particularly at the point of the denial of imputation, which, if you look at the declarations, you see is front and center of this report. And I believe, fathers and brethren, that the Kingdom of God is not at stake here, but I think the purity of the PCA is, and I don't understand—I just can't fathom—the hesitancy about this matter. Too much is at stake, this is the *gospel* we're talking about, gentlemen. And if the Westminster Confession does not already give us a faithful exposition of the gospel, at what point can we trust our Confession? And it seems to me to add these people to the committee, whom our previous committee, fulfilling their mandate to examine whether their views weren't conforming to our confession, is like asking in a courtroom to have the accused become members of the jury. It just doesn't make any sense to me.[51]

In addition to the PCA's *Report* rejecting the Federal Vision, sister denominations in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) published similar reports denouncing the aberrant theological movement. While controversy over Federal Vision and its various permutations and varieties continues to fester below the surface in Reformed churches around the country, the PCA and like-minded denominations maintain strong and public opposition to its errors.

At the same time, vocal opponents to the Federal Vision theology raised concerns about another soteriology heresy: Antinomianism. Finding modulated expression in certain streams of so-called 'Sonship Theology' based on curriculum developed by Dr. C. John Miller (1928–1996), Antinomianism severely attenuates—if not outright rejects—any lasting prescriptive use of the moral law of God for living the Christian life. This approach regards sanctification's 'dying to sin and living to righteousness'[52] as merely meditating upon the forensic results of justification. By rejecting the Reformed 'third

48. Kevin DeYoung, "Whither YRR?," The Gospel Coalition (blog), December 20, 2011, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/whither-yrr/.

49. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America,* pp. 324–330.

50. For a thorough presentation of opposing views on the Federal Vision, see E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004).

51. Transcribed in Stephen J. Nichols, *R. C. Sproul: A Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), pp. 241f.

52. This phrase is adapted from the answer found in Westminster Shorter Catechism 35.

use' of God's moral law, Antinomians neglect the pursuit of holy living in mystical union with the risen Christ.

From within the PCA, outspoken critics of Antinomianism and Sonship Theology at this time included some of the same men who took the lead in combatting the Federal Vision. Dr. Richard D. Phillips of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC not only openly critiqued the Federal Vision,[53] but also participated in the 2012 formation of the Gospel Reformation Network (GRN) with the express intent to promote the PCA's confessional understanding of the doctrines of progressive sanctification and perseverance for the church's ministry.[54] Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, III who served as Senior Minister of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, MS and President of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals during this time, championed the use of the Westminster Standards, biblical Reformed worship, and the importance of the doctrine of sanctification for the life of the church; he also participated in the formation of the GRN. By the end of the PCA's third decade, Dr. Duncan would become Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Reformed Theological Seminary. One founding minister of the denomination, Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., then-serving as President of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (GPTS), which began hosting a popular annual theology conference during his tenure, similarly opposed the Federal Vision[55] while promoting Reformed piety for all of life. At the 2002 GPTS Spring Theology Conference, Dr. Pipa declared, "Biblical Presbyterianism is not merely a system of thinking, but always has included an approach to living. There is a Reformed piety that springs directly from Reformed thinking."[56] Debates over other practical matters pertaining to the ecclesiology and missiology of the PCA resulted in a second study committee report worth noting in this period of the denomination's history.

Being obedient to the Great Commission means nothing less than heeding Christ's command to "make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). However, the nature of discipleship has proven to be a perennial matter of discussion in evangelical and Reformed churches. This was certainly the case in the PCA as it dealt with Insider Movements (IMs) in foreign mission fields. Representing a variety of approaches to ministry in cultures dominated by historically, socially, and culturally entrenched religions, IMs discourage the use of traditional Christian familial language to describe God as Father and Son. They also generally encourage Christian converts to retain their positions and socio-religious identities within the communities from which they are converting. Missiologist and Teaching Elder Dr. David B. Garner of Westminster Theological Seminary, who chaired the PCA's Study Committee on Insider Movements appointed following the 39th General Assembly in 2011 wrote, "It is fair to say that most IM advocates intend that these *remaining* and *retaining* insiders not simply carry on their cultural and religious practices unthinkingly, but do so with an eye toward recasting these religions" and evangelizing those still adhering to their former religious commitments.[57]

While charitably judging the intentions of IM proponents, the study committee over the course of three years nonetheless demonstrated that the ramifications of IMs on theological vocabulary, Bible translation, and the church's understanding of both conversion and discipleship are devastating. At the 42nd General Assembly in 2014, the PCA formally denied the compatibility of IMs with biblically faithful discipleship practices and theological expression (*M42GA,* pp. 21, 603), pushing into the fifth decade of the denomination's history with a significant statement on what it means to be obedient to the Great Commission. To be obedient to the Great Commission anywhere, the PCA must be consistent and resolute in remaining faithful to the Scriptures and true to the Reformed Faith everywhere.

2014–2023: *Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda*

Before considering the last decade of the PCA's ongoing history, it is necessary to recall important theological framing left as-yet unacknowledged in this study. The provenance of the PCA's motto—"Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, Obedient to the Great Commission"—is somewhat uncertain, with the most likely source of the sentiment expressed therein being the lead article of the March 1965 issue of *The*

53. See contributions in Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons*.

54. Jon D. Payne, "The Gospel Reformation Network: For the Continued Faithfulness of the PCA," Gospel Reformation Network (blog), March 9, 2017, https://gospelreformation.net/the-gospel-reformation-network-a-new-vision-for-continued-faithfulness-in-the-pca/.

55. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., "Auburn Avenue Theology: An Overview of Critics' Concerns," in *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons,* ed. Beisner, pp. 9–17.

56. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., "The Sabbath and Reformed Piety," in *Reformed Spirituality: Communing with our Glorious God,* ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. & J. Andrew Wortman (Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2003), p. 101.

57. David B. Garner, "High Stakes: Insider Movement Hermeneutics and the Gospel," *Themelios* 37, no. 2 (2012): 250. N.B. Garner serves as a member of the GRN Executive Council.

Concerned Presbyterian Bulletin edited by Ruling Elder Kenneth S. Keyes, Sr. (1896–1995).[58] In that lead article, the author (presumably Mr. Keyes) wrote the following about the aims of the men promoting renewal and reformation in the PCUS:

> This is the avowed purpose to endeavor to return the control of our Church once more to those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice, that unswerving loyalty to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms is vital and essential to the work of our Church, and that leading the unsaved to Christ and nurturing believers in the Faith should take precedence even over every other proper activity in the Church's program.[59]

This initial expression of the three values included in the PCA's motto captures an important truth that has been tested again and again in the denomination's half-century history. You cannot divide the three values and set them against one another. They are utterly interdependent.

For any church to be Reformed, it must continually be reforming according to God's Word. For the church to be obedient to the Great Commission entrusted to it by the Lord, it must maintain fidelity to the whole counsel of God "contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments" (WSC 2). Whatever else it may mean for the church to be 'Reformed,' it at the very least entails being true to the conviction that the Reformed Faith is the full-orbed biblical Christianity which Christ commanded to be published abroad among every tribe, and in every tongue, under heaven. It is simply incorrect to assert that a church or group can be more committed to biblical fidelity, Reformed theology, or practical missions without being more earnest about all three values at once.

With the last decade of the PCA's current history having just concluded, any conclusions drawn about trends and trajectories are at best provisional and will stand judgement by tomorrow's more clear-eyed church historians. Yet there is a story of hopeful renewal and reformation worth telling amid the debates and exogenous shocks of these most recent years. In a decade when evangelical Christians in North American have faced renewed hostility from the surrounding culture and society—what one observer has called "The Negative World"[60]—the PCA has maintained its witness as an evangelical and Reformed denomination committed to historic confessional and biblical Presbyterianism, but not without difficulty.

During this time, the PCA continued to play host to opposing sub-groups and affinity networks hoping to realize divergent goals for the conduct of ministry in and across the denomination. Through a series of important studies and decisions at the Assembly level, what emerged over time was a reaffirmation of the Church's biblical commitments and uniquely—if not 'intensely'—Presbyterian method of maintaining obedience to the Great Commission. In what follows, four of these studies and three Assembly decisions in particular merit attention.

In 2016, the CMC recommended to the 44th General Assembly that the body authorize the moderator to "form a study committee on women serving in the ministry of the church" (*M44GA,* p. 58). After pointed debate raised by Teaching Elder Dr. David Coffin as to the propriety of the CMC bringing such a recommendation before the body, the Assembly approved the formation of the study committee (*M44GA,* pp. 51–56). The next year, the committee reported back to the 45th General Assembly, putting forward a positive stance on women being actively involved in the life of the Church and formally employed in appropriate local church and denominational ministry staff positions. However, the committee and its report held fast to the biblical position that ordained service in the Church is reserved for qualified men. Though some other Presbyterian bodies ordain women as deaconesses, deacons, elders, and even pastors, the PCA would not join their ranks in this flagrant violation of the biblical requirements for ordination. By and large, the PCA would maintain the *status quo*.

The committee did put forward a series of recommendations, including two that are worth highlighting as examples of how this study committee sought to clarify certain existing practices in the PCA. In a stroke of creativity, the committee recommended "That presbyteries and the General Assembly consider an overture that would establish formally the right of sessions,

58. Among his many important contributions to the beginning, well-being, and growth of the PCA, Keyes procured and donated the land upon which the Ridge Haven Retreat Center sits in Brevard, North Carolina.

59. "Why We Are 'Concerned,'" *The Concerned Presbyterian Bulletin* (March 1965); see Wayne Sparkman, "September 6: 'Faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission,'" *This Day in Presbyterian History: Daily devotional readings in Scripture, the Westminster Standards, & Presbyterian history,* September 6, 2017, https://thisday.pcahistory.org/2017/09/September-6–4/; also, Sean Michael Lucas, *For a Continuing Church,* pp. 253f.

60. Aaron Renn, "The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism," *First Things* (February 2022): 25–31.

presbyteries, and the General Assembly to establish the position of commissioned church worker within the PCA for qualified and gifted unordained men and women" (*M45GA,* p. 642). This innovative verbiage prompted noted scholar and author Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn to introduce his fraternal address to this Assembly with the salutation, "I bring you greetings as a commissioned church worker of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church."[61] The committee also sagely exhorted sessions of local churches to "if possible, establish a diaconate of qualified ordained men" (*M45GA,* p. 639). The committee made this recommendation in response to concerns that some churches in the denomination were refusing to ordain deacons, opting instead to form and maintain teams made up of unordained men and women entrusted with the duties biblically reserved to ordained deacons.

The following year, the 46th General Assembly, skillfully moderated by Teaching Elder Dr. Irwyn L. Ince, Jr., heard from a study committee formed in 2016 to address the issues of racism and racial reconciliation. The committee's report in 2018 by no means initiated a new conversation in the PCA. Though the denomination was founded with an explicit invitation for all people—regardless of social, cultural, ethnic, or economic background—to participate fully in the worship and work of the church, the effectiveness of the PCA's intentional efforts at cross-cultural ministry have been lackluster, at best. Matters pertaining to what NAPARC addressed as "race relations"[62] had been long-lasting concerns. How to close gaps in communion and communication between groups, however, presented a puzzle of existential importance for a church committed to being obedient to the Great Commission. The committee proceeded in its work under guiding principles affirming the unity of mankind in one race of God's image-bearers and rejecting approaches dependent on anti-Christian philosophies such as theological liberalism, Marxism, Socialism, "intersectionality," or other views incorporating racial superiority as a constituent feature (*M46GA,* p. 599). An important ramification of the committee's work is the PCA's formal rejection of controversial critical theories derived from Marxism, including Critical Race Theory. Though Mainline Protestantism had capitulated to Leftist ideologies many decades ago, and shrill voices in the broader culture were calling on Christians to take social or political positions at odds with the Bible's clear presentation of mankind's shared dignity as being created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27), the PCA would disciple the nations in submission to "the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" (WCF 1.10).

That same year, the PCA had to address a controversy sparked by the inaugural Revoice Conference hosted by Memorial Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO. Claiming to promote an historically Christian sexual ethic while dignifying the struggles and peculiar giftings of professing Christians with homosexual erotic desires, the Revoice Conference enjoyed close partnership with and support from Memorial Presbyterian Church and its Senior Pastor Dr. Greg Johnson. The original stated mission of the conference was, "supporting, encouraging, and empowering gay, lesbian, same-sex attracted, and other LGBT Christians so they can flourish while observing the historic, Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality."[63] In addition to hosting the Revoice Conference, Memorial had regularly (since 2007) hosted theater groups, musicians, and visual artists through its exhibition and performance venue called "The Chapel."[64] Apart from Memorial's membership in the PCA, the partnership between the church and Revoice seemed to make perfect sense.

Controversy swirled around the conflict between Revoice's apparent refusal to identify same-sex sexual attraction as inherently sinful and the PCA's biblical and theological commitments in the area of hamartiology, or doctrine of sin. Summarizing the Bible's teaching about sins of the heart, the Westminster Larger Catechism includes among the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment "all unnatural lusts," "all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections," "light behavior, immodest apparel," "entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage," lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays," and "all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves and others," among other items (WLC 139). Whereas

61. Chad Van Dixhoorn, "PCA GA 2017 Wed PM Business," 45th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, Joseph S. Koury Convention Center (Greensboro, NC), filmed June 14, 2017, Video of business, 27:49–27:54, https://vimeo.com/843025798.

62. "NAPARC Statement on Race Relations (1977), from the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) Conference on Race Relations, March 24–25, 1977," PCA Historical Center, accessed December 28, 2023, https://pcahistory.org/topical/race/NAPARC1977.html, accessed December 28, 2023.

63. Mark Galli, "Revoice's Founder Answers the LGBT Conference's Critics: Orientation is not necessarily sexual, Nate Collins says," *Christianity Today* (blog), July 25, 2018, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/july-web-only/revoices-founder-answers-lgbt-conferences-critics.html.

64. Carolyn Curtis, "Goin' to The Chapel: A Sanctuary for the Arts," *byFaith* (blog), December 1, 2008, https://byfaithonline.com/goin-to-the-chapel-a-sanctuary-for-the-arts/; see also, Zachary Groff, "Trans Memorial in an Evangelical Chapel?," *reformation21* (blog), March 6, 2020, https://reformation21.org/blog/trans-memorial-in-an-evangelical-chapel/.

the Revoice Conference encouraged those struggling with same-sex sexual desire to channel their unique affections in service to the church as celibates—or, "Side B Gay Christians"—critics of the Conference and its agenda upheld the power of God's regenerating and sanctifying Spirit in the life of the Christian. The GRN, with its emphasis on the doctrine of sanctification for the ministry of the PCA, played a leading role in opposing the influence of the Revoice Conference and its leaders on the denomination.

In 2019, the 47th General Assembly—after much debate—approved a motion from Calvary Presbytery and presented by GRN Executive Council member and Ruling Elder Melton L. Duncan, Sr. to recognize the 2017 *Nashville Statement* relating to human sexuality and gender roles as a biblically faithful declaration (*M47GA,* p. 76). Subsequently, the Assembly passed a motion directing Moderator Howie Donahoe to appoint a study committee on human sexuality (*M47GA,* p. 77). This same Assembly created a study committee on domestic abuse and sexual assault (*M47GA,* p. 79) which would report its findings to the 49th General Assembly in 2022 (*M49GA*, pp. 949–1266). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the 48th General Assembly was postponed to 2021, at which point the Church received the report of the human sexuality study committee. This highly anticipated report reaffirmed the PCA's stance on biblical sexuality, settling any dispute over the inherent sinfulness of desire for that which is sinful. The report reads, "We affirm that impure thoughts and desires arising in us prior to and apart from a conscious act of the will are still sin. We reject the Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence whereby disordered desires that afflict us due to the Fall do not become sin without a consenting act of the will" (*M48GA,* p. 880).

After another two years of debate, the 50th General Assembly passed a proposed amendment to the *BCO* regarding officer qualifications. The new language makes clear and specific demands of each church officer and officer candidate in the PCA: "sexual purity in his descriptions of himself, and in his convictions, character, and conduct." In accord with procedures for amending the *BCO*, this additional language will go into effect in 2024 only after receiving the approval of at least 2/3 of the 88 regional presbyteries of the denomination and a final majority vote by the 51st General Assembly. However, with the evident popularity of the proposal, most observers (and presbyters) believe that the intense debates over human sexuality are largely settled in the past.

Amid the furor over the hot-button issues discussed above, the PCA accepted the retirement of Stated Clerk Dr. L. Roy Taylor at the 48th General Assembly in 2021 and approved the uncontested election of Dr. Bryan Chapell as his successor. Dr. Chapell previously served as President of Covenant Theological Seminary and is the author of several popular books on preaching, worship, and other matters pertaining to practical theology.

To round out the final section of this historical survey, some observations about revitalized vigor among the grassroots of the PCA over the last five years are appropriate.

In late 2021, email correspondence among a group of PCA elders (mostly Teaching Elders serving in various capacities across the denomination) calling itself the "National Partnership" came into public view. It became clear from these emails that members of a secret group operating within the denomination regarded themselves as stewards of the majority interest in the Church, an interest explicitly opposed to men aligned with the GRN, supportive of the *Nashville Statement,* or critical of theologically progressive influences on the Church.[65]

The controversy ignited by the Revoice Conference and aggravated by revelations of a secret partisan caucus operating across the denomination catalyzed an increase of conservative Ruling Elder participation in the courts of the Church and a renewed interest in the procedures and processes of the historic polity of the PCA. Signs of this renewal of interest in denominational happenings (frequently reported upon by Ruling Elder Brad Isbell of the Presbycast podcast) included mobilization efforts by new groups, such as the Ruling Elder Network and MORE in the PCA,[66] the latter of which began subsidizing the cost of Ruling Elder participation in General Assembly in 2018.[67] Another group of polity-minded presbyters (including the author of this historical survey) launched an electronic and print media publishing outlet for resources on biblical church government called *Presbyterian Polity* in 2021. Over the last five years, the grassroots have sprung up to new life. As mentioned above, three General Assembly actions are worth highlighting as evidence confirming the energetic recovery of the PCA's "grassroots Presbyterianism."

In 2021, the 48th General Assembly adopted a motion to revise the MTW Policy Manual such that the following statement would be included: "All MTW leaders in

65. Todd Pruitt, "Making Sausage with the National Partnership," *reformation21* (blog), November 1, 2021, https://www.reformation21.org/blog/making-sausage-with-the-national-partnership/.

66. MORE stands for 'More Orthodox Ruling Elders.'

67. For more information on this trend, see Brad Isbell, "Ruling Elder Renaissance," Presbyterian Polity (blog), June 20, 2023, https://pcapolity.com/2023/06/20/ruling-elder-renaissance/.

line authority over church planting or church development ministry shall be ordained elders" (*M48GA,* p. 58, 979). This had far-reaching consequences for the administration of MTW, which had employed unordained supervisors over ordained ministers in the mission field for some time, in similar fashion to many parachurch missions agencies around the world. Though opposed strenuously by the Executive Director of MTW Dr. Lloyd Kim—who argued that the precedent of the General Assembly forcing a change on a Permanent Committee's Policy Manual would be "potentially dangerous" to the effective operation of the ministry of MTW—the proposed change passed. In the course of the debate, both Teaching Elder Rick Gray speaking as the Chairman of the Committee of Commissioners which brought the substitute motion in place of the Permanent Committee's recommendation and Teaching Elder Dr. David Coffin appealed to the PCA's historic polity. Chairman Gray touted in his speech the importance of "elder rule" by Christ's divine appointment in the church and its ministry, and Dr. Coffin referred to *BCO* 14–1.7, which states that "The Assembly's committees are to serve and not to direct any Church judicatories. They are not to establish policy, but rather execute policy established by the General Assembly." These arguments not only comported with the PCA's "grassroots Presbyterianism," but also won the day, demonstrating that the Permanent Committees are answerable to the General Assembly comprised of the duly ordained and commissioned elders of the Church.[68]

In 2022, the 49th General Assembly revisited an issue that had last come before the body three years earlier at the 47th General Assembly: leaving the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Whereas a motion to leave the NAE failed at the 47th Assembly by a vote of 590–845 (*M47GA,* p. 21), a nearly identical motion passed the 49th Assembly by a vote of 1059–681 (*M49GA,* p. 25).[69] At both Assemblies, Teaching Elder Carl D. Robbins presented the Committee of Commissioners' recommendation that the PCA withdraw from the NAE. He made substantially the same presentation at each Assembly. What changed between 2019 and 2022 to put wind in the sails of the grassroots movement to cast away from the NAE? While both the advancing political progressivism and offensive theological broadness of the NAE surely strengthened the case that the PCA did not "fit" into the NAE, the greatest contributor to the change in result was the increased enrollment of commissioners who found Pastor Robbins' arguments convincing. The decision to withdraw from the NAE quite literally paid off for the PCA as an expensive and time-consuming partnership of unequally yoked organizations – one a visible expression of the church, and one a parachurch political advocacy group – came to an end. The PCA continues to be actively involved in NAPARC, and the denomination is currently exploring participation in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

In the summer of 2023, the 50th General Assembly amended the *Rules of Assembly Operation (RAO)* to include the following requirement for minutes presented by Permanent Committees and Agencies: "A recording of information sufficient to demonstrate the Committee's or Board's implementation of instructions received from General Assembly and of material policies and material policy changes adopted by the Committee or Board in that year" (*RAO* 4–21.d.4). This change added an important mechanism for the strengthening of the General Assembly's review and control of the activities of the denomination's Permanent Committees and Boards. Generally speaking, review and control of the Permanent Committees and Agencies is enacted through the annually appointed Committees of Commissioners, a hallmark feature of the historic polity of the PCA from the very beginning of the denomination. If the PCA yet aspires to an "intensely Presbyterian" form of church government, it is one that continues to bear a uniquely "grassroots" quality.

Conclusion

Going into the sixth decade of the PCA's existence, the scale of the PCA's mission at home and abroad has expanded dramatically. At the 50th General Assembly, the Stated Clerk reported a total of 390,319 members in 1,627 churches spread across 88 presbyteries. This represents more than a nine-fold increase in membership over the span of a half century. To God alone be the glory! Insofar as the numerical increase or faithfulness enjoyed by the PCA—or any church, for that matter—is true and lasting, "it is of God" (Acts 5:39); and if it is of God, it cannot be overthrown. God has delivered such

68. To review footage of the deliberations and votes, see "PCA 2021 Thu Afternoon Business #4," 48th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, America's Convention Center Complex (St. Louis, MO), filmed July 1, 2021, Video of business, 1:49:41–3:07:29, https://vimeo.com/840644561.

69. N.B. There were two votes taken at the 49th Assembly related to this action. The first vote (1030–699) was to make the motion to withdraw from the NAE—technically a substitute motion—the main motion. The second vote (1059–681) was to pass the motion to withdraw from the NAE. Though effectively redundant, the second vote is the official tally for the withdrawal of the PCA from the NAE.

blessings of fruitfulness through the efforts and sacrifices of many men, too few of whom received mention above. "And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets" (Heb. 11:32).

As of the end of 2023, the doctrinal Standards of the PCA remain the same as they were when initially adopted fifty years earlier. So too does the founding generation's zeal for evangelism and missions, with MTW setting a goal of mobilizing 1% of the overall membership of the PCA into foreign missions, and with MNA casting a vision of growing the denomination to 3,000 churches in the next 10 years. At the same time, there is an urgent need to equip young men to backfill the vacancies that are already beginning to emerge across the Church with the retirement and promotion (into glory) of the aging Baby Boomer generation. The work of faithful theological seminaries and training programs is critical for addressing the Church's need in this area, even as the power resides in God to keep seminaries faithful and to call men into service. May God hear His people as they pray according to Christ's inaugural discipleship directive to "beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:38).

With prayer comes wonder. It is appropriate to marvel with a sense of wonder at God's gracious condescension to hear His people when they pray. In quite another sense, it is appropriate to wonder about what challenges will confront the rising generation of preachers, pastors, and churchmen who will serve the PCA in the years and decades ahead. One urgent issue that may soon come up in the courts of the PCA is how best to address situations and incidents of various kinds of abuse. While some in the Church believe that the solution lies in contracting with third party investigators and recognized experts in addressing and preventing abuse (*M49GA,* p. 951), the Presbyterian form of government provides a mechanism for outside investigation and accountability in the form of graded courts exercising review and control (*BCO* 11–4).

Another important matter that may occupy the attention of presbyters in years ahead is one that the Church has left unresolved until now: the unmet goal of adopting an authoritative standard or set of guidelines for the PCA's public worship. This issue strikes at the very heart of the PCA's shared identity; more than any other aspect of a church's ministry, a church's worship constitutes its corporate witness and public testimony. At the birth of the PCA, the founding fathers of the denomination aspired to be "intensely Presbyterian," and this aspiration extended to their worship. However, they failed to adopt a constitutionally binding Directory for Worship, becoming the first Presbyterian denomination of any historical significance not to have a comprehensive and authoritative standard for the conduct of its worship. For this reason alone (though others exist), the PCA could not rightly be considered a "Thoroughly Reformed" Presbyterian body at any point of its history. However, no church can be said to be such.

Even in the halcyon days of Calvin's Geneva in the 1540s, the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s, the Great Awakening of the 1740s, the period of westward expansion and great polity debates of the mid 19th century, or decades of Mainline Protestant cultural leadership in the mid 20th century, there has never been what might be called a "Thoroughly Reformed" denomination. There have ever only been imperfect Churches that were more-or-less truly Reformed as they were being reformed according to the Word of God. However, when the PCA emerged as the Continuing Presbyterian Church in the American South, the men were "Aspirationally Reformed" in a way that the Continuing Church must not forsake today. The aspirations of the PCA's founding fathers must not give way to a vain complacency among their heirs.

What has been done—or left undone—in the PCA over the last 50 years is not the measure of how Reformed the Church can or should be. The rising generation of elders either new to or born in the PCA must study the Word of God and examine the Church's ministry over and against the standard found therein. Such study should inspire a deeper Reformed and Presbyterian conception of what it means to be faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Reformed Faith, and obedient to the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ who alone reigns supreme as Head of the Church and only King in Zion. May God bless the PCA!▪

A Plea for Confessional Integrity in the PCA regarding the Second and Fourth Commandments

By Geoff Gleason

Introduction

In 2023, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) celebrates its 50th anniversary. There is much to be thankful for in terms of God's provision and work in and through this relatively young denomination. Certainly, the Lord has blessed this small branch of the larger vine that is Christ's Kingdom with growth. The PCA's adopted slogan that summarizes the overall "culture" of the denomination is "Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, and Obedient to the Great Commission." It has been much more than a cheap tag-line. There has been a sincere and genuine pursuit of these things throughout the PCA's history. Specifically in regards to being true to the Reformed faith, the PCA has built its theology on the voices from the past by requiring subscription of its ecclesiastical officers to the Westminster Standards: the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. In that sense, the PCA has been confessional as a denomination.

Confessional denominations are marked by taking their governing theological positions from a system of doctrine contained in documents and doctrinal declarations adopted as binding by the denomination as a whole. In the PCA's case, the aforementioned Westminster Standards serve that end. Within the denomination, these documents are subordinate to Scripture, and yet are seen as a faithful and reliable summary of God's Word, and therefore must be subscribed. Notably, within the PCA's confessionalism there is allowance for limited disagreement with these Standards by its officers. In the language of the PCA's ecclesiology, these disagreements are called "stated differences." An officer who has them is to declare them in writing for consideration and evaluation by the Session or Presbytery which has jurisdiction over him. The complicated part of this form of subscription has been deciding just how far those differences can go.

The PCA's form of subscription is commonly known as Good Faith Subscription and is defined as follows in its Book of Church Order (BCO):

> *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms*, it is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf. BCO 21–5, Q.2; 24–6, Q.2).[1]

There are several implications that are derived from this statement. The first, and most obvious, is that officers in the PCA are allowed to differ from the Westminster Standards. As mentioned above, these differences are to be made known to his presbytery (or his Session in the case of ruling elders and deacons). The second is the impetus for this article, namely that there are limits to the extent of the differences. Differences are to be evaluated by church courts for the purpose of determining whether such a difference undermines the confessional integrity of the Standards as a whole. Stated another way, church courts are instructed to discern if a specific view causes the man who holds it to adopt a position that is internally inconsistent with essential

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1. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2021), 21–4.e.

convictions of the Standards making his relationship to them irreconcilably inconsistent.

To that end, the court is to deliberate as to the effect this declared difference has on the man's ability to align himself with the system as a whole. If the court is convinced "the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion,"[2] it may grant the exception. However, acknowledged in this concession in the BCO is a limit. There are differences that are either hostile to the system or strike at the vitals of religion. Just by way of the briefest summary, those differences that strike at the vitals of religion deny the essence of the gospel. These are not the items under discussion in this paper. Instead, I intend to examine a couple of examples of what it means to be hostile to the system of doctrine. There are two specific and commonly stated differences within the PCA dealing with the second and fourth commandments. It is my intention to demonstrate that these differences create an irreparable or irresolvable conflict between the man who holds the difference(s) and the Standards, thereby making them hostile to the system of doctrine.

The common stated difference regarding the second commandment deals with the use of images of Jesus. Most often men stating this difference argue for a limited use of these images for the sake of instruction, specifically of children. Regarding the fourth commandment, stated differences often revolve around the limits of recreation, but more and more also involve limited commerce on the Lord's Day such as frequenting restaurants, consuming professional sports and other forms of entertainment, and so on. Rather than simply surrendering to popular demand, church courts within the PCA should recognize allowing such stated differences makes the man who holds them hostile to the Confession at its most vital parts, thereby irreparably damaging his confessional integrity.

To be clear, the aim of this study is positive in nature, and limited in scope. Its goal is to consider only these two commonly held differences to aid in the PCA's commitment to be true to the Reformed faith. To that end, it asks if it is possible to state differences with the second and fourth commandments, in the way that is commonly done in the PCA, without a central part of the Standards being denied. Does the stated difference force the PCA to allow a doctrine fundamentally opposed to the central parts of the Standards to live side by side? Are these views hostile to the system of doctrine and compromise the PCA's confessional integrity? Some will seek to dismiss such a study as a push for strict subscription and making the PCA into something it is not. However, the question about form of subscription is not "on the table." Rather it is an examination as to whether the PCA is acting consistently within its chosen form of subscription defined in BCO 21–4.e. To that end, this article will spend some time looking at the Standards themselves, to see if the doctrinal integrity of the PCA is harmed by allowing these previously defined differences to the second and fourth commandments.

The language of the Standards is earnest, grave, and urgent as it describes God's Ten Commandments. These are seen as the ethical framework within which the Christian is called to glorify God and enjoy Him. This urgency is especially clear in the Larger Catechism. Therefore the question of confessional integrity at these points should not be casually dismissed. It is the goal of this article to explain what is in view when the Larger Catechism refers to the breaking of the second and fourth commandments, and outline how the PCA's current response to these stated differences undermines the confessional integrity it is called to guard in BCO 21–4.e. And as such, it is my plea that, responding to the weighty language of the Larger Catechism, the PCA earnestly reconsider its current practice in allowing such stated differences.

Theologically, Dr. Brian Cosby has written on issues of the second commandment,[3] as have Ron DiGiacombo and Dr. Ron Gleason, the latter two focusing on the second commandment and portrayals of Christ in films.[4] Grant Van Leuven has written on the significance of the fourth commandment, and I have added my own voice to the issue.[5] These men have argued against what is perceived as abuses of these commandments in the church. In response, men such as Derek Radney have argued that differences on these issues should be considered as less significant, as they are an expression

2. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 21–4.f.

3. Brian Cosby, "The Second Commandment, Westminster and Images of Jesus," March 31, 2015, https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/the-second-commandment-westminster-and-images-of-jesus (accessed April 24, 2023).

4. Ron Digiacomo, "The Second Commandment And Films Depicting Jesus," *Philosophical Theology*, August 8, 2020, https://philosophical-theology.com/2020/08/08/the-second-commandment-and-films-depicting-jesus/ (accessed April 24, 2023); Dr. Ron Gleason, "The Second Commandment and the Modern Christian," March 13, 2014, https://theaquilareport.com/the-second-commandment-and-the-modern-christian/ (accessed April 24, 2023).

5. Geoff Gleason, "The Sabbath. Now What? | theologyinshorts," June 1, 2015, http://theologyinshorts.com/the-sabbath-now-what/ (accessed April 24, 2023); Grant Van Leuven, "The Ten Commandments: The Fourth," November 25, 2019, https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/the-ten-commandments-the-fourth (accessed April 24, 2023).

of mission and philosophy of ministry.[6] These articles are written at a more popular level. *The Confessional Presbyterian* has dealt with issues regarding these commandments in a more academic format in past issues, utilizing the writing gifts of David Van Drunen, Chris Coldwell, and Lane Keister.[7] However, though related, this article has a different focus and objective.

I intend to treat the theological implications of granting these common stated differences to these commandments in light of the PCA's ecclesiological commitments laid out in the BCO: that presbyteries should discern whether disregard of issues surrounding the second and fourth commandments should be tolerated in a denomination that is confessional in its own, self-conscious description as 'true to the Reformed faith.' To do so, this article will begin by grounding the position adopted in the Westminster Standards within the context of the history of Reformed confessions more broadly speaking. With that foundational context laid, it will examine the language of the Standards and draw conclusions as to the current direction of the PCA on these issues, specifically asking if it undermines the confessional integrity of PCA officers and even the denomination as a whole.

Before delving into the specifics of each commandment, I will specify what I believe must be preserved to maintain the integrity of the Westminster Standards as these commandments are considered. Foundational to the theology of the Westminster Standards is the notion of God's glory and His worthiness for worship. The Shorter Catechism begins by asking, "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer directs man to worship: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."[8] Having established man's chief end, an examination of finer points of doctrine found in the rest of the Standards is no longer necessary. The chief and primary objective of the Standards is to direct man to worship and delight himself in the Lord. That objective goal gives sufficient clarity to guide the inquiry as to whether differences with the second and fourth commandment compromise the holder's ability to adhere to the Standards as a whole. Should the Standards indicate that the differences held attack that chief end, that would be sufficient proof to show these things are hostile to the system of doctrine.

The Second Commandment

Before examining the Reformed expression about images of Jesus it would be helpful to give a very brief overview of this doctrinal controversy through church history. That is because controversy regarding the second commandment is not unique to the PCA, nor is it simply a contemporary debate. In fact, the seventh ecumenical council gathered in Nicaea in 787 to resolve questions surrounding iconography and the making of images of Christ, questions that had been raised in earnest beginning in 726. Though it is often assumed that theological controversy begins in the Church, that is not the case with the disagreements surrounding the second commandment.

A Brief Historical Overview of Controversy Surrounding the Second Commandment

Controversy surrounding what we currently describe as iconoclasm was brought to the forefront through the political policies of emperor Leo III. Though there was some discussion on whether images of Christ are acceptable prior to his reign,[9] he was responsible for making iconography a burning issue of his day.

Also known as the Issaurian, Leo was emperor of the Byzantine empire from 717 to 740 A.D. While his motivations for opposing images of Christ are not entirely clear, he began his assault on images in 726. It appears that his iconoclastic agenda was driven by his belief that "images depicting divine or saintly persons are equivalent to idols and should be banned."[10] The response of his theological opponents was swift, led by John of Damascus.

John was born around 675, and he is estimated to have died prior to 750. John became a monk around 706, taking up his residence near Jerusalem. There,

6. Derek Radney, "Framing Doctrinal Disagreements - Part 2," *Semper Ref*, June 3, 2022, https://www.semperref.org/articles/framing-doctrinal-disagreements-part-2 (accessed April 24, 2023).

7. David VanDrunen, "Pictures of Jesus and the Sovereignty of Divine Revelation," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 5 (2009): 214–227. Chris Coldwell, "In Brief: The Intent of Westminster Larger Catechism 109 Regarding Pictures of Christ's Humanity," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 5 (2009): 227–228; 323. Lane Keister, "The Sabbath Day and Recreations on the Sabbath," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, no. 5 (2009): 232–238; 323.

8. "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," in *The Confession and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2005), Q. 1, 355.

9. George Florovsky, "Origen, Eusibius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *Church History* 19, no. 2 (June 1950): 77–96. Norman H. Baynes, "The Icons before Iconoclasm," *The Harvard Theological Review* 44, no. 2 (April 1951): 93–106. Ann Eljenholm Nichols, "Books-for-Laymen: The Demise of a Commonplace," *Church History* 56, no. 4 (1987): 457–473.

10. Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, "Agnellus of Ravenna and Iconoclasm: Theology and Politics in a Ninth-Century Historical Text," *Speculum* 71, no. 3 (July 1996): 559–560.

living outside Leo's jurisdiction, he responded to his iconoclastic policy. He did so by writing three treatises, now published in one volume called *Three Treatises on Divine Images*. His most forceful arguments in these treatises are derived from his understanding of the hypostatic union, or the relationship between the two natures of Christ. John agrees that the divine nature of God cannot be represented, but when the divine takes on human flesh, images of that visible nature become acceptable and even helpful. Leo's son, Constantine V, challenged these views.

Constantine V was born in the fall of 718. He became the sole ruler of Byzantium in 740 when his father died. Due to urgent political pressures within his own family, it was not until the year 752 that he took up his father's iconoclastic policy and that from a more theological angle.[11] Like John of Damascus, Constantine's appeal is Christological in nature, dealing with the hypostatic union of Christ. However, his conclusion is far from the same.

Constantine refuted the lawfulness of representing Christ in light of the union of the human and divine natures in the one Person. He argued that "the depiction of the prosopon (or hypostasis) which came into existence as the result of the union of the two natures cannot be accomplished, since of necessity this would involve the circumscription of the immaterial, divine nature."[12] In other words, though Christ is presented as truly man in Scripture, it does not present Him as merely a man. Christ is truly God and truly man and these two natures, though entirely distinct cannot be separated from each other. Constantine reaches back to the statements of the fourth ecumenical Council of Chalcedon of 451 which formally declared the human and divine natures of Christ to exist without confusion or separation. The iconoclasts sought further to solidify their theological advantage through formal ecclesiastical declaration. To that end, a council was called by Constantine in 754, the Council of Hieriea.

Hieriea was not considered an ecumenical council due to the absence of representatives from Rome and the Eastern Patriarchs. However, "it did establish the norm of Byzantine orthodoxy for much of the eighth century."[13] The 338 bishops that made up the council affirmed the theology of Constantine and established iconoclasm as the official doctrine of the Eastern Church. However, the Council of Hiereia's gains were only temporary and did not end the controversy around images of Jesus.

Following several decades of political intrigue after Constantine V's death, Constantine VI, his grandson, called Nicaea II, today counted as the seventh official ecumenical council. Nicaea II began meeting on September 24, 787 under the influence of Constantine VI's mother and guardian Irene, who was a staunch promoter of the use of images. The ultimate result was the renunciation of the acts of the Council of Hiereia and reinstitution of the use of images in the Church. After approximately sixty years of additional controversy, iconography was adopted as the settled position of the Eastern Church.

The Theology of Continental Confessions

However settled the matter was in the East, the controversy around images of Christ was not resolved in the Western church. Public debate resurfaced during the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Reformers pushed back against the use of images and recorded their views in confessional statements which were adopted as the official doctrinal position of several denominations. Two such confessions are the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession.[14] These confessions serve as case studies for the theological foundation that undergird the conclusions later drawn by the Westminster Assembly and summarized in the Westminster Standards.

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism is preeminent among Reformed catechisms of the sixteenth century. It was, and continues to be, a bastion of Reformed theology. Written primarily by Zacharius Ursinus, and published in 1563, this catechism quickly came to be viewed as the best summation of the teachings of Reformed Christianity. Divided into 52 Lord's Days to aid instruction in the Church over a calendar year, Lord's Day 35, and specifically questions 96–98, are significant in explaining Heidelberg's view of the second commandment.

In Q. 96 the Catechism asks its initial question about the second commandment: "What does God require in

11. Stephen Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm During the Reign of Constantine V* (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1977), pp. 9–24.

12. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 41.

13. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm*, p. 53.

14. In the interest of space constraints, it is not possible here to expand this article's investigation into a more comprehensive survey of Protestant creeds and confessions on the worship of God. However, readers interested in those documents which are particularly influential on the Westminster Standards may wish to refer as well to the Irish Articles of 1615, paragraphs 53 to 55, 'On the Service of God.'

the second commandment?" The answer states, "That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word."[15] In response it could be asked whether Ursinus opposes all images, including those of the human nature of Christ. Further clarity is gained by referring to a compilation of his own comments on the catechism he authored.

Ursinus's *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* is a record of his annual lectures through the entirety of the Heidelberg Catechism which he commenced shortly after its publication in 1563.[16] These writings clarify his own thinking on issues regarding the commandments. Kyle Dieleman in his doctrinal dissertation on the controversy on the fourth commandment in the Dutch Reformation asserts about this work, "Ursinus's *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* is his most elaborate explanation of the Sabbath commandment and, as a result, is extremely important for understanding Ursinus's theological understanding of the Sabbath."[17] As explained by Dieleman, the commentary allows a more thorough understanding of Ursinus's views of the fourth commandment, and if true of the fourth, it is certainly also true of the second.

In this commentary, Ursinus addresses the making of images of Christ in His human nature by describing the view of his critics. He states they taught that Christ "formerly manifested himself in bodily forms"[18] which justified the making of His image. According to his critics, though the divine may not be portrayed, the material form God takes on in the incarnation may be depicted. This line of reasoning closely follows the theology of the Eastern Church as codified for them at Nicaea II. Ursinus answers this objection by drawing a distinction between God and man: "God may manifest himself in any way in which he may please to do so; but it is not lawful for any creature to represent God by any sign which he himself has not commanded."[19] God's prerogative in manifesting himself does not entitle the creature to depict Him according to the imagination of an artist. To depict God requires divine command. That issue comes more clearly under attack when the Heidelberg discusses "books of the laity". These books of the laity were widely used within the Roman Church during the time of the Reformation and before. Using visible stained glass, frescoes, sculpture, and other mediums, artists represented God and His works so that the illiterate might be made familiar with the biblical accounts.

Ursinus's commentary on Q. 98 moves the discussion beyond representations of the divine nature only by treating the books of the laity which included depictions of Jesus of Nazareth, who is truly man. Question 98 asks, "But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?" This question is of significance especially in considering the argument for the use of images of Christ for didactic or pedagogical uses. The answer from the Heidelberg Catechism states, "No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of his word."[20] Specifically regarding the use of images for instructional purposes, man is not free to invent ways to teach about Christ, His humanity, or salvation. The Heidelberg Catechism identifies the means for such instruction to be preaching. As Ursinus comments on this question, he demonstrates his opposition to the use of images both in worship or simply in making them by saying, "Images are to be rooted out of the hearts of men by the preaching of the gospel. Therefore they are also to be cast out of our churches: for the doctrine revealed to us from heaven does not merely command us not to worship and adore them, but likewise not to make, or have them."[21] For Ursinus it is not simply a case of images used in worship, but whether images of Christ are acceptable at all. His opposition is clear. In line with Ursinus's opposition to the use of images of either nature of Christ, Heinrich Bullinger is another leading Reformed voice. His views can be considered from the Second Helvetic Confession.

Heinrich Bullinger

The Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger was the successor to Huldrych Zwingli in Zurich and produced the Second Helvetic Confession. It was published in 1566, though it was originally written for his personal use in 1561. The fourth chapter of the Second Helvetic is

15. Zacharias Ursinus, "Heidelberg Catechism," *Free Reformed Churches of North America*, n.d., https://frcna.org/heidelberg-catechism (accessed August 14, 2023).

16. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans by. G. W. Williard (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1852), p. xx.

17. Kyle James Dieleman, "The Battle for the Sabbath in the Dutch Reformation: Devotion or Desecration" (Ph.D., United States—Iowa: The University of Iowa, 2017), pp. 116–117, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1929620500/abstract/D5E197700D1644B7PQ/1 (accessed February 3, 2020).

18. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 527.

19. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, pp. 527–528.

20. Ursinus, "Heidelberg Catechism", Q. 98

21. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 534.

entitled "Of Idols; or of Images of God, of Christ, and of Saints." In the second paragraph of this chapter, Bullinger objects to the idea that Christ can be pictured and grounds his opposition in the Incarnation. He states, "We do therefore reject not only the idols of the Gentiles, but also the images of Christians. For although Christ took upon Him man's nature, yet He did not therefore take it that He might set forth a pattern for carvers and painters."[22] In other words, the Incarnation does not justify representing Christ in picture or sculpture. According to Bullinger, images of Christ create an inconsistency in Scripture. Speaking of Christ, he says: "He denied that He came 'to destroy the law, or the prophets' (Matt. 5:17), but images are forbidden in the law and the prophets (Deut. 4:15; Isa. 44:9)."[23] The conclusion is that it is incompatible with Scripture to argue that Christ would approve of His own representation because it is not lawful to make images of God and Christ is God.

Bullinger also makes the observation that Christ "denied that His bodily presence would profit the Church, but promised that He would by his Spirit be present with us forever (John 16:7; 2 Cor. 5:5)."[24] In Bullinger's view, it is the Holy Spirit who profits the Christian, not a picture or sculpture of Christ. In fact, Jesus was taken out of the world into heaven, meaning there would be no profit from His picture. According to Bullinger, images of Christ have no value to the Church, including when they are used as part of the books of the laity.

Bullinger, like Ursinus, objects to the use of the books of the laity on the basis of God's direction: "But that men might be instructed in religion, and put in mind of heavenly things and of their own salvation, the Lord commanded to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15) – not to paint and instruct the laity by pictures; He also instituted sacraments, but He nowhere appointed images."[25] The knowledge of God comes by preaching, and that remains true for all ages. Since there is no biblical command for the use of images, the books of the laity are a human invention and oppose God's direction, which by consequence assert that man is wiser than God.

These confessions inform the thinking of the authors of the Westminster Standards and were the theological standard for the Reformed Churches. It remains then to consider the Westminsterian view of issues surrounding the second commandment.

The Theology of the Westminster Standards

Ultimately, the PCA's confessional distinctives are not found in Constantinople, Heidelberg, or Zurich. They may provide context and history, but the PCA's confessional system of doctrine is summarized in the Westminster Standards. As the Assembly met beginning on July 1, 1643 its task included refining and correcting the theology of the Church of England. The summary of the divines' theological deliberations and doctrinal convictions are contained most popularly in the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Of the documents produced by the Assembly, the Westminster Larger Catechism deals most thoroughly with the second commandment. Questions 107–110 specifically tackle the second commandment. Question 108 asks, "What are the duties required in the second commandment?" As part of its answer, the Larger Catechism states that each Christian is to be engaged in, "removing it (false worship), and all monuments of idolatry."[26] It is the phrase "monuments of idolatry" that has special bearing in considering Westminster's understanding of images of God.

In his commentary on the Larger Catechism, Johannes Vos defines monuments of idolatry as "the altars, images, temples, etc., of false religions."[27] Vos notes that Christians are to eliminate false worship, which includes representations of God in all the places they are able to do so. In doing so, Q. 108 helps Christians deal with existing violations of the second commandment, including visible representations of God. However, the Catechism in the next question also gives guidance by providing a theological rationale behind whether visible representations of God should be created or used going forward.

In Q. 109, the Larger Catechism looks at the prohibitions flowing from the second commandment, and asks, "What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?" One part of its answer deals with giving the True God false worship not commanded in His Word. As part of this answer, the Catechism singles out "the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any

22. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 140.
23. Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, p. 140.
24. Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, p. 140.
25. Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, p. 140.
26. "The Westminster Larger Catechism," in *The Confession and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2005), Q. 108, pp. 246–247.
27. Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: a Commentary* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2002), p. 285.

creature whatsoever; all worshiping of it, or God in it or by it;"[28] The Larger Catechism is unmistakably clear. Making an image of any Person of the Trinity, in any medium, is denied as much as worshipping God in or by them. This statement has a special clarifying consequence regarding representations of Jesus.

The human nature of the second Person of the Trinity still belongs to one of the Persons of the Trinity, and therefore is not to be depicted through the artistic imagination and craft of men. Vos states the following about making images of Jesus: "According to the Larger Catechism, this is certainly wrong, for the catechism interprets the second commandment as forbidding the making of any representation of any of the three Persons of the Trinity, which would certainly include Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, God the Son."[29] The Larger Catechism decries representations of Jesus and calls them "monuments of idolatry." That will be significant in considering the confessional impact of differences with the second commandment.

Confessional Integrity

With the theology established and clearly stated, it remains to examine what happens when a denomination allows men to differ with this part of the system of doctrine contained in the Standards. Larger Catechism Q. 110 examines the reasons given in the second commandment. Specifically considering the language of the commandment that refers to "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,"[30] the Larger Catechism speaks of God's "revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him."[31] The issue, then, is whether holding these positions, which the Larger Catechism defines as spiritual whoredom, and giving places of leadership to "such as hate" the Lord, is hostile to the system of doctrine. In other words, can a man hold this difference or would it cause the integrity of the Standards to crumble on itself with regard to man's obligation to glorify God and enjoy Him? The question is not whether individuals can see how someone could hold such a view and yet be a Christian. The question relates to the system of doctrine presented in the Standards. It is the responsibility of a church court to decide if a man's view is hostile to that system. It stretches credulity to suggest that a man can rightly exercise man's chief end of glorifying God according to the Standards, while simultaneously holding positions which those same Standards consider to be idolatrous, and evidences of 'spiritual whoredom.' The system of doctrine states that those who hold their position (i.e., in favor of permitting images of Christ) are counted as those who hate God. And yet such a co-existence is being granted in the PCA.

For example, in the PCA's 50th General Assembly report of the Theological Examinations Committee there were three theological exams. Of those three exams, two Teaching Elders stated a difference with Larger Catechism Q. 109. Both men held that images of Jesus were permissible for didactic purposes.[32] The PCA's Theological Examinations Committee unanimously approved these men and "deemed the differences to be more than semantic but neither hostile to the system of doctrine nor striking at the vitals of religion."[33] But that assessment is incorrect if taking the language of the Standards as a whole. The Standards refer to images of any of the Persons of the Trinity as "monuments of idolatry" (Q. 108), "spiritual whoredom" (Q. 110), and state that God considers "the breakers of this commandment such as hate him" (Q. 110). To allow a view of images of Christ as appropriate for teaching purposes is counted as idolatry, whoredom, and an act of hatred against God by the Larger Catechism. These things are fundamentally hostile to the Catechism's stated chief end of man which is to glorify God and enjoy Him.

An honest reading of the integrity of the system of doctrine, using the words of the Standards themselves makes it abundantly clear that the keeping of this commandment based on the terms laid out in the Larger Catechism is essential to the confessional integrity of the PCA. Idolatry, spiritual prostitution, and hatred of God cannot be seen as either incidental or non-essential, especially in light of the chief end of glorifying God. Members of the PCA may think the Larger Catechism overstates its case. However, to adhere to the use of images of Jesus for some didactic end is to adopt the doctrine of the Eastern Church, or the Roman Catholic view of the books of the laity. The language of the Larger Catechism, adopted by the PCA as an accurate summary of biblical doctrine, does not allow views that in essence return the Church to a "books of the laity" intended for children. This view, in the words of the

28. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 109, pp. 246–247.
29. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, pp. 291–292.
30. Exodus 20:5b.
31. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 110, 251.
32. Presbyterian Church in America 50th General Assembly, *Commissioner Handbook*, pp. 1101–1102.
33. 50th General Assembly, *Commissioner Handbook*, pp. 1101–1102.

Larger Catechism, is completely opposite to the call to glorify God, and to allow it undermines the system of doctrine and compromises the confessional integrity of the man holding such views.

The Fourth Commandment

The second issue of theological disparity affecting a man's relationship with the Standards adopted by the PCA being examined in this article is differences with the fourth commandment touching on issues surrounding recreation and limited commerce on the Sabbath. When it comes to this commandment, it is more challenging to present a focal point of dispute in broader church history. Unlike the second commandment, which was treated at the seventh ecumenical council, I am unaware of controversy at the same level surrounding the fourth commandment. From a church history perspective, then, it is possible to consider views and practices of influential individuals on this point, such as has been done by Dr. Richard Gaffin in his book, *Calvin's View of the Sabbath*. However, the challenge in studying the views of individuals is deciding whose views should be examined for such a project. And as part of that selection process, it would further have to be ascertained that the views and practices of these individuals represented those of a significant part of the church. Instead, it seems more profitable to examine the doctrinal documents adopted by denominations and Churches, which is my intention for this section of this article. Examining theological ancestry demonstrates the Westminster Standards' consistency or aberration when it comes to the position articulated by the Westminster divines. To that end, here again follows a brief study of those creedal and catechetical documents published by Heinrich Bullinger and Zacharias Ursinus (and their views on this subject), albeit in reverse order.

The Second Helvetic Confession

Bullinger's work in the Second Helvetic Confession was previously introduced in connection with its treatment of the second commandment. Relevant to the fourth commandment, the twenty-fourth chapter deals with the issues of the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath.

In the opening paragraph Bullinger argues that it is necessary for the church to set apart a certain time for "public prayers," the "preaching of the Gospel," and "the celebration of the sacraments."[34] In addition, the establishment of the Christian Sabbath as the Lord's Day is confirmed by recognizing the authority of the church to select which day it will set apart for such exercises. It is to be acknowledged that Bullinger's view that the church selected the day of the week which was to be the Lord's Day is certainly different from Westminster's. However, this difference only touches on the origins of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day and not the actual practice of the day, which is the source of dispute in the PCA. Bullinger notes that, now that the day has been chosen, it cannot be changed, when he says: "no one is permitted to overthrow this appointment of the Church at his own pleasure."[35] To protect this chosen day, Bullinger requires a specific and corporate rest from daily labors when he says "due time and leisure" are necessary to prevent men from being "drawn away from it by their own affairs."[36] Bullinger's point about the primacy of worship of the Sabbath is further reinforced in the second paragraph.

As with the other Reformed documents, Bullinger did not desire to introduce something new, but desired to maintain fidelity to and continuity with apostolic teaching. He makes an intentional connection from his teaching to the Apostles when he states, "Hence we see that in the ancient churches there were not only certain set hours in the week appointed for meetings, but that also the Lord's Day itself, ever since the apostles' time, was set aside for them and for a holy rest, a practice now rightly preserved by our Churches for the sake of worship and love."[37] Thus, the Confession presents an abiding obligation to honor the Lord's Day as the New Testament Sabbath rooted in the Apostles' practice for the purpose of attending the corporate "meetings" of the church.

The third paragraph of chapter twenty-four deals with ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath. In defining these obsolete aspects abrogated in the Lord's Day, the Confession states, "we do not yield to the Jewish observance and to superstitions. For we do not believe that one day is any holier than another, or think that rest in itself is acceptable to God. Moreover, we celebrate the Lord's Day and not the Sabbath as a free observance."[38] The Second Helvetic Confession's view of what is ceremonial in the Sabbath is grounded in two specific aspects, one more obvious than the other. The first and more obvious one deals with the mode and day of celebration as compared to the Jewish Sabbath. The

34. "The Second Helvetic Confession,", Chapter 24.1, n.d., https://www.ccel.org/creeds/helvetic.htm (accessed February 24, 2020).
35. "The Second Helvetic Confession", Chapter 24.1
36. "The Second Helvetic Confession", Chapter 24.1.
37. "The Second Helvetic Confession", Chapter 24.2.
38. "The Second Helvetic Confession", Chapter 24.3.

second and more obscure one stresses the condition of the heart as it rests on the Lord's Day. In the first instance, Bullinger is not taking issue with the abiding nature of one day in seven set apart for worship and rest, but in the trappings of the Jewish observance of it and in the difference on the day chosen on which to rest. And in the second instance, he more subtly points out the heart behind the keeping of the Sabbath. For the Christian, there is a free observance of the Sabbath, not under constraint or compulsion of the ceremonial law, but out of gratitude for the work of Christ who has purchased the rest which the Christian enjoys by suffering the turmoil of divine wrath on the cross.

To summarize Bullinger's Confession, he notes the establishment of the Lord's Day by the Apostles on which the public worship of the church is to be preserved, with the change of the celebration of this Lord's Day explained by an appeal to the abrogation of the ceremonies of the Jewish observance. The Second Helvetic Confession articulates an *abiding* Sabbath in which rest is a necessary and central component. Indeed, there is a ceremonial aspect to the Sabbath that affects the day on which it is celebrated – which is certainly not emphasized in the Westminster Standards – but as an abiding principle, rest from regular work, and the gospel ministry of the church is to be continued also in the New Testament church with one day in seven set apart for that purpose. Ursinus concurs with his Swiss contemporary.

The Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism teaches on the fourth commandment in Q. 103, where it asks: "What does God require in the fourth commandment?" The answer in response is given as follows:

> First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath.[39]

The answer from the catechism divides the significance of the fourth commandment into two parts. First, it considers the fourth commandment relating to the formal worship of God's people through the ministry of the gospel, the schools, and the Sabbath. Second, it also considers the expansion of the joy of the Christian in Christ in our everyday striving to rest from evil by the power of the Holy Spirit. Considering the ongoing implications for the fourth commandment as it touches the formal, corporate worship of God's people, several conclusions about the Catechism's position can be drawn.

As part of its first point regarding the ministry of the gospel and the schools, the Catechism singles out the Sabbath day as the day of rest on which the Christian is to join in hearing the Word of God preached, benefit from the administration of the sacraments, and join with God's people in calling on the Lord, a clear reference to prayer. In other words, far from being a day of idleness, or simply ceasing from bodily labors, the Sabbath is to be a "day of rest," spiritually speaking. The Catechism is clear that this "resting" has a specific direction, or activity. The Christian, on this day, is to be engaged in the spiritual tasks assigned for his rest, which is not comprehended as resting from *all* activity.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism outlines specific *daily* application for the Christian regarding the fourth commandment. Beyond the implications of participation in the corporate worship of the church on the Sabbath, there is also the consideration of the Sabbath as a reflection of the heart of the believer. The believer is urged to cease from "evil works" and rely on God to work change in him through the Holy Spirit. The rest to which the Sabbath enjoins the Christian is already in effect according to the Catechism. These observations have led commentators to surmise that the Heidelberg Catechism presents the Sabbath as a binding day of rest to be observed by the Christian community. As R. Scott Clark has observed, "There can be no doubt that the authors understood the Lord's Day to be a Christian Sabbath. The German and Dutch Reformed churches certainly adopted it with the understanding that it required Reformed Christians to set aside one day in seven for rest, worship, and anticipation of the consummation."[40] That means because that rest is inaugurated but not yet fully realized, an obligation of sabbath-keeping remains.

Ursinus's exposition of the fourth commandment in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism is his most lengthy treatment of any of the commandments. In this critical section, he makes the same distinction Bullinger made dividing the fourth commandment

39. Ursinus, "Heidelberg Catechism", Q. 103.

40. R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety,and Practice* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Pub, 2008), p. 321.

into an abiding and ceremonial aspect. He says, "there are two parts – the *one* moral and perpetual, as that the Sabbath be kept holy; the *other* ceremonial and temporary, as that the seventh day be kept holy."[41] According to Ursinus, there remains a moral, perpetual obligation to keep the Sabbath holy, while at the same time the observance of the seventh day is no longer binding, but is instead to be considered ceremonial. It is that distinction between moral and ceremonial that drives Ursinus's thought throughout his explanation of the Sabbath. The ceremonial is limited specifically to the day chosen to observe the Sabbath: "Hence the Sabbath, in as far as it has respect to the seventh day, was, together with other ceremonies and types, fulfilled and abolished by the coming of the Messiah."[42]

There is clearly harmony between Bullinger and Ursinus on the issue of the ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath, primarily to do with the day on which it is celebrated. Ursinus, like Bullinger, believed the day of the Sabbath was changed due to the liberty purchased for the New Testament church by Christ. He states, "The apostolic church, to distinguish itself from the Jewish synagogue, chose, in the exercise of the liberty conferred upon it by Christ, the first day of the week in the place of the seventh, because on that day the resurrection of Christ took place."[43] Ursinus deflects attention away from a specific day, viewing the actual day as ceremonial, and in some sense almost unimportant. And yet, his assigning part of the Sabbath to the ceremonial should not be understood to imply that the weight of the fourth commandment has in any way been eased.

Although Ursinus identifies ceremonial aspects of the Old Testament Sabbath, he also teaches a moral and perpetual aspect to its observance. Ursinus explained that the ongoing aspect can be recognized in the ultimate goal for the Sabbath: "The *end* or design of the commandment is the maintenance of the public worship of God in the church; or the perpetual preservation, and use of the ecclesiastical ministry."[44] According to Ursinus, the goal of the Sabbath is the worship of God. And since the worship of God is at no time to be neglected, the commandment is still in force. He says, "It follows that God will always have the ministry of the church preserved and the use thereof respected, so that the moral part of this commandment binds all men from the beginning to the end of the world, to observe some Sabbath, or to devote a certain portion of their time to sermons, public prayers, and the administration of the sacraments."[45] There is not a lessening of the moral force of the fourth commandment. Instead, it continues to be binding on all men. There is a continuing and abiding nature to the fourth commandment because it concerns the worship of God. And since the worship of God can never be suspended, if for no other reason than human necessity, daily labors must be suspended on a day to make allowance for worship.

Ursinus stresses the Sabbath rest requirement to the church *and* those outside of Christ. His reason is not to force the pagan to worship. Rather it is to keep the pagan's activity or lack thereof on the Sabbath from being a temptation to the Christian. Using as an example the Jewish nation he observes: "The strangers who lived among the Jews were not bound or compelled to conform to all the ceremonies, nor to the Jewish religion itself, but only to such external discipline as was necessary for the purpose of avoiding offence to the church in which they lived."[46] According to Ursinus, the moral obligation is applied to all and continues today, void of the ceremonial trappings of the specific day.

By way of summary, Ursinus's understanding of the fourth commandment is *partially* ceremonial, but *predominately* moral and abiding. The ceremonial part deals with the day on which daily labors are set aside to enjoy the rest of God's work in man. The moral aspect deals with the actual resting from labor and participation in the worship of God with His people. No man may neglect the eternal obligation. These are foundational considerations of theological context, which aid in seeing the unity of the Reformed, confessional doctrine of the Lord's Day as it is later articulated in the Westminster Standards.

The Theology of the Westminster Standards

Within the Westminster Standards, the clearest treatment of the fourth commandment is found in the Westminster Larger Catechism, questions 115–121. As seen in both Bullinger and Ursinus, the most notable difference between 16th century views on the Lord's Day and that which is articulated in the Westminster Larger Catechism is in how they formulate the reason for celebrating the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath. Whereas the Heidelberg Catechism and Second Helvetic Confession viewed the day to be celebrated as ceremonial and left the choosing of the day to the

41. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 557.
42. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, pp. 557–558.
43. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 563.
44. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 557.
45. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 557.
46. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus*, p. 560.

church, the Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that the timing of the Lord's Day as given by divine appointment. In question 116, the Larger Catechism is quite specific that the Lord appointed the seventh day for rest and worship after creation, but subsequently changed the day to the first day of the week after the resurrection of Christ: "The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world."[47] In assigning the day when the Lord's Day is to be celebrated, the Westminster Larger Catechism (and Shorter Catechism) explicitly identifies the first day of the week as God's appointment in His word. But as has been pointed out before, this view distinguishes the Westminster Standards from the earlier Continental documents only in considering how the day was chosen. The actual practice of the day is not distinguishable between the two streams of thought.

As the Larger Catechism defines its view of the fourth commandment and the observance of the Lord's Day, it notes what should be done: "The Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship."[48] Like the continental Reformers, the Westminster divines held that rest and worship are to predominate the Lord's Day. Allowance for works of necessity and mercy are granted, but the focus is on rest and worship. That focus is important because the system is defining its ethics in relation to man's chief end, which is to glorify God and enjoy Him. Beyond the positive "thou shalts" of the Larger Catechism, it also turns to what is forbidden.

Within that structure of worship and rest, the Larger Catechism defines the sins against the Lord's Day as including the neglect of worship, idleness and giving way to the distractions of regular, or worldly "employments and recreations" (Larger Catechism Q. 117 and 119). This language regarding employments and recreations has been the cause for much confusion in the PCA. A case in point can be found in the stated difference noted in the Theological Examination Committee's report to the 49th General Assembly. There the candidate summarizes his difference with the Standards' view of the fourth commandment as follows: "My exception is with the Confession and Catechisms including recreations as forbidden on the Sabbath. Recreation does not equate to toil or labor. It may regularly be restful and refreshing."[49] The stated difference is taken with Confession of Faith 21.8, Larger Catechism Q. 117, and Shorter Catechism Q. 60. This view expresses a common confusion surrounding the fourth commandment, as has been previously pointed out by Lane Keister by dividing obedience to the Lord's Day into three parts.

Keister has argued previously in *The Confessional Presbyterian* that making the recreation clause an occasion for difference is founded on a neglect or misunderstanding of Isaiah 58:13–14. Regarding that text he notes, "the way of Sabbath-keeping which is forbidden here is 'one's own way' The way of Sabbath-keeping which is commanded here is 'the delight in the Lord.'"[50] That observation changes the question from one of labor, which is primarily in view in the commandment itself, to why it is being done. The question to be asked about recreations is not whether they are labor. There is a more important question being asked in Isaiah 58. And to that end Keister concludes, "Rather than asking about a specific activity, as to whether or not it is lawful (and usually with the mindset of what the person can get away with), it is more helpful to remember that the rest in view is not simply physical rest, but rather a rest of worshipping the Lord."[51] Keister directs the reader to a proper understanding of the Puritan view of the Sabbath: as a day of rest to be enjoyed in the spiritual works of worship and the things that tend to assist man in those works.

Building on Keister's work, the way of evaluating the Lord's Day's activities as laid out in the Larger Catechism can be clarified on the basis of three questions: two based on the commandment itself, and the last one based on Isaiah 58:13–14. In the commandments, God forbids His people either from working or from having someone work for them. Isaiah 58 calls God's people to delight in Him. So the questions to be asked are quite simple: 1. Am I working? 2. Am I making someone work for me? 3. Am I delighting in the Lord? Perhaps a follow up to an affirmative answer to either of the first two questions would be to clarify if it is a work of

47. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 116, 260.

48. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 117, 261.

49. *Minutes of the Forty-ninth General Assembly*, vol. 1 (Lawrenceville, GA: Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2022), p. 480.

50. Lane Keister, "The Sabbath Day and Recreations on the Sabbath," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, no. 5 (2009): 238.

51. Keister, "The Sabbath Day," p. 323.

necessity or mercy. However, if the first two questions are answered in the negative, and the third in the positive, the vast majority of questions about the Lord's Day will be answered, because they address the two-fold purpose of the Lord's Day as laid out in the Larger Catechism: resting in the Lord and giving Him glory on His day according to His appointment. However, the confessional integrity regarding the Sabbath within the theological system of the Westminster Standards is brought to the forefront later in the Larger Catechism's exposition of the doctrine.

Confessional Integrity

Remembering the Moral Law summarized in the Ten Commandments as the ethical framework defined in the Standards by which the Christian will glorify and enjoy God, the Larger Catechism probes further as it examines why the law stresses that the Sabbath Day is to be remembered. Question 121 asks, "Why is the word *Remember* set in the beginning of the fourth commandment?" The answer is provided in several parts, and each one demonstrates the gravity of the fourth commandment within the broader structure of the system of doctrine.

The first observation about the urgency to remember the Sabbath is "because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it, and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments, and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgment of religion."[52] Here the Catechism explains that keeping the fourth commandment's obligations to worship and rest prepares the Christian better to keep the other nine. Formulated negatively, to neglect the Sabbath is to make keeping the other commandments more difficult for the believer. And this observation is certainly plausible, for if the Christian neglects the worship of the True God, he will be prone to replace the worship of the Creator with that of the creature (Romans 1:25). However the urgency regarding the confessional integrity of the fourth commandment is seen more clearly still later in the same answer.

The second, more crucial reason regarding the urgency of the fourth commandment given in Q. 121 is that "Satan with his instruments much labor to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it (the Lord's Day), to bring in all irreligion and impiety."[53] Here the Catechism posits that the neglect of the fourth commandment is a strategy and tool used by Satan and the other fallen angels to corrupt the Christian. The result of breaking the Sabbath in the Larger Catechism is the corruption of worship in irreligion and the corruption of holiness in impiety. Therefore, according to the system of doctrine outlined in the Catechism itself, the neglect of the fourth commandment is so grave that it attacks worship and holiness, leading to idolatry and ungodliness.

The question of confessional integrity starts with an evaluation of the harmony between a man and the Standards, as defined within the document with which the differences are taken. It is not primarily a question about how the man views his relationship. The question is whether a man's professed beliefs about certain doctrines are hostile to the system of doctrine as internally defined. In other words, in examining confessional integrity it is significant to ask the Standards themselves if something is hostile to its system. To approach the question from the point of view of personal approval or disapproval of a theological position is to impose an individualism on a denominational theological standard, an approach obviously contrary to the PCA's current ecclesiology. With the chief end of man described as glorifying God and enjoying Him forever in Shorter Catechism Q. 1, His worship and glory is primary in the system of doctrine of the Westminster Standards. Anything that attacks or damages God's glory or man's enjoyment of Him must be seen as hostile to the system of doctrine. When it comes to the fourth commandment, the Larger Catechism views neglecting the Sabbath as bringing in irreligion and impiety. Neglect of the Lord's Day is hostile to the system in that it is neither preserving the glory of God nor living in His joy. It is rather the opposite. Therefore, confessional integrity in the PCA demands upholding the Sabbath and it should not allow officers to hold stated differences that allow worldly employments, except in cases of mercy and necessity, nor positions that consider an individual's personal delight instead of God's.

Conclusion

The question being asked about confessional integrity often begins at the wrong point. Instead of asking whether a presbytery thinks a stated difference undermines the Westminster Standards, the first question should be whether the Standards themselves describe a theological position as undermining its

52. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 121, pp. 263–264.
53. "The Westminster Larger Catechism", Q. 121, pp. 264–265.

integrity and theological unity. That is what it would mean to say something "strikes at the vitals" of a system of doctrine. In the case of the second commandment, the Larger Catechism describes those who break the commandment (as presented in the Catechism) as engaging in 'spiritual whoredom.' In the case of the fourth commandment the Larger Catechism explains neglect of the Sabbath (as presented in the Catechism) as Satan's effort to bring in 'all irreligion and impiety.' And since the Standards' self-professed chief end of man is the glory of God, stated differences to either of these commandments are blatant attacks on God's glory and therefore undermine the confessional integrity of the Standards themselves.▪

***In Brief:* James Durham on the Unlawfulness of Making Images of any Person of the Trinity. From James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 43–46.**

Hence will it clearly appear, that this command is to be reckoned a distinct command from the former; because: 1. It contains distinct matter, forbids sins of another kind and commands duties of another kind. 2. Because they are certainly ten in number and there cannot be such a reckoning made up if these first two be one; it being clear (as after will appear) that the last is only one and cannot be divided into two. 3. Beside, it is the common reckoning of the ancient Jews, as may be seen from Josephus (lib. 3. 9. [*sic?*]), Ainsworth, and others.[1]

This then being laid down as a truth, we shall, I. Shortly put by some questions concerning images, for clearing the words. II. Come particularly to show what is required and what is forbidden in this commandment and how we break it in our ordinary practice. III. Then open the reasons that are annexed.

I. Concerning images two things are to be enquired. i. If no image is lawful; and if any is lawful, what [are they]? ii. If any use, especially religious, of images is lawful? And if adoration of any kind is to be given to them? We say for answer:

i. 1. That making of pictures of creatures which are visible or may be comprehended or historical fancies (to speak so) such as the senses and elements uses to be [*commonly are*] held forth by (which are rather hieroglyphics than real pictures); these, I say, are not simply unlawful but are so when they are abused. So Solomon made images of lions for his use and thus the gift of engraving and painting, as well as others which God has given to men, may be made use of when (as has been said) it is not abused. As:

(1) When such pictures are obscene and filthy and against Christian modesty to behold, such break this commandment, but more especially the seventh; because, as filthy communication pollutes the ears, so do they the eyes. (2) When men become prodigal in their bestowing either too much time or too much expense on them. (3) When they dote too much on them by curiosity. (4) And many other ways they may be abused; but especially, in the fourth place, if they be abused to any religious use, then they become unlawful, as afterward shall be cleared.

2. Though making of images simply is not unlawful and discharged by this commandment, yet thereby every representation of God (who is the object to be worshiped) and every image *religiously made use of in worship* is condemned (though civil and political images and statues, which are used as ornaments or badges of honor or remembrancers of some fact, etc., are not condemned). (1) Because such images cannot but beget carnal thoughts of God (as {Acts 17:29}), contrary to this commandment. (2) Because God discovered Himself (Deut. 4:15–16, etc.) by no likeness, but only by His Word, that they might have no ground of likening Him to anything. (3) Because it is impossible to get a bodily likeness to set Him out by, who is a Spirit and an infinite Spirit. So then, every such image must be derogatory to God, as turning the glory of the invisible God to the shape of some visible and corruptible creature, which is condemned (Rom. 1:22–23), for every image supposes some likeness. Now, there can be no conceivable or imaginable likeness between God and anything that we can invent; therefore it is said by the Lord (Isa. 40:18): "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" Where it seems it was no idol, but God they aimed to represent by their images, which was the fault condemned in Isaiah 40:25. As also, when we cannot conceive of God and of the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation, as we ought, what presumption must it be to paint them?

Therefore upon these grounds, (1) We simply condemn any delineating of God or the Godhead or Trinity, such as some have upon their buildings or books, like a sun shining with beams and the Lord's name, Jehovah, in it or any other way. This is most abominable to see and a heinous wronging of God's majesty.

(2) All representing of the persons as distinct, as to set out the Father (personally considered) by the image of an old man, as if He were a creature; the Son under the image of a lamb or young man; the Holy Ghost under the image of a dove: all which wrongs the Godhead exceedingly. And although the Son was and is man, having taken on Him that nature and united it to His Godhead, yet He is not a mere man. Therefore

1. [See Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews,* Book 3, chapter 5, §5. Cf. *Works,* translated by William Whiston, vol. 1 (1829), 88. Henry Ainsworth (1571–1622), *Annotations on Exodus* (1617). Cf. *Annotations* (London: Blackie, 1843), 1.338.]

that image, which only holds forth one nature and looks like any man in the world, cannot be the representation of that person which is God and Man.

And, if it is said, *Man's soul cannot be painted, but His body may and yet that picture represents a man*; I answer: It does so because he has but one nature and what represents that represents the person. But it is not so with Christ. His Godhead is not a distinct part of the human nature, as the soul of man is (which is necessarily supposed in every living man), but a distinct nature, only united with the manhood in that one person Christ, who has no fellow. Therefore what represents Him must not represent a man only, but must represent Christ, Immanuel, God-Man. Otherwise it is not His image. Besides, there is no warrant for representing Him in His Manhood, nor any colorable possibility of it, but as men fancy. And shall that be called Christ's portraiture? Would that be called any other man's portraiture which were drawn at men's pleasure without regard to the pattern? Again, there is no use of it. For either that image behooved to have but common estimation with other images and that would wrong Christ, or a peculiar respect and reverence and so it sins against this commandment that forbids all religious reverence to images. But He being God and so the object of worship, we must either divide His natures or say that image or picture [does] not represent Christ.

Again, as to what may be objected from the Lord's appearing sometimes in the likeness of a man or the Spirit's descending as a dove or as cloven tongues of fire, it is answered:

(1) There is a great difference between a sign of the Spirit's presence and a representation of the Spirit. (2) Between what represents the Spirit, as He is one of the persons of the blessed Trinity, and what resembles some gift of His. The similitude of a dove descending upon Christ was to show His taking up His residence in Him and furnishing Him with gifts and graces, and particularly holy simplicity and meekness without measure; and so His appearing in cloven tongues was to show His communicating the gift of tongues to the apostles. (3) Neither is there any warrant for drawing Him in these shapes, more than to look on every living dove as representing Him. And the like may be said of God's appearing sometimes in human likeness; it was but that men might have some visible help to discern something of God's presence, but not to give any representation of Him, and these bodies were but for a time assumed, as a prelude and fore-running evidence of the Son's being to become man.

From this ground also it would seem, that painting of angels might be condemned as a thing impossible, they being spirits which no corporeal thing can represent. Beside that, the representing of them has some hazard with it. And for those cherubims that were made by God's direction under the Old Testament, they were rather some emblem of the nature and service of angels, as being full of zeal and always (as it were) upon wing ready to obey God's will, than any likeness of themselves. And it is hardly possible to fancy representations of spirits, good or evil, but thereby men will wrong themselves in the right description of them, though we grant angels, being but finite spirits, there is another kind of danger and impossibility of representing God who is an infinite Spirit. Also, some say that these cherubims mentioned did not represent the nature of angels, but angels appearing under such a visible shape. And we find (Ezek. 1), there are divers shapes by which they are pointed out, but it is as to their fitness and readiness for service and not as to their nature.

3. We say that no image whatsoever, made use of for religious ends, and without [*outside*] the bounds of civil and politic uses, is allowable; but is by this commandment condemned as unsuitable to the Lord's nature and revealed will. So by this images (otherwise lawful) when abused to idolatry, become unlawful and are not to be suffered, but orderly to be removed. We call that more than a civil or a common use, when religious worship or reverence is purposely intended to them or there is by some one occasion or other, danger, lest they may be so abused. And of this sort (*viz*. dangerous ones) are (1) *Images in places of worship*; but it is not idolatry to have dead men's images on their tombs or monuments in churches. (2) Images of such angels, saints, etc., which have been abused to idolatry by being worshiped or most readily may be so abused. (3) Images erected for helping our prayers to be accepted and which have altars, lights, or temples appointed for them (which will be clearer when we come to speak of religious worship and *bowing*); thus peregrinations and vows to images, touching of them with some apprehension of fruit and advantage thereby, especially when healing is expected from them, and so are they abused also, though help be expected not from the image, but from Him whom it is said to represent. And thus also, when any image, once lawful, comes to be abused, it ought to be removed, as the brazen serpent was by Hezekiah: and under this prohibition come in the images of false gods, as Cupid, Venus, Apollo, Jupiter, etc., which were once abused. Besides, some of these idols being nothing, the portraying of them makes them appear something. And if it was the Lord's way to command the breaking and destroying of all idols and images of false gods, can it be suitable to retain them in memory, that a generation following might have that occasion and help to idolatry (*viz*. the images of old idols) from Christians? And if it was David's and the saint's way (Ps. 16:4), not so much as to mention their names but with detestation, ought God's people for sport or delight to look on these images? Zeal for God would abhor these curiosities and what edification can be in them?▪

"Like a Box of Chocolates": Experiencing PCA Worship

By Frank J. Smith

Who can forget the ever-lovable Forrest Gump from the 1994 eponymous movie? *Forrest Gump* portrayed a somewhat backward, certainly mentally challenged, young man from Alabama who had a remarkable knack for receiving accolades, while also offering homespun sayings. Perhaps his most famous aphorism is, "Mama always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get."

How true! And how true is that sentiment when we consider experiencing Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) worship from the very beginning of this branch of the church until now.

But the root cause of this phenomenon goes back even further than 1973. The PCA did not gestate in a vacuum. She was birthed in an ecclesiastical and societal environment that produced this box of chocolates.

American Presbyterian Worship

The American experience was shaped by the Great Awakening in the early 1700s, by the challenges of the frontier (with its economic hardships, war with Indians, a general lack of regular church buildings, and a paucity of preachers), by the intermingling of various religious denominations, and by the rising democratic spirit that led to political independence. Though the Westminster Assembly formulated its Standards in a world that was turning upside down, nevertheless, the unique set of circumstances in the New World brought other dynamics into play—dynamics which influenced how Presbyterians in America would worship.

Given the numerous winds of doctrine and change blowing across British North America, and the many diverse opinions that resulted, there would be no one way that American Presbyterians would worship. There was not a uniform view of worship—and that lack of uniformity would be reflected not only in practice but also in governing documents. Regarding the adoption of the first American Presbyterian Directory for Worship in the 1780s, Julius Melton noted that the church "had produced what could almost be described as a non-directive Directory!"[1]

Old School and New School Perspectives

The diversity of worship views and practice continued into the nineteenth century. The Old School/New School division in 1837 was the result of profound differences with respect to doctrine, polity, and worship. According to Melton, the criterion for New School worship was evangelistic effectiveness—a novel perspective that was evident among many Presbyterian ministers, including Charles Grandison Finney. Among the "new measures" he promoted were the "anxious seat" (employing an "altar call"); an overemphasis on application in preaching (to the virtual exclusion of Biblical exegesis and doctrinal explanation); singing hymns that were directed to sinners rather than being offered in praise to God; and the use of musical instrumentation, primarily for the psychological effect. The Old School approach to worship focused on Scriptural directives and decorum. However, the traditional understanding reflected in the Old School was not monolithic. For example, in 1832, an influential Old School evangelist and pastor, William B. Sprague, rejected the notion of the Bible being "a textbook of specified and therefore allowable worship practices," and viewed it "as a 'rule of judging.'"

> According to this subtle revision of the Calvinist theory, Scripture furnished *standards* for judging whether

The Author: Dr. Frank J. Smith is an editor of *The Confessional Presbyterian* (see more in editor biographies).

1. Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America: Changing Patterns Since 1787* (1967; rpt. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), p. 27.

> a "method' was acceptable. The method did not have to be specifically sanctioned in the Bible, but it did have to conform to scriptural standards of seriousness, order, decorum, reverence, simplicity, honesty, and affection—qualities embraced by Sprague's term "the spirit of the gospel." He still was unwilling to allow a measure's effect on people to prove its validity, unless by that was meant its "*entire* and *ultimate* effect."
>
> At Sprague's hands "scriptural worship" and "decent and orderly worship" became virtually synonymous. The actual point of difference between him and Finney was thus primarily one of degree.[2]

Historic Presbyterian Worship

What transpired in American Presbyterianism more than two centuries ago was a profound departure from historic Presbyterianism, as enunciated in the Westminster Standards. The Westminsterian view was, of course, rooted, in the Reformed branch of the Protestant Reformation, including particularly the doctrine of worship promoted by John Calvin and John Knox.

Protestantism initially was called Lutheranism, in recognition of the seminal influence of Marth Luther. However, this movement divided into two major branches, Lutheran and Calvinistic. Luther's approach to worship was essentially that of Roman Catholicism, viz., allowing any practice that is not forbidden by Scripture. In contrast to that perspective, Calvin, Knox, and others maintained what became known as the regulative principle of worship (often abbreviated RPW). According to the RPW, if something is commanded for worship, then it is required to be done; if it is not commanded, whether by direct command or by good and necessary consequence, then its use is forbidden in worship.

The implications of this doctrine would be worked out over the next century. The persecution of the Puritans and Presbyterians by the absolutist Stuart kings, including King Charles I's imposition of Anglican liturgy upon the Scots in 1637, triggered the Second Reformation in Scotland, a movement which honed the understanding of the regulative principle.

Also in the mid-seventeenth century, the English Civil War led to the convening of the Westminster Assembly, and to the Solemn League and Covenant, a 1643 religious and military treaty between the English Parliament and Scotland. That Assembly was designed to effect uniformity among the churches of Great Britain—uniformity of religion, doctrine, polity, and worship. The august body formulated the Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Form of Presbyterial Church-Government and of Ordination of Ministers. But the first document that was produced was The Directory for the Publick Worship of God.

On February 3, 1645, the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland voted to establish and to put into effect Westminster's directory for worship. In doing so, the court did,

> with much joy and thankfulness, acknowledge the rich blessing and invaluable mercy of God, in bringing the so much wished for uniformity in religion to such a happy period, that these kingdoms, once at so great a distance in the form of worship, are now, by the blessing of God, brought to a nearer uniformity than any other reformed kirks; which is unto us the return of our prayers, and a lightening of our eyes, and reviving of our hearts in the midst of our many sorrows and sufferings; a taking away, in a great measure, the reproach of the people of God, to the stopping of the mouths of malignant and disaffected persons; and an opening unto us a door of hope, that God hath yet thoughts of peace towards us, and no of evil, to give us an expected end; in the expectation and confidence whereof we do rejoice; beseeching the Lord to preserve these kingdoms from heresies, schisms, offences, profaneness, and whatsoever is contrary to sound doctrine, and the power of godliness; and to continue with us, and the generations following, these his pure and purged ordinances, together with an increase of the power and life thereof to the glory of his great name, the enlargement of the kingdom of his son, the corroboration of peace and love between the kingdoms, the unity and comfort of all his people, and our edifying one another in love.

In its Confession of Faith, the Westminster Assembly laid out the practices of worship, including the ordinary parts of worship: prayer, the reading of the word, the preaching of the word, the singing of Psalms, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. There are also occasional elements of worship: religious oaths and vows, fastings, and thanksgivings. In addition, the Directory for Worship also mentions the pronouncement of the blessing (the benediction).[3]

2. Melton, *ibid.*, p. 56.

3. For a discussion of the Westminster Assembly's view of music in worship, see Matthew Winzer, Review of Nick Needham, "Westminster and Worship: Psalms, Hymns? and Musical Instruments?" in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century,*

However, as noted in Confession of Faith VII.6, the new covenant, in contrast with the old, is administered with greater simplicity and less outward glory. And further, the ceremonial law as a whole has been abrogated through the coming of Christ (XIX.3). Accordingly, all kinds of ceremonial practices, that were appropriate for the church during her old covenant dispensation, are inappropriate in the new covenant era. These practices would include not only animal sacrifices, but also the use of candles, the burning of incense, and the playing of musical instruments.

And furthermore, Presbyterianism rejected making an image of God or any person of the Godhead, as well as worshipping by means of an image (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q/A 109; Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 51).

Sea Change

As is the case when dealing with matters in the church militant, the Bride of Christ is constantly in a battle to maintain the truth—the Adversary is unrelentless in his attempts to damage and destroy her purity. There should be no surprise, therefore, that, as true throughout church history, the visible church would struggle to retain the standards that have been achieved. There will always be temptations to abandon divine worship, and to go back to manmade worship by adding to worship practices new practices as well as various "aids" to devotion, including especially things which appeal to a sensory experience.

Widespread abandonment of strict standards (or, modification of those standards) occurred both in Scotland and in America. In the eighteenth century, thanks in large measure to the intentionally deleterious effect of the paraphrastic Psalm imitations penned by Isaac Watts, exclusive psalmody was abandoned. In the nineteenth century, commitment to *a capella* singing gave way to the employment of organs. Also in the 1800s, there was in general an emotionalism that arose at least partially out of the era's Romanticism.[4]

Why the Inconsistency in Early American Presbyterianism?

However one construes the difference between or similarity of Old School and New School worship, there is no question but that American Presbyterianism as a whole, even in the eighteenth century, was not consistent in its understanding of worship nor in its practice. At least four factors figure in this doctrinal downgrade.

First, there was a general attack on revealed religion with the onslaught of skepticism in the 1700s. The effect of such undercurrents was apparent particularly in New England, where the dominant Puritanism largely apostatized and became spiritually dead.

Second, the First Great Awakening, though a genuine movement of the Holy Spirit, was accompanied by excessive emotional expressions and a concomitant relaxing of strict worship practices, especially with regard to the singing of praise.

Third, the proliferation of various denominations blurred denominational distinctives and led to regarding the presence of diverse doctrinal views as legitimate. Accordingly, there were fewer Presbyterian stalwarts holding forth all of the teachings of the Westminster Standards.

And fourth, the fact that there was denominational diffusion made ecclesiastical establishmentarianism unrealistic and untenable. Even apart from the impracticality of enforcing doctrinal uniformity in the American colonies, the persecution of Dissenters by the Anglican establishment created a great distaste for a close relationship between Church and State. Resultingly, the American version of the Westminster Confession of Faith modified a couple of its chapters in order to set forth a view of separation of Church and State. However, doing so, in effect, engendered a sphere of neutrality, and consequently undermined the objective nature of the law of God. For, either the law of God applies universally or it does not. If the second commandment does not apply to the civil magistrate, then it is difficult to see how that commandment can demand worship that is totally and objectively determined by the Word of God.

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vol. 2, ed. J. Ligon Duncan, *The Confessional Presbyterian*, 4 (2008): 253–66. For a discussion of the Directory for Worship, see Richard A. Muller and Roland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship*, in The Westminster Assembly and the Reformed Faith: A Series, ed. Carl R. Trueman (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2007), pp. 83–175.

4. One could argue that the practice of taking up an offering during worship also owes its prevalence starting in the nineteenth century to the impact of Romanticism and the notion of having to engage in that type of action in order to demonstrate sacrificial devotion. The Westminster Directory for Worship does speak of collections, but not offerings. In conjunction with the Lord's Supper, the Directory specifies: "The collection is so to be ordered that no part of the public worship be thereby hindered." Cf. Ryan M. McGraw, *The Consequences of Reformed Worship: The Biblical Foundations for the use of the Call to Worship, Baptism, the Offering, and Benedictions in Corporate Worship,* (ThM Thesis, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2008).

The Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century, the confusion in American Presbyterianism regarding worship continued. One factor in this regard was the Second Great Awakening, which contributed the phenomenon of revivalism. The evangelistic thrust breathed a pragmatic spirit. Whatever worked in order to bring about conversion was acceptable, including with respect to the practice of worship. Long before the arrival of William James and his philosophy of Pragmatism, the church was employing a strategy of the ends justifying the means.

The pragmatic approach lent itself to a distinct appeal to the emotions. Though the revivalism as perpetuated by New School Presbyterians was oriented toward eliciting a rational response by the individual, at the same time, it also opened the door to an emphasis on emotionalism via playing upon the emotions and seeking to meet individual emotional needs.

That appeal to the emotions, in turn, caused Presbyterians and other Protestants to become vulnerable to the Romanticism of the age—an emotion-ladened movement characterized by fuzzy-thinking.

Presbyterians had long been antipathetic to Romanticism, knowing that it plays into the hands of the Romanists. Nevertheless, the Victorian tide flooded Britain and America, and largely triumphed. Increasingly, choirs were employed in worship, flowers adorned sanctuaries, and Easter and Christmas were observed religiously. And the pipes of organs soon bellowed in virtually all of the congregations. Even in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS, often called the Southern Presbyterian Church), these innovations were welcomed, though with some staunch opposition.[5]

Pecking Away at Inconsistency

Predictably, the opponents of innovative worship practices included the premier conservative theologians in the Southern Church, particularly John Lafayette Girardeau and Robert Lewis Dabney. Girardeau's *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, published in 1888, is still the classic statement of the traditional view. Dabney seconded Girardeau's perspective with a review of the book. Dabney's successor at Union Theological Seminary (Virginia), Thomas E. Peck, also sounded the alarm.

But the warnings were all for naught. The last holdout in favor of *a cappella* singing in the Southern Church was Girardeau's son-in-law, George A. Blackburn, pastor of Arsenal Hill Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina. Sometime after his death in 1918, an organ was installed at his old pastorate. As E. T. Thompson somewhat snidely sneered, "Dr. Blackburn was the last of his kind, and his peculiarity, we are told, limited no little the extent of his ministerial activity. 'There are not many churches,' commented the *Presbyterian Standard*, 'which would consent to part with an organ to secure a pastor.'"[6]

Southern Presbyterian Worship in the Twentieth Century

In the 1900s, worship in the PCUS continued to depart from traditional Presbyterianism. *The Presbyterian Hymnal*, a 1927 denominational publication, manifested the influence of nineteenth-century Romanticism, coupled with early-twentieth century evangelicalism. Only one psalm selection, viz., "The Lord's My Shepherd" (Psalm 23), was included. Not even the Old Hundredth ("All People That on Earth Do Dwell") is found in this hymnbook.

There was increasing acceptance of the use of choirs, floral arrangements, and musical instruments. Christmas and Easter were observed more extensively. In 1965, the General Assembly approved adding to the church calendar the four Sundays of Advent, Epiphany, and the beginning of Lent, "and here and there ministers were beginning to garb themselves in the appropriate colors—white, green, red, violet, purple, and black."[7]

In 1951, Dr. Walter L. Lingle, a well-known Southern Presbyterian minister, reflected on the transformation of worship in his lifetime.

In his youth he noted that services were conducted with Puritan simplicity. All that went before the sermon was frequently referred to as the "preliminary exercises." Some churches were still opposed to instrumental worship in the church. In many churches a paid church choir was looked upon as an abomination. Now, he noted, more emphasis was placed upon worship and maybe a little less on the sermon. Many of the newer churches were being constructed with a view to making the architecture an aid to worship. Members of the choir wore vestments, and many of the ministers were wearing the Genevan gown with the tabs, which the Professor of

5. Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South: Volume Two: 1861–1890* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973), pp. 429ff; *Presbyterians in the South: Volume Three: 1890–1972* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973), pp. 345ff.

6. Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South: Volume Three: 1890–1972* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973), p. 353.

7. Thompson, p. 483.

Systematic Theology in his student days had contemptuously dismissed as "rags of popery." Church services had become more elaborate. Responsive readings, the Lord's prayer, and the Apostles' Creed had been brought into the services and there was more and better music. The people were given a larger part in the services.[8] But the innovation could not be contained in vessels of antiquity. In the 1960s, the theological revisionism that was overflooding the denomination conjoined with the counter-culture movement, resulting in experimental worship in key places in the Southern Church.

Southern Presbyterian Worship in the Swingin' Sixties

In August 1968, the PCUS conducted a "New Days! New Ways?" conference at the denominational conference grounds in Montreat, North Carolina. The editor of the *Presbyterian Journal*, G. Aiken Taylor, described the event as one in which "the audience went on a wild foot-stomping, hand-clapping spree around tables from which sports-shirted dignitaries served pieces of French bread and offered sips of grape juice." He noted: "The rafters were ringing with 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' while an instrumental jazz combo provided the accompaniment. The audience was dancing its way to the tables for 'communion.'"[9]

Examples of other experimental worship in the Southern Church were chronicled in the *Presbyterian Journal*. At a Youth Quadrennial in 1968, several unusual forms of "worship" were planned. In one, the audience was invited to participate in the "liturgy" by scrawling their thoughts on a *graffiti* board. In another, the participants were to have thrown rubber balls at imitation stained glass windows. These were described as "forms of liturgical action" (with emphasis on *action*), and the balls were called "liturgical balls."[10]

Several months later, at a "college weekend" held at Columbia Theological Seminary, there was "a sort of psychedelic worship service—a regular service spiced with all sorts of sounds from the contemporary world blaring from a loudspeaker on the platform." Dr. Taylor editorialized that "Simon and Garfunkel, 'To hell with Jehovah' and Bob Dylan in Sunday morning worship are offensive to many conservatives. They cannot worship God in such an environment." He added: "So a new question is raised to trouble already troubled Christians. What to do when a visit to the house of God not only promises the possibility of views with which one must disagree, but an assault upon one's sensibilities which deeply offends?"[11]

And in May 1973, as the PCA was in the process of being formed, Aiken Taylor wrote that the "modern craze over 'expressing the faith' via dances, psychedelic art forms and liturgical drama" was "indefensible," as these new forms "are a modern version of the ancient tendency to allegorize the faith out of all practical existence." In this same editorial, he described an "interpretation of the resurrection in music and dance" that had been presented at a PCUS church, with a young girl playing the central role as "our dance liturgist."[12]

The Continuing Church Movement

By the 1960s, many conservatives in the PCUS were coming to the conclusion that ecclesiastical separation from the spreading apostasy in their denomination was necessary. The issues were extensive, and there was no realistic prospect for effecting reform.[13]

However, despite agreement on basics such as Scripture and gospel, the Continuing Presbyterian Church movement, which morphed into the Presbyterian Church in America, was not committed consistently to the Westminster Confession of Faith, including its doctrine of worship. This movement was a product of its time, and of the state of Presbyterianism for more than a century—lack of conformity to the Westminster Standards, and lack of uniformity with respect to worship.

As has been noted elsewhere, the PCA at its formation was a mixed multitude, theologically speaking. Reflecting the lack of instruction in historic Reformation theology in Southern Presbyterian denominational seminaries, not every minister who helped in its founding was really committed to the Reformed faith, even on matters such as predestination.

One could argue that the PCA has matured doctrinally over the past half century, such that many of those

8. Thompson, pp. 482–483.

9. Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Silver Anniversary Edition* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999), pp. 493–494, citing "Worth Asking: What Is Sacrilege?", *Presbyterian Journal* (August 21, 1968), p. 16.

10. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 495, citing "When Worship is Not," *Presbyterian Journal* (January 22, 1969), p. 12.

11. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 496–497, citing "Two Ways—Light vs. Dark," *Presbyterian Journal* (March 5, 1969), p. 12.

12. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 497–498, citing "This Is Presbyterianism Today," *Presbyterian Journal* May 30, 1973), p. 12.

13. For a detailed account of the history of and reasons for the separation, see Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*.

early ministers might not be accepted today due to their lack of commitment to basic Calvinism. Nevertheless, the motif of liturgical diversity that was manifest in 1973 has continued into 2023.

Different Approaches

The congregations that constituted the PCA largely reflected the worship practices that were found across the PCUS. And since there was a diversity of practice in the mother denomination, so there was in the new one.

The differences included matters of style, the content of worship, the administration of the sacraments, the garb of the minister, and the issue of women's leadership.

There were congregations that were "liturgical" in their approach, including regular usage of the Doxology and the Gloria Patri, recitation of creeds (particularly The Apostles' Creed), and responsive reading of Scripture. There were congregations that adhered to Puritan simplicity.

There were congregations that employed a hymnal with what might be considered formal hymns—whether the PCUS-endorsed *The Hymnal* or the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's *Trinity Hymnal*. There were congregations which used *Inspiring Hymns* or similar songbooks which reflected an evangelistic thrust and tunes more associated with camp meetings.

There were congregations that would never have a woman take part in leading a service. There were congregations who were happy to have female missionaries to share their experiences during a worship service—addresses which could morph into exhortation.

There were congregations in which the minister always wore a suit or a sports jacket and tie. There were congregations where clerical garb was used.

There were congregations that would never deviate from the normal pattern of having a regular sermon as part of the worship. There were congregations that were willing to substitute a special program, such as a movie or a Christmas play, for the sermon.

Though there were very few, if any, congregations that eschewed the observance of Christmas and Easter, there were congregations which also observed special days, such as Mother's Day and Father's Day. There were congregations that did not do so.

There were congregations that employed candles on the communion table or in the sanctuary, while others did not. There were congregations which featured Christmas candlelight services, while others were much simpler in their observance of December 25th.

There were congregations that habitually extended an invitation for folks to come forward to make a commitment to Christ—sometimes referred to as "hitting the sawdust trail" (an allusion to the phenomenon of a tent meeting). There were congregations who were more formal in their worship service and who would never engage in what has been called "the liturgy of the invitation system as it has come to be in some non-liturgical churches."[14]

Evangelism and Pragmatism

From the very start in 1973, there were at least two related influences on how PCA congregations would engage in worship.

Like the New School of the nineteenth century, evangelism was an overriding concern, which often impacted worship. Many of the founders of the PCA identified more readily with evangelicals in non-mainline denominations than with the leadership of the PCUS. Accordingly, the Continuing Church was influenced by evangelicalism and, indeed, neo-evangelicalism—which affected its worship. Billy Graham crusades (resonating with the baritone voice of George Beverly Shea and, during the closing invitation, the choir repeatedly singing all six stanzas of "Just As I Am"); 1960s Christian folk songs heard in movies produced by Dr. Graham's World Wide Pictures; singing and musical talent at Saturday night Youth for Christ rallies; and the phenomenon of the Jesus Movement (hippies converted to Christ) and Explo '72 in Dallas, were a powerful addition poured into a mix of lively, and sometimes maudlin, fundamentalistic gospel songs. Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF), one of the four organizations that formed the Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, contributed to how worship was conducted in congregations, both through local evangelistic crusades and the annual family conferences held in Montreat, North Carolina.

Having worship determined by the concern for evangelism played into pragmatism—the use of whatever song or practice seemed to work in order to press home the claims of Christ.

One could say that worship in the early days of the PCA was largely "traditional" in the sense that there was not much by way of 1960s-style experimental worship. However, at the same time, the employment of practices that had no biblical justification—showing movies and staging Christmas plays, for example—would

14. The quote is from Dr. John R. deWitt, a professor of church history at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson (personal recollection of the author, 1976).

make the budding denomination susceptible to more bizarre practices down the road.

Given that there was no theology of worship that had been formulated, there was a great deal of different ideas and practices. It is not an exaggeration to say that every congregation was free to do what was right in its own eyes. G. I. Williamson's commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith, which emphasized the regulative principle of worship (RPW), had a positive effect on some ministers, particularly younger ones. Nevertheless, those who had even heard of the RPW, much less those who self-consciously held to it, were definitely in the minority.[15]

A New Start

And yet, there were some stirrings to start to consider the matter of worship more seriously.

One example of this reality was a communication to the First General Assembly, authored by Eurie Hayes Smith, III. The pastor raised several items, including publishing to the congregations "the rich spirit filled, but neglected heritage of Reformed Worship"; contrasting this heritage "with the many non-Reformed liturgies presently in use"; providing "a Reformed Liturgy and a Reformed psalter"; recommending "what constitutes proper pulpit (liturgical) dress for Reformed pastors" recommending "what constitutes proper architecture as exhibits and Reformed Christian faith truly, accurately and majestically"; and demonstrating "by its attention to these matters that for the Reformed Faith, faithful, true, biblical worship in the Church is as important as the Great Commission to the world." The Third Assembly addressed the first four of Smith's items. It noted that "the Reformed view of liturgy, as seen in the Westminster Assembly's Directory for Worship[,] has been marked by simplicity with few stated forms." It recommended "the use of hymnbooks that include a good selection of the Psalms and hymns, that are true to the Word, set to music suitable for the worship of God," with the *Trinity Hymnal* (from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church), the *Psalter Hymnal* (Christian Reformed Church in North America), *The Book of Psalms for Singing* (Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), and *Bible Songs* (Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church) given as examples.

The Third Assembly also approved its Directory for Worship (DFW) as a part of the Book of Church Order (*BCO*). However, in doing so, it adopted a "Temporary Preface," which states: "The Directory for Worship is an approved guide and should be taken seriously as the mind of the Church agreeable to the Standards. However, it does not have the force of law and is not to be considered obligatory in all its parts." That "temporary preface" is still in effect, so that the bulk of the DFW remains not fully obligatory. However, in 1981, three chapters, dealing with baptism, the admission of persons to the ordinances, and communion, were formally adopted as being binding. Later, a paragraph in the chapter on the solemnization of marriage was also given full Constitutional status, in order to be unambiguous that marriage is between a man and a woman, and that PCA ministers "who solemnize marriages shall only solemnize marriages between one man and one woman."[16]

But the fact that the DFW as a whole did not become the law of the denomination was telling. And there are at least two basic reasons for this failure. One, there was no unanimity as to what constituted worship. And two, there was a deep desire not to dictate to congregations how they should operate. With respect to worship, the PCA, effectively, was congregationalist. Instead of uniformity, which is the Westminster ideal, all of the "chocolates" came in a sampler box that carried the label of Pluriformity.

But people who had had to deal with denominational overreach in the PCUS need not have worried, as the DFW was not as strict as they might have feared. That pluriformity was embodied even in the document itself. Chapter 47–6 states: "The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given His Church a large measure of liberty in this matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God's Word are observed and the Spirit of the Lord is, that all things must be done decently and in order, and that God's people should serve Him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness."

The question is, What is meant by this curious phrase, that "The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no

15. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession Of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964). For an extensive overview of the history of the concept "regulative principle of worship," see Frank J. Smith (with Chris Coldwell), "The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature. Part One (1946–1999)," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 2 (2006): 89–164; and Frank J. Smith (with Chris Coldwell), "The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature. Part Two (2000–2006)," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007): 155–215. See also Frank J. Smith, "Recent Reformed Writings on Worship," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008): 227–52.

16. For an extensive discussion of the history of the DFW, see Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 501–6; and also see the lead article in this present volume.

fixed forms for public worship"? At least two possibilities exist.

The first is that the word "forms" refers to actual language of worship. This would then be seen as a statement that there is no prescribed prayer book, as would obtain in Anglicanism. However, taken in its broadest sense, it would also mean that the language with regard to *any and all* of the elements of worship is not prescribed. But that would clearly contradict the fact that the reading of the Word of God entails reading the precise words of Scripture. And, based on a strict Presbyterian understanding of worship, it would also contradict the notion that the church is to restrict itself to singing inspired songs, which are recorded in Scripture.

The second possibility is that the reference is to the practices of worship themselves. In other words, "forms" refers to the way in which worship comes to expression, and that there is no fixity to those modes of expression. On this view, although it would be legitimate to preach a sermon, it might also be fine to sing a sermon—or, to dance a sermon. This view, of course, goes contrary to the historic Presbyterian notion of the fact that the practices or elements of worship are distinct and are prescribed. It would also go against a further statement in the DFW, found just three paragraphs later (*BCO* 47–9): "The Bible teaches that the following are proper elements of worship service…."[17]

Mitigating the problematic expression in *BCO* 47–6 is a final sentence in that section, which speaks of the necessity of "simplicity" of the worship service. Nevertheless, the terminology of "no fixed forms" was used by those who wanted to push the bounds of what transpired in PCA worship.[18]

Avant Garde, General Assembly Style

By the 1980s, there were blatant attempts to implement "contemporary" worship in the PCA. Indeed, the celebration and promotion of avant garde approaches to worship occurred at the General Assembly itself.

To some extent, that which the powers-that-be scheduled at the Assembly merely reflected trends and practices at the local level. Nevertheless, it is hard not to draw the conclusion that there was a top-down effort to influence worship throughout the denomination.

Blatant Idolatry

In 1983, the entertainment-oriented evening programs at the Assembly had been dubbed "worship services" in the proposed docket, but after objection was raised, the nomenclature was changed to "inspirational services." However, it turned out that that was not the whole problem. Only after one of the programs did it become known that the slide show would feature a visible representation of Christ. A personal resolution objected to said depiction which was "in violation of Scripture and our confessional standards" and noted that the Heidelberg Catechism "warns about trying to instruct people through dumb images rather than by the sound preaching of the Word." The personal resolution asked the Assembly to "convey these concerns to the Assembly's committees and agencies and instruct them to exercise greater caution with regard to these matters in the future." The Assembly acted to remind "its churches that in our understanding of Scripture we would reject any visible representation of Christ or the use of religious symbols as objects of worship, but that the particulars in this resolution do not warrant the type of action requested."[19]

Movies and Musical Entertainment

Three years later, at the 1986 General Assembly in Philadelphia, the stage would be rocking with a lively choir as well as films. An attempt to amend the docket to change the nomenclature for these evening programs from "worship services" was, overwhelmingly, turned back. Eleven commissioners recorded their negative votes on the adoption of the docket "due to their belief that unscriptural worship practices were to be included in the evening worship services."

But after those worship services had occurred, fifty commissioners presented a formal protest against "the impropriety of incorporating non-Reformed worship principles and practices into these services in such a predominant way that the clear distinctives of our Reformed worship, as set out in *Book of Church Order*, chapters 47 and 49, were obscured, if not excluded."

17. The preceding four paragraphs are reproduced essentially verbatim from Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, page 502.

18. The deliberate pushing of the envelope with regard to "forms" of worship owes much to John Frame, long time seminary professor, first at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), then Westminster Seminary in California, and finally Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando). In considering various influences on PCA worship, one should not underestimate the impact of his views. For an evaluation of how he framed things, see Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, "Reframing Presbyterian Worship: A Critical Survey of the Worship Views of John M. Frame and R. J. Gore," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, 1 (2005): 116–50.

19. Smith, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 508.

Among the reasons given for the protest was that "the preaching of the Word occupied a minor place in the program of worship each evening"; that "the predominant position was given to musical and choral presentations"; that "this preponderance of musical presentations encouraged applause... and a standing ovation; practices which are in conflict with the Reformed understanding of worship, where recognition is given to God, not man"; and that "the overall effect of these worship services was to produce approval and acceptance of non-Reformed traditions of worship, rather than to reflect the biblical basis and strength of our own distinct theology and practice of worship."

An Ad Hoc Committee was appointed by the Assembly's Moderator to respond to the protest, which report was adopted by the Assembly. The court argued that these evening programs "were intended to combine a worship time with programs which would illustrate and advance the great commission through the committees of the General Assembly." Furthermore, "[t]he parts of the programs that presented choral and instrumental music were Biblical in character, and the films were instructive in the work of the great commission." The response continued:

> Exception was taken to the clapping during some of the singing and the applause after some performances. It should be remembered that these were part of the program emphasizing ethnic missions. If the tempo would not be attractive to some, our tempo and customs may not be attractive abroad where bongo drums may be the accompaniment (BCO 47–6).
>
> The applause was a natural response of appreciation for a good presentation of Scripture truth. The human singing voice is a marvelous gift of God and to applaud it when used in Scriptural song is both to show appreciation to the singer and thanks to God as the author of all our gifts. To show respect and appreciation of fellow Christians is a debt of honor and respect. Romans 13:8 commands us not to leave such a debt outstanding. The Psalmist, after having listed many instruments and various modes of worship, including dancing in the assembly of his people, invites his people to join the Lord in delighting in his people's worship (Psalm 149). One mode by which the Psalmist expressed this "delight," elsewhere, was to join in clapping with the assembled people of God (Psalm 47).
>
> The programs included the appropriate elements of reformed worship and added to the appreciation and understanding of the work of the Great Commission through our committees.
>
> Insofar as the evening program contained worship, that worship was agreeable to Scripture, was a Biblical expression of the Regulative Principle of Worship, and conformed to *BCO* 47 & 49.[20]

Contemplating what the Assembly said is enough to take the breath away. There is obvious ignorance of the regulative principle of worship: the fact that there may have been proper acts of worship in a worship service does not justify incorporating non-ordained practices into a service of worship. The Assembly itself acknowledged that the worship services had other purposes than the worship of God, thereby detracting from His glory. And the court took the position that offering applause to man is appropriate during a time of worship, rather than understanding that in worship, all glory is to be given to God.

A Dramatic Twist

At the 1989 Assembly, not only was there drama during Sunday morning public worship, but the practice of liturgical drama was promoted.[21] Canon Creek Presbyterian Church, San Ramon, California, where the Rev. Lewis Ruff was organizing pastor, distributed a Drama Script Catalog. The Director of Creative Productions, who compiled the Catalog, stated in the introduction: "Many of these sketches are used in our Sunday services at Canyon Creek. Please keep in mind that our target audience is the unchurched and that those sketches are not intended necessarily to stand alone as a teaching tool; rather, they are used to raise questions and/or issues that the Pastor can later address with Biblical truth... Anything you do for the Lord is worth doing excellently. Drama is once again being viewed openly as a powerful means of communicating God's love & power and as such we, His speakers, need to be producing work of a quality that will bring Him honor. Press on!"

A total of thirty-seven commissioners (out of 774) protested the employment of drama during the Assembly-sponsored Sunday morning public worship, as being a violation of the Confession of Faith, and its strict standard of worship: "The acceptable way of worshiping

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 506ff. An attempt to remove the reference to bongo drums failed.

21. Customarily, PCA General Assemblies would not extend over a weekend, but this one on the West Coast started on a Thursday and ended the following Tuesday.

the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in Holy Scripture."[22]

Multi-media Worship

The 1990 Assembly overwhelmingly voted down a minority report from the Christian Education and Publications (CE/P) Committee of Commissioners, asking that exception be taken "to the action of CE/P in approving of and helping to sponsor a multi-media worship service" during the 1989 National Women in the Church Conference.[23]

Controversy Over Prayer

The same year, the Assembly was led in what was called a Concert of Prayer by a Mr. David Bryant, a gentleman from outside the denomination who did not hold to Reformed theology. A protest was lodged.

> First, we protest the charismatic emphasis of the service. This was evident in the manner in which the service was conducted—including the emotional and non-thinking thrust—and also in such phrases as "fuller revelation of Jesus Christ."
>
> Second, we protest the MANIPULATIVE view of prayer manifested in the service and evident in the literature of the organization. For example, the participants were encouraged to pronounce the word "Release!" the participants were told to shout out loud their worst sins. David Bryant's book, *Concert of Prayer*, states, "Like a band on parade, your concept of prayer marches forth in an aggressive ministry of intercession. The leader, who has struck up the band, may put you through different paces and different tempos at different times... pressing on for a change. 'Father, the time has come for you to act.'"
>
> Third, we protest the fact that this Concert of Prayer movement claims to be in line historically and theologically with the Reformation understanding of the nature of Biblical prayer. This movement places an emphasis on prayer almost as a magical formula rather than as a means that God uses.
>
> Fourth, we protest the manifestation of New Age concepts in this service. For example, the participants were told to visualize and act out the putting on of the armor of God, and then to extend their arms as if brandishing the sword of the Spirit. The participants were told to hold out their hands and imagine themselves as being lifted up in their hands.
>
> Fifth, we protest that this service caused grief to many commissioners and guests of the Assembly. The conduct and content of the service have generated great concern among many members of the PCA that such events could ever occur in this denomination.
>
> Sixth, we protest that this concept of Concert of Prayer is being promoted throughout the Church. The book, *Concert of Prayer*, contains the following quote: "Since a major aspect of Jesus' ministry to the unreached involved the casting out of demons, the healing of the lame and the deaf and the blind, the raising of the dead, and many other miracles, ask God to give His Church worldwide whatever signs and wonders are needed to confirm the Word before an unbelieving world."
>
> We are grieved by what we perceive to be the drift of our beloved denomination, as she drifts away from us. We respectfully call upon the Assembly to repent and to return to the faith of our fathers.

There were 126 protesters out of 1220 commissioners. Interestingly, even though there were more than twice as many teaching elders (818) as ruling elders (402 plus 22 alternates) at the Assembly, more ruling elders (64) signed the protest than did ministers (62).

The Assembly responded by expressing great grief to those who were offended. However, the court defended itself by stating that "there has been no cause for the General Assembly to be indicted as to sin in this case. While there may be differences in style, culture, or format which for some are uncomfortable, we believe it is too much to charge the whole of the Wednesday night service as being unbiblical or sinful." Furthermore, "We do not in any way mean to defend either the Concert of Prayer movement, nor everything included within the context of the Wednesday night service. We would point out that the General Assembly has in times past (and even at this present Assembly) invited fellow believers to preach or lead us in worship who are not in

22. The preceding four paragraphs are reproduced essentially verbatim from Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 512f. See the sidebar, "Dramatic Productions at Canyon Creek: Your Benevolence Dollars at Work," for examples of the drama scripts.

23. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 513.

complete conformity with our Standards. This practice has never been interpreted as an official endorsement by the PCA of either the whole of the theology or specific movements or organizations as represented by them."[24]

Shall We Dance?

The 1991 Assembly was hosted by Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama. Women in that congregation had developed a ballet ministry, which included the use of dancing girls on occasion during public worship. In an interview with a local Birmingham newspaper, Senior Pastor Dr. Frank Barker stated that the employment of dancing during public worship would probably be one of the most controversial aspects of the General Assembly. At the Sunday evening worship service, liturgical ballet was offered as part of the worship. Perhaps even more inflammatory were the remarks by the guest speaker—Steve Brown, a well-known pastor and seminary professor—who attacked anyone who would dare oppose this display of the young female dancers.

> You know, of course, John Calvin rolled over in his grave this evening. We simply don't dance in Presbyterian services. I was praying for you guys while the dancers were dancing. And I said, "Lord, is this proper?" And the Lord said (Now we Reformed people don't believe the Lord speaks anymore, but it sounded like him. Maybe it was Rich Little, I don't know.) Lord said, "I really like it—a lot." What a magnificent way to praise God! And if you were not moved, if you were not deeply touched, if you were not moved spiritually, you're insensitive to the Spirit of God.

That Sunday evening service had been arranged under the auspices of the General Assembly Arrangements Committee. A motion from the floor sought to pour oil on troubled waters. It read: "Until such time as there is greater unanimity within the PCA re. worship, local arrangements committees are encouraged to include in their Assembly worship services only those elements outlined in the Directory of Worship." This motion was defeated, 308–384. Fifty-five commissioners asked that their affirmative votes be recorded on the lost motion.

At the close of the Assembly, the attempt to protest the Sunday evening service was ruled out of order, based on the fact that that service had occurred prior to the actual convening of the Assembly. (The Sunday evening service had been listed in the Commissioners' Handbook as being part of the Assembly's agenda.)[25]

American Civil Religion

Also at the 1991 Assembly, there was a patriotic worship service in celebration of the Allied victory over Iraq in Desert Storm. The operation's chief military chaplain was a PCA minister, who helped lead the service. A protest was lodged, as follows:

> We the undersigned do protest the patriotic service, which included a pledge of allegiance which was made to a particular nation; that that pledge of allegiance was improper for the Church to make; that there are members of the Assembly and denomination who are not citizens of the United States of America; and that "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" was sung (which is not a Christian song and which was written in support of what many feel was an unjust war against a sovereign nation).[26]

MNA Machinations

What we have seen is that there were conscious efforts at the General Assembly meetings to push the envelope, so to speak—to foster a progressive approach to worship that was, at the same time, a celebration of pluriformity and hence a denial of uniformity. It is not so much that denominational bureaucrats were trying to dictate to all PCA churches that they must engage in "contemporary" worship. Rather, the point was to give expression to this new way of worship and ensure that the attitude of the PCA would remain that of "live and let live," rather than one in which there would be strict enforcement of the official doctrine of worship enunciated in the Church's Constitution.

An overture had been sent up to the 1991 Assembly from Eastern Carolina Presbytery asking the court to appoint a committee to study whether liturgical dance and drama are consistent with the PCA's doctrine of worship. The Bills & Overtures Committee that year reported a favorable recommendation, noting the "great controversy and much consternation" which such practices have caused throughout the PCA; the fact that some mission churches under Mission to North

24. Smith, pp. 513–15.

25. The material in this section on dancing was reproduced essentially verbatim from Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 515f. The source for the lengthy quotation of Steve Brown's remarks is David C. Lachman, "Reflections on the Nineteenth General Assembly of the PCA," *Presbyterian Advocate* (July-August and September 1991), p. 2.

26. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 516.

America (MNA) sponsorship "have regularly used drama as part of the worship"; and that the dramatic play at Sabbath morning worship at the 1989 Assembly "was vigorously protested." This recommendation, which came late in the 1991 Assembly, was postponed until the next year.

However, the 1992 Assembly defeated a motion to answer this overture in the affirmative. Aiding its defeat was the information that the MNA Committee had, although without General Assembly authorization, appointed a task force on worship. The Assembly commended the MNA Committee for "the caliber and balance of the task force assembled." The MNA Committee was to make this study available to people "upon request and at their expense after approval by the General Assembly." The task force was comprised of more than three dozen people, including several women. At least one of the participants was from a liberal Methodist denomination.[27]

The Innovators Seeking a Consensus

In 1994, various denominational leaders in the PCA set forth *A Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America* (*PSI*). This booklet attempted to reach a consensus by which those across the theological spectrum of the denomination could live with each other in peace. The chapters covered Scripture and Hermeneutics, Subscription to Doctrinal Standards, Theological Reflection, Church Polity, Worship, Church Discipline, and Mission. The breadth of topics demonstrates that the internecine theological war had many aspects, and also shows the crucial part played by the doctrine and practice of worship.

With respect to "Worship," *PSI* professed its allegiance to the Calvinistic Reformation.

> As Presbyterians, we are the grateful heirs of the Reformed tradition, which has clearly based its faith and practice on the Word of God alone. In particular, the Protestant reformers modified and sanctified the worship of God in their day to conform to the pattern of biblical, apostolic worship. In this respect, we believe our tradition still provides a model for true, spiritual worship. As we affirm our past, we are eager to live out these same principles in today's world. In order to do this carefully and fruitfully, especially when there are differences in the Church, we would always return to the first principle of our Reformation forefathers: *Sola Scriptura*, the Word of God alone.

However, the document controversially maintained a three-fold distinction, among "elements," "circumstances," and "expressions" of worship. It also spoke of what it called "somewhat [!] controversial" practices of worship, "such as the use of drama, dance, musical instruments and vocalists, the lifting or clapping of hands, the use of women in liturgical leadership, and the use of various forms of art."

Blue Banner Books, the publishing arm of First Presbyterian Church, Rowlett, Texas, published a response to this proposal. With regard to *PSI*'s perspective on worship, concern was expressed that

> worship elements (and expressions) are being legitimized on the basis of the principle of their not being "specifically prohibited." This, of course, is essentially the Catholic/Lutheran/Anglican position; and, is a complete reversal from the fine statements found in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. We are, quite frankly, at a loss to comprehend how the author(s) could subscribe to the regulative principle of worship, and then two pages later in essence deny it. If someone were writing a parody of a "loose" theological position (or the state of theological and intellectual reflection in today's church), he could hardly do better than simply to quote from the document under consideration.

Noting, with gratitude, "the humble respect expressed [by *PSI*] for the Church's unity," the critique declared:

> We trust that this desire may represent a change from what has occurred in the past, in which General Assembly Arrangements Committees have felt free to impose bizarre worship practices upon the entire Assembly while knowing full well that that imposition would engender resentment and cause heartache for many of the commissioners. We trust that this also represents a mature view of the Church as being an organic whole, in which things that happen in one congregation are seen as affecting all of us (and thus, potentially, causing concern throughout the entire denomination). And, we trust that this principle of charity would inform PCA worship practices from now on.[28]

27. The previous two paragraphs were reproduced essentially verbatim from Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 516.

28. Frank J. Smith, "Worship," in Christopher Coldwell, ed., *Answers to PCA Consensus: An Analysis of* A Proposed Statement of Identity For the Presbyterian Church in America (Dallas, Tex.: Blue Banner Books, 1994).

The *PSI* illustrates the ongoing reality of liturgical diversity throughout the denomination, and how that lack of uniformity was fostered by prominent churchmen, including some in the denominational bureaucracy.

The Bureaucrats Were at It Again

In 1995, the unsettled state regarding worship led to the scheduling of a pre-Assembly "discussion" on worship. However, the way in which the speakers were chosen generated controversy. There had been an attempt by certain interested parties to schedule a genuine debate which would have featured two seminary professors, one representing an avant garde approach (John Frame), the other a traditional viewpoint (T. David Gordon). Professor Frame declined to accept the invitation to debate Dr. Gordon. Then, the person in charge of pre-Assembly seminars decided to schedule a totally different format for discussion. The new event left Dr. Gordon being "uninvited" to speak; among the three speakers who did lead the "discussion" was Professor Frame.[29]

New Song-Salt Lake

Meanwhile, MNA continued its novel ways. In 1998, in an effort to reach "baby busters," an MNA church plant, New Song-Salt Lake, employed styles of worship and forms which varied from what most traditional Presbyterians would be familiar with.

Alternative rock and roll music was one of the styles utilized in public worship. One of the songs sung by the worship team was entitled "Jesus Freak", with the following lyrics: "What will people do if they know that I'm a Jesus freak? // What will people do if they know that it's true? // I don't really care if they label me a Jesus freak, // There is no disguising the truth."

The medium of video was also used. Video clips from secular movies, such as *Forrest Gump* and *Soul Food*, were shown. The organizing pastor also did man-in-the-street interviews with a video camera, which he then showed during public worship.

A video of the "Jesus Freak" song and the video of the man-in-the-street interviews (*What Makes You Happy?*) were on New Song's website. A ten-minute video entitled *What's at Stake in the West*, produced by Presbyterian Media Productions, Inc. (PMP), showed the "Jesus Freak" video and portions of the other. Numerous copies of *What's at Stake in the West* were distributed throughout the denomination.[30]

The Jason Wallace Story

About the time of the New Song-Salt Lake saga, there was another story related to it. A young man, Jason Wallace, was in the process of being sent by Central Georgia Presbytery to do church planting in Utah. The state of Utah was outside the bounds of any PCA presbytery, and therefore any presbytery could engage in ministry within one of those destitute parts of the Church. However, Lewis Ruff objected to Mr. Wallace coming onto the field—not because the young ordinand wanted to engage in traditional worship, but because of his opposition to the type of worship being offered at many of the MNA church plants in the West.

Northern California Presbytery petitioned the General Assembly to extend its boundaries in order to include most of Nevada and all of Utah. Central Georgia fought back. The end result was that the Assembly declined at that time to allow Northern California to exercise total control over the Beehive State.

Nevertheless, Mr. Wallace decided that he would have been in an untenable position if he had remained in the PCA. He thereupon joined and was ordained by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Through his efforts, the OPC has had a fruitful ministry in Utah.[31]

Professionalization of Worship at the General Assembly

In 1980, the Assembly had approved the following motion: "That presbyteries and not the four major committees be responsible for worship services at future General Assemblies on a regular rotating basis." However, in 2002, the Assembly followed its permanent Administrative Committee's recommendation that the Committee "through the local Host Committee be responsible for all services at General Assembly." Though not listed in the grounds justifying the change, heard on the floor was the notion that planning for said worship services could take a long time.[32]

But, of course, the idea that it might take a year or two to plan a worship service is ridiculous—unless the service has turned into a show or a big production. This

29. This paragraph is reproduced essentially verbatim from Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 518.

30. Much of the material in this section is reproduced essentially verbatim from *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring 1998).

31. See "The Saga of Jason Wallace" and related articles, including editorials "Sympathy for New Song-Salt Lake" and "Conscience Bound," in *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 4, no. 2 (Spring 1998).

32. *M8GA* (1980), p. 121; *M30GA* (2003), p. 294.

professionalization of the Assembly's worship services—letting the "experts" be in charge, rather than allowing the grass roots as manifest in the smaller presbyteries of the PCA to lead in at least some of the worship services—was telling with respect to how the Assembly viewed worship. It also meant that because the Assemblies would always be hosted by presbyteries in urban areas, the type of worship offered would skew toward the *avant garde*. And moreover, PCA worship, rather than being informed by a traditional Presbyterian understanding, would further diverge from the Westminster Standards, helping to reinforce the rift between those who were faithful Presbyterians and those who were liturgical innovators. [33]

Worship Diversity among Congregations

The discussions, debates, and controversies at the denominational level were reflective of the diversity locally. But how diverse could it get?

A Baseball Service

On August 23, 1998, the worship service at Parkview Church of Lilburn, Georgia, featured a baseball theme.[34]

News of this event resulted in reaction by Ascension Presbytery, located in western Pennsylvania and northeastern Ohio. That court adopted a communication to North Georgia Presbytery which noted that the Parkview baseball service "violates the Biblical Regulative Principle of worship, and... seems to make a mockery of true worship and proper observance of the Lord's Day." The communique stated that the Presbytery voted 1) "to send a letter to North Georgia asking if they had inquired into this service relative to its conformity to the regulative principle and, if so, if they would be willing to share what they found; 2) to direct the Clerk to follow up by telephone if he does not hear from the North Georgia Presbytery in one month; and 3) to circulate any response from North Georgia Presbytery to Ascension Presbytery within a week after it is received."[35]

The North Georgia stated clerk responded to Ascension's stated clerk as follows:

> I am in receipt of your letter, dated November 10, 1998, to me. I have discussed your letter with the Rev. Mr. Jon Adams, Parkview Church's pastor. My notification was the first knowledge he had that Parkview Church was the subject of discussion and action by your Presbytery. I am appalled that your court would take such action without even contacting Parkview's pastor or other church leaders.
>
> Regarding the August 23rd service, Parkview attempted to combine (1) a Vision Awareness, (2) a call to commit to using spiritual gifts, "Step Up to the Plate", and (3) morning worship. The juices got rolling in planning (1) and (2) and spilled over into (3). Hindsight makes it clear that this was unwise and will not be repeated.
>
> I know and have high respect for the Rev. Mr. Adams and the officers and members of Parkview Church. I do not share your Presbytery's concern about Parkview Church's worship practices; but to allay any fears you may have, the Session has prepared this statement: "We desire that our congregation's worship of God be marked by fidelity to Holy Scripture, informed by the Westminster Standards and the 'Directory of Worship' of our denomination's Book of Church Order (BOCO). Our Sunday morning worship services normally are planned in accordance with the regulative principles of Reformed worship as interpreted by BOCO, and we sincerely regret any confusion or offense caused by insufficient attention to these guidelines on August 23rd."[36]

Despite the (mild) apology from the Parkview Session,

33. Shortly after the 2023 General Assembly, in an article entitled "Music at the GA and the PCA (Reformation 21, July 3, 2023), Terry Johnson lamented the state of worship in the PCA as illustrated by the worship offered at the denomination's highest court.

> Does the PCA in general understand the role of music in the worship of the Reformed Church? The answer must be no if our annual experience at the General Assembly gives any indication. What the Reformation revived was the *congregational* singing of the patristic church. The medieval church had musical instruments and choirs. They provided the music. Congregations sat mute as the 'professionals' performed. The Reformers rightly restored the singing *of the congregation* whether hymns (Lutherans) or psalms (Reformed) as one of five essential elements in the ordinary worship of the church. It was elevated to this place of prominence along with the reading and preaching of Scripture, prayer, and the administration of the sacraments. Congregational singing even takes on confessional status in the Westminster standards (*WCF* XXI.5; *Directory for the Public Worship of God,* "Of Singing of Psalms).
>
> Yet year in and year out we assemble, 3000 strong, only to have the musicians, vocalists, and choirs overwhelm the gathered congregation. Once again, this year, most of the time in our official services it was impossible to hear one's own voice, never mind those of the surrounding multitude. The high level of skill and prodigious efforts made by all of the performers is obvious. Their proper function, less so.

34. "Stepping Up to the Plate: PCA Church Uses Baseball and Hot Dogs to Attract People to Its New Season," *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (Summer 1998).

35. *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 4, no. 4 (Fall 1998).

36. *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (Winter 1999).

questions remain. No matter how many creative juices were flowing, how in the world could anyone with any understanding of public worship allow this baseball service to take place? And what exactly did the Session mean by its commitment to the regulative principle?

"It's Show Time at Spanish River Church"

The entertainment-oriented nature of the worship at Spanish River Church, Boca Raton, Florida, was documented in a July 1999 article in the local newspaper. Entitled "New 1,500–seat Worship Center Opens at Spanish River," the article says,

> Cue the lights, bring up the sound, and roll the videotape: It's show time at Spanish River Church, where a brand-new, multi-million dollar worship center has turned Sunday services into entertainment extravaganzas.
>
> Services at the 30–year-old Presbyterian church have long included dramatic interpretation, soaring music and special videos to bring the Gospel to life. Now, in the $9.3 million worship center that opened this week, the Gospel is larger than life, presented with a fully rigged, professional-quality theatrical stage that includes massive video screens and state-of-the-art lighting, sound and computer graphics. It takes a crew of up to a dozen technicians to run it all, working from a spacious new control booth high above the congregation.

The article continues:

> Like many churches, Spanish River finds it necessary to use new ways of presenting the ancient message of the Christian faith. "You have to think about what people are used to," said... the church's business manager and director of its men's ministry. "People are used to high-energy, multi-media presentations of information, he said, so "we try to take the message of the Gospel and present it in those ways."
>
> [The] director of music and programming, demonstrated that approach with a video created by the church's Tech Team. The team videotaped a drive through Mizner Park in Boca Raton and down Federal Highway into Fort Lauderdale, speeding up the tape to show frantically traveling cars and pedestrians. The tape played on the two 12–by-16 foot rear-projection video screens placed on either side of the stage, while "Through the Noise," a song by the Christian rock band Truth, blared through speakers throughout the facility.
>
> The point... was "how to live a Christian life in a world that continually bombards us with other stuff."[37]

What Is the PCA Worship Experience Today?

It is arguable that there has been a greater awareness of a Reformed approach to worship since the founding of the PCA in 1973—though that approach is more Continental (with liturgies and assurances of pardon and so forth) than Scottish. This is a point that was made by Brad Isbell, a ruling elder at Covenant Presbyterian Church, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, in a 2022 blog post.[38]

He began his piece by stating:

> The state of worship in the Presbyterian Church in America is arguably better than it has ever been, at least as far as *liturgy* goes. More churches now use recognizably Reformed liturgies than at any point in the denomination's history. These are liturgies that include the biblical elements of worship—they are not just the standard evangelical format of "30 minutes of singing/30 minutes of preaching."

However, at the same time, he cautioned about a lack of

> the hard-to-define (but essential) qualities of reverence and awe. What may be trending is leadership of worship that does not comport with or support presbyterian polity. And what may be chipping away at the foundations of proper worship are errant and novel practices, mostly regarding the Lord's Supper.

He listed several items of "tangible and intangible things which have been added to liturgies, to the

37. Kate McClare, "New 1,500–seat Worship Center Opens at Spanish River," *Boca Raton (Fla.) News*, July 17, 1999; quoted in Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 549. Another example of such excess in PCA worship involved a multimedia nativity celebration, an annual event at Ponte Vedra Presbyterian Church, located in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, just south of Jacksonville. Even though this event is not a worship service *per se*, nevertheless, worship is clearly being offered, which is why we have included this account as another example of PCA worship. See "Thousands Take Tour at PCA Nativity Scene Florida Church Puts on Multi-Media Production," and "Secular Press Covers 'A Bethlehem Visit' Local Newspapers Report that Spectators Kneel Before 'Holy Family' Five-Month-Old Girl Among Those Portraying the Baby Jesus," *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (January-February 2001), pp. 10–11.

38. Brad Isbell, "Worship, Polity, & the PCA," pcapolity.com (January 24, 2022).

detriment of simple, biblical, Spirit-and-truth Reformed worship."

For example, there is "an overly horizontal, man-centered ethos" that is "reflected in informal or casual approaches to the service, which could include announcements or presentations that break up the dialogical-biblical flow and tone of the service." Possible foci of these interruptions might include "promotional pitches complete with video presentations or distribution of materials. Fellowship times in the middle of the service (sometimes called 'passing of the peace' or even 'halftime') might succeed in establishing a familiar or homey feel even as they distract from the holy purpose of worship." He also listed children's activities or the departure of the children during the service, as well as "showy musical performances, loud or complex musical accompaniment or leadership . . ., or other inappropriate visual elements." Also mentioned were "the eclectic additions of the Anglican-attracted, which includes complicated and variable clerical garb and vestments, crossings, bowing at prescribed times, or turning to face a cross, bible, or procession."

Elder Isbell lamented a number of omissions in present-day PCA worship, including the lessened frequency of the long pastoral prayer, as well as the loss of the "second" or evening service. He wrote: "All is not well in the way worship is conducted in the PCA"; and added: "Church members who visit PCA churches across the country often come home stunned and confused by the variations they see."

Practices, Participants, and Settings

As we think about PCA worship today, let's consider three angles: the practices or elements of worship; the participants; and the settings, both in terms of space and time.

Practices

Worship Music

The musical repertoire continues to be variegated across the PCA. In terms of instrumentation, it ranges from simple accompaniment (such as organ and/or piano) to all kinds of instruments and ensembles. It appears that there is presently no PCA congregation that engages habitually in unaccompanied singing.

With respect to the content of worship song, it appears that no PCA congregation practices exclusive psalmody. At the same time, there has been an increase in Psalmody, whether through a psalter (such as the *Trinity Psalter* or *The Book of Psalms for Singing* or *The Book of Psalms for Worship*), the *Trinity Hymnal,* or the newer *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. On the other hand, there are many PCA congregations that practice exclusive hymnody.

Many congregations employ old-style tunes. Increasingly, particularly in urban areas, congregations are utilizing more contemporary tunes, such as exemplified by Indelible Grace, a Nashville-based group affiliated with the PCA's agency focused on serving college campuses, Reformed University Fellowship (RUF).

Baptism

One would think that there would be no great diversity on the matter of baptism. Don't all Presbyterians insist on baptizing infants and baptizing by sprinkling or pouring? Well, actually, no.

Crossbridge Church, which is a network of churches with several congregations in South Florida, including ones in Key Biscayne, Pinecrest, Brickell, and Homestead, is one example where people are baptized by immersion. A video on the church's website shows a series of baptisms in the ocean, with the officiants doing the dunking shouting and raising their hands as the one being baptized comes up from the water. There is no indication that the sacrament was accompanied by the preaching of the Word or as part of a service of worship. Nor was there any indication that these baptisms were tied to church membership and the taking of membership vows. It appears that the ritual is a standalone event while folks are gathered in swimwear on the beach. The website advises would-be candidates for baptism: "Don't worry about what to bring for the water baptism. Our team is prepared with everything you need including a Baptism t-shirt you get to keep."[39]

It also bears noting that there have been PCA congregations which perform infant dedications on behalf of parents who do not wish to have their babies baptized. One such example is First Presbyterian Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee. As reported in the press:

> The Session of the prominent PCA congregation

39. Following an investigation by South Florida Presbytery of a woman preaching, the CrossBridge congregations in Pinecrest, Brickell, and Homestead voted in June 2023 to leave the PCA and to join the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), which allows for female ministers. The Key Biscayne congregation was slated to vote in August 2023 as to whether to make a similar move. John Pacenti, "Women in the Pulpit? Key Biscayne Church May Be Caught in the Crosshairs," *Key Biscayne (Fla.) Independent* (July 10, 2023). Nevertheless, the key point in this context is that there was no official Presbytery investigation of the practice of baptism, though initial inquiries were submitted to the leadership of CrossBridge.

> proclaimed that it "prefers and promotes infant baptism," but that "the practice of infant dedication is not intended to be a sacrament, nor any substitute therefor." The elders also stated: "A careful search of scripture reveals no evidence that dedication of infants is not permitted in worship services. The practice of dedication of infants is illustrated in the Old Testament scriptures in the cases of Samuel and Samson. Jesus, Himself, when an infant, was presented to the Lord in the temple by his parents, as prescribed in the law of the Lord. Luke 2:22,23.
>
> "Finally, BCO 47–6 states, 'The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship, but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given His church a large measure of liberty in this matter.' And BCO 47–9 lists the proper elements of worship service and includes... 'on special occasions taking oaths.'"
>
> The Session resolved that, in its judgment, "infant dedication is not prohibited and is therefore permitted by Scripture."[40]

Communion

But what about the Lord's Supper? Surely Presbyterians can agree how to observe that holy meal! Well, actually, no.

Though the Westminster Standards prescribe a duty to fence the table, there are PCA churches which, in essence, practice open communion, inviting anyone who wishes to participate to do so, or, at least, not enunciating that only those who have received valid Trinitarian baptism and who presently have membership in some evangelical church should partake.

There are PCA churches in which the communicants are standing rather than sitting for the meal.

And there are PCA churches that practice intinction, which is dipping the bread into the wine rather than eating the bread and drinking the wine as separate actions. This practice of intinction, which is a Roman Catholic practice, has even been utilized at General Assembly. Attempts to prohibit that practice at the Assembly communion services were unsuccessful, and an attempt to make explicit what is implicit in the PCA *Book of Church Order*, viz., a prohibition of intinction, failed to garner the two-thirds supermajority of the votes by the presbyteries.[41]

Participants

Women Leading in Worship

In the PCA, there have been examples of women having a leadership role in worship, including, reading Scripture, leading in prayer, and even preaching.

In the words of Brad Isbell,

> the most glaring disorderly trend in PCA worship is a matter of *who*—who leads worship. There are PCA churches across the denomination where nearly every portion of the worship service (except for the sermon and benediction) is led by unordained persons—men, women, children, and young people who are not officers of the church. For some reason, these unordained persons are usually women. One assumes that many officers in the PCA have decided that women in the churches suffer from a lack of regard, visibility, and inclusion. And these officers and ministers have decided that assigning large portions of worship leadership to them is a way to remedy their oppression and exclusion.[42]

The phenomenon observed by Elder Isbell is not a new one. In 1999, there was the matter of John Wood and the congregation he pastored, Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church, Knoxville, Tennessee. Despite attempts to bring Mr. Wood to trial for his views of believing in women preaching, and the role he played in having a woman deliver two messages during public worship services, the Standing Judicial Commission effectively ran interference and declined to pursue the matter, while at the same time, noting that the woman had "crossed a line" in what she had done in public worship. Cedar Springs Church ended up leaving the PCA and joining the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), a denomination that ordains women to all ecclesiastical offices.[43]

As early as 2001, a woman spoke in chapel at Covenant Theological Seminary, delivering a message

40. "TVP [Tennessee Valley Presbytery] Supports Practice of Infant Dedications at First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga," *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 6, no. 5 (September-October 2000), p. 6.

41. The 2012 General Assembly voted, by a margin of 14 votes, to approve the amendment, but that amendment was then defeated by the presbyteries, 23–45. Tim LeCroy, "Thoughts on 40th General Assembly, Part Four: Intinction," Vita pastoralis (website; June 29, 2012); *M41GA* (2013), pp. 116f.

42. Isbell, "Worship, Polity, & the PCA." This Tennessee ruling elder went on to argue that the relinquishing of leadership in worship by the presbyters undermines their authority as a whole.

43. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 445–447, 527; "SJC Declines to Proceed to Trial in John Wood Matter: Commission rules that woman 'crossed the line' in her messages in public worship," *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 6 no. 5 (September-October 2000), p. 1. See also "PCA Korean Church Responds to Concern over Woman Preaching and Her Charismatic Teaching: Prominent Congregation Vows Not to Allow This to Happen Again," Vol. 6 no. 5 (September-October 2000), p. 7.

that had the classic earmarks of a sermon of explanation and application.[44] There has been more recent controversy in a similar vein at Covenant College, where women have addressed students during chapel services.

Historically, there has been pushback with regard to female leadership in worship services. For instance, the 1997 General Assembly took exception to the minutes of Southern Florida Presbytery because the "worship service for the purpose of organizing a church and installing its pastor included a lady who 'read passages of Scripture' prior to the sermon." This exception was approved after vigorous debate on the floor. The next year, Southern Florida asked for the rationale for this exception being taken to its minutes. On motion from the floor, the Assembly referred the Presbytery "to 1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11–15; *Westminster Larger Catechism* Questions 155–159."[45]

More recently, the 2023 General Assembly cited Metro New York Presbytery to appear before the Standing Judicial Commission to give answer for not dealing with the serious irregularities in one of its congregations, Trinity Presbyterian Church of Mt. Kisco, New York, which has on several occasions had lay people and a female Episcopalian minister to deliver the message during Sunday morning worship.[46]

Nevertheless, despite these actions by the General Assembly, having women read Scripture and lead in corporate prayer in worship services is not unheard of in the PCA. Indeed, in 1999, the Assembly rejected an overture that the Directory for Worship be amended to state unambiguously that only men may read Scripture in public worship.[47]

Children's Worship

Presbyterianism, historically, would expect that every member of the covenant community, including young children, would worship together, and that therefore the worship practices for everyone is the same unless otherwise regulated by Scripture (space constraints disallow a discussion of the diversity of views surrounding paedocommunion at this point). However, many PCA churches reject that position, and implement worship designed specifically for children.

One such congregation is Perimeter Church, located in the Atlanta suburb of Johns Creek, Georgia, long known for its cutting-edge approach. Perimeter's website advertises Kids Quest, which is the church's "high-energy children's worship service for kids ages kindergarten through fifth grade." The website video shows children jumping around and having a really fun time.[48]

Choirs and Soloists

Many times, having a church choir is regarded as essential for "traditional" Presbyterian worship. Fifty years ago, many PCA churches boasted choirs, often dressed in special robes, and would often feature special music sung by a soloist. That reality is still true today.[49]

At the same time, there are at least some PCA congregations that embrace the historic Presbyterian position of rejecting special choirs, maintaining instead the view that the congregation is the choir, consisting of believers all of whom exercise their priesthood.[50]

Worship Teams

Many PCA churches have moved from having choirs to employing worship teams. Though ostensibly they are to lead the congregation in singing, the reality is that many times they simply dominate the singing, and furthermore, that as a result of the team's dominance, as well as the lack of familiarity with what is being sung, congregational singing morphs into congregational spectating.

44. Mark Rooze, "Covenant Seminary Shrouds Itself in Mystery: St. Louis School Refuses to Release Audio Tapes of Woman's Chapel Message," *Presbyterian & Reformed News*, Vol. 7 no. 2 (March-April 2001), pp. 1–2.

45. Much of this paragraph is reproduced essentially verbatim from Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 527.

46. Matt Fender, "Safeguarding Our Unity: RPR's Citation of a Woman Preaching," pcapolity.com (June 9, 2023).

47. *M27GA*, pp. 212–213.

48. https://www.perimeter.org/pages/worship/kidsquest-childrens-worship/.

49. Examples include Trinity Presbyterian Church, Montgomery, Alabama (https://trinitypca.org/worship/music/adult-choirs/); Granada Presbyterian Church, Coral Gables, Florida (https://granadachurch.com/services/); Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida (https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2457842724314214; https://crpc.org/choir/); Park Road Presbyterian Church, Hollywood, Florida (https://parkroadpres.org/music-ministry/); Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois (https://www.gracepres.org/worship); First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi (https://fpcjackson.org/church-life/adults/music/); Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, North Carolina (https://christcovenant.org/ministries/worship-music/); Westminster Presbyterian Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania (https://westpca.com/music/); Park Cities Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas (https://pcpc.org/ music/choirs/).

50. For the argument against the use of choirs in worship, see Cliff Blair, "The Few on behalf of the Many: An Examination of Choirs in the Light of Scripture, Church History, and Practical Theology," in *The Worship of God: Reformed Concepts of Biblical Worship,* ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and C. N. Willborn (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), pp. 219–35.

Settings

Buildings

Generally speaking, there is no one appropriate architectural style for church buildings. Churches may quite properly meet in storefronts or houses or old broom factories that are repurposed for worship.

However, sometimes there are architectural decisions made that reflect a wrong understanding of worship.

Atmosphere

Most PCA churches would, per the implication of Acts 20:7, have normal lighting. However, there are many PCA places of worship that are deliberately darkened so that a spotlight can be shined upon "performers" on a "stage."

Images of Christ

Numerous PCA churches, from big-city churches to small-town and rural congregations, have sported pictures of Christ in their sanctuaries, especially at the front above the pulpit. To name just a few: Westminster Presbyterian, Atlanta, Ga.; First Presbyterian, Stamps, Ark.; Hazelwood Presbyterian, Waynesville, N.C.; Second Presbyterian, Greenville, S.C.; McIlwain Memorial Presbyterian, Pensacola, Fla.; Seacrest Blvd. Presbyterian, Delray Beach, Fla. At least one church, Key Biscayne Presbyterian (i.e., CrossBridge), Miami, Fla., has used slides that depict Jesus kneeling and washing the disciples' feet and the Last Supper. This list exhibits simply a sampler of the PCA churches that violate the second commandment in their worship spaces and services.

Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., founded by D. James Kennedy of Evangelism Explosion fame, goes one step further: on the outside of its building is a tall statue of Christ, perhaps resembling (for some onlookers) a Catholic church.

Times and Days

Presbyterians have been known to be staunch Sabbatarians. The Westminster Standards have perhaps the most extensive treatment and strict understanding of the Sabbath of any set of confessional documents.

In the early days of the PCA, the General Assembly emphasized its commitment to keeping the Sabbath day holy. However, as noted in a 2016 article in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, the PCA's commitment to the fourth commandment has grown cold.[51]

One manifestation of a failure to regard the entire Lord's Day as being sacred, is the fact that relatively few PCA congregations today have two worship services bookending the Sabbath. Historically, one could tell a Bible-believing church from a liberal one by means of noting whether it had an evening service or not. As documented recently, only about 12% of PCA congregations regularly gather for worship morning and evening.[52]

Concomitant with a lack of Sabbath keeping is a tendency to replace God's day with days of men's own choosing. Accordingly, there are many PCA congregations that observe Christmas and Easter, and many that also observe Maundy Thursday and/or Good Friday, and other such days. Traditional Presbyterianism has always rejected the observance of manmade holy days. The fact that there are many PCA congregations embracing such unauthorized commemorations is another example of pluriformity rather than uniformity with respect to matters of worship.

Communion Seasons

Another example of variety today in the PCA has to do with the frequency of the sacrament of communion. Increasingly, there has been a move toward more frequent observance, including, in a number of cases, weekly communion. The practice of frequent communion, particularly on a weekly basis, is at odds with the historic Presbyterian emphasis on having communion seasons with preparation services and a thanksgiving service after the sacramental service itself.[53]

Worship Survey

In 2023, two Westminster Theological Seminary students conducted a survey of church leaders in NAPARC denominations. The research demonstrated a wide variety of practice among NAPARC denominations, and particularly within the PCA. Among the matters covered were the following: the Lord's Supper (wine or grape juice or both?; frequency of observance); use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms; prayers (use of written); ministerial garb; use of screens; liturgical ceremonies; religious images; and music (content of worship song; instrumentation).[54]

51. Chris Coldwell, "On Dropping the Subject Again," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 12 (2016): 40–99.

52. Justin Andrusk and Matthew Lee, "Morning & Evening in the PCA," pcapolity.com (August 22, 2023).

53. Cf. Gregory David Soderberg, *As Often As You Eat This Bread: Communion Frequency in English, Scottish, and Early American Churches* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023); and see in this current issue, Ryan Speck, "Review: *As Often As You Eat This Bread: Communion Frequency in English, Scottish, and Early American Churches* by Gregory David Soderberg," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 19 (2023).

54. Robert Cone and Nicklaus Hart, *2023 NAPARC Worship Study: How We Worship* (MDiv Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary,

A Savannah Perspective

The Rev. Terry Johnson, a PCA minister, has served admirably for three decades at historic Independent Presbyterian Church, Savannah, Georgia. He has been a champion of "traditional" worship, including most notably with respect to the promotion of Psalm-singing. He spearheaded the overture from Central Georgia Presbytery to the 1992 General Assembly which called for the implementation of Psalmody, and the production of the *Trinity Psalter*, a words-only book of Psalm settings designed to encourage the singing of Psalms in churches practicing hymn-singing.

In 2017, he penned a piece that evaluated the state of worship in the PCA. He noted that a "quiet solemnity has characterized Puritan and Reformed worship" in which emotions "are powerfully moved, but they run deep, below the surface. We have sought to worship God with... 'reverence and awe'... It was this consciously cultivated atmosphere of disciplined reverence that many of us found deeply satisfying, and more importantly, biblically balanced and sound. It was for this that many of us became Presbyterians."

However, he went on to lament what took place at the General Assembly.

> The worship services at General Assembly were quite different from what I am describing. They were novel, unlike the culture and practice of [the] Reformed church across the centuries and across the continents. They were also quite unlike anything practiced in 95–99% of our churches today, though not unlike General Assemblies of recent years. I began criticizing the worship services at General Assembly in 2003. I found the addition of contemporary forms, plus those forms that mirrored the entertainment industry, plus forms borrowed from charismatic and Pentecostal churches, unsettling. It is clear that those who over these years have sought to remake the worship culture of the PCA to a significant degree have succeeded. Though the services at General Assembly were uncomfortably different from historic norms, they seemed to be widely appreciated, even enthusiastically received by many. At least that was the case in the section in which I was sitting. The sensibilities regarding what is appropriate in worship are changing in the PCA in ways that many of us find disconcerting.

Though wanting to be charitable towards those responsible for these services, he described the services as

> contemporary with a dash of Pentecostalism minus tongues. The choirs' performances, the gestures of those leading (arms thrust skyward, hands clapping overhead, hands waving back and forth, one leader literally jumping up and down), up-front leadership of three women, non-traditional instrumentation (drums, tambourines featured prominently), plus choir-dominated and leader-dominated congregational singing, were all outside the norms of Presbyterian practice over the past 400–500 years.

Pastor Johnson claimed that "the services were foreign to what our tradition has considered best, and to the regular practice of the vast majority of our churches today." Despite "a superficial resemblance to the tradition," nevertheless, "the overall impact was overwhelmingly novel, from the prelude all the way to the end, when we were instructed to hold out our hands to receive the benediction."

> My question is, why? Why all this novelty? Why are the organizers of these services not more concerned about their brethren of tender conscience for whom these innovations are a matter of great concern? Large numbers of commissioners have simply stopped attending General Assembly worship services. Should we not be seeking to feature generic Presbyterian services that are familiar, common, and beloved by the majority? Should we not seek strong and obvious lines of continuity with the past? There actually are those of us who, if we *had* to choose (which we'd rather not), would prefer eliminating all instrumentalism, eliminating the choir altogether and reducing the sung part of the service in half if we could have a simple service of Scripture reading, congregational singing of psalms and hymns, and expository preaching without the on-stage distractions. Call it the Zwingli option.

The Savannah minister implored: "Should we not seek to organize services that express the ethos and substance of the vast majority of our churches, even as they reflect the ethos and substance of historic Presbyterianism?" He argued: "Presbyterianism is characterized by both a distinctive theology and a distinctive worship. Doctrine and practice are interrelated and mutually dependent.

2023). Essentially half of the respondents were from the PCA. The authors came close to the ideal goal of 10% in terms of number of PCA respondents; even though they did not hit that number, nevertheless, their survey still gives a good flavor for what congregants are experiencing in PCA worship.

We would be advised not to allow our zeal for diversity of forms [to] undermine what for centuries has united us at the hour of worship." He added:

> I wish that 40 years ago when I joined the PCA that the denomination's elder statesmen had raised their voices warning those of us who came into Presbyterianism from other traditions, be they Baptist (as in my case), Lutheran, Anglican, or Pentecostal, that it was not for us to remake the church in accord with our own background and preferences. I recall trying to persuade stuffy Anglicans and Presbyterians to loosen up and sing "Heavenly Father, I Appreciate You," and "Father, I Adore You." I might also have tried to import the altar calls and gospel songs of my childhood and youth. I wish that we all had been counseled to respect the regulated worship culture of international Calvinism and conform to it for at least a decade or two, so that we might learn to love its distinctive strengths. Too many of us thought we knew better and, as a result, all these years later we are drowning in the liturgical chaos we call the PCA.[55]

The View from the Canterbury Trail

One minister who responded to Dr. Johnson was William H. Smith. one of the original ministers of the PCA. During his career, he pastored significant congregations, including First Reformed Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Westminster Presbyterian Church, Huntsville, Alabama. He became a theological editor for Great Commission Publications, the agency jointly owned by the PCA and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He eventually abandoned Presbyterianism for Anglicanism.

He responded to Terry Johnson by saying that even if his wish for "elder statesmen" to instruct those entering the PCA four decades ago were fulfilled,

> it would not have prevented what is occurring in the PCA. Why? Because many of the "elder statesmen" had been affected by Second Great Awakening revivalism. More than 40 years ago William Hill was writing Reformed Seminary graduates to determine whether they gave invitations in their worship services. More than 40 years ago many of the hymn "favorites" were not Psalms and historic hymns of faith but gospel songs. Nearly, if not more than 40 years ago, at the Pensacola Theological Institute Dr. Robert Strong gave in "invitation" to spite Al Martin who was also on the faculty that year and expositing the Parable of the Sower. The "fathers" could never have agreed to instruct those coming into the PCA in a common form of worship.

In Smith's eyes, "Mr. Johnson gave away his store when he wrote: I'm not saying that anything that was done was wrong or invalid per se. There are many ways to worship God." Smith retorted:

> If the guide is what is "best," then worship becomes a matter of preference. Why must we choose what is best and by what criteria are we to judge it? If I don't care [for] The Metropolitan Opera, why not allow me my preference for the Grand Old Opry? Isn't [it] what['s] best for me?

Smith concluded: "Terry, I am sorry, but the worship issue was over before you ever entered the PCA."[56]

Four months prior to this blog post, he offered this analysis of the PCA and her worship:

> Pastors, in consultation with their staffs and local congregational elders, do what they think best. If you visit churches in the PCA you never know what you are going to get. You can get churches that borrow heavily from the Book of Common Prayer (much of it incorporated into the old Presbyterian Book of Common Worship which was the liturgical standard taught in worship courses when I was a student at RTS-Jackson), Terry Johnson worship, Tim Keller worship, James Ward worship, Bill Hill (PEF) worship, and the list of personalities goes on. In the Jackson [, Mississippi], area you can visit a number of churches and get a different worship experience in each—First Presbyterian Church, Pear Orchard Presbyterian Church, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Madison Heights Presbyterian Church, and more. Across the PCA you can find strict regulative principle worship (few), traditional worship, contemporary worship, black worship, near charismatic worship, blues worship, revivalistic worship complete with the invitation system, gospel-driven worship, and all sorts of blended worship. You can find ministers leading

55. Terry L. Johnson, "Worship in the PCA in 2017," *The Aquila Report* (July 2, 2017).

56. William H. Smith, "It Was All Over before Terry Johnson Entered the PCA," Just a Curmudgeon blog (July 5, 2017). Robert Strong was a minister who, though a strong conservative, never entered the PCA. Al Martin is a well-known Reformed Baptist preacher, most notably pastoring in northern New Jersey. William Hill was the founder of Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF), now called Reformed Evangelistic Fellowship (REF), one of the four organizations that formed A Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church.

> worship in black Geneva gowns, suits with white shirts and ties, blazers and open collar shirts, polo shirts and sandals, khakis or jeans and sports shirts tucked in or out standing behind pulpits, sitting on stools, walking across an empty stage. You can find pulpits, baptismal fonts, and communion tables prominently displayed, or entirely hidden. You can sing Psalms and historic hymns, gospel hymns, praise and worship songs, accompanied by nothing, organs, pianos, orchestras, acoustic guitars, and rock bands. Depending on your worship principles, preferences, and personality, you can find the worship in a PCA church comfortable, compatible, challenging, relevant, irrelevant, or offensive.

There is a phrase I find that describes worship in the PCA: *liturgical chaos.* [57]

Influences on PCA Worship in the Twentieth-first Century

We have earlier noted the impact of evangelicalism and pragmatism. That twin influence is still very influential. However, there are other perhaps more potent factors today.

For instance, sensualism, a movement which influenced the Presbyterian Church starting in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, has become even more pronounced. The stained glass windows have given way to strobe lights and video clips, and the organ music has faded away with loud rock music taking its place. The result is an overwhelming sensory experience.

The sensualism of yesteryear was largely tied to Romanticism. Today, it seems tied more directly to the approach advocated in Anglicanism, as part of a self-conscious motif of a mixture of ancient and modern practices which find their origin in man's creativity rather than God's express command. That affinity with Anglicanism also reflects an increasing imposition of liturgies.

Culture, too, plays a role, in at least three ways. One, there is a desire to conform to the prevailing culture so as to make an appeal to Gen-Xers and younger generations. Two, there is a desire to appeal to minority groups by means of employing styles with which they would be familiar. And three, there is also the notion of the cultural mandate which purportedly provides justification for importing "the arts" into worship as a way of glorifying God by means of various talents.

And let us not forget that there is also an abiding interest in historic Presbyterian worship, particularly as manifest in simplicity of worship and Psalmody. In point of fact, the General Assembly has given its blessing to the singing of the Psalms. In 1989, the same Assembly which had heard Arminian preaching and which entertained liturgical drama, also commended the 1990 Psalmody Conference. In 1993, the court approved a report from a committee on Psalm singing, which included the recommendation that at least one Psalm selection be sung during every worship service. Also approved was the publication of the *Trinity Psalter*, a words-only version, as a joint venture between the Christian Education and Publications Committee of the PCA, and Crown & Covenant Publications, the publishing arm of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.[58]

In the PCA, pluriformity tolerates those who choose to practice according to the Westminster Confession of Faith—so long as no one insists that there is only one way to worship or tries to impose that Presbyterian perspective on others. And while representing only a tiny minority, nevertheless, the position expressed in the Standards is still a factor among a range of flavors.

Shifting Spectrum

Over the past half century, there is, persistently, the phenomenon of a wide spectrum of views and practice in the PCA. However, to some extent, the spectrum has shifted. In 1973, "traditional" PCA churches often featured worship services geared toward evangelism and giving an "invitation" for sinners to walk the sawdust trail and come forward to make a decision for Christ. For the most part, that type of worship has dissipated.

Evaluation

One obvious observation to be made from considering the panorama of PCA worship, is that there is very little understanding of the doctrine of worship. The ignorance is stunning, but perhaps not surprising, given how virtually all the seminaries supplying the PCA with ministers teach contrary to the strict view of worship set forth in the Westminster Standards.

Offering worship that is not divinely mandated is idolatry. Only circumstantial details—the order of

57. William H. Smith, "The Regulative Principle Doesn't Work: And There's Your Problem," Just a Curmudgeon blog (March 4, 2017). The title of this article does not reflect reality, but does reflect the author's rejection of the Presbyterian faith which, when he was ordained, he had professed and vowed to support.

58. *M17GA*, pp. 179–180; *M19GA*, pp. 75–76.

service, the time of service, the length of service, the seating arrangements, the building, the tunes used, the dialect in which the worship is offered, and similar matters—are to display variety. John Calvin observed that all of us are prone to idolatry—indeed, that our hearts are idol factories. To change the metaphor a bit, we could say that churchmen in their confectionaries concoct their own confections rather than following the cookbook. Worship, according to the Westminster Assembly's exposition of the second commandment, is to be kept "pure and entire." Or, we could say, "unadulterated and complete." But in today's PCA, along with most of professed confessional Presbyterianism, the worship is adulterated and incomplete. And one of the results is that the worship that is imposed on God's people and offered to the Almighty is like a box of chocolates. Indeed, it's kind of like buying a box of chocolates that promises the same flavor and discovering that there were many (unpleasant) surprises.[59]

Some PCA chocolates are filled with nuts: those that feature liturgical dance, liturgical drama, or video clips. Some PCA chocolates are spicy: for example, the exciting worship team swaying to rock music, a spotlight on the performers in an otherwise dark auditorium. Some PCA chocolates are cream-filled—smoother and more subtle than the nutty or spicy ones, but still not the norm of uniformity, and therefore unacceptable for saints with refined Presbyterian tastes.

Besides being a direct affront to the Almighty, improper worship causes offense to believers and violates Christian liberty and liberty of conscience. It may seem delectable to some, but to staunch Presbyterians who hold genuinely to the WCF, this worship sampler is galling and causes gagging—especially when it is shoved down the throats of commissioners at General Assembly, or members of the PCA who may be visiting another PCA congregation.[60]

The reality of PCA worship being like a box of chocolates is to be expected, given the lack of adherence to the Presbyterian view of worship as outlined in this article. In brief, rather than being lamented, pluriformity in worship is celebrated.[61]

But please note, then, that the adoption of a pluriform perspective with respect to worship is not a position of neutrality—rather, the attitude of "live and let live" is a direct repudiation of the Westminsterian ideal of uniformity in doctrine, polity, and worship. In other words, it is anti-Presbyterian.

Let it also be said that uniformity *per se* is not the ideal. The uniformity must be the result of conformity to Scripture. The Westminster divines aimed to reflect primitive Christianity. As one Presbyterian minister put it, they desired "worship the apostles would have recognized."

Scottish Presbyterianism, along with its twin, English Puritanism, marked the high water of theological development in the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods, manifesting a depth of doctrine and a precision of theological expression unequaled in Christendom. This observation does not imply that Presbyterianism was or is perfect, nor that there might not be other branches of the universal church that could have particular theological insights that could be of benefit to the church as a whole, and that could be incorporated within the Westminster Assembly's systematic theology. Nevertheless, particularly with respect to worship, the Puritan-Presbyterian perspective represents a refinement of the Calvinistic and Continental Reformed commitment to the regulative principle of worship. In sum, the doctrine of worship found in the Westminster Standards is part of an entire system, and is consistent

59. This present author is privileged to pastor a Psalm-singing congregation in a greatly impoverished, crime-ridden area of inner-city Atlanta that is notorious for heroin-dealing and prostitution-peddling—a neighborhood that happens to be about 96% African-American. Is it not amazing that at least some of the urban dwellers in the "hood" can grasp the concept of the regulative principle of worship and the ideal of purity of worship, but sophisticated academics and educated ministers seemingly cannot? (Or, is it that they *will* not?)

60. Years ago, one astute church journalist referred to the PCA being not a denomination, but a franchise, affording you the privilege of hanging out your PCA shingle by way of identifying with this Delaware corporation. However, while we appreciate the point, nevertheless, that analogy may be insulting to most franchisee enterprises, such as McDonald's: any restaurant under the Golden Arches that does not measure up in terms of predictability, including uniformity of menu, quality of food, and attractive (not to mention inoffensive) presentation, would quickly be disenfranchised.

61. One of the recognized authorities in the PCA with respect to worship is Larry Roff, a minister who edited the *Trinity Hymnal* (1990) and has served for many years as the organist at the General Assembly. In responding to Terry Johnson's article that lamented the worship being offered at the 2023 Assembly, Dr. Roff essentially conceded the reality of non-uniformity of PCA worship as he wrote:

> As has become customary, the three evening worship services at our General Assemblies were each led by a different set of local teaching and ruling elders and musicians from churches in the host presbytery. Each included great preaching, solid liturgical structure, and a variety of musical styles. One evening was with choir, orchestra, and organ. A second was with piano and a small acoustical instrumental ensemble. A third was by a praise band that included guitars, percussion, and vocalists. Each of these involved many hours of planning and rehearsal by talented, well-trained Christian musicians who were honored to offer their skills as a sacrifice of praise to enhance the worship of God's people.

Larry Roff, "A Response to: 'Music at the GA and the PCA,'" The Aquila Report (July 21, 2023).

with Scripture and with itself. The Standards' enunciation of "parts" (elements) of worship; formulation that the worship of the New Covenant, in contrast to the Old, is simpler and has less outward glory; and affirmation that the ceremonial law has *en toto* been abrogated, together constitute an understanding that is thoroughly Scriptural and non-contradictory.

Many in the PCA today desiring to orchestrate "traditional Reformed" worship hanker after the regularity of weekly creeds and confessions, promote responsive readings of Scripture, and have a penchant for the "evangelical holy days." But these practices do not enjoy the blessing of Scripture, in that they are not commanded. Their employment tracks with the "reasonableness" ("decent and orderly") of Old School Presbyterian worship of two centuries ago as exhibited by Sprague cited previously. The lack of strict prescription is the Achilles heel for virtually all of those in the PCA who reject the bizarre excesses that have been manifest in the denomination almost from the beginning.

Accordingly, attempting to fix the problem of pluriformity of worship in the PCA by implementing "liturgical" services will fail. Only consistency will suffice. The ideal of uniformity of worship will not be achieved via aping the Anglicans, but solely through a rediscovery and reaffirmation of Westminster.

Conclusion

The PCA was part of a broad reform movement in the twentieth century—a movement that included new institutions (such as seminaries and colleges), new conferences (such as those in Pensacola and Philadelphia), new publishing houses (such as Banner of Truth), new organizations (such as Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship and the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council [NAPARC]), and new branches of the universal church (including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America). But at the same time, there were deficiencies in understanding, particularly with respect to the doctrine and practice of worship. As a result, the PCA was very much a mixed bag—and her worship was very much like a variety box of chocolates. And now, as she has passed the half-century mark, though there are a few signs here and there of an attempt to rediscover Presbyterianism, historically considered, there are many manifestations of diversity in worship that would have appalled the Scottish Presbyterian forefathers of the faith.[62]

The Lord's blessing of the PCA has not been because of her faithfulness in matters of worship, but in spite of her gross inconsistency. Indeed, this inconsistency borders is wildly ironic – especially given not only the clear teaching of the Westminster Standards, but also the testimony against experimental worship in the PCUS as one of the manifestations of heterodoxy in that liberal denomination.

But there is always hope. Repentance is always an option. The Spirit of the living God may yet blow across the denomination, resulting in genuine Spiritual worship which will reflect His mandated uniformity, not manmade pluriformity.

So, instead of a sampler, perhaps someday the chocolates with the PCA label will all feature plain vanilla filling, and be dubbed Puritan Delight. Plain, simple, sweet, predictable, no surprises—and therefore no disappointment. Most importantly, it would be positively divine.

Now, wouldn't that be a treat?▪

***In Brief:* The Regulative Principle of Worship.**

"The Second Commandment lays down the regulative principle of worship: it forbids idolatry." James Harper, *An exposition in the form of question and answer of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter catechism* (UP Board of Publication, 1905), p. 221. "To worship God otherwise than he has appointed is 'will-worship,' more or less gross. The law regulative of worship is not that we may use both what is commanded and what is not expressly forbidden, but that we must be limited to the use of what is either expressly or implicitly appointed by God (Deut. xii. 32; Matt. sv. 9, xxviii. 20)." Johann Jakob Herzog, *A Religious Encyclopaedia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal,* etc. (Funk & Wagnalls, 1889) "Psalms, Use of the, in Worship," 3.1960.

This biblical doctrine is a hallmark of Presbyterianism, but the phrase is relatively modern. It seems to have developed in US Southern and U.S. and U.K. Covenanter Presbyterian literature. In 1905, Harper appears to be the earliest to use it in print. Earlier in 1889, Harper used the stiffer British phrasing, less friendly for moniker making. John Murray used both phrasings in the OPC 1946 reports on worship song, and this may have helped popularize the label. See Murray, "The Regulative Principle of Worship & Song in the Public Worship of God," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 11 (2015), p. 5–7 n2, n9.

Chris Coldwell.▪

62. For extensive consideration of American Presbyterianism's interaction with the regulative principle of worship, see the following: Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, "Reframing Presbyterian Worship: A Critical Survey of the Worship Views of John M. Frame and R. J. Gore," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005): 116–50; Frank J. Smith (with Chris Coldwell), "The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature. Part One (1946–1999)," *The Confessional Presbyterian*, 2 (2006): 89–164; Frank J. Smith (with Chris Coldwell), "The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature. Part Two (2000–2006)," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007): 155–215; Frank J. Smith, "Recent Reformed Writings on Worship," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008): 227–52.

The History of the Formation of the Standing Judicial Commission

By Scott Cook

Introduction

A 50th anniversary is a time for celebration and reflection. Celebration for the ways in which the Lord has blessed; reflection over the past fifty years and what lies ahead in the next fifty years. The fiftieth anniversary of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is no exception. As *The Confession Presbyterian* journal seeks to celebrate and reflect on the first fifty years of the PCA, this article focuses on the issue of discipline and judicial process in the PCA. Discipline is a vitally important matter. The right administration of discipline is the third mark of the church. Moreover, as this article will explain, discipline (or better, the lack thereof) in the Presbyterian Church in the United States was one of the main reasons why the PCA separated from its mother church. This article will explain the initial structure and growth of judicial process in the PCA, with a particular focus on the development of the Standing Judicial Commission (SJC) as a unique form of the polity of the PCA.

A Continuing Church for Continuing Discipline

On December 4, 1973, the Presbyterian Church in America was born. In its historic *Message to All Churches*, the denomination unfurled her banner before the world, explaining the reasons for her birth and the hope for the future. One essential reason churches were leaving the mother church, the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), and forming the Presbyterian Church in America was the failure to exercise church discipline. The *Message to All Churches* admitted, "We frankly confess that the failure of our predecessors in the PCUS to exercise proper discipline was a major cause of the sad condition of this denomination today."[1] According to the founding fathers of the PCA, the mother church had failed to uphold orthodoxy and godly living. This lack of discipline came with disastrous consequences. "A Church that will not exercise discipline," the *Message* declared, "will not long be able to maintain pure doctrine or godly practice." The decline in discipline was not the byproduct of the turmoil of the 1960s. Rather, the PCUS had been failing to practice discipline effectively for a generation. In *How is the Gold Become Dim!*, an address to the convocation of sessions in Atlanta, Dr. Morton Smith chronicled the failed attempts to maintain orthodoxy in the Southern Presbyterian Church going back to the Hay Watson Smith trial in 1929 and the trial of E. T. Thompson in the 1940s.[2] The loss of discipline eventually led to the formation of the new denomination. The *Message to All Churches* explains, "[w]hen a denomination will not exercise discipline and its courts have become heterodox or disposed to tolerate error, the minority finds itself in the anomalous position of being submissive to a tolerant and erring majority. In order to proclaim the truth and to practice the discipline which they believe obedience to Christ requires, it then becomes necessary for them

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1. The Presbyterian Church in America (hereafter PCA), *The Minutes of the First General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 1973), p. 28. Note that the following system for abbreviation will be followed for the minutes of the Assembly: *M(number of General Assembly)GA*, page number.

2. Morton H. Smith, "How Is the Gold Become Dim! A Message to the Convocation of Sessions" (Westminster Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA, May 18, 1973), PCA Historical Center, https://www.pcahistory.org/documents/convocation/smith-gold.html.

to separate. This is the exercise of discipline in reverse. It is how we view our separation."[3]

The fathers of the PCA claimed that they were a continuing church. In their estimation, alien theological influences had moved the PCUS from its historic commitment to Reformed doctrine and good order. The PCA, by contrast, sought to return to the roots of its American Presbyterian heritage, being the true heirs of the old Southern Presbyterian Church. A self-conscious identity as a continuing church is readily apparent when one peruses the founding documents of the PCA. The fact that the PCA took its *Book of Church Order* from the PCUS highlights the continuing identity of the PCA. However, the PCA was not in 1973 nor in 2023 a mere repristination of the PCUS. As the theological currents of 1860 shaped the formation of the PCUS, so the loss of the PCUS to the liberals shaped the formation of the PCA in 1973. The reaction of the fathers of the PCA to the struggle for the PCUS lead to one of the distinctive marks of the PCA's approach to polity, the PCA's commitment to "grassroots Presbyterianism."

Grassroots Presbyterianism is a distinctively Southern Presbyterian approach to polity, particularly associated with the theologians of the South Carolina Low Country and old Columbia Seminary. A grassroots approach to Presbyterianism is a bottom-up model where the lower-level courts are primary, and the higher courts exist to serve and support the lower courts by establishing the constitution, maintaining discipline, and providing ministry support. The founders of the PCA left the PCUS in part because, as L. Roy Taylor summarizes, the "emergence of an increasingly coercive denominational church polity."[4] The PCA, then, was founded in part to practice discipline but without a hierarchical or coercive system of government.

What does a system of church discipline look like that is equally committed to being serious about enforcing doctrinal orthodoxy while also protecting the rights of the lower courts? This article will trace the history, theory, and practice of discipline in the PCA. The first fifty years of the PCA have been marked by a heroic struggle for its birth, remarkable growth, serious difficulties, and sometimes contradictory forces at work. These same dynamics are present in the way the denomination has sought to maintain order through discipline. This article will explain the original shape of the PCA's *Rules of Discipline*, how the process of handling judicial cases developed at the level of the General Assembly, and detail some important cases that set the tone for the denomination's authoritative interpretation of the constitution.

The Starting Place: the 1933 BCO

Many newly ordained pastors have experiences in their first pastorate for which they feel completely unprepared. "They didn't teach me about this in seminary," has been uttered by many a frustrated novice wading through the BCO. One can only imagine how the founding fathers of the PCA must have felt as they attempted to create a new denomination, and the shear volume of sacrifices that they made in order to create the PCA. The complexities of forming a new denomination were legion. One vital aspect was the formation of the constitution of the new Presbyterian church. C. S. Per Almquist gives an able summary of the formation of the *BCO* in his D.Min project "Presbyterian Polity in Practice: A Commentary on the *Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church in America."

The *BCO* began to take shape after the Convocation of Sessions in May of 1973. The Convocation of Sessions was an effort years in the making. The hard work of the men who called for the convocation was successful—the elders present voted 349 to 16 to begin forming a new denomination. The Convocation recommended that the new denomination begin with the 1933 draft of the PCUS *BCO*. They also called for an Advisory Convention in August of 1973 to further the preparation for the first General Assembly. The Convocation also appointed an Organizing Committee that in turn appointed a Committee on Constitutional Documents to begin drafting the *BCO*.[5]

Why would the Committee on Constitutional Documents begin with the 1933 PCUS *BCO* in particular? In the eyes of many founders of the PCA, the 1933 PCUS *BCO* was the last iteration of the PCUS constitution before the liberals began inserting their influences in the courts of the church. E. T. Thompson argues that 1935 was the turning point where the PCUS began to forsake one of the essential elements of its conservative legacy, the doctrine of the Spirituality of the Church.

3. The Presbyterian Church in America, *M1GA*, 44.

4. L. Roy Taylor, "The Presbyterian Church in America: Non-Hierarchal Presbyterianism" (St. Louis, MO, n.d.), p. 1, PCA Historical Center, https://www.pcahistory.org/mo/taylorLR/taylor_non-hierarchal.pdf; See also L. Roy Taylor, "The Uniqueness of PCA Polity" (St. Louis, MO, n.d.), PCA Historical Center, https://www.pcahistory.org/mo/taylorLR/TaylorLR_12152009_Uniqueness%20of%20PCA%20Polity.pdf.

5. C. S. Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice: A Commentary on the Book of Church Order in the Presbyterian Church in America" (Doctor of Ministry, Charlotte, NC, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, 2023), pp. 83–86.

Morton Smith agrees with Thompson that 1935 was the time when liberals, such as Thompson, began to direct the PCUS towards liberalism. The GA of the Southern Presbyterian Church appointed a Committee on Social and Moral Welfare in 1934. Once that committee reported back to the GA in 1935, the direction of the denomination began to change. Hence, the fathers of the PCA started with a version of the *BCO* that predated the influence of liberalism in the mother church.[6]

The Adoption of the Rules of Discipline

The constitutional history of the PCA began on December 4, 1973, in Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The fledgling denomination had to create every part of the constitution, every permanent committee, and establish every procedure out of whole cloth. For instance, the Assembly had to adopt rules for electing a Moderator immediately before electing its first Moderator. The First Assembly set the basic structure of the *BCO* but would perfect it over the next several Assemblies. The Rules of Discipline were adopted as presented by the Committee on Constitutional Documents without any debate or amendments.

Comparing the 1933 PCUS *BCO*'s Rules of Discipline to the 1973 PCA *BCO*'s Rules of Discipline shows them to be nearly identical. The layout, number and order of chapters, and chapter headings are all identical in both documents. Perhaps the significant difference in the PCA version of the Rules of Discipline pertains to process against a minister. PCUS *BCO* paragraph 217 states "Process against a Minister shall be entered before the Presbytery of which he is a member." The PCA equivalent, *BCO* 8-1, contains a significant addition. "Process against a Minister shall be entered before the Presbytery of which he is a member. *However, if Presbytery refuses to act in doctrinal cases or public scandal, and other Presbyteries request the Assembly to assume original jurisdiction, the Assembly shall do so.*" (emphasis added) Here one sees the founding fathers wanted a denomination where ministers/teaching elders could be held accountable for their doctrine and practice. Even in situations where the Presbytery fails to enforce the standards of the church, the PCA would have recourse to bring judicial proceedings against a minister at the level of the General Assembly. The PCA would eventually renumber the *BCO* by introducing the PCUS practice of a continuous numbering system running through the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline, and the Directory of Worship, but retain the PCA practice of numbering the paragraphs according to chapter, section, subsection, etc. PCA *BCO* 8-1 would eventually become *BCO* 34-1. The current language of 34-1 retains the phrase "refuses to act" but adds additional qualifiers, which make it arguably the most controversial clause in the *BCO*.

Forming the Rules of Discipline

The Rules of Discipline were adopted without comment or revision at the first General Assembly. However, Per Almquist notes that the Assembly approached the Constitution as a work in progress for the first several meetings of the Assembly. The first Assembly was beset with certain theological and polity debates that would be present for nearly the first decade of the denomination's existence. "Among the issues receiving significant attention at the Assembly," Per Almquist writes, "were: (1) church property, (2) miraculous gifts, (3) the length of the term of service for church officers, and (4) ruling elders administering the sacraments. The issue of church property, a major issue in the separation from the PCUS, was addressed with the inclusion of what is now BCO 25-8 through 11."[7]

The divided attention of the Assembly and the sheer volume of constitutional material to be ratified caused the Assembly to suspend the normal process of constitutional amendment. The first page of the constitution recorded in the minutes of the first GA contained the following comment. "Note: The procedure for amending the Book of Church Order, 27-2, was suspended by the First General Assembly until after the final report of the Constitutional Documents Committee to the Second General Assembly."[8] Hence, the *BCO* was adopted at the first General Assembly, but the document was not set in stone.

The editorial work on the *BCO* continued at the second General Assembly in earnest. Presbyteries and commissioners proposed numerous changes both to the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline. Per Almquist notes one communication alone requested forty-seven amendments to the *BCO*.[9] The Assembly amended the Form of Government one hundred times at the second GA.[10] The Assembly also edited the Rules of Discipline. The changes were fewer in number and significance when compared to the edits to the Form of Government. However, some significant insertions were

6. Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice," pp. 86–89.
7. Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice," p. 90.
8. The Presbyterian Church in America, *M1GA*, p. 127.
9. Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice," p. 94.
10. Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice," p. 94.

made. For instance, the Assembly inserted the well-known section that discipline is for the purpose of glorifying God, the purity of the church, preserving the saints, and recalling wayward sinners.[11] The Assembly set the meeting of the third Assembly as the deadline to continue editing the Rules of Discipline without moving through the normal process of constitutional amendment.[12]

The Constitutional Documents Committee brought a report to the third General Assembly in 1975 that contained a number of minor changes to the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline.[13] The most significant change to the Rules of Discipline was the insertion of a new paragraph specifying a fifteen (15) day window to file a complaint with an added warning against circularizing the court ahead of the hearing of the complaint.[14] The Committee recommended that the Assembly set the then-current form of Part II of the *BCO* in stone so that any further substantial edits must go through the normal process of constitutional amendment, where two consecutive Assemblies must vote along with two-thirds of the Presbyteries concurring. Finally, the Rules of Discipline were set for the denomination.[15]

The enduring quality of the Rules of Discipline is evidenced in how little has changed since 1975. Indeed, there are a few significant changes to the judicial process of the denomination. However, the basic structure of the Rules of discipline have remained largely unaltered from the time the denomination set the Rule of Discipline in stone.

The Committee on Judicial Business

An important feature of discipline in the early days of the General Assembly was the Committee on Judicial Business. The Organizing Committee appointed a number of standing committees to prepare the business for the Assembly.[16] The Judicial Committee was a subcommittee of the Organizing Committee, but was elected as a permanent committee. The initial members considered of ruling elders Leon Hendrick (chairman), John Glasser, Ralph Langford, John Barnes, and James Campbell, along with teaching elders Todd Allen and Charles McNutt. The first permanent committee was populated with the members of the original subcommittee, with Ruling Elder Robert Canada serving as convener, replacing Leon Hendrick.[17]

The Judicial Business Committee's first report represented its broad mandate. The Committee reported the incorporation of the denomination with the state of Delaware, suggested that all presbyteries likewise incorporate themselves with the state of Delaware, and made recommendations concerning overtures relating to presbytery boundaries.[18] There was as of yet no defining document for the duties of the Committee as the *Rules of Assembly Operation* had yet to be drafted. The second General Assembly saw a more focused set of duties for the Committee. The report of the Committee detailed their main work as supervising the legal counsel for the denomination and offering support to congregations or presbyteries who were facing legal challenges, particularly when dealing with property claims from the PCUS.[19]

By the third General Assembly, the denomination had expanded the role of the Judicial Business Committee. The report of the Committee on Judicial Business continued to report on litigation that churches were facing. In a supplemental report to the Assembly, the committee noted the awkward situation that while the Judicial Subcommittee had existed since the first Assembly, and the Assembly had voted to elevate the Judicial Subcommittee to a permanent committee, but the Second Assembly forgot to write the committee into the bylaws of the denomination. The Committee Report explains:

> "In the restructured Bylaws adopted by the Second General Assembly in Macon, Georgia, in September, 1974, the Committ [*sic*] was not included. However, the rules for Assembly operation (Appendix A, Section 7-6, page 91) do provide for such an Assembly Committee with responsibilities as originally envisioned by the Advisory Convention. Further, under the duties for the Committee on Administration (Journal, page 73, item 8), approved by the Assembly, a Sub-Committee on Judicial Business is provided for but in neither reference is there any specific provision regarding the number of members nor the method of their selections."[20]

11. PCA, *The Minutes of the Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 1974), p. 60.
12. Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice," p. 95.
13. PCA, *The Minutes of the Third General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 1975), pp. 211–13.
14. PCA, *M3GA*, p. 214.
15. PCA, *M3GA*, p. 211; Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice," p. 96.
16. Per Almquist, "Presbyterian Polity in Practice," p. 84.
17. PCA, *M1GA*, p. 25.
18. PCA, *M1GA*, p. 36.
19. PCA, *M2GA*, pp. 147–48.
20. PCA, *M3GA*, p. 178.

The Committee recommended amending the bylaws and solidifying the existence and purpose of the committee across the *RAO* and other Assembly documents. The purpose of the Committee was expanded to move beyond advising in cases of litigation. The Committee began to take on the roles of advice regarding litigation, constitutional matters, and judicial matters. The language drafted for the purpose of the Committee stated, "The Committee shall advise the Assembly on all constitutional matters, and between Assemblies shall function as advisory to the Stated Clerk and the Committee on Administration. The Committee shall not be separately funded but administratively will operate as a Sub-Committee of the Committee on Administration. The Committee will make direct report to each Assembly."[21]

The Process for the First Complaints

The first judicial matter arising from the presbyteries for the newly formed denomination was a complaint against Pacific Presbytery submitted to the third General Assembly. The Stated Clerk noted that he had received the proper paper work for the complaint of Revs. Harold L. Webb and Thomas Miller against Pacific Presbytery. The case is fascinating in its own right and as a window into the early, chaotic life of the denomination after its founding. Revs. Wedd and Thomas complained that the presbytery conducted significant business at a called meeting without the three ruling elders required by the constitution for a quorum. The moderator of the presbytery overruled a point of order objecting to the lack of quorum, stating that the urgent business on the docket needed to be addressed. The moderator also noted that previous meetings had been held without the necessary number of ruling elders, so the court should follow suit. When Revs. Webb and Thomas brought their complaint to the GA, the reply of the presbytery admitted that they were correct. The Presbytery reply states, "The Stated Clerk reviewed the minutes of all previous meetings and reported that, since the Presbytery's founding, no meeting had had the proper number of accredited ruling elders present. (We have few churches and they are widely scattered.)"[22] The Presbytery claimed that the two complaints objected to the lack of a quorum in this meeting because one of the candidates for ministry held to a Billy Graham style of "ecumenical evangelism," and they wanted to oppose his ordination.[23]

The Clerk referred the complaint to the Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business, which recommended that their committee be allowed to study the matter and report back to the assembly for adjudication. The Assembly accepted this proposal and allowed the Committee to report back at a later time. The committee's report was anticlimactic. The Committee noted the logistical difficulties and, hence, their sympathy to Pacific Presbytery. However, the Committee argued that no presbytery may conduct serious business in the absence of a quorum. Yet the Committee was informed that Presbytery rectified the problem by adopting the actions of the quorum-less-meeting in a subsequent meeting where a quorum was present. In light of the Presbytery's subsequent action, the Committee recommended and the GA concurred that the case should be dismissed.[24]

The first judicial action of the fledgling denomination was not a significant action, except that its demonstrates a difference between the early approach to discipline in the PCA compared with the present. The third General Assembly did not refer the case to a commission for adjudication. Instead, the recommendation was that the Assembly hear the matter for itself, aided by the relevant Committee of Commissioners. The size and ethos of the denomination changed from these early days to where now most of the judicial cases brought to "the Assembly" go before the SJC.

The 13th General Assembly: A Pivotal Year

The first move towards a new mode for discipline at the Assembly level came out of a study committee appointed at the 12th General Assembly. The denomination was experiencing growing pains in a number of areas, including the volume and nature of discipline cases, on the heels of Joining and Receiving into the PCA of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod in 1982. The 12th General Assembly instructed the moderator to appoint a study committee to make recommendations to the 13th General Assembly concerning the structure of the PCA, judicial processes, and the relationship between the permanent committees, Stated Clerk's office, and the other committees of the Assembly. Moderator TE James Baird appointed teaching elders Frank Barker, Paul Gilchrist, William Barker, and ruling elders Richard Chewning, Robert Canada, and Jack

21. PCA, *M3GA*, p. 178.
22. PCA, *M3GA*, p. 50.
23. PCA, *M3GA*, p. 50.
24. PCA, *M3GA*, pp. 85–86.

Williamson, with the Moderator and then Stated Clerk Morton Smith to serve as consultants.[25]

The Structure and Procedure Committee noted the wide scope and breadth of the task assigned to them. "As your Committee began to study and deliberate upon these issues, it soon recognized the enormity of the task assigned. After a decade of existence, PCA structure, organization and procedure needed reflection and refinement. Your Committee received helpful suggestions from many of you in many of these areas. The Committee has considered each such suggestion. The Committee feels that we should not move too rapidly but gradually after the Church as a whole reaches a consensus."[26] The Committee chose to begin with two pressing matters, procedures for discipline and the idea of a representative assembly. The Committee's proposals for a delegated assembly model never came to fruition, but their recommendations would set into motion the creation of the Standing Judicial Commission.

The Committee assigned major areas of its work to a particular member of the committee. Future PCA Stated Clerk, and former RPCES Clerk, TE Paul Gilchrist was assigned the work regarding "Judicial Business Procedure." The portion of the report dealing with judicial matters, which one presumes was primarily authored by TE Gilchrist, begins by noting the burden placed on the Assembly by the growing number of judicial issues.

> In the last few years, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America has had to deal with an inordinate number of complaints and appeals from decisions of lower courts. Whatever reasons may be given, such as ineptitude of lower courts, legalism on the part of some, inadequacy or lack of clarity in the Book of Discipline, etc., nevertheless it has become sufficiently clear that an inordinate amount of time has been spent by a large number of commissioners to General Assembly, and that some unsatisfactory results have emerged. These seem to point up the inadequacy and inefficiency of the current system of judicial process.[27]

The tone of the above quotation is interesting in historical perspective. One is given the impression that there was much frustration with the operation of discipline in the denomination. The language about ineptitude, legalism, and lack of clarity in the "Book of Discipline" (a misnomer, as the relevant portion of the BCO is the Rules of Discipline) make this frustration palpable even when read over thirty years later.

The Structure and Procedure Committee made two initial recommendations. The first was that the Assembly create a Permanent Judicial Commission. Their proposal lead to the formation of the SJC, but their initial formulation looked significantly different from the PCA's current structure. The Committee recommended that the GA Permanent Commission have the power to refer judicial matters before the Assembly to Regional Commissions. "These Regional Commissions," the report explained, "would be responsible for the law-of-the-case, hearing of witnesses, the finding of facts, and decisions which would be final and conclusive unless appealed to the Permanent Judicial Commission. The Permanent Judicial Commission would serve as an appellate court which would only review the record, check on procedures, but would not try the case de novo. It may decide the record is clear and judgment is correct, and the decision would stand. However, if it wishes, it may hear oral arguments citing only the two parties to appear, but no additional witnesses."[28]

The Regional Judicial Commissions would be appointed from TEs and REs within the geographical vicinity of presbytery that originates the case. Each Presbytery would be required to nominate two TEs and two REs who could be called upon to constitute a Regional Commission. Perhaps most interestingly, the Structure and Procedure Committee's proposal provided no avenue for appealing its decision or any mechanism for bringing a matter directly before the Assembly.

The other recommendation was to turn the then current committee on Judicial Business into a Committee on Constitutional Business. The new committee "would have nothing to do with judicial cases. Future matters of constitutional inquiries would continue to be addressed to this Committee on Constitutional Business, but responses to such inquiries need not be reported to General Assembly and would not be binding on the Church as a whole. Such response would be merely advice to the inquirer."[29]

The Committee provided a long, detailed report with its thoughts regarding a total restructuring of the Assembly, even to the point of creating a new, simpler

25. PCA, *The Minutes of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 1985), Appendix P, p. 313.
26. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 313.
27. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 315.
28. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 315.
29. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 316.

set of rules for parliamentary procedure to replace *Robert's Rules*.[30] The Committee offered the following recommendations to the Assembly:

> 1. That the Ad-Interim Committee be continued for an additional year to report to the 14th General Assembly.
>
> 2. That the General Assembly approve and send to the Presbyteries for action the proposed amendments to Book of Church Order Chapter 15 attached in Exhibit "A" to this report.
>
> 3. That the General Assembly approve and send to the Presbyteries for action the proposed amendment to Book o f Church Order Section 14-2 as set out in Exhibit "B" of this report.
>
> 4. That individuals and churches be urged to communicate with this Ad-Interim Committee with their suggestions and reactions to this report.
>
> 5. If the Presbyterian Church in America amends its Book of Church Order chapter 15 as set out in Exhibit "A"" to this report, the first class elected to the Permanent Judicial Commission shall serve for three years, and the fourth class for the full four year term; and thereafter all classes shall serve for the full four year term as set out in the Book of Church Order change.[31]

The report of the Ad-Interim Committee proved to be one of the more controversial matters taken up at the Assembly that year. The Moderator, RE Richard Chewning, was a member of the Committee, so he asked former Moderator TE Paul Settle to assume the Chair for the Committee's report. The first recommendation was put on the floor. The continuation of the Committee was apparently controversial. The Assembly did not vote on the recommendation before an order of the day delayed the vote until later in the Assembly.[32] When the Committee resumed its report, RE Jack Williamson, Chairman of the Committee, removed the first recommendation from consideration. The Minutes state, "By ommon [*sic*] consent, Mr. Williamson was permitted to withdraw Recommendation 1 which had been presented Monday afternoon (13-9, p. 70), and Recommendations 1,2, 3, 4, & 5 were renumbered 3, 1, 2, 4, & 5 respectively (see Appendix P, p. 320)."[33]

The Assembly then began to debate the substance of report via its recommendations to begin amending the BCO. The GA's Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business moved a report, and then a substitute motion was made from the floor. This fairly chaotic series of events was nullified by a point of order regarding the appropriateness of taking this report without consulting the Committee on Judicial Business. A Commissioner moved that the report of the Committee is out of accord with the RAO unless it is first brought to the floor through the Committee on Judicial business and the Committee of Commissioners on Judicial Business. TE Settle sustained the point of order, and his ruling was confirmed by the house when a member of the Assembly challenged the ruling. The report was referred to relevant committees of the Assembly to be brought back later in the Assembly.[34]

The way in which the Assembly concluded the report of the Ad-Interim Committee was fascinating. The Committee's report was brought back to the Assembly through the Committee on Judicial Business. TE Rodney King, Chairman of the Committee on Judicial Business, noted a constitutional inquiry regarding the constitutionality of the Ad-Interim Committee on the Assembly. The query expressed concern that

> "The new procedure raises the constitutional question whether the General Assembly can properly commit matters to a commission, which commission's actions are the actions of the court without the option of veto by the court (WCF XXXI:3). The PCA, in its formation, consciously avoided this procedure. On the other hand, the new process, allows:
>
> a) appeal to a General Assembly regional judicial commission;
>
> b) appeal to and review by the General Assembly's Permanent Judicial Commission;
>
> c) control by General Assembly through the nomination and election procedure which is similar to the control currently exercised over trustees of agencies in the PCA (e.g., GA Bylaws IV Section 1-2-d).[35]

The Assembly also discussed the possibility of moving towards a delegated assembly. The following recommendations from the Committee on Judicial Business were adopted by the Assembly:

30. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 320.
31. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 321.
32. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 70.
33. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 83.
34. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 83.
35. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 120.

> 1. That the advice of the Committee on Judicial Business regarding Constitutional Inquiry (Appendix I, I.C. 1, p. 245) from the Ad-Interim Committee be ratified; that the proposed amendments touching both judicial process and representative assembly (Appendix P, p. 313) be referred back to the Ad-Interim Committee; and that it be noted that the proposal of the Ad-Interim Committee's report marks a radical departure from the original tenets of the Presbyterian Church in America.
>
> 2. That the Ad-Interim Committee be continued for an additional year to report to the Fourteenth General Assembly, that the Stated Clerk add to the Ad Interim Committee four additional members who have some differences with the report and who would bring other perspectives to the Committee, and that all future recommendations of the Committee be communicated to the presbyteries at least 90 days before the next General Assembly.[36]

Notice several important facts as the Assembly considered erecting a permanent judicial commission. First, the idea of a permanent judicial commission was extremely controversial. Perhaps the antipathy of the Assembly towards a standing judicial commission will strike younger ministers in the PCA as odd, given that many younger minister have known the denomination to have such a body for their entire lifetime. However, the grass-roots impulse was still strong at the 13th General Assembly. The Commissioners appeared to be very hesitant to move in this direction.

Second, notice that the original formulation of a standing judicial commission had no real mechanism for appealing a decision to the floor of the Assembly. The Assembly would exercise influence by way of appointing the membership of the commission, but the GA would have no review and control over the commission. This appears to be one of the most controversial features of the Ad-Interim Committee's recommendation, if not the single most controversial aspect.

Third, notice that the Assembly wanted some other voices in the process. The Assembly wanted more men appointed to the Committee in order to bring other perspectives to the discussion. That sort of recommendation is orderly but unusual in that study committees are usually left with their original composition if their work is continued for another year. It is probably not too much speculation to assume that the sweeping, radical recommendation of the Committee caused the Assembly to bring so much balance to the membership of the Committee. The way in which the Assembly chose to add members is even more striking. Ordinarily, the Moderator appoints members to a committee such as this one. However, the Moderator was a member of the Committee. The Assembly authorized the Stated Clerk, TE Morton Smith, to add the four additional members to the committee.

Finally, the Assembly wanted more time to digest any further recommendations of the committee. The Assembly asked that the Committee issue its report to the Presbyteries at least 90 days before the General Assembly. This timeframe certainly shortened the working time for the committee given the demands of writing, printing, and mailing the report according to this time frame.

The 14th General Assembly: A Work in Progress

The Ad-Interim Committee on the General Assembly brought another report to the 14th General Assembly in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1986. TE Morton Smith added four members to the Committee: Ruling Elder David Coffin, Ruling Elder Bruce Ferg, Teaching Elder George Knight III, and Teaching Elder Paul Settle. The Committee spent the year studying the philosophy and theology of the PCA's structure, the possibility of a representative assembly, and the judicial process of the General Assembly. Numerous individuals sent correspondence regarding these areas, and the Committee sent representatives to some presbyteries to field questions and address concerns.[37] The Committee focused its work on three areas, the theological and philosophical basis for PCA Polity, the idea of a representative assembly, and judicial process.

The Committee noted up front that it responded to the widespread concern expressed in the last Assembly that the GA wanted to retain some direct method of intervening in judicial cases. The Committee proposed that the Assembly retain "final action on each complaint or appeal."[38] The Committee's proposal focused exclusively on BCO 15. They proposed an amendment to BCO 15-1, adding BCO 15-3 through 15-7, and renumbering the then 15-4 as 15-8. The Committee was not unanimous in

36. PCA, *M13GA*, p. 121.

37. PCA, *The Minutes of the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 1986), Appendix P, p. 425.

38. PCA, *The Minutes of the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 425.

its recommendation. In fact, two members of the Committee filed a minority report.

The amendment for 15-1 allowed for judicial commissions to hear the case, but that their actions would be subject to approval by the appointing court, with the right to appeal or complain to the appointing court or the next higher court, excluding the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission.

> It shall keep a full record of its proceedings, which shall be submitted to the court appointing it, which if approved, shall then be entered on its minutes, and regarded and treated as the action of the court. In the event of complaint or appeal against an action of a commission, such complaint or appeal shall be made to the court appointing said commission, or the next higher: except there may be no complaint or appeal by any party in the case from a final decision or judgment of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly. Every commission must be appointed by the court which constitutes it, except the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly which shall be elected as provided in BCO 15-4 and the Regional Judicial Commissions may be constituted as provided in BCO 15-5.[39]

The proposed language of BCO 15-3 would allow for parties in cases before Presbyteries to request a hearing by a commission. The language of the proposal strongly encouraged Presbyteries to use a judicial commission but did not require it. "Presbytery may of its own motion commit any judicial case within its jurisdiction to a commission, and should ordinarily follow this procedure, especially when requested by one or both parties to the case. Such a commission shall be appointed by the Court from its members other than members of the court from which the case comes up."[40] Presbytery would have the right to approve all actions of judicial commissions. Should the Presbytery reject the decision of the commission, it could either hear the case itself or appoint a new commission.[41]

The General Assembly would have a new Permanent Judicial Commission according to the Committee's plan. The Commission would have eight members with membership parity between teaching and ruling elders. (Proposed 15-4) The new Permanent Judicial Commission would be able to commit cases to regional commissions for the hearing of cases complained or appealed to the GA. Here, the report is ambiguous. It assumes that the Permanent Commission would not hear the cases directly, but leaves the door open for that possibility. The proposed language for BCO 15-5 read, "The Permanent Judicial Commission may delegate specific judicial cases to a Regional Judicial Commission which shall be responsible for adjudication of the case."[42] The regional commissions would be chosen from neighboring presbyteries, and each presbytery would be required to nominate a teaching and ruling elder to be on standby for such duties. The proposal for BCO 15-6 states that the regional commissions shall hear the case according to the Rules of Discipline. The regional commission would submit its decision to the GA Permanent Commission for report to the GA.[43]

The GA would receive the actions of the regional committees through the Permanent Commission. The actions of the regional commissions would be final if approved by the GA. Significantly, the vote to approve the actions of the regional commission would be a non-debate motion. Hence, there could be no debate or discussion. If the Assembly did not approve them, the Assembly "must set the case for hearing before the General Assembly or a Special Commission appointed by it to try the case on the record as delivered to the Stated Clerk. Such Special Commission shall then proceed and shall report its judgment, in like manner, to the General Assembly for its approval or disapproval."[44]

Notice three aspects of the recommendation from the committee regarding judicial process. First, the Committee responded to the push-back from the Assembly regarding its authority to review judicial decisions of a commission. The report from the Committee to the 13th GA allowed for the Permanent Commission to have the final say in all judicial matters. The report to the 14th General Assembly allowed for approval by the GA. It even went so far as to allow the Assembly to try the case itself and approve all actions of all judicial commissions, permanent or ad hoc. These modifications represent a substantial change in the Committee's proposal.

Second, notice the ambiguity of the proposal regarding the function of the GA Permanent Commission. According to the proposal, the GA had the right to hear cases that were adjudicated by the regional commissions. The Permanent Judicial Commission reports the actions of the regional commissions, but the report says nothing about the Permanent Commission

39. PCA, *M14GA*, pp. 438–39.
40. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 439.
41. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 439.
42. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 439.
43. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 439.
44. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 439.

hearing cases directly. The problem here is that the language of the proposed BCO 15-5 said the Permanent Commission "may" refer to regional commissions, while the other sections assume that regional commissions will be the entities hearing complaints and appeals. It seems that the Permanent Commission's only significant duty would be to select the presbyteries from which the members of the regional commissions are drawn.

Finally, notice the inchoate polity of the proposal. The PCA has three levels of church courts, Sessions, Presbyteries, and the General Assembly. Unlike the PCUS, the PCA did not have Synods. However, the proposal seems to have a synodical impulse to it, allowing for regional commissions to be appointed with members who have not been vetted by the GA, except through the Permanent Commission. This proposal appears to take a step towards Synodical functions, but then proposals of the Committee do not recommend adding another level of church court to the polity of the PCA.

The recommendations of the Committee were filed with the General Assembly along with a minority report from two of its members, TE George Knight and RE Bruce Ferg. The minority opposed all of the recommendations of the majority, either by asking their recommendations to be received as information without action, or rejected in favor of proposals by the minority. The Minority Report concerning judicial process argued against the Majority on the basis of the report to the 13th GA, which is the only place where the majority argued for a pressing need for change in PCA judicial procedure. According to the Minority, the arguments of the Majority in favor of a radical change in PCA polity "cannot survive analysis."[45]

The Minority rejected the reasoning of the majority at two significant points. First, the Minority argued that there are not an inordinate number of cases coming before the GA. The new system, according to the Minority, would not address the purported root-issue of litigiousness. "The proposed new procedures do nothing at all to cure what the majority alleges to be the root of the problem— litigiousness at the presbytery level."[46] Moreover, the Minority argued that there is not an inordinate number of judicial cases. The members created a table representing the total number of complaints or appeals at each GA, noting in parenthesis the number of unique cases (since some cases produced multiple complaints). The Minority listed the number of cases with the following commentary

1—0
2—0
3— 1
4—2
5— 5
6—2
7—0
8— 5
9—4
10—6 (5)
11—15 (7)
12—7 (4)
13—6 (2)

> At Assemblies Ten through Thirteen there were instances of multiple cases arising out of a single proceeding below which were consolidated for hearing, and of cases not heard for various procedural reasons, so the number of cases really heard in those years is the smaller figure in parentheses. The total for the 13 years therefore is 35, or only 2.7 cases per year. That hardly seems "inordinate," especially in light of our denomination's history. Our church has had to struggle with the process of becoming truly presbyterian in its polity, with a working system of graded courts. The only way to preserve some degree of doctrinal integrity during the declension of the PCUS was to resort to de facto Congregationalism. That this had occurred (though not the reason for it) was recognized by the PCUS itself in a report presented to its 1970 General Assembly, which is reprinted in Dim Gold at 379–380. Return to real Presbyterianism has naturally created some stresses, which occasionally result in judicial cases.[47]

The Minority argued from Scripture that the hard work of the GA regarding discipline is an important part of the church's work. "Far more important," the Minority writes, "is the fact that, though it may be unpleasant (like bitter medicine or parental chastisement), a vigorous system of judicial process is absolutely necessary. James 3:17 teaches us that 'the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable;' indeed, without purity, the peace cannot long exist."[48] The Minority report also rejected the premise of the Majority report, namely, that an increasing number of judicial cases is a problem. The zeal for purity, according to the Minority report, is not a problem. "Perhaps instead of complaining about

45. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 445.
46. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 445.
47. PCA, *M14GA*, pp. 445–46.
48. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 446.

too much litigation in our church courts," the Minority responded, "we should be thanking God for the zeal of a Phinehas here and there among us. If maintaining the purity of our doctrine and our form of government through judicial processes is too bothersome for us to do, so that our Assemblies become nothing but overgrown missions conferences, we might as well distribute our assets to parachurch groups and go home, because we will have forfeited the right to identify ourselves as the Church."[49]

Second, the Minority argued that the proposal of the majority will not fix any of the problems identified by the Majority. The Majority complained of the "ineptitude of the lower court." Problems with the process of the lower courts will not be addressed by the proposal of the Majority. How so? The Minority argued that if there are problems in the process of lower courts, the current system is addressing those inadequacies through review and control. If there is nothing wrong with the process of the lower court, then the proposal of the Majority does nothing new. Moreover, the Minority argued that addressing problems at the lower court level through education would be more effective than adding bureaucracy to the judicial process. "Adding levels of judicial bureaucracy," the Minority writes, "may lengthen the process, but the regional and permanent judicial commissions will be staffed by the same sort of allegedly inept presbyters as those who supposedly are creating the problem. If, as was suggested in the Committee meetings, review of lower court actions is made difficult by poor records, the answer is to educate the presbyters making the records, not interpose whole new levels of courts."[50] If there is a problem with inept process in the lower court, the majority proposal would not address the root problems.

The Majority also identified a legalistic spirit and lack of clarity in the BCO as root causes for the increasing number of judicial cases. The Minority argued that neither of these issues are apparent in the recent history of the assembly. The allegations of legalism need to be substantiated, as do the assertions that the BCO is not sufficiently clear. The BCO can be rewritten by overture and interpreted by judicial precedent.[51]

The Minority concluded that the problems identified by the Majority are less than self-evident. Even if there were significant issues, the Minority argued that the Majority's proposal would compound present problems in a number of ways. The Majority's proposal goes contrary to the will of the 1984 General Assembly that rejected the idea of a permanent judicial commission.[52] The Minority also found the idea of the regional commission as problematic. The Minority gave a lengthy quote from Samuel Baird.

> A commission is an extraordinary committee of a Church Court, appointed either for some special business, or to take cognizance of such as may arise during the vacations of the Court. It differs from an ordinary committee in that it is empowered not only to inquire and prepare business for the action of the court, but also provisionally to come to any such determinations, and enforce any such decisions, as would be within the competence of the court itself. It differs from a court, as its decisions and determinations are merely provisional, and of force ad interim; and must be subjected to the revision and ultimate determination of the court, by which they may be set aside and annulled, and which alone can by its sanction give them permanent authority. (Baird's Digest at 213; emphasis added.)[53]

Interestingly, the Minority does not raise issue with the GA voting on the reports of the regional commissions without debate. They did raise the issue regarding presbyteries not having the right to debate. According to the Minority, the Majority, "proposes to hamstring the presbyteries in their consideration of their own cases by explicitly depriving them of a right they at least arguably possess now, the prerogative to fully debate their own commission reports. (See Exhibit C, proposed new BCO 15-3.)"[54] However, the proposed language for BCO 15-3 does not explicitly deny presbyteries the right to debate judicial cases. The language requires presbyteries to follow the Rules of Discipline, but there were no rules prohibiting presbyteries from debating judicial cases. But the Minority clearly took issue with what they saw was an increasing bureaucracy in the denomination. They expressed concerns that a permanent commission would lead to a similar situation that they experienced in the PCUS, where the Assembly would merely rubberstamp the decision of the commission.

The Minority concluded on a strong tone of condemnation. "The conclusion is plain." The Minority wrote, "The proposal for the Regional and Permanent Commissions is pernicious in the extreme and should be totally rejected. Does that mean that our procedures

49. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 446.
50. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 446.
51. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 446.
52. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 446.
53. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 446.
54. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 446.

are so perfect as to be beyond improvement? No; but the changes that should be made go in precisely the opposite direction from those proposed by the majority."[55] What did the Minority propose instead? They did not produce counter BCO language. Rather, they offered a general proposal, requested that the Assembly reject the majority's judicial recommendation, and instruct the Ad-Interim Committee to draft BCO language in keeping with the philosophy of the Minority. They argued that the Assembly should function merely as an appellate court, only reviewing the written record of the lower courts. A committee to help "screen" the actions of the lower court with recommendations to the Assembly along with the right of parties in the cases to produce briefs would enable the Assembly to make coherent decisions when reviewing the lower court.[56]

With Majority and Minority reports coming before the floor, the stage was set for a debate at the 14th GA. The Ad-Interim Committee brought their report to the floor through the Judicial Business Committee. The Assembly decided to function as a committee of the whole in order to have public discussion on every aspect of the report without the need or possibility of motions being made.[57] When the Assembly took up the report of the Committee, Alan Chewning relinquished the chair to TE Cortez Copper, because Chewning was a member of the Ad-Interim Committee. The Assembly allowed the Majority to present with the Minority report being moved as a substitute motion. The first recommendation regarding the philosophy and theology of PCA polity from the Minority failed to prevail on a vote of 372-373, with the acting Moderator casting the deciding vote.[58] The minutes note that the Minority report failed to prevail. However, the floor did not accept the position of the majority. There is ambiguity in the minutes where the Stated Clerk appears to be confused about a motion to amend the recommendation of the Majority regarding judicial matters.[59] When the matter came before the floor for a vote, the Judicial Business Committee noted that the Majority recommended sweeping changes without all the details necessary.[60] Yet the Committee did not call the Ad-Interim Committee's recommendation out of order. The Assembly decided to refer all of the judicial matters back to the Ad-Interim Committee requesting that they work on the matter for yet another year.[61]

The 15th General Assembly: The Birth of the SJC

The Committee took another year to work on the judicial matters recommitted to it. The report it brought back to the 15th General Assembly proved to be one of the more significant reports adopted by the Assembly. At the 15th Assembly, the current judicial structure of the Assembly was set. The commissioners assembled in Grand Rapids, MI approved what we now know of as the Standing Judicial Commission (SJC), the basic process for how the Assembly would handle cases through the SJC, and the function of the Committee on Constitutional Business. The creation of the SJC, like the previous reports of the Ad-Interim Committee on the structure of the PCA, was not without controversy. There were, yet again, multiple minority reports to nearly every part of the Committee's report. Two members filed a minority report regarding the recommendations of the Committee on judicial process.

The majority of members on the committee incorporated advice and pushback from the previous Assembly debate into their new and final proposal regarding the formulation of a permanent judicial commission at the Assembly level. They incorporated three significant changes. First, The Committee noted that they took the advice of TE Don Clements in recommending that part of the functional rules regarding the SJC be placed in the RAO instead of the BCO, so that the Assembly could more easily make changes in procedural matters.[62]

Second, the Committee also clarified its original proposal so that presbyteries could hear the case as a whole or refer it to judicial commission. "At the presbytery level," the Committee wrote, "this proposal would allow the presbytery the option of trying a judicial case as a whole or submitting it to a commission. The Committee felt that presbytery was small enough to be able to try the case as a whole, if it so desired."[63] The Committee's proposal would allow the court to debate the entire case if the presbytery tried the case without a commission. However, the Committee proposed that presbyteries not be allowed to debate the case when approving the actions of a commission. The Committee reasoned that a presbytery should not enter into debate

55. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 447.
56. PCA, *M14GA*, pp. 447–48.
57. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 81.
58. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 102.
59. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 106.
60. PCA, *M14GA*, pp. 107–8.
61. PCA, *M14GA*, p. 108.
62. PCA, *The Minutes of the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 1987), Appendix S, pp. 475-477.
63. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 477.

when all of the members of the court had not heard the case. That is, since the court had not seen the witnesses, the presentation of the prosecution nor the defense, or read all the relevant documentation, it would be unjust for the court to enter into debate. "[T]o allow the presbytery to debate the case when it did not hear the witnesses, have all the facts and exhibits, nor hear the arguments of the parties, would be very frustrating to presbytery members who would be asked to make a judgment on the subjective arguments of presbyters without hearing the case. Such a debate would open the presbytery to the persuasive arguments of eloquent presbyters rather than having the protection of the checks and balances in the Rules of Discipline."[64]

Third, the Committee also clarified the proposal regarding the permanent judicial commission for the Assembly by replacing the regional commissions. The concept of a regional commission was not scrapped altogether. Rather, the idea was transformed into the concept of the SJC using panels to hear cases brought to it, a process that is still used today.[65]

The final shape of the Committee's recommendation was as follows. They recommended that the Assembly create the Standing Judicial Commission. The Commission would consist of twenty-four members. The membership would be nominated and appointed by the Assembly, with the rule that no presbytery may have more than one member on the commission at the same time. The SJC was to submit the following material to the sessions of the church at least thirty days ahead of the meeting of the Assembly: summary of facts, the issues of the case, the written briefs from the parties involved, the recommendations of the judicial panel (if any), the rationale of the commission, and its judgments in the case. The SJC had the option of trying a case by assigning it to a panel of its members. "Such a panel shall be chosen," according to the Committee, "from its members who are geographically nearest to the locus of the case. Such a panel shall propose to the Standing Judicial Commission a recommended decision. We believe this will enable a panel to hear the case quickly when it arises and while all the facts are fresh on the minds of the witnesses. We believe it will work for quicker and fairer judgment."[66]

To ensure that a panel's work would be reviewed by the whole SJC, the decision of the panel would be submitted to the SJC. Both parties in the case and any member of the SJC could request the entire commission to review the matter. A review would be required when requested either by four members of the SJC or a dissenting member of the panel that heard the case.[67]

The Committee also recommended that the Committee on Judicial Business be transformed into the Committee on Constitutional Business. The committee would give non-binding advice to the Assembly for matters referred to it. The Committee could not take up matters of its own accord nor would it give regular reports to the Assembly. "Since its advice would be non-binding," the Ad-Interim Committee wrote, "it would not need to report to a Committee of Commissioners nor to General Assembly, except when so requested. This would eliminate the time consuming reports to General Assembly. If the party receiving this nonbinding advice is not satisfied, your Committee believes the proper procedure to get a binding opinion is through the courts of the church by overture, judicial case, or other permissible procedures."[68]

Two members decided to submit a minority report to the Assembly regarding judicial process, RE Bruce Ferg and TE George Knight. The Minority opposed the Majority on only one issue, whether or not presbyteries or the General Assembly could debate the report of a commission. The tone of the Minority report changed remarkably from the previous year. The Minority noted that much of its objections to the previous proposals of the Majority were adopted in substance in the new proposal. "The revisions in procedure offered by the Committee incorporate many of the ideas suggested by the Minority Report in 1986. The new procedures would permit more timely adjudication of judicial cases by use of the regional panels and the whole Permanent Judicial Commission between General Assemblies."[69] The Minority further noted that the new permanent judicial commission would streamline the work of the Assembly, provide for review and control of decisions of the SJC, and that the creation of the Committee on Constitutional Business would greatly help the Assembly.[70]

If the new proposal of the Minority was so much better, why offer a minority report? The Minority argued against one aspect of the Majority's proposal, the idea that a presbytery or the General Assembly would not have the right to debate when approving the report of a commission. "Our sole area of disagreement," Freg and Knight wrote, "is the refusal to permit debate of the

64. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 477.
65. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 478.
66. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 478.
67. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 478.
68. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 478.
69. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 501.
70. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 501.

reports on judicial commissions, either by presbyteries or by the General Assembly. We should be mindful that, at the Council of Jerusalem, there was "much debate," even on the merits of the issues. (Acts 15:7-21.) The proposals should be modified to permit such debate, and should be passed as amended."[71] The Minority recommended that the words "without debate" and "without question, debate or discussion" be removed from the proposed BCO language recommended by the Majority. Thus, the Minority did not oppose the creation of the SJC, but only that its decisions could not be fully debated by the Assembly.

As the report of the Ad-Interim Committee came to the floor, the Committee on Judicial Business gave its recommendation regarding the report. Given the complexity and the number of controversial issues put forward by the Ad-Interim Committee, regarding judicial business and many other matters, the Judicial Business Committee recommended that the Assembly adopt the following procedure for debating the report

> That the Assembly resolve itself into a "quasi committee of the whole" to hear the majority and minority position on each issue, with no motion to amend or vote, but with questions permitted, and with specific time allotted. Upon the expiration of the allotted time the Committee of the Whole shall automatically rise and proceed to debate and vote on each issue. This process shall be repeated for each of these issues (1) Representative Assembly, (2) Judicial Business Procedure, (3) Nominations, and (4) Structure (Exhibits D through L). Time allotted to each in "quasi committee of the whole" as follows: Representative Assembly - 15 minutes to the majority and 15 minutes to the minority; Judicial Business - 20 minutes to the majority and 20 minutes to the minority; Nominations - 15 minutes to the majority and 15 minutes to the minority; Structure - 20 minutes to the majority and 20 minutes to the minority. Exhibits M through P of the Committee Report shall be considered without going to quasi committee of the whole.[72]

The Assembly accepted the recommendation of the Judicial Business Committee and proceeded to take up the matter. Chairman of the Committee RE Jack Williamson called on TE Paul Gilchrist to present the portion of the report regarding the Judicial Business. The Minority report is not mentioned in the minutes. However, the minutes note that the Majority's recommended changes to BCO 15, including the language that prohibited presbyteries or the Assembly to debate the decision of a commission, were adopted by the Assembly.[73]

The other recommendations of the Ad-Interim Committee were also adopted. The matters were clearly controversial. A protest was entered by eight commissions against the adoption of the BCO 15 amendments. The protestors objected to what they perceived as a lack of time to consider and debate the merits of the Committee's recommendation.[74] When the bulk of the other recommendations of the Committee were considered, (numbers 4-12) the vote to approve was 460-288. About 120 commissions recorded their no votes regarding the recommendations of the Ad-Interim Committee.[75] This number represented about 16% of the commissioners voting at the Assembly during the report of the Ad-Interim Committee.

The recommended changes to the BCO went down to the presbyteries for their ratification. Forty-two presbyteries voted on the amendments, with only one presbytery, Korean Central, not voting on the BCO changes. The votes of the presbyteries totaled 29-13, meaning that the amendments barely scraped by the constitutional threshold of two-thirds of the presbyteries required to ratify changes to the BCO.[76] As of the 17th General Assembly, the PCA would have the SJC and the Committee on Constitution Business to handle all judicial matters arising before the Assembly.

Conclusion

As we take stock of the first fifty years of the PCA, particularly concerning the denominations growth in judicial process, there are a number of noteworthy items. First, younger elders should give thanks for the courage and hard work of the founding fathers of the PCA. The effort that the first generation of teaching and ruling elders gave in order to give birth to a denomination committed to the Scriptures, the Great Commission, and the Reformed Faith was nothing short of remarkable. Their herculean efforts are apparent in the way that they took the 1933 PCUS Rules of Discipline, crafting and shaping them to suit the needs of the PCA. It is worthwhile to remember their efforts and the chaos they went through in order to give decency and order to a fledgling denomination.

Continued on Page 322.

71. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 501.
72. PCA, *M15GA*, pp. 105–6.
73. PCA, *M15GA*, pp. 106–7.
74. PCA, *M15GA*, pp. 107–8.
75. PCA, *M15GA*, p. 108.
76. 16th GA, 90, p. 133.

An Historical Study of Witnesses and their Oaths in the Courts of the Presbyterian Church in America

By Thomas E. Rickard

However resistant Presbyterian churches are to major change, they nevertheless make frequent modifications to their polities, procedures, and practices. While the principles of Presbyterian polity remain consistent, it is important to note that even when specific provisions, such as chapter 44 in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*), is vacated, the underlying principles found in the rest of the *BCO* are not abandoned. Presbyterian churches may update, amend, or revise their forms of governments as long as they do so with the understanding of the basic tenets of the Reformed faith as each denomination seeks to do things decently and in order.

As recently as the 50th General Assembly held earlier this year, the PCA has debated the matter of whom shall or shall not be admitted to testify as a witness in church courts in the process of church discipline. Much of the discussion has concerned possible amendments to the chapter of the Rules of Discipline regarding witnesses (*BCO* 35). This article considers the origin and development of this section of the *BCO* regarding the competency and credibility of witnesses. Following this historical investigation, the article proceeds to defend the practice of administering an oath to witnesses.

The Qualification of Witnesses

Historic Roots in Knox's Book of Discipline

To begin, we direct attention to John Knox's *Book of Discipline* adopted by the national church in Scotland in 1560. This was based on the *Genevan Book of Order* (1556), which has only one reference to 'witnesses' in regard to the process of discipline following Matthew 18:15–17.[1] The *Genevan Book of Order* includes a process of discipline of only about 850 words in length. The content of John Knox's *Book of Discipline*[2] is broader than what we would call a book of discipline today, including instructions pertaining to the election and compensation of ministers, instructions for when worship is to be held, and other general matters of church government and operations. This range of material might be compared to the three parts of the PCA's current *BCO* (Form of Government, Rules of Discipline, and Directory for the Worship of God). Upon reading, the *Book of Discipline,* there appears to be no qualifications for who shall be allowed to testify in the 'kirk's court.' However, two points might be helpful to understand this scarcity of detail.

First, the current *BCO* of the PCA is over 100,000 words and the second part regarding discipline within the church is roughly 13,000 words. Knox's book is miniscule in comparison, having about 21,000 words total, and chapter seven entitled "*The seventh head of Ecclesiastical Discipline*"[3] is about 2,000 words. To put it in perspective, the current *BCO* has about 1,900 words in chapters 42 and 43 alone dealing with appeals and complaints.

Second, these early documents were prepared, published, and put to use in a cultural setting vastly different than our own. The opening sentence in the *Genevan Book of Order* defines the spheres of discipline which separated ecclesiastical discipline from any other spheres.

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1. *The Forme of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments, &c. vsed in the Englishe Congregation at Geneua and approued, by the famous and godly learned man, Iohn Caluyn* (Geneva: Crispen, 1556), p. 91.

2. *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: J. Thin, 1895; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1966), pp. 183–260.

3. Knox, 2.227–233.

> As no city, town, house, or family can maintain their estate and prosper without policy and governance, so the church of God, which requires more purely to be governed than any city or family, cannot without spiritual policy and ecclesiastical discipline continue, increase, and flourish.[4]

Knox's *Book of Discipline* likewise differentiates and clarifies the two spheres of discipline as civil and ecclesiastical. Chapter seven begins by stating,

> As that no Common-wealth can flourish, or long endure, without good laws and sharp execution of the same; so neither can the Kirk of God be brought to purity, neither yet retained in the same without the order of Ecclesiastical Discipline, which stands in reproving and correcting of the faults, which the civil sword either doth neglect, or not punish: Blasphemy, adultery, murder, perjury, and other crimes capital, worthy of death, ought not properly to fall under censure of the Kirk; because all such open transgressors of God's laws, ought to be taken away by the civil sword.[5]

The historical setting in Scotland when the *Book of Discipline* was adopted was such that even blasphemy was to be considered in the civil court, punishable by the civil sword rather than solely by the exercise of ecclesiastical keys. In this context, there is no listing of the qualifications for witnesses in the *Book of Discipline* adopted in 1560. In 1578, the Church of Scotland adopted *The Second Book of Discipline*, which expanded and altered the 1560 version. This book reads more like a modern *BCO* (but still minute in comparison). Although *The Second Book of Discipline* did not have the intricate details of the process of discipline, it limited those who could be involved in the church courts (not witnesses in a trial), especially forbidding '*abusers*' either to vote in parliament or serve in the church courts.[6] The term '*abusers*' specifically referred to those who adopted the titles and practices of the Roman Catholic Church (through the Pope or Canon Law rather than Scripture). The expansion from the first to the second *Book of Discipline* shows how the Church disqualified certain people from participation in church courts based on problematic beliefs.

By action of the 1707 General Assembly, following a draft first proposed in 1704,[7] the Church of Scotland introduced a major change with "The form of process in the judicatories of the church of Scotland, with relation to scandal and censures."[8] In Chapter 2 section 10, this act states:

> 10. Before the witnesses be judicially examined, the accused person is to be called, and the relevancy of the libel discussed, and if the defender compear, he may object against any of them, and if the objection be relevant, and made evident to the judicatory, the witnesses are to be cast; but a person's being the delator [denouncer] or informer doth not hinder him to be a witness, except in the case where he formally complained for his own interest, or of pregnant presumptions of malice against the person accused.

Here we see the introduction of the "relevancy" of the witness. The witness cannot be barred because he is the "delator [denouncer] or informer," unless his complaint is for his own interest or has "pregnant presumptions." This introduction established the principle which is carried through subsequent expressions of Presbyterian polity, that not all are qualified to bear witness in a church court. The judicatory has the ability to judge a witness "qualified" (or not qualified) to testify in a church court. The following section provides more qualifications which were expanded from the draft version of the act:

> 11. Though there be no relevant objection, yet the witnesses are solemnly to be purged of malice, bribe, or good deed done, or to be done, and of partial counsel.

Even if there are no objections, the witness should be examined in various areas to ensure credibility and integrity. The witness should be cleared of potential biases, motives, or ill will towards any party involved. A potential witness must not have been bribed or received reward for his testimony, and he must not have been influenced by outside counsel. Following the certification of a potential witness as eligible to testify, the witness is to be sworn (section 12). However, there is no prescribed oath given in the "Process of Form."

4. Geneva Book of Church Order, ibid., p. 89.

5. *The Works of John Knox*, 4.204

6. See chapter 11, "Of the Present Abusis Remaning in the Kirk," in David Calderwood, ed. (attributed), *The First and Second Booke of Discipline: Together with Some Acts of the Generall Assemblies, Clearing and confirming the same: And an Act of Parliament* (Printed Anno 1621), p. 86, and James Kirk, *The Second Book of Discipline, With Introduction and Commentary* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1980), ¶6, p. 219.

7. Overtures Concerning Discipline and Method in Ecclesiastical Judicatories', in *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638–1842*, Church Law Society (Edinburgh, 1843)," p. 337.

8. *Acts of the General Assembly … 1638–1842*, p. 406.

This is commonly used throughout the "Acts of General Assembly"[9] to refer to men swearing to the "Solemn League and Covenant,"[10] which mentions "doctrine, worship, discipline, and government." However, it is highly unlikely that this is the particular oath taken by a witness before giving testimony. D. X. Junkin wrote that the American Presbyterian Church used the similar form used in Scotland, with some "unimportant variations," reproduced here:

> You do solemnly swear by the Almighty God, the searcher of all hearts, that the testimony you shall give [in the case] shall be truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and that as you shall answer to God at the great day.[11]

The development of the process of discipline in the Church of Scotland reveals that the foundational desire for God's glory has occupied the center of the Church's goal and end of discipline even as changes to the formal expression of that desire were introduced over time by introducing certain qualifications by selecting witnesses who can testify in the church court. We have also established that there was an understanding and practice that a witness is to swear an oath before testifying in the church court. The importance of requiring oaths will be explored further in the second major section of this article.

Historic Developments in American Presbyterianism

At this point, we leave Presbyterianism's historical roots in Scotland and now turn to the American Presbyterian Church. Charles Hodge makes the case throughout his book, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Part I: 1705–1741*, that the early American Presbyterians sought to adopt the Scottish *Book of Discipline* and *Form of Government* as their own.[12] This caused great discussion and debate regarding the relationship of the Church to the Westminster Standards, addressed in the "Adopting Act of 1729."[13] With regard to witness-bearing and oath-taking, the current wording of the PCA's *BCO* 35–1 was adopted in 1858.[14] We will seek to look at the variations and progress from the first American Presbyterians to the adopted change in 1858.

The 1789 version of the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America does not list necessary qualifications for witnesses (there are only two chapters in the version of the *Book of Discipline* current in 1789). However, the oath required to bear witness does limit who might testify ("Forms of Process in Judicatories of this Church," Chapter 1).

> 8. The oath, or affirmation,[15] to be taken by a witness, shall be administered by the moderator, and shall be in the following, or like terms: " I solemnly promise, in the presence of the omniscient and heart-searching God, that I will declare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; according to the best of my knowledge, in the matter in which I am called to witness, as I shall answer it to the great Judge of quick and dead.[16]

The earliest version (found by the author) of a standard of competency regarding witnesses in any Presbyterian denomination on the continent of North America was in the 1799 edition of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church *Form of Government*, Book II-Discipline, Chapter 4 "Of Processes in general," section "Of Witnesses."

> 2. Children, idiots, those defective in any of the senses on which the accuracy of their knowledge and testimony

9. *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638–1842*, throughout.

10. Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, 1851), pp. 464–466.

11. D.X. Junkin, *The Oath A Divine Ordinance* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1851), p. 142.

12. Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Part I: 1705–1741* (Philadelphia: Board of Publication, 1839), pp. 215–18.

13. "The Adopting Act of 1729," PCA Historical Center, accessed July 15, 2023, https://www.pcahistory.org/documents/subscription/adoptingact.html.

14. "The Historical Development of the Book of Church Order; Chapter 35: Evidence," PCA Historical Center, accessed July 28, 2023, https://www.pcahistory.org/bco/rod/35/01.html.

15. The use of affirmation was used in common law to allow for Quakers to affirm the truth without taking an oath (cf. Matt. 5:34–37). Laws were changed in 1695 to allow Quakers to make an affirmation in the following form "I A.B. do declare in the Presence of Almighty God the Witnesse of the Truth of what I say." However, this act still forbid them from being witnesses in a court of law. "William III, 1695–6: An Act that the Solemne Affirmation & Declaration of the People called Quakers shall be accepted instead of an Oath in the usual Forme. [Chapter XXXIV. Rot. Parl. 7 & 8 Gul. III. p. 9. n.3.]," in *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 7, 1695–1701*, ed. John Raithby (s.l: Great Britain Record Commission, 1820), p. 152. A great exposition and refutation of the Quaker view can be found by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Second edition (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), pp. 266–274.

16. *The Constitution of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Thomas Bradford, 1789), p. 177.

> depends, accusers, persons of infamous character, at enmity with the accused, under censure or process for censure, who expect, directly or indirectly, to reap any temporal advantage, or to avoid any temporal disadvantage, by giving testimony, cannot be admitted as witnesses either for or against an offender. On any of these grounds, he has a right to challenge a witness, and the Judicatory is candidly to hear and to, decide on his exceptions.[17]

The current PCA *BCO* has four qualifications for those who are barred from testifying as witnesses. As carry-over material from earlier expressions of American Presbyterianism, we find that nineteenth-century *BCO* commentator F. P. Ramsey summarizes them, "The only grounds of challenge of a witness are too great youth, too little intelligence (i.e., ability), lack of belief in God, or lack of belief in a future state of rewards and punishments." [18] The 1799 ARP constitution holds about 8 qualifications which include the persons age, ability (mentally and physically), character, relationship to the accused, standing in the church, and if they would reap a benefit or avoid a disadvantage. The qualifications are often paired with the oath that witness must make before testifying. The oath taken by the witnesses is given in one appendix which states,

> You do swear by the living God, that the testimony which, in answer to questions or otherwise, you are now to give in the case of _____. under process, before this judicatory, for the sin and scandal of _____ shall be, to the best of your knowledge, the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and that as you shall account to God, the day when he shall judge the world by Jesus Christ.[19]

The maintenance of the oath taken by a witness continues to be a trend in the relevant documentary history of the American Presbyterian Church. Even today it is still the case that all major Presbyterian denominations include an oath to be administered to witnesses before testifying in the church court.[20]

The 1821 and 1833[21] versions of the *Rules of Discipline* of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America include qualifications (similar to the ARP 1799) found in Book II-Discipline, chapter VI. Witnesses. Two sections deal with competency and credibility:

> II. A competent witness is one who ought to be admitted and heard. The competency of a witness may be affected by his want of the proper age; by a want of any of the senses essential to a knowledge of the matter which he is called to establish; by weakness of understanding; by infamy of character; by being under church censure for falsehood or perjury; by nearness of relationship to any of the parties; and by a variety of considerations which cannot be specified in detail….
>
> IV. The credibility of a witness, or the degree of credit due to his testimony, may be affected by relationship to any of the parties; by deep interest in the result of the trial; by general rashness, indiscretion, or malignity of character; and by various other circumstances; to which judicatories shall carefully attend, and for which they shall make proper allowance in their decision.

These two qualifications show that a witness must be both competent and credible to testify in the courts of the church. A competent witness is one who "ought to be admitted." The competency test includes seven criteria: age, knowledge (relevant to the matter), understanding, character, freedom from church censure for falsehood or perjury, absence of close relationship to the parties, any other considerations that defy more exact specification. The credibility test includes four factors: relationship, interest in the trial's outcome, certain negative traits (such as rashness, indiscretion and poor character), and a broad category of other circumstances, all of which members of the judicatory should consider and discuss when determining a witness's relative weight of credibility. However, the oath is required before the witness giving testimony. The oath in these versions (1821 and 1833) of the *Rules of Discipline* is to be sworn as follows:

> IX. The oath or affirmation to a witness shall be administered by the moderator in the following or like terms:[22] "You solemnly promise in the presence of the omniscient and heart searching God that you

17. "The Government, Disciple and Worship, Associate-Reformed Church in North America, Book II, Of Discipline," in *The Constitution and Standards of the Associate-Reformed Church in North-America* (New York: T&J Swords, 1799), p. 518.

18. F.P. Ramsey, *An Exposition of the Form of Government and the Rules of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1898), pp. 215–16.

19. Appendix 1, in *The Constitution and Standards of the Associate-Reformed Church in North-America* (New York: T&J Swords, 1799), p. 578.

20. See, for example, the following: ARP BOD 4.4.I; EPC 9–1; OPC BD IV.A.4.b; PCUSA D-5.0704c; RPCNA BOD II.3.6

21. *The Constitution of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Alex Towar, 1833), p. 404.

22. The use of the phrase "like terms" is common in many of the forms of oaths for witnesses. This would require further research,

> will declare the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth according to the best of your knowledge in the matter in which you are called to witness as you shall answer it to the great Judge of quick and dead."[23]

In the United States of America—unlike in Scotland and other nations—there was no nationally recognized State Church. Article 6 section 3 of the United States Constitution includes the "Religious Test Clause" forbidding the requirement of a religious test for determining the qualification of a candidate for office or public service. However, it is the case that in the nineteenth century, the following qualifications were used as tests for witnesses in civil courts: "belief in God and/or in future rewards or punishments." This stems from English Common Law, dating back at least to the famous case of *Omychund v. Barker* (1744).[24] The American use of the belief in God and future rewards and punishments were upheld by State and Federal court systems cases such as *State v. Cooper* (1807), *Curtiss v. Strong* (1809), and *Wakefield v. Ross* (1827). [25] This prevalence of cases hitting on this matter of jurisprudence and political life in this time period may have to do with the existence of established churches created and maintained by state governments up until 1833.[26] With the eradication of established churches by 1833, it is possible that the Presbyterian Church in the United States then sensed a need to introduce in the 1858 version of the *Rules of Discipline* provisions requiring potential witnesses in ecclesiastical trials to profess belief in God and in the future state of rewards or benefits. Although the specific language appears no earlier than in 1858, the principle and practices for witness qualification which were in place before that time were similar, although the specific words might have changed.

Understanding the historical context surrounding constitutional amendments is helpful not only for building the case for why a particular amendment was included, but also for anticipating what a church could lose if certain provisions were to be removed from its constitutional documents. By way of review, ever since the founding of the American Presbyterian Church a witness was always required to take an oath (or affirmation for Anabaptists/Quakers) stating that he believes in "the omniscient and heart-searching God" and that he will give an account to "the great Judge of quick and dead" for his testimony to be received by the court. The specific wording might stem from political discussion in civil courts, but the practice was essentially the same both before and after the introduction and ratification of the 1858 amendment.

Although the current reading of the PCA's *BCO* 35–1 was not adopted until 1858, the principles undergirding the language that appears today have been consistent over time—particularly within the American Presbyterian churches—and was carried over from the practice of the mother kirk in Scotland. As highlighted in the first section of this article, Presbyterian churches very early on paired the evaluation of a potential witness's ability to testify in the courts of the church as judged by the judicatory with the oath of the witness taken before bearing testimony. The next section seeks to understand the nature of an oath as understood by our Presbyterian forefathers and described in the *Book of Discipline*.

Oaths in Relation to Witnesses

In the sixteenth century, Wolfgang Musculus stated that he did not need to define what an oath was because they are "rather well-known and customary."[27] In the nineteenth century, D. X. Junkin made the statement that an oath is "seldom explained and reverence for it so seldom enforced from the pulpit."[28] Junkin's point is in opposition to Musculus' assertion. To Junkin, oaths are not well known and need to be defined and taught from the pulpit. The trajectory of these two datum points remains unchanged. Today, there is much confusion regarding oaths and vows, even as presented in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) in chapter 22. Every Monday morning during the proceedings of the Westminster Assembly, the authors of the WCF would make the following vow,

> I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of almighty God, that in this Assembly, whereof I am a

but generally speaking, Presbyterians were opposed at requiring a particular form of pray or liturgy (Cf. WCF 20.2, 21.1). For a more robust defense please see Samuel Miller's titled, "Presbyterians Reject Prescribed Liturgies."

23. *The Constitution of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Alex Towar, 1833), p. 404.

24. "Omychund v Barker and the Law of Oaths," Affidavit HQ, June 11, 2015, https://affidavits.info/omychund-v-barker-and-the-law-of-oaths/.

25. Ronald P. Formisano and Stephen Pickering, "The Christian Nation Debate and Witness Competency," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 2 (2009): 219–48.

26. John R. Vile, "Established Churches in Early America," The First Amendment Encyclopedia, 2009, https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/801/established-churches-in-early-america.

27. Wolfgang Musculus, Todd M. Rester, and Jordan J. Ballor, *On Righteousness, Oaths, and Usury: A Commentary on Psalm 15* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, Acton Institute, 2013), p. 44.

28. Junkin, *The Oath A Divine Ordinance*, p. 3.

> member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God's glory and the peace and good of his Church.[29]

Oaths and vows were constantly before these men. This is not the case for those who live in the twenty-first century. Today, oaths are merely ceremonial formalities for civil office, or for civil practice in courts. We view them as more relevant for civil court cases than for ecclesiastical trials, with perjury in the former to be prosecuted by the civil sword. The next section of this article seeks to bring clarity to the words of the oath taken by witnesses in church courts, and to the principle which the oath seeks to accomplish.

The early church to Medieval Church

The practice of taking oaths and the importance of them as religious acts antedate the Reformation. The value of oath-taking was taught and practiced by the church, following the teaching of Augustine, Jerome, Isidore of Seville, and the *Decretum*.[30] This consistent teaching on the value of oath-taking established over time the underlying principles that persisted in the teaching of the Medieval Church as found in Canon Law.[31] The extent and explanation of this commitment to oath-taking can be found in Thomas Aquinas's view of oaths in *The Summa Theologica*.[32] Aquinas explains oaths as calling God as witness, either by means of a "declaratory oath" or a "promissory oath" (Art. 1). He continues to explain that a lawful oath is taken that is good itself and but must not be taken unto evil ends. Aquinas quotes the same passage of Scripture (Deut 6:13) as do the Westminster divines (Art. 2; cf. WCF 22.2). Aquinas also explains that an Oath is an act of religious worship (Art. 4–5). Even Aquinas's distinction of oaths and vows is reflected in the similar distinction drawn by the Westminster divines (Art. 8). This fundamental teaching was carried over into and echoed in the Westminster Standards as they conform to the teaching of the Scriptures.

However, the Reformers' call for church reform did confront the practice of oath-taking as taught by the Roman Catholic magisterium. Aquinas states that the taking of oaths is not limited to God alone, but extends also to His creatures (Art. 6). The practice of taking oaths by created things came about through taking oaths both to God and to His holy gospel/evangelists, or to God and the saints. By the time of the Reformation, the church was encouraging Christians to take oaths by relics, tombs of martyrs, altars, and angels. The practice of the Medieval Church added various means of oath-taking by including practices such as laying a hand on the Bible and kissing it, or by interacting with other supposedly sacred objects.[33] The Reformers applied the doctrine of *sola scriptura* to the practice of taking oaths and vows as we will see included in some detail in the Westminster Confession.

The Reformation

The Reformed principle of taking an oath is outlined in the Chapter 22 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. What follows here is less a commentary on the chapter than it is a distillation of the principles in this chapter regarding witness-bearing in the context of a church court. The fact that there is a chapter entitled "On Oaths and Vows" included in a confession of faith may seem like a superfluous inclusion to modern minds (granting, of course, that confessions of faith themselves are not dismissed as superfluous in the first place). However, the use of oaths was important in the English Reformation with which the authors of the Confession were all associated, both as Englishmen and as Scotsmen. Jonathan Michael Gray opens his book titled, *Oaths and the English Reformation*, by boldly stating, "The English Reformation was as much about oaths as it was about Henry's marriage, succession, and headship over the English Church."[34] The author indicates that even historians are prone to overlook the importance of oaths in the sixteenth century.[35] Without delving into the importance of oaths during the Reformation, it is indisputable that confessions, catechisms, and articles published during the Reformation make frequent reference to oaths and vows.[36]

29. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom,* vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), p. 748.

30. Timothy R. Scheuers, *Consciences and the Reformation: Scruples over Oaths and Confessions in the Era of Calvin and His Contemporaries*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology Series (New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 18.

31. Scheuers, pp. 16–26.

32. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. II (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1981), art. II-II, q. 89.

33. Junkin, *The Oath A Divine Ordinance*, pp. 159–84.

34. Jonathan Michael Gray, *Oaths and the English Reformation*, 1st paperback edition, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 1.

35. Gray, p. 8.

36. Irish Articles (55), 39 Articles (39) and 42 Articles (42), Heidelberg Catechism (101), Westminster Confession of Faith (22), Westminster Larger Catechism (112–113), Savoy Declaration of Faith (23), Calvin's Catechism (161–162), First London Confession 1646 (50).

The early second-generation Reformer John Calvin explains that the regulative principle of worship is the basis for the taking of oaths or vows.

> If all voluntary worship which we ourselves devise apart from God's commandment is hateful to him, it follows that no worship can be acceptable to him except that which is approved by his Word. Therefore, let us not take to ourselves such license as to dare vow to God that which bears no evidence as to how he may esteem it.[37]

Calvin explains his position concisely in the *Genevan Catechism* (1560), answering the catechism question, "161. Can the name of God we used lawfully in oaths?" Calvin answers, "Yes, when they are necessary, i.e., in order to uphold the truth, when it requires it, and in maintaining love and concord among us."[38] More recently, Timothy R. Scheuers seeks to show the challenging task undertaken by Calvin and the council of Geneva of protecting the individual conscience while also having doctrinal and confessional continuity founded on the Scriptures. Calvin initially experienced insurmountable difficulties requiring the citizens of Geneva to swear an oath to a confession of faith.[39] However, during Calvin's second call to Geneva, the Consistory began the practice of demanding that a witness be placed under an oath before testifying.[40]

The Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Reformed confession used by Presbyterians, remains largely unchanged since its adoption in Scotland in 1647 (with several notable and significant exceptions, of course). One detail regarding oaths and vows was changed in the United States of America regarding its relationship to the civil government requiring oaths.[41] The WCF positions chapter 22, "On Oaths and Vows," after the chapter "On Religious Worship." The connection is made clear within the first lines of chapter 22, "a lawful oath is a part of religious worship…." Prior to this opening to 22.1, the Confession reads in 21.2, "Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to Him alone…." The conclusion drawn from the apparent ordering and logic of the Confession is clear. Both oaths and vows are to be made to God alone (WCF 22.1, 22.6). An oath is asserting or promising that God is witness and judge of what the oath-taker swears. A vow is like a promissory oath, but binds the swearer to the duties the vow-taker promises. Using the word "oath" is particularly intended for witnesses in church courts. Witnesses do not "vow" to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. This would emphasize the witness's duty to tell the truth. However, the witness takes an "oath" solemnly calling upon God Almighty as his witness and judge.

God alone is the proper object of our worship even though our neighbors and we may benefit from participating in or otherwise observing religious worship. As we direct worship to God through Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, all those who are gathered together receive a benefit of teaching and admonishing each other (Col. 3:16). John Downame (1571–1652), a Puritan theologian who wrote a treatise on oaths, summarized four ends of lawful oaths: (1) God's glory; (2) the maintenance and preservation of truth and justice, with God as witness; (3) the making of a superlative—or final/ultimate—appeal to God as Judge, and (4) the securing of certain benefits for both our neighbor and ourselves. Our neighbor benefits insofar as he is persuaded to believe the truth. We benefit insofar as we maintain our neighbor against injury and injustice.[42] We are to show love to our neighbors but not worship them, for we are to worship and serve God alone (Exod. 20:3, Deut. 5:7). Our neighbors benefit from our worship to God, but the worship is not to be directed at them. Thus, the chief and highest end of man is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever (WLC 1). Calvin rightly states that using God's name by swearing an oath should be done with only "fear and reverence in order to glorify it."[43] Often we think that the purpose of the oath given to a witness is simply to get at the truth of a situation or line of inquiry. However, this is not the exclusive goal of oath-taking. It certainly is not the ultimate or highest goal of oath-taking.

Above all, oath-taking is intended for God's glory, that the one swearing an oath to God might glorify God through his words and submit to God as the judge of the truthfulness of his statement. God is a witness of all

37. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., The Library of Christian Classics (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 1.1255–56.

38. See "The Catechism of the Church of Geneva," in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, Volume 1, ed. James T. Dennison (Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), p. 490.

39. Scheuers, *Consciences and the Reformation*, pp. 139–62.

40. Scheuers, pp. 170–86.

41. Striking "Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath touching anything that is good and just, being imposed by lawful authority," at the end of WCF 22.3.

42. John Downame, *Foure Treatises Tending to Disswade All Christians from Foure No Lesse Hainous Then Common Sinnes* (London: Felix Kyngsto, 1609), p. 3

43. "Calvin's Catechism; Part II, The Law," Q. 162.

that the oath-taker testifies, not merely with the words that proceed from his mouth, but also of his intentions, motives, and actions. The Prophet Jeremiah specifies three aspects of swearing an oath to the living God: that this oath is one of truth, justice, and righteousness. The true, just, and righteous oath taken before the living God will lead to nations blessing themselves in Him, and in Him shall they glory (Jer. 4:2). Lawful oaths are not merely about truth-telling, for they are also worshipful acts of righteousness and accountability before the living God.

The Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 22, paragraph 1 reads as follows:

> A lawful oath is part of religious worship, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth, or promiseth, and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth.[44]

Four truths can be mined from this brief confessional description of a lawful oath. It is (1) an act of worship; (2) to be taken on justifiable occasions. In the act of taking an oath, a person (3) solemnly calls upon God as a witness to what he asserts or promises; and (4) calls upon God to judge him based on the truth or falsehood of his oath. We will consider each of these four component parts, in turn.

As an Act of Worship

The scriptural reference that the divines chose as a proof-text for this confessional formulation is Exodus 20:7 (KJV), "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." They did not refer at this point to the ninth commandment (Exod. 20:16), which specifically forbids bearing false witness. The reference to the third commandment highlights the fact that an oath is not between two people as neighbors, but between the oath-taker and God Himself. The authors of the Confession did not use this reference merely to highlight the right employment of God's Name, but also to highlight the awful reality that God Himself is the judge of those who bear false witness while under oath. An oath is to be made to something greater than the oath-taker (Heb. 6:13–14). Man was created in God's image (Gen. 1:28) and made a little lower than heavenly beings (Ps. 8:5). An oath ought to be taken on nothing less than the Creator Himself who stands as judge of all oath-takers. Being a part of religious worship, an oath is forbidden to be made to any other than God Himself (Matt. 5:34), for He is utterly unique and perfectly holy. Angels swear to Him who lives forever (Dan. 12:6–7). An oath is to be made to God and God alone. Thus, when a witness swears an oath, it is before God alone. James Fisher emphasizes this dynamic in his catechism regarding the third commandment, "29. To whom are vows to be made? A. To God alone, as the only party and witness in the making and performing of them."[45] Therefore, when a witness in a church court makes an oath, he does so in the court's presence, but he makes the oath to the omniscient God and to Him alone.

On Just Occasion

The Westminster Confession stipulates that not all oaths made are lawful, nor does every occasion call for an oath. A lawful oath is only that which is justified for the occasion. The Pharisees' and Scribes' excessive use of oaths and vows was the counterpoint to Christ's teaching given on the Sermon on the Mount that not all occasions call for an oath, but simply let your "yes be yes" and your "no be no" (Matt. 5:37). The Lord's teaching does not contradict or abrogate the clear teaching of Scripture at other points (e.g., Deut. 6:18), for He does not entirely forbid the use of oaths, but rather specifies under what circumstances oath-taking is justified and therefore lawful. The Westminster divines highlight that an oath must have a justifiable occasion, referring to this three times throughout the Confession. A justifiable occasion involves a degree of rarity and exclusivity, well outside of the ordinary (WCF 22.1, 23.2, and 24.5).

Although the Westminster divines did not stipulate any metrics to validate if an occasion calls for an oath, the practice in the church throughout history has called upon witnesses in cases of church discipline to swear an oath calling God as witness and judge before giving testimony before the court. The divines appear to have this practice in mind as they specifically declare in the Confession that God is witness to the truth (or falsehood) that the oath-taker testifies.

Calling upon God as Witness

The Confession proceeds to explain that the oath-taker calls upon God to be his witness. As stated before, an oath is an act of worship. David Dickson, in his commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith, *Truth's Victory Over Error*, highlights the theological implications of calling

44. *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition*, p. 122.

45. James Fisher, *The Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism Explained … third edition with some further corrections and improvements* (Edinburgh: John Gray and Gavin Alston, 1769), p. 40.

upon God as witness. In one point, Dickson explains that an oath is an act of religion and, when taken by a witness, glorifies and adores God's attributes by calling upon God as witness. Dickson explains how oath-taking is an act of worship as the witness acknowledging God's (1) existence, (2) omnipresence, (3) omniscience, (4) truth and veracity, (5) supremacy, (6) justice, and (7) providence.[46] The ascribing of these attributes to God in the taking of an oath relates not merely to the deciphering or finding out of truth, but primarily demonstrates that the witness makes an oath to God alone, and not the court. Dickson emphasizes that God is called upon as witness because of His uniquely divine nature. No creature can be called upon as witness because no creature can attest or affirm the truthfulness of a statement made by the witness. God alone is the searcher of hearts (Acts 15:8). God is present when no one else is (Ps. 137:9). Early Reformer Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563) shows that these attributes belong to God alone, and therefore an oath should not (indeed, cannot properly) call upon anyone but God as witness. Musculus states, "If indeed knowledge, justice, and power of all those sorts of things belong to God only, what reasonable person does not see how an oath ought not to be taken in a trial and with justice, except in the name of God only, the knower of all secrets and the avenger of every fraud and treachery?"[47] The oath of a witness is to be made to God alone because God alone can be his witness.

Calling upon God as witness can be seen in the aspects and construction of an oath. D. X. Junkin (1808–1888), in a book titled *The Oath a Divine Ordinance,* gives four aspects of an oath made by witnesses, indicating that the form of the oath consists of four parts: "(1) the Name of God, (2) a reference to His presence and perfections, (3) an appeal to Him as the omniscient Witness and final Judge, and finally (4) a covenant to speak truthfully or to act faithfully, as the object of the oath may require."[48] The standard oaths taken in Presbyterian churches often merge these together. For example, the use of His presence and perfections can be found in the oath referring to Him as the great Judge and that He is present as the witness takes the oath. Even in the Old Testament construction, "As the LORD lives" (Cf. Jer. 4:2; Judg. 8:19; Ruth 3:13, etc.) shows the use of many of these aspects, His name, His eternality, and with the understanding that as the covenant Name of God speaks of who He is (Exod. 34:6–7), it would also show His judgment to come. Paul in the New Testament calls upon God as his witness (2 Cor. 1:23).

Acknowledging God as Judge

The last aspect of an oath outlined in the Confession is that God is the Judge of the witness's testimony. God is not merely the One who can witness all that is testified, but He is the One who will judge the witness according to the truth or falsehood of his statements. This is applied in the civil court with the threat of punishment for perjury, but the Confession does not stipulate the temporal nature of the testimony in a church court, even if man could validate the truthfulness of the testimony (which he cannot, as outlined above). The punishment of perjury shows forth temporal justice in any human court. Ultimate justice comes only on the last day when the true and just judge sits upon His throne. Only God can ultimately judge the testimony. On the Last Day, all deeds will be judged by God (Eccl. 12:14). A witness might testify with a partial truth, neglecting to tell the human judiciary important facts, but God will judge all his testimony—even that which is concealed (Matt. 10:26, Rom. 2:16). God will judge witnesses according not only to their words—whether said or unsaid—but according also to their motives (1 Cor. 4:5).

This is a direct application of the third commandment, as the warning in the third commandment states, "for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (Exod. 20:7b). The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains the reason annexed to the third commandment (Q. 56), "that however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment."[49] This catechetical explanation highlights the importance of the reference given by the Westminster divines to the third commandment and not the ninth. God is not only witness of human testimony, but also the only just Judge who can evaluate human testimony (and testifiers) according to the truth or falsehood in which oath-takers swear.

The definition of a lawful oath as presented by authors of the Westminster Confession offers profound insights into the weight of oath-taking as an act of worship, the need for justifiable occasions, the exclusive appeal to God as witness, and ultimate accountability before God as Judge. This definition helps to define and support the consistent use of oaths taken in church courts by witnesses prior to giving their testimony.

This article now proceeds to combine all of what has

46. David Dickson, *Truth's Victory over Error: A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), pp. 162–63.

47. Musculus, et al., *On Righteousness, Oaths, and Usury*, p. 67.

48. Junkin, *The Oath A Divine Ordinance*, p. 142.

49. *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Edinburgh Edition*, p. 408.

been outlined above to oaths taken by witnesses in the courts of the church.

Summarizing the Confession's Position

As we consider the oaths taken by witnesses in church courts, we often think the oath as merely a means of ascertaining or securing the truth. Thus a witness will swear to "declare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." They qualify that they will not leave out any relevant points of truth, and that they will not add any falsehood to their testimony. However, the Confession again helps us to understand the seriousness of the one who swears the vow "to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth" (WCF 22.3). The oath of a witness is an assertory oath in which they assert that what they testify is truth. They assert this not to themselves, nor even to the church court, but to God who is their witness and judge. The oath taken by the witness reflects this truth-centered commitment, emphasizing the profound spiritual dimension of the act. It goes beyond a mere legal formality or a tool for establishing facts in a case. Instead, it symbolizes the witness's acknowledgment that he stands before the Almighty God, bound by his conscience and his faith to uphold the principles of honesty and integrity. By invoking the name of God as his witness and judge, a witness invokes divine accountability and aligns himself with an eternal standard of truth.

In a church court, the witness's oath becomes even more significant. As part of religious worship, the oath bears the weight of God's glory and the pursuit of righteousness. It underscores the indispensable purity of truth within the church, where honesty, transparency, and fairness are essential in maintaining the integrity of the church's discipline and decision-making processes. A witness who takes the oath with sincerity and reverence shows his commitment to seeking God's will and justice rather than serving personal interests or agendas.

Ultimately, the witness's oath is a solemn and religious act that intertwines faith and justice, merging the temporal with the eternal. It reminds all involved that the pursuit of truth is not just a procedural necessity, but a profound moral duty guided by divine principles. The faithful commitment to truth-telling, witnessed by God, serves as a pillar of strength in upholding the values and integrity of the Presbyterian Church, a testament to the enduring relevance of the oath in both its historical roots and its contemporary application.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article delves into the progression of the Presbyterian Church in America's *Rules of Discipline* and its application to oaths taken by witnesses in proceedings of formal church discipline. Over the course of history, the denomination has experienced various modifications in polity, procedures, and practices, all the while remaining committed to its core principles. While amendments have been made to specific provisions in the *Rules of Discipline*, the underlying principles and ethos have endured.

Through the expansion and evolution of the *Rules of Discipline*, beginning with the major revision in 1707 which introduced the qualifications of witnesses as determined by the judiciary, there has been an overriding continuity of respect for oath-taking in church courts. The expression of this foundational commitment to truth-telling before God developed over the years to find its current form introduced in 1858, which has been carried over into the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America.

While the exact list of qualifications regarding competency and credibility has changed, the practice of witnesses swearing an oath before testifying in a church court has remained consistent throughout the history of the Presbyterian Church and indeed is practiced in all major Presbyterian denominations in the United States of America. Stemming from the biblical teaching found in the Westminster Standards, witnesses solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, invoking the presence and judgment of the Almighty.

Throughout its history, the Presbyterian Church has maintained a strong commitment to its confessional heritage, emphasizing the importance of oaths and vows as acts of worship. Such oaths should bring glory to God, advance truth and justice, and promote righteousness.

The Presbyterian Church's history of constitutional amendments nevertheless reveals a consistent commitment to preserving its core principles in the matter of witness-bearing, oath-taking, and formal church discipline. By introducing refinements in language and formal processes while remaining committed to its fundamental principles, the Presbyterian Church continues to strive for decency, order, and the pursuit of truth in its governance and ecclesiastical processes. Above all, the Church exists (in all that it does) to give glory to God.▪

Morton Howison Smith: A Brief Sketch of His Life

By Joseph A. Pipa, Jr.

When considering the life and ministry of Morton H. Smith, I am reminded of Psalm 71:17, 18: "O God, Thou hast taught me from my youth; and I still declare Thy wondrous deeds. And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Thy strength to this generation, Thy power to all who are to come." Dr. Morton H. Smith was a man raised up by God to declare His name for half a century, a man who perhaps more than any other, has been used by God to restore the Reformed Faith and Presbyterianism to the South and disseminate it throughout the nation.

The purpose of this biographical article is not to present a critical biography of the man. That task will be left to a subsequent generation. My privilege is to introduce you to the man and his work.[1]

Family and Early Years: 1923–1941

Morton Smith was born in Roanoke, Virginia to James Brookes and Margaret Morton Smith, on December 11, 1923. He was the fourth of five sons. The family of this man who has been a bridge between the faith of Thornwell, Dabney, Girardeau, and Palmer and the present generation, is itself a genealogical bridge of Reformed covenantal heritage. His father's family on the male side descended from New England Puritans who settled in Connecticut and eventually moved into Kentucky. His paternal grandmother came from Presbyterian stock that migrated from Virginia to Kentucky. Through this side of the family, he is related to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and to Drury Lacy.

His grandfather Howison on his mother's side was of Scottish descent, from a family that emigrated from Edinburgh, Scotland to southern Maryland, and eventually settled in Dumfrees, Virginia. His maternal grandmother was descended from the Huguenots Abraham and Susannah Micheaux, who settled on a land grant in 1699 in Manakintown, on the south side of the James River.[2] Agnes Woodson, a granddaughter of Abraham and Susannah, married Joe Morton. They were converted under the preaching of Samuel Davies, and consequently Joe Morton was one of the founding elders of the old Briery church, near Keysville, Virginia. Somewhat later, a pastor of this church was one of Dr. Smith's ancestors on his father's side, Drury Lacy. William Henry Foote wrote about the Mortons: "The Morton families [Joe's brother married another granddaughter of Abraham and Susannah Micheaux.] were prolific, and the children, carefully instructed in religion and led on by example, became, like their parents, professing members of the church. The influence is not yet lost on their descendants."[3]

Dr. Smith's parents met while his father was studying at the University of Virginia, on the occasion of Margaret Morton's visit to the home of Dr. Frank Dunnington, a professor at the University. They were married August 16, 1910 in Braehead, the Mortons' family home, just

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1. This article is a revision of "Morton Howison Smith: A Brief Sketch of his Life," in Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and C. N. Willborn, *Confessing Our Hope: Essays in Honor of Morton Howison Smith on His Eightieth Birthday* (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2004), pp. 1–30. Much of that material is taken from an autobiographical sketch Dr. Smith wrote for his family. I have been an eye-witness of many of the events since 1967. I also would like to thank Wayne Sparkman and his staff at the PCA Historical Center for providing me with documents. For those interested, the Center has a treasure trove of material on Dr. Smith.

2. My wife's ancestors lived on the land adjacent to the Micheauxs.

3. William Henry Foote, *The Huguenots or Reformed French Church* (1870; reprint, Harrisonburg VA: Sprinkle Publications, 2002), p. 547.

outside of Fredericksburg. His father took a B.A. and M.A. in Mathematics at the University and taught at Hampden Sydney College in Virginia until World War I.

Their first two sons, Benjamin Warfield and Graham Howison, were born to the Smiths while they lived in Hampden Sydney. Graham died at the age of three and is buried in the Union Seminary Cemetery in Hampden Sydney beside his grandfather Samuel Lyle Graham, who taught at Union Theological Seminary.[4] When the U.S. entered World War I in April of 1917, Dr. Smith's father volunteered and served as First Lieutenant in the Quartermaster Corps in Washington D.C. Their third son, James Brookes, was born in Fredericksburg, Virginia, two days before Armistice in 1918.

While working in the Quartermaster Corps, Smith's father became interested in actuarial science. After the war, rather than returning to teaching, he began working in the insurance industry as an actuary. His first position was with Jefferson Standard in Greensboro, North Carolina, and later he moved to Shenandoah Life Insurance Company in Roanoke, Virginia.

Morton Smith and his younger brother, Rockwell MacDonald, were born in the family home at 323 Wasena Avenue in Roanoke. The elder was born December 11, 1923, and his brother on August 26, 1925. Dr. Smith writes: "According to my older brother Brookes, he was told to go out and ride his wagon on the morning that I was born. He recalled it as a sunny day. After he had been out for an hour or two he was invited back into the house and told that another brother has been born."

While a young boy in Roanoke, he became conscious of his faith in Christ. The family were members at the Raleigh Court Presbyterian Church where his father served as one of the first elders. Dr. Smith writes:

> Church was a regular part of our family life. I remember inquiring of my Sunday school teacher at about the age of five whether if I believed that Jesus had died and risen from the dead, I would be saved. Her affirmative response was a great encouragement to me….
>
> At about this same time I remember sitting out in front of the house under the supervision of a black maid (I assume it was Octavia) and I was talking about liking mountains. She expressed her fear of the Day of Judgment, when she said that men would call for the mountains to fall on them to hide from God. I remember saying to her that if we believed in Jesus as Savior, we would not have to fear that day. As I recall it, she agreed with me.

Dr. Smith's love for the mountains comes from his father. From the house in Roanoke the mountains could be seen on every side. Early on, the family would take car trips up various mountains; later they would hike the mountain trails. As a youngster he also developed an interest in technology. His parents gave him an Atwater Kent radio, which he owned all his life. He particularly enjoyed listening to football games and the opera. He remembers the news broadcast on the burning of the Hindenburg and also Orson Wells' *War of the Worlds*.

During this time Dr. Smith also received from his father a love for the South and the Confederacy. He writes:

> I remember driving at night across the plank road past Chancellorsville, where Stonewall Jackson won his greatest victory, and was wounded accidentally by his own men. I remember Dad saying that he could "see" Confederate soldiers marching there. Ever since that night as I drive across that part of Virginia I can "see" Confederate solders marching there. Dad instilled in us a love for the South and for the Confederacy with his own interest in the battles. He used to take us to the battlefields, and hunt for bullets in corn-fields where intense fighting had taken place. I still have bullets from the battles of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Sharpsburg, and Gettysburg. Both Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson became personal heroes of mine.

Young Smith began school at Virginia Heights Elementary School, but transferred the next year to a new school, Wasena Heights, closer to his home. Because of his natural shyness, he did not particularly care about school. He much preferred to be alone or spend time with the family.

When he was about eight years old, the family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where James Brookes Smith went to work for Baltimore Life Insurance Company, eventually becoming its first vice-president. The family settled in the Mt. Washington area of Baltimore because there was a very conservative Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) in that neighborhood—Mt. Washington Presbyterian Church.[5] God profoundly used the ministry of that church in young Smith's life. Toward

4. Union Theological Seminary began at Hampden Sydney, and though the seminary was moved to Richmond, the Seminary's Cemetery remained at Hampden Sydney, near Farmville, VA. R.L. Dabney and Thomas Peck are buried in the cemetery.

5. This congregation came into the PCA and is now named Valley Presbyterian Church.

the end of 1933 the church called James E. Moore, a recent graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, to serve as pastor. He was ordained by Potomac Presbytery on January 4, 1934, and Dr. J. Gresham Machen, founder of Westminster Theological Seminary, preached the ordination sermon. The Machen family at times worshipped with this congregation. Mr. Moore remained at Mt. Washington Presbyterian Church until 1951, when he accepted a call to an Orthodox Presbyterian Congregation in California. Dr. Smith's love for and gratitude to Pastor Moore is immeasurable. Again, in his own words:

> Mr. Moore was to become a major influence in the lives of all the young people of the Mt. Washington Church. Out of this fairly small church of around 150 members, some 15 or 16 young people ended up in the ministry, or as missionaries. The impact was not so much from pressure being put on us by Mr. Moore to enter the ministry, but rather from his impressing us with the fact that Christianity really makes a difference in the lives of believers. It was my sad duty to moderate a congregational meeting of the Mt. Washington Church that accepted the resignation of Mr. Moore. He had accepted a call of an Orthodox Presbyterian Church in California. It was a sad day for many of us to see him drive off in the big stake truck that carried all of his worldly goods…. I believe that Mr. Moore was probably the most influential person on my life outside of my parents.

At the age of eleven, young Morton Smith made his public profession of faith. He says, "I had not gone through the regular communicants' class, but came to Mr. Moore a few weeks after his class had made their profession of faith. I met with the Session and was answering the routine questions, when the oldest elder asked me 'What does Jesus mean to you?' I remember choking up and hardly being able to answer, then said that He meant everything to me, and that I was trusting Him as my Savior."

Smith finished elementary school at Public School 221 in Mt. Washington. He then attended Roland Park Junior High School and afterwards did his high school work at St. Paul's School for Boys. The school was small, so every boy was expected to play on one of the three athletic teams: football, basketball, or lacrosse. Though not athletically inclined, he played on the varsity football team. He won the "spirit award" his first year and played enough his second year to earn a letter. From this experience, he developed a life-long interest in football. After graduating from St. Paul's in 1941 he enrolled at the University of Michigan.

In addition to family and church, another influence on Dr. Smith's life was Boy Scouts. His oldest brother Ben had been active in Scouts and earned his Eagle Scout badge. Young Smith joined the Scouts at the age of 12 and was most involved in the camping and hiking activities. Throughout high school he remained active in Scouts and attended Camp Powhatan, near Roanoke, each summer. After his freshman year at the university, at the age of 18, he served as hike master at this camp.

He gives an interesting anecdote about one hike:

> Brookes and I were sleeping together in a pup tent. I remember being awakened by the howling of a dog or wolf. It is possible that there were a few remaining wolves in the mountains at that time, or it may have been a wild dog. The howling was what I had always imagined wolf howling to be. I waked Brookes up, and we got our flashlights, and tried to see what it was that had waked us. As I remember it we may have caught a glimpse of some shining eyes, but with our awaking, and some others of the scouts, the animal took off. It was apparently frustrated at not being able to get some food out of one of our containers. The next morning we discovered that it had eaten what bacon and bread we had for breakfast. The only thing left was one egg for each of us. We also dug some sassafras roots from which we made sassafras tea. Then we set out to hike seven miles on down the ridge to Patete Gap and back to Camp Powhatan. Brookes, who had a weak ankle from an automobile accident, sprained that ankle about half way down the mountain. There was no way for him to walk, and thus we had to cut some small trees and rig a stretcher, using blankets. We cut the trees long enough for two or three boys to be involved in carrying each end. We carried him down the mountain and back to Camp Powhatan.

The University and War Years: 1941–1949

Because of his interest in nature, the young college student dreamed of becoming a forest ranger. His Uncle Wallace Stephens was the head ranger at the Shenandoah National Park and strongly recommended the program at the University of Michigan. So, our young southerner made his way north in the fall of 1941; it was an eventful year in his life.

He recalls little of his classes that year and less of his classmates. The student body was about 14,000 and

he made few personal contacts. He had a single room on the inside of the quadrangle. At the University his interest in football was nurtured: Michigan's was the largest college-owned stadium, seating some 87,000, where he vividly remembers attending games. He remained an avid University of Michigan football fan.

The Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor was a great disappointment. The Pastor, William Lemon, was a pulpit orator and preached to a packed house, but he was one of the signers of the Auburn Affirmation and did not believe the gospel. For a while Smith attended a Missouri Synod Lutheran Church but was uncomfortable with its low views of the Sabbath and its ritual. He then discovered the Intervarsity chapter in which he became involved. Through that group he was introduced to the Christian Reformed Chapel under the ministry of Leonard Verduin. Although the preaching was very good, he felt out of place among the mostly Dutch members.

In the spring he began attending Grace Bible Church, a choice that led to one of the most important events in his life. Here he met a young lady, Miss Lois Knopf. He describes his first impression:

> One of the things that was new for me was the use of two pianos in the service. I remember being impressed with the young lady who played the lead piano. She had a very open and attractive face, with a beautiful smile. A couple of weeks after starting to attend Grace Bible Church, I was invited by one of the ladies of the Church to go home for dinner with her family. It would be the first home meal that I had had during the school year, except for the Christmas vacation, when I had gone home. After I had accepted the invitation, lo, and behold the attractive pianist came up and the lady introduced me to her as her daughter Lois. Then the father came along, and he indicated that he would have to drive some older ladies home, and I was asked if I would be willing to walk home with Lois. One of the things that Lois did was to have her dad take a picture of the two of us with her box camera. Neither of us had any idea that that first meeting was to lead to our marriage and over 50 years of life together.

The Knopfs were a typical mid-western German family. They had two children, Lois and her brother, who is seven years younger. By persuasion her parents were Baptists. Her maternal grandfather was a carpenter who served for while as a Baptist preacher. During her youth they were part of the fundamentalist movement and knew Dr. Dehaan, the founder of the Radio Bible Class. Her paternal grandfather was of German descent, but lived in Poland. In his teen years he emigrated from Poland because he was subject to being drafted into the Russian army. He came to Detroit where he labored as a carpenter. Lois manifested an early interest in music, and her grandmother insisted she take piano lessons. Beginning at age five, she studied piano, finally majoring in piano at University of Michigan under a very fine professor who wanted to groom her to be a concert pianist. She also sang quite well and was taking a second major in voice.

Her father, though not academically educated, was highly competent in the field of engineering. As a young man he worked as a tool and die maker for the Ford Motor Company. During World War II, he worked for an Ann Arbor ball bearing plant, and later for Argus Camera Company. He finished his career at the University of Michigan College of Engineering, where, among other things, he worked on the nose cones of some of the early rockets that were fired at Redstone Arsenal (Huntsville, AL). He often would examine the blueprints for a proposed device and occasionally tell the professor whether it would work. Initially, those in charge dismissed his analyses and would tell him to proceed with the project. However, when the device failed, they would ask him how to make it function correctly, and eventually they learned to heed his advice. He was an active churchman with a genuine, practical Christianity, which he lived daily.

The young couple only had about a month to become acquainted before Smith returned home for the summer. Through correspondence, however, their relationship grew during that summer.

Meanwhile another life-changing event occurred. Young Smith was at the apartment of one of the faculty members on Sunday December 7, 1941, when he learned of the surprise attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor. Four days later, on Smith's 18th birthday, President Roosevelt declared war on Japan and the Axis powers in Europe. During the spring semester, Smith enlisted in the Aviation Cadet program, and as a freshman was sworn into the Army Air Corps. However, thirteen months would lapse before he was called up to active duty.

After working that summer at Scout Camp Powhatan in Virginia, he returned to the University for the fall term. During this term, he lived in the experimental Michigan Christian Fellowship house. The living arrangement was spartan: "Ed Franks, who was English in background, and I shared a room together. Actually we had a small study and slept on an unheated but

enclosed porch, which was quite cold in the winter." That term he did some physical training preparatory for military service and continued to develop his relationship with Lois.

He was called to active duty on April 11, 1943. The first week of May he began pre-flight training at Maxwell Field near Montgomery, Alabama. From there he traveled to Helena, Arkansas for primary flight training. After advanced twin-engine flight training at Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, he graduated, on January 14, 1944, as a Second Lieutenant. To his disappointment, he was not sent overseas, but received orders to serve as a flight instructor. He spent the remainder of the European war in Blytheville, Arkansas instructing pilot trainees in twin-engine planes. After V-E Day he was sent to Lockburn Airbase at Columbus, Ohio, where he was trained in B-17s. Having completed this program, he was awaiting orders to train in the B-29 when Japan surrendered.

Since providentially he was not stationed overseas, he and Lois Knopf married on June 30, 1944. She was able to be with him during the remainder of the war. Those who know Dr. Smith may be amused by an event in his courtship which I will let him tell in his own words:

> At the end of our basic flying training we were given three-day passes and one hundred or two hundred mile distance. Several of us hired a car to drive us to St. Louis. I caught a Chicago and Southern flight to Chicago. (This airline later became part of Delta Airlines.) Then I hitched rides with truckers to Ann Arbor. As I remember that trip, I called Lois early in the morning from Niles, Michigan, and asked her to stay home for me that day. She agreed. The first thing I did after getting to her house was to check on the train schedules for returning to Walnut Ridge before the three-day pass was over. I think I had about twenty-four hours in Ann Arbor. When Dad heard about this trip, he said it reminded him of his hike from Charlottesville to Fredericksburg to see mother. This was a real risk, since I was beyond the limits of the three-day pass, but I was never checked by the MP's and got back on time.

After his discharge in 1945, he and Lois enrolled at the University of North Carolina, but since the University did not accept all of his course work from Michigan, they returned to Ann Arbor to complete his studies at the University of Michigan. Initially they lived in an old farmhouse a number of miles outside town. Later they purchased a trailer home in which they lived during the remainder of their residence in Ann Arbor.

While a student he began to help with student registration, and after graduation was hired as office manager in the Registrar's office. He worked there for about two years. Little did he think he would ever need experience in academic administration, but God was preparing him for his future ministry.

Preparation for the Gospel Ministry: 1949–1952

During this time another significant change occurred. Having decided not to pursue forestry, he took a degree in Botany in the Literature, Science and Arts College. He also began to teach Sunday school and eventually supplied the pulpit at a chapel of Grace Bible Church. The Lord worked through these opportunities to call him to the gospel ministry.

After visiting a number of seminaries, he enrolled at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. The young couple rented a duplex that was within walking distance of the Seminary.

Though theologically weak, Columbia was the most conservative of the Southern Presbyterian seminaries. He matriculated at Columbia in the fall of 1949. The two professors that were most helpful to the conservative students were Dr. Manfred Gutzke, who, though not reformed, was a sincere evangelical, and Dr. William Childs Robinson. Dr. Roby, as he was affectionately known by the students, had a profound impact on the young seminary student:

> I already had a book or two that he had written. Eventually Dr. Robinson hired Lois to type the manuscript of one or two of his new books. He had the privilege of preaching the last sermon that President Roosevelt heard at Warm Springs, GA. In fact, Dr. Robinson received a thank you note from the President dated the day before he died. Dr. Robinson was a genuine Calvinist. He knew the Southern Presbyterian history, and introduced me to much of their thought. A number of students were intimidated by him, but I always felt he was a defender of the faith and thus I wanted to be aligned with him.

During this time, he also became acquainted with Dr. John R. Richardson, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Atlanta and a leader in the conservative Presbyterian movement.

Because of the liberalism at Columbia Seminary, the Smiths decided in the fall of 1950 to transfer to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. However, before moving north, he served as student

pastor at the Collinsville Presbyterian Church of Collinsville, Alabama. Collinsville was a small town about 20 miles north of Gadsden, Alabama. That summer he delivered a series of sermons on the Apostle's Creed and did pastoral and evangelistic visitation. He writes regarding that experience: "We look back on that summer as a useful training period in our ministerial lives."

The year at Westminster Seminary greatly influenced the seminarian. At Westminster, the young couple lived on campus in one of the "Gate" houses. They had dinner in the student dining club on campus.

Smith profited from the entire faculty under which he studied, but particularly from Dr. Van Til and Professor Murray: "It was without doubt, the most intellectually stimulating year of my education. It was not so much that I was being taught a new doctrine, but rather I was gaining insights in the Biblical grounds for the faith, and also in how we can best defend the faith."

He was also exposed to a different approach to theological education, an approach that confirmed for him the need for students to have ministerial experience:

> One of the sharp contrasts between the Columbia and the Westminster approach to the training of the ministry was seen in the attitude they had toward a student laboring in a church, while in Seminary. Columbia encouraged such relations, where Westminster strongly discouraged such. The goals of the two institutions seem to be different. The Southern seminaries are committed to the training of ministers and pastors, and thus the practice of ministry is part of that training. Westminster, on the other hand, was more interested in teaching at a scholarly and intellectual level.

By studying at the two schools, Smith became convinced that one of the greatest needs of the Southern Presbyterian Church was to have sound teachers at the College and Seminary levels. He believed that God was calling him to engage in such work. Therefore, on the counsel of Dr. Richardson, who told Smith that if he desired to teach in the Southern Presbyterian Church, he should graduate from one of the denominational seminaries, he returned to Columbia.

The summer after his year at Westminster, he served as student pastor at Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia. Mrs. Smith found Savannah charming and developed a taste for seafood. God blessed the work that summer, and the elders invited Smith to serve the congregation during the school year. He drove down every weekend and exhorted at the morning and evening services until the Church called a full-time pastor.

That summer in Savannah he became acquainted with Albert H. Freundt Jr., the son of one of the elders in the church. They became friends and later colleagues when Mr. Freundt worked with Dr. Smith in the founding of Reformed Theological Seminary.

Also, that summer he met John C. Blackburn, the grandson of the great South Carolinian theologian, John L. Girardeau. Pastor Blackburn had one of the finest private collections of Southern Presbyterian books in the world. Smith would later use that library in doing research for his dissertation.

The next year at Columbia, Smith became involved in a serious theological controversy. A number of students were concerned about the presence on the faculty of Dr. Richard T. Gillespie. He openly espoused the higher critical views of Biblical criticism and taught his courses from that perspective. Smith and Jack Scott represented thirty-nine students who lodged a protest with the president, Dr. J. McDowell Richards. Smith and Scott and perhaps one other student were the only ones known by name. Dr. Richards accepted their testimony that thirty-nine students had signed the protest. The names of the others were not revealed to avoid any recriminations. These two young men, though, were willing to face the consequences of their action. A counter-petition was circulated, and after a couple of days of turmoil on campus Dr. Richards met with the student body. Smith writes,

> He indicated that the different views being taught at the Seminary were views held by different elements of the Church, and that we had to learn to live with them. He said that it was the Seminary's position to be representative of what the Church held. We felt that the Seminary should be true to the Standards of the Church, and not merely the reflection of the views held by members of the Church.[6]

The Board of Trustees upheld Dr. Richards' decision. According to Dr. Smith, in this entire affair Dr. Richards treated them fairly, as a Christian gentleman. In a sense this protest planted the seeds of the PCA:

6. See C.N. Willborn, "Southern Presbyterianism: The Character of a Tradition" in *Confessing our Hope*, pp. 293–328 for a brief discussion of the error of this approach in a seminary that belongs to a denomination that subscribes to the Westminster Standards. For an extended discussion of Confessionalism and ecclesiastical education see chapter 5 of C. N. Willborn, "John L. Girardeau (1825–1898): Pastor to Slaves and Theologian of Causes" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2003).

> One of the things that grew out of it was a prayer meeting that some of us held down in the woods behind the Seminary. Expression was made there that we were willing to stand for the gospel, even if it cost us our standing in the Church. Harold Borchert has said that this was the beginning of the PCA. A good number of those involved in this action against Dr. Gillespie ended up in the PCA.

Toward the end of that year Smith began to minister to a group in Valdosta, Georgia. This group had withdrawn from the First Presbyterian Church over the conduct of the pastor and the Presbytery's poor handling of the situation. Some in the group were Dispensationalist in their theology, and he wanted to persuade the group of the truth of the Reformed Faith and historic Presbyterianism. Desiring to keep them from going into independency, he accepted, with the approval of Dr. Richards, an appointment to minister there for the summer. Commenting on the summer he spent ministering among them, he says, "I look back on this time as one of the high points in my personal ministry. We conducted a full program, including vacation Bible school. I preached twice on Sunday, and we had Wednesday prayer meetings."

Since not all the course work he took at Westminster transferred, he had one final semester of work to complete at Columbia. He returned to Columbia for the fall term and continued to minister to the group in Valdosta on the weekends. Upon completion of classes in December of 1952, the Smiths moved to Valdosta.

The Early Years Of Ministry: 1953–1964

During the next few months of the new year, the group in Valdosta was prevented from staying in the Southern Presbyterian Church. After examining the various possibilities, it decided to go into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The young minister had to determine whether to go with them. With great sorrow, he refused the call to Valdosta. He struggled a great deal over this decision. He writes,

> I had talked with Dr. Van Til about moving to the OPC, and his advice was that I should stay in my mother Church and leave my mark on her. During this time we had Dr. Will McIlwaine, a Southern Presbyterian missionary to Japan, with a brother missionary in the OPC, come to visit the congregation. As I drove him back to Atlanta, he urged me not to leave the Southern church yet. He said that each furlough things were worse in the home Church, and that the only bright light that he saw was the group of us struggling for the purity of Columbia Seminary, and that he saw Jack Scott and myself as needed if there was ever to be a reform in the Southern Church. He 'Farelized' me to stay in the Southern Presbyterian Church, which I decided I must do.

After considering a number of possible places of service, including his home church, which wanted to call him, the Smiths accepted a call to a two-church field: Springfield-Roller outside Baltimore. Smith was ordained and installed by Potomac Presbytery (PCUS) in February of 1954. They lived in the manse in Sykesville where the Springfield congregation was located.

They thoroughly enjoyed the work among these people and living near Pastor Smith's parents. However, the Lord's ways are not ours, and about six months after his ordination, Pastor Smith received a call to be head of the Bible department at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. Even though he believed that God would have him teach at the college or seminary level, he did not think it proper to leave his people after only six months. The College issued a second call, which he also refused. When they issued a third call, he sought counsel, wondering if this was not of God. Eventually he accepted that call, and in August the Smiths moved to Jackson, Mississippi. Initially they lived in an apartment on campus provided by the College, and later purchased a house in Clinton, Mississippi.

Belhaven College was founded by the Synod of Mississippi in 1894 as a women's college. In the early 50's, under its new President, Dr. McFerran Crowe, it became co-educational. The purpose of the change was "to build a school in the finest Liberal Arts tradition with a bedrock foundation of Calvinistic theology"[7] and to provide training for a conservative ministry in the Southern Presbyterian Church. Dr. Crowe had assembled a very good reformed faculty including Dr. Gregg Singer in history and Dr. Kingsley Elder in Physics. Already present was a fine classical faculty among whom were Miss Bess Caldwell, Dean of Women, Miss Margaret Shields, Professor of English, and Miss Virginia Hoogenakker, Professor of Music.[8] When the Smiths arrived in 1954 there were only five male students, but the positive Reformed world and life view soon attracted many male students.

7. Quotation from Dr. Crowe in September 8, 1964, "The Southern Presbyterian Journal."

8. All these ladies were still active when I studied at Belhaven 1964–68.

Professor Smith's role was to build up the offerings of the Bible department. As he did so, a number of pre-ministerial students began to attend Belhaven. These men constituted a significant part of the ministers that came into the PCA at its founding.[9]

Dr. Palmer Robertson reflects on those early years:

> Seven of us men lived on the second floor of a building at the far end of the Belhaven campus. Seven men in a two-bedroom apartment with one bath. Morton and Lois Smith were on the first floor, right below us. On one Saturday evening we were up late making too much racket, and Morton came up in his robe to remind us that "tomorrow is the Sabbath." We didn't make much late-night racket after that.

In addition to his teaching, Professor Smith preached across the state and served for six months as interim supply at the Central Presbyterian Church in Jackson. He also began to write Women's Bible Studies for the *Presbyterian Journal*. During this time Mrs. Smith finished her degree, majoring in English. In the summers Professor Smith did post-graduate work at the University of Michigan in Near Eastern Studies, Philosophy, and German. While at Belhaven, he also worked with Dr. John Reed Miller, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, to encourage conservative ministers to take pulpits in Mississippi. They were able to fill a number of pulpits in Central and South Mississippi, with the result that the majority of these churches would withdraw from the PCUS to become part of the Presbyterian Church in America. Charges of "infiltration" were brought against him at the Synod meeting in Memphis (June 1957). A committee was appointed to investigate, but no charges were brought against Professor Smith.

Another important phase of life began for the Smiths while in Jackson. Unable to have children, they decided to adopt. In 1958 they were able to adopt their son Samuel Warfield, and in 1962 their daughter Susanne Rochet. Though temporarily estranged from their parents, later they both developed a close relationship with their parents. Both live in the Asheville area where Susanne is a pharmacist and Sam a carpenter and builder. Sam has two children, Sarah and Benjamin Warfield.

In 1958 Professor Smith was given a two-year Sabbatical to pursue doctoral studies. Although accepted by Duke and Harvard, he went on a Fulbright Fellowship to the Free University of Amsterdam to study under Professor G. C. Berkouwer. His dissertation topic was "Studies in Presbyterian Theology." George and Virginia Knight were at the Free University during this time and kindly assisted the Smiths in getting settled.

During this first year Professor Smith studied Dutch, took a couple of preliminary examinations, and had his dissertation topic approved. After one year in the Netherlands, the Smiths returned to the States. While the Smiths were in the Netherlands, Dr. Smith's father died. His mother lived until 1982.

The second year of his Sabbatical, he did research for his dissertation, living part of the year in Montreat, North Carolina so he could mine the archival riches of the Presbyterian Historical Foundation. Upon the suggestion of Dr. Thomas Spence, director of the Historical Foundation, Professor Smith contacted Mrs. John C. Blackburn about the use of her late husband's distinguished collection of Southern Presbyterian books. Providentially, he was granted permission by Mrs. Blackburn to use her husband's books. Professor Smith spent about two weeks in the Blackburn home in Cayce, South Carolina, where Mrs. Blackburn graciously delighted in hosting the young theologian.

The Smiths returned to Belhaven in 1959 to a great deal of turmoil. In his absence, there had been a controversy on the faculty concerning Dr. Crowe's apparent compromises with the liberals in the Church. In the Smiths' absence, several of the faculty had left. As a result, the school lost its distinctively reformed world and life view, although it remained a conservative Presbyterian college. Professor Smith began rebuilding the Bible department.

Smith finished his dissertation in 1962 and returned to Amsterdam to complete his preliminary examinations and take his major examination. By God's grace he accomplished all of this as well as the publication of his dissertation, *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology,* in a record time. He graduated July 13, 1962 and returned to teach another year at Belhaven.

In the fall of 1963, Dr. Smith was invited to Westminster Theological Seminary as a guest lecturer in practical theology. Although this was not his field, the nature of the call and circumstances in the South were such that he thought it was of the Lord. He had, without success, encouraged conservative leaders in Mississippi to begin a seminary: they considered the project too costly. Therefore, with respect to going to Westminster, he reasoned, "if Westminster placed a Southern Presbyterian on the faculty they might attract more Southern Presbyterians to attend. Thus I accepted

9. Two of the early graduates were Dr. O Palmer Robertson and Dr. Wilson Benton.

the invitation." The call was a one-year appointment, with the possibility of its being renewed, a common practice at Westminster that allowed both the school and the professor an opportunity to assess the situation.

The Years of Beginnings—RTS and the PCA: 1964–1973

The Smiths' tenure at Westminster was short-lived. At the beginning of 1964, he received visits from Leonard Van Horn and later Sam Patterson inviting him to return to Mississippi to investigate the possibility of starting a new seminary.

Sam Patterson, the President of French Camp Academy, was one of the most respected conservative Presbyterian ministers in Mississippi. Although at the time he did not have a particular interest in Reformed theology, he had, as a result of his inquiries, received letters from the presidents of the four Southern Presbyterian Seminaries confirming that they did not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. He consequently became convinced that a new seminary was needed.

Mr. Patterson expressed his conviction to a number of ruling elders in Jackson. As they began to pray, they developed a commitment to begin a seminary. This group of men invited Dr. Smith to meet with them in Jackson. The five elders meeting with him were Robert Kennington, H.S. Williford, Erskine Wells, Robert Cannada, and Frank Horton. Noting the caliber of the men behind the plan, Dr. Smith accepted their call to return to Mississippi.

In 1964 the Smiths moved to French Camp, Mississippi where they lived there in the manse. Dr. Smith taught classes under the name of the Reformed Theological Institute, in Jackson, Kosciusko, and Memphis. The travel was wearying, and God now used Dr. Smith's military training to facilitate this work. He purchased a Cessna 150 with which he reduced his travel time by half. This purchase continued to serve him well when as Clerk of the PCA he flew all over the nation, once even from Atlanta to California. Over the years he owned four different planes, selling the last one in 1988.

Also during this first year, he was invited to teach a Bible class on a Jackson television station. He taught the Bible Survey course which he had previously taught at Belhaven. It aired every day of the week in the early morning for five years and then for three more years on a reduced schedule. This program reached the majority of the state, and so I still meet people who reflect on what they learned from this program.

After a year of testing the waters, the committee decided to move forward with a seminary. Mr. Horace Hull of Memphis financed the purchase of a large home with some ten to fifteen acres on the west side of Jackson. The property had a large, white house in which the seminary began. In their second year back in Mississippi, the Smiths moved into the upstairs portion of the house, where they lived for a little over a year. In 1966 they built a home north of Clinton, Mississippi. Mrs. Smith's parents moved to Clinton from Ann Arbor and enjoyed several years in the South. It was here that her father died.

Working with his friend from the Savannah days, Al Freundt, who was then pastor in Forest, Mississippi, Dr. Smith began the task of compiling a list of potential faculty. Jack Scott, who had served as a missionary to Korea and was an accomplished linguist, was invited to teach Hebrew and Old Testament. He completed his doctoral studies while teaching at the seminary. Freundt's field was Church History and Dr. Smith's Systematic Theology. They invited George Knight to teach New Testament, but he had already accepted a call to Covenant Seminary. He suggested James DeYoung, whom Knight and Smith had known at the Free University. He joined the faculty in Greek and New Testament. Pastor Richard Bodey from the Arch Street Church in Philadelphia was invited to teach Homiletics and Practical Theology. Dr. Palmer Robertson, a son of First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, joined the faculty in Biblical Theology. Guest lecturers taught Christian Education, Evangelism, and Missions. This early faculty's sacrifices were commendable. Because of the tight financial situation, they worked for below-average salaries and most preached every Sunday in order to make ends meet. Dr. Smith would later reflect that regular absence from his family on the Lord's Day was not beneficial for his children.

Reformed Theological Seminary opened in the fall of 1966 with seventeen students (including three transfer students) for whom classes were held in the downstairs portion of the old house. Soon there were over one hundred men studying for the ministry. RTS contributed greatly to the reformation of the Southern Presbyterian Churches and the origin of the PCA. The seminary affected churches throughout the state of Mississippi, most of Alabama, and many congregations in Georgia, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Because of the ministries of the early graduates, many congregations that were formerly evangelical but not Reformed, are now committed to the Reformed faith. Moreover, early RTS graduates developed Reformed University Ministries and the Reformed Youth Movement.

The seminary also served the Church through its early dissemination of Reformed literature through its bookstore and by providing many guest lecturers and sponsoring the annual Winter Theological Institute. Some of these speakers had a lasting effect on students and faculty. Dr. Smith writes, "Of particular interest to my own thinking was the impact that some of these speakers had on my understanding of the Biblical view of evangelism." This insight led Dr. Smith to begin teaching a more consistently Biblical form of evangelism and critiquing methods used by groups such as Campus Crusade for Christ. He published a pamphlet at this time on Reformed Evangelism.

The first president of the Seminary was Sam Patterson, although the executive committee of the Board of Trustees made most of the decisions. The Board had such a bias against ministers' serving on the Board that the only ministerial Board member was Dr. Henry Dendy, editor of the *Presbyterian Journal*. The Board appointed a committee of Ministerial Advisors which met occasionally and gave advice to the Board. The board often looked upon its own decisions as divinely sanctioned, leaving the faculty little recourse when differences arose. For these reasons, tensions soon developed between the Board and the faculty.

Even though the faculty had been carefully chosen, disagreements soon began to develop over the regulative principle, the use of crosses in places of worship, and the manner in which a minister related to the session. Another significant point of contention was whether the conservatives should separate from the PCUS.

Because his ancestors had been associated with the Southern Presbyterian Church ever since the days of Samuel Davies, it was emotionally distressing for Dr. Smith to consider leaving the mother church. He participated in the majority of the early meetings to consider whether it was time to leave, but, because of his reservations, he was not placed on the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee nevertheless commissioned him to research the decline in the PCUS and write a book that would present the rationale for the separation. He spent much of 1973 working on this book, which he titled *How is the Gold Become Dim* (taken from Lamentations 4:1); it was published shortly before the first assembly of the Continuing Church met in December. His research convinced Dr. Smith of the necessity of forming the Continuing Presbyterian Church.[10] The leadership of the Continuing Presbyterian Church was determined to act as Presbyterians, rather than individualists. Dr. Smith describes the procedure:

> Thus, we had a Convocation of Sessions at which the decision was made that we would move towards separation. We then had a Convention that heard reports of the Committee proposing the way in which we planned to establish a new Church, and made various decisions as to what was desired by the body. This body then called for the first General Assembly.

Dr. Smith was elected to serve as Clerk at the Convocation and at the First Assembly. For about ten years, Russ Johnson, a banker in Jackson, had sent Al Freundt and Dr. Smith to every PCUS Assembly so they could learn how an Assembly ought to operate. Since Mr. Freundt remained in the PCUS, Dr. Smith was the one man in the new denomination who best knew how to run a General Assembly. He states,

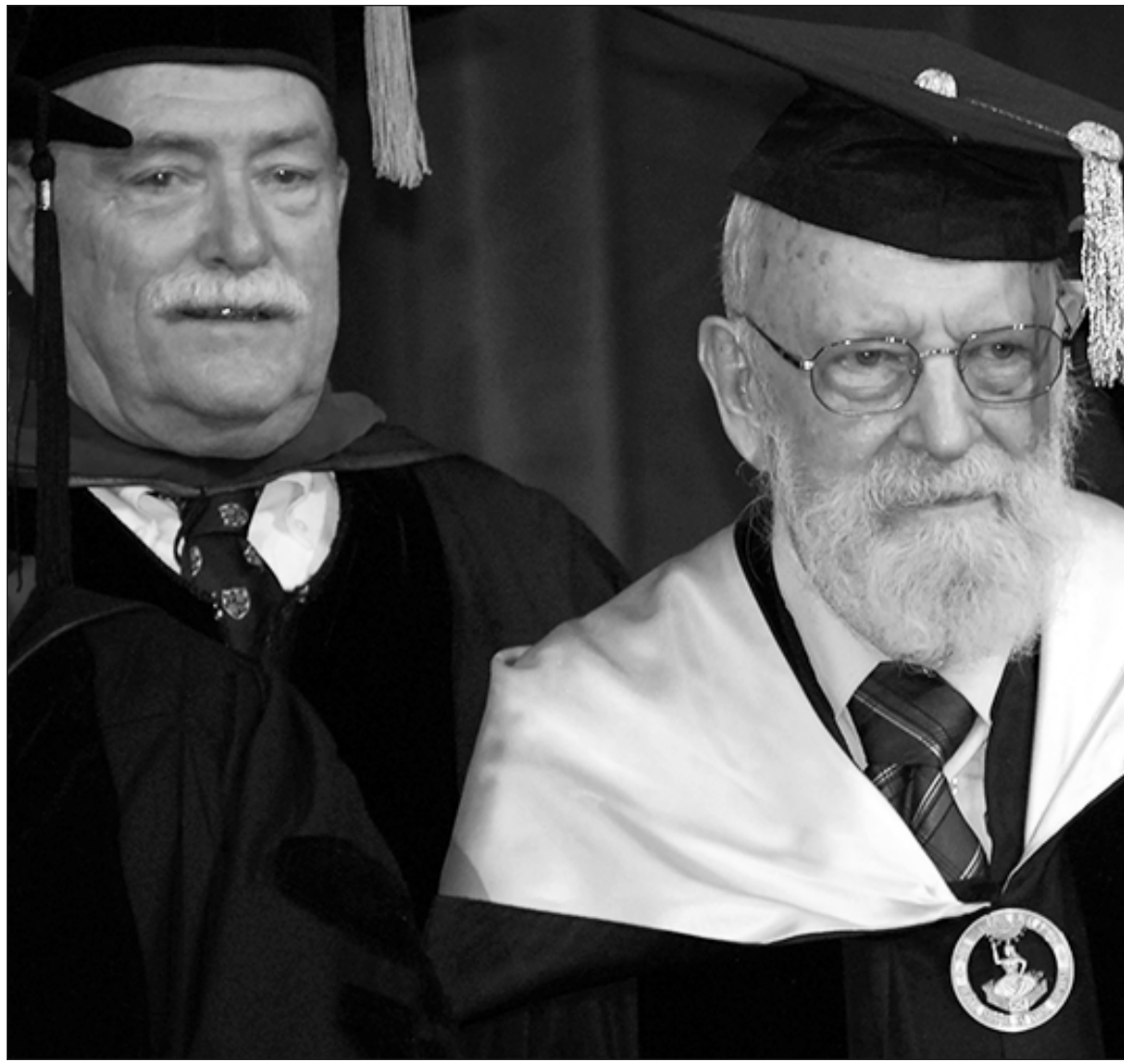
> I guided the formation of the new Assembly very much after the pattern of the PCUS, since this was not the problem with our mother Church. One of the reporters at our first General Assembly said it looked like we had been doing this for years. It was because I sensed that there was no one else prepared to handle these ecclesiastical matters that I accepted the call to the office of Stated Clerk.

The Latter Years—1973 to the Present: Stated Clerk and Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Dr. Smith served the PCA as Stated Clerk until 1988, first in a part-time capacity until 1978, doing the work of Stated Clerk in addition to all his work at the Seminary. Initially he managed the office from his kitchen, in order to keep it separate from the Seminary. Eventually he rented office space in downtown Clinton and hired Jackie Stuckey to work in the mornings as secretary; his wife worked in the afternoons. In 1978 the Seminary Board decided that a faculty member should not hold two jobs. He had to decide: to continue teaching at the Seminary or to continue serving as Clerk of the denomination. Believing that no one was yet prepared to do the work of Stated Clerk, he felt obligated "to answer the call of my Church and accept this position as a full-time position."

He believed that the Board preferred that he leave RTS. "I think my strict views on the Reformed Faith, including my booklet on Reformed evangelism," reflects

10. God used *How is the Gold Become Dim* among many like me to convince us that in leaving the PCUS we would not be acting schismatically.



Dr. Morton H. Smith (right) with Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, GPTS Commencement, May 20, 2011. Courtesy of Tricia Stevenson.

Dr. Smith, "were also behind the move." Dr. Smith desired "an Old School, strict subscription Seminary," while the board intended the Seminary to become more broadly reformed. Even though the entire faculty asked him to reconsider his decision, not one board member expressed any regret over his departure.[11]

The Smiths moved to Brevard, North Carolina in the winter of 1978, having chosen this area because of its proximity to Ridge Haven. As the General Assembly was developing the Ridge Haven Conference Center, plans were made to include a library and historical center. Dr. Smith reasoned that he could assist the denomination with these operations. He set up the Clerk's office in the large downstairs area of his home. In 1983 he moved the Clerk's office to Atlanta, Georgia, and again the Clerk's office was in their house because there was insufficient space in the PCA office. After a couple of years, the Clerk's office moved to the offices of the Administrative Committee, where it has remained. When the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod joined the PCA in 1982, changes in favor of a broader, New School Presbyterianism soon became apparent, and some in the merged church were dissatisfied with Dr. Smith's continuing to serve as Clerk. There was an attempt to entice him to resign by offering him two years' salary if he would proffer his resignation. He rejected the offer and left the decision of his election to the fourteenth

11. Sadly, the published *Brief History of Reformed Theological* Seminary does not mention Dr. Smith's role in the formation of the seminary.

Assembly meeting in Philadelphia. Again, the Assembly elected him as Clerk, but by this time a distinct minority was working against him. He was determined not to stand for re-election after the Sixteenth General Assembly, resigning in 1988.

As clerk, he had served his denomination faithfully for fifteen years, shaping the polity of the church by his role in the development of The Book of Church Order, the operation of the General Assembly, and the form of the Yearbook and Ministerial Directory. As clerk, his tenure was marked by an assiduous devotion to impartiality. There were times his friends felt betrayed, but he acted according to what he thought was correct.

During his last two years in the Clerk's office, he began working with a group of men in Greenville, South Carolina to establish an Old School Presbyterian Seminary. The desire for a theological seminary in the state of South Carolina had been evident since the founding of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1973. Some funds were committed to such an undertaking in 1976, and in 1981 a committee was formed by Calvary Presbytery to study the possibility of establishing a seminary in South Carolina. Neither of these early expressions of interest had their desired result. During the winter and spring of 1985–1986, interest in such a project was again raised. Ligon Duncan III and Duncan Rankin, students at Covenant Seminary, approached Dr. Smith about the need for a seminary that fully met "The Uniform Curriculum" adopted by the PCA. Pastor Paul Settle and ruling elder Ligon Duncan Jr., both at Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, concurred. A meeting was held at the Duncan home in Greenville on February 26, 1986 to consider the possibility of founding a seminary. In attendance at this meeting were Mr. and Mrs. Duncan, their three sons, Ligon, John, and Melton, Mr. and Mrs. Settle, Duncan Rankin, and Dr. Smith. Having considered the need for such a seminary and the advantages that the Greenville area offered, the group agreed to work toward the establishment of the Seminary.

A steering committee was formed consisting of Paul G. Settle, John C. Neville Jr., Morton H. Smith, J. Ligon Duncan Jr., and C. Stuart Patterson. They were asked to arrange for the actual organization of the school. In March 1986, Pastor Settle, acting on behalf of the steering committee, sent a letter to select elders announcing the establishment of the James Henley Thornwell Seminary, which was incorporated under the laws of the state of South Carolina. Under pressure from the PCUSA, the steering committee changed the name to Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Dr. Smith was appointed the Dean of the Faculty and Administrator.[12]

In the fall of 1987, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary began training men for the gospel ministry. The Seminary met in the facilities of what was then Augusta Street Presbyterian Church, with Drs. Morton H. Smith, Gregg Singer, Henry Krabbendam, and others, teaching the first students. The Seminary's first commencement was on June 7, 1991; three men were graduated. Today the Seminary has more than 132 students enrolled in Greenville, Westminster Seminary, Newcastle (GB), and John Wycliffe Theological College in South Africa. Since its founding, the Seminary has been consistently and distinctively Confessional, Old School, and Presbyterian in its outlook and philosophy, and has placed a strong emphasis on the infallibility and sufficiency of the Word of God and obedience to the Great Commission as the one and only mission of the Church.

In 1988 the Smiths moved back to Brevard, again providing an apartment for Mrs. Knopf, who died on November 7, 1991. Dr. Smith continued to labor assiduously in the denomination and at the Seminary, until he retired in 2013. He has served on the Standing Judicial Commission and the Committee on Constitutional Business. In 2000 the 28th General Assembly elected him to serve as Moderator. He was an active member of Western Carolina Presbytery and with his wife were active in Cornerstone Presbyterian Church in Brevard, where he taught the adult Sunday School for many years.

His worldwide ministry has also increased remarkably since 1988. In that year Dr. and Mrs. Smith traveled to South Africa, where he spoke at a conference in Durban on Christ in the Old Testament and preached at one of the South African Seminaries. In June of 1989 he flew to Korea to lecture on missions at a ministers' institute in Pusan. In 1994, 1995, and 1996 he lectured on Systematic Theology at the Theological Seminary of the Church of the Brethren in Prague, the Czech Republic. The first trip on which Mrs. Smith accompanied him was a celebration of the Smiths' fiftieth wedding anniversary. They were able to visit Vienna and Budapest as well as Prague, where they stayed with PCA missionary Sid Anderson. While in the Czech Republic in 1996, Dr. Smith went to Zlin, where he taught courses in theology to two students, Pavel Bartos, the founder of a Reformed church in Zlin, and Rene Draphne. He returned again

12. Dr. Smith continued in this capacity until I began my work as President on January 1, 1998.

to Zlin with Mrs. Smith in 1999 to provide further ministerial instruction to the same two Czech nationals.

In 1998 he traveled to Brazil to attend special services at the First Presbyterian Church in Recife, Brazil. His great uncle, John Rockwell Smith, had founded the church. In addition to preaching at First Presbyterian and a small mission church, he gave some lectures at the local Seminary. He returned to Brazil in 2002 to lecture on Ecclesiology under the auspices of the Puritan Project in Recife and San Salvador. In 2001 the Smiths and their daughter Susanne went to St. Petersburg, Russia, where Dr. Smith gave lectures at a small Reformed Seminary. In the fall of 2003, he traveled to New Zealand, where he spoke for the New Zealand Conference on Reformational Theology. Dr. Smith lectured at three sites (Christ Church, Wellington, and Auckland) on Ecclesiology and preached in two different churches in Wellington.

On August 15, 2013, the faculty at Dr. Smith's request approve a motion to be sent to the Board of Trustee accepting his retirement and being moved to emeritus status. The Board of Trustees granted him Emeritus status in May 2014. The Fall semester of 2013 he taught his last class, Introduction to Reformed Theology. This class perhaps more than any other he taught shaped students for forty-seven years. I know it did me.

Dr. Smith lived four years after retirement. He remained active, continuing to read widely and teaching an adult Sunday School class. I took some men to visit him the day before his stroke and he was mentally sharp. He suffered a stroke Thursday November 9, 2017, and died on Sunday, November 12. And is interred at Blue Ridge Gardens of Memory in Brevard. "Miss Lois" followed him into glory a few months later, January 28, 2018 and is buried beside him.

The Man

What does one say about a man like this? One is immediately impressed with his gentleness. Strangers as well as those who knew him will comment that he was a true Christian gentleman, always polite and unassuming. He was a quiet man, and by his own admission a shy man. Though he would prefer to remain in the background, because of his responsibilities he does not give place to his natural shyness.

He was a godly man. He had a burning love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a high regard for the Scriptures, and he inspired those around him with such love and regard. His was a simple faith, which has been tested and shaped in the refiner's fire. He had regular daily worship with his wife, reading through books of the Bible in various translations. For private reading he prefers to focus his Bible reading on topics he desires to study in more detail, as well as the passages he will preach and teach on the Lord's Day. It was his custom to consult the original languages as part of his reading. For further edification he read in systematic theology and church history, as well as biographies.

It is not my intention to write a hagiography, for Dr. Smith was well aware that he was a sinner, saved by grace. The Gentle Shepherd has refined him in the furnace of trials, and those who knew him best have observed the increase in his patience and gentleness. Neither would he claim to have been without fault during the controversies of his life, even though his passionate desire had been the glory of God and the reform of His church.

He was a humble man. When in 1970 a guest lecturer at Reformed Seminary challenged the faculty and seminary body on Reformed evangelism, Dr. Smith owned that he had not thought through the issue, and he subsequently began to apply the Reformed faith more consistently to evangelism. Out of this experience, he penned his booklet on Reformed Evangelism. Later, as variant teachings on Creation became a subject of disagreement in the PCA, he publicly repented of having taught that the length and the order of the days were not important.[13]

With respect to his humility, I need to touch on the attacks on him the last years of his life. He had written that he had and could live both in integrated and segregated. When he penned those words, he was reflecting the condition of many places in the United States. Nevertheless, he was accused of racism. A number of African-American students have testified that the accusation is grossly false. Dr. Smith was loving and gracious to all his students. He also served alongside an African-American Board member, Dr. Cameron.

He was an innovator, constantly devising new ways to do things. In 1959, as he was doing research on his dissertation, he made an innovative use of photography to facilitate his research:

> I had picked up a single lens reflex camera which I used for my research. I bought large rolls of microfilm, which I cut down to fit standard rolls. I then took the pictures, using a couple of gooseneck lamps. I had a changing

13. I have personally observed the humility of this man. He has warmly supported me in my work as President of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In a manner of speaking, it was his baby, and I had been his student, but he shows no concern for guarding his standing or resisting changes or new ideas.

> bag, and a developing tank, which Dad had used in his hobby of photography. I developed the film each night to be sure that I had gotten good pictures. This process enabled me to do a lot of collecting of materials in a relatively short time.

As computer technology developed, he adapted to it. Although a number of older men have resisted the transition to computers, not only did he make the transition, but he used the technology to the fullest, doing research on the web and using a scanner to facilitate his research. Other earlier examples of his willingness to use available technology were his use of the airplane to expedite his travel; his use of television for teaching in the late 60's, and of the video camera in the late 90's. His innovative spirit was probably the result of his natural curiosity which prompted him constantly to observe and learn. For example, while we were traveling in New Zealand, he regularly questioned our host about various phenomena we were seeing or places we visited.

He remained active, until a few years before his death. He and his good friend, John Neville, hiked the mountain trails of North Carolina. For relaxation he read widely, often historical accounts, particularly of the War Between the States. He also enjoys historical novels, adventures, and mysteries.

The Scholar

Dr. Smith was a thorough-going Westminsterian, fully committed to all the doctrines of the Westminster Standards. He was also well acquainted with the Three Forms of Unity and their relation to the Westminster documents. He was well-versed not only in the writings of the Southern Presbyterian Theologians, but also the Church Fathers, Calvin and the Reformers, the Scottish and Puritan writers, the Princeton men, the Dutch theologians, and modern reformed writers. His own theology may be described as exegetical, Reformed, evangelical, and experiential.

It was exegetical. Although he admired the Westminster Standards, above all his commitment is to the Bible as the word of God. He believed that the Bible alone is to be our only rule of faith and practice.

It was Reformed. He delighted in teaching the great doctrines of the Reformed faith and found much solace in their truths. Unlike some modern Presbyterian theologians, he saw no tension between a commitment to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice and subscription to every article of faith in the Westminster Standards. Rather, his commitment to the Westminster Standards was based on the conviction that the standards are a faithful exposition of the truth of Scripture.

It was evangelical. His was a simple faith in Christ. He loved the Savior and delighted in conversing about Him. As all roads in the ancient Roman Empire led to Rome, all doctrines for Dr. Smith lead to Christ. Often in teaching and preaching he pressed the claims of Christ on his hearers. He maintained an intense interest in home and foreign missions and instilled this commitment in his students and colleagues.

It was experiential. He loved God and pursued holiness, believing that truth should promote holiness in our lives and should have a profound impact on our experience. In his *Systematic Theology,* he quotes Warfield with approval: "Doctrine is in order to life and the study of doctrine must be prosecuted in a spirit which would see its end in the correction and edification of life."[14]

Dr. Smith's philosophy of teaching Systematic Theology also developed over the years. Following the pattern of Professor John Murray, Dr. Smith sought to teach systematic theology on an exegetical foundation. He preferred to begin with Scripture and summarize the doctrines from the Westminster Standards. Like Dabney's *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Smith's *Systematic Theology* is the fruit of his class lectures. When he began to teach Systematic Theology at RTS in 1967, he developed a three-volume syllabus which his students were to have read before class. He would then read and discuss the assigned section with them. Through the process of class discussion, the syllabus grew. Finally in 1994 he published the fruit of twenty-seven years of research and teaching in his two-volume *Systematic Theology*.

His later approach to teaching was an adaptation of Dabney's method, which was described by the students who printed his syllabus:

> The system consists of recitations on lessons from text-books, chiefly the Confession of Faith and Turrettin's (sic.) Elenctic Theology, oral instructions and explanations of the Professor, the preparation and reading of Theses by the students upon the topics under discussion, and finally, review recitations upon the whole. The design is to combine, as far as may be, the assistance of the living teacher with the cultivation of the powers of memory, comparison, judgment,

14. Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Greenville: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 1:19, 20.

> reasoning and expression, by the researches of the students themselves, and to fix the knowledge acquired by repeated views of it. [15]

Dr. Smith would assign students to read weekly or bi-weekly in different authors on the doctrine to be discussed. Each student then would write a brief paper and present it to the class. Dr. Smith would moderate a class discussion, after which he concluded the section with a summary of the topic, based on his textbook. He also assigned a research paper at the end of the term and gave oral examinations, which help equip the men to think on their feet.

His lecture style and preaching was like Hemingway's writing style. As he begins, one may wonder, "What is so remarkable about this?" But without realizing it, the listener is soon captivated. Dr. Smith's thought is well organized and clearly presented. In his preaching he used the method adopted by Calvin, *secundum ordinem textus* (according to the order of the text). His delivery was quiet but forceful.

Though he has taught every locus of theology often over the course of his careers, he maintained a fresh presentation with new reading and research. Toward the end of his teaching career, in discussing with me the covenant, he mentioned two newly published books he was in the process of reading. As mentioned, he also stays current with material found on various web sites relevant to his interests.

The Churchman

Dr. Morton H. Smith arguably was one of the greatest living teachers of ecclesiology and polity. Following Thornwell, he maintained the accountability of the session to the presbytery, and of the presbytery to the General Assembly. He also firmly believed that Christ, the King of the Church, has given His church every gift and resource to fulfill her mission, which is spiritual: to preach the gospel, to nurture God's people, to worship God, and to minister to the needs of God's children through the diaconate. He held to a proper two-office view: one office of elder with two distinct functions (all elders rule and pastor; teaching elders have the additional responsibilities of preaching the word and administering the sacraments), and the office of deacon. He held a very high view of the office of ruling elder and deacon.

Dr. Smith, we should remember, was no ivory tower ecclesiastical ideologue. He was a churchman. One of the salient characteristics apparent in the story of his life is that he never sought a path for himself out of ambition. Every major decision he made outside of his family was for the benefit of the church. Consider the following: his deciding to prepare for teaching because the Southern Church needed sound, conservative professors; his returning to Columbia because of the counsel that if he planned to teach in the Southern Church, he should graduate from a Southern Seminary; his giving up his pastoral charge to teach at Belhaven; his accepting the call to teach at Westminster; his exertions in founding Reformed Theological Seminary; his serving as the first Clerk of the PCA while still teaching at RTS; his decision to serve full-time as Clerk; and his joining the endeavor to found Greenville Seminary. In each of these decisions he believed he was heeding the call of Christ through the Church and for the sake of the Church.

His life's passion has been the reformation of the Southern Presbyterian Church, and, when forced to leave, it was for the preservation of the Reformed faith and practice in the Presbyterian Church in America. His decisions have often involved great sacrifice of time and financial well-being on his part, yet he served Christ in His Church faithfully for sixty years.

He has left his imprint on the PCA in *The Book of Church Order*, his *Commentary* on that book, and his work as Clerk. He led the General Assembly to set up Permanent Committees to oversee the work of the Church and Committees of Commissioners to oversee the work of the Permanent Committees. Although many of the advantages and reforms gained in the establishment of the PCA are being lost by default and usurpation of power by the Assembly Committees, no man has had a more profound impact on the early development of this denomination than he. He was broken-hearted when at the Thirty-first General Assembly, he witnessed the heirs of the Southern Presbyterian Church selling her rich legacy by adopting "System Subscription" and giving individual Presbyteries the authority to determine what comprises the "System."

As the Assembly of the PCA was considering a change in subscription that was being put forth by a group of men who were working in secret meetings to change the church, he wrote an open letter:[16]

15. R.L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), preface.

16. Wayne Sparkman at the Historical Center provided this letter. I have taken the liberty to divide the content into paragraphs that were not in the original.

An Open Letter To The Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership

Dear Brethren in Christ:

It is with a sense of deep sorrow that I feel called upon to address you in this way. First, I desire to express to you my genuine esteem and love for you as brethren in Christ.

A number of you hold high callings by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America. For this, you deserve to be recognized and honored as servants of Christ and of his Church. Others of you hold distinguished pastorates, which is a high honor and great responsibility as servants of Christ. All of you as fellow Christians are to be held in love and respect as brethren in the Lord. I seek to write to you what I view to be the truth "in love" as a fellow Christian.

My concerns are several. First, as a group seeking to offer pastoral leadership in the PCA, it seems to me that on known controversial subjects, you should have acted more pastorally and invited some of those who differ with you to have consulted to see if a genuine consensus could be reached. In fact, such openness and collegiality might have helped avoid certain misstatements (See next paragraph). Your hasty pressing for legislative changes (and that as your initial offering to the church) before consultation with a broad cross-section of leaders—even if that means a greater diversity than you personally might desire—is, to say the least, less than what Christ would expect of us.

I plead with you brethren to lessen your efforts to impose your own political vision on the Church on such a major issue as subscription, until the broader church asks or commissions you, or some other group to do so. As a pastoral leadership group you should lead us by patient and humble persuasion instead of by political maneuvering. A pastoral approach—not an imposed legislative one—is what is needed.

Second, the citation of the statement, which I made at the last Assembly to the effect that I failed to press the issue of subscription at the First General Assembly, did not include the larger context of the statement and my life's work. I ask you as pastors of honesty and integrity to correct or remove your mistaken references to my comments, with apology or quickly to publish a correction in some clear form as an excellent model of repentance and charity.

I indicated that the reason I had not pressed the question of nature of confessional subscription was based on the assumption that all conservative Presbyterians of the 20th century would have concurred with the conservatives of the 19th century that full subscription was our position. In other words, I presupposed that a Continuing Southern Presbyterian Church would be one that held to historic subscription as the Southern Presbyterian Church did in her early years.

To cite someone out of context is less than the best pastoral leadership you might have exhibited. You claim that you want "good faith" subscription. Yet, you have twisted the record of what I attempted to suggest and thus distorted my words to make me appear to say that the PCA did not hold to the received subscription position. I trust that it was done unwittingly, so I sincerely ask that you not harm the PCA with misinformation and that you bear true witness to my sentiments.

Please, in the interests of fairness to all and love to me, correct or publish this letter as a clarification from my own hand. The fact is that this is not my position, and never has been, and I certainly did not intend to leave the impression that the PCA did not adopt the historic subscription position of our forefathers.

Third, in the light of a call for "good faith," have you shown good faith when you suggest in your overture that the PCA has always held to something less than clear subscription? Read the second vow. Professor John Murray, who was customarily precise in his interpretation of language, asserts, "It is not simply the system of doctrine contained in the Confession that is adopted, the Confession is adopted as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture." This is all that we who hold to historic subscription desire, that our officers recognize that they are adopting the Confession and Catechisms as the confession of their faith.

That this was the position of the PCA is seen in the language of the first Assembly adopting the Confession and Catechisms as the bond of our unity. It is seen in the way that most judicial cases dealing with doctrines were handled earlier, although some recent decisions seem willing to depart from that standard. It is also seen in the answer to questions about the meaning of subscription adopted by the Tenth General Assembly.

Fourth, I ask, why you brethren are seeking to organize and chart a radically different direction for the PCA.

The "Address to All Churches" adopted and signed by the members of the first General Assembly sets forth a very different goal than that proposed by the Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership group. This being the case, it seems to this writer that if you are not satisfied by the PCA's goals and direction, then you should use pastoral persuasion to change the Constitution through our normal procedures—not by orchestrating the so called "ground swell" of a number of presbyteries adopting the same overtures, and then seeking to block any amendment to the overtures. You might even humbly submit to other brothers and a church that may not be as convinced of the need to adopt your positions.

One wonders why you men, who have affirmed in your ordination vows the Reformed Faith and conservative Presbyterianism in general, cannot learn from the history of American Presbyterianism regarding subscription to the Standards. During the period from 1801 to 1837 the broad, loose Presbyterianism of the New School group brought about a distinct decline in the doctrinal position of the Presbyterian Church. The result was the major division of 1837 in which the Old and New School groups went separate ways. The vast majority of the Southern Presbyterian Church came out of the Old School Church. It is an historical fact that they clearly identified themselves as Old School Presbyterians and the PCA, in its original formulations, overtly embraced the stance of the First Southern General Assembly.

The Northern Old and New School Churches merged in 1869 on the ground of allowing both views of subscription to the Standards. By 1910 subscription had been reduced from commitment to the Westminster Standards to the adoption of the five points of fundamentalism. In 1923, after the Assembly had reaffirmed the position of 1910, a group of some 1,300 ministers of the denomination signed the Auburn Affirmation, which declared these five points to be theories that Presbyterian ministers did not need to affirm. Nothing was done to them, and this view eventually prevailed in the mainline Church. The result was the separation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1936. It was a terrible day for American Presbyterianism to see a great denomination that had begun with clear adherence to the Standards to allow this requirement to slip from its grasp and to head toward the virtual apostasy of the mainline Presbyterian Church.

It has often been said that if one cannot learn from history, one will repeat the same errors of those who have gone before. Have we forgotten the Auburn Affirmation and its related decline? Is 1973 so far behind us that we have forgotten why we left liberalism? Surely you do not desire that PCA go down that same road. Why then should you espouse the very broadening steps that led the PCUSA into liberalism? You may not agree with my understanding of the early history and intent of the PCA, but many will conclude that the adoption of the loose position you espouse is, to say the least, a dangerous step, which cannot help but weaken the present and future testimony the of the PCA. Knowing the propensity of sinful human nature, instead of loosening our Standards, should we not be striving to strengthen our commitment to our Standards?

Some of you seem to fear classic subscription, because it may bring on charges of heresy against those who fail to keep their ordination vows. Can you tell us when or how often that has actually happened in the entire history of the PCA? The design of healthy subscription is merely to aid candor and honesty, as much as to require that our officers maintain the ordination vows that they have taken, and to uphold the historic, Biblical Presbyterianism of the Westminster Standards.

Failure of the denomination to do this will result in the decline of the denomination's orthodoxy. Jonathan Dickinson, who opposed the original Adopting Act, said that unless discipline is exercised orthodoxy would not be maintained. (Stated in a sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Philadelphia, September 19, 1722.)

Finally, having heard some very disturbing rumors about your group, I ask would you, in the spirit of a openness and pastoral candor, either publish all of your other political goals and mailings—including whether you: (a) have circularized a 10–point plan to stack certain key GA committees this year; (b) plan to employ parliamentary tactics to disallow verbal improvements to previously submitted overtures, as if they were unamendable; or (c) hope to eliminate the historic office of deacons (Acts 6) so that women may serve equal to men in an un-ordained capacity—or else for the peace of the church, please unequivocally and publicly disavow that you or your political allies will use such carnal methods or seek such goals.

> Dear brothers, my opinion in some areas may not be as far from yours as caricatured. May I challenge you, me, and all members of the PCA as follows: Indeed, I quite agree that we desperately NEED more of a pastoral, patient approach that humbly listens, embraces many, and that waits on God more in prayer than depends on raw political power or the tyranny of the majority. We NEED far less politics and much more openness, true consensus, research, reasoned-discussion, and true concern for flocks. We MUST NOT, even in respect for your impressive, collective accomplishments, follow the agenda that you presently promote so zealously. I do not believe that the perceived "crisis" is present, nor is the need so pressing, nor are the remedies proposed so sound. Brothers, may we not apply a little patience with one another, a little more honesty and charity to those who sincerely disagree, and not divide the church?? We have time . . . and God's own promises; let's listen more and politicize less.
>
> Yours in Christ,
> Morton H. Smith
> First Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

Note in this letter the heart of a humble churchman.

Perception of His Legacy: Too Ragged for our Parade.

At the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, the citizens of Charleston gave a victory parade for the low country militia. The great South Carolinian hero and patriot Francis Marion and his soldiers were not allowed to march in the parade because the elite of Charleston considered them too ragged. One leading citizen, Moultrie, objected to their decision, commenting sardonically, "Marion was not too ragged to fight, only too ragged to show."

Sadly, this reprehensible episode has a parallel in the attitude of some in the PCA toward Morton H. Smith. He was "not too ragged" to fight our battles and labor for our denomination, but he is apparently deemed by some as "too ragged to show." Though he is maligned and even disdained by some, he has indelibly left his mark on the Church in a way few men have. His legacy is beyond calculation.

He is our Lawrence Chadderton. Chadderton was the Patriarch of the Puritan movement in England. He was born ca. 1537 and lived to be 103 years old. He taught the first generation of Puritans at Christ College, and then was the head of Emmanuel College, which was established in 1584 as a center of Puritan ministerial training. For fifty years he preached at St. Clements. When he resigned from St. Clements, some forty Puritan ministers petitioned him not to do so, because they owed their conversion to his preaching. He was appointed by King James I as one of the translators of the Authorized Version of the Bible. He defined a movement.

Similarly, Dr. Smith has exercised a Chadderton-like role in the resurgence of the Reformed faith and the Southern Presbyterian tradition in the United States. He developed the Bible department at Belhaven for the training of men for the Southern Church (PCUS). He introduced us to the Southern Presbyterian Worthies. As Dr. Willborn avers later in the aforementioned festschrift: "With the publication of *Studies in Southern Presbyterian Theology* in 1962, Morton Howison Smith turned the attention of a new generation to the riches of Southern Presbyterian history and theology."[17] He was a major participant in the founding of two Reformed seminaries. He was one of the primary architects of the government, structure, and operation of the Presbyterian Church in America. Probably no other professor of Systematic Theology in the twentieth century has taught as many men as he has in his professorial career: hundreds of men have learned the Reformed faith from him. Directly and indirectly through his students he has been used to bring an untold number of Churches to a clearer understanding of the Reformed faith. Even many who do not share his convictions on confessional subscription are more Reformed than they might otherwise have been because of his ministry. His students are ministers, missionaries, and professors. At least three of his former students have served as Presidents of Seminaries.

I am sure that I speak for many when I say I know of no man to whom I am as indebted as I am to Dr. Smith: not only did he teach me the Reformed Faith, but also he instilled in me a deep love for it, for the Church, and above all for the triune God.

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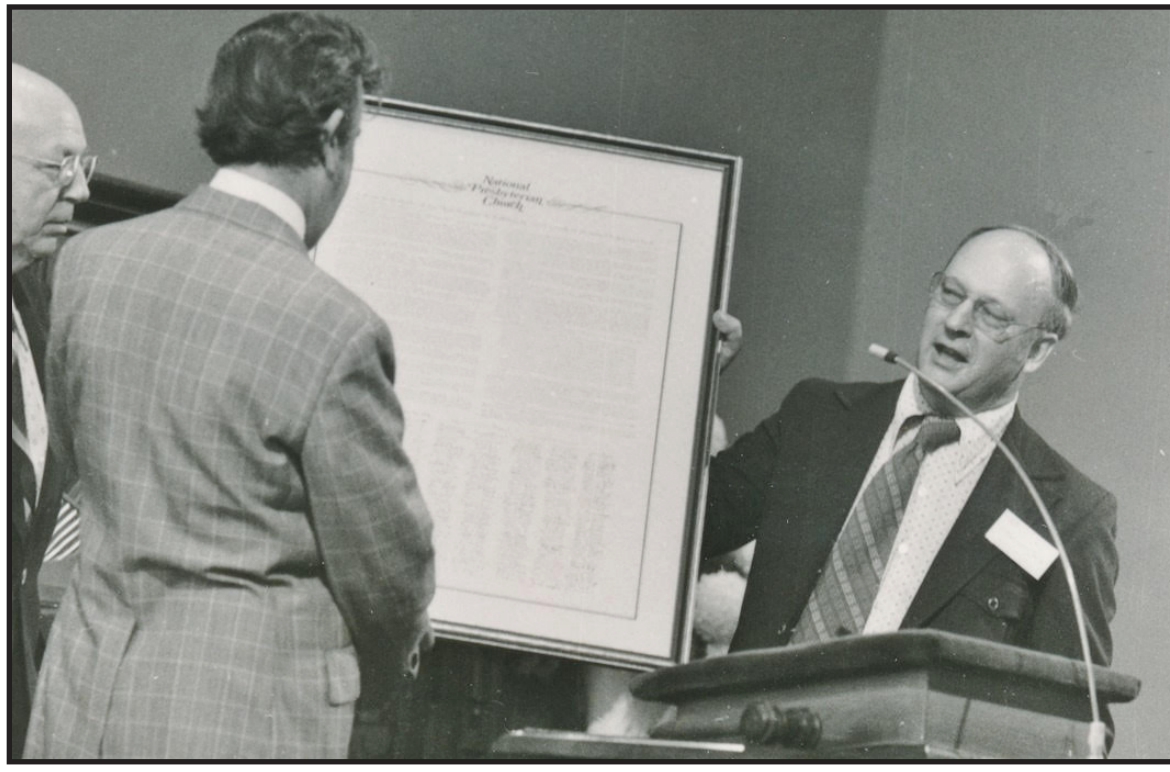
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Above: At the second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America in 1974, Stated Clerk Morton H. Smith presented a framed copy of *A Message to All the Churches of Jesus Christ* to Jack Williamson (RE), who moderated the first General assembly. "The poster-size document includes the signatures of 296 of the over 330 attendees of the first assembly meeting of the new denomination. It is not an official document but a symbolic remembrance of the forming of the PCA that was distributed by the J. Ligon Duncan family of Greenville, South Carolina. The man at the left edge is Teaching Elder Erskine L. Jackson." Barry Waugh, "A Lesson from Morton H. Smith, 1923-2017," Presbyterians of the Past, https://www.presbyteriansofthepast.com/2017/12/04/lesson-morton-h-smith-1923-2017/. Courtesy of the PCA Historical Center. Lower photo: Dr. Smith speaking at the 2011 Spring Theology conference at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Courtesy of Tricia Stevenson.

The Not-Quite Founding Father:
J. Gresham Machen and the Origins of the PCA

By Sean G. Morris

Introduction

As I sit down to write this article, it is the Year of Our Lord 2023. This year is a significant milestone for at least two Presbyterian and North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)-related entities, and I hope to address and discuss something of their relationship one to another. The first entity is that of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. Not coincidentally, this milestone year for the PCA is the theme of this year's *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal. The other entity, more of an artifact, is J. Gresham Machen's (1881–1937) landmark work, *Christianity and Liberalism*, which celebrates its one-hundredth anniversary this year. Other entries in this year's journal aim to address a number of the founding factors and founding fathers that led to the PCA's formation in 1973. I intend to do so as well, but with a slightly different angle, namely considering how Machen may have been something of an "unofficial" founding father of the PCA due to his legacy and influential thought as outlined in *Christianity and Liberalism*.

At first blush, it seems something of a stretch to suggest that Machen was in any way a factor, much less a founding father, in the formation of the PCA in 1973. After all, Machen died in 1937 at the age of 55, his death pre-dating the founding of the PCA by some 36 years. Moreover, while the PCA was founded out of a desire to escape the prevailing heterodoxy of the old Southern Presbyterian church (the Presbyterian Church in the United States—PCUS), Machen was a founding father of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), whose charter members were keen to establish a new conservative denomination to escape the prevailing heterodoxy of the Northern Presbyterian church (Presbyterian Church in the United States of America—PCUSA) a generation earlier.

Still, while the doctrinal and cultural factors that led to the formation of the OPC in 1936 and the PCA in 1973 were not identical, there were several interesting parallels that this article aims to tease out. It is undoubtedly true that Machen was an influential figure among American Presbyterians, both in the Northern and Southern churches. It stands to reason that his concerns for the church and her doctrine articulated in the 1920s would have been broadly shared by conservative American Presbyterians nationwide. Furthermore, given the popularity of Machen's thought amongst conservative American Presbyterians, it stands to reason that conservatives in the Southern church, having read about and observed from afar the spiritual decline among their northern cousins, would have taken Machen's prescient warnings to heart and been on the lookout for similar signs of decline in their own communion.

Additionally, as Sean Michael Lucas notes in his major work on the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, "[T]here were connections between followers of northern Presbyterian fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen and their southern counterparts that contributed to the development of conservative dissent within the PCUS."[1] Lucas notes how Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, which Machen founded, served to supply some of the conservative

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1. Sean Michael Lucas. *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), p. 3.

ministerial leadership to the old Southern church, that several leaders of the "Conservative Coalition"[2] had trained at Westminster, and some ministers who eventually moved to serve conservative congregations in the PCUS had begun their pastoral service in OPC pulpits. There were numerous organic connections, such that the "flow of thought" from Machen's pen a generation earlier would have naturally carried over into some of the founding elements of the PCA.

It is important to note these organic connections because it was not as if the concerns that brought about the formation of the OPC in the 1930s and the concerns that brought about the PCA in 1973 were mere coincidences. No, even if Machen were not directly cited or referenced in the writings of the PCA founding fathers, their familiarity with the story of their northern cousins in the OPC, Machen's battles in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, and the Old Princeton-New Princeton-Westminster Seminary transition meant that the similar concerns of contemporary Southern leaders were a deliberate—not uncanny—phenomenon.

There were significant differences, though, in the founding of these two denominations, as Lucas is keen to note. The OPC, from its outset, sought to maintain a self-consciously confessional Presbyterian ethos, whereas many (perhaps most) of the founding generation of the PCA were not as insistent on Westminsterian Reformed theological distinctives as they were on the goal of evangelizing American culture. Conservatives within the PCUS seemed less influenced by leaders or theological emphases from within the OPC and more influenced by the "New Evangelicalism" and its leading lights (men such as the celebrated evangelist Billy Graham).[3]

Still, many of the issues that troubled southern conservatives— such as the inerrancy of Scripture and confessional subscription— were the same issues that brought about the exodus of northern conservatives from the PCUSA. While such matters may have occupied a less-central place in the catalog of concerns for conservatives in the Southern church, they were nevertheless present. As such, the concerns of Machen from a generation earlier were factors (if not the leading factors) in the formation of the PCA. Thus, in this way, the "ghost of Machen" had a hand in the foundation of the Presbyterian Church in America.

This article aims to explore further and substantiate how and which concerns of Machen expressed in *Christianity and Liberalism* were yet at play in the creation of the Southern Presbyterian "Continuing Church" in 1973.

Methodology

In researching and articulating the potential overlap between the concerns of Machen in 1923 and the founders of the PCA in 1973, the methodological approach is fairly straightforward. After a brief biographical sketch of Machen, we will consider first the fundamental concerns as expressed by a number of the founding fathers of the PCA. In this, Dr. Sean Michael Lucas has done the yeoman's work of compiling the relevant primary sources and writings of the PCA founding fathers into one eminently useful and accessible resource and bibliography via his *For the Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* historical volume. Reference to Lucas' work for commentary and situating the historical context will be employed at various junctures.

Then, having identified the prevailing issues, controversies, and perceived drift in the Southern Church as expressed by that founding generation of PCA churchmen, we will look back to Machen's parallel concerns as expressed in *Christianity and Liberalism* and see where there might be overlap and similarity in apprehension. In this way, we hope to substantiate the claim that, given the organic connections between Machen's influence and early PCA leadership and the PCA founders' familiarity with Machen's arguments, the late OPC minister influenced the establishment of the Continuing Southern Presbyterian Church.

I should note here that I am also grateful for the article by Dr. Carlton Wynne entitled "Machen and the PCA," published earlier this year in the *Reformed Forum Magazine*.[4] Wynne's work provides a valuable introduction to Machen's concerns as they were expressed a century ago and how at least two of those concerns continue to have a bearing on the present

2. The "Conservative Coalition," as the name suggests, was the name given to the networked efforts of several different organizations and associations of elders and lay people which labored for the preservation of conservative biblical and theological commitments in the old PCUS. This network included groups such as Presbyterian Churchmen United, the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians, the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, and Concerned Presbyterians. PCU was an organization of more than 500 ministers headed by John Richards and Paul Settle.

This coalition of leaders met in 1970 and several times thereafter, leading to the eventual formation of the PCA in 1973 (sans the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians).

3. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 3–4.

4. Carlton Wynne, "Machen and the PCA Today," *Reformed Forum Magazine* (Spring 2023): 6–8.

life of the PCA. Wynne's article provides a helpful summary overview. It applies Machen's concerns to the contemporary era of the PCA. In contrast, this present article aims to enumerate additional concerns found in *Christianity and Liberalism* and draw the connections between Machen and the PCA's founding in 1973.

J. Gresham Machen

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, on July 28, 1881 to Arthur Webster and Mary Jones ("Minnie") Gresham Machen, John Gresham Machen is considered by many to be the last of the great Princeton theologians. Though Machen's father was an Episcopalian, his mother was a Presbyterian from Macon, Georgia, and she reared her son in the tenets of Presbyterianism. The family's home church was part of the Southern Presbyterian Church (the PCUS), though Machen would eventually be ordained in the Northern church (the PCUSA) when he went on to teach at Princeton Seminary.

After majoring in classics at Johns Hopkins University, Machen studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and nearby Princeton University. During this time, Machen wrestled internally with whether he wanted to pursue ordained ministry. In 1905, he undertook theological studies in Germany for a year. Engaging with some of the most egregious expressions of theological liberalism, Machen experienced something of a crisis of the soul, though he eventually settled back into historical, orthodox Reformed convictions.

While in Germany, he received an offer to return and teach as an Instructor in New Testament at Princeton Seminary. At age 32, he was ordained in the Northern Presbyterian Church. He served at Princeton for some 23 years until a number of his colleagues and he moved on to found Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929. Machen's time at Princeton was briefly interrupted by his service in World War I, where he volunteered with the YMCA near the war front in France.

Amid the heady days of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy and following in the wake of Harry Emerson Fosdick's infamous 1922 "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" sermon, Machen was nominated as chair of Princeton Seminary's department of apologetics in 1926. However, his colleague, Charles Erdman, and the Seminary President, J. Ross Stevenson, opposed this nomination on the floor of the General Assembly. Because of this, the Assembly did not confirm Machen's election to the position.

Stevenson asked the Assembly to form a committee to help heal a perceived rift in the faculty. There were essentially two parties: one which believed that Princeton ought to propound the Westminster Confession of Faith as the system of doctrine taught in the Bible, and a second party that contended that the Seminary should represent the variety of views within the wider denomination. A complex series of interviews, investigations, committee recommendations, and additional committee appointments followed. Still, in the end, despite a petition bearing the signatures of over ten thousand ministers and elders of the church, the 1929 Assembly adopted the special committee's recommendation. The Seminary's constitution was amended, and the Seminary's Board of Trustees was reorganized, thus granting control of the institution to Machen's opponents. Machen resigned his faculty position at Princeton Seminary one month after its reorganization, and he subsequently relocated to Philadelphia to found Westminster Theological Seminary that same year.

On March 29, 1935, Machen's presbytery found him guilty of insubordination and stripped him of his ordination. Why was Machen charged so? The presbytery pursued Machen for founding the Independent Board of Foreign Missions in June of 1933, separate from the denomination's official mission board. The 1934 Assembly determined that Machen's action was one of disobedience to his ordination vows, and thus the judicatory removed him from the ministry. Though Machen appealed the Assembly's decision, his appeal was subsequently denied in 1936. Thus, Machen went on to found a new denomination that was eventually called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Machen died in North Dakota at age 55. It was Christmas break at Westminster Seminary, and he had taken the train to the 20–below-zero winds of North Dakota to preach in a few churches at the request of Pastor Samuel Allen. Contracting pneumonia, he soon found himself in the hospital. On New Year's Day 1937, he sent the now-famous telegram message to John Murray, his colleague at Westminster: "I'm so thankful for [the] active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." Machen died at about 7:30 that evening.

Westminster Seminary was seven years old when Machen died. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church was only six months old; Machen had been elected the denomination's first moderator.[5]

5. Randy Oliver, "Defender of the Faith: The Life of J. Gresham Machen, Parts 1 and 2," accessed June 9, 2023, https://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/ch/CH.h.Oliver.Machen.1.html#F1A; https://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/ch/CH.h.Oliver.Machen.2.html#F1A.

Setting the Scene: The Late 1960s

Let us consider the historical moment on the eve of the PCA's founding, just before 1973. To be sure, it was not as if these theological departures and moral compromises had arisen out of nowhere and suddenly erupted upon the American church in the mid-twentieth century. Rather, these ecclesiastical tremors had been gradually building for well over half a century, eventually brought to rupture at this point in the Southern Church. A similar boiling point had been reached fifty years earlier in the Northern Presbyterian Church. But it is beyond the purview of this article to survey the ascent of theological liberalism, which had been plaguing the American Presbyterian church since the late nineteenth century. Indeed, this was the very reason why Charles Hodge had gone away to spend two years in Europe—to study in order to confront and rebut the increasingly popular theological liberalism that was making inroads in Germany and coming soon to America.[6] The leftward drift in the church was something with which Old Princeton Seminary and northern Presbyterians had already been dealing (so Machen and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy) and was something with which both northern and southern Presbyterians had become sadly familiar. At this point, the controversy had reached a breaking point in the Southern Church.

It was the late 1960s in America, and all the social turmoil one associates with that era was operating at full force. With the shadow of the Cold War still looming large over society, America had entered the Vietnam War more tangibly; American political and civil life was fraught with tension. Protests in the streets and on university campuses abounded. Marxist political thought had found a broad embrace on many college campuses and among the rising generation of voters. The Civil Rights Movement was at its height, and its figurehead, Martin Luther King Jr., would eventually be assassinated on April 4, 1968. This was the proverbial era of "Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll." The Sexual Revolution of the 1950s and 60s had been making its inroads throughout American society, and the Southern Presbyterian Church had not been immune. G. Aiken Taylor (1920–1984) noted in an article from 1969 the shocking reality that the behavior promoted by the Sexual Revolution had received official endorsement from Presbyterian leadership. A Presbyterian campus minister in Colorado had written for the university newspaper at the University of Colorado, "…a radical ethical distinction must be made between pre-marital intercourse for the purposes of exploitation, entertainment, and gratification from what *may* be pre-marital intercourse by partners between whom a 'covenant of intimacy' exists."[7] Official Church Synod newspapers were offering similar counsel regarding the permissibility of premarital sex for Christian young people, and it seemed that the widely embraced situational ethics resounding from the lecture halls and civic platforms of the era had found a happy home even in the Church's pulpits and classrooms.[8]

The protests and demonstrations sweeping society and public university campuses had even begun to appear in Church-related institutions. Whether it was students demanding the right to keep alcohol in their rooms, or demanding that any vestiges of a Christian identity remaining in an institution's curriculum or mission be cast off, or even the University Christian Movement (an official campus work of the National Council of Churches) who had urged students to partake in various disruptive protests, there was a concerted effort by both adults and young people to shirk off any encumbering social restraint and Christian decency. What's more, the official organs of the PCUS in those days could seem to offer nothing better than capitulation. It is beyond the bounds of this article to comment or analyze in-depth on the matter. Suffice to note that, in an effort to minister and retain the youth of the Church who were being led waywardly by their peers, various youth services at the Montreat Conference Center in western North Carolina would offer attractional liturgical innovations. One such service featured

> "electric guitars and folk music, especially Bob Dylan's anthem 'Blowin' in the Wind,' a dialogue in place of the sermon that focused on social-gospel causes with no Bible references at all, and a lack of traditional liturgical structures. The evening service was more of the same: a jazz trio, a movie that focused on race and poverty, a message that called for economic and political justice,

6. W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 2011), pp. 116–117.

7. G. Aiken Taylor, "A New Sexual Ethic?," *Presbyterian Journal* (29 April 1964): 10.

8. In an official synod newspaper of the PCUS, a writer, in response to the question of premarital sex, responded, "There are so many situations, so many expressions of genital sex. What are they? Where are they appropriate? It is not realistic or possible to expect all youth to wait for marriage to engage in sex. We must not be judgmental. They need to know they will receive understanding from adults who influence them." L. Nelson Bell, "The Sex Revolution," *Presbyterian Journal* (24 April 1968): 13.

> a litany that focused on social sins, the Lord's Supper accompanied by 'We Shall Overcome,' and the service's ending with 'sacramental applause.'"[9]

But more fundamental than the turmoil wrought by society and the church's grappling with the Civil Rights Movement,[10] ascendent communism,[11] cries for the dissembling of the State,[12] the codification of female officers in the Church,[13] and breakneck departure from traditional sexual mores,[14] what alarmed leaders of the Southern Church was the departure of the Church from her confessional moorings. In these divergences, we find great concordance with the warnings issued by Machen a generation earlier.

What Are the Divisions?

For all the upheaval that had been increasingly evident through the 1950s and 60s—including sympathy with the societal drift that had become increasingly entrenched in the churches, seminaries, official agencies and courts of the PCUS— it was but a working out of the more elemental shift which had taken place: —a turning away from the authority of the Scripture and the codified teachings of the Reformed faith in the Westminster Standards. As noted above, this leftward drift had been something the Church had been contending with since the late nineteenth century, and the warning cries had been issuing since the 1920s. But now, it seemed, the lines of transgression had been irreversibly crossed.

In 1969, L. Nelson Bell published an article in the *Presbyterian Journal* entitled "What Are the Divisions?"[15] which originated as a speech he had delivered to a joint meeting of the Board of National Ministries and Christian Education at Montreat, North Carolina. In this article, Bell gives the salient points which were of grave concern to conservatives within the Southern Church.[16] I quote him at length here as he sets out what are, in his view, the fundamental fracture points in the Church's communion in those days:

> We feel that our seminaries have increasingly stressed a certain form of "scholarship" which takes precedence over the plain meaning of Holy Scriptures and with this there has come an ever increasing loss of spiritual power and relevancy….
>
> Another cause of division in the church is the intrusion into the life and worship of the Church of psychedelic forms of art and music which are unrelated to Jesus Christ. At best some of these suggest a childish aping of the world, and at worst blasphemy. Surely the Church does not have to appeal to the flesh in order to reach the spirits of people for Christ….
>
> Much is said about making the Church "relevant" to the world in which we live. But the most utterly "relevant" issue today has to do with sin and redemption, and this issue is too often evaded, ignored, or distorted….
>
> The most disturbing development in recent years is the substitution of Humanism for Christianity perhaps unwittingly but nevertheless certain. Humanism is primarily concerned with man's material, economic, social and political welfare. True Christianity is primarily concerned with man's soul and his spiritual welfare, now and for eternity….
>
> As the emphasis of the Church has shifted to men's social needs her influence has decreased. To her has been committed the Gospel of redemption (reconciliation if you wish), not some scheme of social engineering.[17]

And then, he enumerates what are perhaps the most basic of doctrinal points which must be agreed upon by God-fearing men and yet which are being consciously and flagrantly de-emphasized in the increasingly liberalized church:

9. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 216–217.
10. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 191–200.
11. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 201–207.
12. "Worse yet was the defense of SDS's actions by leaders at the 1969 Montreat youth conference and their urging of the destruction of the state and the redistribution of wealth. Was this the way in which the next generation was to engage the issues of the day? Was this how the church would include them in the work of the gospel?" Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, 216; Clydie [Paul Settle], "007 Rides Again," *Presbyterian Journal* (27 August 1969): 6.
13. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 212.
14. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 215.
15. L. Nelson Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," *Presbyterian Journal* (3 September 1969): 7–8, 21–22.
16. In his article, Bell quotes General William Booth (1829–1912) of the Salvation Army, who at one point proffered, "The chief danger of the twentieth century will be: Religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God and heaven without hell" Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," p. 7. This prescient statement sounds the same notes as H. Richard Niebuhr's (1894–1962) later famous summary of the theology of liberalism: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross" H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 193.
17. Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," pp. 7–8.

> Conversion in the New Testament sense.
> Repentance from sin.
> The new birth, which Jesus says, is an imperative, not an option.
> Heaven as man's eternal hope.
> Hell as a place of eternal separation from God.
> The Bible as God's revelation of truth.
>
> I regret to say that on most of these subjects the Church has become strangely silent, and where these words are used one often finds that they are used in a different sense from that of the Bible.
>
> There is division today, because many of us believe that there are certain absolutes….[18]

Near the end of his article, Bell outlines the final fissures of division as he sees them:

> There is division in the Church because the constitution of the Church—the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms—is no longer held valid by many… There is division in the Church because some are preoccupied with organization to the point where they are willing to sacrifice our position as a confessional Church on the altar of an inclusive ecumenism.[19]

Three years earlier, Roy LeCraw had distilled the controversy in the church thus:

> "The central issue is this: Is the Bible really God's infallible, inerrant witness to men, written by the hands of men who were directly under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit? Or is it merely a record of man's religious instincts, bearing witness to his 'growing awareness' of God but containing many allegories, myths and sayings which are only human in thought and application?"[20]

18. Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," p. 8.
19. Bell, "What Are the Divisions?," p. 21.
20. Roy LeCraw, "The Issue Is the Bible," *Presbyterian Journal* (31 August 1966): 12.
21. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism: Legacy Edition* (Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), p. 78.
22. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 78–79.
23. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 79.
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25. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 81.

Battle for the Bible: 1960s and 1920s

Decades earlier, Machen had been observing much the same divergence in his own ecclesial world. Modern liberalism in the early twentieth century had already been denying the plenary inspiration of Scripture. Therefore the authority which the Bible held in the esteem of conservatives was not to be found among theological Liberals. The Bible, while an eminently helpful and fascinating artifact of antiquity, *as a book,* held no greater authority than any other book.[21]

Given this new void of authority for one's theological convictions, the Modernist would often fill the space formerly held by the authority of the Bible with the authority *of Christ.* Many a Modernist finds distasteful some of the harsh-to-modern-sensibilities commands or the gruesome conquests condoned by God in the Old Testament. Or he finds some of the arguments and instructions of Paul to be out of step with contemporary sentiments. So he cannot ascribe such statements as those to be from the mouth of God, but merely evidence of the prejudices of the time and culture of the text's human author. But Christ—ah, the verbatim statements of Christ surely have divine quality, and therefore the theological basis and warrant for the Modernist's belief lies with the words of Jesus of Nazareth.[22]

But even here, many Modernists will admit that numerous statements attributed to Jesus are disagreeable—particularly those he makes concerning hell or his condemnation of certain sins and behaviors. And so even here, a "sifting within sifting" must occur to ascertain the truly authoritative words that form the basis for the Modernist's Christianity. It is not all the words in the Bible, nor is it simply all the words of Jesus, but only some of the words of Jesus which are authoritative (provided they survive the critical scrutiny and sophisticated scholarly criticism to which they must be subjected).[23] Ultimately, as Machen put it, the Modernist is obliged to reject a vast deal that is essential in Jesus' example and teaching—notably His consciousness of being the heavenly Messiah. The real authority, for theological Liberalism, can be only "the Christian consciousness" or "Christian experience."[24] Contra orthodox Christianity, which is founded upon the authoritative testimony of the whole of Scripture, Modernist-Liberalism was "founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men."[25]

Such rationale was something that the Southern Church leaders knew all too well. In 1968 Nelson Bell wrote that "the differences within the Church are primarily *doctrinal*, not operational, and it is

a deep cleavage about *the content of the Christian faith* which lies at the root of our trouble" (emphasis original).[26] As Machen observed in his day, one of the significant problems in Bell's era was the tendency toward refashioning Christianity into a subjective experientialism, one in which the emotional and psychological needs of the modern man were met through the so-called "Christian experience" or "Christ consciousness."[27] Bell observed that the essential tenets of genuine, historical Christianity were being decried as "rigid orthodoxy" in an effort to sweep aside what the modernist viewed as old-fashioned and cumbersome ideological restraints. Holding to such beliefs made for an obstreperous inflexibility that rendered the modern church incapable of ministering to a modern world with its modern needs.[28]

And what were some of these purportedly unfortunate, stubborn old-fashioned principles?

- An affirmation of Scripture's self-attestation that its words are "inspired by God";
- a belief in an actual virgin birth of the Lord Jesus;
- a belief in the truthfulness and historicity of the miracles purported to be performed by Jesus;
- the belief that Christ truly died and shed his blood on the cross of Calvary for the forgiveness of the sins of his people;
- the belief that Christ truly rose again in the self-same body that was slain on the cross and that numerous of his disciples saw him, heard him, ate with him, and touched that body;
- the belief that heaven and hell are real places to which the souls of all men (one way or the other) are destined and that Satan is a real and malicious personality actively laboring against the purposes of God;
- the conviction that the message of salvation on the basis of faith in the once-dead-now-risen Jesus for the forgiveness of sins is the only hope for mankind and that this message must be proclaimed profligately throughout the world.[29]

The careful reader will observe the overlap between Bell's enumerated list of convictions and the tenets held by the so-called "Fundamentalists" of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of Machen's day.[30]

Doctrine and Scripture

But, as was true in Machen's day, so it was proving to be likewise in the days of the PCA founders: the fact needed to be insisted upon that Christianity was, at its core, a religion founded on doctrine and historicity, not sentiment or mere aspiration.[31] The proponents of theological Liberalism seemed fixated on ridding Christianity of all previous advancements in understanding from generations past. To disregard or discard the advances of earlier eras in an academic field, with the desire to start afresh in every age—such a practice would be utter folly in any other scientific discipline. But in theology, such an approach was celebrated, as such an approach was in the service of returning to a more pristine iteration of Christianity. Machen diagnoses this approach inherent to Liberalism as simply a disdain for doctrine. But this disdain, Liberalism would claim, is merely a healthy skepticism toward the *historic presentations or summations of Bible teaching*. However, Machen holds that it is a scorn not merely to historical *expressions* of Bible teaching but a disdain to the teaching of Scripture itself—against the words of Paul or the Lord Jesus as much as it is against the propositions of Nicaea.[32]

The theological Liberals of Machen's day were keen to "emancipate" Christianity from the accretions of doctrine that it had amassed over the centuries, with some even cataloging the doctrinal accretions from the early church and even the Apostle Paul! Ultimately, they desired to return to the pure, primitive, non-doctrinal religion announced by Jesus himself.[33] The Jesus of Liberalism was a man who announced general principles of religion, ethics, and wise maxims for living. However, even if one granted the claims of the text-critical scholars and their reductionistic approach to the four gospel accounts, one would still be left with a religion proclaimed by Jesus that is very much wedded to the announcement of an historical event and not merely permanent moral principles. Jesus announced an event, a rooted-in-history event that had a bearing on the souls of men, but an historical

26. L. Nelson Bell, "One Moment Please," *Presbyterian Journal* (11 December 1968): 10.

27. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 80.

28. Bell, "One Moment Please," p. 10.

29. Bell, "One Moment Please," pp. 10–11.

30. The "five points of fundamentalism" were, namely: the verbal inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Birth, a substitutionary theory of the Atonement, and the physical and bodily return of Christ. F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone, eds. "Fundamentalism," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 650.

31. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 47.

32. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 46.

33. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 29–30.

occurrence nonetheless. Moreover, he interpreted the event he announced: the coming of the Kingdom. According to Jesus, this Kingdom-Arrival was the turning point of the ages, and a great share of his recorded teachings revolve around what a life lived in that Kingdom ought to look like[34]—doctrine for life as a Kingdom disciple:

> The modern liberal desires to produce upon the minds of simple Christians (and upon his own mind) the impression of some sort of continuity between modern liberalism and the thought and life of the great Apostle. But such an impression is altogether misleading. Paul is not interested, merely in the ethical principles of Jesus; he was not interested merely in general principles of religion or of ethics. On the contrary, he was interested in the redeeming work of Christ and its effect upon us. His primary interest was in Christian doctrine, and Christian doctrine not merely in its presuppositions, but at its centre. If Christianity is to be made independent of doctrine, then Paulinism must be removed from Christianity root and branch.[35]

Years later, in 1961, Aiken Taylor observed, "Today's departures from the faith—in the name of orthodoxy—are many. However, the reasons why there are such departures are relatively few…and invariably associated with some basic attitude toward the Bible or the church."[36] Taylor lamented that this attitude had been so widely embraced by the church in his day (an attitude not unlike that adopted during Machen's day): that the Bible is more concerned about facilitating man having an experience of religion rather than explaining or giving understanding to the subject of religion itself.

34. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 31–32.

35. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 25–26.

36. G. Aiken Taylor, "'Biblical' Theology," *Presbyterian Journal* (25 October 1961): 5.

37. D. G. Hart, "Machen on Barth: Introduction to a Recently Uncovered Paper," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 189–96.

38. "Machen, however, in what became his typical response to inquiries about neoorthodoxy, said that he did not think the theology of crisis was a return to evangelical Christianity, but his limited knowledge made final judgment difficult. So for a fuller assessment Machen referred the Scribner's executive to Cornelius Van Til, Westminster's newly appointed professor of apologetics who eventually became one of America's most outspoken foes of Barthianism." Hart, "Machen on Barth," p. 189.

39. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 18.

40. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 221.

Christianity and Encounterism

Here it is incumbent upon us to note that one difference that must be acknowledged between the theological Liberalism of Machen's day and the Liberalism with which the PCA founders dealt was the more full-orbed presence of Barthianism or Neo-Orthodoxy in the latter variety. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the influence of Barthianism on the PCUS in any meaningful way. Still, it should be noted that Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1962) outlived Machen by some twenty-five years, and Barth's *magnum opus, Church Dogmatics*, was published in stages from 1932 to 1967. While the full-flowered Barthianism that impacted the Southern Church in the 1960s may not have been at its developed capacity in Machen's day, Machen was undoubtedly aware of Barth and had engaged with some of Barth's early publications, which had been released before Machen's death.[37] So while Machen's interactions with the works of Barth and neo-orthodoxy were limited,[38] their effects on the North American theological world were not insignificant.

Astute readers may have already noted the careful bifurcation in the language employed by proponents of theological Liberalism (which Machen was ardently opposing): the division between historical events or facts with religious principles, ethics, and morality. In Machen's day, this Liberal conviction was often expressed as portraying Christianity not so much as doctrine but as a life lived in conformity to the principles of love and brotherhood espoused by Jesus of Nazareth.[39] While these earlier iterations of Liberalism were not as concerned with understanding Christianity in terms of being an historical phenomenon, Barthianism *did* seek to recapture understanding Christianity as an "event." The problem is that even with Barthianism's sympathy toward historicity, its redefinition of "event" led neo-orthodoxy to share the same fatal flaw with earlier theological Liberalism: a redefinition or downplaying of doctrine.[40]

Machen observed that in his time, Liberals were averse to a faith founded upon propositions:

> What is it that forms the content of that primitive teaching [of the church]? Is it a general principle of the fatherliness of God or the brotherliness of man? Is it a vague admiration for the character of Jesus such as that which prevails in the modern Church? Nothing could be further from the fact. "Christ died for our sins," said the primitive disciples, "according to the Scriptures; he was buried; he has been raised on the third day according

> to the Scriptures." From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name "gospel" or "good news" implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth; and when the meaning of the happening was set forth then there was Christian doctrine. "Christ died"—that is history; "Christ died for our sins"—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.[41]

Likewise, the Southern Presbyterians dealt with this aversion to propositional religion in their day. In redefining "event" as something more along the lines of "encounter," the definition of "revelation" had likewise been redefined. Instead of the divine self-revelation being the source of mankind's knowledge of God, human religious experience (or "event") was now reckoned as that source.[42] Again, Aiken Taylor summarized, "The modern theologian says that God is *all* the time doing things and every act is a *revelation* of Him. When we rightly interpret His acts they *become* revelations to us" (emphasis original). According to Taylor, three of the great fallacies to which the Church had fallen prey in his day were the notions that 1) Revelation is Event, 2) The Bible is Witness and Instrument, and 3) The Church is Mission.[43]

Again, the influence of Barthianism can be detected in that second notion, the idea that the Bible itself was not God's revelation but only a *witness to* and *instrument of* that revelation. Revelation was anything—any *event*—by which man had a God-encounter and was not exclusively the domain of sacred Scripture.[44] For Barthians, committed as they were to Christocentrism over against the earlier Liberals' quest for the "historical Jesus," the greatest revelation of all was the self-revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.[45] The Bible was a valuable *witness to* this revelation, it was an *instrument* (perhaps the most ideal instrument) *to* this revelation, but it was not itself entirely synonymous with God's revelation. Revelation was an event; thus, any religious experience/event that a man underwent served as a kind of revelation to him. From the perspective of the conservatives in the PCUS, the unfortunate consequence was that—paraphrasing Syndrome from Disney-Pixar's 2004 film, *The Incredibles*—if everything is revelation, nothing is.[46]

A further consequence—and recapitulation of what Machen saw in his day—is the separation of religious experience from religious knowledge or teaching. The words of the Bible were understood as "the fruit of some one's reflection upon God's mighty acts in the world."[47] Scripture was but one, if not the chief, witness among several to God's revelation. Like a witness in a courtroom setting, the witness is not the same thing as the event or the crime, but rather one who can *point to* and *give an account of* the event. Of course, the problem here—as both Taylor and Machen before him denoted—was that historical events in Scripture were always accompanied by context and propositional truths that offered an interpretation of the "religious encounter." It was often the pattern of Scripture not to simply "witness" to an event but to explain that event with propositional truths—doctrine.[48] Taylor argued that Christians understood that "revelation is first and foremost intellectual propositions" that interpreted the mighty acts of God in history.[49]

Doctrine of Christ

Not only was the doctrine of revelation undermined in the 1920s and the 1960s, but so was the doctrine of Christ, and often in a similar fashion. Because of the ascendent neo-orthodox view that, on the one hand, purported a great Christocentricity and sought to place the great emphasis of Christian theology on the supreme revelation of God's self-disclosure through Christ, yet on the other hand, created a dichotomy between Christ and his Word, the Southern Presbyterians in the late 1960s were forced to play close attention to the theological word-games

41. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 26–27.

42. H. M. Rumscheidt. "Neo-Orthodoxy," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith,* ed. Donald K. McKim, 1st ed., (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 254.

43. G. Aiken Taylor, "'Biblical' Theology," p. 5.

44. G. Aiken Taylor, "'Biblical' Theology," p. 6.

45. H. M. Rumscheidt, "Neo-Orthodoxy," p. 254.

46. "God's Truth Does Not Change," Gateway Resource Library, July 1, 2022, https://gatewayresourcelibrary.com/gods-truth-does-not-change/.

47. G. Aiken Taylor, "It Is!-It Isn't!-It Is!-It Isn't!" *Presbyterian Journal* (January 15, 1964): 8.

48. "Jesus announced not only an event; He announced also the meaning of the event…He certainly did announce an approaching event; and He certainly did not announce the event without giving some account of its meaning. But when He gave an account of the meaning of the event, no matter how brief that account may have been, He was overstepping the line that separates an undogmatic religion, or even a dogmatic religion that teaches only eternal principles, from one that is rooted in the significance of definite historical facts; He was placing a great gulf between Himself and the philosophic modern liberalism which today incorrectly bears His name." Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 32–33.

49. G. Aiken Taylor, "Revelation Is More Than Event," *Presbyterian Journal* (September 4, 1963): 11.

being played in their day. In September 1964, Aiken Taylor observed this wordsmithing sleight-of-hand in his editorial "Christ *and* Scripture, or Christ *in* Scripture?"

In denominational Christian Education publications, he observed that the need to know Christ and the need to know his Word were often treated as two distinct endeavors: "Our people must know the Bible *and* they must know what life in Christ means…We must teach the Bible in the church school. We must *also* teach those things pertaining to man's response to God in the 20th century."[50] He traced out this bifurcation which, more than suggesting, outright asserted that knowing the Bible's content was an entirely different endeavor from knowing Christ Jesus; one may come to know Jesus Christ apart from the Bible. The prevailing doctrinal attitude in the Southern Church during these days, insofar as it understood the relation to Christ and the Bible, was that to read and study the Bible would serve one in a significant accumulation of facts but that Christianity truly entailed coming to know Christ—a sentiment to which, at face value, any conservative, orthodox Christian would add his hearty "Amen!" However, that same orthodox believer would insist that—far from being competing endeavors—the way to know Christ is to meet him through his appointed manner of disclosure, namely his Word. To know Christ is to know him through the Scripture:

> The Christian religion is a religion of revelation, of truth, of the Word of God. The Bible (which is God's revelation, His truth, His Word) is not a substitute for Christ, it is the way *to* Christ. It is the divinely appointed means of grace whereby we find Christ, meet Christ, learn of Christ—and in which we commune with Christ.[51]

While many of the editorial letters in the *Presbyterian Journal* focus more specifically on the doctrine of Scripture, many touch on matters that have implications regarding the doctrine of Christ. In 1964, Nelson Bell wrote an editorial in which he highlighted the remarkable similarity of matters as they played out during the era of Machen and the present:

> During the "Fundamentalist-Modernist" controversy of thirty years ago strenuous objections were raised against any definition of "essential doctrines." Nevertheless, the fact remains that *unless there are essential doctrines there can be no Christianity*, for the Christian faith is about a Person and there are things to believe and things to preach about the Lord Jesus Christ which center in Who He is and what He has done.[52]

Bell observed that the theological sea changes were certainly *different* doctrines than those historically confessed, but the phenomenon was hardly new. Indeed, these doctrinal and ecclesiological divergences were simply a regurgitation of old errors with which the church had often contended—throughout the centuries and even a mere forty years prior, such as the Northern Church dealt with in Machen's day. The "new theology," "new morality," and "new evangelism" (which will come into further play below under the doctrine of the church) were hardly new at all. Rather, they were tired rehashes of previous attempts to bring the church's doctrine and practice into closer alignment with contemporary mores.[53] Furthermore, this new theology was keen to distance itself from the conviction that all men are genuinely lost apart from Christ.[54] And if man is not utterly lost in his sin, if his sinfulness is just a tainting and not a death sentence that alienates him from an utterly holy and righteous God, what real need is there for a sinless Christ to redeem sinful wretches?[55] Could it be that the saints of old, from the ancient fathers to the martyrs of the Reformation, perished needlessly believing and contending for such a doctrine?[56]

50. G. Aiken Taylor, "Christ *and* Scripture, or Christ *in* Scripture?," *Presbyterian Journal* (September 2, 1964): 14.

51. Taylor, "Christ *and* Scripture, or Christ *in* Scripture?," 14.

52. L. Nelson Bell, "For This We Must Contend," *Presbyterian Journal* (January 8, 1964): 9.

53. Aiken Taylor quotes a letter published in a PCUS seminary student newspaper in which two students assert, "We fail to see how the Church can become theologically responsible and obedient to the voice of the Spirit until steps are taken to change the present situation." G. Aiken Taylor, "When There's a Stand To Take," *Presbyterian Journal*, (December 16, 1964): 12.

54. L. Nelson Bell, "Not 'New'—But Very Different," *Presbyterian Journal* (May 26, 1965): 7.

55. Although Bell does not explicitly make the connection, the downplaying of man's sinfulness often came hand-in-hand with the doctrine of the "fallen humanity of Christ" that was promoted in Barthianism, a theological strain that was at its height of popularity in these days. Denying the utter sinlessness of Christ was a common notion in the theological liberalism against which Machen contended. However, the liberals of his day came at this notion from a different angle than the neo-orthodox theologians with whom the later twentieth-century Southern Presbyterians were dealing. Though distinct, this denial of the sinlessness of Christ has significant overlap in terms of the problems it raised. For further examination of this notion, see Thomas Haviland-Pabst, "Christ's Humanity in Current and Ancient Controversy: Fallen or Not?," *Themelios* 43, no. 2, accessed June 9, 2023, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/christs-humanity-in-current-and-ancient-controversy-fallen-or-not/.

56. L. Nelson Bell, "Were They Wrong?," *Presbyterian Journal* (April 2, 1969): 15.

Likewise, Aiken Taylor observed the theologians of his day advocating that the church should continue promoting the salvation available in Christ while not insisting that one believes in the Christ of the Scriptures. Assent to the doctrines of the virgin birth, the miracles of Christ, heaven, hell, and the like were not essential. Strangely, while one might employ terms such as "God," "Salvation," "Jesus Christ," "Holy Spirit," and "Gospel," it was not incumbent upon one to take these terms in the same manner as the Scriptures from which he acquired those terms.[57]

The Southern Presbyterian church dealt with aberrant Christology due to the influence of Barthianism that had been winding its way through the academy and seminaries for the past decades. The Christological errors with which they dealt were slightly different from those with which Machen had to contend, for full-fledged Barthianism had yet to run rampant through the North American context, as noted above. However, there were notable similarities between earlier and later errors, and there was some overlap between the doctrine of Christ aberrations of the 1960s and those that Machen observed in his day. Those aberrations with which the Southern Presbyterians dealt generally fell into the same two broad tendencies as in the time of Machen: namely, 1) downplaying the sinfulness of man while suggesting the potential sinfulness of Christ in his human nature, and 2) a downplaying of the supernatural events or miracles of Scripture. Machen observed that the great project of theological Liberalism insisted that man was not so morally heinous as conservatives would posit. Rather, man simply stood in need of moral improvement. As such, Jesus did not come so much to deliver man from a judicial condemnation or cosmic wrath but to model an ethic of love by which all mankind could be raised to a higher plane of living. So then, if man's sin was not an issue that needed addressing, it is no longer quite so necessary that the Jesus of history, whom we read about in the Scripture, be sinless.

For Liberals, this posed no problem on an intellectual level. But, for adherents to the Christian faith, Machen observed, that thing which makes Jesus utterly unique among man—indeed wholly other from mankind—is taken away. If the sinlessness of Jesus is denied, this new theologically Liberal faith system bears no continuity between itself and the historical iterations of Christianity.[58] Indeed, in redefining this doctrine of Christ, it must be said that the religion of Christianity and the religion of liberalism hold two very different views as to the significance of Jesus of Nazareth:

> There is a profound difference, then, in the attitude assumed by modern liberalism and by Christianity toward Jesus the Lord. Liberalism regards Him as an Example and Guide; Christianity, as a Saviour: liberalism makes an example of faith; Christianity, the object of faith…liberalism regards Jesus as the fairest flower of humanity; Christianity regards him as a supernatural person.[59]

Machen further observes that this tendency within Liberalism to downplay Jesus' sinlessness, in essence, denies his identity as a Supernatural Person and that this intellectual redefinition in the category of "sin" is not too far removed from the category of "miracle." Suppose Jesus is not a Supernatural Person as it pertains to sin. In that case, it follows that he is not a Supernatural Person at all, and therefore the miracles attributed to him—or at least the theological requirement that one must assent to belief in the miraculous aspects about his person—need not be affirmed.[60]

Machen admits that, supposing Liberalism might be correct, it would be far easier for one to believe and embrace the New Testament were it not for its miraculous accounts, but then the Jesus that is presented in Scripture is nothing but an ideal (or ethic or "new morality" as the later iterations of this theology would put it) to imitate. Christians are left, then, with a man worth emulating and a higher lifestyle-ethic worth enacting, but for "those who are under the thralldom of sin [this] is a cruel mockery…if Jesus was merely a man like the rest of men, than an ideal is all that we have in Him."[61] Once again, to reject the miraculous aspect of the person of Jesus—and so to redefine the doctrine of Christ to make Christian theology more palatable to modern sensibilities—is to reject the Savior as he is disclosed in the Scripture:

> Reject the miracles and you have in Jesus the fairest flower of humanity who made such an impression upon His followers that after His death they could not believe that He had perished but experienced hallucinations in which they thought they saw Him risen from the dead; accept the miracles, and you have a Saviour who came voluntarily into this world for our salvation, suffered for our sins upon the Cross, rose again from the dead by

57. G. Aiken Taylor, "'Believe the Gospel' Includes Miracles," *Presbyterian Journal* (December 12, 1962): 10.
58. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 91.
59. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 98–99.
60. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 102ff.
61. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 106.

> the power of God, and ever lives to make intercession for us. The difference between those two views is the difference between two totally diverse religions.[62]

The rebuttal Machen articulated was much the same as the later Southern Presbyterians insisted upon: to deny the miraculous aspects of Christ's life and ministry is to gut Christianity of its essence. One is left with a religion that may be some kind of spirituality, but it is not the Christianity of the Scriptures, for Christ Jesus is essentially a supernatural Person.[63] Moreover, far from being simply an example by which men are inspired to live lives of loftier ideals,[64] "Jesus is no mere example *for* faith; but the object *of* faith" [emphasis mine].[65]

Doctrine of the Church

Not only were the doctrines of revelation and Scripture assaulted with similar tactics in the 1920s and 1960s, but so too was the doctrine of the church. As Lucas notes in his work,[66] and Aiken Taylor likewise,[67] three of the great fallacies to which the church had fallen prey in Taylor's day were the notions that 1) Revelation is Event, 2) The Bible is Witness and Instrument, and 3) The Church is Mission. In that last arena, we find the church doctrine malignantly redefined, both in the days of Machen and in the days of the PCA's founding.

In the 1960s, the increasingly popular notion was that church did not "do" missions; instead, it *was* mission. Taylor argued that this "essentially pantheistic existentialism" would result in the negation of "world missions" and global evangelism efforts.[68] In some regards, the aforementioned trends were three facets of the same gem. That is, the new assertions of "Revelation is Event," "The Bible is Witness and Instrument," and "The Church is Mission" were all just three particular extrapolations of the prevailing "subjective and existential approach to religion" that had arisen via the strange Barthian and liberal theological amalgamation against which the Southern Church was contending.[69]

In this re-casting of the church's identity as "mission," Taylor observes that this essentially conflates the church as institution or organism or people with the task that God has given the church to do: "'Church' means 'the called ones.' 'The Church is mission' therefore means, '*The called ones is mission.*' That is about as enlightening as saying 'Women is marriage.'"[70] The Liberal notion was that the church was really just one vast missionary initiative, and therefore the church could not but help be a constant missionary endeavor, for that is the task to which she was called.[71] But Taylor and others would argue back that while, yes, Christians are called to the missionary enterprise, that was precisely the point: the church *does* missions; it does not follow that because the church is busy with the work of missions throughout the world that the church *is* mission. Certainly, the church *has* a mission, but it does not existentially "become" mission merely by existing in places throughout the world. Taylor perhaps captured the mistaken impulse best when he summarized it as:

> "The Church is mission" is the offspring of a universalist theology which rebels at the thought that some people have something which other people don't have … [according to this modern theological opinion] evangelism must not be thought of in terms of some who "have" and others who "have not." All men are under the Lordship of Christ, but some are in mission, some are not yet in mission — while the mission itself embraces *all* men.[72]

Lucas summarizes this radical redefining of the institutional church's essential, organic identity by the mid-twentieth century Liberals when he observes, "Instead of sending missionaries who were specifically called to a particular field to share the gospel, each Christian's secular calling contributed to God's mission and every sphere in which the individual found himself provided the opportunity to assist in forming an authentic human community."[73] Instead of the church being that place where the good news of Christ was proclaimed to sinners in need of reconciliation with the holy God with whom they were alienated, the church was rather a *mission* bent on proclaiming—by existing and facilitating—throughout the world "political, social, and economic justice." Instead of the church being that organization into which sinners

62. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 112.
63. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 116; Taylor, "'Believe the Gospel' Includes Miracles," 10.
64. "Today there are many who would so dilute Christianity and so broaden its base as to make it nothing more than a glorified set of moral and ethical standards." Bell, "Were They Wrong?," p. 15.
65. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 116.
66. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 222.
67. Taylor, "'Biblical' Theology," 6, 16.
68. G. Aiken Taylor, "'Mission' a Threat to World Missions," *Presbyterian Journal* (August 1, 1962): 10–11.
69. G. Aiken Taylor, "'Biblical' Theology," 16.
70. G. Aiken Taylor, "'Biblical' Theology," 16.
71. Taylor, "'Mission' a Threat to World Missions," 10.
72. G. Aiken Taylor, "That Word 'Mission,'" *Presbyterian Journal* (February 13, 1963): 10.
73. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 223.

were gathered for the worshipping of the Risen Lord Jesus and the perfecting of the saints, the church rather ought to "[realize] one's existential situation guided the individual in the application of love for the purpose of human flourishing."[74]

In Machen's day, similar-sounding notes had been struck. The later neo-orthodox/Barthian influence of the mid-twentieth century provided a variation on a theme from what was uttered in the 1920s. Attacks on the doctrine of the atonement, for instance, provided the launchpad for several of Machen's articulations. Machen's concerns regarding the church had more to do with how two entirely different theological belief systems could cohabitate in the same spiritual communion. In contrast, the PCUS was struggling through an attempt to redefine church "as mission" and likewise redefine missions and evangelism in the process.

But if the aberrations to the understanding of "church" and man's need concerning God and what the church offered to such a needy world were not of the same *species* in these two eras, there were undoubtedly of the same *genus*. As the Southern Presbyterian conservatives contended against a downplaying of man's native sinfulness and their opponents' assertion that what the world truly needed (and what the church could offer) was economic and social justice and an opportunity for human flourishing, Machen observed in his era a "supreme confidence in human goodness." Beneath men's "rough exterior" was enough human nobility, if one would but dig deep enough, that it would overcome the world's evil.[75] The help that man needed to aid him in his plight was entirely native: "The evil that is in man is to be overcome not by a foreign good but by a good which man himself possesses."[76]

The need of mankind was, as Machen surmised from these Liberal interlocutors, remarkably superficial and—he hastened to add—pagan. Machen observed, startlingly, that 75 years prior, the culture had been predominantly Christian. But as he took stock of the culture in 1923, he found it to be predominantly pagan.[77] One wonders what he might have made of the cultural milieu of 1973, to say nothing of 2023.

The great need of the moment, as the theological Liberals of the 1960s saw it, was human flourishing. In 1923, Machen noted quite the same:

> Modern preachers are trying to bring men into the Church without requiring them to relinquish their pride; they are trying to help men avoid the conviction of sin. The preacher gets up into the pulpit, opens the Bible, and addresses the congregation somewhat as follows: "You people are very good," he says; "you respond to every appeal that looks toward the welfare of the community. Now we have in the Bible—especially in the life of Jesus—something so good that we believe it is good enough even for you good people."

Contrary to an outlook that assumed man's basic goodness and need for flourishing, Machen would argue, "The situation of mankind was desperate because of sin; but God has changed the situation by the atoning death of Christ." That God had done something about man's hopelessly dreadful condition is, in fact, what makes the good news good.[78] The mission of the church, Machen's opponents would assert, is to preach a salvation that will save all men everywhere, irrespective of whether they have heard of Christ or what kind of life they might live. The church need not offer doctrine but something which "will meet the universal need of the world… some means of making effective in right living whatever creed men may chance to have."[79]

Another common overlap between the eras is an emphasis on experience. Revelation as event, a man encountering a Christ-experience as Scripture witnesses to Christ, and an experiential church that lives mission were all key emphases in the 1960s. Machen observed in his time that the "modern liberal Church is fond of appealing to experience. But where shall true Christian experience be found if not in the blessed peace which comes from Calvary?"[80] In this statement, Machen was speaking specifically in defense of the traditional doctrine of the atonement and not the doctrine of the church, per se. Nevertheless, the emphasis on *experience* paving the way to one's churchly belonging and the downplaying of old, "harsher" doctrines to redefine them along more palatable lines was common in both eras.

To speak of man's alienation from a holy God who was angry at sin was a horrifying notion to the liberals of Machen's day.[81] God's righteousness and holy purity were not attributes to be emphasized nearly so much as his love—a quality to be highlighted at the expense of all others: "Let us, it is urged, regard Him not as a moody Despot, not as a sternly righteous Judge, but simply as a loving Father."[82]

74. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 223.
75. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 65.
76. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 142.
77. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 66.
78. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p .125.
79. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 126–127.
80. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* pp. 132–133.
81. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 135.
82. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 137.

In what is perhaps his most damning indictment of the redefining of the church's message and mission for the needs of the modern era, Machen states (emphasis mine):

> [Regarding] the improvement of earthly conditions … these things indeed are to be welcomed. They may so palliate the symptoms of sin that there may be time to apply the *true remedy*; they may serve to produce conditions upon the earth favorable to the propagation of the gospel message; they are even valuable for their own sake. But in themselves their value, to the Christian, is certainly small. A solid building cannot be constructed when all the materials are faulty; *a blessed society cannot be formed out of men who are still under the curse of sin.*[83]

Rather than the church being that institution ordained to proclaim the message of God and sinners reconciled, Machen was persuaded that, in too many cases, she had merely become another mouthpiece pontificating earthly solutions to earthly miseries. Rather than propagating the news of peace with God, freedom from sin, and everlasting hope, the church had contented herself with merely advocating for a program for earthly betterment: "Thus the warfare of the world has entered even into the house of God. And sad indeed is the heart of the man who has come seeking peace."[84]

A New Seminary, New Missions Agency, and New Denomination

As a brief aside, what follows here is not so much an academic thesis to pursue but rather an historical parallel to note. While there is likely no grand implication to derive here, it is interesting to observe that in the Northern Presbyterian Church as Machen endured his travails, Westminster Theological Seminary was founded in 1929, and the OPC was founded a few years later in 1936. Around that time, Machen also founded the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1933. Seven years passed between the founding of a new Northern Presbyterian Seminary and the new Northern Presbyterian Church.

A generation later, similar trials were happening in the Southern Presbyterian Church. Reformed Theological Seminary was founded in 1966 in Jackson, Mississippi. And then, seven years later, in 1973, the PCA was established in Birmingham, Alabama, first named the National Presbyterian Church, changing to its present name the following year. Just prior to the founding of RTS, the new Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship was established in 1964.[85] Kenneth Keyes notes that Rev. William P. Hill organized the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship when it became evident that those at the helm of the PCUS's Board of Missions were no longer interested in evangelism. As the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions had become for the Northern Church, the PEF eventually became a sending agency for missionaries that Southern conservatives could support.[86] Many Southern churches had stopped supporting the PCUS' Board of World Missions for reasons not dissimilar to those which led Machen to disavow the PCUSA's Board of Foreign Missions.

While not making overly much of the similarities between the "origin stories" of the PCA and the OPC, they are nevertheless interesting to note: a new seminary, a new missions agency, and then a new denomination—in each case, with seven years' time between the new seminary and the new denomination's establishment.

Conclusion

There is more that could (and likely should) be said on this subject and further research to be done, but that is beyond the purview of the present article. Although the challenges posed by the theological Liberalism in Machen's day were not identical with the Barthian-influenced liberalism faced by PCUS conservatives in the mid-century, the pressing issues at both the founding of the PCA and the issues outlined by Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism* have significant overlap. As observed in this article, merely by considering issues surrounding the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of Christ, and the doctrine of the church, one finds striking similarities between the theologically Liberal contentions and conservative-orthodox rebuttals in both the 1920s and the 1960s. Northern and Southern Presbyterians faced remarkably similar battles within a generation of one another.

Further analysis might be pursued by comparing additional doctrinal *loci* of Machen (both in *Christianity and Liberalism* and his other works) with the issues raised by conservative Southern Church leaders which were not covered in this article. Further research might also be conducted regarding the specific men who had

83. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 162.
84. Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism,* p. 184.
85. "PEF: Our History," Reformed Evangelistic Fellowship, accessed June 20, 2023, https://www.refglobal.org/our-history.html.
86. Keyes, "History of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)," https://www.jrp-pca.org/about-jrp/a-brief-history-of-the-pca/.



J. Gresham. Machen, undated photograph.

trained at Westminster Seminary who would later be part of the "Conservative Coalition" in the PCUS and eventually serve in the PCA. It would be fascinating to document who those specific ministers were (as well as those who might have served first in the OPC and later came to serve in the PCUS/PCA) such that the organic connection between Machen and his seminary and the founding of the PCA could be conclusively substantiated.[87] But even in analyzing the handful of doctrinal concerns outlined by Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism* with those of some of the PCA founders in the years leading up to 1973, the salient matters are too similar to be coincidental. It is evident that the convictions and concerns of Machen were matters of which the Southern Presbyterian leaders were undoubtedly aware, and that Machen's own ecclesiastical experiences had informed their concerns.

Sufficient for the purposes of this article is to conclude that the shadow of Machen loomed large in the minds of the founders of the PCA. The spirit of 1923, however auxiliary, was very much at play in the actions that led to December 7th, 1973.▪

87. As but one example of an organic connection, the PCA Historical Center notes William A. McIlwaine's correspondence with Machen. McIlwaine pastored a church in Florida (that now bears his name), which went on to become one of the founding congregations of the PCA in 1973. Contained in that correspondence collection are seven letters: dated 21 August 1934; 8 September 1934; 19 January 1935; 16 February 1935; 11 May 1935; 6 April 1936; and 20 May 1936 [one page each]. See pcahistory.org/pca/50th/index.html.

***In Brief*: A New Denomination (1,974 years old!). This excerpt is drawn from Otto Whittaker, *Watchman, tell it true: The life and Here-I-Am-Lord times of Bill Hill—pastor, evangelist, and one-time liberal who came back to every jot and tittle of the inerrant Word of God* (Manassas, VA: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1981), pp. 411–451.**

Fifty months after [Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship founder and executive director] Bill [Hill]'s "Go Along Or Go Forth" article, 260 PCUS churches would depart that denomination to form [the] "PCA"—the Presbyterian Church in America—and continue worship as set forth by the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, the Book of Church Order, and other historical Presbyterian documents.

Millions of words might be written to detail the dissensions between PCUS liberals and conservatives, which, during those fifty months, led progressively to "the Separation"….

When PCUS presbyteries in 1954 voted down the proposed union with the highly liberal northern Presbyterian church, those who had voted *for* union, feeling only the loss of a battle in a war which still might be won, simply began working all the harder, using assorted irregular and often unconstitutional strategies for union at any cost. By 1970 they had already radically deflected the teachings of all four PCUS seminaries away from dedication to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God and from commitment to the church's historic Westminster Standards, and a Joint Committee Of Twenty-Four (12 representatives of each PCUS and UPCUSA) was busily working on a study draft of a new Plan of Union to be presented to the 1971 General Assemblies of both churches….

Another action of the 1971 General Assembly had been to denounce a PEF work which had tended to give Bill an image best described as "the Gresham Machen of the southern Presbyterian church."

This work began in 1969 when Ben Wilkinson, who some years later would succeed Bill as PEF's executive director, went to Mexico with Jimmy Lyons, then pastor of Swannanoa Presbyterian, Swannanoa, N.C., and returned appalled by the quality of evangelism they'd found there. Knowing Bill's concern for foreign missions—a concern intensified by Dr. Nelson Bell's resignation from the Board of World Missions after five years of looking on while much of its purpose was detoured—he lost no time in reporting to Bill and the PEF board the situation he and Jimmy had found south of the border.

In January, 1970, the board directed the PEF executive committee to form a commission to study the situation and report on the advisability of beginning a program of overseas evangelism consistent with the stated purposes of the Fellowship. Acting on the commission's recommendations, PEF a short time later established its Executive Commission On Overseas Evangelism—familiarly written ECOE and pronounced "echo"….

At its first meeting ECOE faced what [board chairman] Jimmy Lyons recalled as "a grim question. Would we be willing to become a *sending* agency for missionaries overseas? That is to say, would we actually send out missionaries from ECOE? The question was debated into the wee hours of the night. Over and over it was predicted that if we took this step of actually sending missionaries out, rather than just sending financial support to selected ones, we would be putting the life of PEF in jeopardy. There could be such a severe reaction on the part of the liberal hierarchy [of the PCUS] that the whole Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship could be 'outlawed' as far as the southern Presbyterian churches were concerned. It could very well mean the end of everything Bill Hill had worked and prayed for through the years. But Bill was absolutely fearless. 'So what?' he said. 'God started PEF and PEF is not going to end until He's ready for it to end. And if this is the time for [it] to end, then we wouldn't want it otherwise.'"….

In its 1971 censure, the PCUS General Assembly had described ECOE's method of operation as "a grave departure from the orderly process of the Church," and with that statement rather automatically had also denounced ECOE's parent organization, the PEF…. During these same days in 1971, Jimmy Lyons recalled, "PEF collectively and individually bore a great deal of vilification" from the PCUS liberal leadership—cheered on, no doubt, by the UPCUSA leadership and the National Council of Churches.

Understandably, no one in PEF bore more of such vilification than Bill Hill. The fact that he had founded PEF and was its leader, compounded by his membership on the Steering Committee For A Continuing Presbyterian Church and "the Gresham Machen image" that ECOE had given him in some eyes, especially aimed liberals' abuse at him.

As part of the "severe reaction on the part of the liberal hierarchy" foreseen as early as 1970, Bill on April 2, 1972, was called on the carpet by an administrative Commission especially appointed by Hanover Presbytery "to investigate the activities of members of the Presbytery in organizations promoting a continuing church." As Bill implied in a statement read before the Commission, the summons issued him had described the purpose of the meeting somewhat more jovially:

"Since the chairman of this Commission informed me that the purpose of this meeting was to get acquainted," he said, "I would like to begin by telling you something about myself."

He then read them an eight-page report covering his Presbyterian ancestry, conversion, schooling, and ministry, in which he said, "More than ever, after I went into full-time evangelism and began talking with ministers and laymen all over our denomination, I realized what was taking place in it." Declaring to his investigators that he had made it a policy

not to discuss those realizations in the pulpit, he then turned directly to the real issue:

"It appears that this evening by an act of Presbytery I am being questioned for having fully adhered to the faith of my fathers, holding firm to the Bible and the standards of the Church. The indication is that I am being accused of having violated my ordination vows in believing the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of our Church, thus refusing to be a part of a Church which does not believe them and wants to abandon them.

"Then I am accused by implication of being divisive and disturbing the peace of the church. Let me point out to you, gentlemen, that there is a published document written by an appointed commission of our General Assembly which in itself will divide our Church. The document was written with that presupposition. It was written into a plan by which the church may be divided. Those who promoted the appointment of the commission on union with the northern Church are themselves the dividers of our Church. Those who work to abandon the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and unite with a church which has no binding doctrinal standards are themselves the dividers of our church. They are determined to go into a new church and fifty-five times in this Plan of Union that church is referred to as just that, a *new* church.

"So if anyone is going into a new church, they are the ones. I am not going anywhere. I am continuing in the same church I've been in all my life, the same church in which my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were ordained ministers. I am continuing to believe what I believe our church has always stood for. They may take the power structure and carry it into their new church if they wish; they certainly will not carry the Confession of Faith or the Catechisms into it because, for the most part, they don't believe them.

"In the meantime, those who believe as I do will carry on the work of evangelism and teaching according to the instructions of the Word of God in a *continuing* church. Not a *new* church, but a *continuing* church.

"It is a monstrous lie to say that those who hold true to the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, and the governmental structure set forth in the Book of Church Order prior to 1933, when the liberals began tampering with it, are dividing the church. Efforts of the liberals, sometimes *undercover* efforts, systematically from the early 'Thirties have increasingly divided our church. It is now split wide open, and those who do not believe the standards on which it was born are the ones who have split it….

"The departure of my church [the PCUS] from the Word of God, from its own constitution and polity by the apparently deliberate design of the radical ecumenicals, together with what this organization proposes to do in the next few years, make me feel that it is no longer the church to which I made my ordination vows. I have kept those vows and intend to keep them as part of a church which will continue true to the Word of God. Those who are like-minded, when the present ecclesiastical power structure is pulled out from under us, intend to form another more spiritual and more useful in the hands of the Lord, who said, 'Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"

In the informal discussion that followed his statement, Bill told the Commission that he expected to leave the church. Asked why he hadn't already left it, he answered that he was "waiting for some of my brethren to make up their minds."

Dr. Ernest Trice Thompson, a member of the Commission, asked whether Bill felt any guilt about using contributions given to PEF to finance ECOE.

"There's nothing to feel guilty about," Bill told him. "We have clearly made public the purpose of ECOE. In meetings, our men clearly and carefully ask that if there are any in the congregation who don't want any part of their contributions to PEF used for ECOE, they need only to so designate when giving." (It should be noted that there never was any ill will between Bill and Dr. Thompson. In fact, in mentioning "E.T.'s" name in connection with his Seminary schooling, Bill paused in his report to say, "Dr. Thompson has always been my friend and I value that friendship, even though I disagree profoundly with some of his views of Scripture and fundamental doctrines of the faith.")

Surprisingly, the Commission in its report to Presbytery stated that it had received assurance from Bill that he had not and did not intend to "initiate efforts to convince any person or congregation not already committed, to join the Steering Committee's attempt to organize a continuing body of organizations and presbyteries outside the ongoing life of the PCUS."

Bill immediately made written protest to the Commission:

"Gentlemen, there is very definitely some misunderstanding here…. I now clearly state that I did not, do not, and will not give any such assurance of my intentions as you reported to Presbytery. To do so would be to violate my conscience before God…."

In August, 1972 the Eastern Heights Presbyterian Church of Savannah, Ga., which had already separated from [the] PCUS and declared its status as independent, announced a meeting to be held the first week of September "to organize a Vanguard Presbytery for a Continuing Presbyterian Church"….

Some members of the Steering Committee had mixed emotions about the Vanguard action, wondering if it would in any way undercut the Committee's plans. It had taken most of them by surprise, but not the Committee's administrator, Dr. John Richards, who had worked closely with Todd Allen and, after Vanguard's formation, had invited him to sit in on Steering Committee meetings.

Nor had Bill Hill been taken by surprise. On the contrary, he had been invited to attend the organizational meeting, but had declined for several reasons…. [The Steering Committee] had determined, they reminded Bill, to wait until February, when they would know whether the "escape clause" was still in the Plan of Union to be voted upon.

"I told those who insisted on waiting that there was nothing to be gained by it," Bill recalled. "I told them there wasn't going to be any escape clause in the Plan, and that they knew it, so all we'd do was lose another five or six months' time. They didn't disagree, but they did feel that having waited as long as we had, we could well afford to wait a little longer, because then we'd have 'established fact' to work with instead of 'educated guess.' And they had a point there.

"But I'd promised the Lord I wouldn't stay in a church whose leaders dishonored Him after February, and I knew that if the Steering Committee waited until then for the Plan of Union, we'd still need another two or three months after that to get rolling. So I went ahead and asked Hanover to dismiss me so I could join Vanguard."

Hanover summarily refused his request. To dismiss him to Vanguard would constitute an official recognition of Vanguard, an action to which nothing could move them.

So Bill joined Vanguard without such sanction… As it turned out, Hanover's refusal to dismiss was a matter of record, but its reproach was yet to come…. At its April meeting—held ironically at the Rivermont Church near Hopewell which Bill had organized—it brought against him "defrocking charges for joining a presbytery without permission of his own"…. Bill, however, still had friends in Hanover—conservatives, middle-of-the-roaders, and even a few who leaned leftward—and they joined strongly to protest any attempt thus to banish him from PCUS pulpits.

Dr. E. T. Thompson satisfied all parties concerned, the *Richmond News Leader* said, "by offering in a conciliatory gesture the resolution that recognizes that Mr. Hill has left the church, notes that the Presbytery regrets it, and 'wishes God's blessings on his future work.'"

In response to that motion, the newspaper reported, "A voice vote roared approval."

In May, 1973, ministers and elders representing 260 PCUS churches met at Atlanta in a convocation called by the Steering Committee for the purpose of deciding whether conservatives should establish a Presbyterian denomination independent of [the] PCUS.

At that meeting, Bill Hill delivered the opening message…. He had titled his talk "The No-Compromise Man And the No-Compromise Church." As the following excerpts show, it was not only a subject fitting that occasion, but also one even more appropriate, even priceless, today and in the days still ahead.

Explaining that the Word of God abounds with illustrations of both [the] no-compromise man and the no-compromise church, he expounded on these in reverse order:

"Our Lord in the *Revelation* writes to each of the seven churches of Asia Minor. Out of the seven there are only two for which He has no word of rebuke. To the other five He says many things by way of commendation but always comes around to a solemn warning about ways in which they have *compromised*.

"The two no-compromise churches stand out as shining lights. One was the church at Smyrna…. He commends them for their steadfastness under trouble and poverty, assures them that they have vast spiritual riches, comforts them with the fact that He knows they have resisted, and have exposed and cast out infiltrators of the 'synagogue of Satan.' He tells them of things they must yet suffer, saying 'Fear none of these things…. The devil shall cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried and ye shall have tribulation ten days.' *Then comes the great challenge:* 'Be thou faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.'

"The other church honored is that at Philadelphia. He assures them that He knows their work, challenges them by saying, 'I have set before you an open door, which no man can shut.' He knows that despite their small size and weakness they have kept His Word and have not denied His name. He assures them that at the Judgment Seat all will know that He looks with a special favor upon this no-compromise church … that He also will keep them in the 'hour of temptation which is coming upon the whole world to try them that crawl upon the earth'….

"As we read these letters our hearts thrill with admiration and joy for the two no-compromise churches. They have been unwilling to compromise in faith and in morals. They have been quick to detect hypocrisy and to turn from it. As we come to these days when God seems to be setting before us 'an open door,' surely we should listen to His words and hear the ring of His challenge, 'Hold fast that which thou has. Let no man take away thy crown—be faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.'

"Two no-compromise churches. There was *something good* in all of the other churches, but that good was spoiled by compromise. Now, let's turn our attention more specifically to the no-compromise *man*, because no-compromise churches must be made up of no-compromise men.

"There are three things about a no-compromise man: 1) He refuses to compromise in small things and as a result, he does not fail when the big test comes. 2) He refuses to make his decisions on the basis of possible harmful consequences to himself. 3) He is obedient to the Word of God and separates himself from unbelief and immorality.…

"This is a hard lesson to learn. It is particularly hard in these

soft, easy-going days of permissiveness. It's easy to compromise today. It's easy to rationalize and say, 'Well, under the circumstances there doesn't seem to be any harm, and who knows, maybe some good will come if I go ahead and conform.' Oh, sure, we know at the time that we are compromising in a sense and that we are going along with unbelief and apostasy and immorality, but it's easy to think that 'in these modern times' maybe that's the best thing to do.

"And then we rationalize that if we take a stand it will divide some churches, divide the denomination, and cause untold bitterness and ill will, so maybe we better go along and live in peace. We are too concerned with saving our own necks, saving our property, saving our ecclesiastical reputation. We don't want to make fools of ourselves, so what's the harm in just going along, when maybe some good will come out of it? And it's so easy just to compromise and save our own necks. Lots of people fall for this line. Lots of *good* people. Lots of *judicious* people. Lots of *sincere* people. Lots of *godly* people.

"But not the no-compromise man. If it is the fiery furnace that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego preferred to compromise, so be it. If it means the loss of church property, so be it. If it means the loss of face and reputation, so be it. God helping us, we will stand in the face of laughter, in the face of misunderstanding, in the face of bitterness and persecution. No matter what the cost, we will stand and we will not make our decision on the basis of what happens to us as a result.

"Our Lord faced this same crisis as He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. He knew what awaited Him there. He could have turned back, gone out into the Gentile world, and done much good. But He knew God's will, so He set His face steadfastly toward Jerusalem. Then that lonely night in Gethsemane when He struggled … praying that the cup might pass from Him, that He might not have to drink its bitter potion…. He could easily have slipped away that night and eluded the enemy. He could have done much good. He could have lived out His life in peace. Except for one thing: He refused to compromise, even to save Himself from His enemies….

"All through life we face dreaded decisions. I am thinking now of a group of men who were deliberating and wrestling in prayer and conference about a decision for the future. They said, 'What if it means the end of our organization? What if it means that our friends will leave us?' But they made their decision deliberately; regardless of what the consequences might be, regardless of what the power structure might do, regardless of threats from presbyteries and General Assembly, without compromise they decided to go forward and not turn back.

"Hardly ever does any man face a decision quite as momentous as we are facing today. There are those who say, this movement might fail. It might fragment. We might lose our church property. We might be branded as schismatics. Bitterness and recrimination might follow our decision. What will we do? Considering the possible tragic consequences but despite such possibilities, leaving everything in God's hands, we must make a clear and unfaltering decision that we will not compromise with unbelief and immorality in high places in the Church.

"The no-compromise man never in such decision takes into consideration possible evil consequences to himself. He is bound by the Word of God, as he sees it. He must obey God, not men….

"Does the Word of God preach separation from unbelief and apostasy? Separation from immorality?.... Is our task that of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth? Can we do it best in a reborn church, faithful to the Scripture and to the Reformed faith and obedient to the last command?

"A successful army must have an impregnable beachhead, a fortress from which to move out and conquer. Can we move out and witness from a corrupt, tottering ecclesiastical power structure controlled by men whose testimony is not clear and who compromise and distort the Gospel? What will we do? I cannot say for you, my brothers, but I can say for myself. I will not go on in compromise. I am ashamed that I have gone along as long as I have. The time has come to obey God and not compromise.

"In closing, may I … give you a word of personal testimony? ... God gave me a burning passion to be used by Him to bring men to Christ. But at Seminary I got a mixture of truth and unbelief. I had sown in my mind the seeds of doubt about certain parts of the Word of God. I wasn't greatly bothered by it. I was all for seeing people changed and not too particular about the authority of God's Word. I remember how I sneered at fundamentalists. I participated with the liberal leadership of my presbytery, seconded motions for overtures from Hanover Presbytery to the General Assembly, motions which laid the foundation for the liberal takeover. How blind I was … how ashamed I am now….

"But some six or seven years after I entered the ministry God began to show me—particularly through a godly retired missionary who worked in our midst in Hopewell—that I was a ship without an anchor. The missionary had seen what I was, and out of her meager pension, offered to pay my way to Moody Bible Institute for a week-long program commemorating its one-hundredth anniversary.

"I went, didn't like what I heard, thought all the speakers were too critical and narrow-minded…. And yet, God was dealing with me … before very long He opened my eyes to the total and absolute authority of the Word of God … my ministry began to change. I began to see … that there were strong forces in the wrong direction in the church … in most all Protestant denominations … I didn't say much about it. Didn't tell my people about it. I said that it was enough just to preach the truth and not worry them with a lot of stuff

that didn't really concern them. After a while God showed me what a mistake I was making.

"I began to warn my people, as God taught me, about the dangers of liberal tendencies in the church. In the 'Fifties God called me away from my pastorate to full-time evangelism and as I visited in hundreds of churches across the Southland, I began to see how deep the inroads of unbelief and apostasy were, how they reached down even to the smaller churches….

"This is an awesome hour. For myself, I must say that there can be no turning back, regardless of the cost. I know from personal experience—having participated in it for a time—what goes on in the liberal establishment. I want no part of it. No matter how painful or humbling the future may be, God helping me I can no longer compromise the Gospel or disobey my Lord.

"Some may disagree, and I respect their sincerity. But for me, *any turning back would be a sinful violation of my conscience and disobedience to Almighty God.* I know the reborn church will not be a perfect church. I do not know whether or not it will fragment. I do not know the future—but I do know the decision I must make; to decide otherwise would be to compromise.

"It's said back in the [early 1900s], Dr. Warfield, a professor at Princeton, was out for an afternoon walk on the even of a General Assembly meeting which was held at the very height of the controversy between liberalism and orthodoxy in the Northern Church. As he strolled along, he met a lady of the neighborhood who said to him, 'Oh, Dr. Warfield, I *do* hope and pray that we're going to have peace at this General Assembly!'

"'Yes, madam,' that stalwart defender of the faith replied, 'I, too, hope and pray that there will be peace—*but never peace at the expense of truth.*'

"Like Dr. Warfield, we'd like to see peace, but we cannot, dare not, compromise truth for the sake of peace. I think I can hear the Lord saying to us, 'Behold, I set before you an open door. Fear not the tribulation which will come upon you … be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.'"

Almost unanimously, the ministers and elders attending that meeting in May, 1973, voted to establish a Presbyterian denomination independent of [the] PCUS. After a second organizational meeting in August, the first General Assembly of that denomination was held in December at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. There 382 commissions representing 260 congregations adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith and other historic Presbyterian standards and appointed committees to administer home missions, world missions, Christian education, and business affairs, with that the "re-birth" of the continuing church—the Presbyterian Church in America[1]—was complete and official.

One of the first acts of the Steering Committee after its organization in 1971 had been to ask Morton H. Smith to make a study of the PCUS General Assembly's departure from Scripture and from doctrinal standards,[2] a project later documented by the book, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*.[3] In that book Dr. Smith, professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, had expressed the widely acknowledged truth that "if a new church is to be formed … she must assume the work on evangelism and missions as well as the nurture of her own." In obedience to that conviction, PEF offered and [the] PCA accepted ECOE—its thirteen missionaries and candidates and a fund of almost $100,000—to help the church's own newborn agency, Mission to the World.▪

1. The name first chosen for the denomination was *National Presbyterian Church*, but that choice was protested by a UPCUSA church in Washington, D.C., which bore the same name. Although it probably could have defeated threatened legal action, the new denomination quietly deferred and adopted *Presbyterian Church in America*.

2. "The departures of [the] PCUS from her historic positions are so massive," Dr. Smith wrote, "that it is difficult to document them fully. We have thus limited this study to actions of the General Assembly of the church."

3. [Ed. Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim (Lamentations 4:1): the decline of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., as reflected in its Assembly actions* (Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed faith, [Jackson, MS], 1973), xii, 202pp. Repr. 2nd ed., xii, 448pp.]▪

Machen's Other Warrior Children:
Conservative Presbyterianism in the OPC and PCA

By D. G. Hart

In 2010, around the time that officers in the Presbyterian Church in America were debating the Strategic Plan, Tim Keller gave a talk entitled, "What's So Great about the PCA." However influential the New York City pastor's remarks were for the majority of commissioners who approved the plan to make the PCA missional, Keller's history of American Presbyterianism was instructive for a very important reason. He decided to narrate the history of Presbyterianism as an extension of evangelicalism. Say what you will about the relations between evangelical Protestants and Presbyterians, agreements between them have never come easily easy if you think that Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, and Billy Graham are in any way representative of both groups. But to his credit, Keller followed the history of evangelicalism, warts and all, with ruptures between pro- and anti-revival Presbyterians as part of the story. He also threw in the rise of neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands so that he could use what has become a standard classification of Reformed Protestantism along the categories of doctrinalists, pietists, and culturalists (or transformationalists). This grid allowed Keller to refer to the Neo-Evangelical movement, led by Harold John Ockenga, Carl Henry, and Billy Graham (and related institutions) as the rise of an orthodox culturalist Protestantism. Unlike the Protestant mainline whose transformationalism had turned liberal in the form of the Social Gospel, Neo-Evangelicals had produced a version of Protestantism characterized by sound doctrine, warm piety, and cultural influence.[1]

Not only did Keller minimize difference between Presbyterianism and evangelicalism over Arminianism, eschatology, charismatic gifts, sacraments, and church polity, but the diversity of the PCA was precisely a reason to recommend the communion. The PCA had all the branches of Presbyterianism—doctrinalism, pietism, and culturalism—and generally maintained harmonious relations among them. The PCA's "big tent," according to Keller, did not weaken the denomination's commitments to "Biblical inerrancy and Reformed soteriology" while remaining "open to both Old School and New School emphases."[2]

At the same time, Keller conceded that the breadth of the PCA was responsible for several controversies in the church, and a factor in ongoing suspicions among the denomination's various constituencies. Even so, Keller believed diversity was a strength. Each of the branches needed the other as a form of ecclesiastical checks-and-balances. Of course, Presbyterian polity is inherently a vehicle for keeping everyone—from the laity to denominational offices—in check. But Keller thought the rivalry between doctrinalists, pietists, and culturalists produced a healthy diversity and also reflected the richness of Reformed Protestantism.[3]

As much as Keller's recommendation of the PCA adds momentum to the questionable habit of rendering Presbyterianism a subset of evangelical Protestantism, his account also gives ammunition to those who see significant discontinuities between evangelicals and Reformed Protestants. Such differences are no less evident in the PCA's relationship to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Keller himself nodded in the direction of PCA-OPC relations when he observed that Orthodox Presbyterians were overwhelmingly

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1. Timothy Keller, "What's So Great about the PCA," June 2010, available at https://scottsauls.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Whats-So-Great-About-the-PCA-Tim-Keller.pdf. Accessed Sept. 11, 2023.
2. Keller, ibid., p. 12.
3. Keller, ibid., p. 18.

doctrinalist in ways similar to both Old Side and Old School Presbyterians. Keller also acknowledged a pietistic strain in the OPC coming from the New Life movement launched by Jack Miller (with which Keller himself was associated). Keller admitted that New Life churches left the OPC to realign with the PCA (see below) because of frustration with the OPC's reputation for strict doctrine as opposed to the PCA's pietistic ethos.

That way of putting the differences between the two Presbyterian bodies is perhaps as simplistic as it is provocative. It also may not be the best way to frame a historic tension among American Presbyterians from trying to construct a denominational identity that is both Reformed and evangelical. One chapter in this abiding discomfort is the history of perceptions among northern and southern Presbyterian conservatives between the late 1930s and 1990. If southern conservatives took inspiration from Machen and the OPC in the 1940s, followed by Orthodox Presbyterian optimism about the newly formed PCA in the 1970s, by the 1980s the OPC and PCA had settled into separate communions that approached the evangelical-Presbyterian dynamic in distinct ways. However much each communion suffers from ecclesiastical stereotypes, the evangelical struggle in the American Presbyterian soul explains the sometimes warm and other times frosty relations between the OPC and PCA.

Southerners Take Cues from the North

Sean Michael Lucas finishes his book, *For A Continuing Church* (2015), with a contrast between J. Gresham Machen's assessment of the OPC at its first General Assembly (June 1936) and the vision behind the PCA thirty-five years later. In his sermon at the assembly, Machen announced "we became members, at last, of a true Presbyterian Church; we recovered, at last, the blessing of true Christian fellowship."[4] After sixteen years of contested General Assemblies, a failed battle to retain Princeton Seminary's theological heritage, and a public fight over liberalism among Presbyterian foreign missions, Machen's declaration was as much a sigh of relief as it was another instance of provocation. He and fellow conservatives no longer had to contend with liberal theology and equivocal denominational bureaucracies (and their equally cagey bureaucrats). Lucas adds that at the beginning, the OPC was uncomfortable with its membership of 5,000. He writes that Machen thought other conservative Presbyterians would eventually leave the PCUSA for the OPC. But the split between the OPC and Bible Presbyterians (1937—six months after Machen died), left the OPC a "limited, smaller, confessionally particular" Presbyterian church.[5] In contrast, the PCA at its founding avoided debates over "details in the Reformed system of doctrine." Denominational leaders wanted to continue "the largely evangelical and evangelistic emphases of the southern church while upholding the inerrancy of the Bible and the truth of the [Westminster Confession]."[6] Never mind that Lucas skirts the potential for protracted debate that often attends parsing a "system of doctrine." Still, Lucas' point is plausible—the PCA either intuitively, and in some cases deliberately, chose a path different than that of the OPC—breadth instead of narrowness, evangelistic outreach instead of Reformed militancy, winsomeness instead of polemics.

Subsequent history of the PCA bears out this contrast, but for PCUS conservatives who contended with a Southern Presbyterian version of liberal Protestantism, Machen and the OPC were admirable examples of combating error and resisting bureaucratic mission creep. The most sustained attention to Machen and the OPC that Lucas includes in his book comes from the period after 1939 when the southern Presbyterian denomination was considering revisions to the Westminster Confession—changes that were designed, as the northern church's revisions of 1903 had been, to facilitate church union. For southern conservatives, the dots were easy to connect—if the PCUS was going to unite with the PCUSA, and if the northern church had just come through a major set of theological and institutional controversies, what sort of church exactly were southern Presbyterians joining?

Some southern pastors—Edward Ford and Robert Fry, for example—who invoked Machen and the OPC were either not alive for the PCA's founding or no longer significant voices in the 1960s controversies. But Lucas does follow their objections to the drift of the PCUS in the 1930s and the parallels they drew between the northern and southern denominations. Ford called attention to the "Auburn Affirmation" as one indication of the PCUSA's theological breadth and he lamented that signers of the statement were filling important positions in seminaries and PCUSA offices.[7] Fry echoed Ford when he argued that the PCUSA was guilty of ecclesiastical tyranny by forcing Machen and

4. J. G. Machen quoted in Sean Michael Lucas, *For A Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2015), p. 315.

5. Lucas, ibid., p. 315.

6. Lucas, ibid., p. 318.

7. Quoted in Lucas, ibid., p. 140.

other conservatives to support all of the denomination's programs and agencies and threatening with discipline if they did not.[8]

Some PCUS pastors tried to discount the influence of modernism in the PCUSA which in turn gave southern conservatives room to report on developments in the northern denomination. For instance, Dunbar Ogden, a New Orleans pastor, argued that modernism in the PCUSA had been "discredited" and for the "past fifteen years there has been a decided movement toward theological conservatism."[9] He went as far as to assert that Machen deserved to be tried by his presbytery because the formation of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (1934) was "profoundly un-Presbyterian."[10] William Childs Robinson, a conservative professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, replied to Ogden that the PCUSA's trial of conservatives was merely a "legislative exercise of power" to punish dissent. Robinson also faulted the PCUSA's theological laxity. If the southern church were to unite with the PCUSA, she would "be giving away our corporate testimony to the doctrine of the atonement found in our Standards."[11] George Summey, a southern Presbyterian theologian who died in 1954 well before the PCA's founding, echoed Robinson when he observed the large presence of the social gospel in the PCUSA as well as the increasingly heavy-handed nature of the church bureaucracy. Machen's trial and suspension from the ministry was the most recent example of such "top-down judicial processes."[12]

If southern Presbyterian conservatives were aware of Machen's role in the Presbyterian controversy, Orthodox Presbyterians were also following debates in the PCUS about confessional revision and church union. OPC attention to the South started with a direct connection to Machen—namely, his brother, Arthur, who brought a complaint to the Presbytery of Potomac to compel Franklin Street Presbyterian Church to refrain from union services with two PCUSA congregations in Baltimore, Brown Memorial and First Presbyterian. These joint meetings were a tradition of summertime congregational life. But after the Machen trial, Arthur W. Machen was not inclined to cooperate with PCUSA congregations. Among Arthur Machen's objections was the prevalence of doctrinal error in the PCUSA as signatures to the Auburn Affirmation demonstrated. Presbytery did not sustain the complaint (28–3). The appeal to the Synod of Virginia also failed (14–1). But the Machen family was still making news among American Presbyterians and the PCUS was now on the OPC's radar.[13]

For the next ten years, the *Presbyterian Guardian* followed debates about confessional revision and church union in the Southern church. John Murray, for instance, directly countered a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, J. B. Green, who was one of the most vocal defenders of confessional revision. Murray contended that revisions undermined "the witness of the church to the absolute sovereignty of God in His discriminating decree," as well as "placating the enemies of what is one of the pillars of the Reformed Faith."[14] Two years later, Leslie W. Sloat, a lecturer at Westminster Seminary, reported on the place of the Auburn Affirmation in church union debates within the PCUS. What especially caught his eye was Walter L. Lingle's attempt to whitewash the Affirmation by underscoring appeals to the church's constitution. Lingle, who taught at Union Seminary (Richmond) and became president of Davidson College, supported church union and needed to explain away the "Auburn Affirmation" to win over at least moderates in the PCUS. As someone who had witnessed the effects of the "Affirmation" on the northern church, Sloat would not let Lingle ignore the "Affirmation"'s equivocation on the Confession of Faith.[15]

Editors of the *Guardian* continued to monitor developments in the PCUS. Sometimes they added inspirational appeals to Southern Presbyterian legends like "Dabney, Girardeau, Hoge, and Palmer," who Arthur W. Kuschke referred to as "giants of former days" whose "love for the system of truth" was the chief reason for their "abiding greatness."[16] Other times the editors actually asked for donations to The Southern Church Fund, an agency to support ruling elders in the PCUS who had written and signed a pamphlet that opposed church union.[17] Sometimes the *Guardian* published articles by southern conservatives, such as Garland M. McNutt (not mentioned in Lucas' book), an elder

8. Quoted in Lucas, ibid., p. 141.
9. Quoted in Lucas, ibid., p. 142.
10. Lucas, ibid., p. 142.
11. Quoted in Lucas, ibid., p. 143.
12. Quoted in Lucas, ibid., p. 144.
13. "A Christian's Plea in the Southern Church: An Editorial," *Presbyterian Guardian* (February, 1938): 21–23.
14. John Murray, "Proposed Confessional Revision in the Presbyterian Church in the United States," *Presbyterian Guardian* (November, 1938): 210.
15. Leslie W. Sloat, "The Southern Church and the Auburn Affirmation," *Presbyterian Guardian* (August 10, 1940): 36.
16. Arthur W. Kuschke, "Five Years for the South?," *Presbyterian Guardian* (July, 1948): 172.
17. "The Presbyterian Guardian and the Southern Church," *Presbyterian Guardian* (March 25, 1939): 88.

commissioner to the 1939 PCUS General Assembly. For McNutt, the fact that the same people at the Assembly all favored creedal revision, church union, and joining the Federal Council of Churches was telling of a "decidedly" downward trend in the PCUS that was compromising its status as a bulwark against theological liberalism.[18]

The final word on the PCUS from Orthodox Presbyterians before the 1960s came in 1949 from Paul Woolley who compared the recent General Assemblies of the PCUS and PCUSA. The professor of church history at Westminster was actually encouraged by deliberations within the PCUS where commissioners postponed indefinitely discussions of church union and promoted evangelism. Woolley did not think the future for the PCUS was bright if only because of the "non-Christian position taken by evangelicals on the Negro question." Yet, he also detected more support for evangelism and more grass roots participation than in the northern church.[19]

If the example of Machen and the OPC inspired southern conservatives, the lessons learned were ambiguous. On the question of church union, the OPC's history was a warning to PCUS conservatives about the theological rot and bureaucratic overreach of the northern church. But on the matter of confessional revision, a subject that was part of the OPC's early history when the communion rejected the 1903 confessional revisions that were virtually identical to the changes before the PCUS, southern conservatives paid no attention. The one figure in the southern church who opposed both creedal revision and church union was William Childs Robinson, professor of biblical theology at Columbia Seminary. He may also have known and followed Machen's difficulties the most of anyone in the southern church. His comparison of Machen in America to Barth in Germany was certainly one of the most remarkable comments issued during the southern church's debates:

> Those who enjoy a bit of irony may notice that the same General Assembly of 1934 which laid its iron mandate to bind the conscience of Dr. Machen, passed a resolution commending the German Protestants for refusing to obey those actions of the Nazi church which contravene a minister's exclusive allegiance to the Word of God. With a much more vague and less adequate understanding of what the Word of God is, Karl Barth is indeed challenging the German church with the same issue that the Machen case has raised in the USA church. Is the voice of the church ultimate; or is it only penultimate, with the Word of God ultimate? Is not the Word of God above the church judging her? Barth rightly declares that the material as well as the formal principle of the Reformed Reformation is neither this or that particular doctrine; but a doctrine that is primal for all doctrine, namely, that God is the sole author of doctrine... Shall we stand for the authority of the Word of God in Germany; and the authority of the voice of the church in America? Or shall we return to the sole headship of Christ in His church, and the sufficiency of His Word as a rule of faith and practice?[20]

PCA Inspiration for OPC Fatigue

The triangulation of PCUS-PCUSA-OPC perceptions reemerged in the 1960s when confessional creation supplanted creedal revision. In 1967 the PCUSA produced a new confession of faith, redundantly titled The Confession of 1967. For the OPC this profession, which contained a Barthian view of Scripture and gave room for the PCUSA to nod in the direction of social justice in a chapter on "Reconciliation in Society" (i.e., war, poverty, and sex), was momentous. For southern conservatives, the Confession of 1967 was background noise to ongoing talks about church union and women's ordination.[21]

Why was the new PCUSA confession so important to the OPC? The answer lies in Machen's belief that the OPC was the spiritual successor to the PCUSA. That claim, not by any means a constitutional provision within the OPC, defined the first three decades of OPC history. By claiming to be the true northern church as it were, the OPC and PCUSA were supposed to be in competition for the soul of American Presbyterianism. This explains why Orthodox Presbyterian leaders kept peppering PCUSA conservatives with reasons why they should leave the mainline denomination and join the OPC. Basic to this denominational competition was a common confession of faith—the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. In the aftermath of the Presbyterian controversy (of the 1920s), one of those

18. Garland M. McNutt, "Southern Crossroads," *Presbyterian Guardian* (January, 1939): 3.

19. Paul Woolley, "Assemblies North and South," *Presbyterian Guardian* (July, 1949): 179.

20. William Childs Robinson, "Which is the Rule of Faith and Life: The Word of God or the Voice of the Church?," *Christianity Today* (June 1935): 6.

21. The Confession of 1967 is absent from both Lucas, *For A Continuing Church* and David W. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America: The First Fifty Years* (Powder Springs, GA: Covenant Foundation, 2023).

communions genuinely affirmed the Presbyterian confessional heritage and the other equivocated. With the Confession of 1967, however, that competition ended. In the minds of Orthodox Presbyterians, the two denominations were truly distinct because they had different confessional standards.[22]

The Confession of 1967 left Orthodox Presbyterians disoriented. After 1967 the OPC entered a period when the denomination fluctuated between Presbyterian and evangelical trends. But while being tempted to make alliances in sectors of American evangelicalism, the emergence of southern conservatives in the PCUS reignited among Orthodox Presbyterians hopes for conservative Presbyterianism. Here were conservatives combating liberalism just as Machen had almost fifty years earlier. Perhaps the cause of true Presbyterianism could embrace both the OPC and southern conservatives. One additional circumstance of note was that by 1972 the OPC's negotiations for union with the Christian Reformed Church had basically stalled. Since its founding, the OPC had always enjoyed good relations with other confessional Reformed communions and sought ways to join in a common ministry. With the battle over the true PCUSA behind and the loss of a longtime friend in the CRC, the OPC was experiencing ecclesiastical loneliness and the PCA looked like a potentially pleasing partner.

Signs of the OPC's good will to the PCA came in the *Presbyterian Guardian* where the new communion's General Assemblies received extensive coverage. Editors devoted the January 1974 issue of the magazine to the PCA's (then National Presbyterian Church) First General Assembly, held at Briarwood Presbyterian Church a month earlier. Paul Settle explained to *Guardian* readers why southern conservatives finally needed to separate (one big reason was that plans for union with the northern church left no room for conservatives to get out).[23] G. Aiken Taylor wrote to compliment the OPC and RPCES for faring well after withdrawing from the mainline denomination.[24] W. Jack Williamson wrote a long article to explain the PCA's sense of mission—the Bible, evangelism, and the Westminster Confession.[25] The *Guardian*'s editors also printed an epistle from the PCA to "All Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the World," a statement that echoed Williamson's article but that also appealed to the doctrine of the spirituality of the church when it stated that "We understand the task of the church to be primarily declarative and ministerial, not legislative or magisterial."[26] One reason for such extensive treatment of the PCA in the *Guardian* was that the magazine's editor, John J. Mitchell, had grown up in the PCUS. In the write up of his observations as a visitor to the General Assembly, Mitchell exclaimed delight in beholding the PCA's desire to make "the Reformed faith a real force in American life." As the son of the manse in the PCUS, then ordained as a deacon but rejected as a candidate for ministry, Mitchell was thrilled to feel "thoroughly at home and strongly involved in all that went on."[27]

By the time of the fourth General Assembly in September, 1976, the *Guardian*'s coverage of the PCA not only summarized the gathering's business but also reported on a matter of direct relevance to Orthodox Presbyterians—namely, turning Great Commission Publications into a joint OPC-PCA enterprise. This prospect occurred precisely when cooperation with the CRC on publishing Sunday school curricula had "waned and effectively ceased."[28] The official beginning of GCP as a joint OPC-PCA endeavor was October 20, 1975 with the incorporation of a staff, budget, and offices independent from the OPC's Committee on Christian Education. Its new board of trustees included equal numbers of representatives from both denominations. The original terms of incorporation gave both parties room to leave the agreement. For the OPC, that provision—though never seriously considered—was significant because, in the words of *Between the Times*, "the OPC was committing a major component of one of its oldest standing committees for at least three and a half years…to a joint oversight with a new, untested, and relatively unknown Presbyterian communion."[29] To underscore this novelty and Orthodox Presbyterian enthusiasm over the formation of the southern denomination, the OPC's Committee on Christian Education instituted the agreement with the PCA "without gaining the approval of the General Assembly."[30]

22. See D. G. Hart, *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945–1990* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2011), ch. 4.

23. Paul G. Settle, "Why We Are Leaving," *Presbyterian Guardian* (January 1974): 2–3.

24. G. Aiken Taylor, "Have the Separatists Done All that Bad?," *Presbyterian Guardian* (January 1974): 3.

25. W. Jack Williamson, "Gathered for the Glory of God," *Presbyterian Guardian* (January 1974): 4–7.

26. "Message to All Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the World from the General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church," *Presbyterian Guardian* (January 1974): 9.

27. John J. Mitchell, "A Reborn Testimony in a Reborn Church," *Presbyterian Guardian* (January 1974): 11.

28. Hart, *Between the Times*, p. 218.

29. Hart, *Between the Times*, p. 219.

30. Hart, *Between the Times*, p. 219.

That a Sunday school curriculum publisher would function as the leading wedge of denominational merger is one of American Presbyterianism's surprising moments, but GCP did make union between the OPC and PCA seem inevitable. In 1978, arguably the year of peak Presbyterian optimism, the OPC, PCA, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), CRC, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod (RPCES) all held their annual assemblies or synods contemporaneously on the campus of Calvin College. This was the first somewhat informal meeting of the newly formed North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. The meetings in Grand Rapids under the umbrella of a new Reformed and Presbyterian ecumenical body added momentum as well to plans for uniting the OPC, PCA, and RPCES into one large, conservative Presbyterian denomination. Under the name of "Joining and Receiving" (J&R), the plan to merge the three denominations took off two years after the assemblies in western Michigan. To attribute this good will to the cooperation between the OPC and PCA in Great Commission Publications may be simplistic. At the same time, the launch of the PCA, the inspiration which the new southern denomination supplied to a weary OPC, and the amiable relations of both churches within GCP was crucial to raising hopes for church union. The PCA lifted the OPC's spirits and in turn Orthodox Presbyterians' experience in ecclesiastical and ecumenical institutions turned that inspiration into a blueprint for a conservative Presbyterian denomination with national scope and appeal. What could go wrong?

What do Conservative Presbyterians Conserve?

With the benefit of hindsight OPC-PCA relations indicate that Southern Presbyterian conservatives and Orthodox Presbyterians had the most in common in the early 1940s at a time when the excess of theological liberalism and confessional equivocation (i.e., "Auburn Affirmation"), along with heavy-handed denominational policies, reminded conservatives on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line of the virtues of Old School Presbyterianism's commitments to church polity and confessional subscription. By the 1970s, the rigor of Old School Presbyterianism—the outlook that had sustained PCUS and PCUSA conservatives between 1920 and 1945—seemed alien in an evangelical world where Billy Graham, Wheaton College, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary gave some coherence to conservative Protestantism. By the 1970s, Orthodox Presbyterians understood that their theology and polity were a hard sell to either the mainline or neo-evangelicals. Sometimes all they heard was E. J. Carnell's dismissal of Machen. In his 1958 book, *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary opined that "Machen was a friend of the fundamentalist mentality" because "he took an absolute stand on a relative issue, and the wrong issue at that."[31] For Carnell, the wrong issue was ecclesiology. Ecclesiology was also important to Southern conservatives who formed the PCA, some of whom identified with Old School Presbyterianism. They were also in the minority of a constellation of generic conservatives for whom evangelism, missions, inerrancy, and even eschatology were as inspiring as the confession, catechisms, and Book of Discipline.

Old School Presbyterianism's declining appeal to conservative Presbyterians North and South may explain why the driving force in the OPC and PCA during the 1970s and 1980s was church union. For leaders in the PCA to switch from opposition to church union while in the PCUS to advocacy for Joining & Receiving once a separate communion was at the very least ironic. How the PCA became the vehicle for a large, national, conservative Presbyterian communion in the United States is a story beyond this historical foray. But deciding whether to join the PCA became the question that the OPC and RPCES, a church with roots in Carl McIntyre's Bible Presbyterian Church, needed to answer. It was, of all things, a way for northern Presbyterians who had persisted on the sideline of the Mainline's Christian America to "come home" to the Southern Presbyterian Church. Who would have imagined? But leaders of both the RPCES and the OPC did imagine, and most accepted the PCA's invitation to become a national Presbyterian church dominated by tall-steeple congregations of the Old South.

Of course, J&R was a lot messier than a simple referendum on forming a national conservative Presbyterian denomination with the PCA as the umbrella organization. In 1975 the OPC and RPCES had already considered a proposal to form a new denomination called the Reformed Presbyterian Church. A majority of OPC commissioners (70%) at the 1975 General Assembly approved the merger but the RPCES Assembly failed to secure a two-thirds majority of votes in favor (only 57% approved). The subsequent 1981 plan for "joining and receiving," approved by the Assemblies of the PCA, OPC, and RPCES was an attempt for many

31. E. J. Carnell, *The Case for Orthodox Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 26.

in the OPC to recover from the 1975 defeat and join with the young and vigorous Presbyterians in the South. For the plan to succeed, it needed approval in two-thirds of each communion's presbyteries.[32]

The process once again left the OPC on the outside looking in. The PCA's presbyteries approved the RPCES but narrowly rejected the OPC. Needing a 19–6 majority in the presbyteries, the proposal received a 17–8 majority (one presbytery voted 20–20 tie, which was considered a "no"). That was not the final verdict on church union. In 1986 the PCA extended another "J&R" invitation to the OPC. At the OPC's 1986 General Assembly, commissioners showed they were well-prepared for deliberation. Sixty-seven different speeches on the floor assessed J&R's risks and rewards. The final vote was 78–68 in favor of union, 20 votes short of a required two-thirds majority. Some Orthodox Presbyterians were upset. Thirty-eight commissioners signed a protest that claimed that the vote was "a serious setback to our hopes for a united, vital, biblical and nationwide Presbyterian church." The resolution even alleged that the vote revealed an "attitude of [Orthodox Presbyterian] superiority."[33]

All was not lost, however, for Orthodox Presbyterians who wanted to be part of a larger, national conservative Presbyterian denomination. One consequence of the failure of J&R was a NAPARC agreement that allowed congregations to voluntarily realign with a sister denomination. In 1989 the OPC suffered significant membership losses illustrated by the move of two large New Life Presbyterian congregations (Glenside, PA and Escondido, CA) into the PCA. This was partly an expression of frustration that merger attempts had failed. It was also the shift that brought the likes of John M. Frame and Jack Miller into the PCA's orbit. Richard B. Gaffin and Frame actually debated the merits of realignment in the OPC's magazine, *New Horizons*. Gaffin contended that "Biblical presbyterianism has no place for loyalties torn between the denomination and the local congregation." For Frame, denominational identities were accidents of which true biblical faith was the substance. As such, moving from the OPC to the PCA was merely a practical decision.[34]

Whether the fallout from J&R was the most important factor, from 1990 on the OPC and PCA moved in different directions (at what rate will depend on the observer's eyesight). What once was an Old School Presbyterian set of convictions (confession, polity, and spirituality of the church) that southern conservatives and Orthodox Presbyterians saw in each other now competed with hopes for national influence, contrasting understandings of ecumenism, and socio-economic realities. The PCA aspired to be a denominational thought-leader among conservative American Protestants that in turn fueled networks within evangelical parachurch organizations. The OPC's history had conditioned many of its pastors and theologians to be content with a marginal presence in American church life even while carrying on fraternal relations with small Presbyterian and Reformed communions around the world. The PCA benefitted from the wealth of large urban churches in the Sun Belt which in turn gave the communion an air of respectability that the OPC had never even imagined. The OPC's meager financial resources and limited membership meant operating in a more small-scale, perhaps even grassroots, fashion.

Unlike the OPC which in 1937 went through a controversy over denominational identity that led to a split, the PCA's early history went in the opposite direction. It did not have a chance to sort out the evangelistic, dispensational, inerrantist, and confessional wings of southern conservative Presbyterians. Instead, almost as soon as it began, the PCA started to acquire other varieties of American Presbyterianism—from the RPCES to Orthodox Presbyterian New Lifers—even while maintaining convictions about missions and evangelism that made the National Association of Evangelicals (and similar agencies) a ready outlet for ecumenism. Add to this a Christian-America strain of cultural engagement coming from Francis Schaeffer and his disciples or an urban transformationalism from Tim Keller's model of church planting, and the PCA became the twenty-first century embodiment of New School Presbyterianism. Lucas does not discuss the PCA through the lens of Old School-New School distinctions, though he did observe that the PCUS used Old School convictions to oppose church union. As George Marsden tells the history of the New School, it was a communion largely in sync with the Second Great Awakening by supporting revivalism, moral and social reforms, stressing fidelity to the Bible, and arguing for Christianity as the basis for a healthy nation.[35]

32. See D. G. Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education and the Committee for the Historian, 1995), ch. 9.

33. Quoted in Hart and Muether, ibid., p. 137.

34. Quoted in Hart, *Between the Times*, p. 317.

35. George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 230ff.

Tim Keller more or less followed Marsden when he described New School Presbyterianism as possessing "a very strong sense of responsibility for the reform of society and for deep engagement in national politics," a "vigorous use of ecumenical evangelical voluntary societies (parachurch organizations) for mission," and an "emphasis on the 'religion of the heart' over doctrinal precision."[36] When pressed to call himself a New School Presbyterian, Keller declined. William H. Smith's 2009 essay, "Making Sense of the PCA," had identified three strains of the New School—one from the Columbia Seminary founding generation, one from the RPCES and Covenant Seminary where pietism and revivalism were strong, and a third from a group of urban pastors (including Keller) who were also pietistic, parachurch-friendly, and morally activist.[37] Keller declined the label because Smith had failed to see in the urban pastors elements of Kuyperian transformationalism and emphases on liturgy, community, "cultural engagement and social justice."[38] Still, Keller admitted that the pietist/New School wing was the largest group in the PCA, the doctrinalists/Old School were next, and the smallest group were the transformationalists like himself. For what it is worth, James Bratt, the American scholarly authority on Dutch Calvinism, has argued that Kuyper's transformationalism was closer to the New School's cultural sensibilities than it was to the Old School's spirituality of the church.[39]

On the OPC, Keller judged the denomination to be in the Old School tradition, a plausible reading that also misses a strong dose of Dutch Calvinism in the communion. For the first generation of Orthodox Presbyterians, neo-Calvinism did not directly threaten the spirituality of the church, confessionalism, or church polity. But taking-every-thought-captive outlooks did not communicate to New Life Presbyterians the best way to finesse the "church as institute" versus the "church as organism" (Kuyperian vernacular for the institutional church in contrast to church members in their vocations). When second-generation Orthodox Presbyterians realized that Reformed convictions (both American Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed) were neither attracting PCUSA conservatives into the OPC nor prompting evangelicals to take conservative Presbyterianism seriously, they became willing to look beyond the institutional church for ways of evangelism and ministry. Of course, most still knew the value of Presbyterian polity thanks to lessons from the 1920s and 1930s. And yet, Machen's sense expressed on his deathbed—"isn't the Reformed faith grand!"—faded. Even some of those most opposed to parachurch evangelicalism did so more through inspiration from the Dutch Calvinist side of the OPC (Van Til and Vos) rather than from Old School Presbyterianism.[40] The perceptive reader will note here that the debate between Kuyper and B. B. Warfield over apologetics was a factor in conservative Orthodox Presbyterians losing allegiance to Old Princeton.[41]

Even if the Dutch Reformed influence in the OPC weakened the Old School's influence, associations with the Dutch-American faculty at Westminster and warm fraternal relations with the Christian Reformed Church gave the OPC a very different ecumenical profile than that of the PCA. Thanks to the CRC's involvement with international Reformed networks, the OPC looked outside America for a sense of belonging to a large communion. To this day, the queue of fraternal delegates from overseas at OPC General Assemblies is remarkable. That sensibility also explains why the OPC has never been part of the National Association of Evangelicals (too many Arminians was an easy reason to remain separate). That the PCA voted decisively to leave the NAE only in 2022 is one indication of different ecumenical outlooks, and this fact likely echoes New School Presbyterianism's Americanist spirit. If the OPC merited "cool" points for its international ties, the urban hipster profile of PCA pastors compensates and likely makes it appealing to American evangelicals.

Differing approaches to fraternal relations is just another way of categorizing the PCA as more evangelical than the OPC but in the end the categories are neither fixed nor deep. Both communions bleed evangelical and Reformed even if officers and members in the PCA and OPC take comfort from one of those theological labels more than the other. One indication of

36. Keller, "What's So Great," p. 4.

37. William H. Smith, "Making Sense of the PCA," *Nicotine Theological Journal* (Spring 2009): 4–6.

38. Keller, "What's So Great," p. 16, note 19.

39. James D. Bratt, "Abraham Kuyper, J. Gresham Machen, and the Dynamics of Reformed Anti-Modernism," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 75.4 (Winter 1997): 247–58.

40. See, for instance, Charles G. Dennison's reading of Machen through the lens of Dutch Reformed influences: "Tragedy, Hope, and Ambivalence: The History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936–1962, Part II: Hope;" and "Geerhardus Vos and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," in *History for a Pilgrim People: The Historical Writings of Charles G. Dennison*, ed., Danny E. Olinger and David K. Thompson, (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2002), chapters 8, 6.

41. See George M. Marsden, "The Collapse of Evangelical Academia," in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 219–64.

that evangelical-Reformed mixed identity comes from the histories of each communion. John Muether and I concluded *Fighting the Good Fight* by summarizing the OPC's history as one of emerging from the Presbyterian controversy as keenly opposed to theological error. But the OPC was not simply combative. It also stood for obedience to "the teaching of God's Word as summarized" in the Confession and Catechism.[42] To reinforce that identity, we included Machen's brief for the spirituality of the church in a 1933 essay, "The Responsibility of the Church in a New Age" (which for Machen is the same in every age). The concluding pages of the book were perhaps notably silent on differences between evangelicalism and Presbyterianism. That was not the case for Lucas' *For A Continuing Church*. For him, the PCA was a chief example of a blended evangelicalism and Presbyterianism. Lucas writes that the PCA "represents the largest conservative Presbyterian body in North America." He does not argue that size is a function of combining evangelicalism and Presbyterianism but the logic is implicit in the book's last words. Lucas hopes the next forty years of the PCA could see "evangelical Presbyterians and Presbyterian evangelicals—prosper as a witness to the inerrant Bible, the Reformed faith, and the Great Commission," three sets of images with specific resonance to evangelical and Presbyterian audiences.[43]

At bottom, the reason why neither denomination can claim naming rights to either evangelical Presbyterian or truly Presbyterian is the long history of American Presbyterians' experience with revivalism. Ever since the awakenings of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, conservative Presbyterians have tried to harmonize two parts of Protestant devotion that are hard to reconcile—namely, pietism and confessionalism.[44] This is perhaps a peculiar and idiosyncratic argument, but the dismissals should not obscure a seldom considered point.[45] Christian devotion that makes the born-again experience definitive for genuine faith inherently disregards formal aspects of Christianity (subscription, ordination, church polity, order of worship, creeds). External observance is and always will be secondary to the real believer's affections. Discounting Christianity's churchly practices comes, to be sure, in different degrees of magnitude. But the history of American Presbyterianism has been a long struggle to use awakened piety as inoculation against dead orthodoxy (or dead Robert's Rules, or dead exclusive psalmody, or dead resistance to parachurch organizations). Even Old School Presbyterians, like Charles Hodge, who was critical of the First 'Pretty Good' Awakening, struggled to keep pietists like Archibald Alexander happy with strict Presbyterianism.[46]

The OPC and PCA are on a spectrum of a New World Presbyterianism that veers from personal experience to corporate confessional witness. Between 1940 and 1990 Orthodox Presbyterians and conservatives in the PCUS, followed by officers and members of the PCA, sometimes took encouragement from where the other group was on that sliding scale. At other times they were disappointed. Common enemies produced hopes for union and eventually realignment. The results were two communions, each with Old School Presbyterian DNA, but a gene pool seriously diluted by the third decade of the twenty-first century. Both communions still have enough in common to be warm and friendly. Each denomination has also circulated enough in the strange air of American evangelicalism to speak with some equivocation about what it means to be Presbyterian. The lack of clarity is not the same as what plagued the PCUSA at the time of the "Auburn Affirmation." Neither is opposition to Presbyterian modernism, however, as much a part of OPC and PCA identity as it was two generations ago.▪

42. Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, p. 195.

43. Lucas, *For A Continuing Church*, pp. 327–28.

44. This is the theme of D. G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

45. Carl R. Trueman's review of D. G. Hart and John R. Muether's *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Books, 2007) in *Ordained Servant* (June-July 2009) concludes that the attempt to recover confessional Presbyterianism by an historical approach is a "modern, idiosyncratic" project that lacks "deep, historical, genetic precedents and antithetical categories." Available at https://www.opc.org/os.html?article_id=156. Accessed September 12, 2023.

46. See Paul Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 192–94.

***In Brief*: Personal Remembrances of Dr. J. L. Girardeau from Two of His Students. From *The Life Work of John L. Girardeau, D.D., LL.D.*, ed. George A. Blackburn (1916), pp. 203–205**

Two estimates of Dr. Girardeau as a teacher and as a member of the Thursday Afternoon Conferences, furnished at my request, will close this sketch.

The first is by Rev. Thomas P. Hay, D. D.:

I entered the junior class in the Seminary about a month before Dr. Girardeau entered the institution as Professor of Theology. And it was my privilege to be his scholar during the period of his transition from the eloquent pulpit orator to the professor and teacher. He impressed and greatly helped me by his gift of analysis and of clarifying things by making distinctions, and of logical development of thought; and by the happy faculty of fixing thought and truth, thus elucidated by the illustrations of his imagination and the charms of his eloquence.

Dr. Girardeau required his students to write out from memory an analysis of his lectures, or a recapitulation of the portion of a text-book gone over in a recitation, embodying any criticism he made on the author's statements. One of these analyses would be read and criticized by the professor at the beginning of the next class-hour. By this exercise, I learned to preach without any notes in six months' time; and the professor's system of theology took full hold of my understanding and memory. I could recall his arguments and reasonings on all theological questions raised, and even his personal opinions on matters on which Calvinists differed. I have often said that, next to my revered father, I owed more to Dr. Girardeau than any other man; and this was due to the above characteristics. He certainly taught me theology, established my convictions in the truth of the Calvinistic system and trained my mind.

Let me add to this my impression of his kindliness to his students and his sympathy and readiness to come down to the student's ground and point of view. He reasoned and argued as an equal; so that a young man was not afraid to raise his questions and difficulties, and felt free to differ with him and argue out his own contention.

He impressed me in the Conferences very much, as doubtless he did the congregations whom he served as pastor. He was spiritual, edifying, earnest, eloquent and loving.

The second is from Rev. B. P. Reid:

Students under Dr. Girardeau got a great deal more from him than a mere knowledge of the truths he taught. This is useful enough as far as it goes, and is about all that is to be gathered from many teachers reputed to be great. But there ought to be more in every teacher than his mere mental machinery. Wonderful as was Dr. Girardeau's mental power, there was something in him far beyond this, because, under



J. L. Girardeau

him, we got an impression of a man which lingers with us as an inspiration in life.

Who could fail to be impressed with his devotion to truth which amounted to an absorbing passion with his soul? The very intensity of his love of it made him so quick and positive in the expressions of his conviction of it, as to cause some to suspect him of a lack of charity to those opposed to his view, which was far from being true. When he discussed the great doctrines of theology, who could fail to be touched by his evident feeling of awe in the presence of these great facts about God, and who could escape the conviction that his soul saw reaches not perceived by the ordinary mind?

Eloquence and wit, both natural to him, enlivened all his class-room lectures and talk. Never have we heard anywhere his equal in the power of apt and original illustration drawn from Scripture incident, and of clothing great thoughts easily and rapidly in their appropriate garments of words.

We admired, necessarily, Dr. Girardeau's great power as class-room lecturer and preacher, and we loved him for his sympathy. This was so deep and so pure as to lead him to be absolutely forgetful of himself in the use of all that he had. His evident joy in the opportunity to help, whether with instruction, advice, or money, is something long to be remembered by those under him. The way in which he followed us out into life with a kindly interest which grew with the years, showed that his sympathy was no passing emotion, but belonged to the very composition of his being. To this hour I can not recall, without emotion, the last time I remember seeing him when he called to me across the crowded street of the city with all the joy of youth in his voice over the sight of a friend. He oftimes refreshed and encouraged us with his sympathy in life, and this made it especially hard when we had to be told that the hour of his departure was at hand.▪

Southern Presbyterian Ecumenism:

The PCUS–RCA Merger Plan, Northern Reunion, and the Formation of the PCA

By Zachary M. Garris

American Presbyterian history is full of church splits and church mergers, but it is also full of *failed* mergers. Stories of such leave us wondering what might have been. One notable example can be found in the 1982 Joining and Receiving between the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES). What is not always told is that the PCA had also invited the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) to consider a merger, and the OPC General Assembly even voted to join the two bodies on June 3, 1981. However, when this merger went to the PCA presbyteries, they only approved the receiving of the RPCES, resulting in a two-way merger[1] without the OPC. The PCA invited the OPC to join again in 1986, but the OPC declined.

Even lesser known is the failed merger in 1968 between the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS)—from which the PCA seceded—and the Reformed Church in America (RCA), a major Dutch Reformed denomination. After several years of discussions and a proposed Plan of Union, the PCUS passed the Plan at the presbytery level, but it was then rejected by the RCA at the classis level. As the RCA later grew increasingly liberal, some of its conservative churches joined the PCA in the 2010s, showing the possibility for the Presbyterian and Dutch Reformed traditions to come together.

This essay will explore the background to the failed Plan of Union between the PCUS and RCA in the 1960s, focusing on the rise of liberalism (modernism) and ecumenism in the PCUS in the 20th century. It will then show how RCA's rejection of the PCUS merger plan set in motion events that led to the formation of the PCA in 1973, followed by the 1983 union between the Southern PCUS and the Northern PCUSA. The essay will conclude with reflections on Southern Presbyterian ecumenism.

Introduction

Successful Presbyterian Mergers

Successful church unions have often been reunifications of earlier splits. This was the case for two of the most prominent mergers, the unification of Old School and New School factions in the South and then in the North. The Old School–New School churches divided in 1837–38, and then these two churches split geographically to form four different Presbyterian churches—the New School splitting into Northern and Southern churches in 1857 because of differences over slavery, and the Old School splitting into Northern and Southern churches after the Southern states seceded from the Union in 1861.

Thus, replacing the theological divide of Old School and New School was the geographical divide of North and South. In 1864, the Southern New School (United Synod of the South) joined the Southern Old School church (Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America). After the Civil War ended, it changed its name to the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), or what is often known as the Southern Presbyterian Church. In 1869, the Northern New School also joined the Northern Old School Church (Presbyterian Church in the United States of America).

This meant that for over a century—from 1869 until 1983—there was essentially a Northern Presbyterian

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1. While "merger" is not technically what was proposed and a "joining a receiving" is more unilaterial than a merger, we use "merger" here to denote a coming together of two or more institutions.

Church (PCUSA/UPCUSA) and a Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS). These two churches finally merged in 1983 to form the PCUSA, a national mainline church. (The merger was specifically between the PCUS and the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA), the latter being a 1958 merger of the PCUSA and the United Presbyterian Church of North American (UPCNA), which came out of the Associate Presbytery tradition.) Yet there is much backstory to this reunion between North and South, as it did not take place until the two churches had already experienced departures. A few conservative churches left the Northern PCUSA in 1929 to form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and many conservative churches left the Southern PCUS in 1973 to form the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

Southern Presbyterians and the Dutch Reformed

All of this can be head-scratching for the newcomer to Presbyterian history. But one thing that should be emphasized is the above mergers were between two *Presbyterian* bodies. Yet prior to the unification to form the PCUSA in 1983, as well as the secession to form the PCA in 1973, was an attempted merger in the 1960s between a Presbyterian body (the PCUS) and a Dutch Reformed church, the Reformed Church in America (RCA). This is one of those "what if" moments in church history, as these were two major denominations of different theological heritage.

While both churches trace their lineage back to the Reformed branch of the Reformation, they originate from two different countries, Scotland and the Netherlands. Ministers of Presbyterian persuasion had come to the colonies in the early 17th century, but the first presbytery was not established in America until 1706 by the Scots-Irish minister Francis Makemie (1658–1708). Meanwhile, the first Dutch Reformed church had been established in New Amsterdam (now New York City) in 1628, and a Dutch assembly became independent from the classis of Amsterdam in 1754. (A classis is relatively equivalent to a presbytery.) The first General Synod was held in 1794, and the church adopted the name Reformed Church in America in 1867. However, a group of four churches had left in 1857 to form what would become known as the Christian Reformed Church (the name was not used until 1904), with others leaving the RCA to join the CRC in 1882.[2]

The Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed also come from different confessional traditions, with American Presbyterians subscribing to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms (American modifications in 1787–88) and the Dutch Reformed subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort). While similar in theology, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms (approved and accepted by Church of Scotland 1647) built on the Irish Articles (1615) and the Three Forms of Unity (1561, 1563, 1618–19, respectively) and thus represent a more mature development in post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy.[3]

American Presbyterians had come into contact with the Dutch Reformed through missionary work, and "During the mid-1840s, new school, old school, and both associate strands organized small Dutch Presbyterian congregations from western New York to Wisconsin." One example comes from the 1850s, when Old School Presbyterians sent Jacob Schepers, a missionary born in the Netherlands, to organize a Dutch church in Lafayette, Indiana.[4] Yet despite such interactions, on the surface it is hard to see how such a merger between the PCUS and RCA would have succeeded. Although sister churches in the Reformed tradition, the Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed represent not only two different confessional traditions, but two different peoples. The Dutch Reformed have their own peculiarities, making them a unique subculture in America. Many Presbyterians in America, especially in the early period, were of Scottish and Scots-Irish origin. In the case of the PCUS, it was particularly the *Southern* Presbyterian Church, with its roots in the Confederacy and the secession of the Southern states in 1860–61 (hence the original name, the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America). This Southern identity adds further contrast with the Dutch Reformed, who were mostly

2. Cornelis Pronk, *A Goodly Heritage: The Secession of 1834 and Its Impact on Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and North America* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pp. 335, 337.

3. Richard Muller divides the post-Reformation development of Protestantism into three periods of early, high, and late orthodoxy. Early orthodoxy had two phases (ca. 1565–1618–1640). It began with the death of most "second-generation codifiers of the Reformed faith" (Calvin, Musculus, Vermigli, Hyperius) and "was the era of the confessional solidification of Protestantism." High orthodoxy (ca. 1640–1685–1725) also had two phases, and it "represents a still broader theological synthesis than early orthodoxy." Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 1:30–32. Thus, the Three Forms of Unity fall under the period of early orthodoxy, while the Westminster Standards fall under high orthodoxy.

4. Richard H. Harms, "The Other Reformed: Dutch Presbyterians in Nineteenth-Century America," *Calvin Theological Journal* 42/1 (April 2007): 35.

concentrated outside of the South, with major pockets of churches in New York, Michigan, Iowa, and California. Yet as hard as it may be to wonder how such a merger between a Dutch Reformed church and the Southern Presbyterian Church would work, they did have a plan. Although the differences between the two churches were great, for many the drive for Protestant unity was high and concern for theological distinctives was low.

Ecumenism in the PCUS

Ecumenism and Liberalism in the 20th-Century PCUS

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the PCUS had firmly rejected any notion of reunion with the Northern Church, which comes as no surprise. Not only did the Northern Church demand loyalty to the Union in its 1861 Gardiner Spring Resolutions, but it inflamed the issue in 1865 when the Northern Church (prior to its merger with the Northern New School) issued "orders" that the Southern Church renounce its errors of rebellion, slavery, and states' rights. This was in addition to resentment over the war's devastation in the South and the subsequent Reconstruction period.

Yet as time passed and new generations arose, the PCUS began to consider mergers with other churches, with the ultimate goal being reunion with the Northern Presbyterian Church. As the PCUS entered the 20th century, a spirit of ecumenism was in the air, peaking after the end of World War II in 1945. The nationalism that accompanied two world wars surely aided the desire for church unity in America. However, this ecumenical spirit cannot be disconnected from the coinciding rise in theological liberalism (modernism) in the PCUS in the 20th century, as doctrinal laxity opened the door to an emphasis on church unity at the expense of theological orthodoxy. Protestant ecumenism was part of the social gospel that sought to improve public order in America, where theology and confessionalism became secondary.[5] Modernism sought to accommodate culture, and the coinciding ecumenism (what some had called "broad churchism") sought to water down the church's doctrine in hopes of leading to greater visible unity.

A noticeable shift took place in the PCUS in the 1930s. Yet this was the culmination of liberalizing elements in the PCUS even in the late 19th century. When theologian R. L. Dabney (1820–1898) left Union Theological Seminary (Virginia) for Texas in 1883, Walter W. Moore (1857–1926) joined Union's faculty as an adjunct professor of Hebrew. Moore, who became president of the seminary in 1904, was himself theologically conservative. However, he was willing to allow a looser "system subscription" to the Westminster Standards that undermined such conservatism. As Moore stated to A. J. McKelway, editor of the *Presbyterian Standard*, "We must have more liberty in our Church or there is going to be an explosion….In my judgment there is nothing more certain as to the future of our Church than that we must allow a subscription to the 'system of doctrine,' without trying to tie men down in every statement of detail."[6]

Conservatives in the PCUS failed to take seriously and respond to the liberalizing theology advanced by men such as James I. Vance, A. J. McKelway, and Walter L. Lingle in the early 20th century.[7] Even by the time of the 1906 General Assembly, the editor of the *Central Presbyterian* acknowledged that "it was clearly evident that there were two distinct parties" at the Assembly, one of which formed a "'liberal' element" in the church.[8] As the PCUS moved into the 1920s, this liberal group was much larger than conservatives in the PCUS were aware (Lucas, p. 39). By 1931, William Marcellus McPheeters (1854–1935), a professor of Old Testament at Columbia Seminary who had studied under Dabney at Union, said, "I am persuaded that we are on the verge, either of becoming what is called an inclusive church, which in my judgment is no church at all, or on the verge of testing by judicial process the reality of our church's allegiance to its own record."[9]

5. D. G. Hart, "The Tie that Divides: Presbyterian Ecumenism, Fundamentalism, and the History of the Twentieth-Century American Protestantism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998): 91–92.

6. W. W. Moore to A. J. McKelway, n.d., in J. Gray McAllister, *The Life and Letters of Walter W. Moore* (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary, 1939), p. 208.

7. See Sean Michael Lucas, *For a Continuing Church: The Roots of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), pp. 12–38.

8. "Our Assembly's Letter," *Central Presbyterian* (May 30, 1906): 344, quoted in Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South: Volume 3: 1890–1972* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1973), p. 224. The 1906 General Assembly overturned the Synod of Texas's annulment of the Fort Worth Presbytery receiving Rev. William Caldwell, a University of Chicago PhD who rejected the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis. The synod instructed the presbytery to investigate Caldwell's views, and while the presbytery found his views unsatisfactory, it declined to bring charges. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3:303–305.

9. W. M. McPheeters to A. M. Fraser, March 7, 1931, J. McDowell Richards Papers, Box 80, Presbyterian Historical Society, Montreat, North Carolina, quoted in Sean Michael Lucas, "'Our Church Will Be On Trial': W. M. McPheeters and the Beginnings of Conservative Dissent in the Presbyterian Church in the United States," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 84/1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 52.

Liberal Procedural Victory in the PCUS

Two famous cases evidence the PCUS's shift into theological liberalism in the 20th century. The first is the case of Hay Watson Smith (1868–1940), whom the Arkansas Presbytery received as a minister in 1912 even though he read a paper to the presbytery stating he embraced the theory of evolution and denied biblical inerrancy (Lucas, pp. 69–70). In 1923, Smith published a 115-page pamphlet, *Evolutionism and Presbyterianism*, that said the Bible "is inspired, but it is not inerrant," claimed the doctrinal system of Calvinism was "static and obsolescent," and called for affirmation of evolution and "the modernization of some parts of our theology."[10] After Smith published three other pamphlets, Augusta Presbytery overtured the General Assembly in 1929 to investigate Smith's views regarding evolution. W. M. McPheeters, the conservative Columbia Seminary professor, offered a substitute motion to instruct Arkansas Presbytery to investigate Smith's theology, broadening the scope beyond evolution. However, the Arkansas Presbytery's commission in 1930 focused on Smith's 1912 statement and ruled that his views were insufficient to disqualify him as a minister. Eventually an appeal led the Synod of Arkansas in 1931 to instruct the Arkansas Presbytery to reinvestigate Smith, but the presbytery did not follow the synod's instructions and instead adopted a resolution that affirmed its 1930 commission report. A complaint came before the judicial commission of the 1933 General Assembly, which sustained the decisions of the presbytery and synod and denied the complaint (Lucas, pp. 72–77).

In protecting Smith via procedural methods, this was a watershed case that opened the door for others to hold liberal views more freely in the PCUS. However, it should be noted that at the 1966 General Assembly this procedural principle also protected conservative ministers from discipline for starting Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Jackson, Mississippi.[11] RTS was started in response to the decline of the PCUS and its seminaries, as conservative efforts to revitalize Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia failed (where W. M. McPheeters and W. C. Robinson taught). As the RTS catalogue stated, "As recently as the 1930's the theological position of American Presbyterianism in the South was generally uniform," citing its distinctives as "The inerrancy of the Bible, the pure Calvinism of the Westminster Standards, jure divino view of Presbyterian polity, the spirituality of the Church." The catalogue added, "A movement away from these distinctives began around the year 1935," which was shortly after the conclusion of the Smith case.[12]

The second case evidencing the rise of theological liberalism in the PCUS is that of Ernest Trice Thompson (1894–1985), noted author and much loved professor of church history at Union Theological Seminary (Virginia), who was said to have taught over half the ministers of the PCUS by the time of his retirement (Smith, p. 86). W. M. McPheeters was again at work, having a written exchange with Thompson in 1928–29 where he criticized Thompson for modernist views that undermined the inerrancy of Scripture. Thompson then defended the Auburn Affirmation (1924), of the Northern Church, which led to criticism from John M. Wells in the *Presbyterian Standard*, and led McPheeters to contact the president of Union Seminary, B. R. Lacy, along with four seminary trustees in 1932. Yet the Union board found nothing in Thompson's writings worthy of adjudication (Lucas, pp. 79–83).[13]

McPheeters died in 1935, but his nephew, Tom Glasgow, a ruling elder from Charlotte, North Carolina, took up the cause. At the 1940 General Assembly, Glasgow sought to convince the Assembly to establish a committee to investigate the teaching of the four PCUS seminaries (Columbia, Union, Louisville, Austin), with a focus on biblical inspiration. Glasgow even had a meeting with Union president B. R. Lacy in Charlotte in which Lacy defended Thompson (Lucas, pp. 84–87). In correspondence with Glasgow, Thompson stated that anyone informed of the variations within Bible manuscripts "will have to admit the possibility of errors in the only Bibles that we possess."[14] Both Lacy and Thompson emphasized Glasgow's right to bring charges against Thompson in the appropriate judicatory. Glasgow hoped a minister in Thompson's presbytery

10. Hay Watson Smith, *Evolutionism and Presbyterianism* (Little Rock, AR: Allsopp and Chapple, 1923), pp. 29, 75, 81.

11. Morton H. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1973), p. 85. Smith was commissioned by the Steering Committee of the Continuing Presbyterian Church (which formed the PCA in 1973) to write this book as a justification for their separation from the PCUS.

12. *Minutes of the PCUS Assembly* (1967), pp. 147–148, quoted in Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 89. Thompson agreed with this assessment, saying, "In the 1920's the Southern Presbyterian Church remained predominantly conservative." Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, p. 486.

13. For an account of McPheeters and both the Smith and Thompson cases, see also Lucas, "'Our Church Will Be On Trial': W. M. McPheeters and the Beginnings of Conservative Dissent in the Presbyterian Church in the United States," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 84/1 (Spring/Summer 2006): 52–66.

14. E. T. Thompson to Tom Glasgow, July 4, 1940, Thompson Papers, Union Presbyterian Theological Seminary, quoted in Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 88.

would come forward to lead the case, but when that did not happen, Glasgow published and distributed a pamphlet in 1940 attacking Thomson's orthodoxy.[15] The Synod of Appalachia requested that Union Seminary investigate Thompson, and several presbyteries overtured the General Assembly to examine Thompson's theology (Concord, Florida, and Mississippi presbyteries) and to examine the theology of the seminaries (Mecklenburg Presbytery). Oddly, Thompson himself even requested his presbytery and Union's board investigate his theology.

However, East Hanover Presbytery, of which Thompson was a member, exonerated him in November 1940, and Union Seminary's board adopted a statement in February 1941 that affirmed Thompson's orthodoxy. The 1941 Assembly referred the overtures on Thompson and the seminaries to the committee on theological seminaries, and the majority of the committee recommended they be answered in the negative and noted the proper jurisdiction was Thompson's presbytery and Union's board. The minority report to establish an investigative committee failed at the Assembly 94 to 191. Writing later in 1973, Thompson commented on the conclusion of his case: "But there were now two clearly defined groups in the church, two wings, two divergent points of view, two extremes, some would claim, both equally sincere, one holding that newer points of view threatened the very existence of the faith, the other that they were essential if the faith was to remain viable for modern man" (Thompson, 3.338–339). This explains the liberal or "modernist" mindset—newer, critical views of Scripture were essential for Christians to appeal to "modern man." Rather than teaching "the rigid, unyielding Calvinism of earlier years," Thompson said PCUS seminaries were "prepared to accept insights from Barth, Brunner, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, and others" (Thompson, 3.494).

Similar to the Hay Watson Smith case, liberals in the PCUS protected Thompson through procedural methods, as Thompson's presbytery, synod, and seminary board were supportive of him, and the General Assembly refused to permit members of other presbyteries or synods to bring charges against him (Smith, p. 85). That conservatives were unable to drive theological liberals such as Smith and Thompson out of the PCUS demonstrates the church was changing. Conservatives recognized this, as the Thompson case led PCUS conservatives to meet weeks later to found an independent weekly periodical, the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, which began publication in May 1942 with L. Nelson Bell (1894–1973) as editor (Lucas, pp. 89–99). In 1959, the name was changed to the *Presbyterian Journal*, and G. Aiken Taylor (1920–1984) was made editor. This journal was a voice of conservative dissent in the PCUS and helped lead to the formation of the PCA in 1973.

PCUS Negotiations with the Northern Church (PCUSA)

While the PCUS was liberalizing, for a time in the 1930s it looked like the church had rejected ecumenism in favor of "isolationism" (a phrase used by Thompson in his *Presbyterians in the South*). In a vote of 175 to 79, the 1931 General Assembly withdrew from the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), which the PCUS had joined in 1912 and consisted of more than 20 denominations at the time (Smith, p. 130; Thompson, 3.552). The PCUS considered rejoining the Council in 1937, with the Assembly referring the question to the presbyteries for advice (although re-entry only required a majority vote by the General Assembly). The presbyteries voted 48 to 38 against re-entry, as conservatives opposed the Council because they thought it was controlled by modernists.

However, in 1941, the Assembly voted 154 to 101 to rejoin the Federal Council of Churches, and the attempt at reversal the next year failed 60 to 190 (Thompson, 3.553). Another effort to leave the Council, led largely by laymen, also failed 108 to 274 at the 1948 General Assembly (Thompson, 3.556). In 1950, the Federal Council of Churches joined seven other organizations to form the National Council of Churches (NCC). Conservative opposition to the National Council argued it was friendly toward Communism, evidenced by the Council advocating that China should be admitted into the United Nations in 1958 (Lucas, pp. 129, 204–207). PCUS opposition to the National Council of Churches continued, peaking in the mid-1960s, in part because the Council also supported civil rights. However, debate in the PCUS at that point shifted to relations with the Northern Presbyterian Church (Thompson, 3.558).

Amidst withdrawal from the FCC in 1931, the PCUS had been exploring more formal associations with other churches, particularly the Northern Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). The PCUS had entered into negotiations with the PCUSA in 1887, but those were ended by the PCUS General Assembly in 1888. The same happened in 1894–95. In 1914, the PCUS made the change to require

15. The 1941 publication of the pamphlet included all documents for and against Thompson, which Glasgow then mailed to all commissioners to the 1941 General Assembly. Tom Glasgow, *A Statement For and Against Dr. Thompson* (Charlotte, NC: privately printed, 1941).

three-fourths of the presbyteries to approve a union with another denomination, which added an additional barrier to talks with the Northern Church (Smith, p. 119).

Yet in 1929, the PCUS General Assembly finally made a move toward reunion with the Northern Church. Several presbyteries asked the church to "take active steps toward organic union of all Presbyterian bodies in the United States." The Assembly voted 125 to 9 to set up an Ad Interim Committee, which would report each year to the General Assembly (Thompson, 3.558–559). This signaled a changed in the direction of the PCUS towards ecumenism. In 1929, representatives from five of the leading Reformed and Presbyterian churches in America—the PCUS, PCUSA, UPCNA, RCA, and RCUS (Reformed Churches in the United States)—met in Philadelphia, and committees of all except the RCUS approved "Organic union with other Presbyterian and Reformed Churches on the basis of their existing Standards" (Thompson, 3.559).

While the 1930 PCUS Assembly agreed to continue union discussions, the 1931 Assembly voted to suspend all negotiations and meetings looking to union, yet also ordering the Ad Interim Committee to draft a plan for "A Federal Union of our Church with any or all Presbyterian or Reformed bodies." Yet the committee reported the next Assembly that no church expressed interest in such a federal union (Thompson, 3.560). In 1937, the Ad Interim Committee on union with the Northern Church recommended that "no action be taken touching any plan of union" because no other churches had accepted plans for union. However, there was a substitute motion to replace the Ad Interim Committee with a Permanent Committee on Cooperation and Union, which was passed without debate (Lucas, p. 138). This Permanent Committee on Cooperation and Union was to explore merger possibilities and report to the Assembly. There were efforts in 1942 to change the Committee's task to just cooperation instead of union, but that failed.[16] Conservative opposition to reunion led to the formation of the Continuing Church Committee in 1944, which "promoted a vigorous and aggressive education program" in opposition to the plan of union (Lucas, p. 149).

As steps toward union progressed, conservatives made efforts to ensure a congregation could leave the PCUS with its property if such a merger took place. In 1938, the General Assembly approved an amendment that would permit a church to withdraw from the PCUS with its property upon a majority vote, but the presbyteries rejected the amendment. The Assembly rejected another such amendment in 1942 (Thompson, 3.565). A 1946 overture also sought protection of church property in case of a church union. The Assembly answered that in case of union, "any individual congregation, presbytery or synod of the Presbyterian Church U.S." that within a year declined to consent to a plan of union and sent the minutes to the Stated Clerk of the Assembly "shall automatically and by virtue alone of its own declaration be thereafter an independent or separate organization, with independent, full and complete title, both legal and equitable, to its properties."[17] This formed the background to conservatives seeking an "escape clause" in later merger plans.

Realizing there were not enough votes to bring about union with the Northern Church at the time, the Permanent Committee on Cooperation and Union in 1948 recommended "that for a period of five years the entire plan of reunion with the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., be held in abeyance, and that during this time the committee confine its activities to explore avenues of acquaintance and cooperation only" (Lucas, p. 151). However, it became apparent this supposed five-year moratorium was a means for ecumenists to work behind the scenes to bring about union. This is evidenced by the fact that only two years later, the 1950 General Assembly invited other Presbyterian and Reformed churches to consider a larger union of churches. And by 1952, there was a push for a three-way union that also included the UPCNA, a smaller church located in the North (Lucas, pp. 152–153). In the spring of 1952, committees from the PCUS, PCUSA, and UPCNA met to plan for union, and the 1952 PCUS Assembly voted in favor of a plan for a joint hymnal. Amidst such momentum for union, three unofficial groups in the PCUS announced their plan to form a central office to prevent the proposed merger—the Board of Directors of the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*, the Executive Board of the Continuing Church Committee, and the Association for the Preservation of the Southern Presbyterian Church. The 1953 plan of union permitted congregations in the PCUS and UPCNA churches to leave the denomination with their property by a three-fourths vote within one year after approval of the plan (Thompson, 3.569). Despite conservative opposition, the majority of leaders in the PCUS supported reunion with the North. After four hours of debate, the 1954 PCUS General Assembly voted 283 to 169 to merge with the Northern Church. However, this did

16. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 120, citing *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1942), p. 88.

17. *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1946), pp. 33, 60, cited in Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, pp. 120–121.

not receive the three-fourths approval of the presbyteries, with a vote of 43 presbyteries opposed and 42 presbyteries in favor of union.

At least three reasons for opposition to union with the Northern Presbyterian Church can be identified. First, there was concern over the Northern Church's support for racial integration, which was at odds with segregation in the South. The Northern Church had followed the call of the FCC (and later NCC) for integrated churches by dissolving segregated synods in the 1950s.[18] Also contributing to opposition was the timely Supreme Court ruling only two weeks prior to the 1954 General Assembly, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which mandated public school integration, to the dismay of many in the South. While the *Brown* ruling was not the only reason for reunion's failure, it did feed the Southern Church's fear over the Northern Church's support for racial integration.[19] Tied with this was conservative concern over the Northern Church's understanding of the spirituality of the church and its interference in political issues, including segregation.

The second reason for PCUS opposition to union with the Northern Church was that the Church was theologically liberal. Conservatives cited the PCUSA's ordination of women as elders and deacons, as well as the Auburn Affirmation (Lucas, p. 208; Thompson, 3.559). The Auburn Affirmation was a 1924 document signed by 1,274 ministers that protested the PCUSA General Assembly's declaration (in 1910, 1916, and 1923) that ministers must hold to the "five fundamentals" of orthodoxy (inerrancy of Scripture, virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection of Christ, authenticity of miracles). The Southern conservatives were well aware of the Northern Church's theological liberalism and defrocking of J. Gresham Machen, the conservative stalwart of Southern stock. As Columbia Seminary professor William Childs Robinson (1897–1982) said against union, "Shall we stand… for the faith or shall we surrender our corporate testimony by uniting with Auburn Affirmationists in a body that does not regard such matters as the Virgin Birth, the substitutionary atonement and the resurrection of Christ as essential to ministerial ordination?"[20]

The third reason for opposition to union with the Northern Church involved concerns over the PCUS losing its distinctives by becoming a national church. This included not only its identity as a Southern Church, but also its differing polity. Earlier opponents of union had cited the difference over ruling elders, as the North did not permit them to lay on hands in the ordination of pastors. The Southern Church's two-office view contrasted with the Northern Church's three-office view, a difference going back to debates between Charles Hodge and James Henley Thornwell. Additionally, PCUS conservatives voiced concerns over the Northern Church's administrative centralization, as well as its practice of presbyteries owning church buildings rather than individual congregations. A merger could have made it difficult for conservatives to leave with their property (Thompson, 3.570–571).

PCUS Changes After the 1954 Reunion Plan Failed

By 1955 union with the Northern Church seemed unlikely for the near future. Yet it was not so much a question of if but when union would take place. As E. T. Thompson later said regarding the strategy of the five-year moratorium on church union in 1948, "the tide toward union was running strong, increasing each year through the new batch of ministers coming in from the seminaries" (Thompson, 3.574). Accordingly, liberals pushed for practices that aided a future reunion, including joint Sunday school curriculum and the publication of *The Hymnbook*, a 1955 joint hymnal between the PCUS, PCUSA, UPCNA, ARP, and RCA. 1959 then proved to be a watershed year for liberal victory in the PCUS. By then it was clear that "the liberals have taken over the organized leadership of the church," as Alabama businessman John Ames said. Ames cited Thompson's election as moderator of the 1959 General Assembly, saying he was elected by the "liberal machine" that sought to change the PCUS

18. Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart, *Reformed and Evangelical Across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), p. 290.

19. Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 155–160. Lucas notes that several historians blame *Brown* for the defeat of reunion, including Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3:574; David M. Reimers, "The Race Problem and Presbyterian Union," *Church History* 31 (1962): 203–215; Erskine Clarke, "Presbyterian Ecumenical Activity in the United States," in *The Diversity of Discipleship: The Presbyterians and Twentieth Century Witness*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991), p. 161. However, Lucas cites two historians holding that race was only part of the context for the defeat of reunion: Joel L. Alvis, Jr., *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946–1983* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1994), pp. 57–62; Bradley J. Longfield, *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), pp. 191–195. Lucas "generally agrees" with Alvis and Longfield in *For a Continuing Church*, p. 158.

20. W. C. Robinson, "Reunion of the Presbyterian Churches USA and US," *Christian Observer* (January 24, 1940): 11, 22, quoted in Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3:570. Robinson taught church history and other subjects at Columbia from 1926 until 1967.

from "a spiritual organization" into "a political and social service organization."[21]

In addition to Thompson's election as moderator, the 1959 Assembly made two changes that aided reunion with the Northern Church—confessional revision and the adoption of "union churches." The PCUS had already made some theological changes that cleared the way for reunification when in 1942 the church added two new chapters to the Westminster Confession of Faith, "Of the Gospel" and "Of the Holy Spirit," softening the Calvinistic language of the Standards. These additions were nearly identical to the additions the Northern Church made to its confession in 1903.[22] But in 1959, the PCUS also rewrote chapter 26, "Of Marriage and Divorce," taking a more liberal approach to divorce.[23] The presbyteries had previously rejected such changes approved by the 1953 Assembly, but the report that year revealed the rise of a looser view of Scripture being advanced.[24] This weaker view of the Bible's authority facilitated other changes, including the 1968 Assembly's adoption of the Permanent Theological Committee's report that the relationship between evolution and the Bible is one of "non-contradiction." The 1970 Assembly then adopted a paper stating abortion is "morally justifiable" under several circumstances, including "socio-economic conditions of the family," even establishing a fund to assist abortions.[25] The 1971 Assembly adopted a paper on "The Population Crisis," which, following the claims of overpopulation, said, "man has an obligation to limit the size of his family." That same Assembly adopted a paper on "Public Education," commending public schools and accusing private schools of undermining them (an issue tied with racial integration).[26]

In addition to confessional changes, the 1959 Assembly proposed, and the 1960 Assembly approved, a *Book of Church Order* amendment to create "union churches," where the church's ministers could be members of both Northern and Southern presbyteries (Thompson, 3.577). This created a sort of *de facto* union between the two churches (Smith, p. 121). The 1969 Assembly even permitted the creation of "union presbyteries" (Thompson, 3.581). However, this was not without controversy, as the 1968 Assembly's amendment to permit union presbyteries was rejected at the presbytery level (38 in favor, 39 against), as was the amendment to reject union synods (37 in favor, 40 against). But in an unprecedented move, three presbyteries (Dallas, Mobile, and North Alabama presbyteries) moved to reconsider their votes on union presbyteries, only weeks before the 1969 Assembly. These three presbyteries passed union presbyteries with a two-thirds vote, which satisfied the requirement of a majority of presbyteries for a *Book of Church Order* change. The 1969 Assembly then voted to enact union presbyteries (Lucas, pp. 286–288).

With seventeen union presbyteries in place by the time the Northern and Southern Churches merged in 1983, the establishment of this practice made union inevitable. However, prior to the merger, union presbyteries meant UPCUSA ministers sat and voted in PCUS presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly, even though they did not subscribe to the standards of the PCUS. This is similar to how after the 1801 Plan of Union, congregational ministers sat in Presbyterian assemblies, a practice that was ended when an Old-School-dominated Assembly dissolved the plan in 1837 (leading to the Old School–New School split of 1837–38) (Smith, p. 126).

If the 1959 changes of union churches and confessional revision were not enough, the PCUS in 1964 permitted women to be ordained as deacons, elders, and ministers. In 1955, an Ad Interim Committee appointed by the General Assembly said, "We believe that the Holy Spirit is *leading us today* into a new understanding of the place of women in the Church," recommending steps be taken to permit women to be ordained as elder and deacon. This was not enacted until the 1964 Assembly, after 53 presbyteries voted in favor of (and 27 against) changing the *Book of Church Order* to permit women to be ordained as elders, deacons, and also ministers (Smith, pp. 61, 179; Lucas, pp. 210–212). In 1965, the Hanover Presbytery ordained the first woman pastor in the PCUS, Rachel Henderlite, only nine years after the Northern Church ordained its first woman minister, Margaret Towner, in 1956. (The Northern Church had approved the ordination of women as deacons in

21. "Southern Presbyterian Group Says 'Liberal' Ministers Running Church," *Mobile Register* (Oct. 20, 1959): 1, quoted in Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 133.

22. For the events leading up to this confessional revision, see Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, pp. 52–65.

23. For the exact language used, see Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, pp. 251–253.

24. Regarding Christ's teaching on marriage and divorce in Matt. 5:32 and 19:9, the report stated, "But the majority of New Testament scholars are strongly convinced that these words (the exception clauses) form no part of Jesus' teachings," leading to the conclusion that it is "likely that the Matthean exception does not reflect what Jesus said, and is to be rejected as a basis for formulating Christian doctrine." *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1956), p. 137, quoted in Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, pp. 55–56.

25. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, pp. 58, 63–64, 175, citing *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1970), p. 126.

26. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, pp. 177–178, citing *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1971), pp. 149, 151.

1922 and as ruling elders in 1929.) Henderlite had been the director of the Covenant Life Curriculum (which conservatives opposed), and her ordination took place in All Souls Church in Richmond, Virginia, a predominantly black church where Henderlite was a member (Thompson, 3.478–479). By adopting confessional revision and women's ordination, the PCUS was mirroring its Northern counterpart, as both churches modernized their theology for an egalitarian age. These changes, along with union churches and union presbyteries, prepared the way for an end to the North–South divide of the Presbyterian church.

COCU and a Protestant "Superchurch"

After the PCUS presbyteries rejected union with the Northern Church in 1955, this plan had been further frustrated in 1958 when the PCUSA merged with the UPCNA. This merger, which formed the UPCUSA, required additional assessment of this larger Northern Church. However, while PCUS ecumenists desired reunion with the Northern Church, they were also interested in uniting with other churches, evidenced by their involvement in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), also known as the "Blake–Pike Plan." This was the hope of Eugene Carson Blake (1906–1985), Stated Clerk of the UPCUSA, who preached a sermon on uniting Protestants at Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco on December 4, 1960, at the invitation of Bishop James Pike of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The 1961 General Assembly (UPCUSA) then sent invitations to the Methodist Church (USA), the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the United Church of Christ to unite. Representatives from these four churches met in 1961, with its formal meeting in 1962 that also included the PCUS, then called the Consultation of Church Union (COCU).

The 1962 PCUS Assembly rejected overtures to negotiate mergers to form a Protestant "superchurch" as part of COCU. However, the PCUS became a full participant in COCU at its 1966 Assembly, a "surprising action" that was approved by five synods, which Thompson took as evidence of a "massive change of sentiment in the church" (Thompson, 3.579–580). The 1966 Assembly's move stirred to action the Concerned Presbyterians (a laymen's organization founded in 1964 by leaders associated with the *Presbyterian Journal* and a successor to the 1940's Continuing Church Committee). The *Presbyterian Journal* saw the 1966 resolution on COCU as evidence that a split within the PCUS was inevitable (Thompson, 3.580). G. Aiken Taylor described the 1966 Assembly as a "massive victory for the 'ecumenical' brethren."[27]

The 1967 PCUS Assembly decisively declined to withdraw from COCU. Then in 1968, leaders from Concerned Presbyterians met for prayer, which led to meetings in February and July 1969. At the latter meeting they agreed to a seven-point statement called "The Declaration of Commitment," which included opposition to the church union that COCU membership represented. These ministers called themselves Presbyterian Churchmen United (PCU) (Lucas, p. 269). Robert Strong, pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church (Montgomery, Alabama) summarized conservative concerns when he said, "Radical ecumenicists caused the crisis in the Church and they plan the liquidation of confessional Presbyterianism in the Southland."[28]

In the background of this push for inter-denominational ecumenism was the influence of campus ministries, many of which were inter-denominational college groups that brought Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ together in the South. Seven out of every ten PCUS students were attending a public college by 1965, showing the influence college ministries were having on the PCUS (Thompson, 3.454). These groups often became involved in leftist politics, including the promotion of Communism. The PCUS had its own campus ministry, Westminster Fellowships, which, as Sean Lucas notes, "tended to be much more liberal theologically and socially than the congregations from which the students came," and "students were exposed to social-gospel issues—poverty, illiteracy, racism, economic justice—but heard little gospel preaching or teaching." Westminster Fellowships struggled, leading the PCUS Board of Christian Education in 1966 to phase them out and instead share campus ministries with other denominations (Lucas, pp. 214–215). In 1961, Aiken Taylor observed that it was in college ministries "where advanced ideas in ecumenism and other new religious forms most often find their earliest implementation." Taylor said PCUS "student work on college campuses" was "marching right ahead into organic mergers designed to 'bury' all denominational differences in a unified program." Taylor listed the National Council of Churches as a "motivating force in the movement," as the "student work officials of the various denominations" (including the PCUS) for five years negotiated "a unified outreach"

27. G. Aiken Taylor, "The Assembly Acted…," *Presbyterian Journal* (May 11, 1966): 7.

28. "Rally Applauds Pledge of Continuing Church," *Presbyterian Journal* (Dec. 17, 1969): 7–8.

plan for campus work that was implemented in 1960. Taylor concluded, "Here is the Ecumenical Church already alive and functioning where it will have the most effect: among students."[29]

The PCUS–RCA Plan of Union

PCUS Negotiations with the RCA

Such wide-ranging ecumenism formed the background to the PCUS in 1961 beginning serious merger conversations with the Reformed Church in America (RCA), even though there was a continued desire among PCUS ecumenists to unite with the Northern Presbyterian Church. The PCUS and RCA had formed a "plan of cooperation" and discussed union in 1874, but this ended when both churches joined the World Alliance of Reformed Churches formed that year. This met the desire for cooperation, and the two churches later "worked together for over a decade in close cooperation in the field of Christian Education and in the development of the Covenant Life Curriculum."[30]

Along with the Layman's Bible Commentary (25 volumes between 1959–64), the Covenant Life Curriculum was a 1960s project of the PCUS Board of Christian education seeking to make, in its own words, "new developments and insights" (i.e., critical scholarship) available to laypeople (Thompson, 3.463). *Presbyterian Journal* editor, G. Aiken Taylor, criticized the curriculum for presenting a Barthian view of revelation (that Scripture is only a witness to revelation and "becomes" the Word of God when received), among other forms of theological liberalism (Lucas, pp. 225–233). This sharing of the more liberal Covenant Life Curriculum suggests the theological trend of the RCA was in step with the PCUS. This is confirmed by the fact that while the PCUS opened all church offices to women in 1964, the RCA followed by opening the offices of elder and deacon to women in 1972 and the office of minister to women in 1979. In addition to shared curriculum, the RCA and PCUS were also both members of the more progressive National Council of Churches.

In 1950, the PCUS and PCUSA had sent a joint letter "to all Presbyterian and Reformed bodies in the United States," including the RCA, to consider a plan of union, but the RCA was not interested. At the same time, there had been merger talks between the RCA and another Presbyterian church in 1950, the UPCNA, though both churches turned this down.[31] The UPCNA merged with the PCUSA shortly after this in 1958 to form the UPCUSA (the body that would merge with the PCUS in 1983).

Interest in church union then came from within the RCA, showing ecumenism was alive and well among the Dutch Reformed. Three classes sent overtures suggesting union with the UPCUSA (Philadelphia, Westchester, Paramus), the Synod of New York suggested union with the PCUS, and two classes suggested joining the Blake–Pike discussion of a larger merger (Columbia, Ulster). The RCA then established an Executive Committee to investigate union.[32] The Executive Committee met with representatives of the UPCUSA but decided to terminate discussions.[33] An RCA subcommittee then recommended that its Executive Committee meet with the PCUS Permanent Committee on Inter-church Relations "for the purpose of discussing the possibility of closer cooperative relationships" (Thompson, 3.576).

The RCA General Synod Executive Committee and the PCUS Permanent Committee on Inter-Church Relations held consultations by sub-committees and then met in Washington, D. C. on April 3–4, 1962. These two groups submitted a Resolution to the RCA General Synod and the PCUS General Assembly, which was adopted by both in 1962. This 1962 Resolution recommended that "the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States affirm their common purpose, as branches of the Holy Catholic Church, to seek together a fuller expression of unity in faith and action." The stated desire was "to give more effective witness to the Gospel, and especially to the Reformation emphasis on the authority of Scripture and the Sovereignty of God as expressed in the Lordship of Jesus Christ." Notably, the Resolution read from the preamble of the 1874 "plan of cooperation" that acknowledged that "unity may, in our view, be effectually manifested by us in the absence of outward ecclesiastical uniformity, with which it ought never to be confounded, and which ought never to

29. G. Aiken Taylor, "Student Work Already Merged," *Presbyterian Journal* (Jan. 4, 1961): 10.

30. *The Acts and Proceedings of the One Hundred and Fifty-Seventh Regular Session of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America* (1963), p. 202 [*Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod*].

31. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1950), pp. 152–153; O. M. Walton, "U. P. Presbyteries Vote on Merger," *The Christian Century* 67/20 (May 17, 1950): 630. As of April 1, 28 of 30 U.P. presbyteries voted in favor of the merger, but by May 5, 17 of 48 presbyteries voted against (with only 51 total).

32. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1961), pp. 133–138, 330–331.

33. Spragens, "Conversations with the Reformed Church in America," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 80/3 (Nov. 1964): 27.

be purchased at the cost of truth."[34] The Resolution recommended that each assembly of the two churches authorize a committee of twelve persons to constitute a Joint Committee of Twenty-Four, which was to report annually to the RCA General Synod and PCUS General Assembly.

In studying the doctrine of the two churches and addressing the confessional differences, the Joint Committee enlisted two theologians from each church, Felix B. Gear of Columbia Theological Seminary, John H. Leith of Union Theological Seminary (Virginia), Elton Eenigenburg of Western Theological Seminary, and Howard G. Hageman.[35] The Joint Committee of Twenty-Four presented a Report to the 1964 assemblies that stated that the committee had met six times. The subcommittee composed of the four theologians compared the doctrinal standards of the two churches and concluded that a comparison of "these two sets of standards reveals many minor differences, but complete basic unity," crediting the differences to the Westminster Standards being written after the rise of Protestant scholasticism, almost a century after the earlier Reformed standards. The Report noted that the Westminster Standards "are in much greater detail than the Reformed Church standards and much more specific theologically," but stated that "both confessional systems are expressive of historic Calvinism."[36] The Committee of Twenty-Four appealed to Christ's high priestly prayer "for the unity of His people that 'the world might believe.'" Finding "large areas of agreement in theology, polity, and worship," with "no major impediments," the Committee therefore stated, "we envision the union of our two churches."[37]

In 1965, the Joint Committee recommended against expanding union conversations with the UPCUSA because of its "involvement" in the Consultation of Church Union with other churches. Instead, the Committee of Twenty-Four recommended that the two assemblies instruct the Committee to draft a Plan of Union, which both assemblies approved.[38] Unlike the PCUS's prior discussions with the Northern Church, proceedings with the RCA experienced little opposition until the final vote. The RCA was about a quarter of the size of the PCUS, as the RCA had a membership of around 250,000, while the PCUS had a membership just under one million.[39] While not as large as the Northern Presbyterian Church, the RCA complemented the PCUS as a Northern counterpart and would make the united church a national rather than sectional church. The only challenge raised by the proposed merger for the PCUS was how this would impact the opportunity for reunion with the Northern Presbyterian Church (Thompson, 3.576–577).

PCUS Acceptance of the RCA Merger Plan

The 1962 PCUS General Assembly rejected negotiations with the Blake–Pike Plan (COCU), showing the PCUS was committed to exploring union with the RCA, at least for the time being.[40] In 1965, the PCUS Assembly even put talks on hold with the UPCUSA because of serious conversation with the RCA.[41] Thus, PCUS–RCA union seemed to be a very real possibility—that is, until the 1966 PCUS Assembly entertained other suitors. In response to communication from the UPCUSA, the 1966 PCUS General Assembly directed its Permanent Committee to explore the challenges of a union with the UPCUSA, inviting the RCA to also participate. The 1966 Assembly also adopted a resolution expressing its desire to become a full participant in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), a move that would prove to be fatal to the RCA union proceedings. Still, the 1967 PCUS Assembly finalized a draft of the Plan of Union with the RCA. The following year the Assembly passed that plan in crushing numbers, 406 to 36.[42] It was even approved by more than three-fourths of the 79 presbyteries, leaving the next steps to be the RCA's approval and then the 1969 PCUS Assembly's approval. However, that vote would never come because of the RCA's rejection at the classis level.

The failed effort notwithstanding, it is worth highlighting some aspects of the proposed Plan of Union between the PCUS and RCA, which would form a new church called the "Presbyterian Reformed Church in America." Notably, this plan would have (1) weakened ministerial vows, (2) removed the Westminster Larger Catechism and Canons of Dort from the doctrinal standards, (3) omitted the office of deacon, and (4) made church property belong to the presbytery and not the congregation (a change for the PCUS). The new ministerial vows would have required accepting the Bible as only being "inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the unique

34. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1962), p. 349.
35. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1963), p. 205.
36. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1964), pp. 310–311.
37. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1964), pp. 318, 321.
38. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1965), pp. 277–278.
39. John B. Spragens, "Conversations with the Reformed Church in America," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 80/3 (Nov. 1964): 24.
40. *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1962), pp. 72–74.
41. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 124, citing *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1965), p. 81.
42. *Minutes of the PCUS General Assembly* (1968), pp. 94–96.

and authoritative guide to faith and life," thus weakening the vow to Scripture's authority. The vows also would have required the affirmation of doctrinal standards merely "as setting forth the essential doctrines of the Christian faith as they are revealed in the Holy Scriptures."[43] The removal of the Westminster Larger Catechism and the Canons of Dort would eliminate the most detailed theology of the two churches and thus weaken the extent of subscription. Oddly, the Plan of Union removed the office of deacon and passed that function onto elders, directly at odds with Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-13) (Smith, p. 128).

Morton H. Smith (1923–2017), a founding professor at RTS and first stated clerk of the PCA, noted that while not in the written record, a tape record showed that when Judge John A. Fulton presented the Plan of Union to the 1968 PCUS General Assembly, he stated the plan to make the church property belong to presbytery was a change from the Southern Presbyterian position (Smith, p. 128). (In the PCUS, property belonged to the congregation, but how that would play out in civil court in a separation from the denomination was not always clear.[44] This explains the desire for an "escape clause.") This move surely would have alarmed conservative churches that considered leaving. The fear was that the liberals were attempting to change the *Book of Church Order* to make explicit "implied trust," where the congregation holds its property in trust for the denomination. There was hopeful precedent from a 1966 Georgia Supreme Court case that awarded church property to two congregations that left the PCUS, but this was no guarantee for PCUS churches outside the state of Georgia (Lucas, pp. 295–296).

However, while property ownership might have changed, the PCUS–RCA Plan of Union also included an "escape clause" that would permit congregations to leave their denomination with their property within a year after the union.[45] Smith said that "there were some conservatives who were willing to vote for this Plan, because it provided an escape clause, and this may account for the sharp departure from the faith that is represented by three-quarters of the Presbyteries approving the Plan." Yet Smith noted that "None of this is in the records" (Smith, p. 128). Smith's explanation appears to be based on his first-hand knowledge through discussions with presbyters who voted in favor of the Plan in their presbyteries, and there is little reason to doubt such an account. E. T. Thompson also said the RCA union "was acceptable" to conservatives "because of the 'escape clause'" (Thompson, p. 581). And three years later in 1971, Andrew Jumper, a leader of the moderate Covenant Fellowship, even accused conservative leaders of supporting a plan of union with the Northern in exchange for an "escape clause," suggesting this had been a conservative strategy.[46] The continued conservative resistance to union with the Northern Church would lead to the expectation of greater resistance to the union with the RCA than was recorded. Instead, the PCUS Assembly passed the Plan of Union with the RCA 406 to 36, and over three-quarters of the presbyteries voted in favor of the plan. The best explanation of the widespread support for a merger with the RCA was that many PCUS conservatives sought to leave the church via an escape clause as part of the Plan of Union.

RCA Rejection of the Merger Plan

After the 1966 PCUS General Assembly voted to become a "full participant" in COCU, the RCA Committee of the Twelve said in an addendum to their Report that the PCUS's action "was not anticipated by the Joint Committee." The RCA's Committee did not think the PCUS Assembly intended to "affect the preparation of the Plan of Union," but it did recommend the RCA General Synod send a letter to the PCUS General Assembly requesting it "clarify our mutual relationship in light of the actions of the 1966 General Assembly."[47]

The records indicate that PCUS interest in other churches is what sealed the fate of the Plan of Union. The PCUS already had union churches with the UPCUSA that began in 1959, and many in the RCA were opposed to a later merger with the UPCUSA.[48] However, it was the PCUS's 1966 move to join COCU that was the nail in the coffin. As G. Aiken Taylor noted, the 1966 PCUS Assembly's actions "were considered contradictory by most observers," as the Assembly voted to participate in COCU, which "has had little sympathy within the RCA." Taylor thought that the PCUS's

43. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 127, citing *Proposed Plan of Union Between RCA and PCUS*, p. 461; *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1968), pp. 278, 288–289.

44. Interestingly, the PCUS–RCA Joint Committee of Twenty-Four, in comparing the RCA and PCUS, said of the PCUS property issue—"'Who owns the property?' is a question of civil law. Presbytery's involvement arises only when church is dissolved or ceases to exist (FG, 6-3), or when church attempts to remove itself and its property from the communion" in *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1965), p. 280.

45. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1968), pp. 292–293; Thompson, p. 581.

46. Andrew Jumper, "Is This the End for the PCUS?" *The Open Letter* (Jan. 1971): 1, cited in Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, p. 273.

47. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1966), p. 302.

48. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1968), pp. 290–292.

joining of COCU "means that the four-year conversations with the Reformed Church in America are, to all practical purposes, defunct."[49] And he would be right.

In 1967 and 1968, a number of overtures were sent up by RCA classes to the General Synod calling for the Plan of Union to "cease." In 1967, the Classis of Dakota overtured the RCA General Synod to "cease" the Plan of Union "until such a time as they withdraw as an active participant in C.O.C.U." The reasoning was that "the Presbyterian Church U.S. has broken faith with the R.C.A. by becoming an active participant in C.O.C.U.," as the Committee of Twenty-Four "originally agreed that no other merger conversations would be entered upon, by either denomination, until such a time as the question of merger between the Reformed Church in America and the Presbyterian Church U.S. be resolved." The overture stated that the PCUS's involvement in COCU raised a "red flag" for those hesitant for a merger.[50]

There were also several 1967 overtures to withdraw from the National Council of Churches, with two citing the NCC's position on Scripture. The Classis of South Grand Rapids gave the reason that "The leadership of the NCC is composed almost entirely of those who hold a 'liberal' or non-scriptural view of the Bible."[51] This displays an anti-ecumenical spirit in some parts of the RCA that would conflict with the plans of ecumenists in the PCUS. More overtures were sent to the 1968 RCA General Synod to cease the Plan of Union.[52] However, the 1968 RCA General Synod approved the Plan of Union with 183 voting in favor and 103 against.[53] The plan then went on to the classes, where it needed two-thirds (a minimum of 30 classes). Yet while the PCUS had a higher threshold (three-fourths of the presbyteries), it passed the Plan of Union, and it was in the RCA where it failed to pass two-thirds of the classes (though it was passed by a majority of the classes).[54] It is noteworthy that despite the PCUS joining COCU, the PCUS–RCA Plan of Union was still able to garner the support of the RCA General Synod and over half the RCA classes.

The Formation of the PCA

Thus, 14 years after the PCUS had rejected union with the Northern Presbyterian Church in 1954, it sought to unite with another liberalizing Reformed body in 1968—only to be rejected by the RCA. It seems that while the 1954 defeat of union with the Northern Church gave hope to PCUS conservatives that they could control the church, that hope faded and they instead turned to a "defensive strategy"—supporting union with the RCA or UPCUSA that would include a form of "escape clause" to allow conservative churches to secede peacefully and with their buildings.[55] Another possible explanation of the overwhelming vote in favor of the RCA merger is that PCUS conservatives thought the merger would strengthen their cause. However, although the RCA was fairly conservative in the Midwest at the time, it was heavily liberal in its Eastern churches, as well as its eastern seminary, New Brunswick (NJ) Theological Seminary. The proposed merger between the PCUS and RCA would have increased the total number of conservatives, but it likely would have decreased the percentage of conservatives in a united church.

PCUS conservatives had to analyze the possible outcomes of discussions with the RCA. If the merger were successful, they reasoned "that such a merger would impede rather than aid liberal plans for union with the United Presbyterian Church,"[56] as the Northern Church would have to consider joining with a diverse denomination rather than a simple reunification with the Southern Presbyterian Church. However, if the merger failed, PCUS conservatives anticipated this would increase momentum for union with the Northern Church, the very thing they opposed.[57]

Ironically, this failed merger between the PCUS and RCA helped lead to the formation of an entirely separate church body in 1973, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). For the RCA's rejection of the proposed merger led the 1969 PCUS General Assembly to immediately look elsewhere for church union, which it did by approving the establishment of a merger conversation with the Northern Presbyterian Church (UPCUSA). The 1969 PCUS Assembly instructed its moderator, Rev. Matthew Lynn of Midland, Texas, "to appoint a committee to open immediate negotiations for union with the" UPCUSA (Thompson, p. 581). The Joint Committee of the PCUS and UPCUSA, also known as the Committee of Twenty-Four (12 members from each church and eventually increased to 30 members), reported to each General Assembly beginning in 1970. And after a

49. Taylor, "The Assembly Acted…," *Presbyterian Journal* (May 11, 1966): 6–7.

50. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1967), p. 119.

51. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1967), p. 115.

52. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1968), pp. 106–110.

53. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1968), p. 284.

54. *Acts and Proceedings of the RCA General Synod* (1969), pp. 205, 303.

55. Frank Joseph Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Continuing Church Movement* (Manassas, VA: Reformation Educational Foundation, 1985), p. xiii.

56. Frank Smith, ibid., p. 43.

57. Frank Smith, ibid., p. 43.

liberal route at the 1971 General Assembly, the conservatives knew they had to leave the PCUS. As G. Aiken Taylor said after the Assembly, "In short, to all practical purposes, the show is over."[58]

The draft Plan of Union with the UPCUSA presented to the 1971 PCUS General Assembly included an "escape clause" for those churches that did not support the union and wanted to leave. However, the Joint Committee abandoned a provision for an escape clause in February 1973, even asking the 1973 Assembly for permission to scratch the prior plan and draft a brand-new plan (which would delay the union). With the escape clause off the table, conservatives in the PCUS knew leaving the denomination would likely become much more difficult after a merger with the more liberal Northern Church. Thus, in response to the Joint Committee's abandonment of an escape clause, 21 churches of the Tuscaloosa Presbytery requested dismissal from the PCUS to form the new Warrior Presbytery. This request was granted, and 20 of the 21 churches were released with their property. The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church met the next week and put forth its "Reaffirmations of 1973," which called for a new church body that calendar year.[59] The Steering Committee had representatives from four conservative organizations—*Presbyterian Journal*, Concerned Presbyterians, Presbyterian Churchmen United, and Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship. By August 1973, 14 presbyteries were formed to receive churches leaving the PCUS. (Ten churches and 16 pastors and elders had earlier formed the independent Vanguard Presbytery on September 7, 1972, whose churches joined the PCA in 1977.)

This new church body would be called the National Presbyterian Church, though it would be changed to the Presbyterian Church in America one year later due to threats of lawsuit from a UPCUSA church in Washington D. C. The PCA held its first General Assembly on December 4, 1973, with 260 congregations (519 by 1981) represented (Frank Smith, p. 451). Its first moderator was ruling elder Jack Williamson, and its first stated clerk was teaching elder Morton H. Smith. With many of the conservatives gone, the PCUS had little resistance to a merger with the Northern Church. It took ten more years, but the PCUS and UPCUSA merged to form the PCUSA on June 10, 1983. The PCUS presbyteries voted in favor of the union 53 to 8, and the UPCUSA presbyteries voted in favor 152 to 3.[60]

While the PCA was formed in the context of opposition to reunion with the Northern Church, the PCA was not opposed to mergers in principle. This is seen in that only nine years after its formation, the PCA welcomed the RPCES as part of the 1982 Joining and Receiving, adding 164 churches and over 20,000 members. However, the PCA was also willing to reject mergers it did not see fit, seen in that the PCA also invited the OPC in 1982 but the PCA presbyteries rejected the OPC merger (after the OPC Assembly had approved). The PCA was charting its own course as a church. G. Aiken Taylor even advocated a realignment of conservative Reformed churches. And in 1971, he formed the National Presbyterian and Reformed Fellowship (NPRF), the predecessor to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), of which the PCA is a member to this day (Lucas, pp. 297–298).

The story of the failed PCUS–RCA merger shows the PCA was formed not only because of theological liberalism but also because of coinciding ecumenism in the PCUS. The liberal dream of reunion with the Northern Presbyterian Church concerned PCUS conservatives because liberalism's advance in the Northern Church was beyond that of its Southern counterpart. The 1966 Assembly decision to join COCU was an even more radical exploration in ecumenism, with the goal of forming a Protestant superchurch. Consequently, prior to 1973, the PCUS had supported policies of the National Council of Churches, become a full participant in COCU, voted to merge with the RCA, and advanced union churches and presbyteries with the Northern Presbyterian Church. All of these ecumenical moves were evidence of the PCUS's drift away from biblical authority and commitment to the Westminster Standards.[61] The PCUS no longer desired to be a distinctively Presbyterian church in the South but a broad national church. Thus, theological liberalism and ecumenism cannot be separated in the history of the decline of the Southern Presbyterian Church. PCUS liberals sought visible church union at the expense of truth, while (many) PCUS conservatives severed union for the sake of truth. Amidst such severance the PCA was born.[62]

58. G. Aiken Taylor, "The Assembly Tried to be Gentle," *Presbyterian Journal* (July 7, 1971): 14.

59. Smith, *How Is the Gold Become Dim*, p. 129. For the "Reaffirmations of 1973," see Appendix XVIII, pp. 357–369.

60. Feldmeth, et al., *Reformed and Evangelical Across Four Centuries*, p. 307.

61. Feldmeth, et al., *Reformed and Evangelical Across Four Centuries*, p. 299.

62. The author and the church he pastors have been influenced by much of the history documented in this essay. The author was a member of a conservative RCA church in college, attended RTS Jackson for seminary, and later left the RCA to join the PCA. His wife grew

Reflections on Southern Presbyterian Ecumenism

To conclude, it is fitting to reflect on the ecumenical spirit advanced in the 20th century PCUS. In his survey of Presbyterian ecumenism between 1870 and 1920, D. G. Hart has argued that ecumenism "contributed to the antagonism between fundamentalists and modernists" as much as theological debates, a point he said is missed by many historians of 20th century Protestantism. Hart argued the differences between ecumenists and anti-ecumenists "provide a more fruitful way for understanding twentieth-century American Protestant history than the standard liberal/evangelical taxonomy."[63] Whereas ecumenists "often blur ecclesiastical and theological differences into abstract notions of Christian unity and social harmony, Protestant confessionalists [who are anti-ecumenists] are localists when it comes to the work of the church."[64] Hart's analysis may be applied to the history of the PCUS, as the struggle in the 20th century was one over ecumenism along with theological liberalism.

As demonstrated, there was a clear shift in the PCUS's approach to ecumenism after the Civil War and into the mid-20th century. In the earlier years, Southern Presbyterians were not welcomed by the Evangelical Alliance (founded in in London in 1846 and the American branch in 1867) because of the PCUS's refusal to condemn slavery.[65] Thus, while ecumenical movements tended to downplay doctrine, they often pushed a progressive agenda. Southern Presbyterian leaders subsequently criticized ecumenism for "doctrinal indifferentism" and defended denominations as a good that allows for differences of opinion.[66] This included criticism of the Presbyterian Alliance, a group founded in 1877 with similar aims as the Evangelical Alliance but with an appeal to Presbyterians.

Notable in this regard is 19th century Southern Presbyterian R. L. Dabney, whom Hart praised for "remarkable foresight" in detecting "within the union movement what would become the substance of liberal Protestant theology."[67] Dabney helped bring about the merger between the New School and Old School churches in the South in 1864 (to form what would be called the PCUS), showing he was not opposed to all forms of church union—similar to how the PCA received the RPCES nine years after its formation. However, Dabney vociferously opposed reunion with the Northern Church and attacked ecumenism, or what he called "broad churchism." This may suggest that Dabney was simply a Southern partisan (which he was) and that he valued shared culture as essential to unity (which he did). However, there was also a theological component to Dabney's analysis, as he identified the question not as whether Christians "should be one in aims, in spirit, in affection," but "whether an organic unity is necessary."[68] Unity in truth is the way to union, as Dabney explained: "The more they approximate the Bible standard, the more they will approach each other, not only in community of faith and love, but even in outward form."[69]

In his typical prophetic voice, Dabney warned against the spirit of ecumenism that would weaken the churches—"the same argument which demands that Presbyterian churches must be unified in a visible centre, will necessarily be extended to all others recognized as true churches, though non-Presbyterian." He concluded, "Thus will come about a still wider confederation, not Pan-Presbyterian, but Pan-Protestant; and the necessary condition of its existence will be precisely that combination of loose, unfaithful, *doctrinal* broad-churchism, with tyrannical enforcement of outward union and uniformity, which now characterizes popery." In this way, Protestants would seek "formal union" but "at the expense of that which" God "regards as of supreme value—doctrinal fidelity."[70] Here Dabney anticipated that the desire for Presbyterian union would lead to broader Protestant union, such as the PCUS Plan of Union with the RCA and the COCU "superchurch" movement. Although the pan-Protestant COCU plan failed to transpire, pan-Protestant movements have continued to arise over the years (e.g., Campus Crusade for Christ and The Gospel Coalition). Sometimes these movements even involve more conservative constituents, but their doctrinal minimization inevitably leads to tolerance of more progressive elements.

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up in a Presbyterian church in Kuwait, pastored by her father, that traces its history to the work of RCA missionaries in the 20th century. The church the author pastors, Bryce Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA) in White Rock, New Mexico, was formed by a group that left the local UPCUSA, including its pastor Wayne A. Buchtel, to form a PCA church in 1975, originally known as Sangre de Cristo Covenant Church. G. Aiken Taylor, Morton Smith, and John Gerstner (UPCUSA at the time) had all preached at the church.

63. Hart, "The Tie that Divides," *WTJ* 60 (1998): 87.
64. Hart, "The Tie that Divides," *WTJ* 60 (1998): 106.
65. R. L. Dabney, "What Is Christian Union," in *Discussions: Vol. II: Evangelical*, ed. C. R. Vaughan (1891; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1982), p. 441.
66. Hart, "The Tie that Divides," *WTJ* 60 (1998): 95–96.
67. Hart, "The Tie that Divides," *WTJ* 60 (1998): 97.
68. Dabney, "What Is Christian Union," p. 430.
69. Dabney, "What iIs Christian Union," p. 437.
70. R. L. Dabney, "The Pan-Presbyterian Alliance," in *Discussions: Vol. II: Evangelical*, pp. 537–538.

It should not be missed that broad churchism begins *within* a church, where the church broadens its tolerance of theological diversity, particularly in a more liberal direction. As the church becomes broader, it sees less reason for not being broader still. This is the temptation even for churches today that do not long for formal church mergers. If a church becomes broad enough, the church can expand even without mergers by welcoming more pastors and congregants of diverse doctrinal convictions.

In the case of the PCUS, its abandonment of doctrinal rigour led to greater desire for visible church unity, attuned to the spirit of 20th century America. PCUS seminaries were entrenched in higher criticism, training ministers to hold a lower view of Scripture's authority and thus weaker doctrinal convictions. As liberalism took root in the pulpit, more PCUS pastors and churches saw little reason to remain separate from the Northern Presbyterian Church. And if reunion with the Northern Church could not take place, they would settle for a merger with the RCA, or even churches outside the Reformed tradition (COCU). Greater visible church unity had to happen, and it had to happen *now*. Yet as the PCUS sought reunion with the Northern Church, this fueled further liberal changes in order to keep doctrinal differences out of the way of a potential merger. So the PCUS followed the PCUSA (and UPCUSA) down the path of throwing off all convictions of the past, whether it be biblical inerrancy, Calvinism, conservative social views, or the limitation of church office to men. It was a vicious cycle of liberalism driving ecumenism and ecumenism driving liberalism.

Anticipating the result of 20th century ecumenism, Dabney spoke of "men eager to subscribe a creed which they do not believe, and to explain away their unbelief and opposite convictions, as not adverse or new doctrines, but merely new methods of adjusting the philosophic relations of the old dogmas." This is the essence of liberalism, or modernism, where men "adjust" their creed to suit modernity. Yet this adjustment destroys the very creed it seeks to uphold. As Dabney added, "So benumbing is the spirit of indifferency begotten by this comprehension, that its tendency is to extinguish all true life in the church which practices it."[71] Although writing in 1871, over 100 years before the formation of the PCA, Dabney foretold what was to take place in the 20th century PCUS—a spirit of doctrinal indifference and demand for visible unity that extinguished true life in the church. As confessional Presbyterians look to the future, let us never forget that true life is found not in doctrinal indifference, but fidelity to the Word of God and its doctrines summarized in our confessional standards.▪

71. R. L. Dabney, "Broad Churchism," in *Discussions: Vol. II: Evangelical*, pp. 460–461.

In Brief: **In Fifty Years Another Division? J. W. Hassell, "The Pattern of Success," Mail Bag, *The Presbyterian Journal*, Volume XXXII, No. 17 (August 22, 1973): 2. James Wodrow Hassell (1886–1979) was a missionary to Japan and served a number of Southern Presbyterian churches, including the First Presbyterian Church in McAllen, Texas. "Following his retirement, he served many churches in the Statesville area and was supply pastor for Sweetwater Presbyterian Church and Belk Memorial Presbyterian in Hickory." Hickory Daily Record, "Area Deaths, Funerals. Dr. J. W. Hassell" (Tues., July 31, 1979): 12a.**

The Pattern of Success. The Continuing Church appears now to be well under way. However, we ought to keep uppermost in our planning the kind of organization we intend to build. Are we to be content with simply a proper theology, Church aims that conform to the Great Commission, and right attitudes toward morals? These things are essential, and we must have them. However, it is necessary ever to keep in mind that what we are striving for is quality and not quantity—not number of churches, number of members, number of dollars, but discipline. We must have a return to the old Presbyterian emphasis on character building, on Sabbath observance, family worship, Bible study, catechism, and plain common honesty and truthfulness. And of course all this must be suffused with the love of God and the compassion and tenderness of Christ. There wasn't much the matter with our Church from 1861 to 1920. But then we relaxed and began to slip along all these lines. In 1921 there were over four thousand recitations of the catechisms, and numerous family altars were reported. Today such things have almost vanished. From the very infancy of the new Church we must turn over a brand new leaf and make a completed fresh start. Every minister, every session, every Sunday school teacher should be dedicated to the supreme task of building character, and be satisfied with nothing less. Any other course will bring us fifty years hence to another division. But only as long as the new Church is solid in its faith and moral character will it be permanent in fact as we all so earnestly pray.—Rev. J. W. Hassell, Hickory, N.C.▪

Ecclesial Unity and Creation Doctrine

By William VanDoodewaard

One of the great challenges in evangelical and Reformed churches in creation-evolution debates is the problem of church unity. Concern over ecclesiastical division is real. Many evangelicals prefer not to hold a strong position on creation because of it. Non-creationists often say that creation is a secondary matter that we can disagree about. Creationists see it as the beginning of everything: error here erodes all that comes after. Particular understanding of aspects of creation may not be essential to salvation, but are nonetheless significant to our faith. As evident in the more recent history of Presbyterianism in North America, there are varied views on where boundary lines should be drawn in relation to ordinations, confessional subscription, and local church membership.[1] With these realities, how can local churches and denominations faithfully navigate deeply held differences, including determined ambivalence? How can we avoid splitting churches over genuinely unimportant matters, as has occurred at times in Protestantism? Beginning with the doctrine of the unity of the church, this article explores how to navigate issues of creation doctrine in relation to both ecclesial unity and a confessional commitment to the whole of Scripture as God's Word.

The Unity of the Church

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, became incarnate, lived, suffered, died and rose so that all Christians, through union with him, would be restored to communion with the Triune God, in one body, the church. Michael Horton helpfully reflects "the church has its origin in the decision of the Triune God and is created by God's Word … it is born 'from above.'"[2] In His marvelous High Priestly Prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus prays for His redeemed, "I ask … that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us…. The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in Me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as you loved Me"

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1. This is evidenced in recent decades in several confessional Presbyterian denominations. In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) case of Ruling Elder Terry Gray in Michigan, Gray held that the record of natural history should allow for the possibility that Adam and Eve were created through a process involving primate ancestors. Charges were brought against Gray at the Presbytery level; Gray then appealed to the General Assembly, which denied his appeal. Terry Gray, "A Letter to the Committee of Five in Response to the First Draft of the Charges, March 14, 1994," Documents Related to the Evolution Trial in the OPC at The American Scientific Affiliation, http://www.asa3.org/gray/evolution_trial/response_to_PM-Wcharges.html.See also Terry Gray, "Excerpts from the Minutes of the 63rd General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," Documents Related to the Evolution Trial in the OPC at The American Scientific Affiliation, http://www.asa3.org/gray/evolution_trial/general_assembly_actions.html#anchor8409563. It also became evident in subsequent OPC and Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) General Assemblies, as issues of both the days of creation and theistic evolution were addressed: Presbyterian Church of America, *Report of the Creation Study Committee to the 28th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 2302–91; Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation to the 71st General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, pp. 1601–1740. For a narrative history of views among Presbyterians in the 1990's-early 2000's see William VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics and Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pp. 208–49.

2. Michael Horton, "The Church" in Michael Allen and Scott Swain eds., *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), p. 313.

(John 17:20–23).[3] In keeping with Triune unity, Jesus' prayer is that His people, in their union with God in Him, would also experience the blessedness of unity with each other. His prayer finds its early answer as the disciples gather with Him post-resurrection, and as they continued to come together as a body after His ascension, as when the day of Pentecost arrived (Acts 1:4–2:1).

The New Testament narrates the advance of the gospel and growth of the church from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and beyond. As it does we see repeated indicators of the pattern of continued commitment to the divine plan of Christian unity—whether in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), or the love offering of the Mediterranean churches for the impoverished Jerusalem Church (2 Cor. 9). The apostle Paul celebrates Christ's redemptive work "creating in himself one new man": a church in which all Christians are "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God … a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:15–22). Christians are to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" understanding that there is "one body" (Eph. 4:1–4) of the church in Christ. In the epistle to the Philippians, Paul urges the church at Philippi, "complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil. 2:2). In his God-given vision of heaven, the apostle John sees one church in perfect unity, "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9–10).

Reflecting on Scripture's teaching in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, Geerhardus Vos reminds us that the unity of the church is rooted in the reality that "the individual believer cannot remain by himself … the work of the application of the merits of the Mediator has a communal side…. Believers were all reckoned in Christ, regenerated by the Spirit of Christ; they were all implanted into Christ in order to form one body."[4] Edmund Clowney states "we are to be one because we serve one God."[5] This unity of believers in Christ is a reality that every Christian should long to see more and more fully expressed.

The desire for this unity is evident from the early church to today. Clement of Rome encouraged the early church to be "gathered together in harmony, crying out to [the Lord] earnestly, with one mouth, so that we may come to share in his great and glorious promises."[6] Several generations later, Cyprian lamented the division of the church into separated bodies in his day, arising from divergence on how to deal with those repenting after lapsing under persecution. "I find that you there, contrary to ecclesiastical order, contrary to evangelical law, contrary to the unity of the Catholic institution, had consented that another bishop should be made. That is what is neither right nor allowable to be done; that another church should be set up; that Christ's members should be torn asunder; that the one mind and body of the Lord's flock should be lacerated by a divided emulation … think not that you are thus maintaining the Gospel of Christ when you separate yourselves from the flock of Christ, and from his peace and concord."[7] Cyprian went on to say,

> who, then, is so wicked and faithless, who is so insane with the madness of discord, as to believe that the unity of God can be divided, or to dare to tear the garment of the Lord, the Church of Christ? He Himself warns us in His Gospel, "There shall be one flock and one shepherd." [John 10:16] Does anyone believe that there can be many shepherds in one place, or many flocks? The Apostle Paul urges this same unity: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree with each other and avoid schisms. Be united in the same mind and in the same judgment." [1 Cor. 1:10.] And again, he says, "Bearing with one another in love, labor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." [Eph. 4:3].[8]

While the history of the church bears testimony to many divisions, the call to church unity continues through the reading, preaching and teaching of the

3. All Scripture references are from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

4. Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume Five: Ecclesiology, The Means of Grace, Eschatology*, trans. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), p. 3.

5. Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 79.

6. Clement of Rome, *1 Clement*, 34.7 in Michael Holmes, ed. and trans. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 91.

7. Cyprian, "Epistle XLIII. To the Roman Confessors, That They Should Return to Unity" in *The Epistles of Cyprian* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 321. See also Mark Edwards, "Early Ecclesiology in the West" in Paul Avis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 169–70.

8. Cyprian, "Treatise I. On the Unity of the Church" in *The Epistles of Cyprian* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 423–4.

Scriptures to the present—and is seen in Christian testimony to it.

What about Doctrinal and Practical Divergences?

Just as Scripture clearly indicates the call to Christian unity, it also displays fractures: occasions of division due to divergence within the church, or from the church. In Galatians 2:11–14, the apostle Paul relates an occasion, likely one that led up to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, where there was division in the church because of the introduction of error: Peter and others (fellow Christians to Paul) were succumbing to the influence of the circumcision party, undermining the gospel. Through the council at Jerusalem, the church pursued and regained unity in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Galatians 3:28 Paul reflects by the Spirit that for those in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ."

Not long after the Jerusalem Council, we see another example of division within the life of the church. Acts 15 records Paul and Barnabas parting ways over a practical disagreement as to whether Mark suitably meets biblical qualifications for missionary service—a breach that is healed some time later, likely through Mark's evident growth to a place of such service (cf. Col. 4:10–11). In Acts 18 we read of a case of doctrinal error that could have led to division, but did not. Apollos preached eloquently and sincerely in Ephesus, but with incomplete, and as such, misconstrued doctrine. Priscilla and Aquila "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:24–28), proactively strengthening both the ministry and unity of the church.

Scripture not only relates cases of restored unity after division, but also makes plain there are cases of both unwarranted and warranted division. In 1 Corinthians 1 we read of unwarranted division in the church over pulpit favorites when all those who ministered the Word were ministering faithfully (1 Cor. 1:10–17). In 1 Corinthians 5 we read of a case of a man's sexual immorality, from whom the Corinthian congregation failed to separate itself (1 Cor. 5:1–13). Paul's exhortation by the Spirit is that separation through discipline is warranted and necessary in this latter situation. The Corinthians listened and acted in disciplinary division, which in time led to repentance, and an ensuing ministry of restoration and reunion of this man to the church body (2 Cor. 2:5–11).

In other biblical situations of divergence of professing Christians from Christian doctrine and life, division or separation is commended with the awareness that reunion may never occur. The doctrine of the circumcision party in Galatia was contrary to the gospel of Christ; the apostle Paul describes it as "deserting Christ" and "turning to a different gospel" which warrants being "accursed" (Galatians 1:6–9). The testimony of the New Testament is that while the Jerusalem Council brought a restoration of unity for many, not all of the circumcision party returned to faithful gospel commitment in unity with the church (cf. Titus 1:10).

In the epistle to the Philippians, there are those Paul describes with tears who "walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Phil. 3:18–19). Peter reminds the New Testament church that just as there were false prophets among the people in the Old Testament era, so there "will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies … bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2:1). Jude speaks of these false teachers as "scoffers, following their own ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit" (Jude 18–19). The ascended Christ rebukes the church at Thyatira for tolerating "that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality …"; he declares that he will separate her and her followers from his church through his judgements (Rev. 2:20).

Scripture testifies to the unity of the church in Christ, along with both right and wrong cases of division. Undoubtedly our calling is to pursue growth in unity which only divides when, how, and in the degree that is consistent with Christ's call to do so. Faithful Christian unity in communion with God is a beautiful reality: "Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity … it is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore" (Psalm 133:1–3).

"Theological Triage"

So how do we discern when division is needed, and when it is illegitimate? Reflecting on Scripture, confessional and evangelical Protestant theologians have sought to answer these questions, while avoiding errors of ecumenism or separatism that fail to cohere with the Word that defines both the church and her unity. More recent evangelical Protestant reflection

has followed a model of "theological triage", as initially outlined by Albert Mohler, and further elucidated and applied by Gavin Ortlund in his *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*.[9] Mohler speaks of first, second, and third order doctrines; Ortlund develops this further into four categories:

> First-rank doctrines are essential to the gospel itself. Second-rank doctrines are urgent for the health and practice of the church such that they frequently cause Christians to separate at the level of local church, denomination, and/or ministry. Third-rank doctrines are important to Christian theology, but not enough to justify separation or division among Christians. Fourth-rank doctrines are unimportant to our gospel witness and ministry collaboration.[10]

Ortlund helpfully cites the concern of theologians ranging from John Calvin and Francis Turretin to Gresham Machen that Christians avoid unnecessary division as he makes the case for wise distinctions of theological importance in relation to the unity of the church.

While including careful nuance that "non-essential" (to salvation and Christian fellowship) doctrine retains significance, the lingering question remains, when reading Ortlund, whether there is in reality a category of biblical doctrines that are "unimportant" to gospel witness and ministry collaboration. Added to this is the challenge that his categorical approach can be applied in very different ways between different Christians: one person's fourth-rank doctrine may well be another's second-rank doctrine. Turning to theologians Ortlund cites proves helpful in working towards a more holistic answer to the need for "theological triage" in ministry that is committed to the unity of the church.

Turretin speaks of distinguishing "fundamental and non-fundamental articles" by considering three areas.[11] First, the nature and condition of doctrines (for example are these doctrines "containing necessary causes and conditions of salvation"?).[12] Second, he defines fundamental doctrines as those that are "derived from the declaration of Scripture", and are "necessary and saving" while "ignorance or denial" of them is spiritually deadly.[13] Third, Turretin argues that the Apostles Creed provides a "mark of fundamental doctrines" though he notes "we must however be careful" as it is a brief and limited summary of doctrine.[14] Ortlund's approach has much in common with Turretin here.

Turretin's statement that fundamental doctrines are shown to be fundamental by the teaching of Scripture provides further direction towards a more holistic model of theological triage.[15] His foundational description of how fundamental doctrines are discerned flows from his subsequent reflection on the authority of the Scriptures:

> The Scriptures are inspired of God as the primary foundation of faith. The authority of Scripture is nothing else than the right and dignity of the sacred books, on account of which they are most worthy of faith with regard to those things which they propose to be believed and of our obedience in those things they command us to omit or to do. The divine and infallible truth of these books (which have God for their author) is the foundation because he has the highest right to bind men to faith and duty.[16]

Turretin's reflection on the authority of Scripture as a whole stands in line with the testimony of Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant confessions of faith and catechisms, created to unify churches through shared statements of biblical doctrine in the face of doctrinal division and tumult. The Belgic Confession of Faith (1561) states that while God reveals himself through His creation and providence, "He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation."[17] Everything that Scripture reveals is necessary for us to know and believe.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) summarizes it this way: "the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man."[18] The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647) expands on this noting that

9. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity," Albert Mohler (blog), last modified July 12, 2005; Mohler, *The Disappearance of God: Dangerous Beliefs in the New Spiritual Openness* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2009), pp. 1–8; Gavin Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), pp. 1–152.

10. Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), p. 19. Kindle Edition. Later in the volume Ortlund weights the four categories as going from essential, to urgent, important, and indifferent, p. 47.

11. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992), 1.52.

12. Turretin, p. 52.

13. Turretin, p. 52.

14. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 1.53.

15. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 1.54.

16. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology,* 1.62.

17. Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 2.

18. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 3.

the Scriptures show themselves to be the Word of God "by their majesty and purity, by the consent [agreement] of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God."[19] The Westminster statements confess that divine revelation presents a unity of truth. A repeated theme of the era of Reformation to post-Reformation Protestant orthodoxy is the commitment to the fact that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16), and as such is the Word that reveals and provides the discernment of necessary truth, along with the interconnection and order of these truths. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) puts it this way:

> The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture…. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. [20]

Ortlund shares these commitments regarding the inspiration, authority, order and unity of Scripture, yet they also provide ground for helpful nuance and revision of his four categories of theological triage.[21] They raise a question that crosses the bounds of the categories of "theological triage": if all Scripture is divine revelation (as it is) and an individual Christian, or a church, knows a "lesser doctrine" to be true, can they in good conscience let it go by allowing teaching to the contrary, where they have been granted a role or place in determining the bounds of ecclesial teaching? Or to put it in other words, is there any doctrine taught by Scripture that is unimportant to gospel witness and ministry collaboration, as Ortlund describes his "fourth-rank" category? From the testimony of the Reformed confessions this can only be said in an ultimate sense of a doctrine, or perhaps practice, which is not actually taught by Scripture, and falls into a category of adiaphora. This, however, does not negate the reality, which Ortlund and others have sought to elucidate, that within biblical doctrine there is an order or weight of doctrine, which corresponds to an order or weight of error: "all heresies are errors, but not all errors are heresy."[22]

In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* John Calvin puts forward this premise in relation to doctrine and church unity, "[We ought not to grant] … that the church exists where God's Word is not found. For this is the abiding mark with which the Lord has sealed His own: "everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" [John 18:37]. Likewise: "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep, and they know Me" [John 10:14]. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" [John 10:27] … Paul reminds us that the church was founded not upon men's judgments, not upon priesthoods, but upon the teaching of apostles and prophets [Eph. 2:20] … To sum up, since the Church is Christ's Kingdom, and he reigns by His Word alone, will it not be clear to any man that those are lying words [cf. Jer.7:4] by which the Kingdom of Christ is imagined to exist apart from His scepter, that is His most holy Word?" (4.2.4.)[23]

How did Calvin apply this in his own ministry? While holding firmly to biblical truth, he realized that there were matters in the life of the church, where confused and errant opinions did not "harm the sum of religion" nor cause "loss of salvation."[24] "Fault may creep into the administration of doctrine or sacraments but this ought not so estrange us from communion within the church."[25] Incorrect doctrine could range in severity from heresy (precluding the possibility of salvation) to error of various degrees. Lesser errors "do not break the unity of the faith."[26] Living in unity in the church meant assisting the weak and bearing with the ignorant, while continuing to pursue Reformation according to the whole of Scripture: "I would not support even the slightest errors with the thought of fostering them through flattery and connivance … but we must not thoughtlessly forsake the church."[27] Calvin encouraged John Knox to be patient with the ceremonies taking place in worship during his tumultuous time in Frankfurt. He encouraged English Christians to be patient with episcopacy, and held that individual believers, for the sake of the unity of the church, should honor their ordained leaders, even as they prayed for greater reformation of the church. Calvin writes to Farel that "there are many things which we must endure,

19. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 4.
20. Westminster Confession of Faith, "Of the Holy Scripture" 1.6, 1.10.
21. Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, pp. 75–79.
22. Mark Jones, "When Calling Someone a Heretic…" *Reformation21.org*, November 30, 2015, https://www.reformation21.org/blogs/error-versus-heresy.php.
23. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.2.4.
24. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.12.
25. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.12.
26. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.12.
27. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.12.

because it is not in our power to correct them."[28] Overall it seems Calvin believed that

> Those attempting to reform their church and country could tolerate more than those who had already attained a reformed church … it would be unacceptable for the church in Geneva (which had done away with certain ceremonies) to allow that which he encouraged refugees in Wesel [a city dominated by Lutherans] to tolerate.[29]

While there is no doubt, as Ortlund helpfully reminds us, that a sense of the ranking of doctrinal importance is essential to a patient and faithful ministry that cherishes the unity of the church, Calvin, Turretin, and Protestant confessions on the nature of divine revelation, priorities of doctrine, and ministry, challenge the idea of "fourth-rank" doctrines that are truly unimportant. If the doctrines are biblical doctrines, a lower order, along with contextual ministry circumstances, can rightly call us to focus on greater priorities, yet, they remain God-given truths we also desire to see growth in, and prevent regress from.[30] A model of triage which takes this wider scope into fuller consideration can be expressed as follows:

- First-rank doctrines are essential to the gospel itself. One cannot be a Christian without commitment to them.
- Second-rank doctrines are urgent for the health and practice of the church such that they frequently cause Christians to separate at the level of local church, denomination, and/or ministry.
- Third-rank doctrines are important to Christian theology, but in general not enough to justify separation or division among Christians. Understanding of third-rank doctrines is not required for church membership. However, depending on its nature, teaching contrary to these doctrines may be ecclesially precluded in some church contexts, and could warrant action leading to discipline in a local church or denomination.[31]
- All ranks of doctrine taught by Scripture are to be believed, cherished, and promoted, whatever level of importance any particular doctrine may have internal to the system of truth revealed in Scripture (cf. Matt. 6:17–19; Rev. 22:18–19). Other doctrines or practices, which are not taught by Scripture explicitly or implicitly, and are not contrary to Scripture, are adiaphorous, and as such unimportant to gospel witness and collaboration.

Factors of consideration in applying this holistic understanding of theological triage include the present contextual distinction between the relationships and roles of individuals, and the level of responsibility this creates in pursuing truth and addressing error within the life of the church in its entirety. This includes ecclesiastical distinction in relationship between fellow Christians from different denominations who share substantial Christian doctrine, yet differ in important areas (ie. Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, etc.), to distinctions in ecclesiastical roles within a denomination. Those ordained to preach, teach and shepherd bear a greater weight of doctrinal responsibility and expectation than those occupying the general office of believer.[32] Exegesis, hermeneutical understanding, and an awareness of the understanding of Scripture in the history of the church are foundational tools in pursuing unity in truth and love.

Understanding Hierarchy and Connectivity in Creation Doctrine

So how can we best pursue unity in the church in relation to the doctrine of creation? We can find good answers through applying this modified form of "theological triage" to key facets of creation doctrine, enabling a positive understanding of primary to lesser

28. John Calvin, "Letter to Farel, Geneva, 19th July 1553" in *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters* ed. Jules Bonnet, trans. Marcus Robert Gilchrist (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 7.419.

29. Timothy Pierce, "Unity and Schism: Calvin's Thoughts on the Unity of the Church." Unpublished manuscript, 2023.

30. The Scottish Presbyterian theologian James Durham (1622–58) provides a detailed attempt in his work *Concerning Scandal* to assess varieties of error in the life of the church, and provide a general template for Christian response to error. Durham helpfully notes not only distinctions in degree of error, but also distinctions between individuals in error: some may hold to error because of weakness and confusion in understanding, where others may not only hold, but actively teach an error in knowing opposition to the truth. Durham warns against both an "unlimited toleration of all errors" and "an indifferent, rigid, equal pursuing, or not enduring everything that is an error." James Durham, "Concerning Doctrinal Scandals," in *Concerning Scandal*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas, TX; Naphtali Press, 1990), pp. 163–4.

31. The first two point are identical to Ortlund's, the third is modified. Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, p. 19.

32. Further resources in this area include David W. Hall, ed., *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (Oak Ridge, TN: The Covenant Foundation, 2001), pp. 1–321; William Dunlop and James Buchanan, *The Uses of Creeds and Confessions of Faith* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1857), pp. 17–195; James Bannerman, "Scripture Principles on the Lawfulness and Duty of Union Between Separate Churches" in *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), pp. 857–69.

truths without a loss of the importance of any divinely revealed truth. To do so the remainder of this article will consider three areas: (1) creation *ex nihilo* as a free act of the Triune God, (2) the special creation of humanity, and (3) the days and duration or age of creation. These areas do not exhaustively cover the doctrine of creation, but they do provide a beginning point for reflection and include some of the more contentious matters in recent church history. Beyond the scope of the article is the reality that practical application of pursuing and maintaining doctrinal understanding and commitment to creation doctrine will vary contextually, though in every case it must be undergirded by love for truth, unity, and spiritual vitality in Christ. Glorifying God through delight in and commitment to his Word goes hand in hand with steadfast, wise, and patient love for the church and her individual members.

Creation ex nihilo as a free act of the Triune God

Creation *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing") as a free act of the Triune God is a foundational Christian doctrine of primary significance. God does not reveal himself in Genesis 1 as "a cosmic sculptor who, in human fashion, with preexisting material produces a work of art, but as One who merely by speaking, by uttering a word of power, calls all things into being."[33] Scripture, in the Old and New Testaments, plainly testifies to the reality that "in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1), from nothing. Psalm 33 tells us "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host" (Ps. 33:6). The apostle John states: "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Paul declares that "His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). In Colossians he states, "by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible … all things were created through Him and for Him … and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15–17). Hebrews notes: "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible" (Heb. 11:3).

The ancient creeds of the church, including the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, reaffirm this truth: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible … and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God… by whom all things were made … and I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life."[34] Gregg Allison, reflecting on creedal history, explains:

> Explicit in this credo is monotheism, divine omnipotence, and creation of all that exists (outside of God, of course), specifically in the present world but not limited to it…. It is this belief that the church from its earliest days has confessed as being the truth in regard to creation.[35]

Augustine puts it this way: God is "the Creator of all existences but Himself … no created thing is co-eternal with the Creator."[36]

Creation *ex nihilo* as a free act of the Triune God is crucial to both the core and the whole of Christian theology. It is an inextricable corollary of the biblical doctrine of God. God "is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice and truth."[37] God's creation is finite, temporal, and changeable. God is independent, self-sustaining, ruling over all creation. Creation is dependent on, sustained by, governed by God. Apart from God's decree and act of creation, along with His sustaining providence, all created things would be non-existent: "He brought the entire world out of non-being into a being that is distinct from His own being."[38] At the same time, "in His simplicity and entire sufficiency the [Triune] God would be wholly Himself" were there no creation.[39] God's act of creation is a free act: "He did not create in response to inner need or outer constraint and could, without loss of perfection, refrain from creating."[40] Herman Bavinck states, "true religion distinguishes itself from all other religions by the fact that it construes the relation between God and the world, including man, as that between the Creator and His creature. The idea of an existence apart from and independent of God occurs nowhere in Scripture."[41] Creation *ex nihilo* is inseparably linked with the biblical

33. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker 2004), 2.417.

34. The quote is from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381).

35. Gregg R. Allison, "Theistic Evolution is Incompatible with Historical Christian Doctrine" in *Theistic Evolution* eds. J.P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger, and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), p. 928.

36. Augustine, *The City of God* trans. Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), pp. 349, 398.

37. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.&A 4.

38. Bavinck, 2.416.

39. John Webster, "Creation out of Nothing" in *Christian Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), p. 131.

40. Webster, "Creation out of Nothing," p. 139.

41. Bavinck, 2.407.

Creator/creature distinction. Alternatives range from atheism to dualism to pantheism, possibilities including a range of gods who are fundamentally unlike the God of the Bible. Patristic theologians understood this, affirming "creation ex nihilo … against the Platonic idea of the eternity of matter" as well as against the polytheistic construals of origins.[42] Wayne Grudem helpfully sums one alternative: "were we to deny creation out of nothing, we would have to say some matter has always existed and that it is eternal like God. This idea would challenge God's independence, his sovereignty, and the fact that worship is due to Him alone."[43] Another alternative, which posits that creation is an emanation of the Divine Being, results in a similar divinization of creation. The spiritual alternatives to creation *ex nihilo* as a free act of the Triune God are summed up well in the epistle to the Romans:

> What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made…. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking … they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! (Rom. 1:19–25)

Knowing God as the One who created all things out of nothing is a gospel doctrine, essential to salvation. It is essential to the identity of God, creation in general, and ourselves. It is essential to biblical categories of sin and salvation in Christ. As such this doctrine is essential to Christian unity. Those in error here must be loved and encouraged to a Christian faith in the God who is "the Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible", as they do not yet have faith in the God who is or as He is.

The special creation of humanity

A second area of creation doctrine which provides clear boundary markers for ecclesial unity is the area of the creation of humanity, the theology of human origins. Depending on the nature of the variances or errors within this area of doctrine, differences expressed have implications ranging from first to second-rank doctrine, using the model of theological triage presented in this article.

In the past decade the doctrine of human origins has received substantial attention and debate. A traditional "literal" understanding of human origins holds to God's special, temporally immediate creation of Adam and Eve, Adam from the dust of the ground, and Eve from Adam's rib, within the span of the sixth day, and apart from any evolutionary biological processes (Genesis 1:26–31, 2:7, 2:21–23).[44] Why and how this doctrine should remain a demarcation line for ecclesial unity becomes clear after a consideration of its theological implications in contrast to theistic evolutionary alternatives. These implications include a Christian doctrine of man, ethics of human life, marriage and sexuality, the unity of the human race, and the relationship of the doctrines of man, sin, and Christ and salvation.

The traditional approach to the Genesis 1 and 2 account of the creation of Adam and Eve harmonizes with historic Christian understanding of the doctrine of man. While there have been many debates through

42. Allison, pp. 929–30.

43. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 264.

44. The use of "temporally immediate" in relation to the creation of the first couple does not necessitate an *ex nihilo* act and reflects the fact that God used existing, nonliving matter, "the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7) in Adam's case and Adam's rib in Eve's case, in creating them. John Murray correctly notes that Reformation and post-Reformation theologians helpfully used the term "immediate" as a theological term in describing creation *ex nihilo* and "mediate" in describing "a creative action of God, using preexisting material"—speaking of the creation of the soul of man as "immediate" and the body of man as "mediate." While this was functional in the context of a popular conception of a young earth and a creation week of six generally ordinary days, the functionality of the term "mediate" diminished as its semantic range changed with the increasing acceptance of old earth and evolutionary hypotheses. Charles Hodge's adjusted use of the term "mediate" as including God's activity in the course of ordinary providence was commonplace in the nineteenth century and was often synthesized with evolutionary process to form a theistic evolution. B. B. Warfield notes the latter in his essay "Creation, Evolution, and Mediate Creation." While Warfield's argument for returning to the earlier definition of "mediate" creation is helpful in relation to the mode of creation, it nonetheless fails to eliminate the possibility of a theistic evolutionary model under supernatural influence when moved into an old earth context. The introduction of the common philosophical concept of temporal immediacy proves helpful here, just as Tertullian's introduction of a new use for the term "trinity" proved helpful to patristic theology. John Murray, "Immediate and Mediate Creation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17, no. 1 (November 1954): 22–43; Charles Hodge, "Mediate and Immediate Creation," in *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 1.556–74; B. B. Warfield, "Creation, Evolution, and Mediate Creation," in *B. B. Warfield: Evolution, Science and Scripture—Selected Writings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 204–5. For a history of biblical interpretation on human origins see VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics and Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pp. 1–359.

church history regarding the nature of the image of God in man and the nature of the soul, this approach provides clear foundation and rationale for the image of God in man and his "reasonable and immortal soul."[45] Man is a special creation, unique from the rest of creation, not only by virtue of relationship with God, but also because he is made a "living being" in a distinct new creation act of God (Genesis 2:7).[46]

Genesis 1:30 states that the beasts, birds, and creeping things have "the breath of life." While there is a shared physical reality here between humanity and animals, the activity of Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:7 and following indicates a significant creational differentiation between humanity and animals. Animals were formed or "brought forth" by God's creative spoken word. But there is a uniqueness both in the decision to "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" and the recounting of God's creating man in His own image by forming Adam out of the dust (cf., 1 Cor. 15:45–49). The latter, bearing similarity to the intimate activity of a potter working with clay (cf., Isa. 64:8), is a description immediately followed in the Genesis 2 narrative by the action of breathing "into his nostrils the breath of life" as the culminating activity in the creation of Adam as a "living being."[47]

God places Adam into a garden cultured and cultivated as a crowning beauty of vegetation and abundant fruitfulness. The emphasis is on God's special, direct, intimate creative activity—using materials normally incapable of producing human life. This text, along with the rest of Scripture, affirms the uniqueness of humanity as an intentionally separate, unique creation of God, in His image. Where each animal is created "according to its kind" (Gen. 1:25), God states, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). This is further emphasized in the creation mandate in Genesis 1:28–30 as God places man as a steward over the rest of creation. Connected with the reality of the temporally immediate creation of Adam and Eve in a mature state apart from evolutionary origins, is the reality that they were fully human, fully God's image-bearers from the moment of receiving life. This stands in harmony with the wider doctrine of man in Scripture in relation to ethics of life: Adam and Eve's offspring are seen as coming into living existence at the point of conception (cf., Gen. 4:1, 17), a point clearly reiterated in the Mosaic law (Ex. 21:22–25).

Evolutionary biological models of human origins, while diverse, all posit an inherent and essential connection of humanity in origin to animals and the rest of creation.[48] In the cases of more conservative models, this may be modified by any or all of the following factors: (1) the special creation of Eve; (2) the imparting of a soul, and/or conferral of the image of God, at a distinct point in time; and (3) the selection of a specific pair of hominids to become the first humans—though the latter is at times viewed as occurring through the gift of a spiritual relationship rather than any facet of ontological origin. More radical theistic evolutionary models tend to militate against the inclusion of any of these as modifying factors to a human pair or group. The latter propose an evolution of religiosity: through an evolutionary process or processes concurrent with evolution, man enters into conscious relationship with God. Some theistic evolutionary human origin proponents reject a body-soul distinction, and with it the doctrine of an intermediate state between death and the final judgment, clearly moving into the realm of denial of first-rank or primary doctrines of Christianity. Though beyond the scope of this article, among the significant problems for evolutionary biological models of human origins is the doctrine of sin in relation to the fall in Genesis 3.[49]

45. Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 17.

46. Most translations take the Hebrew (*nepesh*) and translate it as "soul" or "being." The English Standard Version translates it as "creature," which I believe is a weaker choice in this context. While it is rightly noted by a number of commentators and Hebraists that the text is not indicating the imparting of a soul into an as of yet lifeless body, the text is indicating that God here uniquely "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," which at that moment made Adam "a living soul." I differ here from Bruce Waltke's application of the semantic uses and range of *nepesh* to Genesis 2:7 in his entry, "napash/nepesh" in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2.590, and instead follow John Calvin's comments on Genesis 2:7 in his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, p. 112. Keil and Delitzsch also provide helpful commentary on the textual and theological issues in *Biblical Commentary on The Old Testament, pp.* 78–80.

47. John Murray argues similarly to Keil and Delitzsch but interestingly cites the Hebrew term for "living soul" as "living creature" in Genesis 2:7 and notes that it is similar to that used in the creation accounts of other creatures in Genesis 1. Murray argues that the content of Genesis 2:7, including the moment and circumstance of becoming a "living creature" rules out the possibility that any part of Adam, including his body, could have been a living creature prior to that point. Murray, "The Origins of Man," 2.3–13.

48. Comparing the theological implications of human origins according to the traditional "literal" understanding versus alternative models can be challenging because of the diversity and fluidity of views which posit Adam and Eve were created at least in part via evolutionary biological processes (EBP). At times, even individual proponents will suggest varying dates and hypotheses for what they believe may have occurred—because any certitude is unverifiable. Even with these challenges, a basic taxonomy, proves helpful. See VanDoodewaard, "What Difference Does It Make" in *The Quest for the Historical Adam*, pp. 282–312.

49. See "The Goodness of Creation" and "In Adam's Fall We Sinned

Despite the variety among theistic evolutionary models, all diminish the inherent distinctiveness of man from the rest of God's creation, particularly through their partial or complete denial of Genesis 2:7 as a literal reality. Adam is not an entirely new and distinct creation; the formulation of this is connected to the degree of potential implications for what it means to be an image-bearer; as a result it also has direct connection to our understanding of the incarnation—raising the question whether Christ's humanity in his incarnation was the same as, or more evolved than Adam and Eve's. The question of the consistency of the totality of human being over time versus evolutionary development of human being over time rises into the realm of first-rank doctrine, as the latter begs the question as to whether Hebrews 2:17 is correct: "therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect." If, as Scripture indicates, Christ and Adam are similar in every respect in their humanity, sin excepted, then the evolutionary process of human development must have ceased—a tenet not only unlikely to find warm reception in the corridors of scientific naturalism, but one contrary to the writings of many theistic evolutionists. An Adam and Eve loosened from traditional reading of Scripture on their origin become malleable to the whims of the theologian—depending on the extent to which he constrains himself to wider scriptural doctrine. The latter will impact the degree to which he moves from second-rank to first-rank errors.

The lack of a temporally immediate, special creation of Adam and Eve also serves to erode a first-rank area of the biblical ethic of human life: "you shall not murder" (Ex. 20:14). If Adam and/or Eve were at one point hominid and then became human, then they were not fully human for the totality of their existence but became human at the point of their being endowed with a soul or upon becoming image-bearers. In positing this, evolutionary models present a weakening of, or contradiction to scriptural testimony to the sanctity of human life from its first origin, in part by necessitating that animal and hominid suffering, violence, and death are part of the "good" and "very good" realities of God's creation prior to Adam and Eve's fall into sin and the ensuing curse on man and creation. Further, according to evolutionary models, it is an open question, unaddressed by Scripture, at what point hominids became human; by implication, it can remain an open question at what point a fetus—or even a born infant—becomes human. If our ancestors, under divine sovereignty, became human at some point after they began living, why should it be any different for an embryo which has not yet developed to a mature human form? This stands in stark contrast to the literal view's necessary implication: human life begins at the moment of conception for Adam and Eve's descendants, just as it began at the first moment of life for our first parents. The potential impact of the weakness of evolutionary views is in one case expressed by Francis Collins's arguments for the legitimacy of embryonic stem cell research.[50]

The literal understanding of the Genesis 2 account of Adam and Eve's creation, particularly the account of God's creation of Eve from Adam to be his wife as the first pair of humans, is the God-given origin of and paradigm for marriage as a union of male and female, husband and wife. This creation ordinance of marriage with its description of monogamous, heterosexual marital intimacy and desire is described as very good and sinless—made by God. A complementarian view of marriage, with its distinct roles of husband and wife, finds its foundation in the creation of Eve from, for, and with Adam.[51] In its description of marriage and the family unit, Genesis 2:24–25 establishes patterns as literal and normative by virtue of the special, immediate creative action of God. They stand as an expansion and implication of what is revealed in Genesis 1:27.

All of the evolutionary models, even those that posit Adam and Eve as the sole pair for hominid-to-human transition and the head of all humanity, weaken the created normativity of complementarian roles, heterosexual desire, and monogamous marital intimacy. Animal sexual behaviors are widely varied in the present state of creation. If suffering, violence, and death are normative realities of a pre-fall creation in the evolutionary models, why should one assume that present patterns of animal sexuality are less than "good" and "very good"? While the Genesis 1 paradigm of "male" and "female" and reproductive patterns may be assumed as God's general intent through ordinary, providential guidance of the evolutionary process, there is no ground in a nonliteral early Genesis to

All?" in VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam*, pp. 300–305; Hans Madueme, "Some Reflections on Enns and the Evolution of Adam: A Review Essay" *Themelios* 37, no.2 (July 2012): 283–4.

50. Peter J. Boyer, "The Covenant," *The New Yorker* (September 6, 2010), http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/09/06/100906fa_fact_boyer; Francis Collins, "Statement by NIH Director Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., on Supreme Court's decision regarding stem cell case," *National Institutes of Health*, January 7, 2013, http://www.nih.gov/about/director/01072013_stemcell_statement.htm.

51. "The Danvers Statement," *Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 1987, http://cbmw.org/uncategorized/the-danvers-statement/.

argue that hominids, or in the case of the more radical evolutionary models, humans, are innately structured for sexual relations limited to monogamous marriage. The more conservative theistic evolutionary models, while retaining a better ontology of aspects of man as God's image-bearer, suffer from the same weakness as they posit a physical continuity from hominid to human.

The most that can be argued in the evolutionary models is that when Adam and Eve become human and the image-bearers of God, they are brought together by God and instructed toward a monogamous marital sexuality. Extramarital, homosexual, bisexual, and polyamorous sexual desires within these models of origins may be construed as innate to original humanity, and not inherently sinful; the same is true in relation to transgenderism.[52] Aside from complementarian roles, which might best be viewed as in the range of second-rank doctrine, all of these aspects of biblical doctrine on marriage and sexuality tend to the range of first-rank doctrine (cf. Rev. 3:14–16, 20–23).[53] These reasons, along with profound implications for the doctrine of sin and salvation, mean that a special creation of Adam and Eve apart from evolutionary biological ancestry is a non-negotiable line for ecclesial unity.[54] This does not mean that Christians who wrestle with confusion in some aspects of these areas cannot be accepted into church membership, but it does mean that church leadership, discipline, and teaching must remain consistently committed to this aspect of the Christian faith, as revealed in the Scriptures.

The days and duration or age of creation

A third area of creation doctrine which provides helpful ground for the application of the model of theological triage presented in this article is the matter of the days and duration or age of creation. In the six twenty-four-hour day view ("six-day view"), God creates time, initially demarcating it in a supernatural act (light and dark, evening and morning, before the creation of the Sun, moon, and stars), and then continues his works of creation, ordered within time, over the successive days. The short space of time of creation displays his infinite, perfect power, wisdom and knowledge through acts that can be only His, creating a mature creation, which then acts according to principles of multiplication and fruitfulness. While this creation is relatively recent, it is mature, created with inherent "age"; the time frames preclude evolutionary biological origins of at least the "kinds" of creatures, and of humanity. Man is part of, and lives within a creation which is a close display, in time and proximity, of God's supernatural creation power and wisdom.

Areas of doctrinal divergence that may arise with diverging views on the days of the Genesis creation account include:

- whether there is a historical narrative of the creation of time, including the creation of days as a division or measure of time;
- the order of the acts of creation;
- the duration of the days or period of creation, which may include the allowance of vast time for alternate modes of creation (whether old earth creationism, with supernatural decree/sudden acts punctuating a long period of time up to billions of years or more, or theistic evolution, with providentially superintended evolutionary processes over a long period of time up to billions of years or more).
- hermeneutical method, and its implication for the interpretation of both early Genesis and other parts of Scripture.

From one vantage, whether or not the six days described in Genesis 1 were of the same or similar duration to our own in itself seems well-suited to location in the category of a third-rank doctrine: one which has significance in its connections, and may have implications into second-, and even first-rank doctrine, but should not itself be an area of ecclesial division. Gavin Ortlund makes a strong case for this in his application of theological triage: "think of it like this: if you accept only twenty-four-hour day interpretations of Genesis 1 within your church or theological circle, then the following Christians become unacceptable to you: Augustine, Charles Spurgeon,

52. Joan Roughgarden, *What Jesus and Darwin Have in Common: Evolution and Christian Faith* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2006), pp. 115–24. Calvin College, a strong center of theistic evolutionary approaches to human origins, reflects a collegial environment with some movement in this direction. Christian Bell, "Calvin College Statement about Homosexuality Draws Fire," *The Banner*, January 18, 2011, http://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/calvin-college-statement-about-homosexuality-draws-fire. See also "FAQs about Calvin College, LGBT Students, and Homosexuality," *Calvin College,* http://www.calvin.edu/student-life/ss/faq.html.

53. In some cases it may be that confusion, lack of biblical instruction and internal theological coherence, or backsliding into sin, may mean that someone is a Christian but in a state of contradiction and sin (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1–5, 2 Cor. 2:5–11), in which case the genuineness of their Christianity will be proved through repentance.

54. Richard D. Phillips, ed., *God, Adam, and You: Biblical Creation Defended and Applied* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2015), pp. 85–124.

B.B. Warfield, and Carl Henry. Does this seem right?"[55] Theodore Cabal and Peter Rasor make a similar case in their *Controversy of the Ages*, arguing that to require evangelical leaders to hold to a young earth creation, versus allowing a range of young earth to old earth creation views within the church, would be an act of divisiveness.[56] Both Ortlund, and Cabal and Rasor, however, color their positions with overly negative language to alternatives. By comparison, Presbyterians and Baptists hold to differences in whom ought to be baptized, which preclude full ecclesial unity, yet this ecclesial division does not mean that they view one another as "unacceptable" or "divisive" as Christians. In most cases they are grateful for one another as fellow Christians, and work together as much as they are able, though they are each convicted the other is wrong in what they view as an area of second-rank doctrines.

How can the differences on the days and duration or age of creation be wisely "ranked" and navigated within the church? From the vantage of holding the model of theological triage presented in this article, and believing sound exegesis of Genesis 1–2 presents six days similar to our own in duration, an initial question is to assess whether or not a particular church or denomination has an existing stated commitment to a six-day view of creation. This question is in part what roiled denominations like the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in the 1990s: do the confessional statements (the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms) state that creation took place "in" or "within the space of six days", understood as six days corresponding to our own in length?[57] Both the PCA and OPC creation committee reports of this time concluded by recommending the allowance of a range of views of interpretation of the days, while requiring commitment to the historicity and inerrancy of the text of Scripture; both reports were also received by their respective ecclesial assemblies. Within Presbyterian polity the reception of committee reports by an assembly does not in itself change a confessional standard or ecclesial polity—a reality which essentially allowed local churches and presbyteries to operate from more narrowly to as widely as the reports recommended. This would mean that in one presbytery a candidate for ministry might be granted an exception to a six-day view, with the mindset that he could teach his exception, in another he might be received for ministry with the exception, but not be allowed to teach a non-six-day view, and in another he might be rejected if taking exception. Some held that no exception was needed for differences on the days of Genesis 1 in light of the reports. The institutional unity of both denominations was preserved, though internal differences in commitment and application remained.

The Presbyterian context highlights some important considerations. Even where most would agree that the definition of the days in itself is a third-rank doctrine, if it is nonetheless true that the teaching of Genesis is a six-day creation, could a local church, or presbytery in good conscience allow or encourage teaching to the contrary (cf. Matt. 6:17–19; Rev. 22:18–19)? While, if a third-rank doctrine, they ought to be able to welcome Christians who differ on the days of creation as church members, should they grant the ability to positively teach a contrary view? A presbytery or session should not allow teaching to the contrary of what it is convinced Scripture plainly teaches. At the same time, another presbytery or session might conclude that in this area they and others have not come to clarity as a body on what Scripture teaches on the days of creation, and may not be able to in the foreseeable future due to other, more pressing needs. In this case they ought to grant a liberty of expressed views within parameters that do not contradict biblical doctrine more widely. In both cases they ought to act with patience, charity, and desire for a growing ecclesial unity in the local and wider church.

One of the challenges of theological triage with the days of creation is that the days are connected to more than the days. The extent of differences and their implications can range substantially under this category. At a minimum there is a third-rank divergence on whether the creation days were like ours in duration. For those who reject the six days of ordinary duration view, the alternatives include judging the creation account to be expressing an errant primitive understanding of cosmic origins, or viewing it as a literary device where the creation week is a poetic or analogical structure, or figurative of something else. The errancy route immediately moves the issue of the days into a first-rank doctrinal issue: the foundation of the doctrine of Scripture as the divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God is under immediate denial.

Continued on Page 322.

55. Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, p. 143.

56. Theodore J. Cabal and Peter J. Rasor II, *Controversy of the Ages: Why Christians Should Not Divide Over the Age of the Earth* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), p. 216. Kindle Edition.

57. VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam*, pp. 74–84, 223–226; Presbyterian Church in America, *Report of the Creation Study Committee to the 28th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 2302–91; Orthodox Presbyterian Church, *Report of the Committee to Study the Views of Creation to the 71st General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, pp. 1601–1740.

God's Not-So-Ordinary Providence:
Evaluating the Framework Hypothesis "Because It Had Not Rained Argument" from Ordinary Providence

By Zachary Groff

Introduction

In Presbyterian and Reformed theological discourse, innovative readings of the opening chapters of Genesis have become increasingly prevalent in recent decades. One proposed interpretation of Genesis 1–2 is known as the Framework Hypothesis (FH), which includes several variations of a common theme: these chapters present a figurative literary framework of God's work of creation, as opposed to a strictly sequential chronology of the same. The FH as-such was conceived of by Meredith Kline in his seminal article "Because It Had Not Rained"[1] and subsequently developed by Mark Futato in his complementary article "Because It Had Rained: A Study of Gen 2:5–7 with Implications for Gen 2:4–25 and Gen 1:1–2:3."[2] Since the publication of the *Report of the Creation Study Committee*[3] of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in 2000, the FH has enjoyed status as one of four recognized interpretations with some legitimacy in the largest conservative Presbyterian denomination in the United States.

A central feature of the FH reading of Genesis 1–2 concerns the operation of "ordinary providence" during the creation week. The overall coherence and plausibility of the FH interpretation rests upon the soundness of its defenders' interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6 as describing "ordinary providence." In this article, I demonstrate how it is that FH proponents misconstrue the relationship between God's works of creation and providence during the creation week itself. If successful, this article disproves the FH as a viable interpretation of the biblical account of creation.

This article proceeds in three parts to demonstrate FH proponents' faulty understanding of the relationship between creation and providence and to offer an alternative proposal of said relationship. The first part opens with a presentation of the FH understanding of "ordinary providence" and its interpretive import, grounded as it is in Kline's and Futato's exegesis of Genesis 2:5–6. The first part then concludes with a brief consideration of two additional scholars' understandings of the operation of "ordinary providence" in the same verses. The second part furnishes a literature review of critiques of the "ordinary providence" feature of the FH reading of Genesis 1–2. The third and final part proposes an alternative understanding of the operation of God's works of providence in the creation week. This alternative interpretation in fact supports the classic[4] reading of Genesis 1–2.

Before proceeding further, it is important to define providence, and to distinguish it from what FH proponents mean by "ordinary providence." Fundamentally, providence is the work of God in actively preserving and governing His creation. Though distinguished from God's unique work of creation executed by fiat in the six days described in Genesis 1, God's works of providence run concurrently with His work of creation.

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1. Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," Westminster Theological Journal 20 (1958): 146–57.

2. Mark D. Futato, "Because It Had Rained: A Study of Gen 2:5–7 With Implications for Gen 2:4–25 and Gen 1:1–2:3," *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (1998): 1–21.

3. Samuel J. Duncan, et al., "Report of the Creation Study Committee," *Minutes of the 28th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (2000), pp. 119–212.

4. By "classic" is meant the calendar-day view, six-day view, or what Kline referred to as the "traditional interpretation," excepting the day age view which he has subsumed under this same moniker. By "classic" is not meant certain idiosyncratic views promulgated throughout history, such as instantaneous creationism, Neo-platonism, and other patently non-biblical views that nevertheless possess some measure of vintage in the Christian theological tradition.

Herman Bavinck has captured the dynamic well in writing, "Creation immediately and instantly passes into preservation and government."[5] For example, God spoke light into existence on the first day in Genesis 1:3, and thereupon began actively to preserve and govern that which He had created. The closeness of the relationship between God's works of creation and providence is something of a theological commonplace, having been enshrined in biblical commentaries, dogmatic treatises, and creedal statements for centuries. The juxtaposition of treatments of God's works of creation and providence are frequent in the Reformed creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example.[6] More recently, Vern Poythress has noted analogical correlations in the Bible's language describing God's works of creation and providence.[7]

God's works of providence may be understood as operating in two modes. God works to uphold and govern His creation both through instrumental means and by direct intervention into the created order apart from instrumental means. Thus the doctrine of divine providence necessarily involves the utmost regard for both observable predictability in God's created order and an unembarrassed supernaturalism. Taken together, these twin implications redound to God's glory as Creator and Ruler of all that ever was or ever shall be in the created order. When FH proponents speak of "ordinary providence" in relation to Genesis 2:5, they intend a more limited meaning than God's duplex work of preservation and government by both instrumental means and direct divine intervention. Rather, they specify the natural, observable, repeating, and familiar mode of God's providence by which His creation regularly operates, apart from His miraculous intervention. By the term "ordinary providence," FH proponents describe the divinely established and regularly occurring processes of nature which are familiar to human observers. By the same token, FH proponents distinguish "ordinary providence" from miraculous, extraordinary, or otherwise uncommon modes of divine preservation and governance of the created order. With these definitions in place, this article can proceed to engage with FH proponents' interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6.

"Ordinary Providence" in the Framework Hypothesis Interpretation of Genesis 1–2

Proponents of the FH interpret Genesis 2:5–6 as demonstrating that God worked through ordinary means alone to preserve vegetation during the creation week because it had not yet rained upon the earth. Assuming that God worked through ordinary means during the creation week, FH proponents deny the possibility of the creation in time of vegetation before the creation in time of the sun. On the basis of this denial, they argue from inference that God would not have created light before creating the sun, would not have set the planet Earth in space before bringing the solar system into existence, and various other implications which follow the synthesis of natural revelation (i.e., observational science) and their interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6. They argue that therefore the six days of Genesis 1 must be topical and non-sequential.

As mentioned in the introduction above, Meredith Kline first set forth his version of the FH interpretation of the creation account in the mid-twentieth century. The second paragraph of his seminal article opens, "At the heart of the issue, though its crucial character appears to be generally overlooked is the question of whether the modus operandi of divine providence was the same during the creation era as that of ordinary providence now."[8] In answering that question, Kline proposed an innovative interpretation of Genesis 2:5 to prove that the "traditional assumption of supernatural providence for the creation era"[9] is unfounded. Lee Irons and Meredith Kline later named this interpretation of Genesis 2:5 the "because it had not rained argument,"[10] after Kline's groundbreaking 1958 article.[11]

5. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004 [1896]), p. 479.

6. See James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014).

7. Vern S. Poythress, "Correlations with Providence in Genesis 1," *Westminster Theological Journal* 77 (2015): 71–99; Vern S. Poythress, "Correlations with Providence in Genesis 2," *Westminster Theological Journal* 78 (2016): 29–48; Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), pp. 137–212.

8. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," p. 146.

9. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," p. 148.

10. Ironically, this rendition of the relevant clause in Genesis 2:5 misses the agency aspect of the verb הִמְטִיר. The verb is in the Hifil stem, which typically communicates causative action. The emphasis of the clause is not on the absence of rain as much as it is on the fact that someone or something had not yet caused rain to water the land in-question (namely, the Garden of Eden). Who did not yet cause it to rain? The subject of the verb is יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים (YHWH God). The attention of the reader is not on the absence of rain, but on the fact that the Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth, who was preparing an enclave for man with whom He would enter into covenant relationship, had not yet completed His work of preparing the Garden – a work which involved providing a source of water (to be supplied in the following verse).

11. Lee Irons and Meredith G. Kline, "The Framework View," in

Kline embedded his interpretation of Genesis 2:5 in his contribution to *The New Bible Commentary: Revised Edition*[12] in 1970. He further developed the argument in his 1996 article "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony,"[13] and he reiterated it in a posthumous volume published in 2016, *Genesis: A New Commentary*.[14] In these publications, Kline has characterized God's works of providence within the creation week as "ordinary,"[15] "normal,"[16] "natural,"[17] and "secondary."[18] Mark Futato likewise utilized the phrase "ordinary providence"[19] in his 1998 article in which he developed a fuller exegesis of Genesis 1–2 to serve as a complement to Kline's prior work. Both Kline and Futato proceeded in their respective developments of the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2 on the assumption that God's works of providence operative at the time of God's original work of creation did not possess a supernatural or extraordinary element, though they could have if and only if Genesis 2:5 had not cited a lack of rain as the cause for an absence of flora in the land.

Kline's interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6 insofar as it has bearing on the days of creation described in Genesis 1 involves two pertinent hermeneutical considerations. First, Kline's interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6 involves an idiosyncratic reading of 2:5, "And no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Jehovah God had not caused it to rain upon the earth: and there was not a man to till the ground" (American Revised Version). In exegeting Genesis 2:5, Kline focused intently on the fact that it had not yet rained on the earth as the cause of the lack of plant growth. In Kline's understanding,

> The Creator did not originate plant life on earth before he had prepared an environment in which he might preserve it without by-passing secondary means and without having recourse to extraordinary means such as marvelous methods of fertilization. The unargued presupposition of Gen. 2:5 is clearly that the divine providence was operating during the creation period through processes which any reader would recognize as normal in the natural world of his day.[20]

Anticipating the objection that the passage concerns only a specific locality which God designated as a sacral dwelling place on the earth, Kline remarked, "The text would still affirm that at a point prior to the creation of man and, therefore, within the creation era the absence of certain natural products was attributable to the absence of the natural means for their providential preservation."[21] To put the matter simply, the growth of vegetation ordinarily requires rain. Because it had not yet rained, there was no vegetative growth. This condition of ordinary providence was as true in the "creation era" as it is today, which is why the divinely inspired author of Scripture remarks on the lack of rain. The final clause in Genesis 2:5 then serves to strengthen Kline's understanding of the operation of providence alongside of God's work of creation by highlighting the absence of the only alternative instrumental cause—artificial irrigation by human ingenuity and labor—allowing for the conditions of vegetation growth.

The second pertinent hermeneutical consideration of Kline's interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6 is its bearing on Genesis 1. On Kline's reading, Genesis 2:5 is the hermeneutical key to understanding the creation account of Genesis 1 on its own terms. In fact, if his reading of Genesis 2:5 is sound, then "Genesis 2:5 forbids the conclusion that the order of narration is exclusively chronological."[22] Kline more forcefully reiterated the same point in a later article.

> What was the nature of divine providence during the creation "week?" More specifically, by what means did God preserve such things as he had brought into existence? Embedded in Gen. 2:5 is an answer to that question that has decisive implications for the interpretation of the chronological framework of the creation account… Gen. 2:5 tells us that God did not produce the plants of the field before he had established an environment with a watering system, the natural, normal precondition for plant life. The assumption underlying Gen. 2:5 is clearly that a natural mode

The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 230–236.

12. Meredith G. Kline, "Genesis," in *New Bible Commentary: Revised*, ed. Donald Guthrie et al. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 79–114.

13. Meredith G. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 (1996): 2–15.

14. Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*, ed. Jonathan G. Kline (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016).

15. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," pp. 146, 153; Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," p. 13.

16. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," p. 150; Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," p. 13.

17. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," pp. 150n8, 153; Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," p. 13; Kline, "Genesis," 83; Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*, p. 18.

18. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," p. 13.

19. Futato, "Because It Had Rained," p. 1.

20. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," pp. 149–150.

21. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," p. 150n8.

22. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," p. 154.

> of divine providence was in operation during the creation "days." …This unargued assumption of Gen. 2:5 contradicts the reconstructions of the creation days proposed by the more traditional views. The scenario conjured by the literalists' solar-day interpretation is, in fact, utterly alien to the climate and tenor of Gen. 2:5.[23]

Kline flatly denied the plausibility of a chronological reading of the creation week as presented in Genesis 1. From this point of departure, Kline has advanced a theologically imaginative, innovative, and sophisticated interpretation of Genesis 1–2. Mark Futato further developed Kline's interpretation with insights drawn from a structural analysis of Genesis 2:4–25 and a consideration of the Canaanite Baalism which contested the claims of Yahweh in the biblical narrative.

Futato's development of Kline's argument is largely concerned with substantiating Kline's initial claims. Whereas Kline provided the skeleton consisting of initial ideas, observations, and a hermeneutical framework, Futato intentionally set out to supply the flesh consisting of in-depth grammatical and linguistic analysis, biblical theological considerations, and comparison of extrabiblical literature relevant to the original Canaanite *Sitz im Leben* (i.e., *setting in life*) of the Pentateuch. Two of Futato's observations are particularly germane to Kline's conception of "ordinary providence" in Genesis 2:5. First, Futato's article challenges the notion that אֵד in Genesis 2:6 means "stream," suggesting in its place the meaning "rain cloud."[24] After factoring in linguistic and contextual considerations, Futato concludes that only a rain cloud could address the problem of no rain as described in Genesis 2:5b.[25] Thus, on Futato's reading, a rain cloud is the only plausible providential means of watering the ground to bring forth the vegetation described in Genesis 2:5a.

> The burden of proof rests squarely on the one who would wish to argue that something other than a precipitation-fed river is in view in the use of the word *nahar* in Gen. 2:10, since the word is never used for anything other than a precipitation-fed river in the Hebrew Bible. But ultimately the resultant illogical text when *'ed* is taken as "stream" outweighs all other considerations and precludes understanding *'ed* as a reference to a river or stream.[26]

This point dovetails into the ancillary support provided by Futato's second observation.

In the second place, Futato considers the comparative literature of the Ancient Near East (ANE), and of Canaan in particular. Reading אֵד in Genesis 2:6 to be referring to a God-ordained rain cloud to address the lack of precipitation highlighted in Genesis 2:5b, Futato then addresses the question of why there is such a concern in the creation account with rain and vegetation in the first place. The answer he proposes relates to the ANE (and especially Canaanite) context of the biblical creation account in Genesis 1–2. The heathen inhabitants of the land of Canaan worshiped a panoply of Gods, none of which threatened the Israelite religion more than Baal, the local "storm god whose rain was considered absolutely necessary for the growth of crops and hence for life itself."[27] In opposition to Baal and the pagan cult which grew up around the false god, the Israelites were called to remain faithful to Yahweh as the one true God, maker of heaven and earth. "The ubiquitous threat of Baalism provides the theological context in which Genesis 1–2 is to be read… The God of Israel is the Creator. From the beginning the God of Israel, not Baal, has been the provider of the rain that is the prerequisite of life."[28] This second observation supports Futato's proposed solution to the lack of rain in Genesis 2:5b, namely, the providential "rain cloud" in 2:6. On his proposal, the divinely ordained and provided "rain cloud" in 2:6 functions as a feature both of God's "ordinary providence" and of Israelite polemic against Canaanite Baalism.

Other proponents of the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2 highlight the importance of Kline's conception of "ordinary providence" for the argument that the biblical creation account arranges God's work of creation according to topical rather than chronological concerns. For example, Henri Blocher argued vigorously against the classic reading and in favor of a literary framework interpretation of the biblical creation narrative. Blocher claimed, "The hypothesis of the literary procedure gives sufficient explanation of the form of the text; anything further would be superfluous."[29] To support his presentation of the argument, Blocher drew on Kline's understanding of ordinary providence based upon the latter's interpretation of Genesis 2:5.

23. Kline, "Space and Time," p. 13.
24. Futato, "Because It Had Rained," pp. 5–6.
25. Futato, "Because It Had Rained," pp. 6–8.
26. Futato, "Because It Had Rained," p. 9.
27. Futato, "Because It Had Rained," p. 19.
28. Futato, "Because It Had Rained," p. 20.
29. Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 53.

> [Kline's] explanation presupposes the normal activity of the laws of nature for the growth of plants (an operation of divine providence), and a sufficient length of time for the absence of rain to be able to constitute the cause of the absence of plants. That does not fit the hypothesis of a literal week for the creation of the whole cosmos… It is a necessary implication that in Genesis 2:5 Scripture supplies the proof that the week of the Genesis prologue is not literal; this proof has not been refuted.[30]

Scholars who reject the classic reading of Genesis 1–2 without adopting the FH interpretation likewise appeal to Genesis 2:5 to formulate similar proposals for how best to understand the interplay between God's works of creation and providence in the creation week.

As a proponent of the "analogical days position," [31] C. John Collins has interpreted Genesis 2:5 to militate against the classic plain reading of Genesis 1–2 on the basis of the operation of "ordinary providence" in the rain cycle of the "climate of the Western Levant."[32] Collins' position requires an assumption that the climate of Eden was identical to the climate of ancient Israel.

> We are then able to understand just what Genesis 2:5–8 means: in some land, at the end of the dry season, when the "mist" (or rain cloud) was rising to begin the rains, God formed the first man; he then planted a garden in Eden and moved the man there… [This way of reading Genesis 2:5–8] has a strong impact on the amount of time that must have been involved. If the time of year and the absence of man are the reasons for why the plants were "not yet in the land," then this means that the familiar seasonal cycle was in effect; and for this to be so, the seasonal cycle must have been in operation for some number of years.[33]

To his credit, Collins elsewhere has acknowledged, "the climate implied in Gen. 2:5–6 is like that of the western Levant, notably of Israel. It is not clear whether this is a strong claim of the historical location of the event or simply a literary device that recounts the event in terms familiar to the audience."[34] Whether or not one takes Genesis 2:5–6 to be referring precisely to what would eventually become the territory of ancient Israel, the point Collins expressed regarding the operation of "ordinary providence" in seasonal rain cycles remains problematic for any who might otherwise adopt the classic reading of Genesis 1–2. In Collins's judgment, the classic reading "does not allow us to take the causal explanations of Genesis 2:5 seriously: it does not allow enough time for the climate cycle to be relevant."[35] In this regard, Collins's interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6 bears fundamental similarity to Kline's original "because it had not rained argument" insofar as both deny the plausibility of the classic reading of Genesis 1–2. The next section of this article reviews critiques of Kline's original argument and—by extension—of all similar arguments from others who deny the plausibility of the classic plain reading of Genesis 1–2.

Critiques of the "Because It Had Not Rained Argument"

Over the past thirty years, scholarly pushback against the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2 has been earnest and increasingly frequent. Not surprisingly, most of the pushback has come from proponents of the classic reading of Genesis 1–2. Though common in their commitments and concerns regarding Genesis 1–2 and the FH, the authors surveyed below represent a diverse—even eclectic, perhaps—sample of conservative Presbyterian, Evangelical, and Reformed voices. What follows is a necessarily selective literature review of recent critiques of the "because it had not rained" argument from ordinary providence described in the first section above. Rather than proceed topically, the following literature review takes a chronological approach, beginning with a brief article published in 1987.

Writing for the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Robert Grossman argued "that Gen. 1:4–5 deserves a great deal more serious attention than it has usually received from Scripture commentators,"[36] particularly with regard to defining the word "day" in the immediate context of Genesis 1:1–2:3. Rather than considering the account's presentation of the creation of light before the creation of luminaries as a problem, Grossman affirmed that "normal providential law"[37] could

30. Blocher, p. 56.

31. C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), p. 126; for a concise presentation of the analogical days position, see C. John Collins, "Reading Genesis 1:1–2:3 as an Act of Communication: Discourse Analysis and Literal Interpretation," in *Did God Create in 6 Days?* ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall (White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege Press, 2005), pp. 131–150.

32. Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, p. 111.

33. Collins, ibid.

34. Collins, ibid., 253n6; see also C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), p. 147.

35. Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, p. 128.

36. Robert E. Grossman, "The Light He Called 'Day,'" *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 9.

37. Grossman, p. 11.

perpetuate light without luminaries for three earth days. Grossman demonstrated the importance of God's initial separation of light and darkness for "the subsequent development of the earth under the creating hand of God."[38] In fact, Genesis 1:4–5 records God's work of establishing "a fundamental measure of time"[39] which would continue through the creation week and beyond into man's daily experience.

Though Grossman briefly addressed Kline's original "because it had not rained" argument in the body of his article,[40] and he cited Old Testament scholar O.T. Allis in giving serious consideration to supernatural acts of providence during the creation week,[41] he reserved his most direct critiques of Kline's FH interpretation for a brief appendix to the article. Grossman addressed a logical fallacy that later critical readers of Kline have likewise noted, namely that evidence of God working through ordinary providence does not exclude His working concurrently through extraordinary providence.[42] Even if Genesis 2:5 reports on God's working through ordinary providence during the creation week, "Every creative act of God in Genesis 1 is presented as an extraordinary act of God."[43] That is, extraordinary acts of God may be considered as operative alongside of the operation of His works of ordinary providence. Furthermore, Grossman cited commentators E.J. Young and G. Ch. Aalders to argue that Genesis 2:5 refers forward "to the preparation of the Garden of Eden"[44] rather than backward as an interpretive lens for Genesis 1, an exegetical insight that later proponents of the classic plain reading of Genesis 1–2 have explored further. Along the same lines, Grossman anticipated Futato's development of Kline's argument by pointing out a related problem in Kline's understanding of Genesis 2:5. "If Kline is right, plants followed man on the face of the whole earth… Gen. 2:5 proves too much if it is applied to all of creation, because in that case it proves that there can be no plants where there are no men."[45] Though Kline himself sought to preempt this objection by arguing that the precise geographical extent indicated in Genesis 2:5 is irrelevant to his main point,[46] this same objection has repeatedly returned to haunt Kline's interpretation, and for good cause, as demonstrated below.

Old Testament scholar Noel Weeks directly addressed Kline's argument from "ordinary providence" in multiple publications, the first of which has been cited repeatedly by subsequent critics of the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2. In *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, Weeks expressed agreement with Kline in stating, "Whether Kline's view is convincing or not depends on the way we see the information given in [Genesis] 2:5."[47] However, Weeks strongly rejected Kline's position on what Genesis 2:5 is describing. According to Weeks, "there is nothing which clearly indicates that normal providence was functioning during the creation period."[48] Rather, what is clearly indicated is the direct role God played in preparing an environment in which man would experience His presence. In a chapter entitled "Providence and Scripture,"[49] Weeks emphasized the theological observation that regularity in nature is contingent upon God's involvement. Thus, the chief feature of ordinary providence is not inherent to creation itself. Creation once created in its fullness is nevertheless not self-sufficient. This point is crucially important for maintaining the connection explicated above between providence in-general and ordinary providence in-particular. Fundamentally, providence—be it ordinary or extraordinary—is descriptive of God's active involvement. He is not the detached artificer imagined by philosophical Deism. To be clear, no critic of the FH has claimed that proponents of the FH are functional Deists—and neither should any critic be so uncharitable as to regard them as such. However, the "because it had not rained argument" does not emphasize God's intimate involvement in the ordinary providence of employing means to preserve and to govern all which He has created.

In Weeks's following chapter on "The Bible and Technical Precision,"[50] he observed that the Bible authoritatively uses ordinary, everyday language to describe even momentous events. "This means that the Bible can generalize, can use approximation, and at times fail to specify detail. Yet it is still authoritative."[51] In other words, the Bible uses familiar and perhaps frustratingly non-specific language without sacrificing its authority. Readers of Scripture are not to approach biblical narrative expecting something matching the style of a scholastic disputation, a modern scientific magazine or study, or a journalistic newspaper article. Such being the case, the Bible is nonetheless absolutely authoritative.

38. Grossman, p. 12.
39. Grossman, p. 14.
40. Grossman, p. 20.
41. Grossman, p. 25.
42. Grossman, pp. 28–29.
43. Grossman, p. 28.
44. Grossman, p. 29.
45. Grossman, p. 30.
46. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," p. 150n8.
47. Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988), p. 108.
48. Weeks, ibid.
49. Weeks, pp. 26–32.
50. Weeks, pp. 30–32.
51. Weeks, p. 32.

This heuristic principle has direct bearing on how best to interpret potentially difficult and ambiguous texts such as Genesis 2:5 (and demands from readers the humility which should attend any interpretation of Scripture). Students of Scripture must not read the Bible as one would examine a textbook on hydrology or meteorology. Rather, humility and submission to God's truth as received always marks the sanctified use of the Word of God.

Presenting to the West Coast meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on April 26, 1996, Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. laid out a careful and thorough critique of the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2. He later incorporated that material into a longer presentation and published book chapter dealing with several non-literal interpretations of Genesis 1:1–2:3.[52] In that piece, Pipa echoed Grossman in arguing, "Just as extraordinary providence works alongside regular providence in history, we may assume God operated the same way during creation."[53] Further, "Dr. Kline's reasoning involves a logical fallacy. One may not prove the truth of a universal from the truth of a particular… Therefore, particular evidence of ordinary providence during creation may not be used to prove universal ordinary providence during creation."[54] By "universal," Pipa means "exclusively."[55] Pipa added positive features to Grossman's primarily negative objection to Kline's argument from "ordinary providence" by noting two teachings—one implicit and one explicit—drawn out of Genesis 1.

First, God's miraculous upholding of His incomplete creation is necessitated by the very fact that the environmental creation was incomplete until at least day four. "Only if God created everything fully at once, would there be no place for supernatural preservation."[56] Pipa's contention should be extended at this point to state that no mere man can imagine how the created order could hold together by exclusively ordinary natural means before God called any one of the parts of His total creation into existence. As Weeks so poignantly put it, "Everything has been made ready for [man]. He may need to do things in the world but he enters a made world, not a world under construction."[57] Having been made for a complete creation, man cannot imagine any partially created order in place of what God has made in its entirety. Second, the activity of the Spirit of God recorded in Genesis 1:2 is the very description of extraordinary providence. Taken together with later passages of Scripture (e.g., Deut. 32:11; Isa. 31:5), this description of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters in an avian manner suggests God's intimate care and dominion over primordial created matter at each step of the creative process.

Additionally, Pipa demonstrated that the consideration of geographic scope in Genesis 2:5 does affect Kline's attempt to read "ordinary providence" back into God's work of creation. "Even if there were a two-fold deficit [described in Genesis 2:5], its reference is to the garden and not to the creation as a whole… Therefore, one ought not apply the reference to providence to the entire time of creation."[58] Significantly, in levying this critique, Pipa referenced Kline's correct observation that Genesis 2:4 introduces a narrative focused on the Garden of Eden. Subsequently in his critique, Pipa appealed to Job 38:19–20 to argue for the creation of light and darkness as "separate ontological entities" on day one before the creation of the luminaries on day four, thus proving that "ordinary providence was not the *modus operandi* in sustaining and governing creation during the six days of creation."[59] In answering the claim of FH proponents that they are simply comparing Scripture with Scripture by reading Genesis 1 in light of Genesis 2:5, Pipa contends, "The problem with this example is that a problematic interpretation of one passage is the interpretive qualifier for a very clear passage."[60] In other words, it is not simply the case that proponents of the FH understand Genesis 1 in light of Genesis 2:5–6. Rather, it is the case that they read into Genesis 1 certain tendentious conclusions drawn out of an idiosyncratic reading of a notoriously difficult text. One proponent of the FH seems to have conceded Pipa's point to some degree by admitting the difficulty of determining whether to read Genesis 1 in light of Genesis 2:5 or to read Genesis 2:5 in light of Genesis 1.

> If ordinary providence was operating during the creation period for the process of filling the earth with vegetation, then we must revise our understanding of Genesis One as providing a chronological account of creation within one calendar week. Equally, if Genesis

52. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., "From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3," in *Did God Create in Six Days?*, ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall (White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege Press, 2005), pp. 151–96.

53. Pipa, Jr., ibid., p. 161.

54. Pipa, Jr., ibid.

55. Pipa, Jr., ibid., p. 160.

56. Pipa, Jr., ibid.

57. Noel Weeks, "The Completed Creation and Its Implications," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 28 (2017): 109.

58. Pipa, Jr., "From Chaos to Cosmos," p. 159.

59. Pipa, Jr., ibid., p. 176.

60. Pipa, Jr., ibid., p. 194.

> One is taken according to its natural reading as a chronological reading, then we must revise our first-impression understanding of Genesis Two. Lord, to whom shall we go?[61]

Ross demonstrates admirable humility in admitting the difficulty, but his proposed answer in favor of the FH interpretation is not satisfying. Neither are any of the answers attempted by Kline, Futato, Irons, or others.

One key feature of Kline's "because it had not rained argument" is the correlation drawn between Genesis 2:5 and day three (rather than day six) of the creation week described in Genesis 1. Building on Pipa's and Grossman's aforementioned work, Michael Kruger has pointed out, "The only reason Kline sees ordinary providence as the only *modus operandi* is because he thinks Genesis 2:5 is referring to Day Three (Tuesday) in the creative process and thus applicable to all the earth."[62] Kruger's argument against Kline agrees with earlier critiques that Genesis 2:5 cannot possibly refer to all plant life on the planet. The key difference is that Kruger's argument focuses on Kline's application of his reading of Genesis 2:5 to the wrong day, whereas other objections have focused more particularly on Kline's false understanding of the geographical scope (i.e., entire world vs. Garden of Eden) involved in the verse. Interestingly, immediately before addressing this issue, Kruger had (seemingly) collapsed the distinction between God's works of creation and providence while affirming Grossman's argument that God concurrently used ordinary and extraordinary providence in the creation week. Kruger asserted, "In fact, every creative act of God within the Creation Week would constitute an example of extraordinary providence."[63] Though perhaps lacking theological precision, Kruger's statement suggests an important consideration of the dynamic between God's works of creation and providence within the creation week itself. Each creative act of God certainly involved in it the operation of extraordinary providence until the creative work as a whole was complete, at which point God rested from His special work of creation and has since normally maintained His works of ordinary providence in preserving and governing the cosmos.

In a book-length defense of the classic reading of Genesis 1–2, James Jordan set forth several arguments that contribute to the ongoing debate. Aside from those arguments and objections which have already been recorded above, Jordan argued that the first of the terms used to describe the vegetation in Genesis 2:5 (שִׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה) was not included in the plants described in Genesis 1:11–12.[64] Rather, this first term introduced in Genesis 2:5 refers to the plants that grow up only after God curses the ground in Genesis 3:17–19.[65] As for the second of the terms used to describe the vegetation in Genesis 2:5 (עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה), Jordan's reading of the text correlates the plants included in this term to דֶּשֶׁא in Genesis 1:11.[66] These grains had been caused to shoot up (תַּדְשֵׁא) as per the description given in Genesis 1:11, but they had not yet sprouted (יִצְמָח) as per the description in Genesis 2:5. Jordan's interpretation brings the relevant details together in a manner that avoids the problem of contradiction originally alleged by Kline to be unavoidable on the classic reading of Genesis 1–2. On Jordan's reading, "Genesis 2:5 does not say that there were no plants in the earth at the time under consideration. Rather it says that the remaining plants that would exist in the world had not been created and that the grains had not yet sprouted."[67] Furthermore, Jordan's argument summarily dispatches the "because it had not rained argument" in two moves by first pointing out the obvious and by then reasserting his conclusion regarding the plants described in Genesis 2:5. "While Genesis 2:5 may *look* just like today's "ordinary providence," it does not have to be such. But since Genesis 2:5 is not on the third day anyway and has nothing to do with the third day, the argument is nugatory to start with."[68]

Jordan appended to the main body of his book a critical review and evaluation of Futato's article defending the FH. In this appendix, Jordan critiqued Futato specifically on the question of the source of the water (אֵד) described in Genesis 2:6. Noting that Futato relies heavily on extrabiblical context (i.e., the geography and climate of ancient Israel, facts about the original author and audience, local agricultural practices, and the specter of Baalism), Jordan levelled critiques at each discreet element of Futato's case for interpreting Genesis 2:5–6 in the manner that he does. In so doing, Jordan

61. Mark E. Ross, "The Framework Hypothesis: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3," in *Did God Create in Six Days?*, ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall (White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege Press, 2005), p. 128.

62. Michael J. Kruger, "An Understanding of Genesis 2:5," *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 11, no. 1 (1997): 109.

63. Kruger, Ibid.

64. דֶּשֶׁא עֵשֶׂב מַזְרִיעַ זֶרַע, עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינוֹ. James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1999), pp. 53–54.

65. Jordan, p. 54.

66. Jordan, ibid.

67. Jordan, ibid.; see also, p. 184.

68. Jordan, ibid., p. 57.

made a compelling case for understanding אֵד to refer to "water emerging from the ground or from a river, not from rain."[69]

First, if Moses is the original author, then it must be important to consider that he himself never lived in Canaan. More importantly, the original audience of the Pentateuch did not resemble the characters described in the opening chapters of Genesis (e.g., Israelites did not live for hundreds of years), and thus there is no good basis for imagining that the environment of Genesis 1–2 somehow matched the environment of ancient Israel. The original readership of the Pentateuch might not have been very familiar with either the agricultural practices appropriate to the land of Canaan or with the prevalent idolatries extant in the land which they were about to conquer. On this last point, Jordan claimed, "Neither Moses nor the wilderness Israelites had had any experience with Baalism at the time [Futato] says the text was written."[70] A second internal evidence bolsters Jordan's critique of Futato's position.

In the conclusion to this appendix, Jordan presented a brief biblical theology in which he sought to answer the question, "what *is* going on in Genesis 2:5–7?"[71] Jordan's answer seems to be building on a foundation laid by David Tsumura in *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*,[72] in which Tsumura argues for understanding אֵד to be referring to a ground water source (e.g., a subterranean spring) which then generated the river which flowed out of and down from the Garden to water the whole surrounding country of Eden as a result of God's subjugation of chaotic primordial waters. Developing this line of interpretation of Eden as the elevated mountain of God, L. Michael Morales subsequently described the garden of Eden as "resting upon the summit" with Genesis 2:6, 10–14 describing "a spring-fed river that runs through the garden and then flows *down* from Eden, branching out into four riverheads to water the rest of the earth, suggesting a high locale that corresponds well with a mountain summit."[73] On this foundation laid by Tsumura's linguistic reading, Jordan offered a biblical theology of earth and heaven, culminating in a contrast between the first Adam who is of earth and the last Adam who is of heaven.[74] Notwithstanding the risk of indulging in interpretive maximalism, Jordan's biblical theological presentation is more convincing than Futato's argument in that Jordan has interpreted Genesis 2 in light of the clear meaning of Genesis 1 and 3 which frame it as immediate prologue and narrative *telos*, respectively.

Shortly after the turn of the century into the new millennium, the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) formed study committees to address the issue of divergent positions on creation being adopted by men constituting the ordained leadership of each denomination. The OPC General Assembly study committee was subsequent to a more focused study committee of the OPC Presbytery of Southern California handling the FH in particular. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) had previously ruled all views other than the classic reading of Genesis 1–2 as out of accord with its doctrinal standards in the mid-1980s. In 2001 and 2002, pastors in each of these three denominations published critiques of the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2 to defend the classic understanding of the creation week. Each critique has made contributions to the developing evaluation of the "because it had not rained argument."

Pastor Frank Walker, Jr. of the RCUS claimed that proponents of the FH interpretation commit the *petitio principii* (begging the question) fallacy by treating Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 as two independent creation accounts that need to be harmonized. "But a discrepancy appears only if we treat the other [sic] creation accounts as if they were independent of each other. In other words, we must assume the problem in order to find one."[75] The solution to this problem is twofold. First, readers must recognize that only one account (that which is contained largely in Genesis 1) is entirely chronological in nature. Second, Genesis 2:5ff does not constitute a separate account of the creation week, but rather a specified account of the creation of Adam, Eve, and their habitat (the Garden of Eden).

Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. and Michael R. Butler produced an overview and evaluation of the FH interpretation of

69. Jordan, ibid., p. 236.

70. Jordan, ibid., p. 239.

71. Jordan, ibid., p. 240.

72. David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

73. L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), p. 52. For a more detailed discussion of the biblical theological significance of connections between Genesis 1:9–10 and Genesis 2:6, see L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, Biblical Tools and Studies 15 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2012), pp. 61–68.

74. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days,* p. 245.

75. Frank Walker, Jr., "A Critique of the Framework Hypothesis," in *Creation According to the Scriptures: A Presuppositional Defense of Literal, Six-Day Creation* (Vellecito, CA: Chalcedon Foundation, 2001), p. 69.

Genesis 1 out of personal papers drafted during the aforementioned OPC Presbytery of Southern California study of the FH in 1999. In their treatment of the FH, Gentry offered a "Rebuttal of the Framework Hypothesis"[76] and Butler produced a more in-depth examination of "The Question of Genesis 2:5."[77] Gentry noted the historical novelty and exegetical idiosyncrasy of reading Genesis 2:5–6 in the manner proposed by proponents of the FH.[78] After having admitted the difficulty and ambiguity of Genesis 2:5–6 divorced from its context,[79] Gentry remarked, "Erroneous systems often flow from difficult passages—when needed to prove a point. Kline's exegesis develops a *difficult* passage in a *unique* direction for dealing with a *contemporary* debate."[80] Gentry offered a biblical theological critique similar to Jordan's in that he reads Genesis 2:5 as setting the stage for the Fall (and subsequent curse), and not as providing an interpretive lens for reading Genesis 1 topically rather than chronologically. In arguing in favor of the "supernaturally miraculous"[81] effects of God's divine fiats in the creation week, Gentry mistakenly equated God's other miracles with God's work of creation, that is as somehow "non-providential."[82] This error on Gentry's part is the opposite of what was noted above regarding Kruger's imprecise formulation. Whereas Kruger seemed to collapse God's work of creation into His works of extraordinary providence, Gentry collapsed God's extraordinary providences (miracles) into the same category as God's work of creation. In spite of the imprecision on this point, Gentry has provided a strong critique of the FH interpretation reading of Genesis 2:5. Rather than taking it to be the key to understanding Genesis 1, Gentry has echoed others in rightly understanding the verse to communicate a simple fact of the world before the curse resulting from Adam's first transgression: "After the Fall futility befalls man's environment (Ro 8:20–23). But it was not always so, according to Genesis 2:5."[83] Again, Genesis 2:5 anticipates the Fall narrative more so than it somehow reinterprets the events of the creation week.

Butler's contribution takes an even closer look at Genesis 2:5 along three lines of inquiry. He identified contextual, argumentative, and chronological problems with the FH interpretation of Genesis 2:5. Along contextual (i.e., exegetical) lines, Butler's particular contributions include unique critiques of both Kline and Futato. Butler criticized Kline's reading of Genesis 2:5 as making the phrase "because it had not rained" to be an *obiter dictum*, that is, "a few words thrown in the text that are not germane to the narrative."[84] For Moses to have included at this point a statement on God's creational *modus operandi* makes little to no sense. It certainly does not integrate smoothly with the narrative context of Genesis 2–3. The critique which Butler levelled against Futato's development of Kline's thesis is more substantial.

First, Futato has been too vague in his outline of the two-fold problem presented in Genesis 2:4–25. In particular, the terms describing vegetation in Genesis 2:5 do not constitute a merism.[85] Second, Futato has wrongly read Genesis 2 as presenting a problem-explanation-solution framework when, in fact, the chapter is evidently and emphatically anticipating the curse of the ground in Genesis 3:17–19.[86] This critique has direct bearing on the place of Genesis 2:5 within Genesis 1–3. The verse, as with the rest of the chapter, primarily looks ahead to the curse pronounced on the ground and the man. Butler further observed that Futato has read a description of the world before the Fall as a problem in need of a solution.[87] On that same problem-explanation-solution reading of the text, Futato has introduced unnecessary and incoherent redundancy into the text. The two supposed problems in Genesis 2:5 are met with two solutions each (a total of four solutions for two problems) later in the chapter, thus negating the sufficiency of the first presented solution for each problem. [88]

Another of Butler's unique contributions to evaluating the FH proponents' understanding of Genesis 2:5 and ordinary providence is a barrage of textual and biblical theological arguments against Futato's translation of אֵד as "rain-cloud."[89] Two arguments are worth highlighting as advancements on previously articulated critiques. The first is a compelling external argument from Genesis 13:10.[90] In this passage, Lot compares the plain

76. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "A Rebuttal of the Framework Hypothesis," in *Yea, Hath God Said? The Framework Hypothesis/Six-Day Creation Debate*, by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. and Michael R. Butler (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), pp. 67–99.

77. Michael R. Butler, "The Question of Genesis 2:5," in *Yea, Hath God Said? The Framework Hypothesis/Six-Day Creation Debate*, by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. and Michael R. Butler (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), pp. 101–31.

78. Gentry, Jr., "A Rebuttal of the Framework Hypothesis," p. 70.

79. Gentry, Jr., ibid., p. 85.

80. Gentry, Jr., ibid., p. 86.

81. Gentry, Jr., ibid., p. 88.

82. Gentry, Jr., ibid., p. 89.

83. Gentry, Jr., ibid., p. 92.

84. Butler, "The Question of Genesis 2:5," p. 102.

85. Butler, pp. 103–104, 109–110.

86. Butler, p. 105.

87. Butler, p. 106.

88. Butler, pp. 108–109.

89. Butler, pp. 110–119.

90. Butler, p. 117.

of the Jordan to both the Garden of Eden ("garden of the Lord") and the land of Egypt. Lot's comparison strongly favors the position that the Garden of Eden was watered by ground water produced by an underground spring. On this reading, the plain of the Jordan is "fertile in the same kind of way"[91] that Egypt and Eden were fertile. The second argument notes analogical correspondence between Ezekiel's vision of the temple in Ezekiel 47:1–12, the description of Eden in Genesis 2, and John's vision of the heavenly Zion in Revelation 22:1–2. "The point is that these parallel passages all speak of a river that has its source in a spring (literal or figurative) and not in rain clouds. Using the analogy of Scripture, the way to understand *ed* is not as a rain cloud, but as a spring."[92] Not to do so, Butler has pointed out, "would be tantamount to saying that Ezekiel and the Apostle John misinterpreted Scripture for clearly they believed that Eden's water was supplied by a spring and not rain clouds."[93] Butler's employment of the *analogia scriptura* to critique Futato's rendering of the term אֵד constitutes a devastating hermeneutical corrective to Futato's reading.

In closing his chapter on Genesis 2:5, Butler noted a problem called "Creation Product Conflation."[94] In essence, Butler claimed that proponents of the FH equate effects with causes. For example, by arguing that light could not exist without the Sun, proponents of the "because it had not rained argument" seem to collapse the distinction between the Sun and (sun)light. As highlighted above by Pipa,[95] the Bible specifies an ontological distinction between light itself and the source of light. Biblical statements of God's creation of light apart from the Sun (Gen. 1:3–5; Job 38:19–20) necessitate such a distinction. However, to read ordinary providence back into the creation week, proponents of the FH must deny the possibility of light being created apart from the Sun, thereby identifying as one the two separate acts of creating light and creating the luminaries. Butler's argument against such reasoning proceeds, "The eight creative acts, thus, stand or fall together. If two are really just one described from different perspectives, the exegetical equivalent of Pandora's box is opened on Genesis 1."[96] The danger is that such an approach to reading the text of Genesis 1 will terminate in one of two speculations: that of theistic evolution (or progressive creationism, a position which Kline vigorously rejects,[97] though on exegetical grounds apart from the "because it had not rained argument") or that of instantaneous creation (the position that God created all things *ex nihilo* in one instant). To be clear, the FH does not demand either of these conclusions. The point Butler sought to make at this juncture is that neither does the FH rule them out of the realm of plausibility.

In emphasizing the historical novelty of the FH, J. Ligon Duncan III and David W. Hall have pointed out that the overwhelming majority of commentators down to the present day do not adopt Kline's reading of Genesis 2:5. Echoing what other critics have repeatedly observed, Duncan and Hall understand Genesis 2:5–6 to "refer to the sixth day and [to] set the stage for explaining man's obligation to care for the garden."[98] Though interpreters may put more or less emphasis either on Adam's place in the Garden or on his imminent Fall, Duncan and Hall have done justice to the consensus position that "Moses writes these verses to remind us that the world was not ordered and full in its initial form: the paradise of Eden was God's gift."[99] "Initial form" here is to be understood as the form of the world between the beginning of day six of the creation week and God's creative preparation of the Garden of Eden. In presenting the positive case for the classic plain reading of Genesis 1–2, Duncan and Hall cautioned against imposing "normalcy" on the text, for "creation begins *atypically*, as compared to our own experience."[100] Rather than forcing the exclusive operation of ordinary providence into the creation week, careful readers of the Bible must give appropriate consideration to the special nature of the situation pertaining to the creation week. Because the acts of God involved in His work of creation "are by nature miraculous, [they] did not operate under normal providence."[101] Like Kruger, Hall and Duncan may have collapsed God's work of creation into His works of extraordinary providence, but the point they make—that God miraculously upheld the various features of His creation as He brought them into existence—is sound. Perhaps the most significant advancement that Duncan and Hall made in critiquing FH proponents' reading of Genesis 2:5–6 is in how they pointed out that the "because it had not rained argument" is indispensable to

91. Butler, Ibid.
92. Butler, ibid., p. 118.
93. Butler, ibid.
94. Butler, ibid., pp. 126–131.
95. Pipa, Jr., "From Chaos to Cosmos," p. 176.
96. Butler, "The Question of Genesis 2:5," p. 130.
97. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," p. 146.
98. J. Ligon Duncan III and David W. Hall, "The 24-Hour Response (to the Framework View)," in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001), p. 262.
99. Duncan III and Hall, ibid.
100. Duncan III and Hall, p. 53.
101. Duncan III and Hall, ibid.

the FH as a whole. They observed, "the framework view of what it sees as ordinary providence in Genesis 2:5–6 is a *sine qua non* for the interpretation. If its advocates are wrong on that point, the whole theory fails."[102] The FH understanding of "ordinary providence" in Genesis 2:5–6 is a historical novelty and hermeneutical eccentricity which threatens the perspicuity and coherence of the Bible's account of God's creation of the world. This appraisal of the FH reading of Genesis 2:5–6—though variously expressed—is held in common by all the authors surveyed as part of this literature review.

Because the FH finds its most insistent proponents in Reformed and Presbyterian circles, it is unsurprising that most of the critiques have come out of the same academic and theological milieu. The final two critics included in this review come from different settings. Writing for the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Walter Booth has sought to refute the FH interpretation of Genesis 2:5–6 in three steps.[103] In so doing, he has self-consciously drawn on the exegetical labors of Umberto Cassuto, Randall W. Younker, and James Jordan. First, Genesis 2:5–6 refers ahead to conditions which would obtain only after Adam's Fall and God's subsequent curse of the man and the ground in Genesis 3:17–19. Second, the vegetation described in Genesis 2:5 does not include all the plants of the world. Rather, the terms in Genesis 2:5 correspond to the desert-inhabiting thorns and thistles described in Genesis 3:18, and to the grain-bearing plants requiring cultivation implied in Genesis 3:18. Third, Genesis 2:5 does not describe conditions in which rain would eventual emerge. "Rain had not fallen, and would not fall for some time, because the conditions required to produce it, especially the presence in the atmosphere of particles required as condensation nuclei for the formation of raindrops, were not all present. Because the earth was watered by a "mist," rain was unnecessary."[104] In conclusion, Booth addressed the supposed contradiction between Genesis 2:5 and the account of creation found in Genesis 1 by showing that Genesis 2 indicates dissimilarity between the environment of the Garden of Eden and the environment of ancient Israel.

The immediate difficulties which attend Booth's conclusion may be answered adequately by appeal to two observations about the nature of the language of the biblical narrative. First, it is helpful to recall at this point Weeks's observation that the Bible authoritatively uses ordinary language to describe events which actually took place.[105] Second, Vern Poythress analyzed the use of analogical language in Genesis 1[106] and 2[107] to describe God's work of creation in the familiar terms of God's works of providence. As Poythress has labored to demonstrate, "God's acts of creation cannot be equated with his later acts of providence, but there are analogies between the two, which enables [sic] us to understand the acts of creation. The analogies deal with aspects of providence that can be observed by ordinary people."[108] Though Poythress favors a form of the 'analogical days' position on creation days articulated by C. John Collins,[109] his observations regarding the correlations which exist between biblical descriptions of God's works of creation and providence can be marshalled to support arguments like Booth's mentioned above. Poythress noted, "Since the events of providence occur in time and space today, the many analogies with providence confirm that Genesis 1:1–3:24 is likewise giving us real events in space and time."[110] Further, echoing Weeks's point above, "Because any analogy involves both similarity and dissimilarity, it may not provide us with detailed technical information unless we artificially force such detail into our interpretation."[111] Readers of Genesis 1–2 should expect to encounter descriptions of a completely unfamiliar world in familiar language used analogically to highlight the fact that there exists both similarity and dissimilarity between that world and the current world. Far from promoting brash confidence in interpretive speculation, such an expectation should inspire humility, care, and discretion in the exegetical task.

The most thorough critique of the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2 has come from the pen of Robert V. McCabe writing for the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*[112] and Master Books.[113] Since the chapter which

102. Duncan III and Hall, "The 24–Hour Response (to the Framework View), p. 263."
103. Walter M. Booth, "Days of Genesis 1: Literal or Nonliteral?," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 118.
104. Booth, ibid.
105. Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture,* p. 32.
106. Poythress, "Correlations with Providence in Genesis 1."
107. Poythress, ibid.
108. Poythress, ibid., p. 29.
109. Vern S. Poythress, *Christian Interpretations of Genesis 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing; Westminster Seminary Press, 2013); Poythress, *Interpreting Eden*.
110. Poythress, "Correlations with Providence in Genesis 2," p. 43.
111. Poythress, p. 47.
112. Robert V. McCabe, "A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Account (Part 1 of 2)," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 10 (2005): 19–67; Robert V. McCabe, "A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Account (Part 2 of 2)," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 (2006): 63–133.
113. Robert V. McCabe, "A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Week," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), pp. 211–49.

McCabe contributed to the edited volume published by Master Books is a summary of the two articles he previously published with the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, the comments included in this literature review are reserved to his second journal article in which he has dedicated over forty pages to challenge the "because it had not rained argument."[114] McCabe's critique of the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2, including his treatment of Genesis 2:5, is a *tour de force* of exegetical and theological insight. In challenging the argument that the creation account is controlled by ordinary providence, McCabe posed a series of exegetical questions[115] and considered three levels of the context surrounding Genesis 2:5: immediate (2:4–7),[116] surrounding (2:4–25),[117] and wider (Genesis 1:1–2:3, progressive revelation, and *analogia scriptura*).[118]

In discussing the context set by Genesis 1:1–2:3, McCabe made the familiar point that "if there is any supernatural intervention, extraordinary providence, this calls into question this thesis of the framework [hypothesis]."[119] In light of the exegetical support McCabe marshaled for a refutation of Kline's original interpretation of Genesis 2:5 to be making a point about conditions which obtained during the creation week, the familiar contention in favor of the operation of extraordinary providence during the creation week becomes a decisive theological conclusion against the FH interpretation of Genesis 1–2. Thus, McCabe's conclusion is altogether justified on the following page: "A closer reading of the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3 reveals that it is more accurate to say that the creation week is governed by extraordinary providence while, concomitantly establishing the conditions in the created order so that it could begin to operate according to normal providence."[120] Further, McCabe has rightly characterized the utter uniqueness of the creation week. "With God's use of normal secondary causation in providence, every part of a multifaceted universe must be in place so that it can function without God's continual miraculous intervention."[121] Finally, McCabe noted, "during this week the conditions for the earth to operate according to normal providence were being established in such a way that at the end of this week the earth would be ready to effectively operate in ordinary providence."[122] It is God's establishment of an ecosystem of ordinary providence that the third section of this article considers.

The Creation of an Ecosystem of Ordinary Providence

Building upon the definition of providence presented in the introduction above, I proceed in this section first to develop several additional features of the doctrine of providence. I then propose a doctrine of the progressive inauguration of God's works of providence during the creation week terminating in the completion of God's work of establishing an ecosystem of ordinary providence. In the conclusion of this article, I offer an argument for why the doctrine of a progressive inauguration of God's works of providence supports the classic reading of Genesis 1–2. As stated above, included in the term "providence" is all God's works of actively preserving and governing His creation. God's providential works may be classed as either ordinary or extraordinary, typical or atypical, regular or irregular, normal or miraculous. The essential element in God's works of providence is the concern with either government or preservation of the created order and its constituents. Scripture clearly testifies to both God's government over creation (e.g., Dan. 4:34–35; Ps. 135:6; Acts 17:25–28) and God's preservation of creation (e.g., Neh. 9:6; Heb. 1:3).

The inextricably interwoven features of preservation and government distinguish God's works of providence from His work of creation (either *ex nihilo* or *ex materia*) uniquely and exclusively contained within the first six days of the creation week. Unlike God's work of creation, His works of providence are ongoing, unremittent, constantly active, ordinarily operational through means, and occasionally manifest in miracles. Thus, the doctrine of providence is directly opposed to the detached understanding of God articulated in Deism, which denies God's active involvement or intervention in the created order. Shedd's devastating critique is helpful on this point, "The deistical theory, consequently, implies that matter, after its creation, is self-sustaining and self-governing. But self-subsistence and self-sustenation are incommunicable properties. They can characterize only the Creator."[123] In other words, God alone is—and necessarily is—the sole self-sufficient, non-contingent, and utterly independent Being needing no external power to sustain Him. The Deist

114. McCabe, "A Critique (Part 2)," pp. 63–108.
115. McCabe, pp. 67–68.
116. McCabe, pp. 68–90.
117. McCabe, pp. 90–101.
118. McCabe, pp. 101–108.
119. McCabe, p. 102.
120. McCabe, p. 103.
121. McCabe, p. 103.
122. McCabe, p. 104; see also pp. 107–108.
123. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, Third Edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003 [1894]), p. 412.

theory not only immanentizes a necessarily unique and incommunicable attribute of God, but it functionally confuses the contingent creation with the God whom Deists admit created all things.

Perhaps in response to Deism's denial of God's active involvement in the work of preserving and governing all that which He has made, the occasionalism of Jonathan Edwards conflates God's works of creation and providence. Edwards argued, "God's *preserving* created Things in Being is perfectly equivalent to a *continued* Creation, or to his creating those Things out of Nothing at *each Moment* of their Existence."[124] By arguing such, Edwards denied the reality of secondary—or instrumental—means. In place of secondary means, Edwards claimed that God creatively acts directly and immediately on His entire creation at each and every successive moment of time. As Letham has remarked, "This is not providence but only creation repeated on a continuous basis."[125] To collapse the distinction between creation and providence in this manner is to evacuate the meaning of both as well as to rob Genesis 2:2 of all significance. However, God's works of creation and providence are not without commonality. Scripture presents them as sharing common objects and—as outlined above with reference to the work of Vern Poythress—language. Like God's work of creation, His works of providence extend to and bear on all things seen and unseen, visible and invisible, on earth and in heaven.

The objects of God's works of providence include each of His creatures individually and corporately, together with all of their discreet and collective actions and activities. Turretin highlighted the total coverage of God's providence in writing, "we believe that all things without exception are under divine providence: whether heavenly or sublunary, great or small, necessary and natural or free and contingent. Thus nothing in the nature of things can be granted or happen which does not depend upon it."[126] Nothing escapes the direction and care of God's providence. The created order consists of all non-divine physical (e.g., the earth, heavenly luminaries, animals, mankind), immaterial (e.g., time, creaturely consciousness) and spiritual things (e.g., angels, demons, the highest heavens). Physical creation further divides into inanimate and animate creation. God preserves and governs them all by His works of providence. In particular, the actions—"necessary and natural or free and contingent"[127]—of God's creatures are subject to His providential government. Ames expressed the significance of the operation of God's providence in the actions of His creatures in writing, "This government shines forth in the operation of all things."[128] Thus, by His providence, God upholds His creatures and governs their individual and collective activity. He is sovereign over all creation and history.

Just as the discreet stages of God's work of creation are either *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) or *ex materia* (out of pre-existing matter)—immediate or mediate, respectively[129]—God's works of providence operate by one of two means. God's works of providence operate either immediately or mediately.[130] By the first term are to be understood all those works of providence described as extraordinary, atypical, irregular, and miraculous. By the second term are to be understood all those works of providence described as natural, ordinary, typical, regular, and normal. Regarding either means, God is nonetheless immediately involved as the First or Primary Cause of whatsoever comes to pass insofar as providence is the outworking of His eternal decrees. Such being the case does not rule out God's employment of secondary means or causes, but rather establishes it. Aquinas explained this dynamic, as follows.

> Two things belong to providence—namely, the type of the order of things foreordained towards an end; and the execution of this order, which is called government. As regards the first of these, God has immediate providence over everything, because He has in His intellect the types of everything, even the smallest; and whatsoever causes He assigns to certain effects, He gives them the power to produce those effects. Whence it must be that He has beforehand the type of those effects in His mind.

124. Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (Boston; London: J. Johnson and Co. & G. Keith, 1766), p. 419; cf. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology,* trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 109; and Johannes Maccovius, *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*, trans. Willem J. van Asselt et al. (Apeldoorn, The Netherlands: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009 [1661]), pp. 142–143.

125. Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), p. 293.

126. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Volume 1: First Through Tenth Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994 [1679]), p. 498; see also Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2*, pp. 604ff.

127. Turretin, ibid.

128. Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, p. 109.

129. Herman Witsius, *Sacred Dissertations, On What Is Commonly Called the Apostles' Creed, Vol. 1*, trans. Donald Fraser, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: A. Fullarton & Co.; Khull, Blackie & Co., 1823 [1681]), pp. 193–194, 211–213.

130. Johann Heinrich Heidegger, *The Concise Marrow of Christian Theology*, trans. Casey Carmichael (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019 [1697]), pp. 50–51.

> As to the second, there are certain intermediaries of God's providence; for He governs things inferior by superior, not on account of any defect in His power, but by reason of the abundance of His goodness; so that the dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures.[131]

In other words, God's providence includes His foreknowledge and foreordination of causes and effects as well as His government of "certain intermediaries of [His] providence,"[132] namely secondary causes. Bavinck summarized the traditional Christian construal of the relationship between causes and providence in writing, "Christian theology teaches that the secondary causes are strictly subordinated to God as the primary cause and in that subordination nevertheless remain true causes."[133] As the primary cause, God by His providence works by means of secondary causes without destroying or negating them. This is referred to as *concursus dei*, or divine concurrence. Heidegger explained, "God governs all things mediately or immediately. He governs *mediately* through the *ministry of secondary causes*… God's *concursus* or rather the *work* whereby "He works all things" (1 Cor. 12:6) pertains to this, as immediate and predetermining cause."[134] Bavinck likewise expressed the relationship in writing, "With his almighty power God makes possible every secondary cause and is present in it with his being at its beginning, progression, and end… But this energizing activity of the primary cause in the secondary cause is so divinely great that precisely by that activity he stirs those secondary causes into an activity of their own."[135] God's judicious and righteous establishment and active employment of secondary causes is the typical mode of preserving and governing the created order and all which it contains.

The doctrine of divine concurrence operative in God's works of providence is a mystery. God decrees the existence and divine use of necessary, free, and contingent[136] second causes to accomplish His holy will in providence. Nevertheless, He is actively and immediately involved in their execution. Thus, He is immediately involved in second causes of His mediate works of providence. Dabney insightfully remarked,

> Thus, yet in a manner never fully revealed to us, the Almighty Providence employs the powers which reside in created things, to effectuate all His special purposes. The fact that no regular law is infringed does not imply that His superintendence is excluded: it is by means of that very regularity that He works. He guides with His skillful but invisible hand to just those combinations which release the powers of the second causes he needs for His purpose, and reduce to potentiality those whose tasks are for the time completed. It is thus that perpetual providence enters.[137]

Of course, God is not bound to such second causes and mediate means of providence. He is at all times able to preserve and govern His creation without, above, beyond, or against second causes.

When God works apart from secondary causes operating in ordinary providence, He employs extraordinary providence or miracles. It is important to note that while all extraordinary works of God's providence are by their very nature supernatural, not all supernatural works of God's providence are necessarily extraordinary. In his treatment of the doctrine of providence, Letham distinguished between ordinary, extraordinary, and supernatural providence.[138] However, his treatment seems rightly to suggest an overlap between supernatural providence and each of the other two mutually exclusive classifications. Letham wrote regarding the supernatural ministry of angels, "Angels are deployed in the service of the elect (Heb. 1:14). It follows that particular aspects of God's providential care of the church are delegated to the creaturely agency of angels."[139] Insofar as angels are creatures, the works of providence manifested in their ministry are ordinary. Insofar as angels are immaterial beings (i.e., spirit creatures), the works of providence manifested in their ministry are supernatural. But the supernatural feature of angelic ministry is not necessarily extraordinary. The feature of extraordinary providence which makes it at all extraordinary is the direct (miraculous) intervention of God Himself apart from the employment of means, angelic or otherwise. It is precisely this kind of providence (supernatural and extraordinary) which is progressively enacted and employed during the creation week before the completion of the interconnected created order (i.e., an ecosystem of ordinary providence) indicated

131. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Volume One*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Christian Classics Reprint (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948 [1485]), p. 124.
132. Aquinas, ibid.
133. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2,* p. 613.
134. Heidegger, *Concise Marrow,* p. 50.
135. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2,* p. 614.
136. For an explanation of these terms, refer to Turretin, *Institutes, Volume 1,* pp. 499–500.
137. Robert L. Dabney, *The Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century Considered*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press, 2003 [1876]), pp. 261–262.
138. Letham, *Systematic Theology,* pp. 297–299.
139. Letham, p. 299.

in Genesis 2:2, when "God completed His work which He had done, and He rested."

What follows is a theological explication of the operation of God's providential work during the creation week as recorded in Genesis 1. As noted in the introduction above, Bavinck argued that each subsequent phase of creation within the creation week "already anticipates the works of preservation and government…. Creation immediately and instantly passes into preservation and government."[140] Into what kind of providence (preservation and government) did creation pass at each subsequent phase? Using Letham's taxonomy of God's works of providence, was it ordinary and natural, ordinary and supernatural, or extraordinary and supernatural? As cited in the literature review above, Pipa argued, "Only if God created everything fully at once, would there be no place for supernatural preservation."[141] In fact, it is impossible to imagine a multistep creation progressing by means of ordinary providence alone, apart from God's working extraordinarily to preserve and govern His creatures before the completion of creation as a whole. The implications of a multistep creation account militate against any interpretation of the first two chapters of Genesis that demands that ordinary providence was the exclusive mode of God's work of preserving and governing the incomplete created order during the creation week. Whether the sequence described in the creation account is strictly chronological or topical has no bearing on the matter at this point. The creation account's description of a progressive creational process over six ordinary days implies a corresponding progressive inauguration of God's providential work during the same time.

God's works of providence—ordinary or otherwise—must have commenced in stages corresponding to His discreet acts of creation during the creation week itself. The progressive enactment of God's works of providence is inferred first from the fact that the discreet features and objects of God's creation persist beyond the instant of their creation. The perpetuation in space and time of created things is possible if and only if God preserves and governs them by His providence. Due to the fact that natural (and ordinary) providence requires a completed cosmos in order to function, the providence operative during the creation week must have been supernatural. Being closely linked to God's work of creation as exclusive Creator, it is most plausible that God's creation-week works of providence were also extraordinary (i.e., above and beyond all secondary causes and instrumental means, such as angels). Nonetheless, as God created each new feature and object of His creation, He brought it into providential relation with the other extant features and objects of creation. In so doing, the Creator knit together His providential ecology in stages, culminating in a completed cosmos which He pronounced to be "very good" on the sixth day (Gen. 1:31). Throughout the creation week, God upheld the incomplete providential ecology primarily by means of extraordinary providence operating concurrently with His multistage work of creation by the Word of His power. If ordinary providence functioned at all during the creation week, it was in a manner beyond the grasp of human experience and understanding, necessarily in conjunction with God's extraordinary providence as the Creator progressively inaugurated various relations of ordinary providence throughout the week. It was only after God rested from His work of creation on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2) that an ecosystem of ordinary providence was established and the operation of ordinary providence came into full effect. The fact that the seventh day is included in the creation week (Gen. 2:1–3) though God performed no additional creative work on that day requires the conclusion that God enacted His complete providential ecology within the week itself.

The precise outworking of God's providence at any particular point of the creation week itself (other than on the seventh day) is entirely beyond the scope of human understanding or imagination. Such conditions are beyond us, shrouded in the mysterious counsels of God's unfathomable mind and ways. No degree of divine accommodation of language or gracious condescension to our creaturely frame of reference can make known to us the details of how exactly God's providence operated in an incomplete cosmos during the creation week. By affirming such to be the case, this article goes beyond the more reserved statements from Grossman and Pipa about the operation of "normal providential law" in the creation week.[142]

However, redemptive history testifies to God's extraordinary works of providence through the use of miracles in other contexts. For example, God miraculously preserved the Israelites by miraculously parting (governing) the waters before them and subsequently bringing those same waters crashing back down on the pursuing Egyptian army in Exodus 14:13–31. In the Gospel accounts of Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, and Luke 8:22–25, Christ miraculously preserved the disciples by miraculously calming (governing) the raging

140. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2,* p. 479.

141. Pipa, Jr., "From Chaos to Cosmos," p. 160.

142. Grossman, "Light Called 'Day,'" p. 11; Pipa, Jr., "From Chaos to Cosmos," p. 160.

storm on the Sea of Galilee. In John 18:6, Christ likely worked a miracle to floor the men who had come to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even if not miraculous, the incident involves an unusual manifestation of God's governance over the wills and actions of men. Of course, further examples of God's extraordinary preservation and governance of His creation could be multiplied far beyond the scope and limitations of this article.

The progressive inauguration of God's works of providence during the creation week supports the classic interpretation of Genesis 1–2, against the FH interpretation of the same. To reiterate here that which has already been stated above, two insurmountable difficulties with the FH are worth highlighting. First, Kline's novel reading of Genesis 2:5 is neither necessitated nor warranted by the text. On both exegetical and theological grounds, Kline's reading of Genesis 2:5 to demand the exclusive operation of ordinary providence during the creation week as reported in Genesis 1 is implausible. Not only does it lack coherence with the surrounding context, but it reflects an unsound application of the *analogia scriptura* hermeneutical principle by interpreting a clear text (Gen. 1:1–2:3) by a potentially unclear and ambiguous text (Gen. 2:5). Second, what Kline's reading accomplishes does not solve the problem of a supposed contradiction between the opening chapters of Genesis. On the contrary, Kline's attempted solution introduces even more problems. Kline's interpretation of Genesis 2:5 simply demands the rearrangement and amalgamation of certain of God's discreet creative acts. However, rearranging the acts does not permit the exclusive operation of ordinary providence apart from extraordinary works of providence during a multistage process of creation (i.e., the creation week), as the exclusive operation of ordinary providence requires a sufficient providential ecology, which is nothing short of a completed cosmos as reflected in Genesis 2:2.

Conclusion

The doctrine of providence is crucially important for interpreting the creation account given in the narrative presentation of Genesis 1:1–2:3 and poetic accounts elsewhere (e.g., Job 38–40; Ps. 104). The inspired author of Scripture employs the language of providence both in the account of the creation of all things in Genesis 1 and in the focused account of mankind's creation in Genesis 2. For exegesis to be faithful, it must be able to distinguish between texts which refer directly and transparently to God's works of providence and texts which utilize the familiar language of providentially maintained conditions to describe something otherwise impossible to understand from the limited human vantage point. This article has proposed that the FH interpretation of Genesis 2:5 fails to recognize this distinction, resulting in an exegetical blunder in the formulation of a fundamentally flawed understanding of Genesis 1–2.

The implausibility and superfluous nature of the FH interpretation of Genesis 2:5 fatally weakens the FH as a whole. Without the supposed contradiction between plain readings of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2:5, there is no warrant to reject the classic interpretation of the Bible's opening chapters. In fact, proponents of the FH have created the very problem they have claimed to be aiming to solve—a problem which is without basis in the Scripture itself. By presenting a theological and derivatively exegetical case against the FH interpretation of Genesis 2:5, this article has advanced the classic reading of Genesis 1–2 as a more plausible understanding of how God's works of providence function within the context of the creation week. Contrary to the core assumption of the FH interpretation of Genesis 2:5, God's works of preservation and government of the created order during the creation week are not-so-ordinary after all. Such being the case, the following practical application by William Perkins seems only fitting to bring this effort to a close.

> Some may ask in what space of time did God make the world? I answer, God could have made the world and all things in it in a moment; but He began and finished the whole work in six distinct days… and that especially for three causes. (1) To teach men that they ought to have a distinct and serious consideration of every creature… (2) God made the world and everything therein in six distinct days to teach us what wonderful power and liberty He had over all His creatures… (3) He made the world in six distinct days and framed all things in this order to teach us His wonderful providence over all His creatures, for before man was created He provided for him a dwelling place and all things necessary for his perpetual preservation and perfect happiness and felicity… And if God had this care over man when as yet he was not, much more will God have care over him now when he is and has a being in nature.[143]■

143. William Perkins, "Exposition of the Symbol or Creed of the Apostles," in *The Works of William Perkins, Volume 5*, ed. Ryan Hurd (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), pp. 50–51.

***In Brief*: Division, the Great Enemy of Edification and Reformation. James Durham, "A Sermon on Ephesians 4:11–12," in *Collected Sermons of James Durham: Sixty-one Sermons* (Naphtali Press & Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), pp. 933–935.**

If we might speak a word more particularly from the words, in reference to the way of healing, we trust it shall be the mind of Christ and not ours, and therefore consider for the promoting of edification and union there are two things which we may get some rules from to make up a breach and strife, what may edify and unite and what not.

1. If union be the great step to edification as dissention and strife are the door that lets in distraction, then division and separation cannot be the cure, but union is the first and great step of edification. Therefore separation cannot be the cure. Separation has ever been the greatest enemy of edification and reformation. God's way is the uniting way and not a separating way. If ministers could get the whole body of Christ bruised, it should be condescended to [ ], such a thing were spoken that everyone should sunder and keep their mea[ ] with their own judgment, I will not say what comparatively to the condition we are in, it might be, but let me ask this, if ever we will find such a mean as division and separation commended and approved of Christ for the edifying of the body? {In Psalm 133} the blessing is promised to brethren that dwell together in unity. There the Lord commended the blessing. It were a cure to bring on the disease and for fear of a schism to make one, as for fear such a hand should do the arm wrong, we should cut the arm off, and looks to be like the word of the woman that was not the mother of the living child [who was for] {dividing it}. Yea, by following this divided way, instead of having two churches, we may put ourselves to have none. For let us once divide, we will not hold there, and when the bands of unity are loosed, [it] is just with God it should be so. Therefore, it is not Christ's way of edification to divide.

2. Upon the other side, if we would attain to union, it must be by that which edifies, or to attain to union, edification must be studied, and not that which destroys.

And 3. Shall give a rule or two for this also.

Rule One. The breaking or undoing of any one side or party will not be the way to the edification of the church, there being many faithful and eminent men on both sides; therefore neither the way to right union. I speak not only of breaking and undoing by censures and the like, but whether it be by censures or by bringing them or their ministry into contempt, or any other way, it is all one. And by the way, ministers would beware of these things that lead to this.

Rule Two. And consequently, we think no violent way, nor solid authoritative way will do it. How many have followed that gate {who} found it to tend to union with edification?

Rule Three. If union be necessary and union with edification, then the kindliest and speediest way is best; for if it be not kindly, it cannot unite, and if it be not speedy, it cannot but be worse with us. That which I mean, is a way that may not lay hard personal reflections on men that have been instrumental in the work of God or such things are not kindly that reflects on such and looks not to the main end, but stand in the way rather both of edification and union. It is known among natural men, when they would make up firm union, the less remembrance of faults be the better and it is the more conducing to that end.

Question. Seeing then there is a difference, a query may be, wherein may or can we agree? Answer. There is a difference in judgment, affection and practice, and if we cannot agree, let us stand where we are and grow not worse. (2) If we cannot agree in all these three, yet let us agree in some of them, for this may be done if there be not a union in judgment. If it cannot be in judgment and affection let it be in practice. [In] 2 Corinthians 13:11, the apostle has two words to this purpose: "Be of one mind, live in peace." Folks may live in peace though they be not of one mind. As also 1 Corinthians 1:12, the new notes on the Bible has a word on this place that is (say they), though {there} were differences in judgment and had different doctrines, yet they would not have doctrines contrary one to another or the truth [see Westminster *Annotations* (1645)], and so they should be of one mind, and this chapter the rather seems to be the way. Because, Philippians 3:15, 16, the apostle having to deal with a people among whom were divisions, he says, "Let us therefore as many as be perfect be thus minded," keep our judgment and go not back, and what follows, "if in anything ye be other ways minded God shall reveal this unto you." And for practice, "nevertheless whereunto we have attained already, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things." If we cannot in all things agree, let us follow a common rule, and agree in that, and these that cannot come up to us in some things, we may expect God's mind to be revealed to them. But in a way of division and strife there is not a promise that the mind of God shall be revealed; and who knows but if we might come to this, to forbear some things wherein we differ, and take one common way in practice, God might reveal some things to us, and upon the one side some might be made to say, we have not minded edification in things, nor been so tender of authority as was meet, and upon the other side others may be made to say, we have not been tender to keep the work of God in clean hands, and the ordinances pure and from being wronged?

And I would have you to consider, what good have all your debates done? How many have they changed or mollified? They have embittered spirits more, but whose condition have they bettered? And it cannot be otherwise if edification and unity be linked together, and nothing will unite, but that which is edifying.■

William Perkins on Conscience and Casuistry:
Puritan Foundations for Reformed, Scriptural Ethics

By Jacob D. Gerber

Introduction

Since her inception, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has sought to be faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission. Yet, while these ideals hold broad consensus throughout the PCA, many difficulties have arisen over the details of their implementation. In particular, the PCA has faced many challenges regarding what faithfulness to the Scriptures and fidelity to the Reformed faith require in the realm of ethics. To address some of these questions, the PCA's General Assembly has formed study committees to consider ethical issues such as abortion (1978), pornography (1985), Christian responsibility in the nuclear age (1987), "heroic measures" (i.e., in medical interventions for the critically ill and dying; 1988), divorce and remarriage (1992), racial and ethnic reconciliation (2018), human sexuality (2021), and domestic abuse and sexual assault (2022). Still, disagreements persist. For example, while many of the duties required and sins forbidden by the Ten Commandments that are itemized in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* are uncontroversial, two of the most common differences taken from the Standards by officer candidates arise directly from this section: the Second Commandment prohibition against making images of any of the three persons of the Trinity (*WLC* #109) and the Fourth Commandment prohibition against worldly recreations (*WLC* #117, 119). Furthermore, ethical issues about human sexuality and the sin of abuse have recently prompted numerous overtures, extensive debates, and even officer and church departures from the denomination. Beyond these larger debates, a number of other specific duties and sins listed in the *Larger Catechism* have generated varying levels of disagreement as to application.[1]

While there will always be "truths and forms with respect to which men of good character and principles may differ,"[2] the many questions and disagreements in the PCA on these issues suggest a need for greater alignment about the goal and methods for remaining faithful to the Scriptures and true to the Reformed faith in biblical ethics. One wonders, then, whether the PCA has made sufficient use of two central ethical insights from the Reformed tradition that are codified in the PCA's constitutional documents: (1) the Reformed doctrine of the conscience (see *WCF* 20; PCA *BCO Preliminary Principle* #1), and (2) the practice of Reformed casuistry ("cases of conscience"; *WCF* 31.2) that makes ethical judgments not only by what is "expressly set down in Scripture," but also by what is deduced from Scripture "by good and necessary consequence" (*WCF* 1.6), as illustrated in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*'s thorough exposition of the Ten Commandments (*WLC* #98–148). By these

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1. e.g., Overture 26 from Potomac Presbytery to the 49th General Assembly of the PCA in 2022 (*Minutes of the 49th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* [*Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2022*], pp. 1337–39) argued that some of the sins forbidden in the *Larger Catechism's* exposition of the Sixth Commandment ("all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense" [*WLC* #136]) necessitated a denominational condemnation of political violence. The Overtures Committee disagreed, recommending that Overture 26 be answered in the negative (*M49GA*, p. 106). A Minority Report then proposed answering Overture 26 in the affirmative (*M49GA* [2022], pp. 129–31), but it was defeated by a vote of 489–1047. The General Assembly ultimately answered Overture 26 in the negative by a vote of 1108–371 (*M49GA* [2022], pp. 86–87).

2. *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (PCA *BCO*), *Preliminary Principle* #5.

insights, the Reformed faith clarifies both a clear goal for ethics (seeking a good conscience before God), as well as a clear methodology for how to do ethics in a way that is faithful to the Scriptures (the practice of Reformed casuistry in cases of conscience).

My purpose in this article, then, is not to make a direct case for or against any particular ethical issue. Rather, my goal is to work toward a fuller recovery of two of the PCA's constitutional pillars for the Reformed system of ethics (conscience and casuistry) through a focused survey of the work of William Perkins (1558–1602). Perkins's work on ethics was deeply influential during his own day and during the period of the Westminster Assembly. I will stop short of attempting to demonstrate the full extent of the Westminster Assembly's direct dependence on Perkins, and I will not evaluate whether Perkins always came to the right conclusions. My goal in this article is much more modest. Instead, I will present Perkins as a defining figure for understanding the approach of the Reformed tradition to the faithful interpretation of Scripture for ethics. Specifically, my thesis is that the work of William Perkins clarifies what the PCA's constitutional documents already teach about how to do ethics, especially by combining a warm, pastoral heart for the consciences of sinners with a precise, technical methodology of Reformed casuistry that draws out detailed ethical applications from all of Scripture for cases of conscience that arise.

To prove my thesis, I will begin by situating Perkins's understanding of the conscience and his casuistical method within his own context and as background for the Westminster Assembly's work on conscience and on the *Larger Catechism*'s exposition of the Ten Commandments. Then, I will provide a detailed taxonomy for Perkins's casuistical method; however, because Perkins's written corpus is extensive, I will limit my scope to his casuistry on the most ethically difficult texts, where the strengths (and, in some cases, weaknesses) of his approach will be most apparent. Specifically, I will examine only Perkins's work with Old Testament narratives in his most significant work of practical divinity, *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*. Ethical work in the Old Testament is widely acknowledged to be difficult,[3] and the Old Testament narratives are even more complex because they are neither prescriptive, direct, nor explicit, but instead are descriptive, indirect, and implicit.[4] Therefore, Perkins's appropriation of Old Testament narratives provides ample material to see his method in action. Finally, I will offer a few concluding thoughts for what Perkins suggests about how the PCA might remain faithful to the Scriptures and true to the Reformed faith in biblical ethics in the years to come.

Perkins and the Puritans on Conscience and Casuistry

Keith Thomas made a salient historical observation when he wrote, "The seventeenth century can justly be called the Age of Conscience… For much of the century it was generally believed that conscience, not force of habit or self-interest, was what held together the social and political order."[5] In matters of faith, one may observe this burgeoning emphasis on the conscience by comparing Reformed confessional statements from the sixteenth century to the seventeenth century. So, the Three Forms of Unity, which were primarily written in the sixteenth century, acknowledge the significance of the conscience in only

3. As Walter Kaiser observed, "Few aspects of Old Testament study have proven to be so difficult as Old Testament ethics" (Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983], p. 1); see also Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); John Goldingay, *Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

4. Gordon Wenham has observed the difficulty of the "indirect" ethical teaching from the Old Testament narratives, in contrast to the "direct ethical teaching that is found in the legal codes in the Pentateuch, the exhortations of the Wisdom literature and the preaching of the prophets" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000], p. 2); John Barton has similarly noted the need for more work on the "implicit" ethics from Old Testament narratives beyond the more "explicit" ethics elsewhere in the Old Testament (John Barton, "Ethik des Alten Testaments," *Theologische Rundschau* 64, no. 4 [November 1999]: 425); John Barton, "The Future of Old Testament Ethics," in *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2003), p. 173; see also Robin A. Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004); S. Min Chun, *Ethics and Biblical Narrative: A Literary and Discourse-Analytical Approach to the Story of Josiah*, Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Christian Frevel, "More Than Worthwhile to Consider? Old Testament Ethics between Description and Prescription," in *Key Approaches to Biblical Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. by Volker Rabens, Jacqueline N. Grey, and Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, BibInt 189 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 129–153.

5. Keith Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G. E. Aylmer*, ed. by J. S. Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 29.

a few locations.[6] By contrast, the seventeenth-century Westminster Assembly considered the conscience much more centrally to their overall doctrine, which is particularly reflected in their dedication of an entire chapter in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* to "Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience."[7]

Perkins on Conscience

Although Perkins died in 1602, he played a key transitional role in the sixteenth century that helped to shape the seventeenth century as an Age of Conscience. J. I. Packer argues that Perkins, who was often called the "father of Puritanism," was instrumental in influencing the whole Puritan movement to be "supremely concerned about conscience," so that "nothing, therefore, in their estimation, was more important for any man than that his conscience should be enlightened, instructed, purged, and kept clean."[8] Thomas Pickering summarized this conviction in the dedicatory for Perkins's *The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*: "There is no one doctrine, revealed in the Word of God or dispensed by the prophets and apostles, of greater use and consequence in the life of man than is that which prescribes a form of relieving and rectifying the conscience."[9]

Perkins held an anthropology that recognized two faculties of the soul: the understanding and the will. Then, Perkins classified the conscience as a practical aspect of the understanding, "because its property is to judge of the goodness or badness of things or actions done."10 By locating the conscience as a part of the understanding, Perkins and the Puritans followed Thomas Aquinas (a Dominican) rather than the Franciscans, who located the conscience within the will.11 Nevertheless, while Reformed writers depended heavily on Aquinas's work on the faculties of the soul generally, Perkins and other Reformed theologians made a groundbreaking theological contribution by giving a more extensive treatment to the nature and function of the conscience than had previously appeared.12 So, Perkins described the conscience as "of a divine nature… a thing placed by God in the midst between Him and man, as an arbitrator to give sentence, and to pronounce either with man or against man unto God."13 Thus, conscience was rational, but it was also relational as a "shared knowledge" with God. Packer explains Perkins's view well:

> All Puritan theologians from Perkins on are agreed in conceiving of conscience as a rational faculty, a power of moral self-knowledge and judgement, dealing with questions of right and wrong, duty and desert, and dealing with them authoritatively, as God's voice. Often the Puritans appealed to the form of the word (conscience, from the Latin *con-scientia*) as pointing to the fact that the knowledge which conscience possesses is shared knowledge, joint-knowledge, knowledge (*scientia*) held in common with (*con-*) another—namely God. The judgements of conscience thus express the deepest and truest self-knowledge that a man ever has—i.e., knowledge of himself as God knows him.[14]

For Perkins, the conscience performs two actions: "to give testimony or to give judgment (Rom. 2:15)."[15] That is, the conscience bears witness in an individual's soul about what that individual has thought, felt, or done, and then passes judgment over those actions. Thus, the conscience acts as God's own judicial representative in the soul: "(as it were) a little god sitting in the middle of men's hearts, arraigning them in this life as they shall be arraigned for their offences at the tribunal seat of the ever-living God in the day of judgment."[16] Because of this great power, Perkins insists that the only proper "thing which has absolute and sovereign power in itself to bind the conscience… is the Word of God written in the books of the Old and New Testaments."[17] An improper binder of conscience has "no power or virtue in itself to bind conscience," but "only by virtue

6. The conscience is treated incidentally in the 1561 *Belgic Confession* (Articles 23, 24, 32, and 37), the 1563 *Heidelberg Catechism* (#32, 60), and the 1618–1619 *Canons of Dort* (1.16; 5.5; 5.10; Conclusion).

7. In the 1646 *Westminster Confession of Faith*, conscience appears much more centrally in 17.3, 18.1, 18.4 (x2), 20.2 (x4), 22.6, and 23.4. Also in the 1647 *Westminster Larger Catechism*, see #28, 55, 80, 83 (x2), 89, 96, 105, 151.3, 175.

8. J. I. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), p. 107.

9. Thomas Pickering, "The Epistle Dedicatory for The Works of The Cases of Conscience," in *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. by J. Stephen Yuille, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), p. 97.

10. William Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," in *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. by J. Stephen Yuille, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), p. 7.

11. Thomas C. Merrill, "Introduction," in *William Perkins, 1558–1602: English Puritanist—His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: "A Discourse of Conscience" and "The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience,"* ed. by Thomas C. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1966), p. XIII.

12. For Perkins's contribution to the Reformed concept of the conscience, see Paul Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), pp. 111–14.

13. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 9.

14. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness*, p. 109.

15. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 10.

16. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 12.

17. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 13.

of God's Word or of some part of it," such as in the cases of "human laws, an oath, [and] a promise."[18]

This doctrine of the conscience had great practical significance for Perkins, since it set forth the clear goal of gaining a good conscience, "which rightly excuses and comforts, according to God's Word."[19] Although Adam lost (for himself and for all of his posterity) the good conscience that he received at creation, the gospel holds out the promise that sinners may regain a good conscience by regeneration, where "that which being corrupt by nature, is renewed and purged by faith in the blood of Christ."[20] That regenerate conscience then gives new testimony that "we are the children of God, predestined to everlasting life," and new judgment "to excuse, that is, to clear and defend man, even before God, against all his enemies both bodily and ghostly."[21] The peace of a good conscience, then, is one of the greatest privileges that the believer enjoys.

Thus, Perkins recognizes two primary duties concerning conscience. First, we must "above all things labor to obtain [a good conscience], for it is not given by nature to any man, but comes through grace."[22] That is, our first duty constrains us to submit to the judgment of our conscience against our guilt, and to appeal to the gospel of Jesus Christ through faith for a good conscience. Then, "after a man has gotten a good conscience, his second duty is to keep it."[23] Keeping a good conscience is related to the whole work of sanctification, first by addressing "impediments" to keeping a good conscience by renewing our mind from ignorance through the Scriptures, by mortifying our sinful corruptions and affections, and by seeking contentment in life.[24] The second part of keeping a good conscience requires maintaining the "preservatives" of both our "saving faith" as well as "the righteousness of a good conscience" through obedience.[25] So, one can *get* a good conscience only by regeneration, and not through obedience to God's Word. Nevertheless, *keeping* a good conscience requires obedience. It is not that justification in any sense depends on works, but that the human conscience is easily wounded: "the good conscience is the most tender part of the soul like to the apple of the eye; which being pierced by the least pin that may be, is not only blemished, but also loses its sight… And so we must use means to avoid whatsoever may offend or annoy conscience."[26]

In sum, Perkins saw a good conscience as a "precious… jewel."[27] For him, the close connection between the judgment of the conscience today and the judgment of Christ in the future meant that caring for one's conscience was the most important duty in life. While gaining a good conscience depends on faith in Jesus Christ alone, keeping a good conscience requires giving every effort to obey God's Word – not for the sake of one's justification, but for the sake of protecting one's regenerate conscience from further injury from sin.

Perkins on Casuistry

How, though, does someone know what duty God (and, therefore, the conscience) may require in any given situation? For the sake of keeping a good conscience, Perkins and the Puritans developed a form of casuistry by which they sought to identify moral and ethical obligations from the Bible.[28] In this, they drew upon the Roman Catholic tradition of casuistry; however, they believed that the Jesuits "stunted the proper development of the conscience by dictating the minimal requirements for the good life rather than inspiring men to strive for the best that was within them."[29] The Puritans, therefore, sought to more fully "harness our consciences to the Holy Scriptures, in which the mind of God is fully revealed to us."[30]

Importantly, Beeke and Jones note that "we would call much of this teaching personal and social ethics, but Perkins saw it as cases of conscience."[31] This is an important point, since it clarifies the meaning of *Westminster Confession of Faith* 31.2: "It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and *cases of conscience*…" (emphasis added; see also PCA *BCO* 11-2). Thus, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* acknowledges the

18. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 26.
19. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 56.
20. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 56.
21. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," pp. 79, 81.
22. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 86.
23. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 91.
24. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," pp. 91–92.
25. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," pp. 92–94.
26. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 93.
27. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 90.
28. While Keenan persuasively disputes classifying the genre of Perkins's work as casuistry, I will nevertheless use the term casuistry since historical genre questions are beyond the scope of this article: James F. Keenan, "Was William Perkins' Whole Treatise of Cases of Consciences Casuistry?: Hermeneutics and British Practical Divinity," in *Contexts of Conscience in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, ed. by Harald E. Braun and Edward Vallance (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 17–31.
29. Merrill, "Introduction," p. XII.
30. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness*, p. 113.
31. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, "Puritan Casuistry," in *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), p. 933.

ministerial role of the church courts for determining questions of doctrine ("controversies of faith") and ethics ("cases of conscience"). In part, this reminds us that Puritan casuistry is not an historic relic from the seventeenth century, but it remains a constitutional provision for the PCA to this day. More importantly, this also reminds us that the church courts exercise only a *ministerial* power over doctrine and ethics; they do not possess a *magisterial* power to make final, binding judgment on the Scriptures. As noted above, Perkins and the Puritans believed above all that "the Word of God alone, by an absolute and sovereign power, [properly] binds conscience."[32] Therefore, Puritan casuistry "was offered as exposition and application of Scripture, and was to be checked against Scripture by those who received it, according to the Protestant principle of the duty of private judgement."[33] Thus, Andrew Ballitch argued that Perkins interpreted the Scriptures by paying close attention to each text's "context" ("a close reading of the text in terms of the argument and literary features"), "collation" ("a comparison with other passages"), and "the analogy of faith" ("faith the boundaries of the Reformed tradition").[34]

In his casuistry, Perkins argued that "conscience gives judgment in or by a kind of reasoning or disputing, called a practical syllogism."[35] As an illustration of this kind of practical syllogism, Perkins writes that our consciences reason within us like this: "'Every murderer is cursed,' says the mind. 'You are a murderer, says conscience assisted by memory. *Ergo*, 'You are accursed,' says conscience, and so gives her sentence."[36] Of course, we often make simple ethical judgments without consciously thinking through this kind of reasoning, but the Puritans sought to equip people to employ and evaluate these practical syllogisms through training the conscience:

> Occasionally, however, situations arise which give pause. At times it may not be clear to the morally earnest individual which of two possible courses best serve his highest duty. It may fall out, in fact, that he is confronted with a dilemma where two opposing actions lay moral claim upon him on the bases of two general principles to both of which he holds conscientious allegiance [Casuistry] is a tool which applies a general moral precept to a particular human being in a particular place at a particular time.[37]

Thus, the ultimate goal of Puritan casuistry was to apply the whole Bible to modern life, which would therefore "bring all of human activity under the immediate judgment of the will of God."[38]

Perkins's Conscience and Casuistry in the PCA

Perkins stands at the head of the rich, Puritan and Reformed efforts in casuistry for the sake of conscience that stretched over the course of the seventeenth century. While other Puritans offered works on casuistry, Louis Wright has argued that Perkins "was probably read more widely than any other preacher of his day," with the result that Perkins (along with the others) helped "to shape the whole social, ethical, and even literary outlook of the masses of Englishmen."[39] Beeke and Jones call Perkins the "father of Puritan casuistry," citing Thomas Merrill's evaluation that Perkins's work "set a pattern for all later work in Protestant moral divinity."[40] Even historians who argue that Perkins's legacy was harmful do not dispute the influence of his work.[41] Therefore, to understand the approach to biblical ethics that was dominant in the seventeenth century during the creation of the Westminster Assembly, we must understand the work of William Perkins.

This also means that, although many abandoned this emphasis on conscience and casuistry by the end of the seventeenth century,[42] Perkins's legacy lives on in the *Westminster Standards* of the PCA. Of these two emphases, the PCA seems to have given more attention

32. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 13.
33. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness*, p. 119.
34. Andrew S. Ballitch, *The Gloss and the Text: William Perkins on Interpreting Scripture with Scripture*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), p. 3.
35. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 50.
36. Perkins, "A Discourse of Conscience," p. 50.
37. Merrill, "Introduction," p. XI.
38. Merrill, "Introduction," p. XV.
39. Louis B. Wright, "William Perkins: Elizabethan Apostle of 'Practical Divinity,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (1940): 196.
40. Beeke and Jones, "Puritan Casuistry," 931; Merrill, "Introduction," p. xx.
41. Bozeman, for example, has argued that Perkins's extraordinary influence led to "an unrelenting absorption in 'cases' and an increasingly refined analysis of affliction of conscience, its causes and cures" (Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* [Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004], pp. 145–46).
42. Kenneth E. Kirk, *Conscience and Its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry*, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 203; regarding casuistry, "the rise of Deism, the struggle with Socianism and Arminianism and the attacks of Hobbes and Locke on the validity of the idea of conscience, all worked together to create an intellectual and religious atmosphere that was uncongenial to [its] cultivation and further development"

to the role of the conscience than to the method of casuistry. For example, the PCA has recently witnessed major debates about the general role and limitations on individual conscience;[43] however, it would go beyond the scope of this article to evaluate those questions here. Rather, Perkins's emphasis on the importance of the conscience led directly into his method for identifying specific ethical responsibilities. In the next section, then, we will examine Perkins's approach to Reformed casuistry.

A Taxonomy of Casuistical Methods in Perkins's Use of Old Testament Narratives

Perkins never explicitly articulated his methodology for drawing ethical applications from Scripture. Therefore, it will be the goal of the remainder of this article to trace aspects of his methodology inductively by reverse engineering and providing a taxonomy for categorizing the various ways that he appealed to the most challenging ethical portions of Scripture in the Old Testament narratives. Perkins did not limit his focus to the prescriptive, direct, and explicit ethical statements in the Bible, and neither did he overemphasize the descriptive, indirect, and implicit ethical witness of Old Testament narratives. Instead, Perkins integrated straightforward ethical commands alongside the more challenging material contained in Old Testament narratives. In drawing ethical applications so freely, Perkins's approach was controversial in his own day, and remains controversial to this day. John Barton, for example, dismisses many of the ethical conclusions of the Puritans by arguing that they tended to "ignore genre distinctions," a charge he bolsters by citing Perkins's contemporary, the Anglican Richard Hooker (1554–1600), who wrote this against Puritans like William Perkins: "their common ordinary practice is, to quote by-speeches in some historical narration or other, and to urge them as if they were written in most exact form of Law."[44] As I will argue through the rest of this article, however, Perkins's appropriation of ethical applications from Old Testament narratives was much more principled than has been previously recognized.

Throughout the *Whole Treatise*, Perkins employs the Ramist method of seeking to understand a subject by "by way of definition and division" where "an 'axiom' was divided into two parts or into dichotomies."[45] So, Perkins cited Old Testament narratives in a variety of ways to demonstrate whether, under which circumstances, and to what degree, the Bible demonstrates a binding, moral obligation regarding a given ethical question. Only rarely, however, does Perkins explain how he is using a particular text for drawing out moral and ethical imperatives. In the following sections of this article, I will construct a taxonomy by noting at least eight different ways that Perkins uses Old Testament narratives in his casuistry: examples (from both human and divine actions), illustrations, confirmations to prove a debatable point, principles drawn directly from narratives, taxonomies, triangulations, and analogies. Then, we will examine a few of Perkins's more disputable interpretations and applications.

Examples (Human and Divine)

Perkins's use of *examples* represents the first major category in his appropriation of Old Testament narratives. Perkins uses Old Testament narratives as examples more often than for any other kind of method. Perkins cites examples from narratives to serve as proof in themselves of moral obligations, especially when there is no explicit precept to teach the point. Perkins's editor, Thomas Pickering, confirms this understanding of Perkins's use of examples through a postscript to apologize for the accidental inclusion of two examples "in a way of proof of a rule there mentioned."[46] Perkins

(N. Keith Clifford, *Casuistical Divinity in English Puritanism During the Seventeenth-Century: Its Origins, Development and Significance* [PhD diss., University of London, 1957], p. 40); cited by Beeke and Jones, "Puritan Casuistry," p. 939.

43. For example, the 46th and 47th General Assemblies of the PCA cited Calvary Presbytery for binding the conscience of a minister: "The resulting prohibition whereby a TE [Teaching Elder] was prevented from teaching his accepted view is contrary to our practice of good faith subscription and the first preliminary principle [dealing with liberty of conscience]" (*Minutes of the 46th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* [*Office of the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2018*], pp. 20–21, 367; see also *Minutes of the 47th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* [*Office of the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2019*], pp. 29–31, 449–52). The 48th General Assembly, however, reversed this decision by determining that restricting a TE from teaching contrary to the doctrinal standards of the church did not violate the TE's conscience (*Minutes of the 48th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* [*Office of the Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America, 2021*], pp. 24–26, 527–34, 630–33.)

44. Cited in John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), pp. 129–30.

45. Donald K. McKim, "Perkins, William (1558-1602)," in *Dictionary of Major Bible Interpreters*, ed. by Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), p. 816.

46. See footnote 16 in William Perkins, "The Whole Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," in *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. by J. Stephen Yuille, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pp. 413–14.

himself most clearly defines the way he uses "examples" in his discussion of modesty in dress:

> Seventh, it must be framed to the example, not of the lighter and vainer sort, but of the most grave and sober of our order and place, both of men and women. *We have no express rule in Scripture touching the measure and manner of our apparel; and therefore the wise and grave presidents* [editor's note: "Probably should be 'precedents.'"] *of good and godly men, who are of the same or like degree with ourselves, ought to stand for a rule of direction in this behalf*. To which purpose Paul exhorts, "Whatsoever things are pure, honest, of good report, if there be any virtue… think of these things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, those things do" (Phil. 4:9). We have many examples hereof in the Word of God.[47]

Here, Perkins acknowledges the lack of express rule in Scripture dealing with apparel, and, in the absence of a clear precept, he appeals to the "wise and grave [precedents]" and the "many examples hereof in the Word of God." Subsequently, he notes the rough clothing of Elijah and John the Baptist as customary for prophets to wear in those days (2 Kgs. 1:8; Zech. 13:4; Matt. 3:4). One could, perhaps, argue that the highly unique vocations and circumstances of Elijah and John the Baptist as prophets should not be applied directly to the lives of ordinary believers today. Still, it should be noted that Perkins does not appeal to the examples of Elijah and John the Baptist as the sole reason for advocating "grave and sober" apparel, but the seventh and final reason as he first argues for modesty in dress from six other angles.[48] Perkins cites these final examples only to give specific direction regarding the specific "measure and manner" of apparel, to build off of those other biblical principles. Regardless of whether we may agree with him on this point, this passage is valuable to reveal Perkins's own methodology for how he uses "examples."

Perkins cites numerous examples throughout *The Whole Treatise*, often explicitly using the term. So, Ezra and Daniel are "examples" of people who make "supplication made to God for mercy."[49] Job is an "example" of one "who, having been long in outward afflictions, was withal exercised by the apprehension of the anger of God."[50] Regarding "divine temptation," which is "a combat with God himself immediately" so that "the distressed party feels some evident tokens of God's wrath," Perkins points to Cain and Saul as figures who experienced this trial due to their own great sins, but Job and David as "examples" of those who came under such a trial "when there is no sin committed, but obedience to God performed."[51] Jacob, the people of Israel under Moses with the brazen serpent, and David are all Old Testament "examples" to prove that "they who desire with comfort to bear the pangs of death…must set before their eyes promise of remission of sins and everlasting life."[52] David and Daniel provide "examples" for how to repent from sins: "when he sins and falls, he is grieved with himself and labors every day to mortify his corruptions, which are the matter of sin in his heart and life."[53] On three occasions, Perkins cites the "example" of Laban's oath to demonstrate that even oaths made to false gods are binding on those who make them.[54] Perkins calls Lot and Abraham an "example" to prove that we may give civil worship, or social honor, to angels and men who are worthy of it.[55] The "examples of holy men," including "the poor maids of Ramath Zophim" in 1 Samuel 9:13, demonstrate the moral duty that we should not eat until having blessed the food.[56] Finally, Perkins cites the "examples of sundry persons in Scripture," including Abraham, Joseph, the Israelites under Moses, and Solomon, that we may lawfully use costly jewelry: "All these examples do show thus much, that there is a lawful use of these things in them to whom they appertain."[57]

Perkins also cites examples from Old Testament worship as binding on New Testament worshipers today. First, he argues that we must conceive of God only as He reveals Himself to us in His Word, so that we should not attempt to know or to conceive of God as He is in Himself:

> The truth hereof may appear in this one example (to allege no more): When Moses desired to see the glory and majesty of God, for a further confirmation and assurance of his calling, answer was made him by God, that he could not see His face, but he should see His back parts, as He passed by him [Ex. 33:23]… But the

47. Perkins, "Whole Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 410, emphasis added.
48. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 408–10.
49. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 143.
50. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 170.
51. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 170–71.
52. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 192.
53. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 209.
54. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 231, 316, 320–21. The word "example," however, only appears on p. 316.
55. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 303–04.
56. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 398.
57. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 405.

> perfect and full sight thereof no creature was ever able to attain unto, it being reserved for the life to come when (and not before) they shall see Him as He is in Himself face to face.[58]

Second, Perkins argues that we have a duty for the "exaltation or advancement of God's majesty above all the things in the world. We have many examples of these in the Scriptures, as of Abraham, who called God 'his Lord' and himself 'dust and ashes' (Gen. 18:27)."[59] While Perkins often goes to great lengths to argue that old covenant ceremonies do not bind the modern Christian, in cases like this he does not hesitate to argue that examples like this from Old Testament narratives lay down timeless principles that are still binding.

Other times, Perkins does not use the term "example," but he urges behavior to imitate the example in view. So, Perkins points to David as an example to follow in terms of his faithfulness in diverse vocations, first as a shepherd of sheep and then as a king over Israel: "Look then, as David did, so ought we, even by our works, to be answerable to our callings."[60] When Perkins holds up David as an exemplar of someone who was "content with any condition of life," including during the uprising of Absalom, he explains, "So did David…"[61] Noting that Manasseh, Job, Daniel, and the nation of Judah demonstrate the necessity of examination, confession of sin, and prayer, he asserts that these are examples for us to follow: "By all these places it is apparent that there is no better remedy in the world for the mind of man, grieved by means of outward afflictions, than the practice of the duties before named."[62] As proof of the vanity of the things of this world, Perkins cites Solomon as an example by writing, "And the truth hereof appears in the experience of Solomon himself…"[63] To prove our need of submitting to the Word of God preached in worship, Perkins cites Naaman as an example: "in this regard, let him follow the practice of Naaman."[64]

One particular use of the term "example" merits our attention, where Perkins uses an example to prove what is wrong, rather than what is right. In the "Third Book of the Cases of Conscience," Perkins asks "Whether a man may lawfully, and with good conscience, use policy [i.e., strategic deception] in the affairs of this life?"[65] Positively, Perkins finds several "examples" where God explicitly commands "policy," such as Joshua 8:5, where "Joshua uses martial policy in the besieging of Ai," and in 2 Samuel 5:23, where David "being to make war against the Philistines, asks counsel of God, and God teaches him policy."[66] On the other hand, Perkins notes special cases where policy is unlawful, including David's feigning madness before Achish, king of Gath:

> Now if it falls out otherwise, that policy is used, and any of these four caveats are not observed, then it loses both the name and nature of true policy, and becomes fraud, craft, and deceit, and so is condemnable. We have an *example* hereof in David, who, when he came to the court of Achish, king of Gath, and saw himself in danger, he feigned himself mad (1 Sam. 21:14). Though he did this to save his own life, yet his policy was not to be allowed, for it tended to his own disgrace (he being king of Israel). And it was also dishonorable unto God, who had appointed him to be the king of Israel… Besides that, it is not only against the written law of God, but even against the law of nature.[67]

Here, David's actions are an "example" of unlawful policy; however, Perkins's categorization of this "example" from David as a demonstration of what *not* to do is unique in his casuistry.

Relatedly, Perkins also cites *counter*-examples that some may point to in order to object to an ethical principle that Perkins has articulated from other texts. So, after arguing that it is not lawful for a man to hear mass because of its idolatrous nature, Perkins raises the "example" of Naaman (2 Kgs. 5:18–19), as well as Jehu (2 Kgs. 10:18) and Daniel (whether by implication he did worship the Nebuchadnezzar's image; Dan. 3:6) and asks whether these examples contradict his thesis. Then, Perkins explains why the specific features of each of these narratives do not contradict his thesis. Or, after arguing against the lawfulness of swearing an oath by a creature, Perkins cites Joseph's swearing by the life of Pharaoh (Gen. 42:15) as a possible counter-example, and then provides two reasons why an objection from Joseph's actions does not stand: (1) "Joseph sinned in so swearing, for therein he imitated the Egyptians who swore by the life of their king"; and (2) "Joseph does only make an asseveration and not an oath."[68]

58. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 250–51.
59. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 254.
60. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 151–52.
61. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 173.
62. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 176.
63. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 188.
64. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 271.
65. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 369.
66. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 369.
67. Perkins, "Treatise," ibid., p. 370, emphasis added.
68. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 319; for similar reasons, Perkins considers Abigail's swearing by David's life (1 Sam. 25:26) as "only an obtestation, or earnest avouchment, joined with an oath" (Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 320).

Other times, Perkins offers counter-examples both to give specific exceptions to a general rule, and also to use exceptions as the proof of a general rule. So, on the question of whether it is ever lawful to flee persecution, Perkins generally answers the question in the negative, but then also cites "the example of many worthy men recorded in Scripture" who flee for godly reasons, such as Jacob's flight from Esau, Moses into Midian, Obadiah's hiding a hundred prophets, and Elijah's flight from Jezebel.[69] Later, Perkins argues that the extreme nature of Nabal's foolishness and drunkenness means that Abigail's "example, therefore, is no warrant for any woman to give alms [apart from her husband's consent], unless it is in the like case."[70] These all constitute exceptions to their respective general rule. By contrast, Perkins also cites the rarity of makeup use to argue that Jezebel's makeup use was proof of its evil: "This practice is most abominable in the very light of nature, and much more by the light of God's Word, wherein we have but *one only example thereof*, and that is of wicked Jezebel, who is noted by this mark of a notorious harlot, 'that she painted her face' (2 Kings 9:30)."[71] Here, the exception of Jezebel's case – in the text of her overall wicked reputation – proves (for Perkins, at least) a general rule against using makeup.

Less commonly, Perkins does not cite human action as examples, but divine action. Sometimes, Perkins insists that we should follow God's example directly: "Second, we must be rightly and truly informed in the matter, before we give judgment. This was God's own practice, who came down to see whether the sin of Sodom was answerable to the cry (Gen. 18:21)."[72] More often, however, Perkins draws out examples of divine actions in order to define our ethical responsibility in response to what God does. So, Perkins deals at length with questions of theodicy, where he argues for the ethical necessity of praising God for his goodness through our suffering by drawing out "the fruits of affliction" from several biblical examples.[73] In this vein, Perkins proves the general principle that God "has determined certainly the accomplishment of all and every of His promises" from "an example hereof in the Israelites, of whom the Lord said to Abraham that they should be in affliction in a strange land [for] 430 years, and then be delivered [Gen. 15:13]."[74] Or, he cites Abraham, David, and others as proof that God "does not always grant [His servants'] requests….And, therefore, if it shall please Him thus to deal with any of us, we must from these examples be taught to possess our souls with patience, resting contented in His will, and waiting on His good pleasures to the end."[75] When Perkins advocates that we should follow God's example directly, his use of "example" follows closely what he generally means when he speaks of the examples of human beings. More often, though, Perkins uses divine "examples" to fill out our understanding and our faith in our invisible God and what he may be doing in our lives.

Illustrations

Whereas Perkins uses *examples* as proof of the moral necessity of certain actions, he also uses what I will call "illustrations" that do not so much prove a point as they fill out the contours of a duty previously established by other texts. So, regarding oaths, Perkins points to David's oath concerning Shimei as an illustration that defines the extent that such an oath would bind a person:

> David, at the humble request of Shimei (who had before cursed him), pardons his fault for the time, and swears to him that he should not die (2 Sam. 19:23). David made conscience of this oath, knowing himself to be bound thereby, and therefore till his death he kept it; only he charged Solomon not to count him innocent (1 Kings 2:9).[76]

On a few occasions, Perkins uses the operative word "as" to preface an illustration. So, regarding the duties of keeping the law in the "whole man… in his mind, will, affections, and all the faculties of soul and body," Perkins writes, "*As* it is said of Josiah, that he 'turned to God, according to all the laws of Moses, with all his heart' (2 Kings 23:25)."[77] Or, to illustrate the kind of rejoicing commended on the Sabbath, Perkins writes, "But this rejoicing must be such *as* was the rejoicing of the Jews (Neh. 8:12), which was only spiritual and in the Lord. For they rejoiced only for this, that they understood the law of God that was taught them."[78] These illustrations do not prove the ethical obligation, but only clarify what that obligation requires.

69. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 310.
70. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 424.
71. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 413, emphasis added.
72. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 434.
73. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 179–81.
74. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 182–83.
75. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 185.
76. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 320.
77. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 148, emphasis added.
78. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 354, emphasis added.

In a few other cases, Perkins draws from Old Testament narratives for their pure illustrative (i.e., figurative) value, without directly filling out any specific ethical duties. So, regarding the principle that, "in the work of our redemption, Christ gives life, not by life, but by death, and He sends men to heaven by the gates and suburbs of hell," Perkins uses the Passover menu as an illustration: "The Paschal lamb was eaten with sour herbs to signify that we can feel no sweetness in the blood of Christ till we first feel the smart of our own sins and corruptions [Ex. 12:8]."[79] Or, as an illustration of our duty to prepare for death, so that we may "disarm and weaken" him, Perkins argues that we must be as cunning and relentless as the Philistines with Samson (note the use of "as"):

> And in this case, we must deal with death *as* the Philistines dealt with Samson. They saw by experience that he was a mighty man, and by his power and strength had given them many foils; and, therefore, they labored to know in what part of his body his strength did lie. And after inquiry, finding it to be in the hair of his head, they never rested till they had spoiled him thereof. And without question, the time will come when we all must encounter with this strong and powerful Samson, death. In the meantime, it is a point of wisdom to inquire wherein his power and might consist.[80]

Then, Perkins argues that Samson illustrates our duty to "use all means for the cutting off of the lock of our sins, whereby alone Satan has the advantage [over] us" through "the duties of humiliation, invocation, and true repentance."[81] In both passages, Perkins is not directly illustrating our ethical duties by the details contained in relevant narratives. Rather, he is indirectly illustrating the nature of our duties, by appealing imaginatively to the vividness of passages that are not as directly relevant.

Confirmations to Prove a Debatable Point

A third category that I will call "confirmations" may be distinguished from both examples and illustrations. In two passages, Perkins cites narratives to give evidence to *confirm* a point that is debated. This is slightly different from how Perkins uses "examples," which prove the point in themselves. In a confirmation, the operative word is "thus," identifying that what we see in a narrative happens *because*, or *as a result*, of the ethical duty in view. The first confirmation arises when Perkins commends Aaron regarding our duty "'to have and to keep faith and a good conscience' (1 Tim. 1:19)": "*Thus*, it is said of Aaron that when God had destroyed his sons for offering up strange fire before Him, 'he held his peace' (Lev. 10:3)."[82] In the second confirmation, Perkins cites Joseph and military chiefs to confirm the lawfulness for rulers of wearing fine garments and ornaments:

> *Thus* we read that Joseph, being by Pharaoh set over all the land of Egypt, was arrayed "with garments of fine linen, and had a golden chain put upon his neck, to put a difference between him and the inferior princes of Pharaoh" (Gen. 41:42). *Thus*, in ancient times the captains and chief of the armies did wear fine garments of divers colors of needle work, to distinguish them from others (Judges 5:30).[83]

In both examples, Perkins is not drawing an arbitrary ethical point from the details of the narratives. Rather, he is using the details of the narratives to confirm the accuracy of underlying ethical principles in view.

Principles Drawn Directly from Narratives

In many cases, narratives must be interpreted before discerning the ethical import of particular actions within the narrative. In two cases, however, Perkins draws general ethical principles directly from narratives. While these principles are embedded within specific contexts, Perkins recognizes their broad applicability and applies them as such. First, Perkins argues that we must meditate on "the comfortable doctrines that are set down in the Word of God touching afflictions," citing the confessions of Joseph and David as evidence of God's power to correct all his people through suffering:

> Thus, God is said to correct His people "in judgment" [Jer. 30:11]; that is, so as He will have the whole ordering of the correction in His own hand. Joseph tells his brethren that, when they intended evil against him in selling him to the Ishmaelites for silver, "God disposed it for good" (Gen. 50:19-20). When Shimei cursed David, he forbade his servants so much as to meddle with him. And why? Because, says he, "the Lord bade him to curse, and who then dare say unto him, Why hast thou done so?" (2 Sam. 16:10).[84]

79. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 174.
80. Perkins, "Treatise," ibid., p. 187, emphasis added.
81. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 187.
82. Perkins, "Treatise," ibid., p. 149, emphasis added.
83. Perkins, "Treatise," ibid., p. 409, emphasis added.
84. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 177.

Perkins applies these principles about the ethical response of faith from the suffering of Joseph and David directly to the suffering of modern readers. Second, Perkins applies God's prophetic warning to Eli directly to his readers:

> If we would truly honor ourselves, we must honor God in all our ways. For God "will honor them who honor him" (1 Sam. 2:30). Now to honor God, is to honor Him according to His will and Word, in the duties of [a] good conscience and [a] good life. On the contrary, they who dishonor God, God will dishonor them before all the world. And this must teach us even to dedicate ourselves to God and His providence in the whole course of our callings, whether in the church or commonwealth.[85]

Many of the details of God's message to Eli are specific to Eli (e.g., regarding the Levitical priesthood or the cutting off of Eli's house; 1 Sam. 2:27–33). While Perkins does not attempt to apply the entirety of that message to readers, he isolates this single principle that God "will honor them who honor him" for application, according to its general nature.

Taxonomies

When Perkins evaluates the severity of various kinds of sin, he does not deal so much with the question of *what* constitutes good and evil, obedience and rebellion, or faithfulness and sin. Rather, he classifies the varying *degrees* of heinousness in different kinds of sin, laying a clear foundation for *Westminster Larger Catechism* Question #151, "What are those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others?" Since Old Testament narratives provide a wide range of material for comparison and contrast, they feature prominently in Perkins's taxonomies on the varying categories of sin. First, Perkins points to Cain's murder of Abel, the pride of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Egypt's oppression of Israel as sins that cry out for justice: "Crying sins, I call those which are so heinous, and in their kind so grievous, that they hasten God's judgments, and call down for speedy vengeance upon the sinner."[86] Second, when he is distinguishing between the three kinds of "sins of toleration," he speaks of "secret, unknown, and hidden sins in the regenerate," and cites David's ongoing "sin of polygamy, without any particular repentance that we hear of. In like manner did the patriarchs, who may not altogether be excused, yet they were not condemned therefor."[87] As evidence for another kind of sin of toleration, Perkins cites the cases of Moses, Zipporah, and Ahab:

> The third kind of sins of toleration are certain particular acts of men not approved of in Scripture, and yet remitted in respect of punishment. Such was the act of Zipporah [Ex. 4:25] in circumcising her child in [the] presence of her husband, he being able to have done it himself, and she having no calling to do that which she did… Thus, God accepted of Ahab's humility [1 Kings 21], though it were in hypocrisy, because it was a show of obedience, and for that [He] deferred a temporal punishment till the days of his posterity. God sent lions to destroy the Assyrians that dwelt in Samaria for their idolatry [2 Kings 17].[88]

In this context, the question is not *whether* God approved of the idolatry of the Assyrians in Samaria, but *why* God tolerated their idolatry after they began to honor God's law in part. For Perkins, this is evidence that God tolerated those sins to a greater degree than "crying sins."

Third, Perkins applies a general principle from a narrative to establish a distinction that sins against God are more heinous than sins against other men: "This distinction is grounded upon a place in Samuel: 'If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge it: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall plead for him?' (1 Sam. 2:25)."[89] Fourth, Perkins cites two Old Testament narratives where some sin indirectly by their "communication" with the sins of others. In this regard, David "sinned in the murder of Uriah" by commanding it (since he did not carry out the murder himself), and Eli "by winking at sins, or passing them over by slight reproof… in rebuking his sons."[90] Fifth, as Perkins considers that "in sin there are sundry steps and degrees whereby one and the same sin may be lessened or increased and so become more or less heinous before God," he raises the possibility of aggravating sins by addition, "by committing one sin in the neck of another, as David sinned when he added murder to adultery."[91]

Triangulations

On a few occasions, Perkins judges what is right by evaluating the reactions of certain people. Because

85. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 440.
86. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 128.
87. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 129.
88. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 130.
89. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 130.
90. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 131.
91. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 132, 134.

Perkins focuses more on the reaction of a third party than on the original action itself, I will call this technique "triangulation." So, to argue that the "temporary and ceremonial" Jewish law concerning the Sabbath forbade the carrying of burdens, Perkins not only cited an express command in Jeremiah 17:21, but he also noted that "Nehemiah charged the men of Judah with the profanation of the Sabbath in that kind (Neh. 13:15–17)."[92] Then, when he argues that "holy" works are lawful on the Sabbath, he cites the reasoning of the Shunamite's husband:

> Of this kind [pertaining to God's worship] is the Sabbath day's journey (Acts 1:12), allowed among the Jews to the people, to go and hear the Word preached. Thus, we read that the Shunamite went ordinarily upon the Sabbath and new moon to the prophet, to hear him. For when she demanded leave of her husband to go to the prophet, he asks her, "Why wilt thou go, seeing it is neither new moon, nor Sabbath day?" (2 Kings 4:23).[93]

This is subtle logic. Here, Perkins cites a narrative that does not concern a journey on an actual Sabbath day, but a husband's curiosity as to why his wife would travel on a day other than the Sabbath, when her travel would be customary and, therefore, lawful. From this, Perkins triangulates what kind of travel would have been lawful on the Sabbath day.

Analogy

In one instance Perkins draws a moral rule from an analogous, yet unrelated, text. So, in the case of card playing, he acknowledges that dealing cards is a casual act in itself, but that card games rely not so much on the wit, skill, and will of the players, but the uncertainty of chance. Therefore, on the basis that playing card games are like casting lots, Perkins argues that they must be abolished entirely, "because in common experience many abuses and inconveniences attend upon them. And things unnecessary, when they are much abused, because they are abused, they must not be used, but rather removed, as the brazen serpent was (2 Kings 18:4)."[94] There is not a direct line from the brazen serpent to card-playing, but only an analogous line: the latter must be removed for similar reasons that drove the removal of the former.

Disputable Interpretations

Finally, while modern readers may disagree with some of the ethical applications that Perkins drew from the passages listed above, it would be hard to fault much of his interpretation of those passages. In other cases, however, Perkins makes interpretive choices that are debatable even in terms of their interpretation. Even though we may learn much from his methods, it is important that we do not read him uncritically. Perkins's debatable points may be classified into two categories: (1) readings that contradict the text; and (2) disputable interpretations. In the first category of readings that contradict the text, Perkins urges believers not to isolate themselves from the company of other believers, since Satan loves to tempt people when they are vulnerable and alone. To prove this doctrine, Perkins offers a confirmation (note the word "thus") from Genesis 3: "He tempted Eve *thus*, when she was apart from her husband."[95] This assertion, however, seems to conflict with the text of Genesis 3:6, which suggests that Adam had been with Eve during the temptation: "she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also *unto her husband with her*" (KJV). The doctrine may be correct, but Genesis 3 does not seem to confirm the doctrine as Perkins suggests.

In a second instance, Perkins widely reproves dancing, but acknowledges exceptions in a couple of examples:

> We read indeed of a kind of dancing commended in Scripture, which Moses, Aaron and Miriam used at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:20), and David before the ark (2 Sam. 6:14), and the daughters of Israel when David got the victory of Goliath (1 Sam. 18:7-8). But this dancing was of another kind. *For it was not mixed but single, men together and women apart by themselves.* They used not in their dancing wanton gestures, and amorous songs, but the psalms of praise and thanksgiving. The cause of their dancing was spiritual joy, and the end of it was praise and thanksgiving.[96]

While David's dancing certainly arose from spiritual joy, and while the context makes it almost certain that he intended nothing unseemly from it, Michal's charge against David contradicts Perkins's denial that David's dancing was unmixed: "How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day

92. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 345.
93. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 353.
94. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 420.
95. Perkins, "Treatise," ibid., p. 168, emphasis added.
96. Perkins, "Treatise," ibid., p. 418, emphasis added.

in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!" (2 Sam. 6:20).

In the second category, we may consider disputable points of Perkins's interpretation. The prime example could be Perkins's lengthy consideration of the story of Jephthah's daughter. After extensive consideration, Perkins concludes "that Jephthah did not offer up his daughter in sacrifice, but only set her apart to live a single life to the honor and service of God."[97] This may be true, but it is a point on which scholars have long disagreed. On this basis, Perkins could have drawn his ethical conclusions more tentatively. Another time, Perkins cites the flight of Moses into Midian in Exodus 2 as proof of the lawfulness fleeing persecution under certain circumstances. As evidence that Moses was justified, Perkins writes, "And this was no rash flight, but a work of faith (Heb. 11:27)."[98] In context, however, Hebrews 11:27 seems to refer to Moses's defiance of the king in forsaking Egypt during the exodus, and not to Moses's flight after murdering an Egyptian. Relatedly, Perkins justifies the killing of that Egyptian on the basis that "Moses took upon him public revenge in this action, as a magistrate, and not private, as a private man."[99] Again, while this could be a possibility from the fact that Moses was brought up by the king's daughter, the text of Exodus gives us no direct confirmation of this possibility. Another time, Perkins understands David to be condemning his three mighty men in 2 Samuel 23:16 for going beyond their ability (Rom. 12:3): "Their act was a rash enterprise, and such a one as David himself condemns, because they went beyond their strength to encounter with a whole garrison of men, they being themselves but few, namely three in number."[100] While this interpretation is possible, David does not condemn the actions of the men but only refuses to drink the water they bring him. Is it possible that he is not condemning their risk, but honoring it by pouring out the water as a holy drink offering to the Lord? Perkins does not seem to account for other possibilities.

Conclusions for the PCA's Scriptural, Reformed Ethics

What, then, should we conclude from this study of Perkins for the PCA's efforts to remain faithful to the Scriptures and true to the Reformed faith in the area of ethics? Primarily, Perkins clarifies the PCA's constitutional emphases on the Reformed doctrine of the conscience and the Reformed method of casuistry in "cases of conscience" (*WCF* 31.2) and in the *Westminster Larger Catechism's* teaching on the Ten Commandments. While the PCA has a strong understanding of the importance of foundational Reformed doctrines such as predestinarian soteriology, covenant theology, and the regulative principle, it does not seem that there is the same level of understanding and appreciation in the PCA for the foundational Reformed ethical insights of conscience and casuistry. Perkins, then, can help the PCA to recover these foundational emphases in two ways.

First, Perkins models how a right emphasis on the conscience prevents distance between scholarly ethics and the soul of the individual believer. Perkins did not write ethics for the ivory tower, but ethics for the wounded conscience. Accordingly, he labored to show sinners how to gain a good conscience by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ, and then to keep that good conscience by living in a way that (by grace and through faith) pleases God. The value of Christian obedience is not for the sake of demonstrating one's righteousness before others, or of meriting anything from God. Instead, Christian obedience is for the sake of a clear conscience. The current cultural context in which believers are increasingly forced to decide between obeying the conscience as it is bound by God's Word, or the world according to its desires, puts even greater importance on clear teaching about the conscience.

Second, Perkins's skill with casuistry suggests that more work is needed to recover the Reformed method for determining cases of conscience (*WCF* 31.2; PCA *BCO* 11-2). Many valuable studies on Perkins already exist, but one hopes that the current scholarly attention on Perkins after the recent publication of his full works will lead to more attention to his casuistry. Even where we disagree with Perkins's final conclusions, he models a method of interpretation that shows us how to avoid arguing against his views on the basis of our own, subjective, ethical tastes.[101] Rather, we may use Perkins's own tools of casuistry either to confirm his conclusions or to show where, how, and why he may have misinterpreted the passage(s) in question.

Additionally, much research is needed to trace the use of casuistry in the Reformed tradition after Perkins

97. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," pp. 329–30.
98. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 310.
99. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 378.
100. Perkins, "Treatise of The Cases of Conscience," p. 366.
101. On the philosophical origin and contemporary prevalence of moral claims on the basis of subjective taste, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), pp. 160–61.

and the Puritans. For example, future studies might profitably analyze the way that biblical proof texts were used in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*'s exposition of the Ten Commandments.[102] Also, it would edify the church to publish and organize more conveniently the determinations on cases of conscience that have already been written by the courts of the church (i.e., the decisions of the PCA's Standing Judicial Commission, as well as some judicial decisions of Presbyteries and Sessions). While many of these documents are publicly available, they are often buried in General Assembly minutes and organized chronologically rather than topically. Any work to organize these determinations on cases of conscience to improve their discoverability for study by other courts and individuals who are dealing with similar issues would be a great blessing for the denomination. Furthermore, while determinations of cases of conscience belong "jointly" to the courts of the church, individual elders should recognize that many of their "several" duties such as "preaching the Gospel" and "reproving the erring" (PCA *BCO* 3-2) relate directly to conscience and casuistry.[103] Accordingly, Perkins is a valuable resource both to individual elders and to joint courts as they exercise their duties in the course of the full range of ordinary ministry in the church.

Finally, as an observation, the report of the recent Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality provided an outstanding model for combining sharp, casuistical reasoning with warm, pastoral comfort for the conscience in the two paragraphs of each of the "Twelve Statements."[104] This report met with wide approval and did much to unify the PCA on contentious ethical issues related to human sexuality, and I would suggest that one reason for its success is that it utilized the method of casuistry to give satisfactory answers to ethical questions while also attending to the consciences of sinners wrestling with the implications of biblical ethics. Future ethical work within the PCA would be wise to follow this pattern laid down in the "Twelve Statements" to embrace both aspects of a self-consciously Reformed approach to conscience and casuistry.

The Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments teach not only what doctrine to believe concerning God, but also what ethical duty God requires (*WLC* #5). As the PCA continues to wrestle with ethical questions, a better grasp of the principles that undergird her constitutional system of ethics would benefit the entire church. Perkins made a singular impact on defining the Reformed approach to ethics to shape the subsequent Reformed tradition of ethics, and his writings model how to care for the conscience while also reasoning clearly from the Scriptures to discern the full requirements of obedience for every facet of life. This study has suggested, then, that Perkins's work could serve as an important resource in the years to come not only to clarify the provisions about the conscience and cases of conscience in the PCA's constitution, but also for improving denominational unity in the PCA surrounding both the goals and the methodology for doing ethics. It is my hope that this article can make a small contribution toward a wider recovery of the Scriptural heritage of the Reformed faith for ethics in the PCA.▪

102. Some work has been done to explore the use of proof texts from the Westminster Assembly; e.g., Peter F. Jensen, "Making Good the Truth: The Proof Texts of the Westminster Confession," *The Reformed Theological Review* 52, no. 3 (1993): 98–109. Nevertheless, the path from proof text to *doctrine* is somewhat different from the path to the *ethics* in the *Larger Catechism*'s exposition on the Ten Commandments.

103. On the work of individual Puritan ministers for helping to advise individuals on cases of conscience, see Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England," p. 53.

104. *M48GA* (2021), pp. 877–86.

Recovering and Re-evaluating the Historical Interpretations of the Anti-Christ.

By Ottavio Palombaro

Contemporary Amnesia toward the Anti-Christ

In less than a century popular Christian literature has seen a gradual unprecedented shift from the traditional understanding of the Anti-Christ. Identifications of Anti-Christ are continuously changing in nature, geographical and historical location. While Protestantism traditionally understood the Pope and Rome as the Anti-Christ today, this is no longer the unanimous understanding of it. To show how far from this view things have developed, it is enough to mention that in 2013 Pope Francis has been named the man of the year by the Time magazine and in September 2015 he even gave an address to the American congress. The Pope's strategy in following the steps of St. Francis of Assisi and the ecumenical response from much of traditional Protestant denominations is another case in point.[1] The Pope now appears as a humble figure and the times of persecution and religious wars seem so far gone that to even suggest such connection with the Anti-Christ seems superfluous.

In America an increasingly high number of Evangelicals have embraced the idea that the Pope is an actual Christian, or at least a proponent of a new kind of Catholicism, global in its nature. Today to suggest that the pope is the Anti-Christ is considered among many Protestants an anachronism at best and a blatant insult at worse. It seems that the points of division among denominations which characterized past centuries are gone. Other centers of power, such as the United Nations, secularism, or totalitarian regimes, seem far better candidates for the Anti-Christ than a now irenic and ecumenical Pope.[2] Apart from few minor views deemed as fundamentalist and sectarian, no one wants to claim that the Pope is the Anti-Christ. This has also to do with one's eschatological view. Those who today follow a premillennial eschatology tend to identify the Anti-Christ in overly specific political figures, while a-millennialists, for fear of mingling with fictional views, tend to speak of just a 'spirit of Anti-Christ' through the ages, but not a specific figure that we are supposed to be able to identify as Christians. Over-reacting to some excesses of the past, contemporary theologians interested in Eschatology have left a void on this point. What is striking is that such fluctuating views on the Anti-Christ were completely foreign to the traditional understanding of Protestants for centuries.[3]

In today's rampant ecumenism it is vital to keep this discussion in its proper historical perspective. Regardless of one's view on the identity of the Anti-Christ, the issue here seems to be that many evangelicals today have forgotten their history. Given our secularized context, they are also embracing an interpretative framework of Scripture which tends to downplay the demonic realm. Protestant theologians today furthermore, seem to have lost the apocalyptic urgency of their forefathers and an eschatological awareness of living in the last days. Christ warned the disciples of the urgent need to be watchful prior to the end of this current world. Scripture's challenge for the disciples was not so much to guard against external enemies which will openly militate against the church, but against more subtle enemies from within

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1. Robert L. Reymond, *The Reformation's Conflict with Rome* (Fearn: Mentor, 2001), p. 85.

2. Andrew Robinson, "Identifying the Beast: Samuel Horsley and the Problem of Papal AntiChrist," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43, no. 4 (October 1992): 594.

3. Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist. Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1996), p. 173.

the folds of a pretense of piety which has already introduced demonic doctrines into the church. Likewise, the spirit of Anti-Christ tends to work this way.

This article intends to mainly look historically at the fact that such abandonment of seeing Rome as the Anti-Christ is unprecedented and how this change took place only relatively recently in the twentieth century. The final part of this article will also complete this historical analysis by bringing back to the forefront, in order to in part rediscover, some of the Biblical, ecclesiastical and practical reasons why this historical shift is problematic, regardless of one's ultimate position toward who the ultimate Anti-Christ might or might not be. While the focus of this paper remains historical, it is nevertheless crucial given the nature of the subject, to address at least in part, although not in an exhaustive way, scriptural as well as ecclesiastical evidence toward seeing Rome as the seat of the Anti-Christ, something that today remains neglected. While a comprehensive analysis of those elements might be an issue for another paper, through studies which will be referenced in the bibliography,[4] it remains nevertheless relevant to keep them in mind even while the focus of the author remains historical. The problem is that Protestants becoming Roman Catholic friendly are without historical Scriptural nor ecclesiastical warrant. All this shows how Protestants are failing to remember that the Roman Catholic Church today is no less in antithesis (if not even in greater antithesis) to the Biblical Gospel as it was at the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Historical look at the Anti-Christ

What may come as a surprise for readers, is that for almost the entirety of the past two thousand years the predominant position of the church on the Anti-Christ had Rome always at its center. Ever since the time of the early church, the patristic discussion on the Antichrist recognized first of all that: "we are living in the last days."[5] Cyril gave the signs of the Antichrist and warned people lest they should, "take the false Christ for the true." Irenaeus, Tychonius, Victorinus, Bishop of Poetovio, or even Augustine, spoke of the Beast of the book of Revelation as referring to the city of the "seven hills", Rome (*super quos mulier sedet*).[6] Both the church of the East and of the West saw Rome behind such evil, an idolatrous and powerful force. John Chrysostom believed that the "mystery of lawlessness" of the Antichrist was directly tied to the Roman emperors, in particular, to wicked emperors such as Nero, Caligula, Antiochus, Domitian or Diocletian. Nero himself would later be the epicenter of a legend as Nero redivivus, by being killed and yet rising back to life to make his final assault upon the world.

Emperors were particularly plausible candidates because they were demanding religious worship for themselves by all people and opposed any follower of Jesus to the threat of death. Their self-glorification and exaltation, pretending to be worshipped as gods, was an affront to Christ. Delegates from the Roman Empire were at the time of the New Testament imposing their Roman images in Jerusalem's temple. All these things were sending clear echoes to any Israelite or Christian convert acquainted with the abomination of desolation described in Scripture. Any reader of the book of Revelation would have understood the New Testament's references to Babylon as referring to Rome, the city placed among "many waters" from where the Antichrist was to rule. It is in this sense that the eschatology of full preterists is correct, only insofar as it allows people to recognize the clear partial fulfillment of many of these details in an immediate context in the first century. Yet, the early church's position on the matter stands as a warning: the church has forgotten today this Roman locus of the Antichrist as understood by early Christianity.

The rise of the Roman papacy did not see any substantial change in this framework. Already by the sixth century, Gregory I, bishop of Rome, condemned the use of the title "pope" and warned that whoever claims such title: "is in his elation the precursor of Antichrist."[7] Despite his effort, such title would be claimed by future Popes and in centuries to come it became the definitive title of the bishop of Rome. The fact, for example, that the address "pontifex maximum" was a title reserved for the Roman emperor witnesses to such continuity. Already by the synod of Reims of A.D. 991 concerns were raised by some regarding the bishop of Rome, due to his honorary seat and dressings, associating such practices with the "Antichrist seated in the temple of God."[8] In the early Middle Ages the concept of a papal Antichrist only brought forward those pre-existing theories. Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard von Bingen considered the coming of the Antichrist as something imminent and

4. See the Bibliography for this issue. Ed.

5. William C. Weinrich, "Antichrist in the Early Church," *Concordia Theological Quarterly*: 49 (1985): 136 [135–147].

6. G. Biguzzi, "Is the Babylon of Revelation Rome or Jerusalem?" *Biblica* Vol. 87 (2006): 373 [371–386].

7. Sabina Flanagan, "Twelfth-Century Apocalyptic Imaginations and the Coming of the Antichrist," *The Journal of Religious History* 24, no. 1 (February 2000): 58 [57–69].

8. Bernard McGinn, "Angel Pope and Papal Antichrist," *Church History* 47 (1978): 156 [155–173].

connected with Rome.[9] Jan Hus and the Hussites, on their part, expressed themselves against the papacy in the treatise entitled: *Anatomy of the Antichrist*.[10] John Wycliffe likewise gave an open critic of the papacy as primary cause of the collective evil within Christendom. In these treatises the papacy was contrasted with the primitive church, the pope being "the evident Antichrist."[11] Apostolic poverty during the pauperistic resurgence in the Middle Ages was exalted and Popes were often urged to renounce their temporal splendors. The Franciscan Spirituali, Fraticelli and the Apostolic Brethren, among the radical fringes of the pauperistic movements, were not afraid to claim that the pope was the Antichrist.[12] Jacopone da Todi with his *Laude*, as a medieval poet from the Spirituali was a voice expressing such views toward the papacy as Antichrist:

> Jesus Christ laments over the Roman church which is unthankful and villain […]. Idolatry was raised with its pernicious mistake and magic arts to blind the people, reign as an emperor, killing people […] the false clergy has quenched any fruit (*trans. from Italian mine*)[13]

This emphasis on the papal Antichrist and the need to reform can find another example even in the preaching of Ulbertino da Casale or Fra Dolcino. Joachim of Fiore with his *Figurae* was among the greatest defenders of the idea of a papal Antichrist. He saw the crisis of the papacy during his time as a clear sign of the imminent eschatological revelation of the Anti-Christ. The Roman Empire had simply been re-shaped into the Sacred Roman Empire and the spirit of Anti-Christ was at work through it. The papal schism that took place during the Avignon Captivity was also the source of many speculations concerning the papal Anti-Christ and Rome.[14]

Therefore, as Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation came to the scene, the Reformers were not innovators with their strongest invective against the papal Antichrist. Luther in his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, or in: *Against the Bull of the Antichrist*, *The Monk-Calf*, *Against the Roman Papacy*, *Institution of the Devil* … was not coming up with anything radically new or foreign to the mindset of previous ages of church history. One may think *prima facie* that to make such claims was a radical step as compared with the intolerant environment of the day. Yet Luther and the other Reformers where only positioning themselves in a long tradition within the church ever since the times of the New Testament, that called out the danger of a Roman Antichrist. Luther therefore re-appropriated Gregory's claim, questioning the legitimacy of the Papal title from within this centuries-old tradition of the church, where Babylon was identified with Rome.[15] Luther borrowed, therefore, the term "Antichrist" in its Gregorian specific intended meaning. Rome was the seat of Antichrist, Babylon itself.[16] He was not necessarily calling out a specific Pope as the ultimate Antichrist, yet he understood that the papal system was the ultimate fulfillment of such a figure. The Papacy, according to the Reformers, had distorted the sacraments with its own traditions and regulations, transforming them into a system of control.[17]

In other words, the Antichrist narrative, even in its Protestant form with the Papal Anti-Christ narrative, was not an invention of the Protestants. The Reformation did not change such emphasis but it remained instead permeated by the same fervent apocalyptic expectation.[18] Rome was perceived to have brought forward the spirit of Babylon, or even before it, the primeval history with the seed of the serpent.[19] First generations of Protestants were of the eschatological persuasion to be living at the eventide of the world, facing in the Pope the true end-times Antichrist. Although Islam was included in such rhetoric, no one was in their view a better candidate for the Antichrist than the Pope, who sat in the temple of God and declared another gospel.[20] Melanchthon's *The Pope-Ass Explained* was only a revised version of traits, vocabulary, and tropology that many Medieval writers had already explored centuries earlier. Melanchthon also defended the idea that the Anti-Christ needed to be an

9. McGinn, *Ibid*.

10. Lawrence P. Buck, "Anatomia Antichristi: Form and Content of the Papal Antichrist," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 42, no. 2 (2011): 349 [349–368].

11. Charles A. Gieschen, "Antichrist in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions: The Relevance of Reformation Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 for the Church Today," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81 (2017): 264 [263–279].

12. *Ibidem*.

13. Jacopone da Todi, *Laude* (Bari, Laterza, 2006), 175–176.

14. da Todi, *Laude*, ibid.

15. Bernardette Mcnary-Zak, "An Invitation to Pope Leo X," *Cithara* 56 (2017): 4 [3–12].

16. Eric Leland Saak, *Luther and the Reformation of the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 342.

17. Paul W. Robinson, ed., *The Annotated Luther*. Vol. 3. The Church and Sacraments (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), p. 9.

18. Michael Parsons, "The Apocalyptic Luther: His Noahic Self-Understanding," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 4 (December 2001): 628 [627–645].

19. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), p. 135.

20. George Yule, "The Church in the Theology of the Reformers," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 34, no. 4 (October 1983): 591.

individual within the Christian church, taking divine authority upon himself, claiming divine teaching and authority over all men. John Calvin and other Reformers, and afterwards, with one voice essentially confirmed, strenuously defended this same position, rejecting the papal Antichrist's claims with unbending attitude.[21]

Future generations of Protestants like the Puritans, heirs of the Reformers, were no different in their open and unanimous condemnation of the Pope as the Antichrist.[22] They were not waiting for a coming, "man of sin," but rather they were persuaded that the Antichrist had already shown himself through Roman Catholicism. Protestant martyrology in England, such as the one found in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, displayed great invective against the Pope as the Anti-Christ. This was driven also by political concerns, fearing that England may once again fall under the control of the Church of Rome.[23] This was not something relegated to a few fundamentalist positions among the Puritans, but it was still a widespread opinion within the whole established Church of England for centuries.[24] Such unanimous understanding of the pope as the Antichrist proceeded through the centuries and across denominations even until the nineteenth century, through the preaching of notables such as Charles Spurgeon or in the twentieth century through Martin Lloyd-Jones. Within this long tradition, the papacy was still seen as the Babylon of Revelation.[25] It is possible to conclude, therefore, that the traditional interpretation of the church for centuries of Christian thought, all the way to little more than half a century ago, had always been that Babylon is Rome, and that the Antichrist must be a Roman figure, namely the Pope.

Since this was the predominant view for eighteen hundred years of church history, we now have to focus on the twentieth century. We must consider what brought the sudden abandonment of a deeply rooted position of the pope as the Anti-Christ within Protestantism: the advent of ecumenism within Protestantism as well as within Catholicism. Such shift in American mainline Protestant culture toward becoming Roman Catholic friendly, according to scholars, seems to have had its beginnings at least in our Reformed camp already in the beginning of the twentieth century. This had to do with a broader shift beyond just North America in the wider Anglo-Saxon world of politics. All the way until the end of the nineteenth century, Protestant English culture, particularly Anglicanism, strenuously kept Roman Catholicism and the papacy at arms length. However, after the end of the revolutionary era, with the end of the temporal power of the pope and until the advent of the first world war, this began to look just like an outdated issue compared to other more pressing changes.[26] This was not just the case among Protestants but even among Roman Catholics toward Protestantism. This is noticeable if one compares the overall anti-Protestant animosity in the language of Vatican Council I (not just the Council of Trent) with its second counterpart less than a hundred years later.

Historic Reformed denominations, therefore, began changing their stand on this point, which became increasingly inconsistent with their intention to embrace ecumenical views. Discussions were underway on how to interpret confessional statements on this point that began to be perceived as controversial. For example, while until then adherence to the confession was a given among Reformed denominations on this point, several editions of Reformed confessions at the end of the nineteenth century began to have issues with the anti-Catholic language contained in them. The Heidelberg Catechism, because of the its strong anti-Catholic language in question n. 80 on the "popish mass," began to be seen in contrast with the goals of a new ecumenical movement even among Protestants (see Philip Schaff's comment[27]). One can think also of the Presbyterian Church in United States of America (PCUSA), which in 1903 took out the words the "pope is that antichrist" from their new edition of the Westminster Confession of Faith. All this was considered as not in tune anymore with the change of times. But the shift was broader than theology, as it involved a social and cultural dimension as well. Between the 1950's and 1960's, one can observe the shift in considerable cases of American religious journalism, even within fundamentalist circles. All this was reflective of a reciprocal opening both through the

21. Darren Chung Keung Fung, "Calvin's Critique of the Papacy: A Historical and Theological Study" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2003), p. 10.

22. Ronald N. Cooke, *Antichrist Exposed. The Reformed and Puritan View of the Antichrist,* Book 2 (Max Meadows, Va.: Truth International Ministries, 2006), p. 345.

23. Peter Lake, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat. Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 281.

24. Kenneth Gibson, "Eschatology, Apocalypse and Millenarianism in Seventeenth Century Protestant Thought" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Nottingham Trent University, 1999), p. 46.

25. Anthony Gavin, *A History of Popery* (Hartford: Case, Tiffany and Burnham, 1848), p. 119.

26. Cadoc Leighton, "Finding Antichrist: Apocalypticism in Nineteenth-Century Catholic England and the Writings of Frederick Faber," *Journal of Religious History* 47, no. 1 (2013): 80.

27. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom,* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), p. 69.

influence of the Vatican Council II in 1962 and the rise in fortune of the Protestant ecumenical movement in the post World War II decades.[28] Things came to their climax after the election of the first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy. His election saw the rise in popularity of an approach in America that became less and less pan-Protestant and more and more open toward Catholicism.[29] And even in relative terms, one can compare the anti-Catholic bias that Kennedy still had to face prior to his election with the unqualified reception of another professing Catholic president such as Joe Biden just sixty years later.[30] Such change of perspective no longer just involves Protestant denominations that are openly embracing ecumenism, but even conservative fringes of Evangelicalism who, whether to seek to remain relevant in a Western culture where secularism has risen as a common enemy or simply because they have forgotten their history, have abandoned the task of vocalizing any anti-Catholic remarks simply because this is considered unpopular. Any hostile sentiment, at least based on religious concerns, seems today completely removed. Roman Catholics are now treated as just confused Christians.

Exegetical look at the Anti-Christ

Now that the historical development of this concept of the pope as the Anti-Christ has been explored as the primary goal of this paper, it is still relevant to also make allusion to the Biblical support of seeing Rome, if not the pope, as the Anti-Christ. This is not just a matter of history and confessions of faith. It is significant that Scripture itself testifies of this geopolitical and religious dimension of Rome as the Anti-Christ. Protestants today have by and large abandoned this hermeneutical interpretation. Obviously, this section is not intended to be a complete treatment of the matter, but only insofar as it informs and validates the historical background seen so far. What makes it hard for Biblical scholars to come to a conclusive opinion concerning the nature of the anti-Christ is the limited Biblical information on this figure. Only few passages of Scripture seem to speak directly of the Antichrist: Daniel 9:27, 11:36–38, Matthew 24:15, 2 Thessalonians 2:3–8, the Johannine epistles, as well as Revelation 13 and 19:20. In all these instances the individual is identified in the Greek as ἀντίχριστος, or with other titles such as ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς νομίας ("the man of lawlessness"), or ὁ υἱὸς τῆς πωλείας ("the son of destruction"), or ὁ ἀντικείμενος ("the adversary"), or ὁ ἄνομος ("the lawless one"). This individual will overthrow worship and demand to be worshipped while he persecutes true believers.[31] In Daniel a succession of kingdoms is described in the form of a ram and a goat. The reference according to the angelic interpretation refers to several successive kingdoms, such as Media, Persia, Greece (8:20–21), culminating in the "horn," the "fierce-looking king" who will destroy the holy people and "take his stand against the Prince of Princes" (8:25). This will be the Roman Empire, which will rule during "the time of the end" (8:19). As for much of prophetic literature, it is clear that here Daniel is using prophetic foreshadowing, describing aspects that have a double fulfillment: one chronologically close and the other in a more distant future at the end of the age. This double fulfillment is due in particular to the fact that prophecies like this look at the same time to the first and to the second coming of Christ. Some take the predictions about successive kingdoms (Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Antiochus Epiphane) contained in Daniel 8:20–27 as well as Daniel 9:24–27, and particularly its predictions of the abomination of desolation, as referring exclusively to Christ's first coming. This theory, however, goes against the same measurements of time repeated in the book of Revelation, which was written in a time subsequent to Christ's ascension.

Daniel 9:27 is clearly referring to the Antichrist (not Christ), who will set up the "abomination that causes desolation." In chapter 11, from verse 36 on, Daniel goes back to the description of the Antichrist, an individual who will demand worship, exalt himself above all other gods, and expand his dominion from outside Israel throughout the holy land. It is true that such figure has found a near fulfillment in the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Antiochus placed his image in the temple of Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig in the holy place. Yet, given the fact that New Testament passages confirm and describe similar events long after Antiochus's death, it is evident that the prophecy has a far fuller fulfillment still to come.[32] The statement on the abomination that

28. Lerond Curry, *Protestant-Catholic Relations in America: World War I Through Vatican II* (Lexington, KY: Lexington Press, 2015), p 61–62.

29. Patrick Lacroix, *John F. Kennedy and the Politics of Faith, 1960–1963* (New Hampshire: Proquest Dissertation Publishing, 2017), p. 45.

30. Brad Murg, *Tracing American Catholicism: from Archbishop John Carroll to Vice President Joe Biden* (Seattle, WA: Digital Commons, 2016), p. 23.

31. David M. Whitford, "The Papal Antichrist: Martin Luther and the Underappreciated Influence of Lorenzo Valla," *Renaissance Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 32 [26–52].

32. Mark A. Hassler, "The Identity of the Little Horn in Daniel 8: Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Rome, or the Antichrist?," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 27, no 1 (Spring 2016): 44 [33–44].

causes desolation is in fact quoted by Jesus in Matthew 24:15 after the signs of the times, looking far beyond the apostolic age to an ultimate tribulation still located in the physical Jerusalem. Such an evil figure standing in the holy place, the temple in Jerusalem, will desecrate the sanctuary and abolish the sacrifices. When one comes to the famous and more direct passage on the Anti-Christ in 2 Thessalonians, several labels are given to this figure ("man of lawlessness," "man doomed to destruction," …). The temple once again is mentioned there and the temporary restraint of the Anti-Christ prior to the end.

To these evidences one can add John's epistles addressing the coming of "many antichrists" (ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ) or "false christs" (ψευδόχριστοι) in the plural, not necessarily having in mind the single figure dealt with elsewhere (1 John 2:18, 22, 4:3; 2 John 7; Matthew 24:24). This plural connotation does not deny the presence of an ultimate Anti-Christ as described in previous passages and even here in 1 John 2:18: "you have heard the antichrist is coming…." Here, with the plural, John is referring to heretics, in particular Gnostics that denied that Christ came in the flesh. Verse 22 seems to be problematic, "whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ … is the antichrist." Later on, in chapter 4 verse 3, John repeats a similar thought: "every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God"; "This is the spirit of antichrist"; as well as 2 John 7: "many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh…. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist." Roman Catholicism and the Pope in the past have always confessed Jesus as the Christ and defended Christ's deity. These statements must be kept in balance with the other passages mentioned above mentioning an individual final figure. False prophets as well as rulers of this world requiring worship under threat of persecution are said to be the preamble to this final individual. Such an individual is also described as the "beast out of the sea" in Revelation 13, the Antichrist. It is clear that from a Jewish perspective the beast out of the sea with seven horns is Rome seated on seven hills (17:9) which will demand worship. This is the only way to harmonize this passage with the prophecies of Daniel 7:2–7. The second "beast out of the earth" is the false prophet which comes upon Jerusalem from the opposite side of the Mediterranean Sea. As for the Antichrist, such a role could have had various examples in history such as Nebuchadnezzar or the emperor Trajan, but still, the ultimate fulfillment of such a figure may point to a false prophetic figure from the east. Although my thought here is only tentative, Muhammad and Islam in general could come under such alliance, both geographically and religiously. Despite the deception perpetrated over the whole world, the Anti-Christ and the false prophet will one day be punished and thrown in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20).

The etymological nature of the word Antichrist is also to be kept in mind, as the word does not simply mean "against Christ" but "in the place of Christ" (ἀντί-χριστος). What many eschatological views of the Antichrist fail to realize is that biblically Antichrist is not equal with being openly and directly against Christ or godless. The Antichrist is not necessarily appearing as a secular archenemy of Christ, but indirectly he stands in antithesis to everything that Christ's teaching commands while pretending to represent that same Christ. Just like the Devil since the beginning was cunning and did not approach mankind as an open enemy of God but somehow as his counselor ("did God say…?" Genesis 3:4), so here we see a similar kind of deception. The crucial aspect of the Anti-Christ conceived this way will be to claim and pretend to be a pseudo-Christ but despite his claims hides behind hypocrisy, avarice, and concupiscence.

It is evident that the Babylon in view in John's mind (Revelation 18) was not the historical city situated on the river Euphrates in Mesopotamia, which by that time was in ruin. Nor could it refer to a metaphorical idea of a general evil force active through the ages since Revelation 17:10 describes Babylon as a kingdom currently active at the time John was alive. She is said to have persecuted the saints through the ages and to have fornicated with the nations (by her idolatry and wealth), standing among many waters, with ships passing through her. Its dressings are said to be "purple and scarlet" (18:16). Peter himself, the apostle from which the Pope today claims to trace his lineage, called the city of Rome "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13). The New Testament parallel between Rome and Babylon is therefore evident even from scriptures themselves, as one explores how the mystery of iniquity was re-shaped through the Roman Empire and the rise of the Roman Papacy later on.[33] It is, however, more than just a correspondence of principles. It is a geographic and detailed correspondence. The identity of the "false prophet", as I mentioned, could have according to this parallel a candidate in Islam. This may point to a future alliance between the Pope (Antichrist) and a Muslim representative (false prophet) in tune with the prophecies contained in the

33. Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion. Ancient and Modern* (Riverside, Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1976), p. 81.

Quran which speak of the return of the Messiah (surah 43) and the hadiths (vol. 3, book 43, n. 656). In this sense, this exegetical approach allows to take the historical intuition seen before and support them further with more accurate exegesis of eschatological passages from an historical premillennialist approach. It is here that the Augustinian amillennial eschatology can meet with a more precise exegesis in order to make sense of the Anti-Christ as much as possible to our finite minds.

Ecclesiastical look at the Anti-Christ

If Scripture, as well as the overwhelming majority of history, dealt with the idea of Anti-Christ as referring to Rome and the Papacy, then the implications for ecclesiology are lasting. John Calvin understood well the need to come to this logical conclusion: there is such a thing as a false church which can even rely on succession divorced from the truth of Christ.[34] Protestants traditionally were explicit in calling the pope the Anti-Christ.[35] Their thinking was that the Church of Rome still failed to display the requisites of a true church on all points by transforming the sacraments into the "abomination of the desolation" in the holy place, by abusing the exercise of church discipline for political reasons, and by failing to preach the Word of God in faithfulness with the Gospel of salvation by faith alone.[36] The pagan spirit of the Roman Empire was mixed with a Christian structure where indeed the pope acted "as God on earth."[37]

Some think that with Vatican Council II many reforms have taken place in Roman Catholicism, transforming it into something far more acceptable to the modern man.38 If one takes into account such a dark history, then the evaluation of Roman Catholicism becomes very negative. Five hundred years have passed from the Reformation and Catholicism has not changed any essential element in its opposition to the Biblical understanding of the Reformation. The Pope still claims today the place of Jesus Christ on earth, with supreme and full power in faith and morals over each and every individual.39 Popularity has not decreased either as Pope Francis remains the most re-twitted leader in the world. Political presidents and governmental authorities still pay homage to him. However, the duty of the true Christian, according to the major Protestant confessions (see for example the Belgic Confession, Art. 29), is to separate from Rome as a false church, which "ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than the Word of God." Similarly, the Scots Confession claims to "abhor all kind of papistry" and calls the pope the "Roman antichrist."40 These are more than historical clichés or colorful invectives from centuries past. Regardless of one's idea of the Anti-Christ, if he claims to be Protestant, then he should at least become aware of his personal substantial distancing from a centuries-old past Protestant interpretation of Rome and the Papacy. One has simply to look at the old notes of the Geneva Bible on the Book of Revelation to see how such eschatological emphasis on the papal Anti-Christ was a substantial part of Protestant thought for centuries.

Practical Look at the Anti-Christ

After having seen the historical and exegetical support for a Roman Anti-Christ, it is time to come to some practical conclusions. The implications of seeing Rome as the seat of the Anti-Christ and the Pope, do not just pertain to theoretical matters but have practical implications. The Evangelical church in North America today on this issue is in danger more than any time in the past, since the goal of the Anti-Christ, whoever he may be, remains to deceive the church into thinking that he is not a threat but just a form, if not the very representative, of Christ.[41] Never before our society has there been such a revived interest in prophecy experienced, with the spreading of many heterodox messages, pointing to the approaching of the end times.[42] The Papacy is today, like in the past, a vital component, bringing together many tendencies of apostate Christendom under its wings, granting Protestant denominations in decline a voice and a space in the overall machinery of ecumenism. The Anti-Christ is more than a fictional idea or a mythological figure but he is a person that incarnates the spirit of Rome in the name of false religion. The

34. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), p. 690.

35. Francis Nigel Lee, *Antichrist in Scripture* (East Sussex: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1992), p. 41.

36. J. A. Phillips, *Roman Catholicism Analyzed* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915), p. 29.

37. Grattan Guinness, *Romanism and the Reformation* (Blackwood: Snead Printing Co., 1967), p. 16.

38. Charles Stuteville Isaacson, *Rome in Many Lands* (London, The Religious Tract Society, 1906), p. 99.

39. Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962), p. 127.

40. The National Covenant or Confession of Faith … 1581 … 1638, etc., in *The Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, etc. (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, Edinburgh, 1855), p. [347].

41. Barry Gritters, *The Anti-Christ* (Byron Center: Protestant Reformed Publications, 1990), p. 18.

42. Andrew Bonar, *The Development of Antichrist* (Essex: Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony, 1990), p. 110.

way the universal church in all past ages has almost always interpreted the historical and scriptural warrant to the Anti-Christ points to Rome, and particularly for paleo-Protestants, the Papacy. According to Catholic apologists themselves, such Anti-Christ is instead often identified in the force behind secularism or any external opponent to the church.[43] Yet, as I pointed out, there is no Biblical warrant to exclude the religious dimension that such an Anti-Christ will manifest as he will take the place of Christ on earth, as an individual person and not just a force.

In less than a hundred years, contrary to the overall direction of previous church history, the church has almost completely forgotten the reality of the papal Antichrist. If history has strenuously and unanimously defended such a view on the basis of a strong exegesis, what warrant do Protestant have today in distancing themselves from such view or dismissing the whole issue as irrelevant? Many facing the trauma of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century began to discredit the thesis of the papal Antichrist in favor of a more secular figure or simply in favor of an allegorical principle active throughout all ages.[44] I tried to show in this article how such conclusions fail to give justice to the religious and Christian roots of the Anti-Christ figure. Also, I pointed out how the interpretation of the pope as Antichrist is not something that came out of the blue, but it remains rooted in the overall tradition of Christendom ever since the early church. An individual person as Anti-Christ is therefore still to come. It will be far worse than Diocletian or Nero. Worse than Popes such as Innocent III or Boniface VIII. Worse than recent historical figures such as Hitler or Mussolini.

Surely all of these figures of the past advanced or intended to revive an imperial and almost divinized vision of the glories of Rome, trying to subvert true Christianity from within. In this sense they all worked to the advancement of the same spirit of Anti-Christ. The church is therefore called to oppose such a spirit of Anti-Christ, even in our present context. The Bible invites us to recognize that such a spirit is already at work among the sons of disobedience and that this is an increasingly relevant struggle for us especially just prior to Christ's second coming. As I pointed out, even if one takes a less historical interpretation of the Anti-Christ, even in the eventuality of coming to a different conclusion on who is the final Anti-Christ, the historical evidence itself still points to Rome as the best candidate ever since the time of the Roman Empire. The ultimate and climactic revelation of the Anti-Christ remains still in the future. In tune with what Revelation tells us, an alliance will work itself out in a temple. We could think in the case of Jerusalem of a city that has been the crossroad between Roman Catholic and Islamic contentions for centuries. It is there that the papal Anti-Christ will sit with the false prophet in their effort to thwart the coming kingdom of the true Christ. This is how knowing past history and Scriptural warnings is intended to help us to face the unknown future with a little bit of discernment.▪

***In Brief:* The First Beast is Antichrist in his kingdom. From James Durham, *A Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation,* v3 (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), chapter 13, lecture one, pp. 120–121.**

Conclusion Two. By this first beast then is understood Antichrist in his kingdom, which appears by all the characters given: 1. He succeeds the dragon in his seat. 2. His rise, reign, and continuance agree to these forty-two months desolate condition of the church ending and beginning with it. He is worshipped not civilly only (that worship is no fault in itself) but religiously, as no emperor was; he has absolute dominion and takes a title to him over all kindreds, tongues, etc. Their submission to him is voluntary and with admiration, which was never to any civil state; he has crowned horns and kings under him who reverence him, which will more particularly appear in opening the words. For all spoken here agrees to one beast, and in one state or condition, to wit, under the last head when the wound which the sixth got was healed (things to come being represented to John as past). The beast thus healed in his head is admired, worshipped, followed, etc., to him power over the saints is given (alluding as is ordinary in the Antichrist's case to Antiochus, Daniel [11:21–35]), so either Antichrist is no head of this beast, or he is set out by this beast who this long continues, and in whom and by whom the dragon is again worshipped by the men of the earth: all which can agree to no other. To speak in short then, here is set out the Roman Empire as Antichristian or headed with Antichrist, having now the sixth head which was wounded by the throwing down of heathenish idolatry again healed by the papacy's becoming the seventh (for, there are but seven); and to this empire as under this head agrees all that is spoken unto here, considering it as representing that same civil state, now the seventh time carrying another head of blasphemy, yet again repeated under another type, that it may be known not to be the same head (though on the same beast) with that which was wounded, nor of the same kind altogether with the former.

It is true this is generally otherwise expounded by learned interpreters…. ▪

43. Vincent P. Miceli, *The Antichrist* (New York: Roman Catholic Books, 1981), p. 24.

44. Arthur W. Pink, *The Antichrist* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988), p. 29.

We've Been Dating It All Wrong:
Richard Denton (1603–62) and the Arrival of American Presbyterianism

By Ryan Denton

America Presbyterianism prior to the eighteenth century is shrouded in mystique. Some would say it did not exist because there was no formal presbytery established until 1706. Books and lectures on the history of American Presbyterianism rarely detail what the landscape was like before the eighteenth century. However, some scholars have admitted there was a transatlantic movement and church planting taking place. Too often scholars present the arrival of presbyterianism in the American colonies as corresponding solely to the ministry of Francis Makemie (1658–1708). Such reductionist accounts do a major disservice to the pre-Makemie colonial Presbyterians as well as to those wanting a more complete account of Presbyterianism in early America.

Though Makemie's significant and pioneering efforts are widely recognized in historical scholarship, students of American Presbyterian history would do well to consider the earliest and most active Presbyterian in the New World's infancy.[1] The Reverend Richard Denton (1603–1662) was a dwarfish, one-eyed Cambridge Puritan whom Cotton Mather boasted "could sway a congregation like he was nine feet tall."[2] Historian Alfred Nevin says, "In the history of early Presbyterianism in this country the name of Richard Denton should have a permanent and prominent place."[3] Unfortunately, such has not been the case. Interested readers will be hard-pressed to find any mention of Denton in recent treatments of American Presbyterianism, despite the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) claiming that he was "the first Presbyterian on this continent,"[4] which is the same conclusion drawn by Nevin.[5] In Denton's day, he was well-known enough to be included in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*, where he is described as follows:

> Among these clouds was our Pious and Learned Mr. Richard Denton, a Yorkshire Man, who having watered Halifax in England, with his fruitful Ministry, was a Tempest then hurried into New-England, where first at Weathersfield, and then at Stamford, his Doctrine dropt as the Rain, his Speech distilled as the Dew, as the small Rain upon the tender Herb, and as the Show'rs upon the Grass.[6]

Denton has been described as "a highly religious man with strong Presbyterian beliefs…"[7] "His well-accomplished mind, in his lesser body, was an Illiad in a nutshell. I think he was blind of an eye, yet he was not the least of the seers of Israel; he saw a very considerable

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1. Walter C. Krumm, "Who Was the Reverend Richard Denton," *New York Genealogical and Biological Record*, Vol. 117 (New York, NY: New York and Geneological and Biographical Society, 1986), pp. 163–166.

2. Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The ecclesiastical history of New-England, from its first planting in the year 1620. unto the year of Our Lord, 1698. In seven books....*, Vol. 1 (Hartford, 1853), p. 398.

3. Alfred Nevin, *Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America: including the Northern and Southern Assemblies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian encyclopedia publishing co., 1884), p. 182.

4. Krumm, "Who Was the Reverend Richard Denton?", pp. 163–166. Krumm makes this claim about the PCA in his article.

5. Nevin, *Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church*, 182:"Richard Denton was one of the very first Presbyterian ministers in the country, and the Church of Jamaica, Queen's county, New York, is the oldest existent Presbyterian Church in the United States."

6. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1.398.

7. David T. Myers, A Highly Religious Man with Strong Presbyterian Beliefs. *This Day in Presbyterian History*, "August 5, [2019], Rev. Richard Denton (1603–1662)," accessed November 8, 2023. https://thisday.pcahistory.org/2019/08/august-5-6/

portion of those things which eye 'hath not seen'. He was far from cloudy in his conceptions and principles of divinity…."[8]

Who Was Richard Denton?

Richard Denton was born in Yorkshire, England in 1603. Upon graduating from Cambridge in 1623 he ministered at Coley Chapel, near Coley Hall, in a small town north of Manchester.[9] The *History and Vital Records of Christ's First Presbyterian Church of Hempstead, Long Island, New York* tells us "Denton had been educated in Cambridge University, where the principles of Presbyterianism had been instilled into his mind firmly and aggressively."[10] "Here he remained seven years, when, finding the times hard, the bishops at their height, and the Book of Sports on the Sabbath-day insupportable, he immigrated with a numerous family to New England."[11] The *Memoirs of the Rev. Oliver Heywood* provide us with a fuller description of Denton's decision to leave England for the New World:

> He was a good minister of Jesus Christ, affluent in his worldly circumstances, and had several children. He continued here about seven years; times were sharp, the bishops being in their height. In his time came out the book for sports on the Sabbath days. He saw he could not do what was required, feared further persecution, and therefore took the opportunity of going into New England.[12]

Even though "the chapel at Coley was enlarged" under Denton, the vexations of impure worship finally drove him from his homeland.

Presbyterians were founding congregations in the New World as early as the 1630s.[13] Denton himself had established "a Presbyterian church" in Hempstead, Long Island in 1641 even though he was preaching "to a Presbyterian congregation from the first arrival, in 1630."[14] Records of his ministry indicate he would also preach "from time to time to a small group of Puritans" in New York City.[15] However, not all of Denton's hearers received him with appreciation. His "strong Presbyterian beliefs" seem to have riled Independents and Anglicans alike on more than one occasion. After migrating to the New World with John Winthrop and Sir Richard Saltonstall, Denton had tried to settle down in Watertown, Massachusets: "but the firmness of his convictions—his Presbyterian opposition to the oligarchic rule of the New England Divines—again led him to depart to Hempstead."[16]

Such strife between Congregationalists and Presbyterians was not unique in the New World. Collaboration among the two groups was often sought out but never without frustration. A type of "Presbyterianized Congregationalism" was produced by the Cambridge Platform of 1648, in which Congregational churches "shared 'Church-communion,' aiding, admonishing, and consulting on issues in congregations."[17] The document also called for a type of representative consociations (not presbyteries) which would be "orderly assembled, and rightly proceeding according to the pattern, Acts. 15."[18] Whether American Presbyterians influenced such an approach to church polity is debatable, but the obvious networking that took place between the two groups would suggest the plausibility of cross-influences on this score. What is certain is that Denton was caught in the middle.

Dutch ministers John Megapolensis and Samuel Drisnis mentioned in a letter to the Classis of Amsterdam, dated August 5, 1657, that "when [Denton] began to baptize the children of parents who are not members of the church, they rushed out of the church."[19] Ten years prior, while at Hempstead, a conflict over Presbyterian polity "caused some twenty-five families, led by Mr. Denton, to make another move."[20] They did not travel

8. Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1.399.

9. In those days the chapel was commonly called "St. John of Jerusalem."

10. "History of Our Church," Christ's First Presbyterian Church, Hempstead, NY, accessed April 21, 2023. Cfpcny.com/history.

11. "Richard Denton," Dictionary of National Biography, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908), vol. 5, p. 830.

12. Richard Slate, "Memoirs of the Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A.", in *The Whole Works of the Rev. O. Heywood,* 5 vols. (Idle: John Vint, 1827), 1.20.

13. David Koch, "Long Island Presbyterians: Our Puritan beginnings" (https://www.pcusa.org/news/2014/11/20/long-island-presbyterians-our-puritan-beginnings/).

14. Nevin, *Encyclopedia*, p. 182.

15. Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949), p. 23.

16. John Dean Fish, "History and Vital Records of Christ's First Presbyterian Church of Hempstead, Long Island, New York," in *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, Volume 53 (New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 1922), p. 235.

17. Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart, *Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2022), p. 141.

18. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, p. 21.

19. J. Franklin Jameson, *Narratives of New Netherland, 1609–1664* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 398.

20. Fish, ibid., p. 236.

far, however, soon stopping within the Colony of New Haven at a place called Stamford. In Stamford, "He followed Presbyterian forms, but not without protests."[21] Among other points of controversy, "Mr. Denton's uncompromising democracy, or Presbyterianism, came in conflict with the New Haven rules that none but church members should vote in town meetings."[22]

Richard Denton the Presbyterian

That Denton was Presbyterian is hardly debatable. In the same 1657 letter to the Classis of Amsterdam mentioned above, it is stated that "at Hempstead, about seven Dutch miles from here, there are some Independents; also many of our persuasion and Presbyterians. They have also a Presbyterian preacher, named Richard Denton, an honest, pious and learned man."[23] We saw above that Mather painted him as "a highly religious man with strong Presbyterian beliefs." In Long Island, Denton went to work building up both the colony and congregation of Hempstead. Nevin stated a whole colony of Presbyterians came with him from "the old country, and followed him till their final settlement on Long Island."[24]

Nevin reported there was an entire "Presbyterian tree planted by the hand of Richard Denton"[25] in Long Island, going so far as to call Long Island "a Presbyterian colony" under Denton's leadership, a fact also preserved by colonial records.[26] Two of Denton's sons, Nathanael and Daniel, "with a number of their Presbyterian brethren," not only formed a colony in the village of Jamaica in 1656 but "as might be expected, they immediately established religious worship."[27] A memorial of the inhabitants of Jamaica, signed by Nathanael Denton, states: "This town of Jamaica, in the year 1656, was purchased from the Indian natives by divers persons, Protestants, dissenters, in the manner of worship, from the forms used in the Church of England, who have called a minister of our own profession to officiate among them."[28] Thus religious services were taking place since at least 1656, but more importantly for the history of American Presbyterianism, it can be demonstrated these religious services were Presbyterian.

On March 24, 1663, Rev. Zachariah Walker was assigned to the parsonage built the year before, and

> from this date to the present day there is a clear record of every minister who has served the church, together with the time of their service. George McNish, the eighth pastor, was one of the original members of the Mother Presbytery of Philadelphia. That this church has always been a Presbyterian church there seems no room for doubt. It is so denominated in all the records where it is named. It has had a bunch of ruling elders from time immemorial.

Historian Leonard J. Trinterud states that although the Presbyterian beginnings under Richard Denton "failed to develop into churches of Presbyterian order, the Hempstead church did contribute to the founding, at Jamaica, Long Island, of what was probably the first permanent Presbyterian church in the new world."[29]

A recent history of American Presbyterianism confirms that "an organized Presbyterian congregation was established on Long Island by 1662 (Jamaica Church), and there were other Presbyterians throughout New York."[30] The governor of New York reported in 1678 that of all the religious groups on the Island, "Presbyterians and Independents [are] most numerous and substantiall."[31] On November 25, 1700, John Hobbert was "ordained according to ye Rule & way of the Presbyterian way, & it is the unanimous mind of the towne that he be ordained accordingly."[32] In 1702 there were more than a hundred families at the church. It was "the mother church of other churches in the vicinity" and contributed families to the First Presbyterian Church in New York City and Hopewell, New Jersey. Thus, Nevin concluded that "Richard Denton was one of the very first Presbyterian ministers in the country, and the Church of Jamaica, Queen's county, New York, is the oldest existent Presbyterian Church in the United States."[33] Such historical records testify to the significance of Presbyterianism in seventeenth-century colonial America,

21. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, p. 23.
22. John Dean Fish, ibid.
23. Nevin, *Encyclopedia*, p. 183.
24. Nevin, *Encyclopedia*, p. 183.
25. Nevin, *Encyclopedia*, p. 183.
26. Nevin, *Encyclopedia*, p. 183.
27. Nevin, *Encyclopedia*, p. 183.
28. Nevin, *Encyclopedia*, p. 183.
29. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, p. 22.
30. Feldmeth, et al., ibid., p. 145.
31. Feldmeth, et al., ibid., p. 145.
32. Feldmeth, et al., ibid., p. 145.
33. Not only did Nevin claim to have "verified by personal examination of the authentic sources here mentioned," but he also lists the following sources: *Thompson's History of Long Island; Woodbridge's Historical Discourse; Onderdonk's History of Queen's County; McDonald's Church History; New York State Documents History; Moore's Early History of Hempstead; Jamaica Town Records.* Such accounts record the existence of a fertile Presbyterian "history" in America long before 1706.

and specifically as it flourished through the labors of Richard Denton.

Denton Heads South—And Back

Another letter from Megapolensis and Drisnis dated October 22, 1657 claims, "Mr. Richard Denton, who is sound in faith, of a friendly disposition, and beloved by all, cannot be induced by us to remain, although we have earnestly tried to do this in various ways."[34] They mentioned Denton going to Virginia "to seek a situation, complaining of salary, and that he was getting in debt," but he had since returned. That Denton would head to Virginia as a Presbyterian brings up additional questions.

The Jamestown, Virginia colonists of 1607 included some Presbyterian clergy. Others such as Alexander Whitaker came to Virginia four years later (1611). Whitaker "was from a Presbyterian Puritan family, his father, William, a divinity professor at Cambridge, a hotbed of Puritanism."[35] This means that Whitaker's father was a professor in Cambridge shortly before Denton had matriculated. Another Presbyterian, the Scotsman George Keith, instituted Presbyterian polity in several parishes in Virginia from 1617 forward. However, in 1629 the Virginia Assembly required all ministers to conform to the practices of the Church of England. The suppression of Presbyterianism in Virginia persisted throughout Richard Denton's life, which raises questions about his attempt to relocate. Why would he visit such a place in order to find a new call and living situation?

A plausible answer may be found when examining the life of another "Apostle of Presbyterianism in America."[36] Francis Doughty (1616–1670) arrived in Massachusetts from England in 1637.[37] Like Denton, his beliefs regarding infant baptism got him into trouble with his congregations in Taunton and Cohasset. Doughty alleged that "according to the Covenant of Abraham, all men's children that were of baptized parents, and so Abraham's children, ought to be baptized." This led to Doughty being dragged out of the assembly and forcibly removed from Massachusetts.[38]

By 1642, Doughty had made his way to Long Island, where he was granted a tract of land by the "Director of New Netherland," Willem Kieft. He was given "power to erect a church, and to exercise the Reformed Christian religion which they profess."[39] However, Indians harried the group to New Amsterdam where Doughty pastored for five years. Further conflict with Kieft and Captain John Underhill caused Doughty to relocate to Virginia, where he became known for "troublesome but unsuccessful witch-hunting proclivities."[40] Doughty reportedly pastored churches in Northampton County and Rappahannock County, Virginia, from 1654—1668.[41] Thus, Richard Denton's visit to Virginia took place three years after Doughty had begun pastoring there.

Intergenerational Baptism

Doughty's view of baptism is called "intergenerational baptism," a not uncommon belief in his day, as evidenced by none other than John Calvin. On August 27, 1559 Knox wrote a letter to Calvin asking "whether it be lawful to admit to the sacrament of baptism the children of idolators and excommunicated persons before their parents have testified their repentance."[42] Calvin brought the question to his Genevan colleagues. Their answer was unanimous:

> Now God's promise comprehends not only the offspring of every believer in the first line of descent, but extends to thousands of generations. Whence it has happened that the interruption of piety which has prevailed in Popery has not taken away from baptism its force and efficacy. For we must look to its origin, and the very reason and nature of baptism is to be esteemed as arising from the promise of God.[43]

Thus, reasoned Calvin and his colleagues, "it is by no means doubtful that an offspring descended from holy and pious ancestors, belong to the body of the church, though their fathers and grandfathers may have been apostates."[44] Not stopping there, Calvin even claimed that to withhold the sacrament of baptism in such cases

34. Jameson, "Narratives of New Netherland, 1609–1664," p. 401.
35. Feldmeth, et al., ibid., p. 144.
36. William Gray Dixon, *The Romance of the Catholic Presbyterian Church* (Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1918), p. 233.
37. Susan Hardman Moore, and Susan M. Moore, *Pilgrims: New World Settlers & the Call of Home* (Yale University Press, 2007), p. 197.
38. Thomas Lechford, "Plain Dealing, or Newes from New-England," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 3, third series (Cambridge: Metcalf, 1833), p. 96.
39. "Rev. Francis Doughty," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (1898): 290.
40. William Gray Dixon, *The Romance of the Catholic Presbyterian Church*, p. 233.
41. John Frederick Dorman, *Adventurers of Purse and Person, Virginia, 1607–1624/5: Families G–P* (Geneological Publishing, 1956; repr., 2007), p. 134.
42. John Calvin, *Letters of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Jules Bonnet, trans. Marcus Robert Gilchrist (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), "Letter 549," 4.73.
43. Calvin, ibid., 4.74.
44. Calvin, ibid., 4.74.

would be to defraud such children of a God-ordained right:

> Children are defrauded of their privileges if they are excluded from the common symbol; because it is unjust when God, three hundred years ago or more, has thought them worthy of his adoption, that the subsequent impiety of some of their progenitors should interrupt the course of heavenly grace. In fine, as each person is not admitted to baptism from respect or regard to one of his parents alone, but on account of the perpetual covenant of God; so in like manner, no just reason suffers children to be debarred from their initiation into the church in consequence of the bad conduct of only one parent.[45]

Calvin's only stipulation for such cases was that the child have a sponsor. This would be a family member of the child who is in good standing in the church and willing to catechize the child in the faith. "Wherefore if none of its relations present himself to pledge his faith to the church that he will undertake the task of instructing the infant, the rite is a mockery and baptism is prostituted. But we see no reason for rejecting any child for whom a due pledge has been given."[46]

Such a view can also be found in the Italian Reformer Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), who argued "the children of those that are indeed in the church, but, because of their unclean way of living, declare that they are not indeed of the church; if they be offered to baptism, they cannot be debarred therefrom, nor ought they."[47] Zanchi states that it is "the piety of the church in which they are born" which counts, as well as "their ancestors who have lived godly and holily," not the parents.[48]

Richard Hooker (1554–1600) approved of Calvin's response to the Knox letter, although he disagreed with the way Calvin came to his conclusion. Hooker felt that if Calvin's reasoning was valid, it would mean that "all the world may be baptized, inasmuch as no man living is a thousand descents removed from Adam himself."[49] Hooker's response is especially important for better understanding the climate of Doughty and Denton, since Hooker was a fellow Englishman. According to Gavin Ortlund, "Calvin's affirmation of intergenerational baptism was broadly taken up by those who affirmed the national organization of the church, while Congregationalists frequently challenged this practice as insufficiently reformed."[50]

Ortlund even claims that the issue regarding children of baptized but unprofessing parents "was one of the issues debated among Presbyterians and Independents in Great Britain in the period leading up to and during the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s."[51] He cites Samuel Rutherford in particular as a vocal proponent of intergenerational baptism. This dates the debate's progression to around the same time that Doughty and Denton were ejected from Massachusetts for their views on baptism. In Puritan New England such views would lead to the "halfway covenant," adopted at the 1662 Synod of Boston, but not before Doughty and Denton had already moved south.

Why are these historical details important? Because the wider context of this theological development provides insight into the conflict and sacrifice early Presbyterian ministers were forced to endure in America. Although intergenerational baptism is unheard of today, it seems to have been considered an orthodox view in the Reformed churches in the days of Doughty and Denton. Thus, although modern readers may see such practices as being outside the pale of presbyterian practice, it would be wrong to call Doughty eccentric in his beliefs, at least for his historical setting. From all appearances, his view of baptism that got him dismissed from Massachusetts seems like nothing else than mainstream Reformed orthodoxy in the seventeenth century.

Denton's Return to England

Eventually, circumstances forced Denton's return to England. Denton's return was necessary, "because of his wife who is sickly will not go without him, and there is need of their going there on account of a legacy of four hundred pounds sterling lately left by a deceased friend." Denton arrived back in England in 1659, although he left behind a quiver of children who would in turn have big families and contribute meaningfully to the westward

45. Calvin, ibid., 4.74.

46. Calvin, ibid., 4.74.

47. As cited by Thomas Boston, in "Miscellaneous Questions," Question VI: Who have right to baptism, and are to be baptized? in *The Whole Works of Thomas Boston*, vol. 6: Sermons and Discourses on Several Important Subjects in Divinity (Aberdeen: George and Robert King, 1849), pp. 139–140. [Ed. Boston is citing from Girolamo Zanchi, *In Epistolas ad Ephesios*, in *Omnium Operum Theologicorum*, Vol. 2, Part 4–6 (Geneva: S. Crispini, 1619), pp. 226–227.]

48. Boston, "Miscellaneous Questions," ibid., pp. 139–140.

49. Richard Hooker, *The Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. John Keble, 7th ed., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1888), 1.349.

50. Gavin Ortlund, "Why Not Grandchildren? An Argument Against Reformed Paedobaptism," *The Gospel Coalition*, accessed May 16, 2023, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/why-not-grandchildren-an-argument-against-reformed-paedobaptism/. Much of the above information is credited to this article.

51. Ortlund, "Why Not Grandchildren?"

expansion of the colonies. "The men were active in the local militias fighting the Indians and they developed excellent military experience that prepared them for officer commissions when they moved to the Virginia frontier."[52] Upon his death in 1660, Denton's tombstone in Yorkshire bore the following inscription: "Here lies the dust of Richard Denton. O'er his low peaceful grave bends the perennial cypress, fit emblem of his unfading flame. On earth his bright example, religious light, shown forth o'er multitudes. In heaven his pure rob'd spirit shines like an effulgent flame."

Denton's unyielding commitment to Presbyterian polity and his unswerving zeal to see it implemented in the New World calls for a reiteration of our initial point: the history of the Presbyterian church in America begins in earnest in the wilderness of New York in the 1630s, not Philadelphia in 1706. For those who would dissent, the following must be weighed: without the pioneering efforts of early Presbyterian ministers like Denton, would there have been a presbytery in 1706? This is not to downplay the tremendous efforts of men in the eighteenth century, notably Francis Makemie. But it is to give due regard to the vast exertions of labor that went into the Presbyterian cause long before Makemie came onto the scene. Denton and Makemie were on the same team, so to speak, and each deserve a place in the history of American Presbyterianism.▪

***In Brief:* Calvin to Knox on Baptism (Nov. 7, 1559). *Letters of John Calvin* (Calvin Translation Society, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858) pp. 73–76.**

…Respecting the questions of which you ask for a solution, after I had laid them before my colleagues, here is the answer which we unanimously resolved to send. It is not without reason that you inquire whether it be lawful to admit to the sacrament of baptism the children of idolaters and excommunicated persons before their parents have testified their repentance. For we ought always to be carefully on our guard that the sanctity of this mystery be not profaned, which it certainly should be if it were promiscuously administered to aliens, or if anyone received it without having such sponsors as may be counted among the legitimate members of the church. But as in the proper use of baptism the authority of God is to be considered, and his institution ought to derive its authority from certain conditions, one of the first things to be considered is who are the persons that God by his own voice invites to be baptized.

Now God's promise comprehends not only the offspring of every believer in the first line of descent, but extends to thousands of generations. Whence it has happened that the interruption of piety which has prevailed in Popery has not taken away from baptism its force and efficacy. For we must look to its origin, and the very reason and nature of baptism is to be esteemed as arising from the promise of God. To us then it is by no means doubtful that an offspring descended from holy and pious ancestors, belong to the body of the church, though their fathers and grandfathers may have been apostates. For just as in Popery it was a pernicious and insane superstition, to steal or forcibly abduct their children from Jews or Turks, and forthwith to have them baptized; so likewise, wherever the profession of Christianity has not been altogether interrupted or destroyed, children are defrauded of their privileges if they are excluded from the common symbol; because it is unjust, when God, three hundred years ago or more, has thought them worthy of his adoption, that the subsequent impiety of some of their progenitors should interrupt the course of heavenly grace. In fine, as each person is not admitted to baptism from respect or regard to one of his parents alone, but on account of the perpetual covenant of God; so in like manner, no just reason suffers children to be debarred from their initiation into the church in consequence of the bad conduct of only one parent. In the meantime we confess that it is indispensable for them to have sponsors. For nothing is more preposterous than that persons should be incorporated with Christ, of whom we have no hopes of their ever becoming his disciples. Wherefore if none of its relations present himself to pledge his faith to the church that he will undertake the task of instructing the infant, the rite is a mockery and baptism is prostituted.

But we see no reason for rejecting any child for whom a due pledge has been given. Add to these considerations that the manner of proceeding adopted by a church now arising from its ruins, and that of one duly formed and established are two very different things. For whilst a church is being composed out of that horrible state of dispersion, since the form of baptism has prevailed through a long series of ages down to our times, it is to be retained, but with the progress of time the abuses which have crept in are to be corrected, and the parents forced to present their children themselves and become the first sponsors. For if in the first commencements an absolute perfection is severely exacted, it is greatly to be feared that many laying eagerly hold of this pretext will continue to wallow in their corruptions.

We confess indeed that we should not attach so much importance to anything as to swerve even a hair's breadth from the line prescribed to us by God; but we imagine we have demonstrated in a few words that if we exclude from baptism those whom we have had proofs of having been domesticated, as it were, in the church, the exclusion would be too rigorous….▪

52. Josephine C Frost, ed., *Records of the Town of Jamaica, Long Island, New York: 1656–1751,* 3 vols. (Brooklyn, NY: The Long Island Historical Society, 1914), 1.20.

The Doctrine of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ in the Works of James Durham

By Colin Dow

Introduction

The heavenly intercession of Christ is a neglected doctrine in our pulpits.[1] Of the consolations and comforts of this doctrine most Christians remain ignorant. It is the unclaimed treasure of the Christian church. James Durham (1622–1668) wrote, "there is no piece of the fulness of our blessed Lord Jesus that is more rich in consolation than His intercession, and yet it is suffered to lie beside even the Believer, not being emproven to the excellent use which doth flow from it."[2] This article explores features of Durham's pastoral applications of the doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession. These applications were prompted by Durham's pastoral approach and were therefore presented from the pulpit as a response to questions he had received in the homes of the people he served. The burden of this article is to highlight the pastoral applications of Durham's doctrine. Differing views of this doctrine (e.g. hypothetical universalism) will only be raised in brief form to both note Durham's awareness of them and his eagerness to propound solid Westminster theology. This article also suggests some contemporary applications of Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ.

The Life of James Durham

James Durham was born of noble stock in 1622 near the Angus village of Monifieth. He was brought up in the Powrie Estate which later became the property of the Wedderburns of Dundee.[3] Durham left Powrie to study at St. Andrews University but left before he graduated, instead intent on pursuing the life of a country gentleman. In his early years, he had little interest in spiritual matters. However, over the course of a Communion Weekend in Abercorn, he came under conviction through the ministry of Ephraim Melville and went forward to the Lord's Table.

Immediately, Durham devoted himself to study. Howie wrote, "He gave himself much up to reading and meditation; for which purpose that he might be free from all disturbances, he caused a study to be built for himself … in this place … he enjoyed much sweet communion with the Lord."[4] The formulation of the Doctrine of Christ's Heavenly Intercession clearly comes from a mind devoted to much study.

His call to the ministry is remarkable. Conscripted as a captain in the Scottish army during the English Civil War, before battle was joined at Marston Moor (July 1644), he led his regiment in prayer. Passing by on his horse, David Dickson, the Professor of Divinity in Glasgow University, heard Durham's prayer and challenged him that after the war was over, he should

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1. The author conducted a survey of fellow ministers in the Free Church of Scotland and discovered that in the last year, only 15% had preached directly on the heavenly priesthood of Christ. Only 35% had even referenced Christ"s continuing high priestly activity in a sermon.

2. James Durham, *A Commentarie upon the Book of the Revelation* (Glasgow: Sanders, 1680), p. 384. Original spellings have been retained in quotations unless otherwise noted.

3. The Wedderburns are famous for the so-called "*Wedderburn Psalms*", a collection of spiritual songs in broad Scots—*"guid and godlie ballatis."* See *A Compendious Book of Godly and Spiritual Songs commonly known as "The Gude and Godlie Ballatis" reprinted from the edition of 1567*, edited with introduction notes by A. F. Mitchell, D.D., LL.D., Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh and London: Printed for the Society by William Blackwood and Sons, 1897).

4. John Howie, *The Scots Worthies: containing a brief historical account of the most eminent nobelmen, gentlemen, ministers, and others, who testified or suffered for the cause of reformation in Scotland from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the year 1688* (Glasgow: W.R. M'Phun, 1829), p. 211.

pursue a calling to the ministry. During the battle itself, Durham's horse was shot from beneath him and, when asked at sword-point by a soldier, whether he was a priest, admitted, "I am a priest of God". The soldier spared his life and Durham determined, from that moment onward, to repay his gratitude to God by entering into the holy ministry.

He studied under David Dickson in Glasgow and was licensed in 1646 by the Presbytery of Irvine. He was ordained and inducted to be a minister in the Blackfriars church in November 1647. In 1650, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland appointed Durham to attend to the King's family as a chaplain. These were difficult days for the Scottish Church, committed as they were both to the National Covenant but also to the King. George Christie wrote of Durham, "it was no light task to gain the Royal confidence without forfeiting that of the Church, yet that seems to have been the object of his attendance."[5] It may be that during his time as chaplain to the King, Durham learned many lessons which helped him to understand how, if intercession is made with an earthly monarch, Christ makes intercession for us with the Heavenly King. In 1651 Durham was called to become one of the ministers at Glasgow's Inner-Kirk, a position he held until his early death in 1658. His parish lay on the east of Glasgow and he had nearly 1500 people under his charge. Durham died after a painful illness in 1568.

Charles Spurgeon refers to him as, "a prince among spiritual expositors."[6] John Owen said of him that he "was one of good learning, sound judgement and every way "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed."[7]

However, what is of interest is Durham's "case-divinity" preaching.[8] Howie wrote of Durham, "he gave himself much to meditation, and usually said little to persons that came to propose their cases to him, but heard them patiently, and was sure to handle these cases in his sermons."[9] It is clear from Durham's expositions of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ both in Revelation and Isaiah 53 that "case-divinity" played a large part in application. As a pastor-theologian, he reveled in the doctrine and rejoiced in its application. Many of the comforts and encouragements he presented as applications of the doctrine were directed towards those whom he had personally counselled.

One of the Durham's consolations of the Doctrine of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ is "against the mighty opposition that is made by enemies." He wrote, "but for this there is consolation in Christ's intercession … He cannot be an intercessor but His enemies must down. For who, I pray, will be able to stand when He gives in His complaint against them? Who will plead Antichrist's and other persecutors cause when He appears against them?"[10] One may almost imagine a member of Durham's congregation privately expressing to him a fear of the opposition the Scottish church faced, only for Durham to use said situation in a "case-divinity" style by addressing it from the pulpit via the Doctrine of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ.

John Macleod wrote, "along with his young friend and ministerial disciple, James Durham, Dickson (David) was also the author of the *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, which, though without authority from the Church, has been often printed in the same volume as the Westminster documents. This solid and valuable piece is an expansion of some sermons preached by Dickson at Inverary when he was Argyll's guest there: it was the means of the conversion of the amiable and eminent Robert Murray M"Cheyne."[11]

A new comprehensive biography and annotated bibliography of Durham's published and manuscript works are given in the third volume of a new critical edition of the commentary on Revelation.[12] With respect to these sermons, they were transcribed by an interested listener at the time and then later collected and compiled into a book by Durham's brother-in-law, John Carstairs. John Macleod wrote, "of his rich exposition of the 53rd of Isaiah, John Duncan said: Read Durham on the 53rd of Isaiah at my request. He has much repetition and you may be disgusted with that. But its repetition of a very fine thing, the eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of His blood. Well, that's what we must be repeating, in fact, all our life long."[13]

5. George Christie, "James Durham as a Courtier and Preacher" George Christie, D.D., "James Durham as Courtier and Preacher," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, IV Part I (1930), p. 70.

6. Quoted in Chris Coldwell, Introduction, in James Durham, *Christ Crucified: or, the Marrow of the Gospel* (Dallas: Naphtali Press & Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), p. 24.

7. Quoted in Donald John Maclean, *James Durham (1622–1658) and the Gospel Offer in its Seventeenth-Century Context* (V&R Academic: Gottingen, 2015), p. 80.

8. See the Appendix to this article, "A short word on "*case-divinity*" preaching.

9. Howie, p. 214.

10. Durham, *Christ Crucified*, p. 761.

11. John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1943), p. 85.

12. See "James Durham: A New Biography," in *A Commentary upon the Book of Revelation, A new critical edition with additional material from a 1653 manuscript containing an early form of the lectures*, ed. Chris Coldwell, 3 vols (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2020–2022), 3.15–78, and "A James Durham Bibliography," 3.525–584. See also, "Sermons and Lectures of James Durham, A Chronological Catalog, 1647–1658," 3.503–524.

13. John Macleod, p. 95.

Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ is completed by a digression in his lectures on the book of Revelation. He delivered these lectures to his parishioners every Sunday before the morning service. Carstairs said of his digressions in Revelation that Durham gave them, "to prevent drowning, as it were, in following the series and tract of the story and Commentary, according to the practice of several learned and worthy men in their writings upon this Scripture."[14] Again, his lectures on Revelation were transcribed by one of his hearers.

The Covenant of Redemption & the Heavenly Intercession of Christ

As already said, the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* is an expansion of some of David Dickson's sermons. It is a summary of the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith. We must remember that it was only a couple of years previously, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had agreed to adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith as its subordinate standards. According to Wodrow, "it is said by some that Mr. Dickson and Mr. Durham went sometimes to the Craigs, about the High Kirk of Glasgou, and made that little piece we have called The Summ of Saving Knowledge."[15] Head II of the Sum and Substance contains, "the remedy provided in Jesus Christ for the elect by the covenant of grace."[16] Dickson first coined the phrase "covenant of redemption" in a speech delivered to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1638.[17]

The covenant of redemption, as summarized in the *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, written by Dickson and Durham, presents the mainstream Scottish Reformed understanding of the covenant made by God the Father and God the Son, in the council of the Trinity, to save sinners.[18] It is separate from the covenant of works and the covenant of grace but is both their foundation and is the ground from which they grow. According to the Covenant of Redemption, Christ fully obeys the Covenant of Works both positively (in fulfilling the demands of the Covenant of Works) and negatively (in bearing the penalty of our broken Covenant of Works). In being appointed as our Mediator according to the Covenant of Redemption, He offers His full obedience to us in the Covenant of Grace through faith in Him.[19] As we shall see, the heavenly intercession of Christ is a vital part of the Covenant of Grace in the application of all the benefits of Christ's work of satisfaction to the elect.

The covenant of redemption was made between Father and Son, in the council of the Trinity, before the world began. Its purpose was God's salvation of the elect and the glory of His name. The *Sum of Saving Knowledge* details the process by which Father and Son, in the council of the Trinity, achieved such a purpose: it was through the appointment of God the Son as Redeemer. As we shall see in a later section, Christ Jesus was "clad" in the three-fold office of prophet, priest, and king. Christ was made a priest "to offer up himself a sacrifice once for them all, and to intercede continually with the Father, for making their persons and services acceptable to Him."[20]

Consistent with his and Dickson's presentation of the covenant of redemption, in his lecture on the heavenly intercession of Christ in Revelation, Durham wrote, "this Intercession is a Thing of old determined in the Council of God."[21]

In *Christ Crucified*, Durham attempts to establish an exegetical framework for the Covenant of Redemption. Of Isaiah 53 he wrote, "there has been a compendious sum of the covenant of redemption delivered by the prophet in this chapter."[22] From verse 12, Durham suggests a division between things promised to the mediator and the conditions the mediator must meet.[23] Concerning the first, Durham summarized them as: "I will divide him a portion with the great" (a glorious victory) and "he shall divide the spoil with the strong" (a rich spoil). Concerning the second, Durham summarized them as: "He hath poured out his soul unto death," "He was numbered with transgressors," "He bare the sins of many," and "He made intercession for transgressors."

The consummate pastor, Durham aimed to apply the certainty of the covenant of redemption to his listeners.

14. John Carstares, To the Reader, in *A Commentarie upon the Book of the Revelation*, p. iv

15. Robert Wodrow, *Analecta or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Printing Company, Printed for the Maitland Club, 1843), p. 10.

16. David Dickson and James Durham, *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (Inverness: F.P. Publications, 1981), p. x.

17. Alexander Peterkin, ed., *Records of the Kirk of Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Sutherland, 1838), p. 158.

18. For a fascinating discussion of this covenant, read J.V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Mentor: Fearn, 2016).

19. See Guy Richard, "The Covenant of Redemption," Reformed Faith & Practice. https://journal.rts.edu/article/the-covenant-of-redemption/ (accessed August 21, 2023).

20. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, Head II, Section III.

21. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 386.

22. *Christ Crucified*, p. 716.

23. *Christ Crucified*, p. 727.

He wrote, "the greatest monarch on earth has not such ground of assurance for his dinner or supper as the poor believer has for eternal life."[24]

However notice the vital place Durham affords the heavenly intercession of Christ. It forms a condition Christ as Mediator must meet. Just as the mediator must die as the sacrifice for transgressors, so he must intercede for them. This posits the heavenly intercession of Christ as an indispensable element of the Covenant of Redemption, the purpose of which was the salvation of the elect and the glory of God's name.

Durham and Dickson[25] were not formulating the doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption in a vacuum.[26] As well as referring to the errors of Socinianism, Roman Catholicism, and Arminianism,[27] they were also contending with a relatively new problem. In the Saumur Seminary, the Scottish theologian John Cameron (1579–1625), together with Moses Amyraut (1596–1664), developed a system of hypothetical universalism. They were convinced that Calvin's doctrines had been distorted by his successor Theodore Beza, and by the Synod of Dort in its effort to refute Arminianism. Durham was familiar with the contentions of John Cameron,[28] Richard Baxter,[29] and William Twisse[30] on the issue of the extent of the atonement. Ultimately, as we shall see, Durham, while respecting the theologians involved, believed that hypothetical universalism was both theologically unsustainable and pastorally harmful.

24. *Christ Crucified*, p. 731.

25. For Dickson's view of the Covenant of Redemption, see David Dickson, *Therapeutica sacra: shewing briefly, the method of healing the diseases of the conscience, concerning regeneration* (Edinburgh: Watson, 1697). Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675), younger brother of George Gillespie and a contemporary of Durham and Dickson, proposed his doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption in the *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption between God and Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst at the Bible and three Crowns in Cheapside, near Mercers Chappel, 1677), with a preface by none other than John Owen.

26. For a fascinating discussion of the formulations of the *pactum salutis* (another name for the Covenant of Redemption) see Richard Muller, "Toward the Pactum Salutis: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11–65.

27. Dickson's speech at the 1638 General Assembly where he coined the phrase, "*Covenant of Redemption*" was aimed as a polemic against Arminianism. Peterkin, p. 158.

28. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 268.

29. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 270.

30. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 270.

31. *Christ Crucified*, p. 742.

32. *Christ Crucified*, p. 742.

33. *Christ Crucified*, p. 742.

The Definition of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ

In accordance with the maxim that we must speak not in order to be understood, but in order not to be misunderstood, in *Christ Crucified*, Durham lists what the heavenly intercession is not. It does not involve a humbling of the Mediator, as Christ prayed on earth or as we might intercede with each other. Secondly it is not verbal. Durham wrote, "there is no such language in our Lord's intercession."[31] Thirdly, given that the heavenly intercession of Christ represents an integral role in the fulfilment of His priesthood, it involves no new act of His will. We must not conceive of Christ's heavenly intercession in terms of Him praying for us in heaven as we pray to God on earth. It is something belonging more to the office of priest. Durham wrote, "His being in heaven and appearing there in our name, is His intercession."[32]

Positively, he defined the heavenly intercession of Christ in this way: "it is our Lord Jesus Christ making effectually forthcoming for the behoove of the people what He has purchased and has engaged to Him in the covenant of redemption, as if He were agenting their cause as an advocate in heaven."[33] One may notice the following features of this definition: first, His intercession is in heaven. He is our advocate there, where we ourselves remain on earth. It is the task of another article to examine the role of Christ's intercession on behalf of the heavenly church. Secondly, it is on behalf of "the people." Later we will examine what Durham meant by "the people," but suffice to say at this stage that it represents all those for whom Christ has made satisfaction on the Cross. He is "agenting their cause" and is acting on their "behoove." Thirdly, Christ's intercession is in an integral element in the covenant of redemption. Fourthly, it involves Christ interceding that what He has purchased for them may be "effectually forthcoming." It is inextricably linked to His work of satisfaction such that the two cannot be separated. He satisfies so that he may intercede; he intercedes on the ground of His satisfaction.

Later we will examine that for which Christ intercedes, but in this definition Durham opened our horizon to its extent. As we shall see, those for whom Christ intercedes are co-extensive with those for whom He made satisfaction. According to this definition, that for which Christ intercedes is co-extensive with that for which He made satisfaction. He has purchased the fruit for His people on the Cross; He now intercedes for its fruition for them and in them. He purchased their

reconciliation through the Cross; He now intercedes for its effectual forthcoming for them and in them. Every fruit of Christ's work of satisfaction becomes the subject of His work of intercession.

In the *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, this is described as "the work of applying actually the purchased benefits of the elect". Satisfaction has to do with *purchasing* benefits for the elect; intercession has to do with *applying* those benefits to the elect. Christ's appearance in heaven in our nature and in our name is His intercession, the Christ who by divine appointment became mediator in our nature and made satisfaction for us on the Cross. To summarize, the intercession of Christ concerns the application of the benefits of redemption. That which He has purchased for His people before God, He now intercedes to be given to His people by God.

Durham acknowledged that "this be a mystery"[34] There is no natural corollary and it is difficult to picture. And yet, in accordance with his expository brilliance, Durham asserted what is true and scriptural while refusing to speculate on that which is clouded to us. He defined the heavenly intercession of Christ in a manner which draws us back to the Cross where, by contrast to the mysterious nature of His intercession, we clearly see satisfaction being offered by Him for us. All we need now know as Christians, for whom Christ has died on the Cross, is that the heavenly Christ is now engaged in applying the fruit of that satisfaction for us and in us.

A modern criticism of Durham's view, which is founded on the theology of Dort and Westminster, proposes that it differs from that of John Calvin. R. T. Kendall proposed that Dort and Westminster significantly distorted the view of John Calvin: "According to Kendall, Calvin held that the scope of the death of Christ is different from that of his intercession. He died for all, but intercedes only for the elect."[35] The refutation of Kendall's view of Calvin is beyond the scope of this paper.[36] What is of importance, however, is that Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ does not admit any bifurcation between those for whom Christ offered satisfaction (those for whom he died) and Christ's heavenly intercession.

John Murray did not like the term "covenant of redemption". While sympathetic to the theology behind it, he wrote, "it may not be remiss to observe that the term "covenant" in Scripture refers to temporal administration, and it is not strictly proper to use a biblical term to designate something to which it is not applied in the Scripture itself. For this reason it is not well, and is liable to be confusing, to speak of this economy in terms of covenant. I prefer some such designation as the inter-trinitarian economy of salvation."[37]

Illustrations of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ

The heavenly intercession of Christ may only be understood in terms of His priesthood. In line with Calvin,[38] Durham asserted that Christ was clothed with the offices of prophet, priest, and king. The *Sum of Saving Knowledge* describes Christ being made a priest, "to offer up himself a sacrifice once for them all, and to intercede continually with the father, for making their persons and services acceptable to him."[39] The priesthood of Christ renders His heavenly intercession intelligible. In *Christ Crucified*, on one of the ways in which Durham illustrated Christ's heavenly intercession is by drawing attention to the activity of Old Testament high priests. These priests served two functions: first, to offer sacrifices and secondly, intercession. Durham wrote, "the high priests went into the most holy once a year and sprinkled blood and prayed for the people; in which time they were standing without, praying in the hope of having their prayers made the more acceptable. This was by God's appointment, typically to prefigure our Lord's intercession in heaven."[40]

Durham called his listeners to imagine themselves standing outside heaven while their great high priest intercedes within. For Old Testament believers, there was uncertainty: would their High Priest perform the ceremony successfully; would the blood He sprinkled be enough to expiate their sins; will that shed blood include every one of them in its atoning sufficiency? By drawing attention to Christ's high priesthood, Durham allayed the fears of his listeners. Christ's intercession is successful for all His people. Those who have rested by faith in the satisfaction of Christ can be assured and need not wait in uncertainty until they appear before God on the Day of Judgment.

In *Christ Crucified*, Durham illustrated the Heavenly Intercession of Christ in three ways. In the first instance, Durham compared making use of His intercession

34. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 384.

35. Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), p. 36.

36. For a refutation of Kendall"s view read Helm, pp. 32–50.

37. John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), p. 130.

38. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 425.

39. The *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, Head II, Section III.

40. *Christ Crucified*, p. 776.

with making use of His satisfaction. We make use of His satisfaction when, acknowledging our sinfulness and renouncing any effort to earn salvation, having heard of the satisfaction Christ has made for us and believing that His invitation is for us, we close with God in the covenant. In the same way, we make use of His intercession when, though under a challenge or struggling to approach God because of our sinfulness, hearing that we have an intercessor in heaven who will act on behalf of all those who will make use of Him, we base our confidence upon Him to present our case to God and expect an answer.

Most Christians think first of Christ's satisfaction and only then of His intercession. Using this illustration, Durham made the intercession of Christ accessible even to those who are completely unfamiliar with the doctrine. There is no substantive difference in how we relate to God through satisfaction and intercession—both are through faith in Christ.

Secondly, Durham used the illustration of the Old Testament high priest, which we have already described. Thirdly, Durham used the illustration of human agreements. When two parties are at variance, the party offending dare not approach the party offended without a friendly mediator who will plead his case and has power to prevail. It is by virtue of that friendly mediator the party offending secures a favourable hearing and reconciliation is secured. In the world of the day, such an illustration would have been familiar to Durham's listeners, providing from daily life a vivid reminder of Christ's heavenly intercession. Likewise, given that Durham served as chaplain to the King's family, he would have been very familiar with parties offending bringing a friendly mediator to approach the King.

We may suppose that many of Durham's contemporaries would have devoted significantly more time to each aspect of these illustrations. One can only imagine Andrew Gray developing the last of these three similes, perhaps even personalizing the parties involved and describing in detail the pleadings of the mediator. Durham and Gray may have held a similar status among the people, but Gray was the greater preacher.[41]

In his lectures on Revelation, Durham illustrated Christ's heavenly activity as intercessor using four biblical terms: mediator, intercessor, advocate, and appear. The last of these provides a fascinating insight into Durham's view of Christ's heavenly intercession. He viewed "appearing" as superior to "advocacy." Consistent with his definition of Christ's heavenly intercession, it is Christ's appearance in heaven in our nature and on our behalf which constitutes His intercession for us. It is that appearance which keeps fresh the memory of His blood-bought satisfaction for his people.

The Subjects of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ

Durham was a pastor-theologian. His theology was harnessed to his pastoral vocation. It was not enough that Durham was able to state truth; it had to be applied in his case-divinity practice. When it came to the question of the extent of the heavenly intercession of Christ, or for whom does the heavenly Christ intercede, the truth he states is as follows: "(it is of) equal extent to the covenant of redemption."[42] He continually intercedes for those for whom He made satisfaction in His redemptive death, no more and no less. The priest does not merely offer sacrifices, but continues to intercede on account of those sacrifices.

A careful reading of Heads II and IV of the *Sum of Saving Knowledge*[43] defines the subjects of Christ's heavenly intercession as:

- Sinners … lacking ability or will to save themselves
- Those who have faith in Jesus Christ
- A certain number of lost mankind whom God has freely chosen to life
- Those ransomed and redeemed from sin and death on the cross

41. Wodrow says of him that he did not have "a popular or plausible way of speaking given him" (Analecta 3, p. 108). Christie describes Durham as a "*heavy*" preacher whose sermons lacked "*illustration and … sparkle*". He recounts an occasion when Durham and Gray were walking together to church, Durham noticed the crowds flocking to hear Gray preach compared to the few who were attending upon his ministry (Christie, p. 77). See "Durham the Preacher," in "James Durham: A New Biography," in A Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation, Lectures on Chapters 12-22 (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2022), pp. 48–52. Andrew Gray had been ordained to the Outer Kirk of Glasgow Cathedral in 1654. According to Blaikie, '*He (Gray) had a remarkable power of probing the conscience; as James Durham remarked, he could make men's hair stand on end.*' He continues, '*thoroughly puritan in his theology, Gray had the courage to speak with more natural freedom and natural life than many of his contemporaries … often, at the close of his sermons, in warning sinners and exhorting them to accept the offer of Christ, he rises into a strain of impassioned appeal that has been rarely equalled in any age.*' Gray died in 1656 at the age of 21, two years after his ordination. William Garden Blaikie, *The Preachers of Scotland from the Sixth to the Nineteenth Century: Twelfth Series of the Cunningham Lectures* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), pp. 136, 137.

42. *Christ Crucified*, p. 743.

43. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, Heads II & IV.

- Those for whom Christ has purchased righteousness and eternal life
- The people of Christ

In his lecture from Revelation, Durham added, "… all that will make use of Christ and come to God are admitted."[44]

In Christ crucified, Durham summarized his position, "His intercession being grounded on His death and satisfaction, it must be of equal extent therewith and must be of equal extent therewith and must relate to the covenant of redemption, wherein so many were given Him to be redeemed by His death."[45]

As pastor-theologian, Durham expanded on the proper subjects of Christ's heavenly intercession to offer consolation and comfort. "The Lord's intercession gives a fourfold extent of consolation that makes it wonderful."[46] First, his hearers were to consider the universality of the persons to whom it is extended. Christ's intercession is bound to the elect and yet He does not turn away any who honestly give Him a case to plead. Secondly, he proposed the universality of cases He pleads. Durham wrote, "it secludes no case, though it looked like a lost cause."[47] Thirdly, he extolled the perfections of the salvation that comes by Christ's intercession. In his commentary on Revelation, Durham wrote, "more cannot be imagined."[48] In typically Durham-esque language he wrote in *Christ Crucified*, "He shall not leave a tear on the cheek of any of His own, ere all be done."[49] Lastly, Durham put forth that the extent of the consolation reaches to all times; "there is never an hour nor moment that He has His door shut."[50]

The heavenly intercession of Christ is an untapped source of consolation for the Christian, and so in a later section of *Christ Crucified* Durham listed qualifications for those who may take comfort from this doctrine. First, it is a source of comfort for a person who has betaken himself to Christ's satisfaction. Durham reminded his listeners that Christ's priestly works of satisfaction and intercession cannot be divided. He intercedes with God for those for whom He made satisfaction before God. Secondly, it is a source of comfort for those who are pursuing holiness. They are wrestling with their sin and weakness, and yet pursuing godliness. Thirdly, it is a source of comfort to those who place no weight on the performance of their religious duties, but all on Christ to make it acceptable. Lastly, it is a source of comfort to those who know that the weight of their needs rests only upon Christ's intercession and nowhere else.

Given the range of Durham's listeners and the wide variety of personal, ecclesiastical, and national needs he encountered, the consolation he offered is impressive. Through his pastoral visitation to rich merchants, poor widows, and influential noblemen, each with his or her own particular anxieties, Durham was able to formulate an all-encompassing, gospel-focused, and theologically consistent application to the question of the heavenly intercession of Christ. Christ intercedes for every sinner for whom He made satisfaction. None are excluded from the privilege of this intercession except those who exclude themselves.

Soon after the Synod of Dort, out of Saumur, Moses Amyraut, inspired by his teacher John Cameron, developed a system of doctrine known as hypothetical universalism. Amyraut gave his name to its variant Amyraldianism. Convinced that Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, had pushed Calvin's doctrines further than was warranted, Amyraut, according to Maclean, posited, "a double reference in the atonement, where Christ died for both the elect and the reprobate but in different senses, or a hypothetical, conditional redemption of all men."[51] Schaff adds, "Amyraut distinguished between objective grace which is offered to all, and subjective grace in the heart which is offered only to the elect."[52] Kendall's view, mentioned earlier, falls into the Amyraldian category.

James Durham, while respecting those who held Amyraldian views,[53] was resolute in his criticism of them. He devotes an entire excursus in his commentary on Revelation to discussing and refuting their views. Durham believed that Christ intercedes for every sinner for whom He made satisfaction. But for whom did He effect redemption? Durham summarizes three views: He died to make redemption possible (Arminianism); He died to make redemption conditional (Hypothetical Universalism); He died to make redemption absolute (Westminster).[54] The condition of redemption is faith in Christ. At the 1637 Synod of Alencon, Amyraut said, "those who are called by the preaching of the Gospel to

44. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 387.
45. *Christ Crucified*, p. 743.
46. *Christ Crucified*, p. 753.
47. *Christ Crucified*, p. 755.
48. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 387.
49. *Christ Crucified*, p. 755.
50. *Christ Crucified*, p. 756.
51. Maclean, p. 86.
52. Phillip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, volume 1 (1877; repr. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1878), p. 481.
53. He calls both Richard Baxter and William Twisse "learned." Twisse held to a variant of Amyraldianism limiting hypothetic redemption to members of the visible church.
54. Durham, *Commentarie on Revelation*, p. 264.

participate by faith in the effects and fruits of His death, being invited seriously, and God vouchsafing them all external means needful for their coming to Him, and showing them in good earnest, and with the greatest sincerity by His Word, what would be well-pleasing to Him: if they should not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but perish in their obstinacy and unbelief; this cometh not from any defect or virtue or sufficiency in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, nor yet for want of summons or serious invitation unto faith and repentance, but only from their own fault."[55] But for Durham this was theologically problematic given that he held that faith itself was a gift of Christ's purchase and not a function of the divine decree of election. For Durham, election precedes soteriology—"the Work of Redemption doth presuppose Election to have preceded."[56] Maclean writes, "given, then, that the covenant of redemption itself was governed by the prior decree of election and was therefore a discriminatory covenant, it necessary followed that Christ's death had reference only to a limited number of individuals co-extensive with those given to Christ in the covenant of redemption."[57]

Out of the many arguments Durham presents against hypothetical universalism, I want to select three: exegetical, theological and pastoral.[58] Exegetically, Durham examines John 3:16,[59] which was commonly used to support hypothetical universalism. The "world" in this setting is not to be taken distributively as referring to every person in the world but must be understood in the context of the previous verse.[60] Durham writes, "God's end in the giving of His Son, is mentioned to be a ground of quietness to all that should believe, and will bear that Universal well, whoever believeth are redeemed, and may expect the benefits of Christ's Redemption; because the justifying and saving of such was the end for which God sent His Son."[61]

Theologically, as well as many other objections, Durham points to the intercession of Christ as being co-extensive with, and regulated by, the satisfaction of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption. From John 17:9[62] he writes, "he doth not pray for the world which were not given him, but expressly He doth exclude them … therefore, it must be supposed, that He did no way die for the world, seeing he doth not pray for them, because He did not satisfie for them, because they were not given unto him. And we can no more say that there is a conditional satisfying for, and redeeming of, all, than we can say, that there is a conditional prayer for all; and we cannot say, that there is a conditional intercession for all, seeing he doth so expressly, and absolutely exclude the Reprobate world from His prayers."[63]

The consummate pastor, Durham maintained hypothetical universalism threatened the pastoral well-being of God's people. His excursus on the extent of the atonement comes immediately after his exposition of Revelation 5 with its song of the redeemed. He writes, "if the justification, salvation, etc, of the redeemed be not necessarily and peremptorily knit unto Christ's laying down of His life for them, then were even their justification and Salvation uncertain, and so none of them could heartily praise for the same, or comfort themselves therein; much lesse could all do this."[64] Not only are the praises of God's people threatened by hypothetical universalism, their assurance of faith is as well. It is of more consolation to the believer to know that Christ's work makes salvation certain, than makes it possible or conditional. To go back to Durham's exegesis of John 3:16, God's purpose in the giving of His Son is to be a ground of quietness to all who believe—their assurance of redemption.

For these and many other reasons listed in his excursus on the extent of the atonement, Durham insists that Christ intercedes for every sinner for whom He made satisfaction.

The Extent of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ

As we have already seen in our discussion on definition, the satisfaction of Christ is co-extensive with the intercession of Christ. The two cannot be separated. That for which Christ intercedes is co-extensive with that for which He made satisfaction. That which He purchased on the Cross He now applies through His intercession. Everything for which He died is included. Even as Gregory famously said of Christ's incarnation, "that which is not assumed is not redeemed,"[65] so

55. Quoted in The History of the Free Offer, Chapter 4, Amyraudianism, http://www.prca.org/current/Free%20Offer/chapter4.htm (accessed, August 21, 2023).

56. Durham, *Commentarie on Revelation*, p. 272.

57. Maclean, p. 118.

58. Maclean contains a summary of Durham's arguments and should be consulted for a fuller picture. Maclean pp. 117–123.

59. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (ESV).

60. "so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (ESV).

61. Durham, *Commentarie on Revelation*, p. 275.

62. "I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours" (ESV).

63. Durham, *Commentarie on Revelation*, p. 271.

64. *Commentarie on Revelation*, p. 261.

65. St. Gregory Nazianzen, To Cledonius the Priest against Apollinarius (Ep. CI), *NPNF2*, vol. 7, p. 440. "If anyone has put his trust

Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ allows us to say that He intercedes for as much as that for which He made satisfaction. Durham described the extent of Christ's heavenly intercession as "being as broad as His purchase."[66]

The *Sum of Saving Knowledge* frames the extent of the heavenly intercession of Christ in terms of "the blessings conveyed … to the Lord's elect."[67] Dickson and Durham insisted that through the outward ordinances, by the power of the Holy Spirit, God "applies to the elect all saving graces purchased to them in the covenant of redemption."[68] The Sum proceeds to list a variety of saving graces purchased by Christ and now that for which He intercedes on behalf of His people. These include repentance, saving faith, justification, adoption and glorification.

In his excursus on Christ's intercession in his Commentary on Revelation, Durham approached the issue of extent from the viewpoint of Hebrews 4:16. Durham wrote, "here Grace hath a throne; and he that seeks upon this Account (Christ's Intercession) may expect to find Mercy and Grace as that which aboundeth most under this Dominion and about this Throne."[69] All the blessings of Christ's work of satisfaction, listed in the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* and also in *Christ Crucified*, are comprehended under these two titles: grace and mercy—that which abound through Christ's work of intercession.

In his summary sermon in *Christ Crucified*, Durham wrote, "He intercedes for everything that is needful and everything promised to them"[70]. He included the following:

a. That the elect who are not regenerate, may be regenerate and made believers.
b. That they may be justified, pardoned and received in favour, friendship and fellowship with God.
c. That they may be kept from temptation.
d. That temptations may be prevented and they made to persevere.
e. That Satan may not make their faith to fail.
f. That they and their prayers and their service may be accepted.
g. That the supplications that they present and put up in His name, may get a hearing.
h. That they may be armed against the fear of death.
i. That they may be carried in the gradual advances of sanctification.
j. That they may be glorified and be where He is, to behold His glory.

In a later sermon, Durham subsequently wrote, "if you look through them (the following list), you will find that there is nothing that may be useful to a believer either as to a particular or public mercy, but it is knit to Christ's Intercession."[71] The list he provided proves Durham's genius as a case-divinity pastor/preacher. It is both comprehensive and contemporary. He divided those issues for which Christ intercedes under two headings: first, private mercies, and secondly, the public case of God's Church. We may list them all, but under certain items Durham provided memorable quotes which, both in his day and today, provide comfort and assurance to struggling Christians.

Under the heading of private mercies Durham listed the following:

(i) The beginning and growth of our spiritual life—we may ask why a particular person is a Christian. We may attribute their regeneration to God's sovereign work of election, or to their own faith, but for Durham, the heavenly intercession of Christ is an important component. He wrote, "the pouring out of the Spirit is a fruit of Christ's Intercession. It is this that procures the first conviction of the Spirit to an elect person laying in nature; it is this that continues these convictions and procures the Spirit's quickening of them."[72] We may ask what importance we may attach to the heavenly intercession of Christ. Durham emphasized that it is a matter of life and death. We owe our regeneration to His heavenly intercession in pouring out His Spirit into our hearts to convict us and give us new life.

(ii) It is from Christ's intercession that we are kept from many temptations—Durham wrote, "there would be living for us in the multitude of temptations if He were not interceding for us."[73] We do not face many of the temptations which, if Christ was not interceding for us, would utterly defeat us.

(iii) The preventing of many judgements temporal and spiritual.

in Him as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved."

66. *Christ Crucified*, p. 744.
67. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, Head IV.
68. *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, Head II, Section II.
69. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 387.
70. *Christ Crucified*, Sermon 66, p. 744.
71. *Christ Crucified*, p. 757
72. *Christ Crucified*, p. 758.
73. *Christ Crucified*, p. 758.

(iv) Disposition for duty and help in the name of duty—Durham wrote, "it is His digging and pains that makes the barren tree fruitful."[74] The successful completion of our duties as Christians is thanks to Christ's heavenly intercession on our behalf. We depend on His "digging and pains"—His gracious intercession—for our obedience and sanctification.

(v) Our prayers are heard—our prayers are substandard, and yet, Durham wrote, "it is He that takes the mangled and half prayers of His people and presents them to God."[75]

(vi) An answer to all our challenges—the challenges to which Durham refers are the accusations of Satan, the world around us and our own guilty consciences. We may not be able or in a fit state to answer these challenges and accusations, but "His intercession is the last defence on which the triumph of faith rises."[76]

(vii) It takes away the guilt of holy things.

(viii) The strength to bear through under a cross—we lack the strength to overcome the sufferings in life and yet we find it in the Cross. It "comes from Him as intercessor".[77]

(ix) Our perseverance in and perfect glorification.

We shall examine a particular example of how a believer can use the doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ in a following section. Durham concluded by writing, "now, if all these be put together, besides many more that may be gathered from Scripture, what lacks a believer for his own private and particular consolation which this one word, that Christ is our intercessor, does not answer?"[78]

James Durham lived in difficult days for the church in Scotland. It was beset by restrictions imposed upon it from outside, and by challenges of its own making. Durham was a chaplain to the royal family, and also a peace-maker between Resolutioner and Protester parties.[79] He knew more than most the great need of the Scottish church for Christ's Intercession on her behalf. Under the heading of public and private mercies, Durham highlighted the following areas in which the heavenly Christ intercedes.

(i) The fear of a scarcity or weakness of the public ministry.

(ii) Against the mighty opposition that is made by enemies—the church in Durham's day faced many opponents, "but for this there is a consolation in Christ's intercession … who will plead Antichrist's and other persecutor's case when He appears against them."[80]

(iii) There is a court in heaven that gives out orders—earthly kings and courts may make legislation, but ultimately the world has no advocate in heaven, whereas the church has Christ interceding for her.

(iv) Offences in herself and the spreading of error—when the devil cannot persecute the church from outside, he changes tactics and introduces error into the church. But the heavenly Christ intercedes for the doctrinal and moral purity of His church.

"What reason for anxiety is there or could there be here if the solid and lively faith of this intercessor and advocate, His being in heaven and thus interceding, were in our hearts?"[81]

There is another way to think about these areas Durham emphasized. Rather than view them merely as those things for which Christ intercedes, we place ourselves within them and view them as situations from which we may pray for and in Christ's intercession. For example, the believer beset by temptation is best placed to call upon Christ's intercession and be assured that the heavenly Christ is interceding for her. For Durham, these situations become opportunities to reflect upon the privileges of both the satisfaction made upon the Cross and the heavenly intercession of Christ.

The Sympathy of Christ

For Durham, the sympathy of Christ is a vitally important element in His heavenly intercession. Christ intercedes for us as a willing mediator who knows our weaknesses by virtue of His incarnation. In one place, Durham identified the sympathy of Christ as the source of His intercession on our behalf: "the last thing wherein we shall consider the Consolation of this Intercession, is the Sympathy from whence it floweth, and which it

74. *Christ Crucified*, p. 758.
75. *Christ Crucified*, p. 759.
76. *Christ Crucified*, p. 759.
77. *Christ Crucified*, p. 760.
78. *Christ Crucified*, p. 760.
79. The difference between Resolutioner and Protestor parties consisted in their view of the composition of the early 1650"s Scottish army. The Resolutioners (including David Dickson and Robert Baillie) followed the resolve of the General Assembly that anyone (even Episcopalians and those who did not hold to the Covenant) could join the army. The Protesters (including Samuel Rutherford and Patrick Gillespie) protested against the authority of the General Assembly to admit members of the "Malignant Party" to join the Scottish army. The two parties could not be reconciled and held rival assemblies, presbyteries, and even supported rival ministries in the same parish.
80. *Christ Crucified*, p. 761.
81. *Christ Crucified*, p. 762.

carrieth along with it."[82] Durham called this sympathy "humane" to distinguish it from the "figurative" sympathy Christ had for us before His incarnation. He wrote, "the sympathy (of Christ) is the main ground of consolation which doth sweeten all the rest."[83] It forms part of the beauty of His standing before God.

The sympathy of Christ for His people is an indispensable element in His union with them. Durham's pastoral skill comes to the fore in his discussion of how the sins committed by believers provoke sympathy in the heart of Christ. He is affected not merely by their troubles, but by their transgressions. Durham wrote, "O What a Wonder is this, the more Sin, the more Sympathy! Which ought to make Believers humble, and yet exceedingly to Comfort them under a sinful Condition … Christ's Intercession is suited unto, appointed and designed for Sinners."[84]

In his discourse concerning the Intercession of Christ in his lectures in Revelation, Durham gave some properties of Christ's sympathy. In the first instance, he called the sympathy of Christ real and humane. By virtue of His incarnation, the sympathy of Christ is that which affects one brother on account of the troubles of another. It is the kind of sympathy a parent has to its child. Durham wrote, "it is the believing of the reality of this humane Sympathy, that openeth the Door to all the following Consolations, to wit, that our Lord Jesus hath a humane Heart stirred and affected in that same Manner … as ours are towards our Friends, and Children in their Necessities."[85]

Secondly, the sympathy of Christ is sinless with no bias or mistake. Thirdly the sympathy of Christ is perfect. The purity of Christ's sympathy while on earth has been glorified. Fourthly, it is the Sympathy of a Man who is God and Man in one Person. Christ knows our necessities even if we do not. Durham wrote of the believer who finds consolation in this, "he also hath a Ground to stay his Faith in diving in these, and comforting himself in these, because they are Bowels of a Person who may be lippened (*trusted*) to, and rested upon, as no mere Man can be."[86] Lastly, the sympathy of Christ is agreeable to His divine will.

For Durham, the sympathy of Christ is the spring of our comfort as Christians. In whatever situation we find ourselves in, or place ourselves in, the heavenly Christ sympathizes with us and His sympathy moves His intercession on our behalf. This is case-divinity at its best in Durham's writings and ministry. He is a fine example of the historic Scottish Reformed pastor in how he applied the best theology to the individual situations faced by his listeners.

The Use of Christ's Intercession

The heavenly intercession of Christ is, even according to Durham, "sublimely spiritual and somewhat tickle (puzzling)."[87] In another place he wrote, "there is an unsearchableness in the mystery of the Godhead, in the mystery of God's becoming man and in the mystery of the Mediator taking to Himself these offices to exercise them in our nature."[88] Even though it is sublimely spiritual and unsearchable, Durham explained how the believer may use Christ's intercession, while all the time admitting, "there may be a real making use of Christ's intercession where there is much indistinctness in the uptaking of it."[89]

In his writings, Durham described how to use Christ's intercession in three places: twice in *Christ Crucified* and once in his lectures in Revelation. In so doing he took account of the varying degrees of spiritual maturity among his listeners.

In Sermon 71 of *Christ Crucified*, in answering the doubts of puzzled Christians concerning how to make use of Christ's intercession, Durham gave four answers: first, make sure you pray to God; secondly, renounce your own righteousness; thirdly, believe that you will be accepted through Jesus Christ, and fourthly, on that account, to put up your prayer to God. Making use of Christ's intercession, at its most basic level, it is as simple enough for a child to understand.

In Sermon 69 of *Christ Crucified*, Durham went deeper and answered the question of what properly it is to make use of Christ's intercession. In the first instance, hold onto Christ's satisfaction for peace with God. Building upon that satisfaction, it is to lay our weight upon the intercession of our mediator and advocate. Secondly, expect God to hear our suit on the basis that Jesus Christ is our intercessor in heaven. Durham offered pastoral insight at this point, "this guards against … anxiety on one hand and presumption on the other. Against anxiety and fainting, whenas there is not only a proposing of our desire, but an on-waiting for and expectation of a hearing from God; against presumption and turning carnal, when the expectation of a hearing is not founded on our own righteousness, but on the

82. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 388.
83. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 388.
84. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 388.
85. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 388.
86. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 389.
87. *Christ Crucified*, p. 746.
88. *Christ Crucified*, p. 784.
89. *Christ Crucified*, p. 795.

intercession of Christ."[90] Thirdly, despite difficulties wait patiently for God's answer. Again, Durham offers this pastoral insight, "there is a weight laid on Christ's intercession by faith's trusting to him, which makes the soul to be without anxiety … because it lays the weight of its coming speed [having success] with God, not on its own argumenting, but on the Mediator's intercession."[91] Lastly, attribute anything obtained not to one's own praying, but to the virtue and efficacy of Christ's intercession. This allows us to enjoy that which we have received on the account of His intercession. "The improving of Christ's intercession thus, would make the thoughts of Christ always fresh and lovely to us."[92]

If not in length, the most comprehensive guidance Durham offers in using Christ's intercession is found in his additional excursus in Revelation. He proposed seven steps.

(i) Men would study to know the fulness that is in Jesus, and that they would rest under the Holy Priest of our profession

(ii) In our addresses to God, faith would be exercised on Jesus Christ, even in respect to this part of his office—"as there is a resting by Faith on Christ's satisfaction, for attaining of Pardon or what else is needful; so there ought to be a resting on Christ as Intercessor, for the obtaining of what we are petitioning for before the Throne."[93]

(iii) Faith would not only respect Christ's supply as an intercessor, but as an intercessor who is man in our nature—"the neglect of this maketh Christ look like a Stranger and maketh the Soul anxious even its addresses to him."[94]

(iv) There ought to be access with holy boldness, the heart exulting in its approach to God, that it hath such a new and holy way, as the veil of His flesh, to approach to God—"were this considered, it would banish the drouping (*sic*), heartless approaches that Believers make to God through Christ, as if they were coming to a Stranger rather than a Brother really and sensibly touched with their Infirmities and affected with them, as any Brother on Earth is with the Infirmities of another."[95]

(v) "The heart would keep confidence on this Account, as to the Event, however it be for the Time." In other words, don"t pre-judge Christ's Intercession by present circumstances; rather, keep praying.

(vi) "Believers should carry in themselves a little copy of that sympathy that is in Jesus Christ," and … that by meditating thereon, the heart may be refreshed." The more we meditate on the sympathy of the Heavenly Christ, the more our hearts will be stirred to persevere in prayer.

(vii) This would be to the believer the last refuge. When all around looks dark, he anchors himself in Christ's intercession and sympathy—"he sympathizeth with his Church, and every Member of it; it is most fresh in Straits, because then his Bowels are awake, most stirred and warmed; and it is a Fortress against the Terror of Death, seeing he died, and therefore hath the fresher Sympathy in that Choke [shock; critical point]."[96]

Case-divinity was the foundation of Durham's ministry. It is not merely knowing the doctrine that confers benefit, but applying it in the day-to-day challenges and pressures of the Christian life. He wanted his listeners to make use of Christ's heavenly intercession because he understood its pastoral advantages in promoting faith and quietening anxiety.

Pastoral Situations in which Christ's Heavenly Intercession may be Used

We recall what Howie wrote of Durham, "he gave himself much to meditation, and usually said little to persons that came to propose their cases to him, but heard them patiently, and was sure to handle these cases in his sermons."[97] We call this "case-divinity" preaching. Durham was the consummate pastor-theologian who harnessed the theology of the doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ to the needs of his listeners. It reminds me of what my systematic theology professor once said to me in passing, "use every bit of theology you learn for the benefit of your people."[98]

Referring to Christ as intercessor, Durham wrote, "In this one word there is stored up a treasure of consolation, for all cases that a Christian can be in."[99] So eager was Durham to use this doctrine that his sermons in the latter section of *Christ Crucified* were packed with references to the pastoral benefits of Christ's

90. *Christ Crucified*, p. 773.
91. *Christ Crucified*, p. 774.
92. *Christ Crucified*, p. 775.
93. Concerning Christ's Intercession, in *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 389.
94. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 389.
95. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 389.
96. *Commentarie in Revelation*, p. 390.
97. Howie, p. 214.
98. Principal Donald Macleod, in private conversation.
99. *Christ Crucified*, p. 783.

heavenly intercession. In what follows, I purpose to draw attention to two of the sermons in which we find these references.

In sermon 68 of *Christ Crucified*, Durham referred to particular times and occasions when the people of God should use this doctrine for consolation and comfort. He listed four: in our languid and lifeless conditions, when challenges are very fresh, under a cross condition, and when we ourselves cannot intercede for ourselves. We shall consider the first and fourth use.

The first time and occasion when the people of God should use the doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession for consolation and comfort is in our languid and lifeless conditions. He referred to "when the body of death comes in on them … they ought to comfort themselves in this that they have an intercessor that can rebuke that; when temptation is violent and fears he be undone, he has a grip here to hold himself by … that man would be desperate if He were not in heaven and interceding, but he gathers confidence from this ground … a great consolation it is, when the temptation is strong and we weak, when the devil is violent and we are despairing to resist him, that there is a high priest at hand, whose office is to do it"[100] Because he knows that the heavenly Christ is interceding for him, that man is confident as he enters battle with temptation, that he is not fighting alone. Likewise, when a Christian is struggling with his spiritual apathy and lukewarmness, he may look to Christ's heavenly intercession as a warrant for his return and assurance that he shall be accepted.

The fourth time and occasion when the people of God should use the doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession for consolation and comfort is when we ourselves cannot intercede for ourselves. He wrote, "if on the account of Christ's intercession, a sigh, a groan, a broken word, nay, a breathing will be accepted; the intercessor has His own incense to perfume it with and it is accepted on the weight that it has from Him … He accepts the prayers of all saints, the weakest as well as the best; for the best goes not up but by His censer and incense and the weakest goes up the same way."[101] It is the fervour of Christ's intercession which is crucial because God hears us on account of the worth of Christ's intercession, not ours. Such consolation is unspeakably precious to the the believer struggling with acute problems which may render intelligible prayer virtually impossible. We may think here, for example, of Christians struggling with mental health challenges or with acute grief. In situations like these, a sigh, a groan or a broken word may be all one is capable of, and yet, Christ's intercession renders it entirely as acceptable to the Father as if one has the liberty of an angel in prayer.

In sermon 70 of *Christ Crucified*, Durham referred to special instances in which the believer is to make use of Christ's interceding for transgressors. He listed four examples: a believer in liberty or in bonds, when we aim to obtain anything or when we have obtained it, both in a most sad and in a most cheerful condition, and, when the believer is under challenges.

The first of these special instances in which the believer is to make use of Christ's heavenly intercession is when he is in liberty or in bonds. The liberty to which Durham referred corresponds to a believer who is thriving in his spiritual condition and receiving answers to his prayers. In such a situation, that believer must remember that first, the liveliness he is enjoying is by virtue of Christ's intercession; and secondly, that without Christ's intercession, his prayers are no more acceptable to God than if had no words to say at all. The bonds to which Durham referred correspond to a believer who is struggling to the extent that he cannot pray and "he scarce has a word to speak to God."[102] This believer must also make use of Christ's intercession lest he becomes weary in prayer, always remembering that "it is especially for such a time and case that He (Christ) is held forth as an intercessor."[103] In such a situation, the believer can rest quiet because it is the intercession of the Mediator which makes his prayer acceptable and we can expect a hearing on that account alone. Durham wrote, "Hence sometimes looks, sometimes thoughts, sometimes broken words and groans come up before God, are acceptable and get a return; the reason is because, through the intercession of the Mediator, the prayers of all saints are acceptable."[104] Likewise, when the believer in bonds lacks fervency in prayer, he looks to the intercession of Christ. He, "would have an eye to the efficacy of Christ's intercession, that is of continual vigour and efficacy, even when we are very dead, indisposed and lifeless."[105] How precious Durham's application is for Christians who struggle with mental health challenges, spiritual lukewarmness, and grief!

The second of these special instances in which the believer is to make use of Christ's heavenly intercession is when he aims to obtain anything or when he has

100. *Christ Crucified*, p. 763.
101. *Christ Crucified*, p. 764.
102. *Christ Crucified*, p. 779.
103. *Christ Crucified*, p. 779.
104. *Christ Crucified*, p. 780.
105. *Christ Crucified*, p. 780.

obtained it. With respect to the Christian who aims to obtain, Durham insists that our faith of obtaining must be founded upon Christ's intercession and not our own and that "our faith may be stayed and fixed on the expectation of the thing."[106] With respect to the Christian who has obtained that for which he has been praying, he must acknowledge himself to be in debt to Christ's intercession. Durham wrote, "this makes Christians to be humble when they have gotten anything and helps them to a sanctified use of the thing received."[107] This is an interesting application given that it extends the doctrine beyond the strict limits of prayer to the sanctified use of those things received through Christ's heavenly intercession. This speaks powerfully into a Western society where acquisition of possessions and status can become a snare. It reminds us that even our daily bread is God's gracious gift to us.

The third of these special instances in which the believer is to make use of Christ's heavenly intercession is when he is in a sad or a cheerful condition. By a sad condition, Durham spoke of spiritual sadness or a temporal outward disconsolate condition. He wrote, "when we make not use of His intercession in each as it occurs, either anxiety and discouragement grows or we turn to some unwarrantable and crooked means or way for an outgate [deliverance] from such a disconsolate condition."[108] In such a sad condition, the believer improves Christ's intercession in two ways. First, he understands that, however bitter the sadness, "Christ Jesus has the management of its case and cause."[109] Durham reasoned, "although I was unwatchful and this condition came on me unawares and I was surprised with it, yet it is not any surprise to Him. He was not sleeping though I was. He knew what was coming, though I knew not; therefore this will not hurt nor prejudge my main cause because it comes through his hand."[110] Secondly, when we remember that "there is a friend at the court of heaven who can order our cause and make such a thing work for our good."[111] If our situation is more cheerful, we make use of Christ's intercession by consciously attributing that cheerfulness to him. Durham wrote, "When He is depended upon for the continuance of it and when the praise of it is returned to Him, it sounds the heart that there is no access to grow carnal."[112] Would that Christians who find themselves in the position of King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:15–16)[113] take note of Durham's warning!

The fourth of these special instances in which the believer is to make use of Christ's heavenly intercession is when he is under challenges. Durham referred to an attitude of self-accusation. In such a situation, "put the libel in His hand to answer it, which is done by faith's resting on Him as a priest for the obtaining of an absolution from that charge, although we cannot answer it ourselves."[114] By contrast, when the believer is calm and tranquil, he must remember that "there cannot be a sanctified calmness, without depending on Him, by virtue of whose satisfaction and procurement we have it and by virtue of whose intercession it is continued."[115]

The pastoral skill of James Durham shines through all of these examples. Doubtless, if he had more time, he'd have set before his listeners many more occasions when the doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession would be invaluable to their spiritual health.

Contemporary Applications of Durham's Doctrine of the Heavenly Intercession of Christ

The doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ is clearly taught in Scripture (e.g. Hebrews 7:25). It is a vital part of Christ's office as priest, laid down as it was, in the covenant of redemption between Father and Son in the council of the Trinity. However, just because the doctrine is clearly taught in Scripture doesn't mean that it is easily visualised and understood. The same might be said of the doctrine of Christ's incarnation and satisfaction. There are depths in these doctrines which finite minds cannot grasp and yet of which may be confident enough to rest upon. Little wonder that Durham spoke of the doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession as "sublimely spiritual and somewhat tickle."[116]

Christ stands in heaven for us. His intercession is non-verbal. It consists in the application to us for all He made satisfaction. It is co-extensive with His satisfaction, both in its objects and blessings. There is no exact earthly corollary of the heavenly intercession of Christ and yet it should be understood and experienced as oath relates to promise. It reinforces the blessings of the satisfaction of Christ. Always remembering Durham's words, "In this

106. *Christ Crucified*, p. 781.
107. *Christ Crucified*, p. 781.
108. *Christ Crucified*, p. 781.
109. *Christ Crucified*, p. 782.
110. *Christ Crucified*, p. 782.
111. *Christ Crucified*, p. 782.
112. *Christ Crucified*, p. 782.
113. "And his fame spread far, for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God" (ESV).
114. *Christ Crucified*, p. 782.
115. *Christ Crucified*, p. 783.
116. *Christ Crucified*, p. 746.

one word there is stored up a treasure of consolation, for all cases that a Christian can be in,"[117] there are at least ten situations in which we, as today's pastor/preachers, may apply Durham's development of the doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ. All these applications may equally apply to the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, but we must remember that "the pouring out of the Spirit is a fruit of Christ's intercession."[118]

1. *Assurance to the Doubting.* Many Christians wrestle with the issue of forgiveness. Their past sins haunt them and although intellectually they may acknowledge that Christ has made atonement for them on the Cross, they do not experience the freedom of forgiveness. Such Christians acknowledge the truth of 1John 1:9,[119] but forget what follows in 1 John 2:2[120]. Durham wrote of Christians who feel that the list of their debts is long and large, "though the charge should be given in, what is the matter? There is a way to be freed of it; there is an advocate at the right hand of God in heaven, who became cautioner for and paid the elect's debt and is now interceding for them; and who can lose the case when He pleads it?"[121] Our present experience of forgiveness rests both on Christ's past satisfaction and Christ's present intercession. We must regularly remind ourselves and other Christians of the continuing high priestly work on our behalf. It will bring comfort and assurance of our forgiveness.

2. *Challenge to the Presumptuous*. Especially in the West, although they wouldn"t say it publicly, many prosperous Christians believe that they are 'self-made." Whether it is their health, wealth, status or some other measure, they presume that by their own efforts they have reached distinction. Such beliefs can often lead to spiritual pride and lukewarmness. Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ challenges that presumption by reminding them that they owe everything they have and are to the intercession of Christ. In line with what the apostle Paul tells us in 1Corinthians 4:7[122], Durham wrote, "these things wherein others grow carnal, such as health, strength … are thus made spiritually refreshing to the people of God, because there is an up taking (understanding) of them as coming through Christ's intercession and a returning of thanks to Him for them."[123] Far from being the occasion for spiritual pride, understanding that those things which tempt us to presumption come through Christ's intercession for us becomes the occasion of spiritual refreshment.

3. *Hope for the Despairing*—the more a Christian grows in his faith, the more his are grieved by how weak his resistance to temptation and how readily he fall into sin. This, in itself, is a healthy sign since the Holy Spirit, poured out upon us by virtue of Christ's heavenly intercession, continues to prosecute his work of conviction. However, Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession gives hope to the Christian despairing by his seeming lack of progress against temptation and sin. With regard to temptation, Durham wrote, "there are many temptations that He (Christ) keeps off that they beat not on us … what strength have weak and witless we to resist temptations? What could we do with the sheat (flood) of corruption when it rises like a flood upon … but there is an intercessor that pleads our cause."[124] Such knowledge of Christ's intercession on our behalf fosters hope. With regard to sin, Durham wrote, "His (Christ's) digging and pains .. makes the barren fig tree fruitful"[125], and, "His intercession is the last defence on which the triumph of faith rises."[126] The battle against sin will not be won without the knowledge and experience of Christ's heavenly intercession for us. Such gives hope to the Christian despairing of his lack of progress in holiness.

4. *Encouragement to the Desperate*—any diligent pastor will be aware of people in his congregation who have been praying for years for some special favour but are growing discouraged and desperate. It may be a parent praying for the conversion of a wayward child, or an elderly member praying for a reverse to the decline in numbers in the church, but they feel as if their prayers are not being heard or answered. The heavenly intercession of Christ does not guarantee that they will be answered according to what they are asking, but it does assure them that their prayers are being heard and that they should persevere. Durham wrote of the heavenly intercession of Christ that, "it quiets and fixes us in expecting of an answer".[127] The expectation of an answer is not the same thing as the expectation of the granting of the thing asked for, and yet, it relieves our anxious fears that we are not being heard, and it bestows upon us fresh diligence and perseverance in prayer.

117. *Christ Crucified*, p. 783.
118. *Christ Crucified*, p. 758.
119. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (ESV).
120. "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (ESV).
121. *Christ Crucified*, p. 764.
122. "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (ESV).
123. *Christ Crucified*, p. 782.
124. *Christ Crucified*, p. 758.
125. *Christ Crucified*, p. 758.
126. *Christ Crucified*, p. 759.
127. *Christ Crucified*, p. 781.

5. *Joy for the Depressed*—modern churches are full of Christians facing mental health challenges. Be it depression, anxiety, dementia or some other illness, concerning mental health challenges, the church all too often lags behind the medical world in addressing those who struggle in this way. Many Christians with mental health challenges find prayer an extremely difficult discipline in which to engage. By virtue of their illness, they struggle to verbalise their thoughts and, at times, are so taken up with their own mental pain that they have little energy left to think of anything else. This compounds their guilt and can contribute to a further deterioration in their mental health. Durham's presentation of the doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ is of unspeakable comfort to Christians struggling with mental health challenges. It is not the fervency or verbal quality of our prayers which render them acceptable to God, but the strength of Christ's heavenly intercession. Durham wrote, "if on the account of Christ's intercession, a sigh, a groan, a broken word, nay, a breathing will be accepted; the intercessor has his own incense to perfume it with and it is accepted on the weight that it has from Him … He accepts the prayers of all saints, the weakest as well as the best; for the best goes not up but by His censer and incense and the weakest goes up the same way."[128] Christians struggling with mental health challenges may be unable to verbalise their prayers, but they can sigh, groan and weep and by virtue of Christ's intercession, it is accepted. To explain that to such a Christian relieves their guilt and may lessen their mental pain. Likewise, the sympathy of the heavenly Christ towards the Christian struggling with depression and anxiety goes beyond any human comfort.

6. *Restoration for the Backslider*—every church is filled both with Christians who are growing in the faith, and with Christians who are either stagnant or backsliding. The latter is a cause of heartbreak for the pastor, especially when he sees those in whom he has invested much time, prayer and energy losing a grip on their faith. Backsliding is rarely due to theological difficulties. Rather, it is most often precipitated by moral pressures. Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ gives hope to heart-broken pastors, but perhaps more importantly, promises restoration to the backslider. No true believer wants to continue in sinful backsliding, but rather feels trapped by the choices they have made and unable to extricate themselves. Being assured that the heavenly Christ intercedes for them can provide them with both the willingness and ability to repent of their sinful lifestyle and return to a healthy faith. Nothing more (or less) is promised by Christ's intercession than was purchased by His satisfaction. Our perseverance in faith is a priceless purchase of the Cross and is therefore the subject of Christ's intercessory work in heaven. It is one thing for the backslider, upon meeting a church member in the street, to hear them saying, "I am praying for your restoration". It is an altogether more powerful thing to know that the heavenly Christ is interceding for them. Likewise, concerning the sympathy of Christ, Durham wrote, "O What a Wonder is this, the more Sin, the more Sympathy! Which ought to make Believers humble, and yet exceedingly to Comfort them under a sinful Condition … Christ's Intercession is suited unto, appointed, and designed for Sinners."[129]

7. *Confidence for the Church*—the normal experience for many churches in the West is decline. The preaching of the Word often lacks the unction of the Spirit and the mission of the church yields little results. In Great Britain there is a huge lack of young men offering themselves for the work of the ministry. The church is under attack from secularism and false teaching such that Evangelicalism has almost become a meaningless term. Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ is an unspeakable comfort to the church. Much of what Durham wrote of individual Christians can be applied to the church at large. Yet, for each of our concerns, Durham had an answer. For example, concerning the scarcity of men for the ministry, building upon relevant biblical texts, Durham wrote, "our Lord has … poured out such gifts on the apostles and others … what gifts He pleases and sees needful for the church's edification. And that He gives such gifts to men … whence it is, but from His intercession?"[130] Again, concerning the opposition faced by the church we remember Durham's words, "here the consolation lies, that there is a court in heaven that gives out orders, where the church has an agent constantly lying (standing) where the devil and the world has none: Jesus Christ is the church's agent and intercessor there."[131] Christ interceding in heaven for his church gives preacher and people confidence in mission and ministry. He who intercedes for them is greater than those who oppose them.

8. *Heavenly Mindedness for the Carnal*—by far the majority of evangelical preaching is focused upon the past work of Christ (e.g. incarnation, satisfaction) and the future work of Christ (e.g. glorification), but not His present work. Unless the present work of Christ is

128. *Christ Crucified*, p. 764.
129. *Commentarie on Revelation*, p. 388.
130. *Christ Crucified*, p. 761.
131. *Christ Crucified*, p. 762.

emphasized, the pastor may find his people conceive of their faith in abstract terms. Encouraged also by a materialistic worldview, this can form a certain kind of carnality within the Christian whereby they forget the great truths of Colossians 3:1–3[132]. They lose their heavenly-mindedness. Durham's presentation of the heavenly intercession of Christ acts as a preventative to this form of carnality. Christ is at work in the present for the believer. He is our great high priest by whose present intercession on our behalf we are kept from many evils and preserved until He comes again. Although it cannot be pictured, the believer is to grasp the reality of the heavenly Christ standing at the right hand of God interceding that all the benefits and blessings purchased at the Cross may be applied to us in our daily lives. Without losing our focus on the past and present work of Christ, if the preacher wants to prevent his people from this form of carnality, he must regularly remind them of the present intercessory work of Christ on their behalf.

9. *Understanding for the Confused*—many Christians are confused by the Levitical regulations and ceremonies of the Old Testament. They wrestle with the sacrificial system and the precision with which the priests activity is ordered. Their confusion is compounded when they try to interpret the priestly references in the Book of Hebrews. They fail to understand that the satisfaction and intercession of Christ is the archetype all these Levitical regulations and ceremonies of the Old Testament prefigure. Durham's doctrine clears the confusion. The Levitical regulations and ceremonies were by "God's appointment, typically to prefigure our Lord's intercession in heaven."[133] For the pastor/preacher who is concerned by his people's confusion, Durham's advice would be to begin with the archetype and work back to the prefigurements, and only then to allow the prefigurements to shed deeper light upon the archetype. There is no gospel in Christ-less regulations, sacrifices and ceremonies; but when read through the lens of the satisfaction and intercession of Christ, they come alive and rather than causing confusion, and they then expand the believer's praise of his great high priest.

10. *Expectation for the Exhausted*—many pastors will have heard a dying member of the congregation whisper into their ear, "I"m exhausted. I just want to go home". These precious believers have experienced enough of this world's tears and long for the peace of Christ's closer presence in heaven. Durham's doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ soothes their exhaustion and replaces it with expectation. He wrote, "He (Christ) will not leave a tear on the cheek of any of His own, ere all be done … He who who has begun the work will perfect it; and He will not leave it till it be at such a height of perfection as it can be desired to be at no higher."[134] Such is the sympathy of the heavenly Christ for us, and such is the work of his interceding grace, that ere all is done, all our tears shall be gone and we shall enjoy the highest of perfection.

There are potentially as many contemporary applications of Durham's doctrine of Christ's intercession as there are of His satisfaction, and perhaps also, given that the fruit of Christ's intercessory work is the pouring of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Spirit. But this is a seam which, by study, mediation and prayer, each pastor must work out for himself.

A Short Word On "Case-Divinity" Preaching

"Case-divinity" preaching, such as Durham modelled during his ministry, is deeply pastoral and somewhat counter-cultural in today's church. It requires a level of engagement with listeners which goes beyond the normal pastoral practice. Many preachers choose their texts based upon personal interest, time-constraint or sequential ordering. In the Reformed church, consecutive exposition of Bible books is probably the most common practice. From time to time, the preacher may ask his listeners whether there are topics, books or figures about which they would like him to preach. But "case-divinity" is none of the above (although to be fair, in *Christ Crucified*, Durham approached the doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ in a consecutive exposition of Isaiah 53).

The origin of "case-divinity" is not the preacher's study, but his listeners' firesides. In the course of his multiple pastoral visitations, he engages in spiritual conversations which uncover the issues they are facing. He may discover that they wrestle with the experience of forgiveness, that they are struggling with unanswered prayer or that they are backsliding. Through his interactions with them, he realizes that their deepest need is somewhat different from his personal desire to preach his way through the life of Abraham or commence a verse-by-verse exposition of the Book of Ezekiel. He knows that they need to be gently led back to the Cross and Christ's work of satisfaction. He knows his people well enough to discriminate between what they

132. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (ESV).
133. *Christ Crucified*, p. 776.
134. *Christ Crucified*, p. 755.

want to hear and what they need to hear, between what he wants to preach and what they need him to preach.

It is clear that Durham was a conscientious, diligent and meditative pastor. He knew that he had to go deeper than each individual issue he faced in his pastoral visitation; that rather than stopping up the waters of each individual stream, he must find their spring and stop it up instead. In the doctrine of the heavenly intercession of Christ he found the answer to the multiple pastoral needs of his people. Rather than dealing merely with the symptoms of their illness, he dealt with its cause. In so doing, he provides a model for us as pastor/preachers. Do not merely deal with the symptoms of pastoral need, deal with their cause. Do not merely stop the waters of each individual stream, find their spring and stop it up instead. Through meditation, prayer and study, we are to gently lead our listeners to the Cross and Christ's work of satisfaction.

In our case, it may not be preaching through and applying the heavenly intercession of Christ. It may be a different doctrine (or book or life-study) we choose to preach: e.g. adoption, incarnation, eschatology. But rather than begin with our preferences, we begin with the deepest needs of our listeners. If we deal with the cause, their symptoms will lessen and may disappear. If we stop up the spring, the streams will dry up. Throughout our ministries, there will doubtless be many springs which need to be stopped up, but the conscientious, diligent and meditative pastor will, for the sake of Christ and his people, devote himself to that task.

Conclusion

James Durham died young, but in his few years he achieved much. From a uniquely Scottish perspective, he explored the high priestly work of Christ from the perspective of the covenant of redemption. Having firmly established its Scriptural basis, avoiding the hazard of over-speculating, Durham laid the groundwork for pastoral applications of the heavenly intercession of Christ which, to this day, have never been built upon by any other Scottish theologian. This is a pity given that, in Durham's words, "there is no piece of the fulness of our blessed Lord Jesus that is more rich in consolation than His intercession, and yet it is suffered to lie beside even the Believer, not being emproven to the excellent use which doth flow from it."[135] If all this paper achieves is to whet the appetite of a superior Scottish theologian than the author to build on Durham's foundation, it will have achieved its purpose.▪

135. *Commentarie on Revelation*, p. 350.

***In Brief*: "Your Sins Do Not Surprise God." From *Collected Sermons of James Durham: Seventy-Two Sermons on Isaiah 53* (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), Sermon 26 on Isaiah 53:6, pp. 339–340.**

Doctrine Four. Considering our sinful way as the occasion of this transaction and of the laying of our iniquities upon Christ as the result of it, we have this sweet observation: T*hat the elect are considered in the covenant of redemption as foully and vilely sinful and with all the aggravations of their sins and sinful ways; so that they cannot be fouler and more vile in time than they were considered to be, when they were given to Christ to be satisfied for by Him*. How were they then considered? The text tells us, even as *straying sheep*. But that is not all; they are considered as such who have had their own peculiar way of straying from God and have *turned* aside to and run on in their *own* sinful *way*. Thus the Lord considered the elect in the covenant of redemption, thus Jesus Christ considered them in the undertaking for them, even with all the several aggravations of their sinfulness. So that they are not, nor cannot be worse in time than they were considered to be before time. This is so ordered by the Lord, for these ends…:

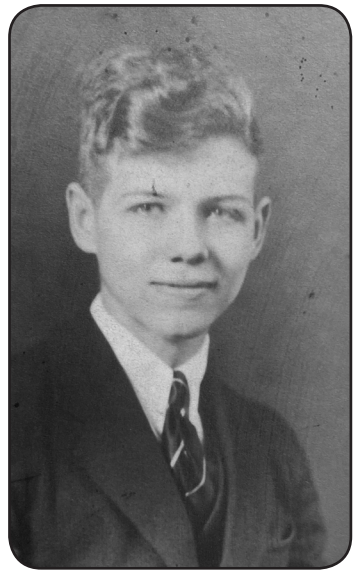
(3) It is also ordered so for this end, even to confirm the believer's faith when he comes to take hold of Christ and of the covenant. And when this objection mutters within him, "dare such a sinful wretch as I take hold of Christ, who have been thus and thus polluted with sin?" 'Yes,' says the text, for these sins, so and so aggravated, were not unknown to the Father, nor to the Mediator, when you were bargained about. Nay, these sins, with their aggravations, were expressly considered in the covenant of redemption, and there is no sin already committed or to be committed by you in time that was not considered before time. What was your posture, believers, when God "passed by, and cast the lap or skirt of his love over you?" Were you not "cast out in the open field … etc. (Ezek. 16:4–6). And wherefore, I pray, is this set down? But as to let you know that you are no worse in time than you were considered to be before you had a being; so to aggregge the love and grace of God in Christ and to draw you in to Him, that since God and Christ the Mediator in the transaction about your redemption, stood not on your sinfulness, you may not stand on it, when seriously taken with, but may submit to His righteousness and say, "be it so, Lord, I am content to take what thou freely offerest." And the more sinful and lost you be in yourselves, when suitably affected therewith, the more wonderful is the grace of God in the plot of your redemption, the more strong is your consolation and the greater ground of believing have you. Your sins do not surprise God, nor the Mediator; the bargain was made before your sins were committed and therefore the price must reach them, even when they are all summed up together.▪

Who Was William Young?
And What Did He Do for the Presbyterian Church

By Robert McInnes

William Young, a native of Brooklyn, New York, was born to William Young, Senior and Miriam Combs Barrus Young on May 9, 1918. William Young, Senior was a US Navy veteran and Miriam was a homemaker. William Young, Junior was the eldest of four children, having had two sisters—Elizabeth "Tootie" Young Cicero, Miriam Young, and a brother—Robert.

Growing up in Brooklyn, he matriculated through the New York public school system. He attended and graduated from John Adams High School, where he excelled academically.



William Young, ca. 1933. William Young collection, PP023.020

Beginning on August 13, 1932, when Young was only fourteen years old, he began keeping a journal in which he recorded his thoughts on religion to the exclusion of almost any other subject. In his opening remarks Young wrote:

> With God there is no sadness. The only true consolation for our so-called griefs is found in the word of God. How wonderful it would be if each one of us could say as Christ said "I have overcome the world." To overcome the world ought to be the height of every man's and woman's ambition. Then there can be no misery but only joy in the truth of Christ.

Some of his journal entries suggest that, like Martin Luther, he was pre-occupied with his own sense of guilt—feeling entrapped in sin. On October 27, 1932, Young wrote, "I have gone through the most horrible and greatest experience of my life. I have repented of my sin. I have at last come to my Lord and master, never, no never to depart from him." On November 12, he wrote, "I am an evil sinner. God, as a true father, gave me all the blessings of his truth, life, and love. I sinned and departed from him. May he be merciful to me." Later, he wrote, "I have broken the least commandment of Christ and I realize that I am least in the Kingdom of heaven."

On November 19, 1932, Young wrote: "From this moment I shall follow Christ, my savior. He is with me and is ready to guide me along the strait [sic] and narrow path that leads to eternal life. He is the Truth." Comments like these appear throughout his journal, showing him to be a youth of extraordinary depth in matters of spirituality. Nearly all his comments concerned the

The Author: Robert A. McInnes is the Research and Archives Services Librarian at Westminster Theological Seminary, in Glenside, Pennsylvania. Mr. McInnes has worked as an archivist and special collections librarian since 1987, having worked for such institutions as the Virginia Historical Society, the Kansas State Historical Society, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Charlotte Christian College and Theological Seminary. This article is a natural outgrowth of his work on the William Young papers, Manuscript Collection 023, in 2018.

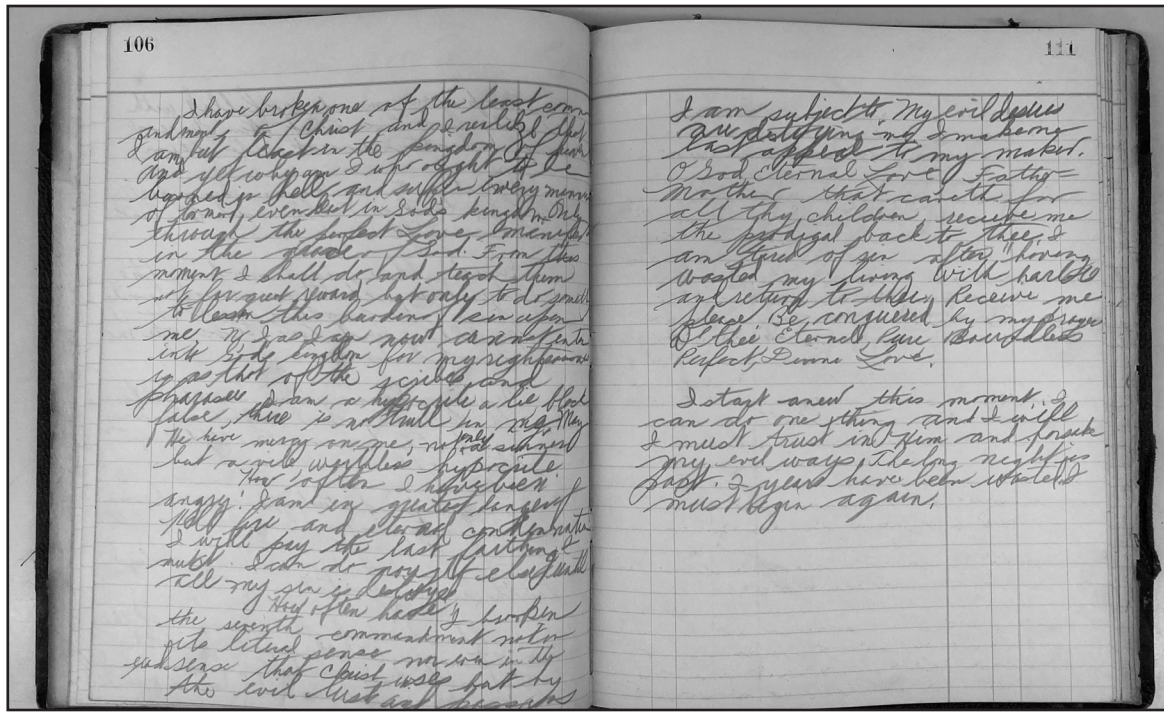


William Young, passport photograph(?), ca. 1960, The William Young collection, PP. 023.031.

seriousness of sin and the consequences of a condemned life without divine forgiveness.

Young's career in higher education

Following his years in secondary education Young first matriculated through Columbia University in his native New York City. A letter from Frank H. Bowles, Acting Director of Admissions of Columbia, dated July 11, 1934, informed Young of his acceptance at this Ivy League school. Later correspondence indicates that, as a graduate of a public high school in New York City, Young was eligible for (and received) a Pulitzer Free Scholarship to fund his entire under-graduate education, which he started in the fall of 1934. The curriculum that he



William Young's journal. Westminster Theological Seminary, Montgomery Library, The William Young collection, 023-09-45.

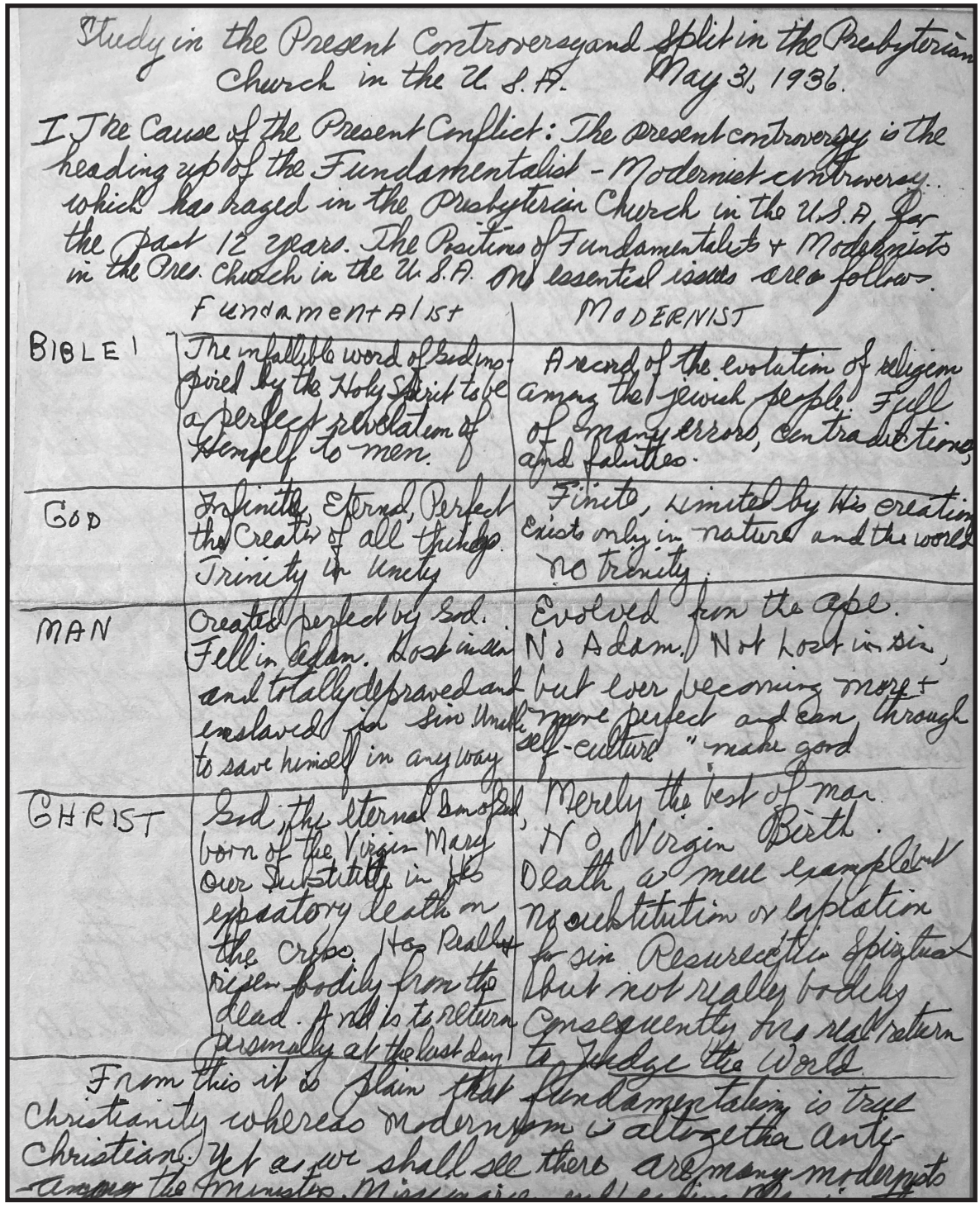
pursued was a liberal arts education, as his collected papers indicate that he took coursework in astronomy, English, French, geometry, German, Greek, Greek classics, history, hygiene, logic, Latin, mathematics, music, philosophy, and psychology. Young graduated from Columbia in June of 1938, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree, with honors in Greek, Latin and philosophy.

In extra-curricular activities, *The Columbian* annual yearbook cites that Young was the President of the Columbia Chapter of the League of Evangelical Students, an organization that was founded in 1925. Young's collected papers contain two folders of material generated as the result of his involvement with the LES, and these include a wide variety of materials, such as correspondence, brochures, and tracts, as well as papers concerning the organization of conferences, programs and summer camps for LES members.

Some of the brochures in these files pertain to the conflict between Modernists and Fundamentalists among Christians. At least as early as 1937, Young was well-informed about the growing rift between these two factions that were dividing Christians in America.

An item of singular importance found in Young's collected papers are four pages of notes, handwritten, front-and-back on two sheets, on which Young outlined the historical background of the division that was then taking place between conservative Fundamentalists and a new cadre of liberal "Modernists" within the PCUSA. Young compiled these notes on May 31, 1936, when he was mid-way through his matriculation at Columbia University. These notes indicate that he was thoroughly knowledgeable of this growing schism that was taking place. In addition, he leaves no question as to his position on the issue—he entirely sided with the Fundamentalists and considered the Modernists to be (at best) apostates. A scan of the first page of Young's notes appear on the next page.

Young started corresponding with officials at Westminster Theological Seminary as early as 1935. He seems to have developed an interest in this institution, as he followed the conflict between Modernists and Fundamentalists within the PCUSA. Also apparent is Young's growing admiration for Dr. J. Gresham Machen, the leading founder of this new seminary. Young's collected papers contain correspondence not only with Dr. Machen, but also with Paul Woolley and Cornelius Van Til—two other prominent officials and professors at WTS. This correspondence indicates that Young was interested in acquiring brochures, booklets and pamphlets written by Machen. These included The Attack Upon Princeton Seminary: a Plea for Fair Play, and Modernism and the



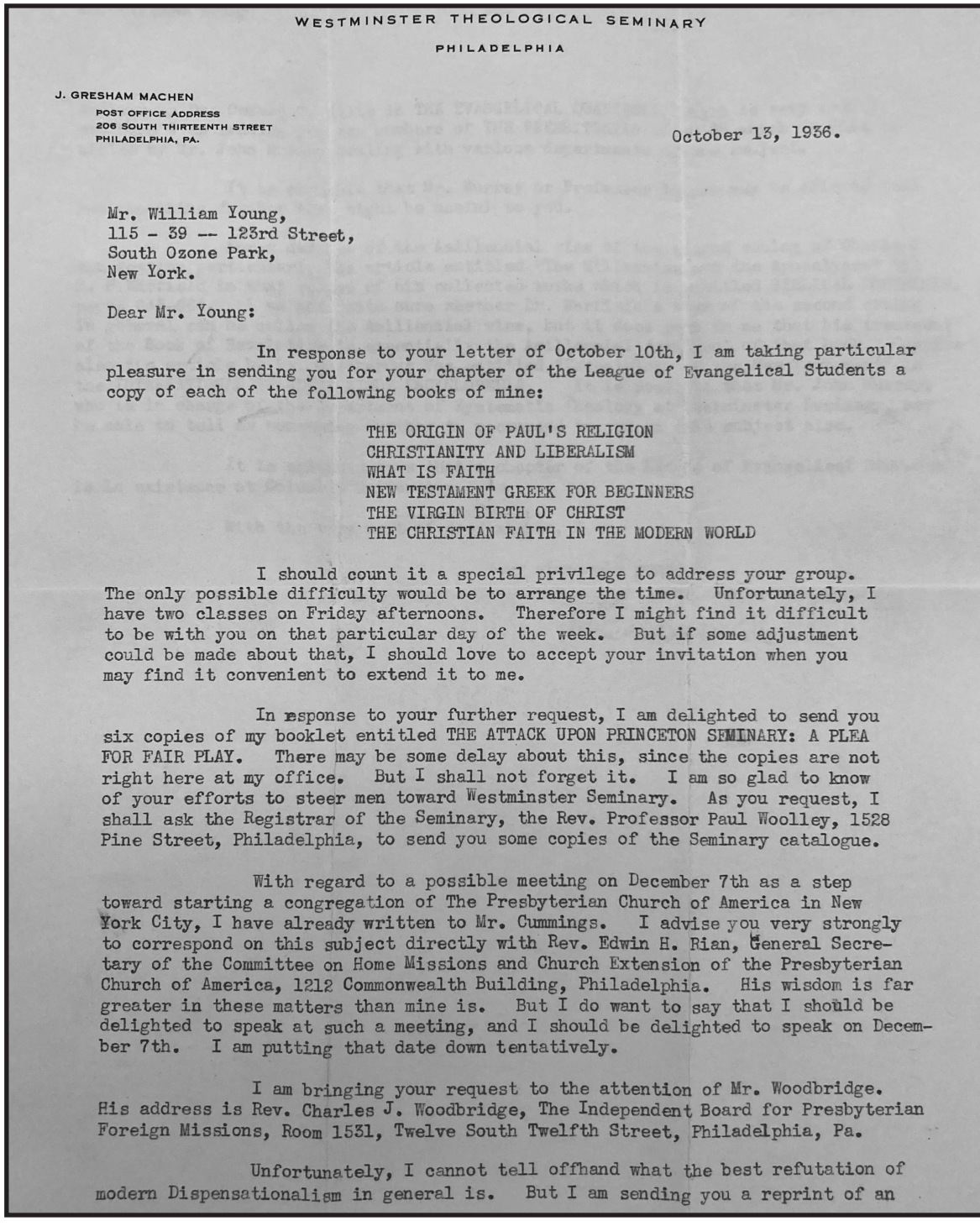
Study in the Present Controversy and Split in the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. May 31, 1936.

I. The Cause of the Present Conflict: The present controversy is the heading up of the Fundamentalist - Modernist controversy which has raged in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. for the past 12 years. The Positions of Fundamentalists + Modernists in the Pres. Church in the U. S. A. on essential issues are as follows.

	FUNDAMENTALIST	MODERNIST
BIBLE	The infallible word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit to be a perfect revelation of Himself to men.	A record of the evolution of religion among the Jewish people. Full of many errors, contradictions and falsities.
GOD	Infinite, Eternal, Perfect the Creator of all things. Trinity in Unity	Finite, limited by his creation exists only in nature and the world. No trinity.
MAN	Created perfect by God. Fell in Adam. Lost in sin and totally depraved and enslaved to sin. Unable to save himself in any way	Evolved from the ape. No Adam. Not lost in sin, but ever becoming more + more perfect and can through self-culture "make good"
CHRIST	God, the eternal Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. Our substitute in His expiatory death on the Cross. Has Really risen bodily from the dead. And is to return personally at the last day	Merely the best of man. No Virgin Birth. Death as mere example. No substitution or expiation for sin. Resurrection Spiritual but not really bodily. Consequently no real return to Judge the World.

From this it is plain that Fundamentalism is true Christianity whereas Modernism is altogether anti-Christian. Yet as we shall see there are many modernists among the Ministers. Missionaries [illegible]

Study in the Present Controversial Split in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. May 31, 1936. William Young's journal. Westminster Theological Seminary, Montgomery Library, The William Young collection, 023-12-07.



WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PHILADELPHIA

J. GRESHAM MACHEN
POST OFFICE ADDRESS
206 SOUTH THIRTEENTH STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

October 13, 1936.

Mr. William Young,
115 - 39 -- 123rd Street,
South Ozone Park,
New York.

Dear Mr. Young:

In response to your letter of October 10th, I am taking particular pleasure in sending you for your chapter of the League of Evangelical Students a copy of each of the following books of mine:

THE ORIGIN OF PAUL'S RELIGION
CHRISTIANITY AND LIBERALISM
WHAT IS FAITH
NEW TESTAMENT GREEK FOR BEGINNERS
THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST
THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE MODERN WORLD

I should count it a special privilege to address your group. The only possible difficulty would be to arrange the time. Unfortunately, I have two classes on Friday afternoons. Therefore I might find it difficult to be with you on that particular day of the week. But if some adjustment could be made about that, I should love to accept your invitation when you may find it convenient to extend it to me.

In response to your further request, I am delighted to send you six copies of my booklet entitled THE ATTACK UPON PRINCETON SEMINARY: A PLEA FOR FAIR PLAY. There may be some delay about this, since the copies are not right here at my office. But I shall not forget it. I am so glad to know of your efforts to steer men toward Westminster Seminary. As you request, I shall ask the Registrar of the Seminary, the Rev. Professor Paul Woolley, 1528 Pine Street, Philadelphia, to send you some copies of the Seminary catalogue.

With regard to a possible meeting on December 7th as a step toward starting a congregation of The Presbyterian Church of America in New York City, I have already written to Mr. Cummings. I advise you very strongly to correspond on this subject directly with Rev. Edwin H. Rian, General Secretary of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Presbyterian Church of America, 1212 Commonwealth Building, Philadelphia. His wisdom is far greater in these matters than mine is. But I do want to say that I should be delighted to speak at such a meeting, and I should be delighted to speak on December 7th. I am putting that date down tentatively.

I am bringing your request to the attention of Mr. Woodbridge. His address is Rev. Charles J. Woodbridge, The Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, Room 1531, Twelve South Twelfth Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Unfortunately, I cannot tell offhand what the best refutation of modern Dispensationalism in general is. But I am sending you a reprint of an

Letter from William Young to Dr. J. Gresham Machen, October 15, 1936.

Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, as well as other printed materials that concerned Presbyterian polity. Shown here is a letter from Dr. Machen to Young, dated October 13, 1936, about two and a half months before Machen's death, on January 1, 1937.[1]

1. William Young collection, 023-03-05.

In addition to his correspondence with Young, Machen also sent brochures and printed sermons —these being *The Separateness of the Church* (1925), *The Parting of the Ways* (ca. 1925), and *Fight the Good Fight* (1929). In each of these writings, Machen always wrote his refrain about the essential importance of maintaining a Christian doctrine that is faithful and true to the Holy Scriptures, and even breaking away from churches or seminaries that are not dedicated to this faithfulness.

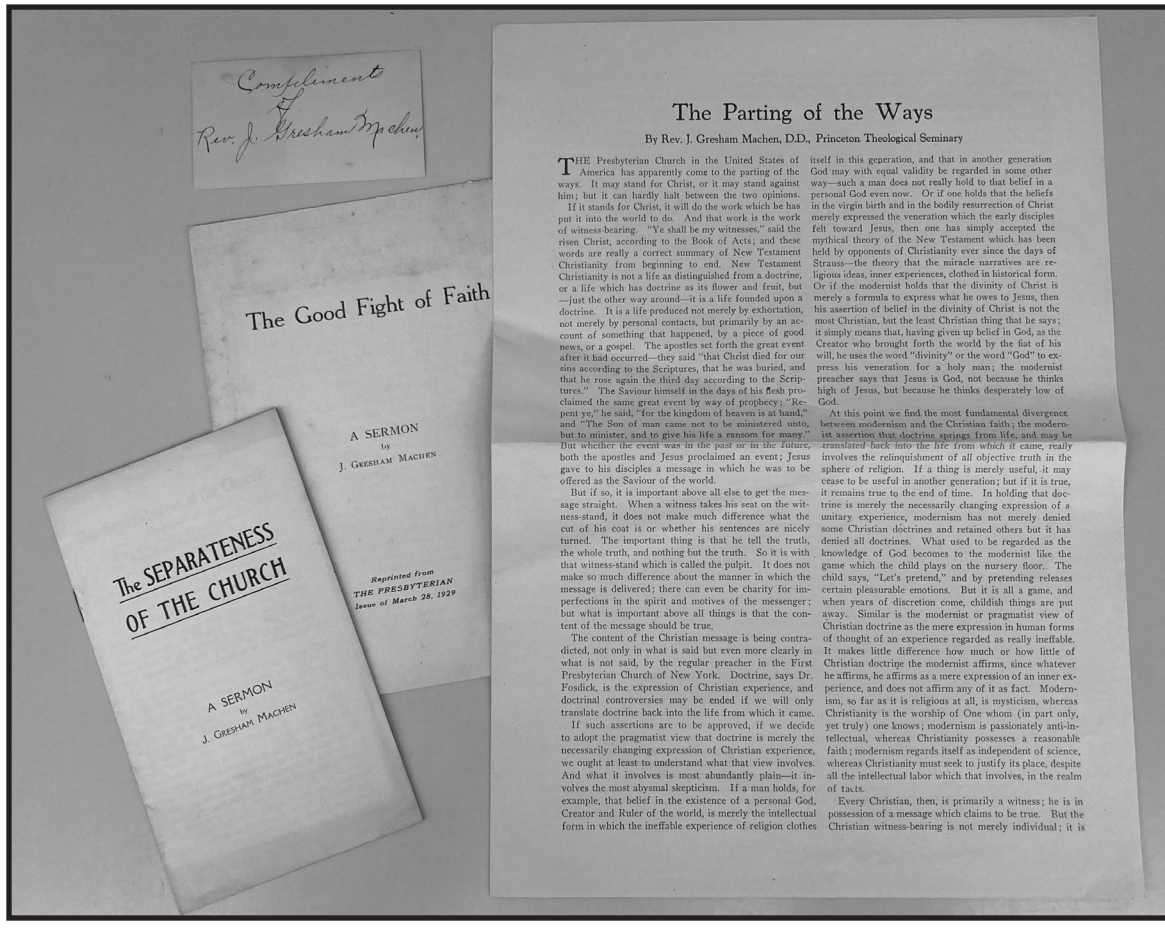
As an enthusiastic and committed Christian, Young felt called to ministry, and with opinions like his, it is only natural that Young should apply for admission to WTS within a few years' time.

Though Young's correspondence with officials at WTS during a time that transcended the death of Machen, nothing in the Young papers tell us how Machen's death affected him—though it must have weighed heavily on his heart.

Following his graduation from Columbia in 1938, Young moved to Philadelphia to begin his matriculation at WTS. Young's studies there were comprehensive in scope, and it seems that he obtained an outstanding education during his time there. Young received his Th.B. and Th.M. degree from WTS in 1941. His diploma is pictured on the facing page.

An event of major importance to Young's life and career during his time at UTS was his ordination in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church—a milestone that took place on October 8, 1942. The OPC Presbytery of New York and New England conducted a special meeting to discuss Young's candidacy for ordination, as well as an ordination service for him. The scanned minutes of the Presbytery meeting, shown here, indicate that Mr. John Rankin, Dr. John Murray, Mr. John Skilton, Mr. Bruce Coie, Dr. Edmund Clowney, Ruling Elder Robert Wallace, and Mr. David Freeman participated in Young's ordination service. The minutes of this presbytery meeting are pictured here.

Following his graduation from WTS, Young returned to the city of his birth to pursue a ThD degree from


Compliments of
Rev. J. Gresham Machen

The Good Fight of Faith

A SERMON
by
J. GRESHAM MACHEN

The SEPARATENESS OF THE CHURCH

A SERMON
by
J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Reprinted from
THE PRESBYTERIAN
Issue of March 28, 1929

The Parting of the Ways

By Rev. J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Princeton Theological Seminary

THE Presbyterian Church in the United States of America has apparently come to the parting of the ways. It may stand for Christ, or it may stand against him; but it can hardly halt between the two opinions.

If it stands for Christ, it will do the work which he has put it into the world to do. And that work is the work of witness-bearing. "Ye shall be my witnesses," said the risen Christ, according to the Book of Acts; and these words are really a correct summary of New Testament Christianity from beginning to end. New Testament Christianity is not a life as distinguished from a doctrine, or a life which has doctrine as its flower and fruit, but —just the other way around—it is a life founded upon a doctrine. It is a life produced not merely by exhortation, not merely by personal contacts, but primarily by an account of something that happened, by a piece of good news, or a gospel. The apostles set forth the great event after it had occurred—they said "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." The Saviour himself in the days of his flesh proclaimed the same great event by way of prophecy; "Repent ye," he said, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." But whether the event was in the past or in the future, both the apostles and Jesus proclaimed an event; Jesus gave to his disciples a message in which he was to be offered as the Saviour of the world.

But if so, it is important above all else to get the message straight. When a witness takes his seat on the witness-stand, it does not make much difference what the cut of his coat is or whether his sentences are nicely turned. The important thing is that he tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So it is with that witness-stand which is called the pulpit. It does not make so much difference about the manner in which the message is delivered; there can even be charity for imperfections in the spirit and motives of the messenger; but what is important above all things is that the content of the message should be true.

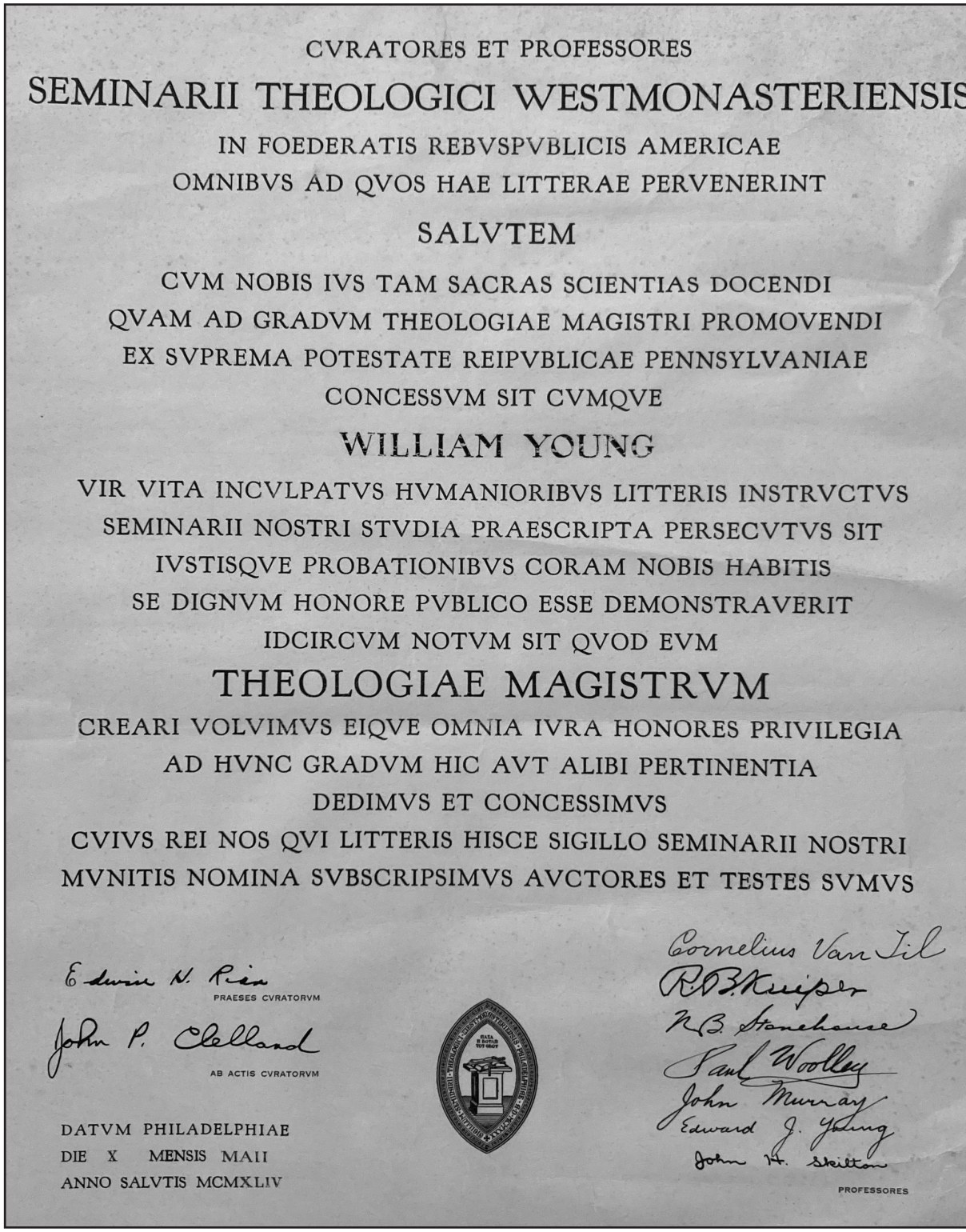
The content of the Christian message is being contradicted, not only in what is said but even more clearly in what is not said, by the regular preacher in the First Presbyterian Church of New York. Doctrine, says Dr. Fosdick, is the expression of Christian experience, and doctrinal controversies may be ended if we will only translate doctrine back into the life from which it came.

If such assertions are to be approved, if we decide to adopt the pragmatist view that doctrine is merely the necessarily changing expression of Christian experience, we ought at least to understand what that view involves. And what it involves is most abundantly plain—it involves the most abysmal skepticism. If a man holds, for example, that belief in the existence of a personal God, Creator and Ruler of the world, is merely the intellectual form in which the ineffable experience of religion clothes itself in this generation, and that in another generation God may with equal validity be regarded in some other way—such a man does not really hold to that belief in a personal God even now. Or if one holds that the beliefs in the virgin birth and in the bodily resurrection of Christ merely expressed the veneration which the early disciples felt toward Jesus, then one has simply accepted the mythical theory of the New Testament which has been held by opponents of Christianity ever since the days of Strauss—the theory that the miracle narratives are religious ideas, inner experiences, clothed in historical form. Or if the modernist holds that the divinity of Christ is merely a formula to express what he owes to Jesus, then his assertion of belief in the divinity of Christ is not the most Christian, but the least Christian thing that he says; it simply means that, having given up belief in God, as the Creator who brought forth the world by the fiat of his will, he uses the word "divinity" or the word "God" to express his veneration for a holy man; the modernist preacher says that Jesus is God, not because he thinks high of Jesus, but because he thinks desperately low of God.

At this point we find the most fundamental divergence between modernism and the Christian faith; the modernist assertion that doctrine springs from life, and may be translated back into the life from which it came, really involves the relinquishment of all objective truth in the sphere of religion. If a thing is merely useful, it may cease to be useful in another generation; but if it is true, it remains true to the end of time. In holding that doctrine is merely the necessarily changing expression of a unitary experience, modernism has not merely denied some Christian doctrines and retained others but it has denied all doctrines. What used to be regarded as the knowledge of God becomes to the modernist like the game which the child plays on the nursery floor. The child says, "Let's pretend," and by pretending releases certain pleasurable emotions. But it is all a game, and when years of discretion come, childish things are put away. Similar is the modernist or pragmatist view of Christian doctrine as the mere expression in human forms of thought of an experience regarded as really ineffable. It makes little difference how much or how little of Christian doctrine the modernist affirms, since whatever he affirms, he affirms as a mere expression of an inner experience, and does not affirm any of it as fact. Modernism, so far as it is religious at all, is mysticism, whereas Christianity is the worship of One whom (in part only, yet truly) one knows; modernism is passionately anti-intellectual, whereas Christianity possesses a reasonable faith; modernism regards itself as independent of science, whereas Christianity must seek to justify its place, despite all the intellectual labor which that involves, in the realm of facts.

Every Christian, then, is primarily a witness; he is in possession of a message which claims to be true. But the Christian witness-bearing is not merely individual; it is

Materials sent from Dr. J. Gresham Machen, William Young collection, 023-14-33.



CVRATORES ET PROFESSORES
SEMINARII THEOLOGICI WESTMONASTERIENSIS
IN FOEDERATIS REBVSPVBLICIS AMERICAE
OMNIBVS AD QVOS HAE LITTERAE PERVENERINT
SALVTEM
CVM NOBIS IVS TAM SACRAS SCIENTIAS DOCENDI
QVAM AD GRADVM THEOLOGIAE MAGISTRI PROMOVENDI
EX SVPREMA POTESTATE REIPVBLICAE PENNSYLVANIAE
CONCESSVM SIT CVMQVE
WILLIAM YOUNG
VIR VITA INCVLPATVS HVMANIORIBVS LITTERIS INSTRVCTVS
SEMINARII NOSTRI STVDIA PRAESCRIPTA PERSECVTVS SIT
IVSTISQVE PROBATIONIBVS CORAM NOBIS HABITIS
SE DIGNVM HONORE PVBLICO ESSE DEMONSTRAVERIT
IDCIRCVM NOTVM SIT QVOD EVM
THEOLOGIAE MAGISTRVM
CREARI VOLVIMVS EIQVE OMNIA IVRA HONORES PRIVILEGIA
AD HVNC GRADVM HIC AVT ALIBI PERTINENTIA
DEDIMVS ET CONCESSIMVS
CVIVS REI NOS QVI LITTERIS HISCE SIGILLO SEMINARII NOSTRI
MVNITIS NOMINA SVBSCRIPSIMVS AVCTORES ET TESTES SVMVS

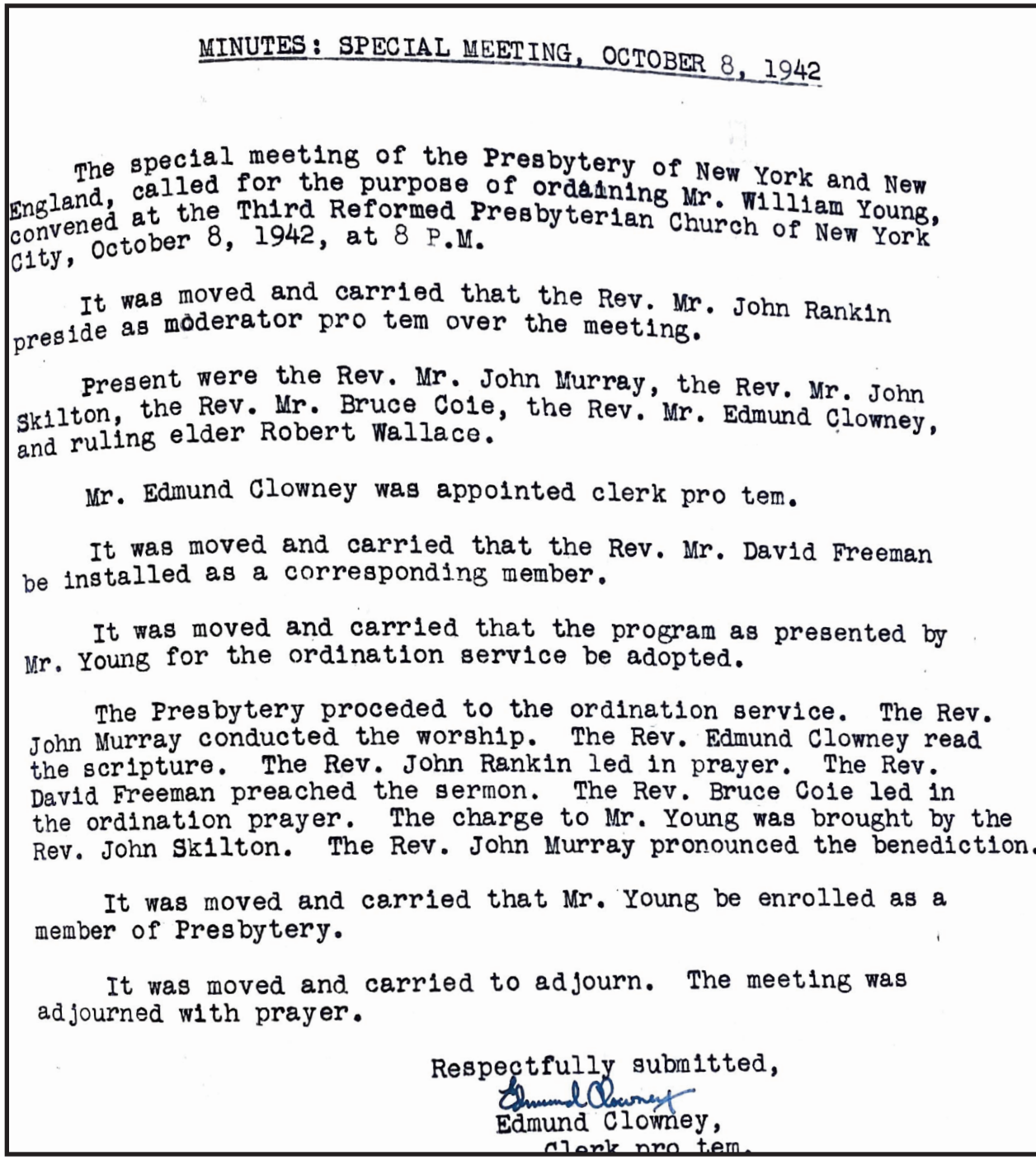
Edwin H. Rian
PRAESES CVRATORVM

John P. Clelland
AB ACTIS CVRATORVM

DATVM PHILADELPHIAE
DIE X MENSIS MAII
ANNO SALVTIS MCMXLIV

Cornelius Van Til
R. B. Kuiper
N. B. Stonehouse
Paul Woolley
John Murray
Edward J. Young
John H. Skilton
PROFESSORES

Diploma of William Young, William Young collection, 023-03-05 through 023-04-29.



MINUTES: SPECIAL MEETING, OCTOBER 8, 1942

The special meeting of the Presbytery of New York and New England, called for the purpose of ordaining Mr. William Young, convened at the Third Reformed Presbyterian Church of New York City, October 8, 1942, at 8 P.M.

It was moved and carried that the Rev. Mr. John Rankin preside as moderator pro tem over the meeting.

Present were the Rev. Mr. John Murray, the Rev. Mr. John Skilton, the Rev. Mr. Bruce Coie, the Rev. Mr. Edmund Clowney, and ruling elder Robert Wallace.

Mr. Edmund Clowney was appointed clerk pro tem.

It was moved and carried that the Rev. Mr. David Freeman be installed as a corresponding member.

It was moved and carried that the program as presented by Mr. Young for the ordination service be adopted.

The Presbytery proceeded to the ordination service. The Rev. John Murray conducted the worship. The Rev. Edmund Clowney read the scripture. The Rev. John Rankin led in prayer. The Rev. David Freeman preached the sermon. The Rev. Bruce Coie led in the ordination prayer. The charge to Mr. Young was brought by the Rev. John Skilton. The Rev. John Murray pronounced the benediction.

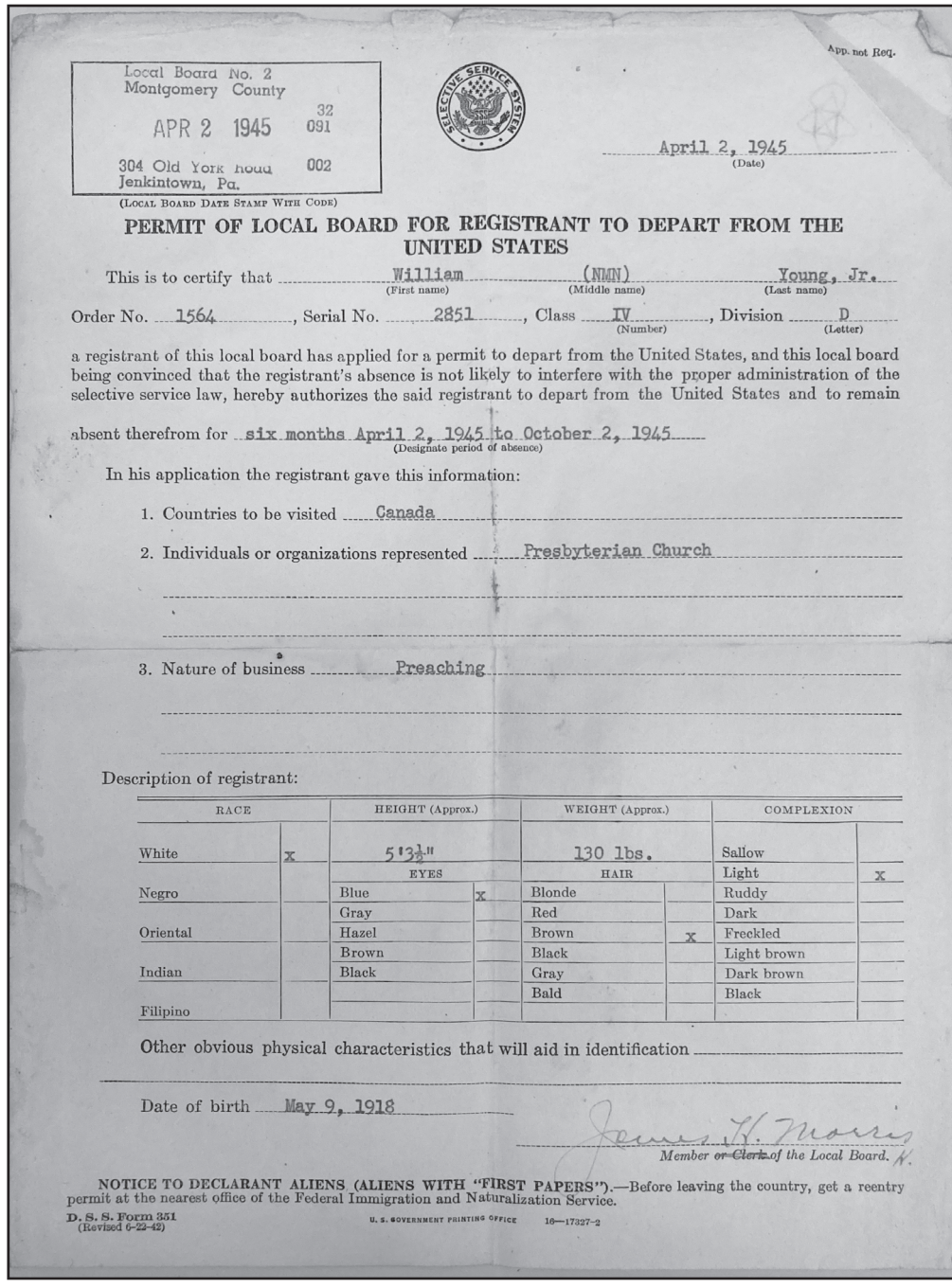
It was moved and carried that Mr. Young be enrolled as a member of Presbytery.

It was moved and carried to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned with prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Edmund Clowney,
Clerk pro tem.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbytery of New York and New England, special meeting for the purpose of ordaining William Young, October 8, 1942, William Young collection, 023-11-72.

Union Theological Seminary. Unfortunately, Young's collected papers only contain a very small assortment of materials documenting his time there. A *precis* of his doctoral dissertation indicates that he was interested in Dutch Calvinism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as his dissertation was entitled *The*



App. not Req.

Local Board No. 2
Montgomery County
APR 2 1945
32
091
304 Old York Road
Jenkintown, Pa.
002
(Local Board Date Stamp With Code)

April 2, 1945
(Date)

PERMIT OF LOCAL BOARD FOR REGISTRANT TO DEPART FROM THE UNITED STATES

This is to certify that William (First name) (NMN) (Middle name) Young, Jr. (Last name)

Order No. 1564, Serial No. 2851, Class IV (Number), Division D (Letter)

a registrant of this local board has applied for a permit to depart from the United States, and this local board being convinced that the registrant's absence is not likely to interfere with the proper administration of the selective service law, hereby authorizes the said registrant to depart from the United States and to remain

absent therefrom for six months April 2, 1945 to October 2, 1945
(Designate period of absence)

In his application the registrant gave this information:

1. Countries to be visited Canada
2. Individuals or organizations represented Presbyterian Church
3. Nature of business Preaching

Description of registrant:

RACE		HEIGHT (Approx.)		WEIGHT (Approx.)		COMPLEXION	
White	x	5'3½"		130 lbs.		Sallow	
		EYES		HAIR		Light	x
Negro		Blue	x	Blonde		Ruddy	
		Gray		Red		Dark	
Oriental		Hazel		Brown	x	Freckled	
		Brown		Black		Light brown	
Indian		Black		Gray		Dark brown	
				Bald		Black	
Filipino							

Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification

Date of birth May 9, 1918

James H. Morris
Member ~~or Clerk~~ of the Local Board. #.

NOTICE TO DECLARANT ALIENS (ALIENS WITH "FIRST PAPERS").—Before leaving the country, get a reentry permit at the nearest office of the Federal Immigration and Naturalization Service.

D. S. S. Form 351
(Revised 6-22-42)

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 16—17327-2

Permit from the United States Selective Service allowing Dr. Young to depart from the United States for Canada, dated April 2, 1945, William Young collection, 023-15-52.

Development of a Protestant Philosophy in Dutch Calvinistic Thought Since the Time of Abraham Kuyper.

It was at UTS where William Young became *Doctor* William Young, when he completed the requirements for a ThD degree in 1944. Dr. Young did take additional steps to further his education—at Oxford University, but at a much later date.

Young's career and calling following his formal education

The Young collection contains little information concerning World War II, and the fact that Young never served in any branch of the US military must have been due to his enrollment in divinity school—he must have had a ministerial deferment—though his papers do not include such a document. There is not enough material here for us to conclude what Young's position was concerning military service, though he may have been a conscientious objector. This may strike the observer as odd, considering that his father had a career in the Navy and Presbyterians are not normally known to embrace pacifism. It is also noteworthy that Young never took any courses on chaplaincy during any of his years of formal education. The Young collection does contain a permit from the United States Selective Service allowing Dr. Young to depart from the United States for Canada and is dated April 2, 1945. This permit (pictured on the prrevious page) shows that Young was allowed to remain outside of the United States for up to six months.

Among other things, this permit gives us information on the physical description of William Young—most notably, he was a diminutive five feet, three and a half inches tall.

After graduating from UTS, Young received an invitation from the leadership of Bloor East Presbyterian Church, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, to serve as a guest pastor on several occasions. Dr. Young traveled to Toronto to supply the pulpit for several Sundays in the summer of 1945.

One of his personal connections at BEPC was a woman named Ruth Campbell. Young was acquainted with Miss Campbell at least as early as 1941, and on a few occasions it was Campbell who wrote to Young on behalf of the BEPC, extending invitations to supply their pulpit at times when there was no one else available to preach. On April 4, 1944, Miss Campbell wrote to Young, stating

> I am authorized by the Supply Committee at Bloor to write and ask if you could come as Supply for the month of May. Nothing has been decided yet for the summer months. If you are free to consider remaining for the rest of the summer, you might say so when you write. It may be possible to make arrangements before you come. In any case let us know about May.[2]

According to "A History of the Presbyterian Reformed Church" by Sherman Isbell, Rev. Young was the stated supply at BEPC from 1944 to 1946.[3]

Young was someone who could easily be described as a "joiner." His collected papers containing files on some eighty different organizations with which he had some sort of affiliation, and though he did not join all of them, he did join many of them. Among these were the American Scientific Affiliation, the Bible Science Association, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, the Evangelical Theological Society, the Hegel Society, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the League of Evangelical Students, the Metaphysical Society of America, the Charles S. Pierce Society, the Moody Institute, Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society, the National Association of Evangelicals, Promise Keepers, the Tavern Hall Club, and many more. A fact that may enter into Dr. Young's prolific joining may have been the fact that he never married, and joining organizations likely fulfilled his need for social connection. If it is possible to surmise a man's values by the company he keeps, it is easy to see that Young was someone who was an accomplished academic (especially in philosophy), as well as a devoted and conservative Christian and Presbyterian.[4]

Having left his pastoral call at Bloor East Presbyterian Church, Dr. Young transitioned to a teaching career starting in 1947. Dr. Young received an offer to fill a faculty position as an assistant professor of philosophy at Butler University in Indianapolis, where he remained until 1954. Unfortunately, Young's collected papers contain only a few folders of material concerning his time at Butler University, and those are rather sketchy.[5]

Young moved to Jackson, Mississippi to teach in the 1956-57 academic year with a contract to teach philosophy and psychology at Belhaven College. Belhaven College (now Belhaven University) has a long Presbyterian history, which must have been what attracted Dr. Young to seek employment there. Unfortunately, like the documented record of Young's time at Butler University, there are just a few folders of materials that document Dr. Young's time at Belhaven, and these provide little information about his activities while he was there.[6]

A return to formal education

Following his one-year teaching stint at Belhaven, and a brief period of time preaching at BEPC, Dr. Young took a sabbatical to pursue a PhD at Merton College, Oxford University, starting in the fall of 1957. While

2. William Young collection, 023-08-11.
3. William Young collection, 023-13-02.
4. William Young collection, Series 17.
5. William Young collection, 023-05-27.
6. William Young collection, 023-05-32

there he attended courses and wrote a proposal for a doctoral thesis on the origins of G.W.F. Hegel's dialectical methods.

On May 6, 1960, when Young was living in Oxford, Dr. Francis H. Horn, President of the University of Rhode Island, wrote to Young informing him that the Board of Trustees had approved his application for a teaching position in philosophy at URI.[7] It seems that he had reached a point in his doctoral research where he could work from home, rather than at Oxford—though he did periodically return to Oxford to stay in touch with his review committee and to do research.

He submitted his thesis for review to his committee late in 1964. A letter from Dr. Ron Hane, dated December 16, 1964, explained the committee's decision concerning the fate of his thesis—that it did not fulfill all of the requirements expected of a PhD candidate. Young must have been terribly disappointed not to have earned that coveted doctoral degree from one of the world's most acclaimed universities—especially considering that this goal was so close at hand.

Back in Rhode Island

In the 1960s the Christian Association at the University of Rhode Island had a strong and thriving membership. This organization had twenty-seven members on its advisory board, some of whom were on the URI faculty. Moreover, it offered a wide range of programs and services, including Sunday evening discussions, regional and national conferences, study groups, orientation to seminary, its own library, Sunday morning worship, personal counseling, non-credit Biblical courses, marriage preparation counseling, and more. This dynamic program would be a natural attraction for Dr. Young.[8]

Though the courses that Dr. Young taught included such things as classical philosophy (Ancient Philosophy, Logic, Advanced Logic, and Symbolic Logic), he also taught courses on Christian aspects of philosophy—Christian Ethics, Church History and Philosophy of Religion.[9]

Young's collected papers include his performance evaluations at URI, written by the Head of the Philosophy Department. Among the comments that appear in the 1982 review are that

> Dr. Young's courses are meticulously prepared, systematically arranged and forcefully presented. His wealth of knowledge of Western thought allows him to draw on a rich store of illustrations illuminating the points which he is making. His class presentations are also characterized by a fine sense of humor. Dr. Young makes rigorous demands on his students; he makes no allowances for deficient preparations or poor study habits. That this doesn't sit well with many of our undergraduates is hardly surprising, but I still have to meet the first serious student who does not see an excellent scholar-teacher in Dr. Young.[10]

A tabulated data sheet produced from student evaluations rated Professor Young in twenty-nine different categories, on a five-point scale. In nearly all categories, Dr. Young's students rated him between a 4 and 5. In only two categories did his students rate him less than a 4, these being "Motivates students to excel" (3.83) and "Provides outline or syllabus" (3.86). From this we can gather that Dr. Young was proficient in teaching at the university level and that he was generally popular among his students.[11]

Dr. Young remained at URI until his retirement in 1988. During his time there he attained the faculty rank of associate professor. In 1988 URI awarded Dr. Young emeritus status.[12]

Young's collected papers are full of pages with his handwriting—on a variety of subjects—but mostly concerning theology, philosophy, and philosophers. Young wrote hundreds of essays (some of which he may have turned into books, sermons, or articles), several books, many articles and many more book reviews. He was a co-translator of Herman Dooyeweerd's *New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, and he was the author of *Toward a Reformed Philosophy*. He also contributed to the article on Dooyeweerd in an anthology entitled *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, edited by Philip Edgcumbe Hughes.

One of Dr. Young's greatest interests was the philosophy of Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein, an Austrian philosopher who lived from 1889 to 1951. Wittgenstein's interests were in logic, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind, and mathematics. Dr. Young wrote a monograph on the celebrated philosopher for the *Modern Thinkers Series*.

Young's diverse interests

Like the company a man keeps, a lot can be determined by the materials that he accumulated over the course of his life. A series in the Young collection entitled "Subject

7. William Young collection, 023-06-49.
8. William Young collection, 023-05-39.
9. William Young collection, 023, Series 11.
10. William Young collection, 023-06-12.
11. William Young collection, 023-22-11.
12. William Young collection, 023-06-49.

File" provides not just a glimpse of this man, but an in-depth view of his interests, opinions, and values. There are more than seventy folders in the Subject File, concerning everything from A to W (from *Abortion to Women in the Church*). Most of the subject materials he gathered concerned religion—Christianity, and Calvinism in particular—as well as moral and political issues (such as communism, feminism, marriage, Mormonism, prostitution, the VietNam War, wine and Christianity, and much more).

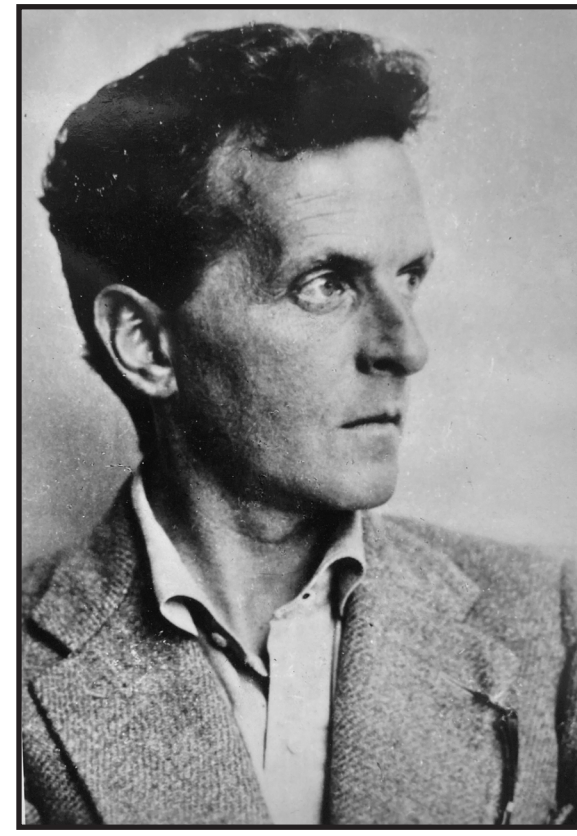
Concerning abortion, Young, as a Calvinist, was very predictably a Pro-Life advocate. In fact, the folder containing subject matter on this issue includes a handwritten essay from Young, with a title at the top of it saying, "A Calvinistic Approach to Abortion."

Young's writings

As revealing as these subject files are, even more revealing are the things he wrote, and his collected papers contain a cornucopia of written material on a wide range of issues. To say that Dr. Young was a prolific writer would be a gross understatement. Dr. Young was someone who was *constantly* writing notes on one or another aspect of theology or philosophy, and this collection contains folder after folder of papers in his handwriting on these matters. His mind must have been perpetually ruminating on matters philosophic and theologic. Some of his monographs bear indications that he was writing late at night or during the very early morning hours. His papers contain seventeen folders of manuscripts for articles, eleven book manuscripts, and two folders for brochures he wrote. The Young collection also contains folders for ninety essays (which he may have transformed into articles, lectures, or sermons at a later date). Though Young spent many years teaching in higher education and must have written hundreds of lectures, his collected papers contain only five written lectures. He also wrote notes for prayer meetings, one folder of which survives. His papers contain two folders of written public addresses, and sixteen book reviews. As a pastor or pulpit supply for several decades, his papers include forty-eight folders containing hundreds of his sermons.

Young's travels

Young traveled extensively around the world—especially in Europe and the Orient. In addition to the years he spent in England while studying at Oxford, he spent time in the Netherlands in 1958, and Norway and Finland in 1966, studying modal logic, and it was there



Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein, PP-023.073

that he worked on his monograph at the Wittgenstein Archive. He also traveled to Iceland and the Orient, as pictured here.

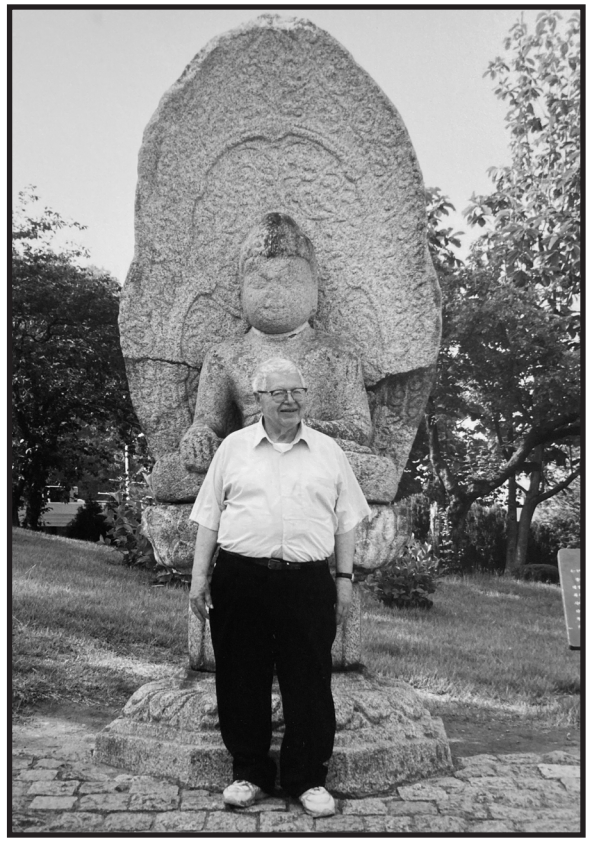
Among the things that can be gleaned from the papers left by Dr. William Young is that he apparently never learned to type. Some of the papers he generated while teaching at URI were tests and quizzes that include instructions for the number of copies he would need for his students, suggesting that a departmental secretary handled his typing for him.

Dr. Young was a faithful and dedicated Presbyterian throughout his life, and he held very conservative views on Christian theology. It was the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (a conservative off-shoot from the PCUSA) in which he was ordained, and in which he first preached.

On July 25, 1969, William Matheson, the Clerk of Session of the Presbyterian Reformed Church, wrote to Dr. Young extending an invitation "to supply the Gospel ministry in our churches as soon as possible, and for as long a period as may be convenient for you."[13] It seems that Dr. Young declined this invitation, since no more correspondence exists between Young and the PRC until several years later. In a letter dated January 23, 1976,

13. William Young collection, 023-12-48.





Above, Dr. Young, Þingvellir (Thingvellir) National Park, Reykjavik, Iceland, ca. 1971 (with unidentified), PP-023.039. Left, in South Korea, ca. 1987, PP-023.071.

Mattheson wrote to Dr. Young again saying, "This letter is to confirm the information given by telephone on December 27, 1975, advising that on that date the Presbytery of the Presbyterian Reformed Church unanimously agreed to extend … an invitation to consider joining our Presbytery as a ministerial member."[14] Dr. Young continued in his role as the stated supply of the Presbyterian Church of Rhode Island in East Greenwich until 1995.

Young's collected papers contain hundreds of letters that he received from his associates in the Presbyterian Reformed Church, and they pertain to all matters of denominational administration, such as the ordination or calling of new pastors, meetings of the Presbytery, supplying pulpits during the absence of the usual pastors, planting new PRC churches, the possibility of accepting congregations from other branches of the Presbyterian denomination into the PRC, the nomination of elders or deacons in one or another congregation, the occasional disciplinary action taken against members

14. William Young collection, 023-12-48.

584 Van Horne Ave.,
Willowdale, Ont., M2J 2V3
March 13, 1976.

Dear Bill:

I spoke by telephone with Bill Matheson some time ago and told him that I would be writing to you and sending along to you a few of letters and documents pertaining to the affairs of the denomination. I am enclosing for your information the following:

1. Copy of Letter addressed to the "Clerk of Presbytery" requesting Presbyterial Investigation dated March 11, 1976.

2. Material relating to the Presbytery
   a. Official Position of the Presbytery re relationship with other churches dated March 27, 1970.

   b. Letter from Clerk of Presbytery received Jan. 30/74 dealing with request for the formation of a committee to investigate possibility of union with F. P. Church of Scotland.

   c. Presbytery Minutes - October 15, 1974.

   d. From F. P. Mag. - February 1975

   e. Canadian Report by Rev. J. A. MacDonald - F. P. Mag. - Mar 1975

   f. Petitions from Canada by Rev. Donald Campbell - F. P. Mag. - March 1975

   g. On Sabbath Travelling by Rev. Donald MacLean-F. P. Mag. Oct. 1975

It has been contended that because of the resignation of Mr. Caldwell the Presbytery is defunct and the union between the Chesley-Lochalsh and Victoria Park congregations no longer exists. This was not considered by the Session of the V.P.P.R. Church.

It is difficult to give all the particular details in a letter. I send this along to you without making any comment. I will be looking forward to hearing from you.

Cordially,

Cameron Finlayson

Encl. in 2 sections.

or pastors who had violated the PRC constitution, committee assignments, and personal matters concerning various church members. A good example of the kinds of letters Dr Young received as a result of his work as an active member of the PRC is shown above.[15]

He was also interested in, and to some extent interacted with other branches of the Presbyterian

15. William Young collection, 023-12-48 through 023-12-52.



Dr. William Young, ca. 1990, PP-023.060.

denomination, and his collected papers contain documentation from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, the PCUSA, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, in addition to the Presbyterian Reformed Church. He also supported Christian missionary efforts in Korea and Japan. Though he was deeply involved in Presbyterianism in a variety of ways over many years, it was his pastoral call at the Rhode Island Presbyterian Church (a congregation in the Presbyterian Reformed Church) where he made his biggest contribution, as its stated supply for fourteen years.

Toward the end of his life his eyesight diminished to the point of blindness, though his friends attest that he remained mentally sharp. Dr. Young died in Kingston, Rhode Island in 2015 at the age of 97.▪

In Brief: **"Save Our Sabbath." Recent Accomplishments in Defense of the Sabbath, Report of the General Secretary, Rev. Robert M. Blackwood, D.D., The Sabbath Association of the Pittsburgh Area, Cooperating Denominations represented by fifty-seven Directors and Officers. Undated [1926.] Courtesy of The PCA Historical Center. Used by Permission.**

"Save Our Sabbath" 1926

The Sabbath Association of the Pittsburgh Area

Cooperating Denominations represented by fifty-seven Directors and Officers

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MR. GEORGE W. PENNIMAN
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OUR OBJECTIVES

To create a loyalty for the sacredness of the Sabbath

To encourage the enforcement of Sabbath Laws and

To defend their integrity

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BELL PHONE: WALNUT 1596
1011 TYNDALL STREET
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Rev. Robert W. Woods
Mr. Robert M. Young

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN DEFENSE OF THE SABBATH

REPORT OF GENERAL SECRETARY

I.—Educational

In connection with our field work in Western Pennsylvania, public meetings have been held every week to create a "loyalty for the sacredness of the Sabbath," to defeat the anti-"blue law" propaganda paving the way for the commercialized Sunday, and to overcome the inconsistency of some churchmen strangely advocating a half-holiday Sunday.

In addition letters and literature have been sent out to pastors and interested friends without whose help we could not have succeeded. In response many ministers have plead for a sanctified Sabbath as opposed to a half-holiday Sunday, and Ministers' Associations have passed resolutions urging civil officers to enforce our Sabbath laws and with encouraging results.

II.—Law Enforcement

Meanwhile with such co-operation the association has succeeded in gaining some victories for the Sabbath. Through our encouragements the proper officers have stopped such violations as: Sunday charity moving picture shows followed by attempts to commercialize the Sabbath; Sunday secular programs in theaters for church benefit; Sunday championship golf matches that would have attracted large crowds; Sunday picnics of churches and lodges with dancing, drinking, and paid admissions; public games of Sunday football, semicommercial and disturbing the quiet of communities; and other violations of our Sabbath laws likewise tending to undermine the Christian ideals and morals of our youth and creating disrespect for all law.

In two contested hearings before the Council of the City of Pittsburgh the Association won a victory for the Sabbath in the Council's decision to hold the Pittsburgh celebration of the anniversary of Stephen C. Foster's on-hundredth birthday on Monday, July 5, instead of Sabbath July 4, his real birthday. Also, we have co-operated with Governor Pinchot and Attorney General Woodruff and others for the Sunday closing of the Sesqui-Centennial Exposition. We are also encouraging community movements in various counties in this end of the State to enforce the Sabbath law, made more difficult by reason of the defiance of our Sabbath laws in the Eastern end of the State. In fact Western Pennsylvania had been well on toward an open Sunday now had it not been for the intensive, though quiet work at times of this organization in recent months.

III.—Legislative

To help keep up the good record of Western Pennsylvania which has been furnishing the majority of votes against anti-Sabbath bills in the State legislature the Association co-operates with moral leaders in our communities for the election of the right men to represent us, a preparation for our work in the legislature. A late attempt in the City Council of Pittsburgh to pass an ordinance, contrary to law, to permit all kinds of Sunday sports in city parks and playgrounds which was defeated, is but another challenge to do well our own part in the legislature for the Sabbath.

To help save the capitol of the Greatest Christian Country on earth from the shame and evil influence of a pagan Sunday we are co-operating with other organizations for the Sunday Rest Bill for the District of Columbia.

Co-operation Urgent

Never were the churches and communities of Pennsylvania in greater need of a sacred Sabbath and at the same time in greater danger of losing it. Through the determined efforts of organized enemies on the one hand and the indifference and compromising desecration of the Sabbath by professing friends on the other hand we are now confronted with a situation critical to the sacredness of the Lord's day. The planned attacks against the Sabbath's stronghold in the large Pittsburgh Area indicate its strategic importance in the State and our imperative duty to meet these attacks promptly. Delay in doing so is perilous.

We earnestly solicit your co-operation, therefore, because it is deeply needed now and because we believe you share our conviction that the Christian Sabbath is vital to the spiritual life of the Church and indispensable to the welfare and perpetuity of the Nation.

The Sabbath Association of the Pittsburgh Area,
ROBERT M. BLACKWOOD, D.D., Sec.,
1011 Tyndall St., Pittsburgh, Pa.

James Durham:
A New Biography, Part Two

By Chris Coldwell

James Durham the Preacher[1]

Durham clearly worked hard, but what kind of preacher was he? As already described, Durham had a rather awe inspiring bearing about him, and appeared far older and commanding of immediate respect than his actual age. "He was a most grave man as one could look upon; his very look and countenance would have made a person stand in awe of him, when they looked to him."[2] In fact, as noted, this was the reaction of the King and his court who seemed to have held Durham in some regard, though he viewed it as grievous service because the King was not rather in awe of the Word of God. An anecdote which is preserved by Robert Wodrow sheds some light on Durham's serious frame.

> Mr. Durham was a person of the outmost composure and gravity, and it was much made him smile. In some gentlman's house, Mr. William Guthry and he wer together at dinner; and Mr. Guthry was exceeding merry, and made Mr. Durham smile, yea, laugh out, with his pleasant facetious conversation. It was the ordinary of the family to pray after dinner; and immediately after their mirth, it's put upon Mr. Guthry to pray; and, as he was wont, he fell immediately to the greatest measure of seriousness and fervency, to the astonishment and moving of all present. When they rose from prayer, Mr. Durham came to him and embraced him, and said, "O! Will, you are a happy man! If I had been so daft as you have been, I could not have been serious, nor in any frame for forty-eight hours!"[3]

This bearing also impacted Durham's preaching and he took the duty of the pulpit very seriously, to the point it affected his health.

> He was wonderfully exercised, and much concerned before he went out to preach his sermons. He told his cousin, Mr. John Maul, late Minister of Renfrew, who told to a Minister that told me, that his very concernedness about his public preaching would have wrought upon his very body, and made him purge several times as if it had been a potion of physic.[4]
>
> Mr. James Stirling tells me, he hears that Mr. Durham kept two days a week for fasting and prayer, for discovering of the Lord's mind when he was writing on the Revelation; and it was thought that, with his close study and thought, cast him into that decay, whereof he died. He was a man that was very much in meditation. He usually said very little to persons that came to propose their cases to him, but heard them; but next day he preached, he was sure to handle them.5

As to content, Durham was said to have excelled in "case" or "casuistic" divinity, or "cases of conscience." In a letter dated May 21, 1653, Baillie writes, "I have desired him to write case-Divinity, wherein he is excellent, and daily grows."[6] Several of his published sermon

The Author: Chris Coldwell is general editor of *The Confessional Presbyterian* and publishes Puritan, Reformed, and Presbyterian books under the Naphtali Press imprint.

1. This new biography of James Durham continues from part one in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 18. The full biography first appeared in James Durham, *Commentary upon Revelation*, vol. 3 (Naphtali Press & Reformation Heritage Books, 2022).
2. Wodrow, *Analecta,* 1.105–106.
3. Wodrow, *Analecta,* 2.140.
4. Wodrow, *Analecta,* 3.106. "It was thought that his great study and labour upon the Revelation hastened him to his end, and that he thought he was much the worse of night-reading. When he was writing or lecturing on the Revelation, he kept two or three days in the week for fasting and prayer in secret, to get the mind of God made known to him in that mysterious book. He had a great memory and vast judgment given him, but a bad hand of write [writing]."
5. Wodrow, *Analecta,* 1.321.
6. Baillie, *Letters & Journals*, 3.222.

collections have "conscience" or "cases of conscience" as part of their titles. The first week or weeks of his ministry in Glasgow, Durham began a series of sermons on Matthew 16:24 for his assigned weekday of Tuesday. These were later published as *The Great Corruption Of Subtile Self* (1686). *The Great Gain of Contenting Godliness* published with it may reasonably be assumed to date to the same time.

Christie provides a modern (circa 1930) assessment of Durham's preaching, which seems only partially fair and accurate.

> Durham lacked imagination, that is clear; his sermons have no sparkle in them, little of illustration or incident, nothing personal or moving. Very rarely does one feel any thrill of eloquence. Even his perorations are dull, unless hell's horrors are his theme, yet there is a depth of spirituality and a loftiness of Christian feeling, a skilful probing of motive and analysis in temper, which excite thought and aspiration. His preparation of mind and spirit was perfect—the stream is pure and strong, straight and deep, if without ripple and light—and his matter was read and re-read for generations. "He liked not to soar and hide himself from the Hearers in a cloud of words," *i.e.* he was not a "popular preacher." He was a weighty preacher—possibly a heavy one—and had he been able to combine grace with his gifts, attractive and pungent presentation of the truth with seriousness and strength, he would have been "a very rare and singular man" in his generation. Extremely modest and humble, he never strove for plaudits or praise by fine phrase or by playing upon the emotions; intent upon the matter, he left style alone.[7]

Christie knew enough of his subject to have been affected by his depth, but Durham is no more eloquent on hell than he is on the freeness of God's grace and when extolling Christ. It is true he was not a popular preacher in both senses of that term. Durham was rather awkward in his speech. He does not show a poetic imagination like Samuel Rutherford's, nor does he exhibit a gift for short and memorable statements, such as had his mentor and teacher David Dickson. He often feared he would have no one attending sermon or that all would flee once he began to speak![8]

Two anecdotes, perhaps pertaining to the same occasion, perhaps not, illustrate that Durham was indeed not so popular, but also that he was by no means an ineffectual preacher. The first story preserved in the 1739 biography relates a conversation between Durham, who was to preach in the Inner Kirk, and the younger Andrew Gray who was to preach in the Outer Kirk.

> In the whole of his ministry, he was a burning and shining light; he shined in all Christian and ministerial gifts and graces, and particularly, he did exemplarily shine in humility and self-denial. One instance of many was this: Upon a certain day, when Mr. Andrew Gray and he were to preach, as they were walking together, Mr. Durham observing multitudes thronging into that church where Mr. Andrew Gray was to preach, said to Mr. Gray: 'Brother, I perceive you are likely to have a throng church this day.' To which Mr. Gray answered: 'Truly, brother, they are fools to leave you and come to me.' To which Mr. Durham replied, 'Not so, dear brother, for a minister can receive no such honor and success in his ministry, except it be given him from heaven. I rejoice that Christ is preached, and that his kingdom and interest is getting ground, and that his honor and esteem does increase, though my esteem in people's hearts should decrease, and be diminished; for I am content to be anything, so that Christ may be all in all.'[9]

Despite this humble self-assessment and the aforementioned lack of style or polished expression, the second anecdote preserved by Wodrow shows that Durham nevertheless could make a deep impression. He could affect and move the audience that attended the Inner Kirk where he preached, even if at times many were forced to be there due to overcrowding in the Outer Kirk!

> Sometime after Mr. Andrew Gray was settled at Glasgow, he was exceedingly followed, and had for his helper Mr. William Guthry and some others of the most popular preachers. On the Communion Sabbath, the Outer Church was so throng[ed] that there was no getting near the door; and within, the confusion was so great, [that] several persons were brought out sick and fainting. Through necessity, not choice, the person went into the Inner Church, where the thinness was as remarkable. However, by the time when Mr. Durham came into the pulpit, the Inner Church was pretty full by the people who could not get in to the Outer Church. He began with the greatest seriousness, and

7. Christie, p. 77.

8. In the second of apparently three sermons which John Carstares preached upon Durham's death, in application, he preached, "I have heard this faithful servant of God, He hath now translated to heaven, complain often that when he came to preach in his own church, he saw not the face of a congregation, and that he came seldom to the pulpit, but he feared some tumult among the people in running away from him." *Life,* 61 Sermons, p. 24.

9. "Life," in 72 Sermons on Isaiah 53, p. 36.

> grew wonderfully. His text was the known one, Matthew 22:5[10] [but they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise], and all through the work there was a remarkable divine presence; and many were converted, and far more edified, and that was one of the greatest days of power ever the relater saw.[11]

Whether or not Durham's ineloquence was an impediment, once removed from the delivery he felt made him unappealing, his printed words were republished repeatedly. He may not have impressed the "room," but his fellow ministers, who could see past the niceties of verbal delivery, knew what they had in their fellow preacher. Carstares described Durham's preaching thus:[12]

> Was he not a very seasonable and judicious speaker? Did not God give him *the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to the faint and weary soul* [Isa. 50:4]? How seasonable and pertinent were the ordinary subjects of his sermons? And did he not also pitch upon the most suitable and proper subjects of evangelical preaching, upon fast days,[13] and at the solemn celebration of the Lord's supper? Was he not also a very candid and searching preacher? He would have been, in an instant, in the inmost corners of your bosoms, with the out-most caution and meekness, without giving any of his hearers the smallest ground to fret and repine at his freedom in dealing with them.

David Dickson "had a wonderful opinion of great and worthy Mr. Durham…. He said somewhat to this purpose of Mr. Durham, that 'He was like a great bottle full of excellent good wine, that when it did go to come out, it could not well come out, but it played buck, buck!—so Mr. Durham had little expression, but much good and great matter."[14]

James Durham the Peacemaker

In addition to his preaching, Durham's renewed ministry in Glasgow began just as the Protester-Resolutioner schism was exploding in the Church of Scotland, and this took up some of his time for a few years. To review and summarize what has already been said, this controversy was an

> internecine feud which divided the hitherto unified Covenanting movement during the Cromwellian invasion and occupation of Scotland, 1650–60. During the English invasion of Scotland in 1650, incipient divisions within the kirk erupted as the moderate and radical Covenanters divided over the reception of Charles II as king and the passing of the Public Resolutions, which allowed "malignant" royalists into the army and state. When the 1651 General Assembly approved the Resolutions, the schism was institutionalized and the kirk divided into two factions: the Resolutioners, who supported the king and government, and the Protesters, who disavowed the authority of both. After the English conquest in late 1651, these divisions were internalized as both factions engaged in numerous (albeit unsuccessful) attempts to gain ascendancy in the kirk.[15]

At the same time, there were also movements, most often led by Durham and Robert Blair, to bring the two sides together and heal the division. This activity centered in the Synod of Glasgow, the only area of the country where Protesters were in the majority. In September and early October of 1651, Durham had attended

10. Durham's preparation sermon, preached before this communion, would seem to be the one on Matthew 5:2–4 in his communion sermons. Cf. *61 Sermons,* pp. 464–485. There are apparently three known manuscripts of this sermon, one undated, one dated only Thursday, and one dated July 15, 1655, which was a Thursday. To date no manuscript is known to survive of the communion sermon on verse 5 which had such a powerful effect on Durham's audience. There were only three communion seasons during the entire decade of Durham's ministry in Glasgow, one in October of 1656, two consecutive Lord's Days the last of April in 1657 and one in July of 1655. See *61 Sermons,* p. [430]; see "*Antiquary:* The James Durham MSS Held by Glasgow University Library," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 5 (2009): 305–307; Part II, volume 7 (2011): 230–231.

11. *Analecta,* volume 2 (1842), p. 364. Andrew Gray died in February of 1656, so the only communion service he could have preached in Glasgow was the one held on July 15, 1655 (see previous note). There is a fragment of his exhortation prior to the sacrament at Glasgow in his works. Gray's sermon is not identified; but due to some phrases such as "Christ is gone" and "sad evidence," it may be that Sermon III was preached in a Saturday preparation service, which was not uncommon, and Sermon IV on the Lord's Day prior to the exhortation. Neither sermon has a date or place attribution. This is speculation however, and the sermon may remain in manuscripts yet to be found. See *The Works of the Reverend and Pious Andrew Gray* (Aberdeen: George King, 1839), pp. 481–483, 415–423. Manuscript notations indicate Gray preached Saturday preparation sermons at a communion at Bodell. See "Sermons [manuscript], ca. 1655–ca. 1665," Folger Shakespeare Library, V.a.415 (formerly MS Add 389), contents in hand in front.

12. "Life," 19–20.

13. It is not clear how many providentially called fasts were held and at this date only the manuscript lecture and sermon prior to battle with Cromwell are known (see Durham, Commentary on Revelation, 3.578). There surely was a fast held due to the Great Fire, but from Baillie's account, even then the Resolutioners and Protesters were contentious over the reasons for such a fast. Baillie, 3.10.

14. Wodrow, *Analecta,* 3.10.

15. Holfelder, "Factionalism," Abstract.

two meetings at Edinburgh, where he took the lead in the latter in confession of sin for what had come upon church and the land. The next April in 1652, Durham drafted and with Robert Blair presented to the Glasgow Synod some overtures for union.

> Being still more and more convinced of the necessity of Union among the Ministers of this Church, be the many evils that accompany these differences, [the Synod] doe therefore think it expedient, to endeavor some way of healing, at least of preventing the growing, of the same. And though they neither intend hereby judicially to condemn or reflect on any acts or proceedings of any of them, either on the one side or the other, preceding this time, (but to leave both sides without prejudice by this agreement,) yet for the ends foresaid, they doe voluntarily condescend mutually in the things controverted, in as far as concerns their practice for the interim, as follows:
>
> 1. That they shall eschew all public wakening or lengthening these debates by preaching or spreading papers, either in favours of the one side or the other.
>
> 2. That they shall forbear the practising, executing or pressing of all acts concluded in the last Assembly at St. Andrewes and Dundee, and also the pressing or spreading appeals, declinators or protestations against the same; and that both these foresaids, together with any sentence intended or followed thereupon, shall be for the time, (as to practise and our use-making of them in any thing) as though they had not been; this being always so understood as inferring no actual condemning of either of them, as is said.
>
> 3. That none of those be to any, whatsoever rank, minister or elder or expectant, a ground or aggravation of challenge or censure, or of exception against their being admitted to office, they being in other things found qualified.
>
> 4. That some be named as correspondents who may carry these Overtures to be conferred of with and recommended unto brethren of other Synods; who are to be written unto to send some of their number to meet at ane convenient time and place for that end.
>
> 5. Likeas it is their purpose, if God shall give a free Generall Assembly, to endeavour for a full and judicial settling and oblivion of the foresaid differences, and all consequences that has followed on them; and, in the meantime, to proceed in all affaires according to the uncontroverted rules and acts of our Church.
>
> This Agreement may be drawn to the laying aside of all the present controversy, the matter being, for the particulars, removed but by the Assemblie itselfe and submission of men censured; else no Assembly firm hereafter: And with cautions against feared domination, and a due processing of novelties tending to separate congregations, Why should an oblivion of Malignants, the King and they having satisfied, be granted also? Why not deposed ministers and elders, for no other scandal, on submission, made capable? What Union else firm?[16]

Robert Baillie was as keen a partisan on the Resolutioner side as men such as Samuel Rutherford and Archibald Johnson were on the side of the Protesters. Baillie convinced the Synod to postpone consideration of Durham's overtures to the June meeting, but he had no intention of allowing them to ever come up again and was instrumental in raising opposition against the plan in other parts of the church where the Resolutioners were the majority. The Protesters, in the one thing apparently agreed upon by both sides, worked equally against Durham's overtures.[17]

At a conference about union in May, the Resolutioners enraged the Protester minority with their proposal for union that was a far cry from what Durham and Blair proposed. The Resolutioners had set the stage nationally to discipline Protesters unless they repented and ceased their separate "anti-judicatories"[18] and recognized the General Assembly's authority without question (controlled by the Resolutioners). Thus by the time the Glasgow synod was set to met in June, political calculations about local control in presbyteries and delegates to the upcoming General Assembly were in view and not union. The two sides met apart in separate meetings and both chose Durham as moderator, who refused until the two sides came together to meet.[19] This does not seem to have been from some humbled change of heart, as both sides then used the meeting to put forward their respective plans.[20] Baillie characterized the June meeting of the Glasgow Synod as two days of "bickering." After detailing some of the disputes

16. Baillie, 3.185–186.
17. Baillie, 3.176ff. Holfelder, p. 165.
18. Holfelder, p. 167.
19. "Life," p. 39.
20. See Holfelder's description of the battles in the presbyteries of Glasgow Synod and the Synod itself, p. 168. See Baillie, 3.186–190, 193–195, 562–566.

over approving some ministers and other matters, he complains in a postscript to a letter to James Wood, "In the end of our Synod, Mr. Patrick with Sir John, with consent of our Moderator, obtained ane act for keeping our Synod book from going back to the next Assemblie; against which we protested."[21] In the letter he also warned Wood to "beware" the counsel of "neuters." This was Baillie's disparaging term for those striving for peace, such as Durham and Blair.

In the middle of this bitter contention amongst the members of Glasgow synod and Durham's and Blair's attempts to bring peace, the Lord in His providence sent significant destruction on the City of Glasgow by means of the Great Fire that commenced on Thursday, June 17, 1652. A third of the city was burned, many killed, and a thousand left homeless. On the subsequent Lord's Day, June 20, between seven and eight o'clock in the morning, a secondary fire started and did more damage.[22] The city instructed the churches to keep their doors open so the homeless had places to resort for their devotions. The city sought relief from both the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and Cromwell's government in London, while the city ministers preached that the fire was God's judgment for consorting with the English sectaries.[23]

Durham apparently presented a paper calling for a fast to the Glasgow Resolutioners, to which Baillie records a reply of July 8, 1652. While this likely related to the attempt for peace, the call to fast appears to be related to the fire, though it is difficult to confirm without Durham's original paper, and the response never mentions the fire specifically; neither is it clear if Durham presented the paper calling for a fast to the Protesters of the city.[24] The Resolutioners and Protesters had each been holding their own separate fasts since the eruption of the divide in 1650, the former on Saturdays and the latter on week days. As far as this particular call, the responding challenges from the Resolutioners would seem to indicate it went nowhere, though some fast must have certainly been held in the city.[25]

The Glasgow Synod minutes apparently do not exist from this period,[26] but in addition to his 18th century biographer's account of this, it can be deduced that Durham was moderator at the June meeting, because he preached the customary retiring moderator's sermon at the next meeting in October. While there are no minutes, we do have one account of this October meeting. Nicoll records the following entry in his diary.

> The Synod of Glasgow having met at their ordinary time, the first Tuesday of October 1652, there was much controversy amongst them, and with great difficulty could a Moderator be chosen by reason of the differences amongst them; so that two days and almost a great part of the night was spent in this election. So they dissolved the second day about 11 hours at night, doing nothing save only that the Moderator was chosen, calling Mr. James Fergusson.[27]

That the Synod at least got to the point of electing a new moderator indicates that Durham actually preached his sermon before the Glasgow Synod. A remarkably full text of this long sermon by Durham standards, survives in manuscript, and the content presaged the larger treatise he would complete on his deathbed as his dying testament.[28] The title of this sermon is "5 October

21. Baillie, 3.187–188.

22. George MacGregor, *The History of Glasgow: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Glasgow: Morison, 1881), pp. 231–232.

23. Bulstrode Whitelock, *Memorials of the English affairs*, vol. 3 (1732; Oxford, 1853), p. 433. Wariston opined that it was God's judgment on Malignants (royalists) in that the rich part of the city burned according to the accounts he received. *Diary,* vol. II, Scottish History Society, Second Series, Vol. XVIII, ed. David Hay Fleming (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1919), pp. 175, 176. That many merchants were ruined appears to be true. MacGregor, p. 232.

24. Durham may have presented this paper calling for a fast to Baillie or some few first and the reply concludes by asking him not to present it yet publicly in session or to a committee. Baillie, 3.193. Lange gives no comment at all on this paper as to what it was.

25. Baillie, 3.10. "Having looked upon together the causes of the fast communicated to us, we have thought meet to acquaint you with these our thoughts thereof, in private, to receive your brotherly advice and direction thereupon, as God shall put it in your mind. We have been earnest of a long time to have had public and solemn fastings, for many most important causes, both to the land [Scotland] and this place [Glasgow]; but have always been peremptorily refused all concurrence therein [by the Protesters], unless we would make our duties sins, and other men's sins our duties. When the Lord's strange judgments on us has put us now once again to fast together, upon causes uncontroverted [likely the Great Fire], we are very willing and desirous to continue this gracious and very necessary exercise upon any causes we know, or which, beside our present knowledge, we shall be instructed in, by you or any. As for this paper…." For Mr. James Durham. July 8th 1652. Ballie, 3.190.

26. Minutes do exist for the Protester half of the Glasgow Synod for 1654–55 during the time the Synod actually divided into a Protester synod and a Resolutioner synod (Holfelder, 14); but Holfelder does not cite minutes for these earlier synod meetings. Given his extensive research this may indicate they do not exist. While the folios have not been physically checked, a review of the National Library of Scotland finding aids and indices for the Wodrow collection seems to confirm this. My thanks to Matthew A. Vogan for aid in this regard.

27. John Nicoll, *A Diary of Public Transactions and other occurrences, chiefly in Scotland, From January 1650 to June 1667* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1836), p. 102.

28. For history and background to the sermon and a straight transcription, see "*Antiquary:* James Durham's 1652 Sermon on Ephesians

1652 Ephes. 4 11. 12. For the edefieing of the bodie of Christ A Sermon taught before the Synod assembled in Glasgow by Mr. Ja: Durhame."[29]

As a good puritan preacher, Durham began his sermon by briefly opening up the scope of the text, which is "how precious a point unity is, and how it tends to the purpose of edifying the church." He then pursues three doctrines.

Doctrine I. The great purpose for which God has appointed a ministry, which is the edification of the body of Christ. Three uses or applications about the ministry followed.

Doctrine II. In reference to the scope, ministers should study and promote unity as a main part of edifying the body of Christ, which he instances: 1. In the frame of their spirits. 2. In respect to their fellowship. 3. In their doctrine and discipline. And 4. He asks his audience to consider the bitter end of their divisions.

Doctrine III. Here Durham got to the heart of the matter in addressing their divisions with the linking of unity and edification; they relate to and infer each other. Durham briefly states the doctrine, and after waiving off what was not at issue, states wherein their division consisted. It was whether this particular assembly or another was the rightly constituted one whose determinations should have been followed. He applies the doctrine to this question, maintaining the whole matter should be waived for the sake of unity and edification. This refusal to take a side he clears from the appearance of lukewarmness: 1. From the greater consequences that follow upon their continued division. 2. Because of the clear exhortations in Scripture to avoid strife and contention. 3. The consistent opposition to schism and division by fathers of the faith, counsels and the practice in Scripture, and law of nature.

Durham then continues by dealing particularly with what may promote edification and union, drawing some rules from two points concerning their division. 1. If union is the necessary step to edification, as dissension and strife are the avenue that led to division, separation cannot be the remedy.[30] He asked, "if ever we will find a means as division and separation commended and approved of Christ for edifying of the body?"[31] He opposed a division as a scriptural remedy of division (and while he never mentions their separate fasts specifically, in his later reflection on the strife, he stressed to avoid separate meetings and separate fasts[32]). 2. Union must be attained by that which edifies, not by that which destroys. 3. Durham draws rules from the second point: 1. The destruction of one side or the other will not be for the edification of the church. 2. No violent authoritative way will heal their division. 3. If edifying union is a necessity, then the kindest and quickest manner of healing is needed.

The question is adduced and answered, wherein may they agree? He answers: 1. As they have a difference of judgment, affection and practice, at least agree to not let things get worse. 2. Agree where they can, if they cannot have the same judgment, at least maintain affection and practice.

While he was not sanguine about the reception of his advice, Durham then addressed several objections that stood in the way of their union. It is questioned, shall they sin in order to have peace, by dismissing ordinances and papering over the controversy? This he answers in six considerations. He then answers two other questions together regarding practices which stood in the way of union, one side objecting that if they overlooked the question of the division, there would never be another assembly, and the other objecting that if they overlooked faults, there would be no stemming of corruption. Durham then closed the sermon with some words of direction to ministers and church members.[33]

> And the last word shall be to all that hear me, people as well as ministers. If a ministry be given for their edification, let not people stumble at them for any fault or infirmity they apprehend to be in them; but seeing instrumentally their edification and salvation depends much on them, be earnest with God that they may be brought to promote that end, and that all things may be laid aside that may hinder it. The ministry is the means whereby Christ brings in and furthers these that are brought in, in the faith; therefore, stumble not to your own prejudice for anything that is among us. There is no expectation of your being above ordinances as long as you are in this life; and how tasteless so ever ministers

4:11–12 Taught before the Synod of Glasgow: A Transcription from Manuscript," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 12 (2016). A refined text edited for easier reading appears in *Collected Sermons: 61 Sermons* (2017), pp. 906–940.

29. Sermons preached before the Synodal Assembly in Glasgow [manuscript], 1652, 1658. Sermons on 1 Corinthians 1, v.10, by James Fergusson April 5, 1658, and on Ephesians 4, v.11 and 12, by Mr. James Durham, October 5, 1652. Folger Shakespeare Library, X.d.424, MS Add. 257.

30. This is an important observation and it should be something on the order of stating the obvious. However, for modern (faithful, not apostate) Presbyterians, accustomed to their divisions, it may be stunning in its implications.

31. *Collected Sermons: 61 Sermons*, p. 934.

32. *Concerning Scandal* (1990), p. 292.

33. *Collected Sermons: 61 Sermons*, p. 940.

> be, they are Christ's gifts that He has given to you for your edifying, and you would pray that the gift may be blessed to you for that end. And who knows but the little praying that has been among people for ministers may have had a hand in our emptiness and other ills that are amongst us? Would to the Lord both you and we could be humbled for these things: and let us all and every one not set ourselves any longer to uphold division; but by earnest prayer wrestle with God for removing of them, and to bestow upon us unity and peace for the edification of the body of His Son.

This remarkably frank sermon to parties at even greater loggerheads since June and after more contentions and a walk out of the Protesters from the July meeting of General Assembly, clearly did not have any immediate effect, as shown by Nicoll's account of it. However, Durham perhaps sowed some seeds which had a short positive impact in November of 1652.

> In November, Robert Blair and a convocation of centrist ministers, met at Edinburgh and attempted to negotiate a union between the Protesters and Resolutioners, both of whom were about to meet in their respective Commissions. In an unprecedented turn of events, these centrists were able to persuade the Protesters to suspend all their polemical activities pending the outcome of a new attempt at union. Remarkably, they also prevailed upon the Protesters to write a letter to the Resolutioners in which they offered to forbear acting as the 1650 Commission "as long as endeavours and conferences for union shall continue," providing the Resolutioners would agree to suspend their activities as the 1652 Commission and refrain from executing the acts of the controverted General Assemblies.[34]

Sadly, as Holfelder goes on to note, the Resolutioners derailed the talks. "Unfortunately, the centrists' mediatorial efforts with the Resolutioners were less effective and they responded to the Protesters overture for union with a strange mixture of contempt and compliance."[35] Durham with Blair and others made another attempt on May 27–28, 1653 in the rival commissioners' meetings held prior to the opening of the General Assembly on July 20, 1653.

> Before the Commission adjourned, the leading centrists, James Durham and Robert Blair, engaged in a last ditch attempt to negotiate an agreement between the factions and prevent another disastrous General Assembly. Unfortunately, their pleas for "peace and union" fell on deaf ears as both parties refused to cooperate in any union which involved compromise on their part. They were, however, able to secure a grudging promise from both factions that they would meet prior to the Assembly for one last attempt to compose their differences.[36]

Both sides remained entrenched, and the promised union meeting "shortly before" the assembly turned out merely to be a face saving move by both sides so that neither would be seen as unwilling to make the attempt.[37] The General Assembly meeting itself was broken up during the roll call by Cromwell's troops, who also broke up the Protester meeting the next day and ordered ministers out of the city.[38] No meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland would meet for thirty-seven years. Things did not improve the next year as both sides began actively seeking advantage over each other by courting favor from the English.

> In 1654, the Protester Patrick Gillespie attempted to break the resultant stalemate when he sought and obtained an ordinance from the English government establishing a system of "triers," which superseded the authority of the kirk's presbyterian courts. In doing this, Gillespie broke the factions' official policy of non-cooperation with the English and ushered in a period during which both factions courted the favour of the Cromwellian regime in an attempt to gain an advantage over their rival. From this point on, the fortunes of the factions became linked inextricably with the ebb and flow of English politics, the Protesters allying themselves with the radical officers of the English army and the Resolutioners with the conservative forces of parliament. The benefits of such alliances, however, proved transitory, serving only to intensify the factions' animosity. By the eve of the Restoration in 1660, the schism had

34. Holfelder, pp. 179–180.
35. Holfelder, pp. 179–180.
36. Holfelder, pp. 189. Holfelder cites *The Diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie* ([1863]), pp. 43–4, and National Library of Scotland, Wodrow MS Folio, no. 35, ff. 123r-124r, and *The Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland,* 3 vols., ed. A. F. Mitchell and J. Christie (1892–1909), 3.556. Durham was likely not a commissioner as he is not recorded as officially attending the Resolutioner's meetings, though Blair is. Bodie implies by "we" that Durham was still present on the 28th when he was also appointed along with others to confer with brethren returned from London on how to reach a union, who were then to meet later in the house of Robert Douglas (*Records,* 3.549; Brodie, p. 44).
37. Holfelder, 190.
38. *Life of Blair,* p. 308. *The Diary of Mr. John Lamont of Newton 1649–1671* (1830), pp. 56–57.

> not been remedied and the divided kirk proved an easy prey to its adversaries.[39]

Durham and Blair made another attempt in June of 1655, but the Resolutioners were again unwilling to compromise,[40] and a more promising attempt in November the same year also failed. As Holfelder notes, the two sides had become politically entrenched, each seeking Cromwell's support to get dominance over the other. Durham would save any further pleas for his *Dying Testimony*. He had plenty of work to keep himself busy. He married again in 1654, taking to wife the widow of Zachary Boyd, Margaret Mure, and more children filled the Durham home. Margaret was the sister of John Carstares' wife, his partner in the Glasgow ministry. Mrs. Durham and Carstares would partner in bringing most of Durham's lectures and sermons to print.

The Death of James Death

As the division proved incurable and Protesters and Resolutioners alike were content to fight a continuous battle for domination, Durham appears to retire from the controversy, and "moves off the stage and becomes an onlooker: his ministerial work comes first, his study, his pulpit, his visitation, his writing, and the weakness of body which first threatened during his chaplaincy, made retirement increasingly necessary."[41]

Christie writes that "his health gave way in the most alarming manner, aggravated by 'a great burden of continually preaching,' due to the absence of some of his brethren from the city, and the correction and revision of these Lectures [on Revelation] put a great strain upon him."[42] Writing to his cousin about the time Durham died, Baillie remarks: "Our friends in town are all well. Only good Mr. Durham has kept his chamber above these four months, and his bed more than this month, of a lent fever and defluction, that puts his life in great hazard. In the absence of Mr. Patrick Gillespie more than a year, and Mr. Robert M'Quare [MacWard] seeking his health in London, a great burden of continual preaching lay on him, and perfecting of his work on the Revelation for the press was very heavy. It were a great pity of the man; albeit I have my own differences with him, and sharp reckonings sometimes, yet I love him dearly, and counts him one of the best and ablest men in Britain." In a postscript he adds, "Mr. Durham yet continues extremely sick, much regretted by all: no man looks for his life."[43]

Shortly before taking sick Durham had decided his ministry in Glasgow was over; indeed, he had been thinking of another call. It is recorded,

> That a little before he sickened, there came a call to him from Aberdeen; and, jesting with his wife, he says, "My dear, will you go with me to [New Town,] Aberdeen?" She surprised, and said he needed not to doubt she would go where he went; but what meant he by that? "Truly," said he, "I think I must go either to Aberdeen or my grave: There is certainly somewhat before me; for my work is done in Glasgow; I cannot get a text to preach to them." And with[in] a little time he sickened and died.[44]

While the call from Aberdeen (issued on December 23) was not objected to by the Glasgow assembly, it is not clear if Durham actually accepted it or if the whole matter was rendered moot upon his taking ill.[45] He was still uncertain and considering it, even though he knew the seriousness of his condition and unsure he had "anie mor lyf," in a February 15, 1658 letter to David Dickson, which he wrote seeking advice as to whether he should entertain accepting the call under the circumstances. Dickson had been primarily responsible for Durham's entering the ministry and it was fitting he sought his advice at the end of it.[46]

39. Holfelder, "Factionalism," Abstract.
40. Holfelder, p. 212.
41. Christie, p. 75.
42. Christie, p. 78.
43. Baillie, 3.368, 373. Baillie comments on the death of Lord Balcolmy, who Laing notes died on 26 June, a day after Durham died. This dates the letter to about the time of his death, though there must be some mistake in the reckoning as it does not seem possible Baillie would have remarked on Lord Balcolmy's sudden death the paragraph before this, which happened after Durham's death, and not remark on Durham's passing on the 25 June.
44. *Analecta,* 2.140. Cf. *Analecta,* 3.107. Wodrow also records Mr. Simson (Patrick Simpson) as saying, that after Durham had finished preaching through the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, that "he could not get a text, save that, 'Martha, Martha,' etc., and he looked on his commission to Glasgow as at an end." *Analecta,* pp. 167–168. This is a reference to Luke 10:41–42. This may place the eight sermons he is said to have preached on "The One Thing Needful," after the Isaiah 53 series, of which one is known and published. *61 Sermons* (2018), p. 887.
45. *Selections from the Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen,* ed. John Stuart (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1846), pp. 145, 247. Cf. *Diary of Alexander Jaffray* (1833; Aberdeen: G. & R. King, 1856), 118.
46. This letter is in the secretary hand, and is not as clear, perhaps due to his health, as the letter to Douglas about the chaplaincy. A first time partial transcription was given in "*Antiquary:* The James Durham MS III: James Durham's 228 Sermons on Song of Solomon 2–8," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 13 (2017). My thanks to Mark Koller for providing the above refined text and a transcription as follows: Number 26 (51) Right Reverend, | I have beine put not manie weeks

> Feb. 15, 1658
> Right Reverend,
>
> I have been put not many weeks since, to give myself to the Lord's good will whether I should have any more life or not. Now he hath tried with another exercise, when yet I have not had access to be in public (it's likely you heard of it) it's writt[en] by a motion from Aberdeen. I know there is not much depending on my being, or not being anywhere; yet considering some circumstances of the thing, and time we are casten in, I thought it duty to communicate it with you; you, all most all, have had a main hand in God's providence, in ordering all my stations hitherto; yea, and in my first entry to my ministry, Therefore, I hope you will not shun to help me with your advice in the whole matter, and this, as a piece of service to our common master, I beg from you: I can say little more for your information, save that I profess I have no discontent to persuade a change, nor any other desire in this, but to do what may be most edifying, which I entreat you singly, without respect to my inclination to consider: and stand not on generals, for I desire for satisfaction only to put you to this trouble. My infirmity makes me to write to you all jointly,[47] which I beg you will not mistake.
>
> From Your loving brother and servant in the Lord,
> James Durhame

Durham may have believed himself a failure. His great grandfather, grandfather, and father had served kings, but he could not endure the "grievous burden" of being chaplain to Charles II. He was denied many times the opportunity to be a professor of theology for which he believed he was most suited, by both friends and foes alike. His heartfelt principled position to plead for church unity was a failure and one side disparaged him as a "neuter," and the other proclaimed that it was God's justice that he not obtain the ministry he sought in Glasgow. He knew he was far from eloquent and of his own initiative never ventured to put anything to the press, and only from importunity of friends labored to try to bring his lectures on Revelation to some form to be published, and while doing that craft his work on Scandal as a dying testament. He took the responsibility of preaching the Word so seriously as to put himself in physical agony, and his constant study, prayer and fasting to prepare for that tremendous duty appears to have put him in constant ill health, which contemporaries believed caused his final decline and death. With only ten years in the ministry, he would have otherwise had plenty of time for a second career in Aberdeen, but an early death was closing that door.

Durham seems to have been accepting of his illness and likely death and the apparent end of his usefulness to the ministry, as is clear from his February letter to David Dickson. This acceptance continued late into his illness once he was confined to his bed in the last month of his life.

> Mr. John Hunter tells me, that Mr. Patrick Adair came into Mr. James Durham when he was on his deathbed; and, speaking to him, said, he did not question but he was ready, and had nothing to do but to die. He blessed God that had made him ready, adding, that he had scarce that to do, viz. to dye; for, besides that God had long taught him to die daily, he had brought death upon him so gradually and insensibly, by his lingering distemper, that he believed death would be very easy; and he was gradually and very softly dissolving."[48]

However, as death drew near, there then began a great struggle, and he who had preached the need for

since, to give | my selfe to the Lords good will wh[e]ther I should have | anie mor lyf or not. now he hath tryed with ane[other] | other exercise, [whe]n yet I have not had access to be | in publick (its lyk you /\heard of it) its writt by a motion | from Aberdeen. I know ther is not much depending | on my being, or not being anie [whe]re; yet [con]sidering | some circumstances of the thing, and tyme we are | casten in, I thought it dutie to communicatt | it with you; you, all most all, have had a main | hand in Gods providence, in ordering all my sta | tions hitherto; yea, and in my first enterie to | my ministerie, Therfor I hop you will not | shune to helpe me with your advice in the whole | matter, and this, as a peece of service to our com | mon master, I begge from you: I can say little | mor for your informatione, save that I professe I | have no discontent to persuad a change, nor ane | other desire in this, but to doe [wha]t may be most | edifieing, [whi]ch I intreat you singly, without respect | to my inclination to consider: and stand not on | generalls, for I desir for satisfaction only | to putt you to this trouble. my infirmete maks | me to writ to you all ?jointly, [whi]ch I bege you | will not mistak, from | feb 15 | 1658 Your loving brother and | servant in the | lord | Ja: durhame." James Durham to David Dickson, February 15, 1658, NLS, Wodrow MSS Folio XV, Number 26 (51).

47. Though mainly addressed to Dickson, it appears Durham wrote a group letter due to his illness. The Edinburgh ministers were tending to work and correspond as a group at this time and Durham may be including any or all of the following: Dickson, Robert Douglas, Mungo Law, James Hamilton, John Smith, George Hutcheson, Robert Lawrie, Hugh MacKale, Thomas Garven. These names are from the fullest jointly signed letter at this time addressed to some Englishmen including Thomas Manton, dated September 3, 1657. See Scottish History Society, third series, volume 16, *Register of the Consultations of the Ministers of Edinburgh and some other brethren of the ministry, 1657–1660* (Edinburgh: Printed on the University Press by T. and A. Constable, Ltd., 1930), p. 114.

48. *Analecta*, 3.297.

assurance of salvation in Christ so strongly,[49] struggled with doubts at the end of his life. There are several brief accounts of this recorded by Wodrow and others.

> When on death-bed, he was under considerable darkness about his state, and said to Mr. John Carstairs, "Brother, for all that I have preached and written, there is but one scripture I can remember or dare grip unto it; tell me, if I dare lay the weight of my salvation upon it, *Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no ways cast out.*" Mr. Carstairs answered him, "You may depend on it, though you had a thousand's salvation at hazard."[50]

Howie records,

> When he was drawing near his departure, and in a great conflict and agony, though finding some difficulty, yet, through the strength of God's grace, he triumphantly overcame; and cried in a rapture of holy joy, some little time before he committed his soul to God, "Is not the Lord good? Is he not infinitely good? See how he smiles! I do say it, and I do proclaim it.[51]

James Stirling's account recorded by Wodrow is,

> He had a great struggle at his death, and was in a great agony. A little before he died, he cried out, "A great sinner I have been! O! a whole world for the least hope of heaven! Of all that he has given me he has lost nothing, but that him that cometh unto me I will in no ways cast out. O may I lippen [trust confidently] to that brother?"—said he to Mr. John Carstairs. To which Mr. Carstairs replied, "If ye had ten thousand souls, ye may hang them all safely on that pin! I suppose, brother, it is not for yourself you are meeting with such a dark cloud, but for the sake of others, viz. of some of us that are now made to hear you!"[52]

And there is another account by a near relation recorded by Wodrow saying,

> That that great man, when upon his death-bed, was under deep and sore exercise as to his soul's case and state; and when his collegue, Mr. Carstairs, came in one day to see him, he asked him how he was? He answered, "Very low. There is but one promise in all the Scripture that I dare look to, 'Come unto me all ye that are weary,' Math. xi. 28. "May I venture my salvation upon it?" "Yes," said Mr. Carstairs. "If you had a thousand souls, you might venture them on it!"[53]

Robert MacWard's Account of Durham's Death

These accounts are brief and leave one wanting to know more. Happily, we are indebted to Jacob Koelman,[54] the translator of Rutherford's Letters and of Durham's lectures on Song of Solomon into Dutch, for preserving a longer account from the words of a letter he had in his possession. The letter was written by Robert MacWard[55] to a Scottish woman to comfort her upon her own approaching death. MacWard gives a significantly longer and very stirring account of the death of James Durham, along with an assessment of his ministry. Even though this appeared early in print, only twenty years after Durham's death, it remained generally unknown outside of those knowing the Dutch language. This is the first translation of the text into the English language, and this writer is happy and it is fitting to include it in this updated biography. The following is translated from

49. "If we have been convinced and made sensible of sin, and of our lost condition by nature; if we have not smothered that conviction, but cherished it; if we have not run to this or that duty for satisfying of divine justice, and for making of our peace thereby, but were necessitated to betake ourselves to Jesus Christ made offer of in the gospel for the salvation of sinners; and if we have closed with him as he was offered —if *we* have done so, *we* may thence conclude that he had loved *us* and given himself to save *us* because he has humbled *me* for sin (may the serious soul say) and given *me* this faith to believe in him; and this is his promise which *I* rest upon, that *I* shall be saved." *Collected Sermons: 72 Sermons on Isaiah 53,* Sermon 20, p. 278.

50. "Life," in *72 Sermons*, p. 39. This is taken from Wodrow's first account in *Analecta*, 1.136.

51. John Howie, *Lives of the Scottish Covenanters,* ed. William M'Gavin (1858; Greenville, SC: A Press, 1981), p. 216.

52. Wodrow then adds, "But after that he got his cloud dispelled." *Analecta*, 3.106.

53. *Analecta*, 1.215.

54. Jacob Koelman greatly admired James Durham and generally in his work on Revelation follows the views of Durham. "Schatplichtig weet Koelman zich zoals gezegd met name aan de Schot J. Durham, voor wie hij grote bewondering koesterde. Hij neemt diens eschatologische opvattingen in grote lijnen over." Mathijs van Campen, „Gans Israël, Voetiaanse en coccejaanse visies op de joden gedurende de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw," P:h.D.diss., Leiden (2006), p. 188.

55. At the Restoration, many of those who had been in the Protester party in Scotland were either executed or banished. The latter included Robert MacWard and John Brown of Wamphray. "In exile MacWard, Brown and other militant presbyterian ministers drew close to the *Nadere Reformatorie* or 'Further Reformation' movement within the Dutch Calvinist Church. Among their close contacts were several leading lights of the *Nadere Reformatorie*, such as Jacob Koelman, James Borstius and professors at the University of Utrecht, such as Gisbert Voetius." Mark Jardine, "The United Societies: Militancy, Martyrdom and the Presbyterian Movement in Late-Restoration Scotland, 1679–1688," University of Edinburgh, PhD Thesis (2009), pp. 16–17.

Koelman's preface to the first Dutch edition of *Clavis Cantici*.[56] He begins by writing,

> But above all I shall put the judicious and Christian reader in hand a more express and extensive narrative of this great minister and his labors, of his life and of his death, as I have found it inserted in an elaborate letter, written three years[57] ago to some Scottish lady by Mr. Robert MacWard[58] (a faithful and brave professor and witness of Jesus Christ for His truth and government against the apostate in Scotland, formerly minister in the same church of Glasgow where Mr. Durham was before him).[59] This letter has not even appeared in print in English. However, I have noted down the following from his original. I shall relate Mr. MacWard's own express words. He speaks thus of that 'great and gracious writer', of that 'great interpreter of Scripture', as he calls him:

Koelman goes on to cite a lengthy passage from MacWard's letter.

> *Firstly*. In his call to the work of the ministry there were not a few extraordinary things. Many things there were in his first thrusting forth to labor in the vineyard which are not found in the sending forth of other even faithful laborers, who nevertheless obtain mercy to be serious laborers together with God [1 Cor. 3:9].[60] This particularity predicted and promised a special and proportioned presence of God, and that his Master would be with him, and hold his hand, and put him forth in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ [Rom. 15:29]; and many experienced it thus.
>
> *Secondly*. As there were many uncommon things in his first sending out, so also his qualifications and abilities

56. This text was translated by Ruth Pieterman in August, 2021, from *De Sleutel of Verklaaring Van 't Hoogliedt Salomons, Beschreven door Mr. Jacobus Durham … Vertaelt door Jacobus Koelman* (Utrecht: Willem Clerck, 1681), pp. 48–58. From pages 42–48, Koelman rehearses facts and assessments of Durham taken from Carstares' and Baillie's prefaces to the Revelation lectures, and Owen's and Jenkyn's prefaces and Carstares' letter to the reader affixed to the lectures on the Ten Commandments. The MacWard letter appears to be the only unique manuscript material he adduces. Allusions to and citations of Scripture were supplied by the translator.

57. Koelman was a student of Gisbertus Voetius, and became minister of the congregation at Sluis in Staats-Vlaanderen from 1662–1674, when he was ejected by the magistrates. The life of Durham is not dated, but Koelman's dedication is dated 17 Januari 1681. If the "three years" is more or less precise, this dates the letter to about the lasts months of 1678 or the beginning of 1679. The dedication is to Koelman's own congregation in Sluis. "Jacob Koelman had been ejected from his charge in Flanders for 'refusing to observe the festival days and formularies of the Dutch Church.' He was noted for favouring stricter churches, and gave considerable help to the Scots Kirk in Rotterdam, including participating in Richard Cameron's ordination…." "The Societies would look to Koelman not only as a 'great witness against corruptions' in Holland, but as 'a great sympathizer with the afflicted contenders against defections' in Scotland. From the Restoration onwards, Koelman had specialised in translating Protester presbyterian divines, such as Hugh Binning's *Principles of Christian Religion* (1678), [William] Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest* (1680) and others works by James Durham and David Dickson, often seeking biographical details or introductions from MacWard in Utrecht. In return, Koelman was of tremendous help to MacWard and Brown in their correspondence with the States General when they were threatened with extradition to Scotland 1677. He worked closely with Brown, often translating his manuscripts into Dutch and disseminating them across Holland before their publication in English, and he translated MacWard's collection of Rutherford's letters, *Joshua Redivivus*, in 1672, which proved so popular that it ran through five further Dutch editions prior to 1688." Jardine, ibid., p. 17.

58. Koelman spells MacWard and Rutherford as Macwair and Retorfort, and these have been changed without notice to the current English Spelling.

59. Koelman may be referring to Robert MacWard's several tracts in English, for which see *A Collection of Tracts, Containing, I. Banders disbanded. II. The poor man's cup of cold water. III. A testimony against paying of cess to the persecutors, in a letter to a friend* (Dalry: John Gemmill, 1805). However, it may rather be the case that he is drawing from the only work by MacWard that had appeared in Dutch prior to this, which was a translation of a letter (again), preserved in MS but never published in English. *De wekker der leeraaren. In tijden van verval met aanwijzingh van den plight der vroome, ten goede van haer leeraars. Voorgestelt in een brief, eerst in't Engels beschreven, door een yveraar Godts*, trans. Jacobus Koelman (Vlissingen: Abraham van Laren, 1674). The manuscript is "A solemn & necessary warning especially to those in the holy office of the ministry." New College Library, Edinburgh, MSS MacWard, U.S.II.4.8a. Koelman learned of and obtained the text from a devout lady of Utrecht (possibly Maria van der Voort, who befriended both MacWard and Brown of Wamphray), and was so taken by it that he translated and published it. The text in Dutch is not attributed and it appears that Koelman did not know the author to credit until he met MacWard as early as the next year (1675). Editions after 1700 attribute it to MacWard. The work is quite critical of the conforming clergy in Scotland. In one way, at least for Koelman, it was too harsh in saying read prayers flowed from Satan (read prayers were common Dutch practice, see *De wekker der leeraaren,* page *3r), and he tempers and explains that MacWard's severity was due to the situation of the church in Scotland. For background he refers to the Dutch translation by his friend Jacobus Borstius, of James Stewart's and James Stirling's *Naphtali, or The Wrestlings of the Church of Scotland for the Kingdom of Christ* (1667; Dutch, Rotterdam: Borstius, 1668), See L. J. van Valen, "In God verbonden: De gereformeerde vroomheidsbetrekkingen tussen Schotland en de Nederlanden in de zeventiende eeuw, met name in de periode na de Restauratie (1660–1700)," PhD Thesis, Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam (2019), pp. 302–306.

60. All Scripture references have been deduced and supplied by the translator. While MacWard is not explicit, this at the least must allude to Durham's conversion and then later escape from death at Marston Moor.

were uncommon. He was the man, of any I knew, whose natural and acquired abilities made him very able for such an undertaking to open up that deep Scripture, Revelation. Such a treasure and multitude of eminent gifts, such foreseeing and penetrating discernment of spirit, such firmness and solidness of judgment; in a word, such rich and rare combination of requirements to qualify a person to such a work is hardly to be found in a whole age.

Thirdly. I must tell you, though He who had sent him forth to the work of the ministry, also with a strong hand [cf. Isa. 8:11] pressed on his soul to enter upon this work of the exposition of Revelation, and moved him to dive into this deep, nevertheless such was his gracious humility (for with such is the secret of the Lord [Ps. 25:14]) and so low was his esteem of the rich treasure wherewith his Master had provided him, that he regarded what he had as bearing no proportion at all to that wherewith he was occupied. He thought that his abilities would mean little to open up the mysteries which are enveloped in that book, unless the Spirit of wisdom and revelation worked together with an extraordinary assistance, guided him into the truth in the search, and discovered to him those deep things out of the darkness [Eph. 1:17; John 16:13; Job 12:22]. And therefore, under this right and happy conviction of his inability to these things, in spite of all his abilities, he did that which I do not know could be said of any other exposition of Scripture which is in print. Namely, he never studied nor tried to study any lesson or sermon in that book until he first had given himself to fasting and prayer, to the end he might be helped to find out the meaning and sense of the Spirit and to unfold that mystery, and afterwards he went to work in faith and dependence. This on the whole testifies that his Master took him alone and expounded to him all those things which for others would have been as parables and dark sayings. So that the things which this Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God [Mark 4:34; Ps. 78:2; 2 Chron. 26:5], has written (without deducting anything from other worthy and great men) seems to be more truthfully a Revelation of Revelation than anything else which the world has ever yet seen about that portion of Scripture.

Fourthly. During all the time of his ministry in his sermons and persuadings he so constantly filled the field with Jesus Christ and with faith in His blood, that none excelled him in this. What God made His Christ for poor sinners, and what he himself had found Him to be (for he believed, and the Spirit of faith had been given him, and therefore he spoke [2 Cor. 4:13]), was Mr. Durham's constant subject. How seriously and urgingly he most closely followed up that great gospel design, so that the soul might embrace Jesus Christ unto righteousness! His sermons always showed that he had determined not to know anything among the people than Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And though he disdained that showiness and vain floweriness of the enticing words of man's wisdom in proclaiming the testimony of God, yet he spoke as being moved by the Holy Spirit. And the movements of the hearts of his hearers on the moving of his lips were a testimony that his speech and his preaching was in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power [1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Cor. 2:4].

And thus this was always his advice to the students of theology that they would clearly present Jesus Christ as crucified before the eyes of the people for the obedience of faith [Rom. 1:5; 16:26]. And that they would make it their work, on the one hand, to discover the people to themselves, and the wrath of God against all unrighteousness, until they were brought to that question of the jailor: 'What shall we do to be saved?' And on the other hand, to point to the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world, and to preach the marrow of the gospel wherein, unto the sinner's salvation, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith [Acts 16:30; John 1:29; Rom. 1:17].

And here I must tell you what you should especially observe, that he by this way of preaching (whereby he occupied the hearers about their own hearts and about the body of death that was in them, to the end that this might always be to them a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save sinners [1 Tim. 1:15]) became the happy instrument of establishing and grounding his hearers in the firm truths of the gospel. For though there were more professors in Glasgow than in any other place of that nation which was not more populous, yet during all the time of the stay of the English among them, the former did not persuade one soul into their sentiments; yes, many of the English heard him constantly with great edification and benefit.

He judged, as a wise physician, that no way was so safe—not only to prevent people's falling into the freneticism of the papal bewitchment (though I admit that the devil indeed was wiser than on that time to have presented the papal abominations in their natural shape,

well knowing how greatly these, thus being displayed, would have been detested; nevertheless this seer [1 Sam. 9:9] observed that that mystery of iniquity wrought then, and foreseeing what is now carried on in Britain [2 Thess. 2:7], he made it part of his work to give the souls of his hearers an antidote to the venom of Rome), but also to oppose those light opinions which were ready to commend themselves to the less steadfast and less approved people under the color of high attainments, meanwhile insensibly consuming the lively practices of godliness and stopping the lively exercises of religion, putting a dry skeleton of sapless and windy concepts in the place of sweet communion with God and of the serious striving for conformity to His image—I say, he judged no way so suitable and proper (and the outcome showed that he had the mind of Christ) to prevent those deadly evils than that of teaching the people to keep their finger on their sore in order that their eye might always be on their remedy, and to keep their wounds bleeding for Christ until He would bind them up. He sought to make them have a right knowledge of the plague of their own heart [1 Kings 8:38] and to make them know that nothing could heal their disease than a plaster of the blood of Christ, applied by faith.

Fifthly. Let me tell you (which can be of special use for you before you die and at your death) yet a little of his soul's exercise on the last day of his life, where I myself was present and of which I must say that it was the most edifying sight that I ever saw on earth. And perhaps God made me a witness of it to this end, among others, that I at this time and occasion might give you a narrative of it to your edification.

When he was drawing near to his end and I alone, except for his own family, was present, he turned away from us with his face to the wall and thus was lying still for a considerable time. We judged that he was asleep, but from the narrative that we afterwards got from himself, we found that he refreshed his soul in the begun enjoyments of God, having got his head laid on the bosom of his Master and satisfying himself with the first fruits and with the blessed anticipations and foretastes of the glory which was now to be revealed. For these were his words: "I turned to the wall, and I thought of Hezekiah's posture, and I had a good hour."

But as soon as he turned himself to us again, we at once observed such a change that presently his friends were sent for to see him giving up the ghost (little thinking that they would have to be witnesses of one of the most remarkable soul-battles of which anyone of them, all things well-considered, had ever been a witness). Immediately after this glorious enjoyment it pleased the Lord to draw a shutter between the eye of His servant and His own face, and by a dark cloud to eclipse the light of His countenance, which just now had shone upon his soul; and at the same time to let loose the tempter upon him, whereby an unexpected storm was raised in his soul.

My pen almost drops out of my hand while I am writing this, when I remember the anguish and distress of his soul in that battle. His heaviness was so great that he in his wrestling, as not far from being overcome (yet he could not be overcome and sink because everlasting arms were underneath [Deut. 33:27]; thus a sustaining influence was more present than he felt at that time), burst forth into this expression: "Lord, has ever a work like this fallen out badly in Thy hand?" (Oh, "in Thy hand," a remarkable word, as knowing to Whom he had committed the keeping of his soul [1 Peter 4:19]). Yet the storm increased and after a long continuation in this sharp conflict, he again burst forth into this expression: "Lord, if ever I have found grace in Thy sight, let me alone" [Exod. 33:13; 34:9; Judges 6:17; Job 7:16,19; 10:20].

This battle continued from six o'clock in the morning unto at noon, in which time he as it were had to pass through again all the several stages of Christianity, from the first touching of a soul which is made sensible of its lost state to its admission into glory. During this time the poorest burdened maidservant, ignorant of the way of making peace with God and being pursued with the terrors of the law, never listened with greater eagerness and attention to grasp something from the narrative of a Savior and of a city of refuge, than this great preacher of faith listened to a word of faith in Christ Jesus, by whomsoever it was spoken. And when that other great gospel preacher who oftentimes had been a comfort to him, Mr. Carstairs (a happy pair of colleagues, and a blessed people among whom such fellow laborers and fellow workers are laboring unto the kingdom of God [Col. 4:11]), said something to him that amounted to these words: "My Sir, it is becoming that you should be put in this exercise, and that you, being driven away from all other refuges, should make use of the shield of faith therewith to quench all the fiery darts which are thrown at you in this furious attack [Eph. 6:16]—you who were so often helped to preach the nature, the necessity, the excellency, the use, and the end of faith in Christ Jesus, in order that we, by your making use of

this shield before our eyes and by practicing thy teaching in this duel, may now strive for that steadfastness in the faith whereby alone we are to be enabled to resist the roaring lion [1 Peter 5:8–9], and in order that we may see it is a lighter matter to preach, profess, and speak of the faith in Jesus Christ, than to practice and use that precious faith as a shield and buckler."

On hearing this he burst forth into this expression: "Oh, how true is the thing you say! In this day I bear witness to that truth, that it is one thing to preach and persuade concerning the faith in Christ Jesus, and another thing to put it into practice."

When it had been twelve o'clock, all those present were requested to move to another room; only Mr. Carstairs and I stayed with him. Then, after a deep comfortless silence, he suddenly cast an eye on us shining with that joy unspeakable and full of glory which is in believing [1 Peter 1:8], and with a brightness and transport of soul as of one who is taken up on the mount or who at once enters into the immediate enjoyment of God, he said: "Oh, how lovely He is looking! Does anyone of you know Him! He condescends to satisfy me, ungrateful me!"

After this time he was so taken up with that new sight of that blessed object, God in Christ reconciling the sinners unto Himself [2 Cor. 5:19], and so enraptured with that sight of his face, and his uplifted thoughts were so arrested in these raptures, that he being thus absorbed, could no longer endure to speak with us. Only we saw that his soul was bathed in pure delight and immersed in the depth of wonder. Hereby it was given us to understand a little bit of what will be the eternal exercise of the souls which are admitted into the immediate sight of God, when in all the ages of eternity the soul will be so occupied by Him that it will never endure to look to anything else. Nothing but God will have access to look into the soul, for He will be all in all, all that is seen, all that is known, all that is beheld or loved, and all that is enjoyed; and the soul will not look for another object, having now in possession everything it desires.

Thus we saw that good soldier of Jesus Christ entering the battle [2 Tim. 2:3].

Thus we saw him being pursued.

Thus we saw him pleading and presenting Jesus Christ and His righteousness as his only protection.

Thus we saw him being absolved and acquitted.

Thus we saw him fighting and conquering.

Thus we saw him putting Christ between him and everything from which he could not otherwise be justified [Acts 13:39].

Thus we saw the God of peace bruising Satan under his feet [Rom. 16:20]; and this was the victory whereby he overcame, even his faith in His blood [1 John 5:4].

Thus we saw him dying while kissing the wounds of a slain Savior.

And thus we saw his Master kissing those lips which by kissing His wounds were like a scarlet thread.

And in these mutual embraces we saw his Master carrying him off the stage to receive the immortal crown.

So that great request which he had made (which a few days before on his special order had been written down and has been printed at the end of his book, summarizing all the desires and longings of his blessed soul; Oh, noble frame, to depart out of this world panting to have possession of God, breathing out his soul in the bosom of Jesus Christ, dying because he could no longer live in the body, in this respect that while he was at home in the body, he was absent from the Lord! [2 Corinthians 5:6, 8]) was granted him in a full measure, heaped up, shaken together and running over [Luke 6:38]. And thus, being filled with all the fullness of God [Eph. 3:19], he was set down to sing among those glorious choristers above.

Thus he lived unto God.

Thus he believed.

Thus he walked.

Thus he wrote.

Thus he preached.

Thus he wrestled.

Thus he fought the good fight of faith [2 Tim. 4:7].

> Thus he died more than conqueror through Him who loved him [Rom. 8:37].
>
> Thus he departed out of this life.
>
> And thus we saw an entrance was ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [2 Peter 1:11].

Koelman then concludes, "So far Mr. MacWard," and adds,

> Here I shall yet add two things. Firstly, Mr. MacWard says towards the end that to Mr. Durham his request was granted which he had made to be noted down at the back of his book, but he does not mention what it was. Therefore, the reader should know that the following words are at the end of Mr. Durham's book of the exposition on Revelation:[61] "The worthy and pious author of this treatise (whose communication {communication to others} was habitually good for the use of edifying, and such as did minister grace to the hearers, being about to leave this world [Eph. 4:29], to which he was dead when alive, while all that were about him did see him panting {panting and thirsting} for God, for the living God, as the hart does after the water brooks [Ps. 42:1]), a little before he fell asleep, desired one of them who stood by to write for a close to this commentary of Revelation these following words (worthy to be graven {to be written} with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever), *And now, O my soul, when all says 'Come' and concurs in a sweet harmony, seeing thou hast heard and does hear the call* {the *voice*} *of the gospel, say with the bride and with the Spirit, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly'*" [Job 19:24; Rev. 22:17, 20].
>
> Secondly, I cited in the preface to the Letters of Mr. Rutherford by occasion that an eminent well-exercised Christian in Scotland,[62] perceiving that many were of a very sorrowful spirit upon the removal and death of that glorious, burning and shining light [John 5:35], Mr. Durham, used this word of comfort and encouragement (wherewith at the same time he expressed his esteem of him):[63] "Turn your tears and sighs for this loss, though it seems to you {seems to be} almost irreparable (an age hardly producing such another) into songs of praises, and do not so indulge your sorrow, because the Master hath called home an ambassador who did so faithfully and successfully negotiate for him, as ye {that you would} forget in the meantime to praise the Lord of the harvest who thrust forth such a laborer into His vineyard. Let not the greatness of your grief make you forget the riches of His goodness to the Church of Christ in Scotland, in that there was a Mr. Durham to die out of it."

Thus far the remarkable account of the death of James Durham from Robert MacWard via the preserving hand of Jacob Koelman. Shortly before he died, Durham received a letter from Samuel Rutherford,

> Sir, I would ere now have written to you, had I not known that your health, weaker and weaker, could scarce permit you to hear or read. I need not speak much. The Way ye know, and have preached to others the skill of the Guide, and the glory of the home beyond death. And when He saith, "Come and see," it will be your gain to obey, and go out and meet the Bridegroom. What accession is made to the higher house of His kingdom should not be our loss, though it be real loss to the church of God. But we count one way, and the Lord counteth another way. He is infallible, and the only wise God, and needeth none of us. Had he needed the staying in body of Moses and the prophets, He could have taken another way. Who dare bid you cast your thoughts back on wife or children, when He hath said, "Leave them to Me, and come up hither"? Or who can persuade you to die or live, as if that were arbitrary to us, and not His alone who hath determined the number of your months? If so it seem good to Him, follow your Forerunner and Guide. It is an unknown land to you, who were never there before; but the land is good, and the company before the throne desirable, and He who sitteth on the throne is His lone a sufficient heaven.
>
> Grace, grace be with you.
> Yours in the Lord,
> S. R. St. Andrews, June 15, 1658.[64]

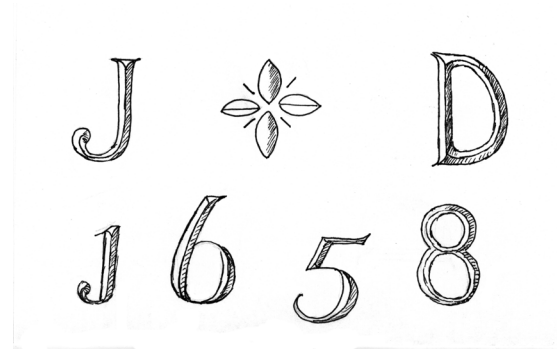
61. The text from the end of the Revelation lectures is inserted here. The words in braces are translations of the Dutch Koelman made from the original English text into Dutch.

62. Sadly, the writer is not identified.

63. See in English, *Joshua redivivus, or, Mr. Rutherfoord's letters divided into two parts*, ed. Robert MacWard (Rotterdam?, 1664), Christian Reader, p. [c6 recto], and in Dutch, *Het tweede deel der brieven van Mr. Samuel Rhetorfort. Professor, en predikant wel eer in de Academy, en kerk van St. Andries, in Schotlandt*, translated by Jacob Koelman (Tot Amsterdam: By Gerardus Borstius, boekverkoper, aan den Dam, op den hoek van de Nieuwendijk, 1679).

64. *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, ed. Andrew Bonar, fourth edition (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1890), Letter CCCLI, To Mr. James Durham, p. 685.

James Durham entered glory ten days later on the 25th of June, 1658, in the thirty-sixth year of his age. He was interred in Blacader's (Blackadder's) Aisle in the cathedral, which was "formally set apart for the city clergy" on November 30, 1648. There would have been no funeral in keeping with the then general practice, and there is no obvious memorial, but only the bare initials and dates of the many ministers buried since are crudely carved into the wall, and even these are practically forgotten and covered over with multiple coats of whitewash.[65] In addition to this indignity, more significant disturbing of Durham's resting place may have occurred in 1903, but no details of the excavation work done for heating ducts in the floor at that time could be found as to whether burials were disturbed or not.[66] However, while the grand memorial crypt in St. Rule's Monifieth erected by his grandfather for the Durham's of Pitkerro has long since been carelessly eradicated, as one steps down into that cathedral aisle, on the right at the first bay may be found the initials of a son of Durham who left the life of the country gentry for the gospel ministry: "M", "J.D." 1658." And next to those are the initials of Andrew Gray,[67] whose more popular ministry was cut short two years earlier.



The Legacy of James Durham

For all his sharp opposition to Durham's peacemaking found in his then private writings, Robert Baillie chose to say publicly in his preface to Durham's lectures on Revelation,

> The Epistle [to the Reader] speaks to the man. I shall add but this one word, that from the day I was employed by the Presbytery to preach and pray and to impose, with others, hands upon him for the Ministry at Glasgow, I did live to the very last with him in great and uninterrupted love, and in a high estimation of his egregious

65. The Durham initials were still visible in 1823 and in 1898. James Cleland, *Statistical Tables Relative to the City of Glasgow,* third ed. (Glasgow: James Lumesden and Son, 1823), p. 178. George Eyre-Todd, *The Book of Glasgow Cathedral: A History and Description* (Glasgow: Morison Brothers, 1898), p. 201, 418. Unfortunately, no photographs antique or modern were discovered that display these initials clearly. The aisle has been whitewashed, heavily it seems, more than once after it was set aside as a place for worship in 1937 through funds raised by Friends of Glasgow Cathedral (Andrew G. Ralston, *Nevile Davidson: A Life to Be Lived* [Wipf & Stock, 2019], p. 40). Ongoing restoration work and the setting aside of the aisle for worship services has rendered it off limits to the general public, and due to Covid restrictions it was with a great deal of difficulty that Durham's and Gray's initials were confirmed to be still visible and present. While Durham's initials and date are visible to the naked eye, Gray's are harder to see, and neither could be photographed well due to the whitewash, and a more professional attempt could not be undertaken under the restrictions and publication time constraints. Other 17th century initials may still be present under all the whitewashing, but only Durham's and Gray's could be detected. My profuse thanks are due Jess Lydon, Steward, Glasgow Cathedral, with Historic Environment Scotland, who on my query investigated this and provided some photographs and details on the location of the Durham and Gray memorial initials. Through some AI the Durham initials were raised enough to make the above artist's conception rendering. My thanks go to the artist, J. David Gillespie, Stonecutter, South Carolina.

66. There were excavations in 1992–93 at the cathedral to install new and updated heating and electrical systems under the floors. There were 84 burials excavated from throughout the cathedral, of which 79 skeletons were in such condition as to enable removal for analysis. However, according to Dr. Stephen T. Driscoll (Correspondence, August 2, 2021), the excavations of 1903 were relied upon for the installations in the aisle. The charts of the 1992–93 work do indicate a dozen excavations around the interior perimeter walls and three areas in the middle of the room. Presumably, then, these were already disturbed in 1903. Dr. Driscoll thought facts about this would be in some archive, but there is nothing at the Mitchell Library and neither could Historic Scotland find records relating to this (Correspondence with Dr. Driscoll; Correspondence with Jess Lydon, Historic Environment Scotland; Correspondence with Joe Waterfield, HEC, Archives, Heritage Directorate). See Stephen T. Driscoll, "Excavations at Glasgow Cathedral: A Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Discoveries made in 1992–93," Fig. 2. Location Plan, *Glasgow Archaeological Journal*, 17 #1 (1991–1992): 66. The remains removed in 1992–93 from other places in the cathedral were to be reburied at some point (Stephen T. Driscoll, et al., *Excavations at Glasgow Cathedral 1988–1997*, The Society for Medieval Archaeology Monographs, Book 18 [Oxford: Routledge, 2002]). However, it could not be verified if this has yet been done. It is less likely as much care was taken in the 1903 excavations, but it remains unknown if burials were disturbed.

67. It has been said that Durham was the first to be buried in the aisle. James Cleland, *Statistical Tables Relative to the City of Glasgow,* third ed. (Glasgow: James Lumesden and Son, 1823), p. 178. However, the initials A. G. and 1656 would indicate that Andrew Gray was the first. There is something fitting to the fact the two, at least memorials, are next two each other (Durham first from the entry, though apparently the second buried).

> [*remarkable*] enduements [*accomplishments*], which made him to me precious among the most excellent divines I have been acquainted with in the whole Isle."[68]

The early eighteenth century author of Durham's life, writes,

> His death was the more to be lamented, that he died thus in the very flower and vigor of his grace, gifts and age. Mr. John Carstairs, his colleague in the Inner-kirk, preached next Sabbath upon Isaiah 57:1. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering, that the righteous are taken away from the evil to come." Where he gave him a large character, and represented the great loss of such an eminent man.[69]

In his second of apparently three sermons on the occasion of Durham's death, John Carstares preached to the congregation,

> And we may thankfully declare, as an eminent instance of God's goodness to this city of Glasgow, that we have been kept in the most wonderful calm, and lived in great amity and peace there eight years by-past, when he was with us, though we were as much predisposed, and in danger of being consumed by these woeful fires of division and strife that were burning our church, as any other Christians were. And if we can commend any proper mean of healing such distempers, or promoting peace and unity among all ranks, we cannot sufficiently extol and celebrate his incomparable moderation, prudence, meekness, lowliness, and integrity. It will be a signal mercy if we be kept so long again from some kind of reeling, confusion, and schism; and if ever we see again these woeful days, we will bemoan the want of one of his cementing, peaceable, and healing spirit. Was he not, in a word, a merchy [*marrowy; pithy*] and substantial preacher, who gave us the marrow, yea, the very pith and kernel of the gospel; he delivered very much sound divinity in little bounds, and in few words. Ye that are the common people, are deprived by his death of a plain and easily understood preacher. Ye that are sore troubled in spirit, and exercised, ye want a very tender and sympathizing guide. Ye that are learned and wise, want a learned minister, who was well instructed in the mysteries and laws of Christianity, the most valuable learning I know. Ye that are proud, covetous, or wicked, now want [*lack*] a teacher that would have exposed your corruptions, and might have been a blessed mean of reforming you, and reclaiming you from your dangerous mistakes and errors, without fretting and irritating you."[70]

Even though in his lifetime he never thought to send anything to print on his own initiative, at the end of his life at the entreaty of Baillie and others, Durham spent the remaining months of his life preparing his lectures on the Revelation of John for publication, and when confined to his deathbed, he finalized a manuscript for others to prepare for the press. This was his *Dying Man's Testament to the Church of Scotland*, a theological treatise against offenses and division in the church. These appeared after his death, as all of his books did. While the ministry of James Durham as preacher of the Word in Glasgow was brief, yet, no doubt contrary to his own expectations, the result of those six years of preaching and teaching have continued to instruct and spiritually nurture the church.

> The writings of 'Judicious Durham' claim a place in Scottish Bibliography simply owing to their great popularity. His books were constantly read for almost two centuries. Twenty-six printing-presses in eight towns of Scotland, England, and Holland were occupied with them; in each decade between his death and the beginning of the nineteenth century at least one of his books was printed…. Not one of them, however, was published during his lifetime … it was through the loving care of his widow and her brother-in-law, Mr. John Carstairs of Glasgow, that his Sermons and Expositions were edited and published.[71]■

68. *Commentary upon the Book of Revelation,* vol. 1 (2020), p. 24.

69. "Life," p. 41. These sermons existed at the time of the publication of the lectures on the Book of Job in 1759, as the prefacer cites them extensively. See *61 Sermons* (2017), pp. 18–25.

70. "Life," p. 21.

71. Christie, "James Durham as Courtier and Preacher," p. 35. See the *Annotated Bibliography* of Durham's works in James Durham, *Commentary upon Revelation*, vol. 3. Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2022.

***In Brief*: The PCA and The Federal Vision. From Charles Stover, "RC Sproul at the PCA's 35th General Assembly," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Jg4eIiRQzY, and "The PCA's Nine Declarations Against The Federal Vision (PCA GA Minutes [2007], pp. 566–567).**

In 2007 the Presbyterian Church in America voted to receive the report of the ad interim study committee on Federal Vision [FV] and the New Perspective on Paul [NPoP] and Auburn Avenue theology. This committee was asked to study the soteriology of the [NPoP] and [FV] and report back to the General Assembly [GA]. The committee constructed a marvelous document outlining the teaching of the Westminster Standards on election and covenant, justification and Union with Christ, perseverance, apostasy, and assurance. The report also set forth nine areas in which the [NPoP] and [FV] teaching was at odds with the Westminster Standards. The report was accepted by the 2007 [GA], but not without considerable debate. Before voting on the report a debate was had on a motion ... to add two ministers sympathetic to the [FV] and the [NPoP] to the committee, and to revise their work with their perspectives represented fairly…. It was during this debate that Pastor R.C. Sproul went to the microphone.

"(mic. #12). RC Sproul, Central Florida Presbytery. Speaking against the motion. I think we're all aware of Luther's evaluation of the doctrine of justification where he said that it was the article upon which the church stands or falls. Calvin added to that it is the hinge upon which everything turns. And in our day we've had an unprecedented attack on the Reformation understanding of solo fide, particularly at the point of the denial of imputation, which if you look at the declarations, you see is front and center of this report.

And I believe, Fathers and Brethren, that the kingdom of God is not at stake here. But I think the purity of the PCA is. And I don't understand; I just can't fathom the hesitancy about this matter. Too much [is] at stake. This is the gospel that we're talking about, gentlemen, and that the Westminster Confession does not already give us a faithful exposition of the Gospel, at what point can we trust our confession, and it seems to me to add those people to the committee whom our previous committee, fulfilling their mandate to examine whether their views weren't conforming to our confession—it's like asking in a courtroom to have the accused become members of the jury. It doesn't make any sense to me, and [loud applause]

[gentlemen, moderator speaking] Shame on you fathers and brothers you're not allowed to do what you just did so. [what he said, moderator speaking] I apologize for that outburst of unseemly but righteous applause."

The PCA's Nine Declarations Against The Federal Vision

1. The view that rejects the bi-covenantal structure of Scripture as represented in the Westminster Standards (i.e., views which do not merely take issue with the terminology, but the essence of the first/second covenant framework) is contrary to those Standards. 2. The view that an individual is "elect" by virtue of his membership in the visible church; and that this "election" includes justification, adoption and sanctification; but that this individual could lose his "election" if he forsakes the visible church, is contrary to the Westminster Standards. 3. The view that Christ does not stand as a representative head whose perfect obedience and satisfaction is imputed to individuals who believe in him is contrary to the Westminster Standards. 4. The view that strikes the language of "merit" from our theological vocabulary so that the claim is made that Christ's merits are not imputed to his people is contrary to the Westminster Standards. 5. The view that "union with Christ" renders imputation redundant because it subsumes all of Christ's benefits (including justification) under this doctrinal heading is contrary to the Westminster Standards. 6. The view that water baptism effects a "covenantal union" with Christ through which each baptized person receives the saving benefits of Christ's mediation, including regeneration, justification, and sanctification, thus creating a parallel soteriological system to the decretal system of the Westminster Standards, is contrary to the Westminster Standards. 7. The view that one can be "united to Christ" and not receive all the benefits of Christ's mediation, including perseverance, in that effectual union is contrary to the Westminster Standards. 8. The view that some can receive saving benefits of Christ's mediation, such as regeneration and justification, and yet not persevere in those benefits is contrary to the Westminster Standards. 9. The view that justification is in any way based on our works, or that the so-called "final verdict of justification" is based on anything other than the perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ received through faith alone, is contrary to the Westminster Standards.▪



Picture: Dr. R. C. Sproul speaking at microphone 12 at the 2007 35th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America. With permission/Source: kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/the-latest-post/2007/6/13/pca-general-assembly-vote-on-nppfv.html

Can a Christian Be an Objective Professional Historian?
An Unorthodox Autobiographical Review Article of Ian Hugh Clary on Arnold Dallimore's Historiography

By Ryan M. McGraw

Introduction

Historiography is inescapably personal for me. This may sound strange to some readers, partly because, for most of us, historiography is not an everyday word. Historiography is the study of history, or the theory of how we should do history. Ian Clary's book on Arnold Dallimore's work and method as a historian draws out of this author a personal history of struggling with the study of history. Historiography, or the theory and methodology undergirding historical research and writing, is his primary target.[1] While historiography may sound abstract and irrelevant to some people, for me the topic has marked a spiritual exercise in how to understand and explain God's relationship to the world in human history. I trained as a professional historian (twice) and, early in this process, Dallimore's popular biography of George Whitefield altered my life permanently and positively, both as a Christian and as a minister of the gospel. Yet I have since changed my mind over whether Dallimore did the "right thing" in trying to interpret Whitefield's life *primarily* in terms of the meaning of God's providence and the work of the Holy Spirit. This personal and gradual shift in my thinking explains my style in this essay as well. While academic writing in a theological journal should be objective, interpreting facts in contexts and shying away from first person pronouns, my choice in using them here actually illustrates the substance of my answer to a key question raised in Clary's work, "Can a Reformed Christian be faithful to Christ as a professional historian?"

Stated differently, the question is whether Bible-believing Christians can serve faithfully as academic historians, who rely more on objective historical evidence for their work than on divine providence as an interpretive guide. Can a Christian historian present objective history, based on social, political, and ideological contexts alone, or does it betray one's loyalty to Christ to fail to explain events such as the First Great Awakening without appealing to the direct divine intervention of the Holy Spirit? My preliminary answer is that being objective about studying historical facts in historical contexts is a better way of honoring Christ as a historian than attempting to explain evidence in terms of what we think God's intentions are behind historical events. Doing so does not make us neutral in laying aside our loyalty to Christ, but humbly recognizes the limitations of our knowledge of how God works in the world.

Clary's conclusion in this penetrating book serves as a launchpad for what I want to say here. His bottom line assessment is that Dallimore went a long way towards writing objective history (234, 244) while aiming simultaneously to use Whitefield as a model for pastoral ministry today (139). I am using this conclusion as an occasion to ask how Christian scholars should study history itself. Restated, my primary contention in this essay is that Clary's work gives readers significant insight into how conservative Christians can use objective historical methods without betraying their theological commitments. To do this, I first provide a proper academic review of the book, then I illustrate my stubbornly reluctant journey toward prioritizing the value of objective history through personal narrative, and lastly I offer some reflections on historical method and

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1. All subsequent parenthetical references are to Ian Hugh Clary, *Reformed Evangelicalism and the Search for a Usable Past: The Historiography of Arnold Dallimore, Pastor-Historian*, vol. 61, Reformed Historical Theology (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

theological evaluations of historical ideas. My hope is to promote the value of professional history, seeking to give a suggested path forward for Christian historians.

What Clary Says about Dallimore's Historiography

Ian Clary provides readers with a well-researched and careful evaluation of Arnold Dallimore's approach to history. He acts as a model historian while examining and evaluating the work of another historian. Having "a significant impact on evangelicalism" (98), Dallimore's two-volume biography on George Whitefield shaped a generation of conservative Christians, purposefully advancing a model of Christian ministry and the work of the Holy Spirit in preaching through an account of Whitefield's life (139). Dallimore's significance makes his historiography an ideal entry point into recurrent debates over the nature of historical writing among evangelical scholars.

Clary's research question is one of historiographical classification: does Dallimore's monumental achievement fit more in the genre of carefully researched objective history, hagiography (searching for Christian heroes), or some hybrid of the two? After briefly introducing his own approach and historical method (ch. 1), Clary states the question, couching it in terms of evangelical debates over the nature of Christian historical writing (ch. 2). Generally speaking, the two sides of this debate reflect the goal of pursuing objective history based on historical evidence, versus those who also ascribe explanatory power purely to supernatural intervention, emphasizing theological evaluation of historical events. Appealing to works like Ian Murray and George Marsden's biographies of Jonathan Edwards, Clary shows that these approaches to history are not hermetically sealed off from each other, with historians on both sides appreciating elements of each other's work.[2]

He then presents a careful biography of Dallimore with an eye to his writing ministry (ch. 3). Writing Dallimore's biography was the author's initial intent, which morphed into reducing this endeavor to a relatively large chapter on Dallimore's life. Acting the faithful historian himself, Clary constructed a targeted life of Dallimore, drawing evidence from personal correspondence, interviews with people who knew Dallimore, and other sources in order to explain his ideas objectively. This material is targeted in that it aims to explain how and why Dallimore wrote his biography of Whitefield, exemplifying an objective historical method with a clear research question in view. Rather than biography for its own sake, Clary's biographical material aims persistently towards evaluating Dallimore's historiography. Though some readers may not realize the fact, Clary's practice here reflects the fact that good history is always more consumed with asking why something happened than it is with simply telling people what happened. Chapter four turns towards Dallimore's work on Whitefield, explaining Dallimore's historiography in light of the questions of celebrity history, and of his treatments of Whitefield's views of slavery and revival. Clary's consistent conclusion is that Dallimore's work was not mere hagiography, though it often fell short of relating fully relevant evidence to present a full picture of Whitefield's life and character. Scholars judge a research method by an author's stated aims, and Clary's point is that Dallimore both achieved and fell short of his aim through incomplete investigation of the objective evidence available. Chapter 5 broadens the context of Dallimore's work by investigating his subsequent biographies of figures like Edward Irving, Susanna Wesley, and Charles Spurgeon. Excepting the biography of Irving—which was based too heavily on secondary sources and blunted historical accuracy by an anti-charismatic bias—Clary concludes that these other works were generally reliable, though not measuring up to the thoroughness and rigor of the author's work on Whitefield (204). Illustrating the effects of Dallimore's commitment to Whitefield as his subject, chapter six shows the effects of Dallimore's polemic tone in relation to John Wesley, dividing the Wesleys into the "good" (Charles and Susanna) and the "bad" (John). The seventh and final chapter concludes the book with reflections on history as a discipline in light of the preceding study as a whole.

Clary's fourfold summary of the contributions of his research illustrate the strengths of his historical method, two of which particularly stand out. He notes that this research first sheds light on debates over evangelical historical method (237), second provides a biography of Dallimore himself, third highlights the influences of Dallimore's theological convictions on his biographies (238), and finally argues that Dallimore was properly an historian (239). The first thing that stands out in relation to these points is how Clary illustrates appropriate objective historiography. His critiques of Dallimore's work show the need for basing historical arguments on facts and evidence to create as accurate a picture of the

2. In my view, the final chapter of Marsden's academic biography of Edwards is one of the finest treatments of the central question of this essay. See George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

past as possible. For example, regarding Dallimore's contention that Whitefield was the greatest preacher since the time of the apostles, Clary asks how a historian should (or can) evaluate such a statement. Does one measure this by number of converts, for instance (119)? This observation illustrates how theological evaluation sometimes reaches beyond the bounds of available objective evidence. To illustrate, making an evidence-based case that Whitefield reached more hearers than anyone else we are aware of in Christian history differs widely from a subjective statement about the greatness of his preaching. Likewise, Dallimore asserted that the true measure of a man is his "inner self" (162). Yet this is not a proper object of historical research. Who other than God can know the heart of man (1 Sam. 16:7)? Additionally, Dallimore's theological agenda often led him to "tamper" with or omit relevant evidence, altering quotations without telling readers (208), bypassing Charles Wesley as hymn writer and poet (211), and treating John Wesley as "the bad" Wesley to bolster his apologetic for Whitefield (217). Historians are never unbiased, and they have the right to think whether Wesley was good or bad. Yet making historical evaluations as to whether they like what they find in history clouds their judgment in seeking to present people as they really were, so far as is possible from available sources. Clary illustrates that reserving theological judgments in writing history is a necessary component of responsibly writing history.[3] Suspending judgment until we can hear people out on their own terms does not mean that we cannot make such judgments. It means simply that our judgments are not immediately relevant to striving for an accurate history.

The second outstanding virtue that emerges from Clary's conclusions is his reflections on the question of evangelical historical research and writing. Effectively, he provides a path forward for evangelical and Reformed historians by teaching them how to separate objective historical investigation from theological evaluation without entirely sidelining the latter. For example, he contends that while Dallimore's theological biases clouded his judgment and use of sources at times, he nevertheless expressed appropriate reserve at points, not wanting to "read the Spirit too much into history" (237). Historians can thus simultaneously take warning from Dallimore's theological biases, while learning from what he did well. Dallimore was properly a historian using sound historiographical practices in the main, even though "the principal tools of his trade were pastoral" (240). Clary's summary evaluation is that we cannot forsake objectivity for usability (or drawing lessons applicable for the present day), yet the past may still be useable. Citing Carl Trueman on the difference between objectivity and neutrality (241), he affirms that we do not need to be neutral, either respecting God or historical events, when we limit historical evaluations to the (limited) available evidence. Moreover, Clary adds that divine providence reminds believing historians that history is teleological (or has a goal), and that Hebrews 11 shows the legitimacy of learning from past successes and failures (242–243). The real issue is how such ideas factor into writing history itself. Despite Dallimore's defects as an historian in some cases, he wrote history "to praise his God" (243), and "his work as an untrained historian is impressive" (244). While providence may have limited use as an explanatory force of particular historical events, theological evaluation remains appropriate *after* the historian has made his tentative case from tangible evidence. Theological evaluation should not crowd out objective history, yet objective history does not negate the uses of assessing what one finds once he or she finds it. In other words, Christian historians honor Christ best by learning to listen to people on their own terms and by exercising ideological self-restraint and even self-denial.

Clary models for readers the value of careful objective historical writing. His research is well-documented and rooted in primary sources. Drawing from personal letters, interviews, and published works, he expertly reconstructs Dallimore's thought and approach to history. The author's use of secondary literature is equally impressive, including academic studies on Canadian thought (where Dallimore lived) in relation to heroes and celebrities in the twentieth century, as well as sketching debates about historiography, both preceding and following Dallimore's work. Writing history about modern figures is harder than older ones in many cases, since the historian is much closer culturally and ideologically to the subject. Yet Clary exemplifies well how to do this, teaching readers both the method and value of objective historical writing. The bottom line is that "for

3. Yet Clary engages in some moral evaluation as well, especially in denouncing Whitefield's view of slavery, and critiquing Dallimore for not being more critical of Whitefield's views of slavery (127). Undeniably, this is a moral judgment rather than a historical one. Slavery is certainly reprehensible, but the historian's task is to explain how people regarded slavery at the time (and why they did so) in the context of a variety of viewpoints on the subject. As repulsive as slavery may (and should) be in the eyes of modern readers, historians need to understand their subjects of investigation in ways that they would have recognized themselves at the time in which they lived. Historians can make judgments, but they need first to explain how and why people thought the way that they did.

historians the useable past should not mean sacrificing objectivity for the sake of pragmatism" (196). In other words, historians need to give historical figures their own voices in light of their own times before they can decide what to do with what they learn. Such features make Clary's research useful for suggesting a path forward for believing historians. A long personal journey had led the present author to walk the same path with Clary in this area.

A Personal Historiographical Narrative

My own personal journey as a professionally trained and practicing historian reflects key points of Clary's evaluation of Dallimore's historiography. This is where my article becomes a bit "unorthodox" in terms of academic writing, since personal experience is ordinarily irrelevant to an academic review. However, it is not stretching matters too far to say that it is as though this book was custom-made for someone like me. Sketching my personal history as a growing historian and my experience with Dallimore's biography on George Whitefield provides a vantage point from which to further illustrate the value of objective history and to preface my answer to the questions of how and why a Reformed Christian can be a professional historian in the third section below.

Reading about Dallimore's historiography touches a deep nerve for me. Around 1999, I read Dallimore's work voraciously and with great interest. Introduced to the work by a youth pastor shortly after my conversion to Christ, I was captivated by Dallimore's historical examples of the Holy Spirit's power at work through Whitefield's preaching, which exemplifies Clary's statement of the impact of Dallimore's work on the church (244). So great was the influence of this book on me, that the Lord used it to develop in me a sense of call to the Christian ministry, which led me first to minister in a Baptist church, then to seminary, then to pastor two Presbyterian churches, and, finally, to become a professor in a conservative Presbyterian seminary. Along the way, I earned a history degree at California State University at Fullerton (CSUF). I vividly remember taking a historiography course from the most difficult professor in the department, only to find him challenging my defense of reading history in light of God's providence. I argued that the purpose of studying history was to see God's hand at work in historical events. With a kind and sympathetic demeanor towards me, the professor asked how I could study and interpret providence as a specific rather than a general historical cause. In other words, even if everything happens through God's providence, how can particular acts of providence answer clearly how and why people thought and acted? Biblical explanations of Biblical history might be divinely inspired, but how could a Bachelor level student's reading of history presume to know God's mind in extra-biblical historical events without God telling him what he did and why?

Admittedly, to no fault in the professor, I found this challenge both antagonistic and offensive at the time. Did not failing to interpret history in light of providential causes and intentions dishonor Christ? Meanwhile, on breaks between classes, I would disappear to the top floor of the library to read Ian Murray's *Evangelicalism Divided*,[4] which, "providentially," was hot off the presses at the time. I loved this book almost as much as Dallimore's biography, and I still do. Yet my historiography professor's comments got under my skin. He was not hostile to Christianity, serving as an elder in a Presbyterian church, and he was not rude in challenging my appeals to providence. He simply asked honest questions that deserved honest answers. How can a Christian appeal to providential intentions behind history in order to write history without God telling him or her what he intended? I had the nagging suspicion that while God certainly grabs our attention through special acts of providence, how we read such events is always provisional and even sketchy sometimes.

A certain reservation in making providential judgments was already woven intuitively into my preaching at the time. For instance, just before transferring to CSUF from a "junior college" for my upper division courses, in God's providence, I was scheduled to preach the Sunday after 9/11. I chose Genesis 3 as my text, pressing the idea home that God uses the evidences of the Fall and the resultant miseries of sin in this world to drive us to Christ. However, I did not feel comfortable arguing, for instance, that thousands of people died in New York because God was judging America for the sin of abortion or something equally specific. I knew intuitively that faith in God's control over everything that happens has limited interpretive power in relation to details. Scripture tends to give general counsel under such circumstances, such as telling us that unless we repent we will likewise perish (Lk. 13:3), versus asserting that sinners dying in a tragedy are worse than others, or even whether some such disasters are specific "messages" from God to us at all. Maybe such events

4. Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001).

are merely general "calls" to repentance to people suffering in a sinful world. Maybe the Bible better teaches us how to respond to providence than how to explain it. Maybe my professor was on to something after all.

The hermeneutics of history also overlapped with biblical hermeneutics. As my professor taught us how to read and evaluate texts in their contexts, learning to ask historical questions rather than contemporary ones, it struck me how similar this process was to interpreting the Bible. Though I read the Bible primarily to know God, bathing Bible reading with prayer, I wanted to know what the Bible said without imposing my opinions on God's Word. This resulted in an "objective" interpretation of Scripture, albeit with a "subjective" end in view.[5] I needed to understand God's Word before I could use it. My practice in learning to seek objective meanings of texts based on evidence in history, mimicking careful Bible reading, made me a better and more careful history student in the end. My first published essay was even an analysis of the historiography of Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian, which I based on careful exegesis and implications drawn from a close reading of Herodotus's work. I began to realize that the appreciation of objective history that my professor sought to instill in his students was something I needed and cherished in other pursuits.

However, I was still undaunted in my own search for a "useable past," studying history trying to give explanatory power to providence. Though I understood how to write objective history, doing so proved to be much harder than interpreting the Bible, both due to the absence of God-given evaluations of events and because of the inherent uncertainty over whether the historian has adequate evidence. I was burnt out on historical research by the time I finished my BA, dropping a potential path towards professional history to devote myself to full-time ministry. Over a decade later, with some irony, I pursued a PhD in historical theology on John's Owen's Trinitarian theology.[6] Admittedly, it was not so much providential history that drew me toward resuming historical research, but neither was it objective history.

Choosing Owen because I wanted a "mentor" to help me know the Triune God better, I pursued an academic degree in a discipline that I thought I had permanently seen the back of to dig deep into a topic (the Trinity) that I hoped would be useful. The Lord seemed to be funneling events towards my teaching systematic theology at the seminary level, which required a PhD. Historical theology seemed to be a safer choice than academic work in systematic theology because it was far easier to write something "new" in history than theology. The history of ideas is a vast field, always offering fresh research topics. I did not want the pressure of "solving a theological problem" that the church had never successfully resolved, while trying not to fall into heresy or produce unintended consequences by accident. Yet when I turned in my first chapter on Owen, one of my supervisors said something like, "I think you need to start over, and stop being such a pastor as you write history." From page one, I was focusing on theological uses of what I was studying, with an aim towards serving the church, rather than asking historical questions and understanding Owen in his context(s). The reviewer's comments were both distasteful and offensive to me at the time. I likely only started over using the methods I knew already because of a supportive wife who told me that I was not allowed to quit.

I underwent a major historiographical shift through my PhD work. I began to apply what I knew already about objective history, asking historical questions about Owen rather than the contemporary ones that led me to study him to begin with. Unexpectedly, this process became as life-altering as reading Dallimore on Whitefield in the late 1990s, if not more so. Dallimore helped me long for the Spirit's continued work in the world through preaching. Writing objective history on John Owen taught me many more and equally far-reaching things.

First, asking objective historical questions of a subject rather than contemporary ones is a good life skill. Too often we are more ready to debate an opponent with whom we disagree than we are to understand them, especially in evangelistic conversations. We are also too ready to justify the ideas and actions of our friends and heroes. Understanding where people are coming from is a vital life skill and doing so involves learning to show them respect and connecting with them before seeking to answer them. Being more ready to speak than we are to listen (Jas. 1:19), whether with living or dead people, almost always results in missing our targets. Far too many Christians do not learn how to take interest in people as people, hearing them out and representing them well before we speak to them. Respecting historical people as image bearers of God by listening to them was a better way to honor Christ than risking taking them out of context simply to say what I wanted to say.

Second, I began to realize that my theological

5. Which sounds very much like what Clary advocates in the conclusion to his work on Dallimore.

6. Ryan M. McGraw, *"A Heavenly Directory:" Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship, and a Reassessment of John Owen's Theology*, Reformed Historical Theology (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

"heroes" were just normal people. Yes, the Lord greatly used people like John Owen in the church, but Owen also seemed difficult to get along with, overly private, possibly unstable in his political views, and redefined church membership to fit his Congregational principles in ways that may have had unintended consequences for practices such as infant baptism.[7] Historians should not be out to find "dirt" on historical figures, acting like a group of highly-educated tabloid reporters. Yet, as a friend of mine likes to say, not every theological question in history has a theological cause. We are people of our times in ways we can scarcely understand; so were people in the past. Stories of normal people who did extraordinary things can be just as inspiring as stories of extraordinary people to whom we cannot ultimately relate because they are either too saintly or too sinister. Rather than resembling novels revolving around heroes, historical research is more like being a crime scene investigator. When historians arrive on the scene, they should not jump to conclusions but start collecting evidence to find out what happened. After ruling out possibilities, the investigator might arrive at a suspect. The CSI agent may find a villain and the Christian historian may find a hero, but both should be skeptical about coming to hasty conclusions. I am tempted to say that in history, the only real "hero" is Jesus Christ. We can appreciate and learn from dead people just like we can from living people, but we should not burden the dead or the living with heroic expectations that only Christ can meet. If Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Owen, Whitefield, or Hodge prove to be flawed, or even outright wrong sometimes, then that is okay. We can still love them and learn from them, but first we need to understand them.[8]

Third, it dawned on me that gaining perspectives from people in times, cultures, and contexts differing from my own was precisely what I needed to break up the monotony of hearing familiar voices in contemporary discussions. I discovered that I did not really need another modern Reformed (American even!) inspiring interpretation of historical events and people. I am still prayerfully grappling with plenty of those in the Bible. I needed to understand people on their own terms in their own times so that my own social and cultural assumptions would not pass unchallenged.[9] The fact that an Aquinas or Owen lived literally in a different world than we do is actually helpful. While some of the questions they faced seem foreign to us, and occasionally the questions they asked appear bizarre (especially in Aquinas' case!), historical figures often bring fresh ideas into contemporary conversations that prevent both tunnel-vision and a whiggish sense that all of history seems to have been leading towards us. Though this list of three lessons could be much longer, it showcases some fruits of my "conversion" to objective (though clearly not neutral) academic history.

This personal narrative, which is still unfolding, partially illustrates the value of Clary's book. Can a Christian pursue the standards of modern objective historical writing and remain faithful to Christ by not appealing to providence as an interpretive factor? Do such efforts inherently compromise Christian principles, betraying an aim to be accepted by the academy? Is there a place for using history for the glory of God and the benefit of the church? At least in my case, the answers to these questions are yes, no, and yes. I have published four academic history books, and several articles, all of which self-consciously make no significant appeal to divine providence.[10] Yet I believe that I honored Christ in writing them, with the Spirit's help, by seeking to honor truth and to "hear people out" in their own times.[11] I do not believe I have compromised Christian principles, though I have published with academic publishers such

7. For example, Crawford Gribben argues along these lines in a way that took me some time to warm up to in Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Ohio University Press, 2016). The last question regarding Owen's assertion that church members are only those who covenant voluntarily with God and the church is addressed in my introduction to volume 15 of the forthcoming *Works of John Owen* with Crossway.

8. Case in point, my most recent academic book seeks to trace Reformed ideas before and after the Enlightenment, asking how large scale contextual shifts affected Charles Hodge in nineteenth century America. Ryan M. McGraw, ed., *Charles Hodge: American Reformed Orthodox Theologian*, vol. 76, Reformed Historical Theology (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023). Though many readers will not likely see things this way, my team of authors sought to take honest looks at persistence and change without judging who the good guys and bad guys were.

9. The final chapter of my book on Reformed scholasticism illustrates some areas in which historical options can add fresh voices to contemporary discussions. Ryan M. McGraw, *Reformed Scholasticism: Recovering the Tools of Reformed Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2019).

10. McGraw, *A Heavenly Directory*; Ryan M. McGraw, *John Owen: Trajectories in Reformed Orthodox Theology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); McGraw, *Reformed Scholasticism*. McGraw, ed., *Charles Hodge: American Reformed Orthodox Theologian* (V&R/Brill, 2023).

11. An important book that was required reading for my undergraduate degree in this connection is Joyce Oldham Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret C. Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994). While the authors do not present, in my view, a sufficient philosophical foundation for truth, they illustrate well why historical investigation hinges on the quest for truth based on appropriate evidence. Denying the concept of truth is the death of the discipline of history.

as Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Palgrave, T&T Clark, Brill, Lexham Academic Press, and others. Despite common Christian insinuations against "objective" historians, I have never really cared much about my academic reputation, and never sought an academic post at a major university. Without intending any disrespect to those who take this path, I believe that the Lord simply called me to do something else. With some irony, I believe that by seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33) by praying to be a righteous and faithful historian, the Lord added all these other things to me. Often the best way to honor Christ is simply doing our jobs as well as we can to His glory (Eccl. 9:10). Working hard and doing our jobs well, whatever they may be, pleases the Lord. Yet what is the point of Christians doing rigorous academic historical research if few people will have any interest in reading it? My answer is that professional peer-reviewed work in historical theology forces one to dig deeper, work harder, learn more, and accumulate a wealth of material to use for other purposes.[12] Personally at least, I do not need heroes from history as much as I need ideas with which to interact, without the burden of needing to find historical ideas to justify my own.

Can a Christian be a professional historian? Should Christians write history meant to inspire the church and pass on ideas? Is Clary right to say that we can do both on some level? I have come to believe that both are possible, though it took me a long time to get here. I love Iain Murray's biography of Jonathan Edwards, and I love George Marsden's. I still recommend Dallimore on George Whitefield and I praise the Lord for directing me to read it at the right time. Yet I now devour more history books from Oxford than I do from Banner of Truth. Both have their place, but I am in a different situation in life than I was twenty years ago. I am more convinced than ever that overly specific providential readings of history often have very little value. There is no "thus says the Lord" evaluating the life histories of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Owen, or George Washington. Even if there was, then we would still need to understand the people and events in question by piecing together the evidence we have.[13] I am more convinced than ever that there is a wide difference between providential explanations of historical events and contemporary uses of historical ideas. There would be no history without providence, but maybe providential history is not the category we are looking for. I thank God for Augustine's teaching on the Trinity, while others vilify him as promoting modalism.[14] But is not understanding his ideas in context more important than understanding God's (hidden) intent behind events in Augustine's life? It turns out that objective history can be "inspiring" precisely because the ideas we discover and the people we get to know are so different from what we expected them to be. By refusing to see our own reflections when gazing into the well of history, we can begin to see history's true value.[15]

Some Reflections on Christians and Historiography

In light of the preceding two sections, four particular observations about Christian historiography follow. Clary's work exemplifies each of these in a number of ways, and these four areas of reflection both harmonize with and expand his conclusions.

First, we should separate historical evaluations from theological evaluations before bringing them together. Though we can do both, even in the same book or essay, distinguishing historical theology from contemporary uses is important. The beauty of writing historical theology is that the historian does not have to like what he or she finds, even if he or she likes the people he or she is studying. For example, if I want to know the real Jonathan Edwards, then I am not very interested in how John Piper uses Edwards' ideas, though I find Piper edifying and even exciting at times. Getting to know Edwards in a way that Edwards and his contemporaries would have recognized is a vital first step. Blending or blurring historical investigation and theological evaluation runs the risk of never "meeting" the real Edwards. Is it not better to slog through the hard work, and often halting efforts, of trying to "see things their way" before telling people whether "their way" is good or bad, or both?[16]

12. I have published about six times as many books for the average person in the church as I have for the academic world. Yet I could not write so many "popular" level books on theology and Christian living unless the Lord had used my academic work to push me beyond what I already thought I knew.

13. By saying this, I am not implying in the least that histories by publishers like Banner of Truth are mere hagiography, or that we should not write history meant to inspire readers. Banner books are not usually guilty of the problems I have in mind, and my academic path is not likely to appeal to the average Christian. However, becoming aware of objective historical questions may help even lay readers realize that their heroes are not necessarily such unreachable (often disheartening) models of sainthood as they can appear to be.

14. For example, Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

15. I have heard this expression from Carl Trueman, who claimed to get it from Richard Muller, who picked it up from somewhere unknown to me.

16. This is an allusion to Cambridge historian Quentin Skinner's

Withholding judgment for a time gives us a clearer picture of the ideas that we want to evaluate in the end.

Clary's illustration of Whitefield on slavery (125-138) is, once again, a good example. I find American slavery revolting, as do Clary and many others. Yet the historian's question is not whether slavery is reprehensible and that, by implication, so was Whitefield for his participation in the institution. The real issue is how Whitefield's approval of slavery fits into his broader context and what it says about eighteenth century American culture and ideas. Leaving out moral judgments and theological evaluations is the only way to make them accurately later. As a professor of systematic theology, I freely and frequently evaluate historical ideas, since I want to teach my students what to believe and how to minister to people. Yet what good is it to use or reject past ideas if we do not first adequately understand where these ideas came from and why people promoted them? Second, objective history writing is an important life skill. We saw this point above, but I cannot overstress its value. Understanding how and why significant historical figures thought the way that they did affects how we deal with our contemporaries. How many times, for instance, do we get into arguments about things like "free will" with people in schools or church lobbies without taking the time to ask them how they understand their terms and what their concerns are? We might find that someone is more concerned about human responsibility and free choice than they are with denying God's sovereignty. Perhaps the disagreement stems more from an incomplete account of the Bible's teaching, or misunderstanding and misuses of terms, than it does from entrenched opposition to our perception of the truth. Maybe through asking more questions we might discover that we have not presented the truth in a balanced or clear way and that we need correction ourselves. Some people may even react emotionally to a bad experience with someone who opposed their view in the past.

The skill of writing objective history fosters learning to ask good questions, and being hesitant to presume what people mean or to prejudge conclusions. Put bluntly, we become too narcissistic in pressing our views and talking about what matters to us instead of listening to others. Pontificating on matters before we hear them out is prideful in personal communication (Prov. 18:13), even as it clouds historical judgment. Pursuing objective history is a humbling—and at times humiliating—affair, often teaching us more about what we do not know than what we think we do know. Why cannot learning such humility, being more ready to hear than to speak (Jas. 1:19), transfer into areas of life beyond historical inquiry?

Third, divine providence necessarily has a limited role in interpreting historical events. Objective history asks why events happen and why ideas developed. Yet we can answer "why" questions in some cases better than others. Asking "why questions" of divine providence can be a risky business. We know that all things work together for the good of the church, marching towards the glorification of believers in Christ through suffering (Rom. 8:28–29). Yet why God does what He does in particular instances leads us more towards trusting God's wisdom in general than towards explaining what precisely God is doing in particular life circumstances. When God has not revealed His mind to us in His Word, prying into his "thoughts" seems inappropriate, if not irreverent. God's speech is our blessing; God's silence is none of our business (Deut. 29:29).

Pressing historians to explain why God did what He did in the lives of particular individuals places an intolerable burden on historians. On the one hand, one can conclude that the fact that God spared George Washington from death numerous times is a remarkable set of providences that shaped recent world history. On the other hand, one can say the same thing about sparing Adolf Hitler from assassination. We should have radically different evaluations of the character of both men, but who other than God can say why He chose both to establish America as a nation and allow Nazi Germany to flourish for a time?

Historians can explain historical causes and effects as far as they are available to them through tangible evidence. Theologians can defend the goodness of God and His ultimate purposes in every act of providence without forcing historians to transcend their creaturely limitations.[17] We can have a better idea of why people did what they did in history than we can of God's specific intentions in individual human lives. The Triune God is the greatest historical cause, but who can know the mind of God except the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:11)? Unless God provides more details than the general facts that He is protecting the church, spreading the gospel, and glorifying the saints, who are we to put words in God's mouth? Job serves as a model, whom God simply

approach to history as outlined in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory, eds., *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

17. As does, for example, Scott Christensen, *What About Evil?: A Defense of God's Sovereign Glory* (P & R Publishing, 2020).

pressed to faith by reminding him of His character instead of explaining His actions. This underscores why theological evaluation is a better category than providential readings of history. Historians should not mimic the proverbial practice of trying to see the Book of Revelation unfolding definitively in the morning news. Providence is a vehicle for directing believers to faith in Christ under hardship. Conjecturing about God's secret counsel cannot become the measure of whether an historian is a faithful Christian any more than it marks faithful Christian living. Doing so undercuts historical method just as much as it cripples people who try to live by interpreting events rather than interpreting the Bible.

My favorite example of the detrimental effects of giving explanatory power to particular acts of providence relates to early modern standards of theological education. It is almost cliché for theologians to point to the fact that John Calvin wrote the first edition of the *Institutes* in his twenties as evidencing his astonishing providential gifting by the Holy Spirit. Even if this is true, such an evaluation is a hasty conclusion, failing to ask good historical questions. The picture changes when one realizes that Thomas Goodwin began his studies at Oxford around age twelve, that Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus were in their early twenties when they contributed to the Heidelberg Catechism as University professors, that George Gillespie exercised great influence at the Westminster Assembly though he died before reaching age 36 years, that Jonathan Edwards studied at Yale as an early teenager, and so on. Historians looking for patterns may start to wonder whether more was at work there than extraordinary spiritual gifts. The fact is that educational standards were very different in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries than they are today.[18] While this observation does not deny that some of these people were indeed young and exceptional, even for the times, yet we must be cautious in drawing too many conclusions simply from the fact that they were young. The Spirit alone knows how gifted Calvin was, while the historian can say that other more objective explanations have a vital role to play. In His providence, did not God put people like Calvin in the right time, place, culture, family, and university to suggest some objective reasons for why and how they did what they did? The lesson we walk away with may speak more objectively to how different the world was at the time than to fuel our subjective interpretations of divine agency.

Expanding this example, while we think of teenagers as playing video games and sports and trying to figure out what to do with their lives, in the past the select few who pursued a track of higher education followed very different paths. Students learned Latin and Greek very early before pursuing bachelor's degrees, often between ages twelve to sixteen. Men pursuing ministry usually added a one-to-three-year MA degree, followed by a seven-year divinity program, marked by daunting cross-confessional multi-disciplinary reading lists and regular academic disputations. If they made it through this course, then it was normal to enter ministry in one's early twenties. All such students committed large blocks of classical literature and theology to memory, which tells us more about educational culture at the time than about individual gifting by the Spirit. In this light, the amount of material such men could recall during debates, and the early ages at which they began their ministries and writing careers, seems far less remarkable. We may thank God for what many of them did, and attribute every good thing they did to the Holy Spirit. Yet giving credit where credit is due yields very different results than simply attributing everything we cannot account for to the Holy Spirit. Maybe the special act of providence that we are looking for is the fact that such people were born in such times. The Lord uses means to accomplish His ends. Historians are more concerned with investigating the means than they are in speculating as to the intent of divine agency in such circumstances. Appealing to providence as a primary explanation of such things is painting with too narrow a brush. It is both ok and helpful to realize that our "heroes" were ordinary people who lived in a world that is foreign to us.

Fourth, objective historiography should promote self-awareness and humility. This point makes explicit a purposeful implication pervading the above material. As Carl Trueman has said often, as cited above in Clary, there is a difference between objectivity and neutrality.[19] Being humbly self-aware of one's limitations restricts historians to objects that they can reasonably examine. Objectivity entails inductively evaluating evidence and drawing tentative conclusions. Historical conclusions are always provisional because they flow from inductive investigation. History is vast, and the motives of now-deceased people are lost to us (if ever such motives were available!). Even approaching evidence as objectively as

18. For a host of examples along these lines, see Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema, eds., *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition*, vol. 170, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

19. See at length Carl R Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2010).

possible, someone out there always knows something that we do not, and fresh evidence may shed new light on or even correct our own research. By contrast, neutrality implies indifference to the subjects we are studying. Yet whether a historian is a believer in Christ or not, personal factors always contribute to something even as basic as what one chooses to study and why. Why would any historian write on something that he or she does not find interesting? Regardless of the reasons behind such decisions, personal interest is always a factor for historians. We are attached to our subjects even in objective history in some manner, maybe for reasons known only to ourselves. Yet history demands the hard work and self-discipline of looking beyond personal reasons leading to research, remaining open to finding some things that are familiar and other things that are totally foreign. Again, it is liberating for historians to realize that they are not constrained in the least by discovering things that they like in history. There is something refreshing in hearing someone out in their own times and terms with no strings attached. This humbling quest for objectivity makes no naïve claims to neutrality, though self-consciousness of our biases prompts a healthy reserve and willingness to be corrected.

In summary, objective history reflects rather than betrays evangelical and Reformed Christian convictions. Loyalty to the Triune God both leaves to Him the business of understanding His designs in every historical detail, and leaves to us the task of learning from the objects He has actually placed in our grasp. Either way, Johannes Cocceius' seventeenth century exhortation to theologians to test their theology by Paul's doxology in Romans 11:33–36 is an equally good test for the work of historians.[20] Does our work lead us to exclaim humbly, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen?"

Conclusion

Clary's book on Arnold Dallimore, as well as this essay, will likely continue rather than conclude debates over Christian historiography. At the very least, both should give believers food for thought in approaching history as an academic discipline. We should always bear in mind that history, like theology, is a quest for truth, each in their own ways with their own methods. Contemporary denials of objective truth are simultaneously direct attacks against history as a discipline and assaults against biblical Christianity. With some irony in light of debates over whether Christians can be professional historians, objective history is not ultimately possible without the True and Living God as the foundation of the idea that there are facts to discover through evidence. If the Triune God departs from our thinking, then the idea of truth departs with Him. This does not mean, however, that Christians are unfaithful if they fail to identify providence as a specific cause of historical events having key explanatory power. Neither does it mean that non-believing historians cannot be good at their trade. What it does mean, and what Clary illustrates well, is that whatever one does with history, history as a discipline must always prioritize objective investigative methods and goals. Christians can honor Christ as professional historians, or lay historians, by learning to be good historians.▪

20. Johannes Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, trans. Casey Carmichael, vol. 3, Classic Reformed Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), p. 166.

Reviews & Responses

Review: Nathan P. Feldmeth, S. Donald Fortson III, Garth M. Rosell, and Kenneth J. Stewart, *Reformed and Evangelical across Four Centuries: The Presbyterian Story in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022). Paperback. Xix +364 pp. ISBN 978-0-8028-7340-8. $29.99. Reviewed by Sean G. Morris, Associate Pastor at Covenant Presbyterian Church (PCA), Oak Ridge, TN.

This volume, as the title suggests, surveys the history of Presbyterianism in America as it has developed over the past four hundred years. This work possesses the unusual quality of being both well-researched and detailed in its presentation, and also a thoroughly pleasant read. The volume takes readers from the early foundations of Presbyterianism in the days of Scotland and John Knox, through Presbyterianism's expressions in colonial America, and up to the present. The work is co-authored by four academics who come from different American Presbyterian denominations: Nathan Feldmeth is A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), Don Fortson is Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), Garth Rosell is Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), and Ken Stewart is Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). As such, these men's shared work brings an ecclesial and perspectival balance to the survey—a valuable, if underappreciated, element.

The opening four chapters review the rise of Protestantism in Britain, the genesis of the English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians, Presbyterians' role in the English Civil War, and the ramifications for Presbyterianism once the British monarchy was restored after the Interregnum. Chapters 5 through 12 take the reader through the late seventeenth into the nineteenth century: from the arrival of Presbyterianism and Reformed theology in the New World up through the American Civil War. Along the way, the chapters examine the first American Presbyterian denominational body in 1729, Presbyterian involvement in the First and Second Great Awakenings and the American Revolution, slavery, the American Civil War, and related church schisms and postbellum ecclesiastical reunions.

Chapters 13 through 15 take the reader through Presbyterians' engagements with Darwinism, immigration, urbanization and industrialization, and the influence of the German university and her higher-critical scholarship upon American Protestant churches.

Chapters 16 through 19 take the reader into the twentieth century covering the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, World War I and II, Presbyterian missionary efforts during the first half of the century, the debates and development of women's ordination through the mid-century, the Civil Rights Movement, and changes to the confessional standards of mainline Presbyterian denominations.

The concluding chapters, 18 and 19, trace out the exodus of evangelical Presbyterians from the mainline denominations and how they went about establishing their own communions. Particular attention is given to the founding of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in 1973, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in 1981, and the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) in 2012.

One of the more pleasant surprises to this writer was the attention given to the formation of the Presbyterian Church in America (299–303). Here at the fiftieth anniversary of the denomination's founding, this was a most welcome inclusion. The attention to the historical and ecclesiastical factors behind the denomination's founding was both fair in its narrative, and historically thorough in its documentation. Especially appreciated were the highlights of various key leaders and organizations such as Morton Smith, Kennedy Smart, Concerned Presbyterians, and Reformed Theological Seminary. The section was also sensitive to modern items of note, such as minority outreach and ministries among Black and Hispanic populations, Mission to the Word, Reformed University Fellowship, the global church planting efforts of Redeemer Presbyterian Church and the late Timothy J. Keller, as well as the Redeemer City to City church planting network. Also well-noted was the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and its eventual joining and receiving into the PCA in 1983 (305–306). Earlier in the work, three other eventual leaders in the PCA are given happy acknowledgment: John Gerstner, James Montgomery Boice, and R.C. Sproul (295–296).

It is because of this fair and sensitive documentation of the PCA that the lack of parallel documentation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) stood out to this author. Admittedly, perhaps the legacy of the OPC, J. Gresham Machen, and Westminster Theological Seminary play an outsized role in this author's imagination. As well, in a survey volume such as this one, when taking in the history of four hundred years

Reviews and Responses critical of articles and reviews may be submitted for consideration for publication by sending drafts to the editorial address. Please contact the editor at editor@cpjournal.com, beforehand to obtain submission requirements and preferences. When possible, the subject of a negative or possibly controversial review may be contacted beforehand for any appropriate response for publication along with the review, and the reviewer will be given an opportunity for a response. If required, responses and replies may continue in subsequent issues.

of American Presbyterianism, it is impossible to do justice to every historical rabbit trail of Presbyterian denominationalism as one would like. Nevertheless, given the historical significance of Machen and the founding of the OPC in the midst of the twentieth-century Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy (which is highlighted in chapter 16), one might have expected a similar treatment of the origins and present expression of the OPC as had been given to her sister denomination, the PCA.

To be fair, the struggles of Princeton, the story of Machen, the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary and the OPC are noted in chapters 16 and 17 (251, 253, 258, 269 in particular), but even some of the book's mentions of Westminster Seminary are in connection with the founding of the PCA (301, 302). Again, the fact that the various pieces of Machen and the OPC's story were strewn about rather than strung together in a shared section struck me as a bit odd.

Conversely, the Reformed and Associate Presbyterians are given suitable attention in the book, particularly in the historical overview of their respective foundings (126–129). Now known as the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA) and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), these communions are historic and well-established in the North American Presbyterian scene, which warrants the greater mention they are given relative to the OPC: The Reformed Presbyterians securing a minister on American soil as early as 1752, and the Seceders (Associate Presbyterians) in 1733 vs. the OPC being established in 1936. This volume ably highlights these communions' shared history, from the Great Awakening to the nation's founding, the 1777 Basis of Union, activism with regard to slavery, and more (100–102; 126–129; 169–170).

There are all kinds of hidden gems in this novel: from the well-documented analysis regarding the development of women's ordination in Presbyterianism in chapter 18, to the brief synopsis in that same chapter regarding the trial of Wynn Kenyon (287–288, an historically significant moment that is often overlooked in American Presbyterianism regarding the right of conscience and its collision course with the cause of women's ordination), to even the first two appendices at the back of volume. The first appendix (331) is a numerical breakdown of the total membership of the major American Presbyterian bodies, with statistics as recent as 2021. Readers will find these data to be fascinating and illuminating for a whole host of reasons. The second appendix (332–333) presents a nice genealogical table tracing out the splits, reunions, and developments of the various branches of Presbyterianism, from the time Scottish settlers arrived in the 1700s up through their present-day expressions. Visually-oriented learners will be especially grateful for this graphic aid that helps to make sense of the often-confusing schisms, mergers, and re-mergers among those "Split-P" Presbyterians.

Among the book's more salient aspects was the attention it gave to Princeton Theological Seminary and her centuries-long role in the education of Presbyterian ministers. Princeton's place of educational preeminence among Presbyterian clergy and her role in shaping the life of the Presbyterian church in the nineteenth century are difficult to overstate. Princeton's impact on Presbyterian theological education is well highlighted (153–156; 242–243), as is the development of other Presbyterian educational institutions (of both the New School and Old School persuasions) that coincided with American westward expansion. This institutional significance carried over well into the twentieth century, as this volume highlights Princeton's significance in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies (252–256). Especially beneficial were the sections devoted to the careers and influence of Charles Hodge (204–207) and B.B. Warfield (207–211).

The overview of Princeton also touched on the academic controversy surrounding the origins of the Ph.D. degree, with its genesis in European universities before later being implemented in American theological education (242–245). Consideration is given to the rise of the so-called "Princeton Theology," coinciding with the founding of Andover Seminary and a post-Enlightenment dissatisfaction with theological training offered at Harvard and the New Divinity/New England theology. Following this brief observation, the authors then highlight the relatively late development of the Doctor of Philosophy degree on the American scene, with Yale University awarding the first Ph.D. degree in this nation in 1861. The impact of the Ph.D. degree on American theological education is rightly considered here, given how studies unobtainable in America were sought out by an increasing number of American scholars, including those such as Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield. The theological controversies and subsequent ecclesial turmoil surrounding German Ph.D-awarded Charles Augustus Briggs is well-worth pondering. While the authors make no such pronouncement, a general cautionary tone is detected: when it comes to the theological education of Christian ministers, is the PhD necessary, and was requiring it of seminary faculty members worth it?

The work ends on an apropos note, highlighting American Presbyterianism's multi-cultural growth in the current global age, particularly with regard to Korean Presbyterians and their influence on American Presbyterianism (316–317). The connections between American Presbyterians and Korea date back to nineteenth-century missionary efforts, and the establishment of distinctly Korean presbyteries within both the PC(USA) and the PCA (as well as autonomous Korean-American Presbyterian denominations) is a worthy inclusion. Additionally, the brief note on Presbyterian connectionalism (317–318) was a welcome item, noting the involvement various denominations have had in wider bodies such as World

Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, National Association of Evangelicals, and the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).

The conclusion of Presbyterian self-understanding as evangelical (319–329) made for a interesting epilogue. Though these days the term "evangelical" is often fraught with misunderstanding and unwelcome political import, the authors explore aspects of Presbyterian identity under the more classical definition of "evangelical," with attention to a commitment to biblical authority, spiritual renewal, missionary efforts, theological seriousness, and cultural transformation. Historically, these descriptors have been true of evangelical Presbyterians, but a self-reckoning seems to be in the making in the present moment, as Presbyterians determine if and how they wish to remain committed to these virtues well into the next millennium.

Negatively, while the book does have a perspectival balance in many ways, in some ways, it does fall short. All four of the authors hold views that are largely sympathetic to the "New Side" school of Presbyterianism. Some of the authors have expressed this conviction outright. As such, there are some treatments of historical episodes that suffer from a less-than-full-orbed evaluation of the issues, such as:

- the discussion of the broader movement of evangelicalism and Presbyterian interaction with it (321–322);
- the assessment of the Synod of 1729 and the subsequent Adopting Act in which there was a heavy reliance on Charles Briggs and Leonard J. Trinterud as secondary source evaluations.
- likewise, the manner in which subscriptionism was discussed, noting this disagreement between John Thomson vs Jonathan Dickinson and what constituted the "essential and necessary articles" of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms (93–98).
- the synopsis on the Great Awakening (100–113, 322), especially with regard to the evaluation of the ministries and impact of Gilbert Tennent and Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen.
- the overview of Old School/New School split of 1837–38 and the use of Charles Hodge to frame the discussion around the "constituent doctrines of the Calvinistic system contained in the confession of faith" (146–150).

On these matters, the volume would have been greatly strengthened by having a contributing author of the "Old Side" persuasion. At the very least, the book would have been well-served if the authors had included some of the more robust Old Side arguments as worthy counterpoints raised during the controversies. Readers will note that there seems to be an underlying supposition that, while not expressly stated, assumes that American Presbyterianism is largely part-and-parcel with evangelicalism and revivals and that the two developed along parallel lines (322)—a thesis with which Old School or Old Side proponents would have great objection. A clearer distinction between "evangelical" Presbyterianism and "confessional" Presbyterianism may have served the work better.

Overall, this is a well-researched, pleasant to read, and useful volume for Presbyterian history students, scholars, and hobbyists alike. The authors are sympathetic to the evangelical Presbyterian cause while giving a fair overview of mainline Presbyterian developments. As such, evangelical and confessional Presbyterians will likely derive more profit from it than their mainline cousins.

Review: David W. Hall, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America* (Covenant Foundation, 2023). Hardback. 408 pp. ISBN 979-8-3991-0538-3. $29.95. Paperback. ISBN 979-8-3970-5783-7. $21.95. Reviewed by Ryan Biese, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Fort Oglethorpe, GA.

The Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is an occasion for thanksgiving and celebration as well as reflection and assessment. David W. Hall's new volume, *Irony and the Presbyterian Church in America*, aids us toward those ends by reflecting on how faithful the PCA has been to the original vision of her charter.

As he engages in his survey, Hall consistently asks two questions: "(a) are the actors unaware of some of the drama's plot, even if unintended; and (b) are the actors aware of a larger comparative grid, namely, not how does the PCA fit with its contemporary peers in America but how does it fit with a broader, older Presbyterian ethos" (13–14). That second question is especially salient given the tension within the PCA, reflected in Hall's work, between those who desire the PCA to be distinctively Reformed and Presbyterian versus those with a broadly evangelical vision for the PCA.

Hall did not enter the PCA with the original generation in 1973, but in 1982 through the "Joining and Receiving" of the PCA with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES). As such, his historical research in the archives of the PCA is supplemented by Hall's own reflections on the deliberations, acts, and deliverances of each of the PCA General Assemblies since 1982.

Hall's work is a welcome addition to the historical study of the PCA. Not only is it the first (and as of September 2023, *only*) monograph history of the PCA's first half century, it notably lacks the hagiographic triumphalism that one would anticipate in such a work. Instead, Hall takes a realistic approach analyzing the growth, conflicts, and developments

of the PCA as she has advanced and persevered from 1973 through her 50th Assembly in 2023.

In his realistic assessment, Hall offers candid evaluation of how the denomination has, ironically, been transformed from a decentralized, grassroots denomination that prohibited the physical offices of its various agencies from even being in the same city, much less the same building (62) in 1975 to now in 2023 a denomination with a sizable bureaucracy headquartered in Lawrenceville outside of Atlanta, Georgia. In fact, Hall details the controversy regarding the purchase of a centralized office building and the loans to acquire it (see especially pp. 132ff).

The denomination's founding elders were so wary of church bureaucracy being abused by liberals that they proclaimed themselves "intensely presbyterian" (*Min1GA*, p. 29) and carefully established impediments to the cooperation of denominational agencies. However, by 2006 the PCA had developed a powerful and centralized "Cooperative Ministries Committee" (CMC) that would restructure the functioning of the General Assembly under the guise of "preserving the 'grassroots' nature of the Assembly," yet, Hall notes, at the time observers "sensed a centralizing effect, even if unintended" to the changes implemented by the CMC (316).

Another irony Hall observes is the overly ambitious goals set by denominational luminaries regarding church growth. Hall injects a realistic assessment to the impressive sounding initiatives of denominational bureaucrats. For example, he bluntly reminds his readers the accomplishment of "Vision 2000" (the goal of 2000 PCA churches by the year 2000) would have required 50 churches to be planted per annum until 2000 (259). It is worth noting that the PCA consisted of only 1,911 congregations and missions in 2021 (*Min49GA*, p. 184). Currently, the Mission to North America (MNA) Vision asserts, "by resourcing our churches for kingdom impact, in the next ten years, MNA will facilitate the multiplication of PCA churches in the U.S. and Canada from 1,932 to 3,000 congregations;" this would require an increase of more than 100 PCA churches every year (See https://pcamna.org/vision/). The more things change, the more they stay the same. One wonders why PCA Agencies have historically avoided establishing realistic goals with clear metrics for accomplishment and instead put forth impressive and highfalutin visions with few benchmarks for gradual achievement.

In his work, Hall regularly places the flashy and impressive-sounding ambitions of denominational bureaucrats against a contrasting backdrop of slow, but steady growth since 1973—growth that often was led not by the large churches, but by smaller congregations faithfully carrying out their ministry (see e.g., 170f). Rather than dwell on impressive or lofty sounding names and new initiatives, Hall praises the steadily faithful commitment to historic Presbyterian and Reformed principles. Hall is not without warrant to conclude regarding Vision 2000, "Thankfully Vision 2000 was soon discarded to the dustbin of other failed plans. However, the successes of faithful churches would last for generations" (259).

Fittingly, given the title, it is ironic that Hall should produce the first—and thus far only –monograph reflecting on the first half-century of the PCA. For all its bureaucracy and centralization, its publishing arm and media staff, the Lawrenceville headquarters of the PCA has thus far been unable to produce any commemorative volume for the 50th Anniversary. Perhaps that is to be expected since the denomination did not undertake to mark its 40th Anniversary until the 42nd General Assembly (355). Perhaps by the time the General Assembly meets in the yet-to-be-determined city in 2025 for its 52nd General Assembly there will be an official commemorative and celebratory volume published by the PCA to mark the half-century. Until that time, David Hall's *Irony* is not only the definitive history of the PCA, but also provides a refreshing and helpful survey of the challenges and opportunities through which God has sustained this branch of His Church.

Review: Warfield's Works, A Review & An Appreciation: Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, The Classic Warfield Collection (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2023). Hardback. 680 pp. ISBN 978-1-6299-5896-5. $49.99. Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ*, The Classic Warfield Collection (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2023). Hardback. 752 pp. ISBN 978-1-6299-5897-2. $49.99. Reviewed by Jeff A. Stivason, Pastor, Grace Reformed Presbyterian Church, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania (RPCNA).

From 1948 to 1958, P&R Publishing published a five-volume collection of Benjamin B. Warfield's best theological writings. These works are now reprinted—and according to the *Forword* to the *Revised Edition*—with the goal of providing "more accessible, readable, and useful versions of these books." This review will consider the first two books in the series of five, namely, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* and *The Person and Work of Christ* under three sections. First, the review will briefly explore the updates to make this edition of Warfield's works accessible, readable, and useful. Second, some of the content will be highlighted. And third, we will reflect on why Warfield's writings have occupied an on ongoing place in the theological reading list of serious Christians.

The accessible, readable, and useful updates

First, if we are to thank P&R Publishing in general for these volumes, we must specifically thank John J. Hughes. John has put countless editorial hours into achieving the goals set for

these volumes, the fruit of which will be valued by generations to come. By way of example, each chapter begins with an abstract which contains a fulsome outline of the article. What is more, John spent a great deal of time reading through Warfield's text and taking his sometimes excessively long paragraphs and breaking them into shorter ones so that the modern reader might be helped to follow the logic of Warfield's keen mind. For example, in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, the first article in the older edition is titled "The Biblical Idea of Revelation." The beginning paragraph is a page and a half long! In the new edition, that beginning paragraph is separated into three paragraphs so that each logical step of the argument might be viewed clearly. This process was painstakingly done and it will benefit future readers.

Furthermore, anyone who has read the older volumes will have been frustrated by the lack of bibliographical information. For instance, only chapters 1, 3, and 5 of the earlier editions of *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* had bibliographical information, and they typically lacked complete data by today's standards. In the present edition, bibliographies have been either completed where information was lacking or created for chapters missing them entirely.

And who can forget Warfield's use of Latin abbreviations like *ad loc.*, *in loc.*, *loc. cit.*, *op. cit.*, and *sub. voc.*? In the present edition, where possible, actual information is used in their place. For example, in the older version of an article titled "The Real Problem of Inspiration," Warfield would have written the note "Op. Cit., vol. I, p. 49". (cf. *IAB,* p. 196). However, the new version reads, "Farrar, *Life and Word of St. Paul*, 1:49".

In addition, spelling and capitalization have been updated to conform to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (11*th *ed.*). What is more, the reader will have frequent recourse to the ever-helpful "Ed. Note," of which 170 of them have been added to facilitate ease of use. In these notes you will find the translation of obscure Latin words and phrases, definitions of opaque English words, comments on bibliographical matters, and other information to facilitate accessible use of the volume. An enormous help are the bibliographies containing hundreds of books and journal articles contained in the volumes.

After each article there are two accompanying sections. The first contains a series of study questions that will help the reader successfully meditate on and digest the material found in the preceding chapter. The second section, titled "For Further Study," contains works by Warfield and others related to the chapter topic. In this section, you will find not only paths to other related works by Warfield, but also recommendations of related works by other authors with annotations. These sections will provide fruitful avenues for further study. There are also appendices, glossaries, indices, and a biographical sketch of Warfield's life from his one-time student, later friend, and co-founder of P&R Publishing, Samuel G. Craig.

It has been said that Warfield is an often-quoted theologian who is little read. Perhaps the fault lies between Warfield's unwieldy academic style and our modern desire for ease. Nevertheless, it is my hope that P&R Publishing has created an onramp for those who have always wanted to dip into Warfield but were too afraid to take the plunge. These books are an invitation to become acquainted with a great man of the Faith who can only help you grow closer to your God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

THE ARTICLES

It is not hard to understand why the book titled, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, is on the shelf of every person concerned with the doctrine of Scripture's inspiration. This book is known by almost all who love Scripture. However, it is equally difficult to understand why the same book is often not read. The book is a posthumous work. It is a collection of articles that Warfield wrote on the doctrine of Scripture. Some of them were written for journals, others were published as encyclopedia or dictionary articles, at least one was penned for the American Sunday School Union, and Appendix D is Warfield's Inaugural Address from his early days at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. All of them are pure gold.

I recognize that not everyone will labor through "The Oracles of God," which is a word study of the term λογια. However, some may and would do so with benefit. This article was written before all of the scholarly helps at the fingertips of Greek students today. This article stands as a testimony to Warfield's scholarly ability. However, "God-Inspired Scripture" is the same. It may draw more readers than "The Oracles of God" due to the topic, but its technical nature will likely ward off all but the courageous.

However, "The Biblical Idea of Revelation," "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," and "The Church Doctrine of Inspiration" are articles that will likely capture the attention of most readers. They provide the patient and careful reader with a firm foundation and appreciation for Warfield as a defender of an orthodox view of inspiration. More importantly, these articles will instill not only understanding but confidence in a high view of Scripture that is continually under attack. This is not to say that "The Real Problem of Inspiration" holds no value today. It certainly does. In fact, there is more here for us today than meets the eye. What is more, "'It says:' 'Scripture Says:' 'God Says'" is a tour de force that will remind the reader that Scripture views itself as God's Word.

For many years, Warfield defended an orthodox view of inspiration, and *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* is the fruit of some of that defense. However, he started to realize

that opponents of Scripture were formulating similar arguments and directing them at Christ. Those who rejected the divinity of Scripture were ready to reject the divinity of Christ. Thus, Warfield defended Christology with the same acumen and zeal with which he defended Scripture. *The Person and Work of Christ* is some of the fruit of that defense. The first two chapters, "The Historical Christ" and "The Person of Christ According to the New Testament" function as companions. Both are non-technical treatments. The first provides external and internal evidence for the existence of Christ as a historical figure and the second leads us through the New Testament's presentation of Christ.

However, "The Christ that Paul Preached" will be an exciting read for those who know that Warfield's close friend, Geerhardus Vos, took a much different view of Romans 1:3–4. For those interested in comparing Warfield and Vos, consult Vos's article, "Paul's Eschatological Concept of the Spirit," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (P&R Publishing, 1980). The article titled "The Emotional Life of Our Lord" is a classic piece that should be read by every Christian. Here Warfield, the defender of Christ's divinity, puts on full display the humanity of the Savior. It is true that you will read names like Holtzmann, Montefiore, and Weiss, which are likely unfamiliar unless you are familiar with older scholarship. Despite our lack of awareness about certain names, we can still discern Warfield's point and it's often mixed with quick wit and not a little wry humor. For instance, when Johannes Weiss tries to convince us that Romans 9:5 has been corrupted and cannot actually say that Jesus is God, Warfield writes that "there is not a scintilla of evidence of textual corruption in Romans 9:5" and that "corruption is assumed solely because the assertion of the passage does not fit in with the lowered Christology which Weiss would fain assign to Paul."

Not everyone will appreciate every article. Some are more academic, and others are non-technical, but all are meant for the upbuilding of Christ's church. Therefore, every article is worth the attention it ought to be given. Give them your attention.

Warfield's Longevity

Sinclair Ferguson was asked to write the introduction to this new set of Warfield's works. It certainly adds value to an already valuable collection. In his introduction, Ferguson identifies what it is about Warfield's works that gives them perennial value from one generation to the next. He writes, "Warfield's perspective was that of a biblical theologian, and there is a kind of timelessness and constancy about much of his writing" (p. xxx). This is true. According to Ferguson, the "names change and the contexts differ" but the basic theological issues remain the same, though they may appear in a new dress!

But there is something else. Warfield trains a Christian to think. He helps us to think biblically and theologically. But he also gives us the courage to call falsehood, well, falsehood! For example, when Warfield described the Ritschlian school of thought, he said that there was a strong tendency in Evangelical circles to look upon this neo–Kantianism with favor. Warfield continued, "Such a tendency was, indeed, little creditable to either head or heart; and can be esteemed merely a fresh example of that shallow charity which 'thinketh no evil,' only because it lacks the mind to perceive or the heart to care for the evil that is flaunted in its face."

Let me encourage you to pick up these volumes and read a godly master teacher of the Faith. Warfield is a man from whom you will learn much and much of what you will learn will be biblical and theological. However, you will also "catch" what it means to be a godly man by the way he handles a text, by his charity toward others, by his humble but courageous boldness, and certainly you will get a sense of his reverence for God and adoration of Christ as he, a mere man, relies on the Holy Spirit.

Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022). Hardback. 672 pp. ISBN 978-0-3101-2872-4. $44.99. Reviewed by Benjamin Shaw, Reformation Bible College.

The Book Itself

The reading public has long since become used to blurbs from prominent readers appearing on the back of a book. In today's social media world, these endorsers would be termed "influencers." Follow the influencer; read the book. More recently, publishers have begun taking several pages before the title page to add to the list of influencers promoting the book. This book is no exception, with encouraging blurbs from such notable evangelical scholars as Kevin Vanhoozer, Michael Horton, and William Edgar.

I am no influencer. And given that my specialty is the Old Testament, I am not best suited to provide the kind of review expected from those influenced by the blurbs accompanying this book. That being said, *caveat lector*.

The book begins with a substantial introduction. In this introduction, Watkin defines three terms that give direction to the body of the book. The first, and perhaps most important term is *figures*. Figures "are patterns and rhythms in creation, whether of matter, language, ideas, systems, or behavior" (5). He distinguishes figures from "ground," which might, somewhat simplistically, be defined as the background of the figures. For Watkin, there are six categories of figures: language (which includes ideas and stories), time and space,

the structure of reality, behavior, relationships, and objects. All these figures taken together define the culture of the particular moment.

Watkin's second term is *worlds*. This could also be called worldview, but it is perhaps best understood as "world" as used in such phrases as "the Victorian world," "the world of model car making," or "the world of the New Testament." A world is composed of a multitude of figures, but no one figure controls the totality. The mutual interaction of the figures produces the particularity of the world. If we are going to understand our world, we need to understand the figures and their interaction.

Watkin's third key term is *engagement and diagonalization*. Engagement involves recognizing that cultures often present us with distorted versions of biblical ideas. We get the modern contrast between love and justice, where the culture presents love without justice ("no labels, just love") or justice without love. For Watkin, this is a false dichotomy that has dismembered biblical ideas. This is where diagonalization comes in (this is best visualized by seeing Watkin's diagrams). In short, diagonalization involves rejecting the dichotomy and bringing the sides into union by utilizing a biblical idea. This process of engagement and diagonalization is Watkin's primary tool in his cultural analysis, as can be seen by the significant number of diagrams in the book that present some particular diagonalization.

Following the introduction, Watkin gives the reader twenty-eight chapters of biblical theology, beginning with the Trinity and ending with eschatology. Each chapter presents some aspect of biblical or systematic theology and its application to our current cultural situation. An example of Watkin's approach is found in his treatment of the Tower of Babel episode from Genesis 11. For Watkin, the story displays human autonomy and pride, followed by the judgment of God. Borrowing a phrase from Richard Bauckham, Watkin identifies the episode as the beginning of a "globalization of domination," which results in those with power dominating others. This globalization of domination characterizes the city of man, which operates without consideration of the coming judgment by God. We find these same things reflected in our current cultures. Unfortunately, this chapter is typical of Watkin's analyses. He presents some aspect of biblical theology and points out that we see the same thing in modern cultures. Considering that obvious point, the reader might easily say, "So what?" or "What am I supposed to do about that?" Watkin's answer is, "To live in God's city here and now is to enjoy God's limitless peace, love, and creativity; it is also to live a subversive, revolutionary life in this world as we repeatedly scratch the surface of the earthly city to reveal God's goodness, truth, and beauty under its makeshift palimpsest" (220–221). The reader might be forgiven for thinking that, as prettily as this is said, it is both facile and trivial.

A second example is the final chapter, "Eschatology and Culture." He presents three dichotomies. The first dichotomy is "The Dichotomy of Comparing Cultures" (Figure 110). This contrasts two ideas: that one culture is superior to other cultures and that all cultures are essentially equal. Watkin's diagonalization rejects the dichotomy by asserting the preeminence of the transcultural gospel. This fails to recognize that some human cultures are more gospel-influenced than others and, hence, culturally superior by merit of that greater quotient of gospel-influence. It also fails to deal with the difficulty that, before the eschaton, the transcultural gospel will have different levels of effectiveness in different cultures.

The second dichotomy contrasts between the demand for absolute justice now and the apathy and self-interest that avoids any work for justice in the present. Watkin diagonalizes this contrast by observing that we shall be changed; therefore, we abound in the work of the Lord. In other words, we should recognize that complete justice will not be achieved in the present, but we should nevertheless work to increase the level of justice we see in society.

The third dichotomy is that between the Left and the Right. He defines the Left as socially global and economically local. He defines the Right as socially local and economically global. The diagonalization that solves this dilemma is the globalization of blessing.

In all three dichotomies, Watkin fails to define his terms clearly. I imagine, for example, that many on the Left and the Right would object to his characterization of their views. In each case, the solution he proposes is a simplistic presentation of a biblical truth. It's the kind of thing that most Christians recognize to be true, but the difficulty is in implementing a solution. He does not seem to recognize that Christians may agree on the problem but disagree on the solution to that problem, with neither side necessarily being entirely wrong.

The Problem of the Title

The title of a book implies something about its content. Given the recent prominence of discussions about Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, and social justice, the title of this work implies either a critique of these current ideas from a biblical perspective or the presentation of a critical theory based on the Bible. In either case, clear definitions of the terms are necessary if the reader is to profit from the book. It is unfortunate, then, that the work presents no such definitions. This strikes me as odd, given that the author is a specialist in modern French philosophy. The philosophers generally regarded as connected with Critical Theory are Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and Friedrich Pollock, among others. Except for a single reference to Marcuse, none of these names appear in the body of the book, the bibliography, or the author index. We must

conclude that the author has no interest in dealing directly with Critical Theory and its offshoots. Given the lack of clarity in public discussions about the meaning of these terms, the absence is disturbing. The title serves only to create false expectations about the content.

The problem of the sources

Who does Watkin cite? Whose thoughts lie behind Watkin's discussion and analyses? First, we have Augustine. Watkin indicates this in his preface when he says, "I have attempted to take the biblical-theological structure that I find so compelling in Augustine and use it as a way to frame some contributions to a biblical social theory for today" (p. xx). The remaining list of most-cited authorities is an odd mix. From before the twentieth century, he gives us Thomas Hobbes and Karl Marx. We have G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and Paul Ricoeur from the early twentieth century. More recent names include David Bentley Hart and Timothy Keller, the Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor, and the English ethicist Oliver O'Donovan. It makes the reader wonder how much Watkin had studied the topic of Christianity and cultural engagement before he set out to write the book.

The *et cetera* problems

Oddly, a book devoted to Christian cultural engagement manages to say nothing about some of the most pressing issues of our time. There is nothing in the work about abortion. There is nothing about the alphabet soup of LGBTQ+ and transgenderism. There is nothing about religious freedom. There is nothing about human trafficking.

Even with those omissions, the work is too long. Careful editing, including eliminating unnecessary jargon, would have produced a more readable and perhaps more profitable work. As it is, I cannot recommend this book to the reader. Having said that, a couple of alternative suggestions are in order. Justin Ariel Bailey, *Interpreting Your World: Five Lenses for Engaging Theology and Culture* (Baker Academic, 2022) is a good introductory-level discussion. The following are more advanced discussions: Kevin Vanhoozer, et al., eds. *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Baker Academic, 2007). James K. A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Baker Academic, 2017). Each of these accomplishes that kind of thing Watkin seems to be aiming at but in much less space.

Lyle D. Bierma, *Font of Pardon and New Life: John Calvin and the Efficacy of Baptism*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Hardcover. ix + 267pp. ISBN 978-0-1975-5387-9. $78.23. Reviewed by Ryan M. McGraw, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

The sacraments occupied a central focal point of debate during and after the Protestant Reformation. An author's views of the nature and efficacy of the sacraments often served as the proving ground of his entire theological system, illustrating the practical outworking of his understanding of the relation of Word and Spirit, the nature and necessity of faith in Christ, the role of the church in salvation, and many other related issues. Surprisingly in this light, historical scholars have devoted inadequate attention to baptism in particular—let alone its efficacy—in Reformed thought. Lyle Bierma helps remedy this lack by providing one of the first monographs on John Calvin's view/doctrine of sacramental efficacy, including his potential influence on later Reformed sacramental theology. This finely written and well-documented study helps guide readers through Calvin studies on baptism up to this point, showing the enduring effects on Reformed thought in relation to how baptism serves as a means of grace.

In nine chapters, Bierma traces Calvin's teaching on the efficacy of baptism chronologically. Following the introduction, he follows Calvin's thought on this topic from the first edition of the *Institutes* in 1536 up through the *Consensus Tigurinus* and Calvin's death in chapters two through six. Dividing Calvin's life into five periods, Bierma challenges authors who detect massive developmental changes in Calvin's views of baptismal efficacy (245–246). His primary thesis is that Calvin's views of baptism contained elements of what he calls instrumentalism, parallelism, and developmental change (15).

Rejecting the idea that the sacraments were mere symbols of grace (241), Bierma argues persistently that Calvin balanced two senses in which baptism was instrumental of grace: the first in that it strengthened believers' knowledge and assurance in Christ, and the second that baptism was an actual means of grace exhibiting and conferring what it signified (e.g., 241). Parallelism, which was the view of Heinrich Bullinger, asserted that both the sign and the thing signified could be present at baptism without establishing a clear connection between the two (see ch. 5 and pp. 205–214). Without rejecting such parallelism, Bierma contends that Calvin went beyond it in his view of instrumental grace in baptism. In each chapter, the author argues cumulatively that Calvin did not substantially change his views of baptismal efficacy through the course of his life, but that he increasingly balanced his emphases on baptism as both an instrument of assurance and an instrument of grace (e.g., 115, 122). However, Calvin qualified his views of baptismal efficacy by noting that the efficacy of baptism could be "latent" or delayed for baptized people who came to saving faith at various points in life, and by observing that the benefits of baptism were life-long (5, 244).

Following this chronological sketch, the author in chapter seven devotes special attention to the efficacy of infant baptism, followed by the "legacy" of Calvin's teaching in Reformed

confessional theology up through the Westminster Standards in the mid-seventeenth century. The chapter on infant baptism further highlights the point of latent and enduring baptismal efficacy, following the chronological method of the preceding chapters. Chapter eight traces eight influential Reformed confessional statements (176), detecting Calvin's direct or indirect influence in at least six of them. What will perhaps surprise some readers is Bierma's arguments that the Heidelberg Catechism and Second Helvetic Confessions teach only "instrumental parallelism," falling short of asserting that the Spirit exhibits and conveys Christ and his grace through baptism as a means of grace. Regardless of whether readers are persuaded by this chapter, the author makes a cogent case for his conclusions using copious primary source evidence. The conclusion drives the idea home that Calvin taught instrumental baptismal efficacy without rejecting parallelism, contending that his views remained relatively stable throughout his life.

One helpful feature of this volume is the author's attention to Calvin's description of the sacraments exhibiting Christ to people. Such terminology passed into much later Reformed thinking (see ch. 8), though it is often opaque or unclear to modern readers. For Calvin, 'exhibiting Christ in baptism' meant holding him forth in his saving power as the object of faith (26–27). While Bullinger largely rejected this language in favor of "testimony" (94), Calvin embraced and articulated the position that 'exhibiting Christ' was the turning point between treating baptism as a sign and its use in conferring and applying Christ's grace to believers. In fact, "exhibit" was Calvin's favorite term in describing the sacraments as means of grace (132). As God exhibited Christ in baptism, believers moved through the sacrament as an instrument of knowledge and assurance to baptism as a means of increasing their union with Christ (133). Since exhibition language passes into such widely used Reformed confessions as the Westminster Standards, Bierma's attention to this term furthers our understanding of the broader development of Reformed sacramental theology.

Whether or not readers fully agree with Bierma's explanations and conclusions, this is a solid and readable work of historical theology. We need many more historical studies on the Reformed sacramentology in order to grasp more clearly the meaning and function of the sacraments in Reformed thought. Such studies will enable us to understand and use sacramental language better as it has passed into currently used Reformed confessions, enabling the church to administer and apply the sacraments more effectively

Gregory David Soderberg, A*s Often As You Eat This Bread: Communion Frequency in English, Scottish, and Early American Churches* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023). Hardback. 280 pages. ISBN 978–3–525–56070–9. 120,00 €. $138.00 US.

Review by Ryan Speck, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA), Columbia, Missouri.

introduction

This book could have been a very small pamphlet if it simply addressed the historical frequency of communion—even a chart, really. The titles for the columns would have been, "Annually, Quarterly, Monthly, Weekly," and the names of pastors, theologians, and churches would have been entered into the appropriate columns (along with dates). However, Gregory David Soderberg addresses much more than the simple fact of frequency; he addresses the reasons for the varied rate at which churches observed the Lord's Supper, delving into and analyzing the theological, political, traditional, and financial factors that led to varied frequencies in observing Communion. By his research, Soderberg opens a rich vein for understanding the arguments and reasons for Communion frequency.

One of the main takeaways from this book is the tension between Communion frequency and preparation. Many theologians throughout church history believed in the necessity of extended and rigorous preparation before participation in the Lord's Supper. Such preparation made it impossible to partake frequently. If men would prepare properly, they simply could not partake weekly.

Another primary lesson is that not every man got what he wanted in his church context –or even pressed for his belief to be instituted—which should not be overly surprising to experienced ministers. For example, perhaps you have heard someone say something like this, "Well, Calvin observed the Lord's Supper weekly in Geneva. We as *Calvinists* should too!" In fact, Calvin expressed a desire for *more* than weekly communion, not necessarily on Sunday (p. 48). Further, while Calvin expressed his desire for more than weekly Communion, he only ever practiced quarterly Communion in Geneva "'because of the frailty of the people'" and "'the danger'" of misunderstanding Communion, if observed too frequently (p. 64). Thus, we must distinguish between what a man believed and what he practiced, discerning whether this was mere hypocrisy or feeble cowardice or pastoral sensitivity (or something in between).

chapter 1: communion frequency and reformed identity

In his short introductory chapter, Soderberg begins by suggesting that recent discussion about Communion frequency "raises fundamental questions about the nature of the Reformed tradition. Does the historic Reformed tradition elevate the 'Word' too far above the 'Sacraments'? What does it mean to partake of communion in a meaningful way? Has the Reformed tradition interpreted Paul's exhortation to

'examine yourself' in an overly intellectualistic fashion? Can a ritual be repeated frequently, and yet not lose any sense of its profound meaning?" (pp. 11–12). To explore such questions from historical data (not Biblical exegesis), Soderberg's "study focuses on a central research question: *What patterns of communion frequency characterized the sixteenth-century Swiss Reformed, English Puritan, Scottish Reformed, and early American Reformed communities*?" (pp. 15–16). Yet, as noted, Soderberg does not merely ask "what" but also "why" these patterns emerged.

Chapter 2: Communion Frequency in the Late Medieval Period and the Sixteenth-Century Continental Reformed Reformation

In this chapter, Soderberg presents the Medieval context of Communion frequency setting the stage for reform, and sets forth the convictions of key Reformation figures, whose beliefs were "transmitted to later generations" (p. 22). In fact, the Reformation was especially an attempt to reform worship practices. As John Calvin maintains, "the whole substance of Christianity … is, a knowledge, *first*, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, *secondly*, of the source from which salvation is to be obtained."[1] Accordingly, the issue of Communion as related to the Mass was of critical importance in the Reformation.

Although for the first three hundred years of the early Church, churches partook of Communion weekly (which is not disputed), by the Medieval Age, Communion was held once a year on Easter (p. 25, fn. 15). This infrequency heightened the holiness and mystery of the act and created a sense of community. Even, when the people themselves did not partake (or did not partake fully), the priest communed with Christ, and the people via the priest (p. 24). For, to partake of this profound mystery of holiness, rigorous preparation was demanded—only those elite in holiness would dare to partake more than once a year (which was resented by the more "humble," who dared but partake only once or less a year). Accordingly, many did not dare to partake at all, at least not with their mouths. Rather, "visual reception" became the norm. Citing Horton Davies: "'To see the sacred Host became the principal, if not the exclusive, concern of worshippers in the High Middle Ages'" (pp. 25–26). Yet, for a more tactile experience, the congregation would "pass the pax" during Communion, which refers to "'a smooth round object … with a crucifixion scene'" passed around to be "'touched and kissed'" (p. 26, fn. 22).[2] Thus, the sensual aspects of the Lord's Supper were transmuted into visual reception and passing the pax. This was the entrenched tradition the Reformers faced in their day.

Next, Soderberg details the beliefs of key Reformers, beginning with Johannes Oecolampadius, who assumed "the Lord's Supper had a regular place in worship" and "was among the first of the Reformers to argue for 'fencing' the table" (p. 30). However, he did not convince most in Basel. Although accounts differ during his lifetime, by 1543 (after his death in 1531), Basel was known to hold monthly communion.

Martin Bucer favored weekly communion and practiced this frequency in his own cathedral. However, to achieve unity, he allowed for differences in belief and practice in other places of worship, and he taught the necessity for "religious instruction, catechesis, pastoral examination, private confession of sin, public profession of faith, fraternal admonition, and participation in a community fellowship committed to holiness and informal discipline" (p. 60)

According to Soderberg, it "seems inaccurate" to characterize Huldrych Zwingli's view as "a mere memorialism" (p. 39). Rather, he believed in "'a spiritual impartation of Christ'" (p. 38, fn. 77). However, Zwingli certainly did significantly emphasize the horizontal aspects of communion. Thus, in a novel move, he even allowed participants to pass the elements one to another (as an act of reconciliation), and he argued against excluding even impenitent sinners (since they might be brought to repentance and reconciled in the act of Communion, p. 42, fn. 99). Zwingli instituted observance of the Lord's Supper four times a year: Easter, Pentecost, harvest time, and Christmas (p. 40).

For my part, after reading and re-reading this section, I remain confused about Zwingli's position on the Lord's Supper, which is not surprising, given that experts and scholars debate it still today (as Soderberg demonstrates). Further, Soderberg does not cite any original material in which Zwingli makes his view plain on the presence of Christ. If such material exists, I suppose the debate would end. As it stands, I remain uncertain as to exactly what Zwingli believed on this issue.

Heinrich Bullinger, embroiled in controversy and battles of his own, did not fight this frequency battle but chose a middle way. Although he believed "weekly celebration was certainly justifiable on theological grounds," he commended each side (frequent and infrequent observance) for their ideals, insisting that the Lord has left churches free to make decisions best fitting their congregations (pp. 44–45).

John Calvin believed that the Sabbath was abrogated (p. 48). Therefore, no particular day of the week need be set aside for worship, but at least one should be.[3] Accordingly, Calvin

1. John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Dallas, Texas: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995), p. 15.

2. One wonders how this "passing the pax" might relate to "passing the peace," as observed in some worship services today.

3. Cf. John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980). Ed. Banjamin W. Farley. Those who hold to the "continental view" should review Calvin's sermons on the Sabbath. For, in his sermon on this subject, Calvin

argued that whichever day(s) the church sets aside for worship, Communion should be one of the elements included, appealing to Acts 2:42 (p. 46). For Calvin believed that the Supper was a means of grace to nourish believers spiritually, and although he warns against partaking while "unrepentant and continuing willfully in sin," he believed that "[o]ur faith in Christ makes us worthy" to partake (p. 53). Calvin also encouraged "that children be catechized and examined" before being admitted to the Supper (p. 65). In fact, considering the practice Calvin allowed in Geneva (explained later in the book), Soderberg concludes: "It becomes apparent that Calvin was willing to sacrifice frequency for the sake of proper preparation, which could imply that frequency was not an unqualified blessing in Calvin's mind" (p. 45). Calvin's chief concern was "to get rid of this great pile of ceremonies" heaped up by Roman Catholicism and to abolish annual communion, which he called a "'veritable invention of the devil'" (pp. 46–47).

The issues of church discipline, "the preconditions for participation in the Eucharist," and the relationship between church and state were intimately bound up with the practice of Communion during the Reformation. Therefore, Soderberg considers the various attempts of Communion reforms in Zurich, Basel, Strasbourg, and Geneva. In Zurich, for example, Zwingli believed the church "'was under the complete authority of the Christian magistrate'" (p. 56), with which Bullinger (his successor) agreed (p. 57). However, Bullinger did not believe excommunication by the state meant exclusion from the Supper. In Basel, Oecolampadius believed impenitent sinners should be cut off from the Supper, but pastors had little control over such matters in Basel, which fell largely to laymen and magistrates (p. 59). In Strasbourg, Bucer believed excommunication should be in the hands of church leaders, and he called for the novel "*pre-communion confession and examination*" (p. 61). His ideals may not have been realized in Strasbourg, but he influenced other Reformers, such as Calvin (pp. 60, 63). Although Calvin—in Geneva—believed in frequent Communion, he also insisted upon proper discipline by church leaders: "Accordingly, the consistory devoted much of its time before the quarterly communion services to facilitating the reconciliation of offended parties, and to drawing up a list of those who were unrepentant, and thus barred from communion" (p. 67). Calvin himself often preached a fervent preparatory sermon the Sunday before Communion (pp. 67–68). In fact, he believed the people of Geneva may not be prepared to participate in frequent communion: "'But because the frailty of the people is still so great, there is danger that this sacred and so excellent mystery be misunderstood if it be celebrated so often'" (p. 64). Therefore, he recommended only monthly Communion in Geneva, but even then, bearing with the weakness of the people (with recorded protest), Calvin resigned himself to quarterly Communion observance: "at Christmas, at Easter, at Pentecost, and in September" (pp. 64, 67). Soderberg summarizes Calvin's position (p. 69):

> In the context of this study, in [sic] can be concluded that Calvin thought that weekly communion was ideal, but not essential (it could be either more, or less often). However, Calvin gradually came to hold that spiritual preparation and examination were indispensable for proper participation in the Lord's Supper, and for practical reasons this necessitated an infrequent communion-rhythm of at best 5–6 times a year per church.

Thus, the Reformers "did not simply argue for more frequent communion– they argued for more *faithful* frequent communion" (p. 71).

Chapter 3: Communion Frequency in the Reformation in England and Scotland (1536–1603)

As Soderberg cleverly puts it, "The scholarly interpretations of the upheavals in sixteenth century England and beyond are only slightly less contentious than the original events themselves" (p. 75). However, it is clear that Cranmer and other English Reformers held weekly Communion as their ideal (pp. 78–9). Nonetheless, given the long-standing tradition of only once-annual observance and the practice of visual only (vs. oral) Communion that developed during the Middle Ages,

explains his position: "Moreover, let us realize that it is not only for coming to the sermon that the day of Sunday is instituted, but in order that we might devote all the rest of the time to praising God…. It is true that it would be a poor thing if we did not think about the benefits of God except on Sunday, but on other days, seeing that we are so occupied with our affairs, we are not as much open to serve God as on a day which is totally dedicated to this…. But when Sunday is spent not only in pastimes full of vanity, but in things which are entirely contrary to God, it seems that one has not at all celebrated Sunday [and] that God has been offended in many ways. Thus when people profane in this manner the holy order which God has instituted to lead us to himself, why should they be astonished if all the rest of the week is degraded?" (p. 110). Calvin spoke of "a special day which should be totally dedicated" to spiritual ends each week, suggesting "one or two" such days might be established each week (p. 111). Is this the "continental view" so many are claiming today? Cf. John H. Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study," in *Exploring The Heritage Of John Calvin: Essays In Honor Of John Bratt*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 40–75; *Holy Time. Moderate Puritanism and the Sabbath* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989); "Sunday: The Lord's day as a Sabbath—Protestant Perspectives on the Sabbath," in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Tamara C. Eskenezi, Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., and William H. Sher (New York: Crossroads, 1991); Stewart E. Lauer, "John Calvin, the Nascent Sabbatarian: A Reconsideration of Calvin's View of Two Key Sabbath-Issues," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007): 3–14, 302; repr. in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 12 (2016): 149–160.

it is not clear how successful the English Reformers were in actually instituting weekly Communion.

In Scotland, the *First Book of Discipline* (1561) called for quarterly observance of the Lord's Supper. In an attempt to avoid all superstitious holidays, they recommended observance on the first Sundays in March, June, September, and December (pp. 83–4). *The Book of Common Order* (1562) "notes that communion is 'commonly' held monthly," but this "was an ideal which failed to take root in Scotland" (p. 86). Why? Soderberg answers: "Some blame the tenacity of medieval Catholic tradition. Others blame the Puritans. While these various explanations might all capture aspects of the truth, one important factor is often overlooked. This is the same dynamic that made communion frequency difficult to achieve in Continental Reformed churches—the emphasis on catechesis and church discipline" (p. 88).

The Scottish Reformed liturgy "was dominated by preaching," displacing the traditional centerpiece throughout the Middle Ages: the drama and mystery of the Mass. The Word preached was understood to be "sealed in the Eucharist" (p. 90). Thus, whenever the Scots observed Communion, they preached the Saturday before, twice on Communion Sunday, and once afterwards on Monday (p. 90). This quadruple sermonizing stoked great intensity during such times—an intensity that could hardly be sustained for frequent Communion. Likewise, the Scots insisted upon intense preparation for Communion seasons, including catechizing, rigorous examinations by the kirk (which granted a token or ticket to partake for those who passed), and much fasting. Such intensity in preparation made frequent Communion practically impossible in Scotland.

Chapter 4: Communion Frequency and Church Discipline in Post-Reformation England and Scotland (1603–1689)

In England, while Elizabeth may have believed that the 1559 settlement was the conclusion of Church reform, the Puritans did not. Their concern for further reform and purifying of the Church included the Lord's Supper, which, at this time, "most parishioners only received annually" (p. 102). When able to do so, the Puritans changed such practices. Accordingly, "The Puritan Baptist groups practiced monthly communion" (p. 103); "The English Congregationalists, or Independents, celebrated communion weekly" (p. 104); and "The English Presbyterians … adopted the Continental Reformed practice of quarterly communion" (p. 105). Yet, their concern for purity included the need for proper preparation to partake.

Next, Soderberg cites many individual case studies, exploring "the dual priorities of emphasizing the duty of participating in the Lord's Supper and the necessity of preparation" (p. 109), beginning with Lewis Bayly. Bayly wanted to observe the Supper at least monthly, and "his emphasis on preparation makes it seem that our experience of God's grace in communion depends on how well we prepare for it" (p. 112). Thus, Bayly wrote: "'the efficacy of the sacrament is received according to the direct proportion of the faith of the receiver'" (p. 112, fn. 78).

Arthur Hildersham and William Bradshaw did not clearly state their frequency convictions. Rather, they emphasized the necessity of preparation and worthiness to partake, balanced by the blessedness of participation.

Stephen Charnock believed: "'Frequent it should be. The too much deferring doth more hurt than the frequent communicating'" (p. 121). Likewise, Charnock noted: "'[i]f we abstain from it for reverence, we may rather come for reverence; for if it be worthily received, it increaseth our reverence of God, and affection to him'" (p. 121). Accordingly, while "'it is not absolutely necessary that it should be administered every Lord's day,'" Charnock noted five benefits in partaking: "It weakens sin in us … nourishes the soul … increases the faith and grace in our lives … increases our 'sense and assurance of [God's] love' … and in the Supper 'union with Christ is promoted'" (pp. 121–22). Thus, he concludes: "'Can we too often clasp about him; can the union be often renewed, and become too close and strait?'" (p. 122).

The Westminster Divines "hotly debated" who could partake of the Supper, with many urging the necessity for churches to have the right to exclude participants, while some contemporaries (notably, William Prynne, labeled as an Erastian) argued that only government officials could exclude from the Supper. In fact, Prynne even "introduced the concept that the Lord's Supper was a 'converting' (i.e., leading to conversion) ordinance" (p. 126). Regarding frequency, the Westminster Assembly may have alluded to weekly Communion, but it left that decision to local churches (p. 127).[4]

Thomas Doolittle implies his approval of weekly Communion, but his calls for stringent preparation drown out his frequency conviction. Doolittle wanted days of preparation so that participants would come only "'after painful

4. "The communion, or supper of the Lord, is frequently to be celebrated; but how often may be considered and determined by the ministers, and other church-governors of each congregation, as they shall find most convenient for the comfort and edification of the people committed to their charge. And, when it shall be administered, we judge it convenient to be done after the morning sermon. The ignorant and the scandalous are not fit to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Where this sacrament cannot with convenience be frequently administered, it is requisite that publick warning be given the sabbath-day before the administration thereof: and that either then, or some day of that week, something concerning that ordinance, and the due preparation thereunto, and participation thereof, be taught; that, by the diligent use of all means sanctified of God to that end, both in publick and private, all may come better

and serious preparation: no preparation, no participation'" (pp. 131–32).

Matthew Henry followed the example of his father by observing Communion monthly. Further, he maintained that because Communion "is a family meal, all members of God's family should be present at the family meal. … even if they have not had sufficient time to prepare thoroughly" (pp. 134–35). For, he held "that believers are inherently qualified to come to communion" (p. 136).

Strangely, Soderberg concludes this section on Post-Reformation England by simply announcing (without citation) that "communion frequency fell most naturally into a monthly rhythm" (p. 136). How that fits with the weekly, monthly, and quarterly summary on pp. 103–5, the reader is left to wonder.

Turning next to Scotland, Soderberg observes that the Scots continued the tradition of observing Communion once a year, despite their own church courts' various attempts to mandate more frequency. This tradition was due to many factors, including politics, economics, lack of clergy, weather, etc. The Scots would preach preparation sermons, issue tokens, and gather around a table to participate in Communion, which became known as the Communion season. This season was a five-day event, and such "'festivity' mitigated against 'frequency'" (p. 140). These events were times of intense religious experience and became entrenched tradition so that "Biblical exegesis was not enough—at issue was a Presbyterian tradition, combined with popular experience and expectations of what 'communion' should look, sound, and feel like" (p. 141). In 1701, 1711, 1712, 1724, and 1751, the General Assembly in Edinburgh urged more frequent Communion with little effect.

chapter 5: communion, preparation, and ecclesial identity in american reformed churches (1620–1758)

Christians came to the New World, in part, to put into practice their ideas of what a pure church should be and "saw themselves as examples for Old England" (p. 148). The earliest sources, Thomas Lechford and John Cotton, describe monthly communion in which a minority present partake, only officers sat at the table, and visitors must have a letter of recommendation from their home church to participate (pp. 149–50). Further, American Reformed Churches often practiced rigorous preparation for Communion, including especially the necessity of a conversion testimony. "However, not everyone could provide this verbal testimony" (p. 157), which led to the phenomenon of some who were baptized, regularly attended, had their children baptized, were considered Christians but were never received into the church's communing membership, and so did not partake of Communion (p. 157). "In essence, there were two levels of membership: baptism and then participation in communion" (p. 158).

Next, Soderberg surveys select prominent theologians in America, beginning with Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard's main concern was to get people to partake of the Supper, for he believed Communion to be a "converting ordinance" such that you need not be regenerate to partake. Edward Taylor opposed Stoddard, arguing in sermons based on Matthew 22:12 that coming to the Supper required the "clothes" of saving faith and preparation. According to Taylor, the Supper "'never was ordained by God to give the first grace, but it is only a strengthening ordinance'" (p. 163, fn. 74).

Samuel Willard argued that "[m]oments of doubt and weakness are the most important times for us to come to the Lord's Supper" because "communion is a vital means of strengthening faith in Christ" (p. 166). Further, when some participants feared that they came unworthily, because they did not experience what they expected or desired, Willard argued that it is man's duty to partake "regardless of what spiritual experiences he may, or may not, have during communion" (p. 166).

Cotton Mather denied the necessity of relaying one's conversion experience before partaking of the Supper, attacked the idea that the Supper was a "converting ordinance," and warned against laxity in admission to the table (p. 167). Mather and others were fighting against chronic neglect by eligible participants. Accordingly, Mather challenged congregants not to make excuses but to prepare and partake. While Mather speaks pastorally at times, he quickly returns to emphasizing preparation and proper participation (p. 170). No wonder congregants refrained, considering themselves unprepared and unworthy.

In typical Puritan fashion, in his sermons Jonathan Edwards argues for strenuous preparation and self-examination before partaking of the Supper. Although Edwards thought 1 Corinthians 11:28–29 revealed that frequency bred contempt of the ordinance, he came to believe that weekly participation was ideal (pp. 175, 177).

The Scotch-Irish who emigrated to America continued the annual Communion seasons, gathering various church communities together for these extended festivities. The First Great Awakening arose out of such Communion gatherings (p. 179).

chapter 6: scottish reformed communion frequency debates: a trans-atlantic perspective (1716–1840)

In this final chapter, Soderberg presents the debates on this issue amongst the Scottish Reformed, beginning with John Willison. Although Willison, alongside Whitefield,

prepared to that heavenly feast." *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, in *The Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1855), p. 384. https://archive.org/details/confessionoffaitoochur_0/page/384/mode/2up

"preached at the largest documented revival in Scottish history"—which occurred at a "communion season"—Willison nonetheless desired weekly communion, saw quarterly as realistic, and lamented the practice of only annual observance. He argued that frequency does not lead to contempt but to higher esteem. Willison provided three reasons for frequent communion: the words "as often," the example of the primitive church (e.g., Acts 2:42, 46; Acts 20:7), and the necessity of our souls.

Of all the original sources cited, John Erskine's *An Attempt to Promote the Frequent Dispensing of the Lord's Supper* appears to be the strongest source in favor of weekly communion, containing comprehensive and powerful arguments for frequency. He argued from Scripture (e.g., Luke 24; Acts 2:42, 46; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20–21, 25–26) and from church history, answered objections, and made observations (also providing quotations).

Thomas Randall argued that churches should celebrate the Supper as often as they use the other means of grace, such as preaching and prayer. Randall also suggested that "Jesus did not teach directly on everything, but revealed some things to the apostles through the Spirit. Because of this move, Randall can elevate the communion practices of the Apostolic church to the divinely-revealed will of God" (p. 196). As Soderberg notes, such a claim is dangerously close to similar Roman Catholic claims.

John Mitchell Mason, though writing with "excessive rhetorical flourishes," added to the arguments by contending that the Lord's Supper does not "'require more holiness … than in other services'" (p. 201). If preparation for the Supper requires fasting, for example, why does not preparation for preaching? Soderberg suggests that by relegating "the sacrament to a more 'ordinary' position, a position which would not require 'extraordinary' preparation, including fasting days, Mason … seems to deny any special grace available in the Supper" (p. 202). In fact, Mason goes so far as to say that Christians will not find "'a single blessing'" in the Supper, which we might not expect "'in every approach to God through the faith of Jesus'" (p. 203).

John Thomson argued against Mason, as an older minister to "a young man who is too brilliant and eloquent for his own good" (p. 203). Thomson argued that the apostolic Church needed frequent communion, considering its persecution and its conviction of the imminent return of Christ (p. 205). Regarding the early Church, Thomson argued it was corrupt, and its practices do not set the example for future ages. Further, he declared that preaching "'commemorates' the death of Jesus and his love for sinners'" (p. 206), which is itself a feast for believers. In addition, Thomson argued that preparation days with fasting had biblical warrant in the Old Testament preparation days for Passover, and preaching after Communion had biblical warrant in the feast days that followed Passover (pp. 206–207).

Likewise, John Anderson argued against Mason, especially emphasizing the centrality of "solemnity," which was incompatible with frequency. Accordingly, Anderson argued that the Supper is not a "feast" but a "fast" (p. 213). Further, Anderson sees the other means of grace as distinct from the Supper, which condescends to our weakness. Accordingly, "[s]ince the Lord's Supper is a 'sensible' (sensory) ordinance it should be infrequent, so that our senses are not dulled" (p. 214).

Alexander Duncan also argued against Mason, maintaining that the primary reason for the Lord's Supper was unity. For Duncan, this meant unity amongst congregations, namely, "for large, multi-parish gatherings" (p. 215) He argued this based upon 1 Corinthians 10 and 1 Corinthians 11:20. Likewise, he argues, since the Passover was annual, so should be the Lord's Supper. Duncan explained "as often" to mean "whensoever." While he grants the early church observed the Supper more often, he argues that the corrupt state of the church in his day demands less frequency, since the people are not properly prepared to partake. Likewise, while he grants fast days are not Scripturally mandated, "they are not contrary to Scripture and are salutary and beneficial" (pp. 222–23).

John Brown of Haddington—published posthumously—answered many objections to frequency. For example, to those who claim the early church lived in times of persecution, which led to frequent communion—as if it might be their last opportunity—he answers, "We ought to live as if every Sabbath were our last" (p. 227). Likewise, if Brown's day was one of declension, the antidote is the Supper. "Do we withhold milk from a sickly child? Do we water a garden less frequently because it is dry?" (p. 227). Further, if solemnity is so necessary for the means of grace, why not "establish a fast day, preparation day, and thanksgiving day in order to hear sermons twice a year?" (p. 228). And, "If Passover is our model … Surely the Apostles knew the Passover was a yearly event, so why did they then celebrate communion so often?" (p. 229).

James W. Alexander, while acknowledging the benefits that came from communion seasons, argued that "'all services which render the celebration of the Lord's Supper protracted or wearisome, and all instructions and ceremonies which invest it with an unscriptural mystery or awfulness, have a necessary tendency to infrequent communion. Instead of being an attractive and delightful ordinance, it thus becomes fearful and repulsive. … The question is not whether it is 'solemn,' but whether it is 'commanded' by Scripture" (pp. 230–31). Alexander argued that annual communion was the innovation, not frequent communion.

At the end of this chapter, Soderberg summarizes the arguments from both sides. He notes, for example, that pro-frequency proponents largely argue based upon the New

Testament, while those for infrequent observance argue largely from the Old Testament. Regarding theology, those in favor of frequency argue the Supper is a feast, whereas opponents argue it as a fast (i.e., solemnity). Likewise, frequency advocates argue for a leveling of the means of grace, whereas they accuse their opponents (strangely, in my view) of too highly elevating the preaching of the Word. Regarding church history, frequency contenders argue it as an example, whereas their opponents point out the corruption of the early Church. In the end, Soderberg concludes: "The debates were not just about Biblical texts, or historical examples, in the abstract, but about shared rhythms of life that many people loved, some hated, and formed the inescapable context of the discussion" (p. 247).

Eventually, annual communion largely died out as a normative practice in American Presbyterian Churches. Yet, the fatal blows were not theological so much as pragmatic. For example, American revivalism grew in popularity and did not include Communion (p. 248). Likewise, "communion seasons" were seen as peculiarly "Scottish," not American (p. 248). Yet, even some opponents of annual communion lamented the loss of serious preparation and broader Christian fellowship (pp. 248–49).

conclusion

Soderberg concludes: "There is no single pattern of frequency that can be labelled as 'truly' reformed, as if all others were sub-standard and relics of the medieval church … Communion frequency is a matter of inference, best judgment, and pastoral wisdom" (p. 254). In fact, Soderberg notes: "It is supremely ironic that the sacrament of unity has often been the source of disunity" (pp. 255–56). Further, Soderberg detects a lack of concern in modern discussions and practices on serious preparation for Communion, which preparation he "tentatively" calls "a 'catholic consensus'" in the historical debate (p. 256). His final words, then, are: "What might it mean for us to prepare more fully for this rite? How might a renewed attention on this aspect of eucharistic spirituality help to restore this central sign of union and communion, which has so often been the site of division? Writers in the past knew that there was much at stake in the observance of the Lord's Supper. By learning from communion frequency debates in the past, perhaps we can have more productive debates in the present, and in the future" (p. 256).

analysis

By way of critique, this book is, at times, confusing in its outline, making it difficult to discern what subject Soderberg is addressing or what point he is making. For example, Soderberg claims the goal of his book is "to illuminate the historical backgrounds and contexts of communion frequency debates in the American Reformed tradition" (p. 12). Yet, how does that fit with his central research question: "*What patterns of communion frequency characterized the sixteenth-century Swiss Reformed, English Puritan, Scottish Reformed, and early American Reformed communities*?" (pp. 15–16). In fact, the book is best read as more aligned with this central research question than any special focus upon the American Reformed tradition. Likewise, for example, at times Soderberg enumerates lists with missing numbers (e.g., pp. 120–21, 253ff). Thus, the organization and presentation of content could helpfully be edited.

However, the subject matter is clearly well-researched and chock-full of helpful and corrective information. He proves his lesson that no one can claim "the" Reformed view on Communion frequency, and I was certainly convicted to think more seriously about the necessity of preparation for Communion.

Yet, one question Soderberg does not explore at length is how the centrality of preaching fits with frequency of communion, which, in my estimation, is an essential question in this debate. Soderberg touches upon the subject from time to time. For example, he does highlight the Scottish practice of hearing four sermons during a communion season (a preparatory sermon, two sermons on communion Sunday, and one after) as an "emphasis [that] flowed naturally from the Reformed emphasis on the close connection between the Word preached and the Word sealed in the Eucharist," and he refers to the "'logo-centric' shape of Scots Reformed worship" (p. 90). In fact, proponents of frequent Communion themselves complain that the "Scots Reformed place a greater emphasis on preaching" than on Communion (p. 239). Yet, in such communion seasons, is preaching, in fact, central and most emphasized? Preaching might occur four times and surround the sacrament, but is not the Supper, rather, the main event? If preaching were central, why use it as merely preparatory for the Supper? In fact, it seems to me that such an arrangement elevates the Supper above preaching. Preaching has become the preparation; the Supper is the central event. This arrangement seems to elevate the Supper beyond bounds and diminishes preaching. In my estimation, if the Supper is observed rarely, the possibility of elevating its importance beyond all bounds increases, making even preaching subservient to it.

Traditionally, the Reformed Church replaced the altar with the pulpit.[5] In Protestant church buildings today, is not the pulpit generally elevated even above the table, typically on a raised platform with the table beneath? This architectural arrangement seems symbolic. The Word preached is elevated above the Supper served. The Supper flows from the Word—is

5. Bob Gonzales, "Sacred Desk or Sacred Cow? Perspective on the Pulpit (Part 1)"; accessed August 18, 2023 on the internet: https://sharperiron.org/article/sacred-desk-or-sacred-cow-perspective-pulpit-part-1. Cf. even Wikipedia, "Pulpit," accessed August 18, 2023 on the internet: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pulpit.

the Word made visible—not vice-versa. The Supper is below (subordinate to) the Word, not above it. Reformed churches declare that the three marks of a true church are the proper preaching of the Word, administration of the sacraments, and exercise of discipline. However, really, both the administration of the sacraments as well as the exercise of discipline hinge upon the proper preaching of the Word and flow from it. Thus, preaching should be central in every worship service, with the Lord's Supper flowing as an application from it. The type of preparation involved in communion seasons seems incompatible with the centrality of preaching, even over the sacrament.

In modern debates among theologically confessional American Presbyterians, it is the Federal Vision proponents who explicitly argue that the Lord's Supper—and not preaching—is to be central. Thus Jeffrey Meyers, referring to the Lord's Supper, writes, "the end or goal of God's covenant is always a feast. God invites us to a meal. We come to church on Sunday to eat with Jesus and one another, to feast in His presence."[6] Accordingly, they would have us observe the Lord's Supper (by necessity) every Sabbath.

Yet, whether observing it once annually or weekly, the Lord's Supper is not the centerpiece of the worship service; rather, preaching occupies this place in corporate worship. In my estimation, therefore, whenever we schedule the Supper less frequently than weekly, we run the risk of elevating it above preaching. How so? That Sunday, "Communion Sunday," becomes a special event, somehow more important than "regular" Sundays in which we only get to hear preaching. On Communion Sunday, we get to partake of the sacrament, which by implication is so holy that it cannot be offered every Sunday!

Of course, the Lord's Supper is certainly an important means of God's grace to nourish the souls of believers. By pinpointing the primacy of preaching, I do not mean to diminish the Lord's Supper as unimportant. In fact, by conviction we observe the Lord's Supper weekly at the church where I serve, for we do not understand why church leaders would not offer the full cornucopia of God's means of grace to the church every Lord's Day. If preparation is the issue, then emphasize it. However, let us not deprive our people of spiritual nourishment in the Lord! It may not be "the" Reformed position, but in my estimation, weekly observance of the Lord's Supper is the best practice to put the primacy of preaching and the blessing of the Supper into their proper places.

6. Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), p. 34. Meyers also wrote: "The sermon, for example, is elevated all out of proportion as the dominant element of worship" (p. 26).

G. K. Beale, *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2023). Hardcover. 558 pp. ISBN 978–1–5409–6042–9. $49.99. Reviewed by Roland Matthews, Pastor of Drapers Valley Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Drapers, Virginia.

G. K. Beale is a name well-known in the circles of academic biblical studies. He is a prolific scholar who over the course of his decades-long career has authored a number of important biblical commentaries, as well as numerous monographs, essays, and articles that delve deeply and competently into the sometimes murky waters of biblical theology and Scripture's use of Scripture. Building on the foundation of his previous work, Beale's most recent volume entitled *Union With the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* focuses on the believer's union with *the resurrected* Christ "as the beginning of the eschatological new-creational kingdom" (xvi, 14).

Beale begins the book in earnest with a brief introduction that sets forth his basic thesis, which is succinctly expressed in the following: "What is true of Christ in his end-time resurrection and ascension is true of believers in their union with his resurrection" (2, 100). The introduction is then followed by seventeen chapters that develop and defend this thesis. They are divided into two sections.

The first section of the book is comprised of only two chapters, but these chapters serve an important purpose for the development of the book's thesis. These chapters present in brief form the contours of the biblical story-line Beale has developed in greater detail in his wide-ranging work, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2011). This story-line serves as the theological framework that undergirds the argument of the remainder of *Union with the Resurrected Christ* (21).

The story begins with Adam whom God made in His image and to whom God gave a commission in Gen 1:26–28 to subdue and rule over the earth (21–25). If Adam had fulfilled the parameters of the commission, he would have gained "irreversible escalated eschatological blessings" (24–25) for himself, his progeny, and the world. However, Adam failed to attain these escalated, consummative blessings, for he failed to guard the moral and spiritual sanctity of the Garden of Eden (25, 33). He did not rule and subdue, and he did not multiply and fill the whole earth. Nevertheless, according to Beale, Adam's sin did not bring an end to the divine mandate; Noah, Abraham, and Israel were "other Adam-like" figures whom God raised up and to whom God gave the priestly and kingly duties that He had first assigned to Adam (25–32).

The introduction of sin changed something of the tenor of the eschatological movement from the inaugurated kingdom to the consummated kingdom in that consummation

now required—and thus acquired—a redemptive dimension. With the entrance of sin into the world, a promissory redemptive element enters the picture so that the eschatological takes on a soteriological hue. Before the kingdom can be consummated, sin must be dealt with in such a way that victory over evil and its effects is secured. This then becomes the mood of the biblical storyline after God expelled Adam from the Garden. It is history, but more so it is *redemptive* history in which God is moving the creation toward His appointed end through promise, covenant, and a chosen people.

Yet, for one reason or another, none of these Adam-like figures received the fulness of the blessings of the consummated kingdom, though they did experience *some* degree of its fulfillment. In the case of Israel, sin and rebellion are the chief factors that prevented the consummation of the kingdom (30), but the promise remained. Thus, the hope of the consummated kingdom remained under the economy of the old covenant order. If Israel had repeatedly failed to advance the kingdom, what hope would there be of ever attaining to the eschatological blessings towards which the promises and the covenants pointed? The solution to this dilemma is found not in the nation of Israel per se, but in one person, namely, Jesus. Jesus Himself stands in the line of David and of Abraham, and He is the proper recipient of the promises God made to them. Therefore, Jesus is the one in whom the storyline of the old covenant economy finds its climax and fulfillment.

Jesus's life and earthly ministry that culminated in his death for sinners becomes the means by which God definitively addressed the problem of sin, and His resurrection from the dead was the inauguration of the new creation. The notions of resurrection and new creation are inextricably linked. In this regard, Beale says, "resurrection is conceptually equivalent to new creation because the way redeemed humans participate in the new creation is through having transformed, newly created bodies" (64). Jesus is an Adam-figure, but unlike other Adam-figures He has not only inaugurated the eschatological kingdom, but He has brought forward the essence of its power in His resurrection from the dead. His resurrection then leads naturally to the commission He gave to His disciples to engage in a worldwide mission to bring the prophetic word of blessing and judgment to the uttermost parts of the world. This corresponds to Adam's call also to move outward from the Garden to fill the whole earth with the glory of God. The resurrection has signaled the turning of the ages and stands as not only the anticipation of the consummation of the kingdom, but the present enjoyment of some measure of those escalated eschatological blessings (88) as those who are identified with and share in Jesus' death also are identified with and share in His resurrection and kingship (93). What is true of Christ is true of believers as they are united to Him by faith through the Spirit.

In sum, the biblical storyline begins with the first Adam who failed in his commission to rule over and subdue the earth, and it finds its climax and anticipated eschatological consummation in the death and (especially) resurrection of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one in whom and through whom the heightened eschatological blessings find their initial fulfillment.

The second section of the book is comprised of the remaining fifteen chapters. Here Beale develops the relation between Christ's resurrection and the believer's union with Christ. He uses the metaphor of a diamond to picture the multifaceted nature and simultaneous possession of the benefits that belong to the believer by virtue of this union (p. 101).

In chapter 3, Beale turns his attention to the Gospels, Paul, and Hebrews. He argues that Christ is (1) the Son of God, (2) the Last Adam, and (3) true Israel. As the one who is "a corporate representative for his people," Christ brings believers into communion with Himself, so that they are identified with him as the glorious Adamic image and resurrected Son of God" (129). Chapter Four continues in a similar vein with an examination of portions of the Gospels of Matthew and John, some of Paul's writings (e.g., Eph 2:18–22; Col 2:9–10), Peter's first epistle (1 Pet 2:4–8), and the Book of Revelation (Rev 3:12). Beale argues that Christ is the true temple of God. Believers are incorporated into Christ, and through Him they become the true, end-time temple of God. In chapter five, Beale ranges over a number of New Testament passages and returns to the notion that Christ is the true Israel of God. He then contends that "believers become true Israel when they believe and come into union with Christ" (152). This means that those whom He represented as the true Israel of God become participants in His identity and are "considered to be obedient sons, true Israel, and were being restored" (156, 176–177).

The next chapter speaks of Christ as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of the believer. Looking to 1 Cor. 1:30 for support, Beale argues that this passage teaches not the full and perfect possession of these attributes in the experience of the believer, but the full and perfect possession of these attributes in terms of their position and identification with Christ (180). Returning to Adamic imagery in chapter seven, Beale once again underlines the royal and cultic significance of Adam as king-priest in Eden, and draws a connection through Daniel 7 to the identification of Jesus as the *Son of Man* in the synoptic Gospels. Here he argues that the Son of Man carries with it the same royal and cultic overtones associated with Adam's calling. He concludes that Jesus, as Son of Man, also bears this royal and cultic role as king-priest but with a heightened

eschatological-fulfillment. Where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded, but ironically through the tribulation of death. Other portions of the New Testament also bear out Jesus' role in these terms. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He is king and priest on behalf of His people, and His people—because they participate in His death and resurrection—are also kings and priests (224, 233). Chapter eight turns to consider the topics of restoration and reconciliation. Here Christ is seen as 'the one who is in exile' who suffers the ultimate exile on the cross, while His resurrection is His reconciliation and restoration, a return from exile (241–242). "All those he represented underwent his exile on the cross and his resurrection, which was the restoration and reconciliation to God" (242). The people of God find the way of restoration through the vicarious suffering of Jesus Christ. Suffering then becomes a marker of identification between Christ and His people, which is uniquely expressed in Paul's own suffering on behalf of Christ, but also experienced by believers in general as they not only "imitate Christ's sufferings but that they actually participate in Christ's sufferings" (264–268). This also underlines the unique way in which the church as the people of God is a light to the nations: since Christ the servant of God suffered in bringing reconciliation into the world, those who are identified with him in His suffering and resurrection are to bring this message to the world.

Beale turns his attention to consider the relation of Christ and the Spirit in chapters nine and ten. In chapter 9 he focuses on the transformative work of the Spirit in both Christ and the believer. Beale notes that Paul speaks of Christ's transformation by the Spirit at His resurrection in 1 Cor. 15, which involves a future resurrection and transformation of the believer, and then of the believer's definitive transformation in 2 Cor. 3:16–18 by the Lord, who is identified with the Spirit. The same identification of the Lord with the Spirit is made in Rom. 8. Through this relation between Christ and the Spirit, the believer is transformed by the Spirit by virtue of his union with the resurrected, Spirit-transformed Christ. Chapter ten continues to address the relation between the Spirit and believers by drawing attention to those passages that speak of the Spirit bringing the believer into union with Christ. By bringing a believer into union with Christ, the Spirit transforms him into something different from what he was. The important point here is that the Spirit is the agent who brings the believer into union with the resurrected Christ through whom presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer provides a definitive break with the old world and therefore the old way of life (309). The believer will not experience the fulness of this consummative transformation until the eschaton, but in principle this transformed existence belongs to him now.

Chapters 11 and 12 are concerned with the important question of righteousness. Chapter eleven looks at Rom. 10:1–10 and 5:15–19. Beale argues that the former verse teaches that Christ has perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law, and the believer receives this righteousness by faith. The righteousness here is not merely the righteousness of what theologians have called the passive obedience of Christ (i.e., His death on the cross) but is inclusive also of his active obedience. Romans 5 bears this out, according to Beale. He expresses the relation between the two in this way: "it is better to see Christ's obedient death as a climax to his entire life of obedience, which has a parallel with Adam's sin" (332). Christ as the last Adam—by way of his obedient death—secures a justification that leads to life for the one who believes in Jesus. Here Paul draws a close connection between the believer and Christ, and states that that the righteousness of Christ becomes the believers only by faith in Him.

Chapter 12 and Beale's discussion of righteousness begins with an important feature of Christ's resurrection: Christ's resurrection was Christ's vindication, it was His 'justification." This is evident in such passages as 1 Tim. 3:16, but the point for Beale's argument ought not to be missed. The believer's solidarity with Jesus and identification with Him is a solidarity and identification with His justified status (358). This point becomes clearer still in a passage such as Rom. 4:25. "Jesus's dying 'on account of our transgressions' identified him with believers in the punishment due those transgressions… Christ's resurrection 'on account of our justification' identifies him with saints in the verdict of justification" (359). Here the believer's justification is directly associated with the believer's identification with Jesus. Beale then considers several other passages that express a similar sentiment. Christ achieved justification through His resurrection, and those who believe in Him are identified with the justification of the resurrected Christ (365). They are thus declared to be just by virtue of their union with the resurrected Christ.

It is at this point that Beale addresses what he takes to be a theological problem, and indeed it has been a problem for some. The issue centers on the relationship between good works and justification. In particular, Beale asks, "what is the relationship between good works and the justification (or vindication) of believers?" (365). Some may take issue with Beale's formulations here, and dispute with his interpretation of certain key passages (e.g., Rom. 2:13; James 2:14–26), but Beale's basic point aligns with the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q/A 90. The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that the righteous will be "openly acknowledged and acquitted" in the day of judgment. To draw this point in connection with the theme of union with the resurrected Christ, Beale, citing Gaffin, argues, "the last judgment for believers, which is according to works, is 'reflective of and further attesting their justification that has been openly manifested in their bodily resurrection'" (370). The believer is raised from the

dead in union with the resurrection life of Jesus, which is also equivalent to his justification (369), and only then will he be brought before the throne of judgment.

Beale seems to use 'justification' synonymously with 'salvation' in connection with this point (371), but the two notions are conceptually distinct. Perhaps it would have been better to distinguish these related theological terms to avoid possible confusion. Nevertheless, Beale notes that good works do "not have to include the idea of earning salvation by doing good deeds" (371). Thus, good works have a place in the final judgment, but the role is a subsidiary one in relation to the justification of the believer that is specially attested in his union with the resurrected Jesus. "What is true of Christ in his end-time resurrection and ascension is true of believers in their union with his resurrection" (2, 100). This would include all that is true of the believer's standing with God, as expressed in the Reformed (and biblical) doctrine of justification.

Glory is the topic of the next two chapters. Chapter thirteen explores the relation between Christ's "consummate glory at his resurrection/ascension and how this glory is attributed to those identified with Christ" (379). Christ's death and resurrection are the means by which His glory is evidenced, and it is this selfsame glory that is 'shared' with believers (382) through their participation in Him (383–4). Beale then examines several other passages in which the two themes of resurrection glory and participation/identification of the believer in the glory of Christ are brought together. Jesus' resurrection glory becomes a predicate of His people through their union with Him in the present. They will receive the consummate glory of Christ in their own resurrection at which time they will fully and perfectly reflect the glory of Christ. Chapter 14 continues to examine the theme of glory, but Beale focuses especially on the theme as it is developed in 2 Peter. The theme of the glory of Christ and the believer's participation in that glory is similar to Paul's. As with Paul, the believer is identified with the resurrection glory of Christ in the present, existing in "His realm." As such, believers reflect Christ's attributes in their present manner of life, and they will experience the full manifestation of that glory in themselves at the coming of Christ.

Chapter 15 touches on the topic of definitive sanctification. Beale defines *definitive sanctification* in the following way: "when one believes, one decisively, irreversibly breaks with the world and is transferred to a new creation in the image of the resurrected Christ, where one grows in the lifestyle of the new creation" (447). Clothing imagery in the Pauline corpus (e.g., see Col. 3:8–11; Eph. 4:22–25) draws this point out. The stripping off of the old man and putting on of the new man corresponds to becoming a new creature in Christ, and marks the believer's definitive separation from the world (i.e., definitive sanctification). This then places him in the position actually to obey the commands of God (i.e., progressive sanctification) until the consummation of the ages in which believer will be fully sanctified. "At their final resurrection, the resurrected Christ will fully conform them to his image" (464).

Chapters 16 and 17 round out the book. Chapter 16 is concerned with the regeneration of the believer. Looking at several passages in the Pauline corpus, a passage from 1 Peter and 1 John, Beale states that regeneration is a work of the Spirit who brings a person into person union with the resurrected Christ. It is by virtue of this union that the resurrection power of Jesus effects regeneration and therefore new creation. Chapter 17 brings a close to Beale's arguments by drawing the reader's attention to the fact that the life of the believer is now a share in the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. The one who believes in Jesus has eternal life because he abides in Christ and the life of Christ flows in him. The link between Christ and the believer could not be more tightly drawn. Indeed, according to Paul, they are inextricably linked (Gal. 2:19–22).

Beale's conclusion to the book draws the various lines together in a summary fashion. One can restate the essence of his concluding sentiments with the same sentiment with which the book began. "What is true of Christ in his end-time resurrection and ascension is true of believers in their union with his resurrection" (2, 100). What may properly be predicated of Christ in His resurrected glory may properly be predicated of believers in virtue of their close identification with and participation in the resurrection life of Christ.

Beale's scholarship in this volume is extraordinary in its scope. He demonstrates a remarkable mastery of the original sources and an impressive command of the whole sweep of the biblical canon. One may not agree with all of the particular moves that Beale makes in this volume (and he will no doubt leave some readers unconvinced of some of the particulars), but Beale has gone to great lengths to establish his central thesis that the believer by virtue of his union with the resurrected Christ receives the status of Christ Himself. The conclusion is unassailable.

Beale's intended audience is the serious Christian reader. His work should appeal to academics, specialists, and students of theology, but also to the interested reader with no formal training in biblical or theological studies. *Union With the Resurrected Christ* contains a wealth of deep insights and penetrating analyses of the rich tapestry of Scripture that will be of interest to both. Ideally, it should be read in concert with his *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, but reading this book on its own will also prove beneficial. It will surely be of profit to anyone who will take the time to take it up and read.

Willem van Vlastuin, *Catholic Today: A Reformed Conversation About Catholicity*, Reformed Historical Theology, 66 (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Gmbh & Co., 2020). Hardback. 252 pp. 978-3525540817. 130.00 € / $150.00 US. Reviewed by Thomas Haviland-Pabst.

Willem van Vlastuin is Professor of Theology and Spirituality of Reformed Protestantism, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands and the author of *Be Renewed: A Theology of Personal Renewal* (V&R Academic, 2013) as well as various chapters in edited volumes.

With this book, he seeks to explore a primary question: "how can the understanding of catholicity in the Early Church serve catholicity in the Reformed tradition?" (p. 12). In order to answer this question, he first turns to the historical theology, giving attention to views on catholicity in the patristic era in the first part and the views of Reformed theologians in the second part. Following this, he offers his own constructive account of catholicity in the third part.

The first part is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, he discusses the views of Ignatius (ca. 35–107). In the second and third chapters, he surveys Cyprian (ca. 205–258) and Cyril (ca. 315–386), respectively. With the fourth chapter, he explores Augustine's views (354–43); finally, Vincent of Laurens (died between 434–450) concludes van Vlastuin's survey of this era.

The second part is divided into six chapters. He begins with John Calvin (1509–1564) (ch. 6), which is followed by a discussion of key standards, such as the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Westminster Confession of Faith (ch. 7). Chapters eight through eleven give attention to James Ussher (1581–1656), John Owen (1616–1683), Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), and G. C. Berkouwer (1903–1996), respectively. With each chapter in these two parts, van Vlastuin focuses on key aspects of the particular theologian's understanding of catholicity, which is followed by his own assessments of their understanding. In the final, constructive part of the book, the author teases out various aspects of catholicity that emerged in his historical discussion.

The remainder of this review will highlight some of the main aspects and arguments of van Vlastuin's monograph. Summarizing his assessment of Ignatius, the author writes, "… the catholicity of the church is founded on the catholicity of Christ," and, as such, "it cannot be locked within narrow national borders" (p. 24). Moreover, for Ignatius, "any attack on the unity, the truth or the offices in the church, is an attack on the body of Christ, and therefore … [on] Christ himself" (p. 25). Cyprian, according to van Vlastuin's analysis, is similar to Ignatius in that he understands catholicity as a quality rather than numerical quantity and he makes a strong connection between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Cyril provides an even fuller account of catholicity then the previously treated theologians by drawing out some significant implications of the same, such as the universal scope of the church's mission, the inclusion of all categories of people (e.g., the poor and rich), and it is in the church that all doctrine is found as well as all virtues. Cyril, additionally, shows development in the patristic era such as his understanding that baptism can be received unworthily and thus the efficaciousness of baptism on the soul is lost.

With Augustine and his engagement with the Donatists, we see an extensive development of catholicity. For Augustine, van Vlastuin argues, catholicity was more primary than ecclesiastical office; thus he refused to deem the Donatists as separate from the church catholic, although at odds with the same, and was willing to honor their bishopric, even requiring "the catholic bishop to withdraw in favour of the Donatist bishop" (p. 55) if they were serving in the same town or city, which means that he effectively contextualized apostolic succession to some degree. As one might suspect, then, Augustine, while affirming the holiness of the church, did not see it as sinless and thus he stressed the link between "hidden election" and catholicity, without "evaporating" the visible aspect of the church (p. 58).

The last figure discussed in van Vlastuin's handling of the patristic era, Vincent of Laurens, stresses that there is an underlying essence or identity to the church which remains the same despite all the shifting changes and weaknesses that has attended its history. Given this, Vincent warns us to exercise caution when considering innovations, especially ones that do not arise from the catholic church but rather "from a certain denomination or … theologian" (p. 65).

From his discussion of this era, van Vlastuin derives six heads which guide the constructive account in the third part of this book: (1) difference and development; (2) the body of Christ; (3) the unity of Christ and thus the church; (4) the relationship between the church and the individual believer; (5) the link between the Holy Spirit, baptism and orthodoxy; and (6) the pilgrimage of the church in the world.

Turning to the Reformed historical survey, the author argues that, with the Reformation, "there is much more emphasis on the individual relationship with God at the expense of the corporative aspect of the church" (p. 87). In other words, the invisibility of the church was stressed more than the visible, external structures, offices, etc. Because of the dynamic, personal dimension of the church, it was possible, so van Vlastuin, "for Calvin to criticize the [medieval] church and to prove the relevance of the Reformation" (p. 87). Given Calvin's stress on the forgiveness of sins and communion with Christ that every believer enjoys, he began with the invisible aspect of the church before moving out to the visible, without neglecting the latter.

Moreover, unlike the stress on justification by his predecessor, Luther, Calvin stressed both justification and sanctification and, as such, "[h]e speaks of Law and Gospel, Word and Spirit, election and responsibility … inward and outward, church and state," without merely striking a balance but rather while allowing "the radicalism of opposites to function" (p. 98). By way of example, since "Christ's dominion" is over "all areas of life," he avoids both "sacralising [*sic*]" and "secularizing" society (p. 98).

Whereas Calvin signals something of a departure from the patristic era, Ussher represents continuity with the same given his stress on the *totus Christus* and his emphasis on the corporate body over against the individual believer. However, in line with Reformed sentiments, he considers the Roman Catholic Church an enemy of true catholicity by placing the pope as head of the church and prizing "its organisation [*sic*]" over "organic thinking" (p. 118). If Ussher stresses the corporate more than Calvin, then, according to the author, Owen stresses the individual more, even explicitly placing "the visible congregation at a lower level" (p. 120) than the invisible. Owen's emphasis, in turn, displays his thoroughgoing Congregationalist conviction that the local church is free from "superlocal church relationships" (p. 122).

While Calvin stressed the universality of Christ's lordship, Bavinck extended this insight, applying it not only to elect in Christ, but to the entirety of creation since "Bavinck has a cosmic reality in mind" (p. 137). Berkouwer, the latest figure discussed in the author's survey of Reformed theologians, represents a mix of different Reformed tendencies. Like Ussher, he stresses the visible over the invisible aspect of the church and, in distinction from Bavinck, he reframes cosmology in the context of ecclesiology, thus moving him closer to understanding the church as *totus Christus* as well as the stress of Calvin, Owen, and Ussher on Christ as the source of the unity and catholicity of the church. Van Vlastuin sees Berkouwer's focus on "the pneumatological dimension" (p. 149) of the catholicity as his most significant contribution to the discussion.

There are a number of strengths that attend this work. Van Vlastuin helpfully summarizes key patristic and Reformed theologians before embarking on his own understanding of catholicity. Given this historical theological analysis consists of the bulk of the book, the author demonstrates his conviction that systematic theology ought to stand on the shoulders of theologians that have come before. Naturally, not everyone will agree with the figures he chose for his survey in the first two parts.

Some will wonder why he left out Chrysostom or Athanasius; others will ask whether the omission of medieval theologians negatively impacted his treatment of Reformed theologians; still others will question why he didn't include such modern 'Reformed' theologians as Karl Barth alongside such broadly Reformed thinkers as Berkouwer. However, he does not make the claim that his historical-theological survey is comprehensive; rather, it is a sampling of significant thinkers from the periods in view. Moreover, he makes it a point in his exposition of Reformed thinkers to show their connection to the Middle Ages, which is especially seen with his discussion of Calvin and Owen. Two minor criticisms ought to be mentioned at this point. While one appreciates his summary of Calvin, his engagement with relevant secondary literature is noticeably lacking. Furthermore, he relies on Berkouwer's book *The Church* primarily in his discussion of his ecclesiology. One wonders if his inclusion of Berkouwer's sympathetic but critical engagement with Roman Catholicism (e.g., *The Second Vatican Council and The New Catholicism*) would have provided a different picture.

Additionally, his systematic discussion in the third part is brimming with insight. First, he stresses that catholicity, while having a quantitive referent (i.e., universal), is primarily a qualitative aspect of the church as it expresses "the spiritual fulness and theological richness of Christ's body" (p. 163). Second, true catholicity, for Vlastuin, is best expressed by focusing on the one who is the head of the body, namely, Christ, recognizing that the growth of his body is not a work of the flesh but wrought by Christ himself through the Holy Spirit—the church is "Christologically determined" (p. 173).

Third, Vlastuin rightly argues that the primary difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformation was "the structure of the church," with the latter retrieving the fact that the church is "the body of Christ" (p. 171). Fourth, regarding the relationship between the gospel and culture, Vlastuin makes the intriguing assertion that "the gospel contains such a fullness that it manages to absorb any culture" and thus that the identify of the Christian lies foremost in their "unity in Christ that transcends all cultures" (p. 180). Before one suspects that the author is overly triumphalist, he is careful to point out that the church is always in exile in this world and thus a wholesale Christianizing program divorced from the suffering that accompanies the church's witness is not what should be expected. Fifth, he urges for the necessity of affirming the authority and inspiration of Scripture, arguing that one cannot have the Word become flesh without the Word speaking through the Scriptures. Sixth, he pushes against attempts to recast Reformed identity into a "Reformed 2.0" (p. 218) by contemporary Dutch theologians, arguing that they fail to understand the confession of the Reformed faith that is Christ and the continual reforming character of the Reformed tradition.

At this point, it must be noted that not all will appreciate Vlastuin's criticism of confessionalism, which he sees as attempting to completely crystallize the truth in clear principles

and betraying an overreliance on doctrinal formulations to maintain the well-being of the church rather than a living relationship with Christ that promotes continuance reformation. Nor will all appreciate his more ecumenical tone which does not prioritize the Reformed tradition as more faithfully catholic than other traditions, all the while making it a point to emphasis the strengths of the Reformed tradition as writing from within this same tradition himself.

Aside from these criticisms, a few quibbles take away from the overall usefulness of this book. For example, the author makes the inaccurate statement that *Kurios* is the term that translates "the Hebrew word 'Messiah'" (p. 178), apparently not realizing that *Christos* is the actual Greek word used to translate the Hebrew. Also, throughout the book there are a number of typos and misspellings, such as when we read "Thomas of Aquino" (p. 124) rather than the typical English rendering of Thomas Aquinas. Despite these and other criticism of this book, this is a sophisticated and historical sensitive exploration of the catholicity and unity of the church from a Reformed perspective that ought to be consulted by any theologian or serious student who is interested in the living, dynamic reality that is the body of Christ.

Review: Alasdair J. MacLeod, *John Kennedy of Dingwall, 1819-1884: Evangelicalism in the Scottish Highlands* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023). Cloth. vi + 250 pages. ISBN 978 1399503891. $114.90. Reviewed by Rev. Lane Keister, minister at Momence Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Momence, Illinois.

It is a pleasure to review a volume written by someone to whom I am undoubtedly related (my Scottish highland clan is the MacLeod clan), but also about a subject of which I have a personal interest: the progress of Christianity in the highlands of Scotland. This volume in no way disappoints. Not only are we treated to an excellent biography (and by "excellent" I mean a sympathetically critical appraisal) of one of the most significant ministers of 19th century Scottish evangelical Presbyterianism, but also an acute "situatedness," or the historical background, of 19th (and even some 18th and 20th) century Presbyterianism itself. MacLeod is very sympathetic to his chosen subject, but not hagiographic in any sense. The author is a minister in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), and lectures part-time at Highland Theological College, having received his Ph.D. in 2019 (in history) from the University of Edinburgh.

The purpose of the volume is to answer partially the following question: how and why did Highlands evangelicalism become diverse from Lowlands evangelicalism in the years 1843–1900? While not claiming that the ministry of John Kennedy of Dingwall constitutes a complete answer to the question, MacLeod does posit that Kennedy's ministry was a major factor (2, 4, 11, 228). This thesis Macleod amply proves from primary sources of the time. The importance of Kennedy is stated on page 4: "Kennedy was an able and prominent Highland minister, who pastored Dingwall Free Church for forty years from 1844 until his death, being recognised in the later years of his ministry, from about 1860 onwards, as the effective leader of Highland evangelicalism."

MacLeod makes room for his thesis by pointing out the deficiencies of other accounts of the divergence between Highlands and Lowlands evangelicalism. Some argue that race (the difference between Gaelic and non-Gaelic Scots) played an important role. Others say that clan loyalty was the main factor. Still others that linguistic or sociological considerations hold pride of place. Most of these theories have already been debunked (6–11).

In chapter 1, MacLeod covers Kennedy's conversion and ministry in more general terms, with some discussion of controversies surrounding the Lord's Supper. Kennedy's conversion to Christianity is described as a fairly typical evangelical conversion (18–21), though with a few unusual aspects. The occasion, by his own testimony, was the death of his father (20), and this happened after his ministerial studies had already begun. His ordination (at the age of 25) was on February 13, 1844 (25). Though he had been licensed by the Church of Scotland, he became ordained in the Free Church, being persuaded by the Disruption of 1843 (wherein the Free Church was formed) to go in a purer Establishmentarian direction. Kennedy would always remain persuaded of the Establishmentarian position, even if, as with all the Free Church ministers, he protested the right of patronage. Kennedy's preaching was always textual-based expository preaching that was experimental and powerful. His pulpit was specially designed to allow him to walk back and forth across the whole width of the church with handkerchief in hand (27). Kennedy regularly spent about half the year travelling over the Highlands helping out with communion seasons (28). While he has been described as unlearned, this would not be terribly accurate, as Kennedy was well-versed in the languages (38–9), and while his preaching was not overly reliant on other authors, he was still well-read. His preaching centered on three themes: "From the various surviving evidences, therefore, it must be concluded that Kennedy's preaching ministry was characterised by three particular themes: Divine sovereignty in achieving salvation, the freeness of the gospel offer on that basis, and the need therefore for urgent and thorough self-examination to ensure that one possesses the reality of a work of sovereign saving grace" (46).

Even in chapter 1, MacLeod notes some of the many controversies that would accompany Kennedy's ministry, and

to which he would contribute. A baptism controversy arose with regard to the difference between members and adherents. Could both sets of people expect to have their children baptized, or only the former? Kennedy held that both sets of people could have children baptized, an opinion with which the General Assembly concurred (59). MacLeod's own opinion aligns with Kennedy (57).

Kennedy saw the observance of the communion season as one of the markers of faithfulness that proved the Highlands were more faithful than the Lowlands (60). This would be a highly debatable point, which MacLeod does not pursue. Instead, MacLeod focuses on Kennedy's concern to prevent false profession and illegitimate religious experience.

In chapter 2, the focus is on Kennedy's writing ministry. Kennedy wrote a history of Highland Christianity in Ross-shire called *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* (1861). Kennedy's historical writing was fairly idealistic and lesson-oriented, as was fairly common in the 19th century. Perhaps there was a sense of missing "the good old days." Kennedy was primarily seeking to retain the kind of piety and theological stability of confessional 18th century Scottish Presbyterianism, which he saw as being in decline. A similar idealism is present, even more obviously, in his biography of John Macdonald, entitled *Apostle of the North*. He used Macdonald as a template to tell people what ministers ought to look like. This biography does not escape the critique of being hagiographic (89–90, 92). However, what is intriguing is that Kennedy's biography of Macdonald was also critiqued in its day for being too frank in bringing up the false charge of adultery.

A further issue of Kennedy's writing is his only apparent approval of a sort of mystical piety (100ff). It was a sort of supernatural insight he was accused of favoring. However, Kennedy was only reporting what others had said. He did not approve of them himself.

Chapter 3 relates Kennedy's steadfast adherence to the Westminster Standards in the face of many challenges. The first challenge was on the reference of the atonement. A certain John Brown believed that the atonement had a double reference (one for all, but only to the elect was there an effectual reference). He was acquitted against Kennedy's protests. A second confessional controversy was over the proposed union between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church. Initially favorable to it, Kennedy eventually was turned off to it by the United Presbyterian Church's tendency to play fast and loose with the Westminster Standards, as well as their rejection of Establishmentarianism. The controversy over Establishmentarianism was a larger debate within Scotland, and would rage over several decades. With regard to confessionalism, the United Presbyterian Church proposed what was effectively a system subscription act. Kennedy opposed this vehemently.

Chapter 4 specifies five different controversies in which Kennedy played a large part in influencing Highlands Presbyterianism towards confessional positions. The first was Sabbath observance. When a train line was proposed to travel on the Sabbath, Kennedy and most Highlanders opposed it. Kennedy was also prescient about the effect of Sunday School on many families. A point which Ken Ham mentioned in his book *Already Gone*, and which Old School Presbyterians also mentioned, was that Sunday School would tempt parents not to instruct their children during family worship.

Secondly, Kennedy opposed the introduction of hymns and instruments into worship, things the Lowlands were propounding and implementing (175–82). Here is another place where Macleod's own theological positions are visible, as he agrees with Kennedy that the introduction of hymns and instruments constitutes a serious downgrade of worship. Whether readers agree with this position or not, the historical picture is undoubtedly accurate.

The third controversy MacLeod outlines was occasioned by D.L. Moody's evangelistic tours in Scotland. Here MacLeod critiques Kennedy for misrepresenting Moody in his critique somewhat. Kennedy's main concerns were with the superficiality of conversion experiences (186–190). MacLeod's assessment is balanced, as he acknowledges that there were genuine conversions as a result of Moody's ministry, but also that the long-term discipleship would suffer from a general change in Scottish theology towards more revivalistic thinking.

The fourth controversy MacLeod describes is that of the temperance movement. Kennedy (somewhat unsurprisingly, being a Scot!) opposed the temperance movement. The concern was legalism (196). Quite insightfully, MacLeod comments, "In conclusion, Kennedy urged that the answer to the sin of drunkenness was the gospel of Christ, and its saving effects. By treating drink as the problem, the temperance movement was 'excusing' rather than 'exposing the sin'; drunkenness would be better treated as a crime" (198).

The fifth, and perhaps most importantly for the future of Scottish theology, the attack of the liberal-critical Documentary Hypothesis wound up undermining confidence in Scripture (205, 213–4). Kennedy was firmly opposed. The trial of Robertson Smith wound up having a similar effect to the Scopes Trial in the United States: Smith lost the trial, but won the war, much like Clarence Darrow lost the trial, but won the cultural war.

In conclusion, MacLeod has written a very strong biography that firmly situates Kennedy in his historical context, both in terms of events, and with regard to the theological climate and trends of the time. Kennedy was certainly a major factor in the diverging paths of Highlands and Lowlands evangelicalism. It is highly recommended.

Review: Mark D. Liederbach and Evan Lenow, *Ethics As Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021). Hardcover. xxxii + 751 pages. ISBN 9781629952628. $49.99. Reviewed by Rev. Lane Keister, pastor of Momence Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Occasionally a book comes along which a person reads and thinks to himself, "This book could have been truly great." This volume is one of those. There are flashes of brilliance intermixed with fashionable buzz-words, unclear language, and lack of theological rigor. This reviewer really wanted to like this book, but cannot ultimately recommend it.

There are a number of things which the authors do commendably well. Treatments of many issues are thoroughly biblical, thoughtful, and therefore helpful (the treatments of capital punishment, war, abortion, euthanasia, and sexuality are the best chapters in the book).

Furthermore, there are many quotable moments in the book. Their definition of ethics says many good things, though there are some issues with it: "Ethics is about God. It is about maximally adoring him and rendering to him all that he is due from all that he has made. And it is about our doing so both individually and corporately" (xxi). It seems that the core is correct, but the trappings leave something to be desired. No mention is made here about God's law, which has always been central to Reformed ethics. Also, there is no distinction here (the whole volume suffers from this problem) between everyday life-as-worship and corporate weekly worship on the Lord's Day.

The common canard that no one should legislate morality is dispensed with quite adequately (4, 490). All ethics has its source in God (5), and any attempt to have another foundation will result in chaos.

Theologically, they have an initially adequate (though not as precise as some of the best confessional definitions, such as WCF 11 and Heidelberg Catechism 60) definition of justification: "By *justification* we mean God's judicial act of pardoning sinners, making them righteous, and accepting them as justified such that their relationship and standing with himself is permanently made right. It is God's declaration that a sinner has been made righteous in the eyes of God on the basis of grace alone and taken advantage of by faith alone" (70, emphasis original). The language of "being made righteous" is ambiguous, as it does not delineate whether the pardoning changes a person on the inside (Roman Catholic formulations) or remains *extra nos* (Reformed and Lutheran understandings). They do include grace alone and faith alone. The words "taken advantage of" instead of "received" could be taken to imply that a person is contemplating whether or not to be justified, and decides to take advantage of it. Rather, the language of "receive" safeguards the passive reception of Christ's righteousness imputed. Later on, we will see some serious problems with the fudging of justification and sanctification.

Their definition of inspiration is thoroughly Warfieldian (137), though it is not entirely clear why a discussion on inspiration is necessary in a volume about ethics. Their attempt at connecting the dots runs through the idea of truth as determinative for ethics. Certainly, truth is at the center of ethics, but the method by which we obtain truth is not quite as central to ethics.

Their views on the three parts of the law is accurate and helpful: "[W]hile the *civil laws* may be time-bound and *ceremonial laws* find their fulfillment in Christ, the *moral laws* endure beyond context and time" (150, emphasis original).

The authors have a laudable emphasis on the goal or telos of ethical consideration. Why we do what we do, or for what purpose we do them, is a primary consideration. They would argue it is the most important consideration in ethics (182–3). We choose actions that are in accord with our values (183).

The dismantling of unbiblical systems of ethics is one of the more helpful sections in the book. Their discussion of utilitarianism (211–216) was particularly insightful. Also nuanced was the discussion about how to handle ethical dilemmas (246–79). One could argue whether such dilemmas are so common as to justify including such an extensive discussion about them. However, their discussion gives a good lay of the land.

Some statements about race in this book were biblical and advance the discussion. One I have appropriated in my own thinking is their encouragement to think not so much about color-blindness as about color celebration (321). To push the thinking forward a bit more: if "white" people can celebrate other colors in people as God-made diversity *and vice versa*, it will go a long way towards mitigating racial tensions. To put a theological point on things: it is God's providence that each person has the color of skin they have. Does anyone wanting to think biblically about this really want to claim that God made a mistake in any such case? They also (as do I) prefer to use the word "race" to describe the unity of humanity (320) as God's image-bearers. Differences in background and skin color should then be described as ethnic diversity, not different races. There is only one human race. They also highlight how the gospel transcends all such distinctions (323). By the same token, Marxism is rejected, in terms of its advocacy of class conflict as the way to overthrow oppressors.

Their discussion of poverty is also noteworthy in positing gradations (355). The US federal government's definition of poverty, for example, is not the same as the World Bank's definition of extreme poverty. Their recognition that certain discussions of living wages "often incorporate socialistic ideas that present a new set of problems" (355) is salutary.

In their chapter on capital punishment, they offer a biblical

exegesis of Genesis 9 and Exodus 20:13 that is much more convincing than that of those wishing to abolish capital punishment (432–4).

Lastly, in terms of the positives, their discussion of sex and gender rejects modern attempts to separate biological sex from gender identity as modern trans-gender activists do (570). Recognition that this is what is posited by those advocates takes away the first and primary objection to the biblical position, which objection is usually that we "confuse" sex and gender. There is a highly gnostic but self-contradictory and simultaneous rejection-yet-worship of the body in the trans movement: they believe that one's biological sex does not always match with the gender, and that gender is fluid, and yet they want to change their body to "match" their gender identity. If the body doesn't matter in gender identity, then why the need to change it? And if one is changing it, then why is it only a change to the other gender, and not to the supposed myriad of other possibilities?

In critiquing this volume, alas, there are far more points. The most important will be dealt with first. The concept of worship is not rightly distinguished, in terms of "all-of-life" worship versus corporate weekly worship. The elements of worship are redefined in terms of worshiping the right God, from the heart, in a proper form, comprehensively, individually and corporately (xxiv). This is not how Reformed theology defines the elements of proper worship, namely, preaching, prayer, alms, singing of psalms, sacraments, etc.

There is a very unfortunate fudging of the distinctions and connections of justification and sanctification. They define "positional sanctification," for instance, as "the Holy Spirit's work to apply the benefits of justification to our lives" (75). They then posit an internal moral change as part of justification (76): "Believers literally and actually are made righteous before God because we have been given the righteousness of Christ." They define God's declaration concerning sins as part of "our moral formation" (76), and then seem to posit sanctification coming before justification, "once the Spirit applies salvation to us and sanctifies us, we actually stand before God justified" (76). This means we cannot be justified before we are sanctified. Forgiveness, normally included under justification, is placed under the benefits of positional sanctification (80). Even worse, justification requires infusion: "[W]e would say that whereas the lived doctrine of *justification* requires the infusion of *theological virtues* (i.e., positional truths) into our lives by grace through faith, the lived doctrine of *sanctification* requires the development of *moral virtues*" (191, emphasis original). No Roman Catholic would object to this kind of highly confused language at all.

This reviewer would agree with David VanDrunen's assessment about sanctification, that "they treat the crucial issue of sanctification as primarily a human work (in which God's grace and Spirit provide crucial help) rather than as a work of God, as the Westminster Standards define it."[1] In particular, the authors seem to have virtue and good character backwards as to what produces what. They claim that "virtues and norms (are) necessary to shape morally good character" (174). In reality, it is the reverse: good character is formed by God's grace and results in virtues. They also seem to claim that rightly ordering our lives is what enables us to become the worshipers God wants (128). The Bible teaches that God forms us into the worshipers He is seeking.

Ironically, though they place too much emphasis on works, they claim "The ethical demands of the Ten Commandments were never meant as a means to earn God's favor" (66). Except, perhaps, for the Covenant of Works before the Fall? Coupled with this is a deficient definition of sin. Sin is defined biblically as violating God's law, either by commission or omission, in our thoughts, words, or deeds. There is nothing comparable in this volume with regard to such a definition. The closest they get to defining sin is primarily a disordered relationship (62).

They seem to equate the final state with "restoration" (xxvi), and not as glorification, a step far above what Adam and Eve had before the Fall. Therefore, their eschatology is also deficient on this point. This is confirmed on page 83, where the glorified state is definitively equated with the Adamic state before the Fall. One could query at this point whether sin would still be possible, as it was in the Adamic state? If it is, then they have placed themselves outside of the normal Augustinian schema concerning sin and the four-fold state.

They give much too much ground to atheists in claiming that "It is possible to live an internally consistent life with the basic assumptions that God does not exist" (16). Of course, the authors show no sign of being presuppositional in their approach to apologetics, which is not the main focus of their volume, obviously. However, this reviewer, at least, would dispute the claim. Atheists have to have both a closed universe and an open universe simultaneously, if the Big Bang theory is going to have any credibility. Atheists have no basis for ethics or for any kind of definition of right and wrong, and yet reproach Christians concerning the problem of evil. They live as if both chance and order are simultaneously at work in their lives.

Less important, but still somewhat important, critiques can be offered concerning their linguistic outdatedness. They do not seem to be aware of James Barr's refutation of "Hebraic" versus "Greek" thought (134). They use buzz-words like "missional" and "flourishing," which they do not define, and

1. See David VanDrunen, "Review of *Ethics as Worship*," in *New Horizons*, March 2022, 14–15. I also concur with VanDrunen's assessment regarding too much focus on "big-issue" items, and not enough attention on everyday Christian living, especially as focused on how the Ten Commandments apply to the Christian life.

are often ciphers for progressivistic kinds of thought. They describe the fallen state as "broken and disordered," instead of "rebellious" (146).

They argue that "The single greatest injustice in human history—indeed, in the history of the universe—is that God does not receive the worship he is due" (285). While one could not argue that the lack of worship of the one true God is a huge injustice, the crucifixion of the God-man Jesus Christ ranks as a far greater injustice. They show the influence of social-justice warriors when they call evangelism and discipline "social-justice initiatives" (288). They believe that racism is systemic (301–2, 317–8, 331). Their discussion of black versus white pictures of Jesus does not even address the Second Commandment violation that either would perpetrate (332). A claim that the Lord is free from bias is surely incorrect (334, fn. 46). The Lord God has the most holy, righteous, and correct bias in existence. This claim of theirs contradicts their ideal to see life situations "from a completely objective point of view" (266, fn. 42). They seem to quote favorably a rather semi-Pelagian, or even full-blown Pelagian assessment of humanity (341). The volume suggests that human activity is causally connected with environmental degradation (read "climate change", 380). This is a highly disputed point, fraught with political connotations. They show no awareness that there is debate on the point.

For all these reasons, while there are some valuable points, and it is not a waste of time to read, it cannot stand as any kind of standard on Christian ethics that would replace, say, Bavinck, Douma on the Ten Commandments, or the excellent Puritan treatments of James Durham and others.

REVIEW: L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption,* Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020). Paperback. 207 pages. ISBN 978–0–8308–5539–1. $24.00. Reviewed by Zachary Groff.

In *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, L. Michael Morales traces the theme of redemption across select portions of Scripture. Throughout, Morales presents the narrative of Israel's exodus out of Egypt as a—if not the—paradigm for biblical redemption. While eleven of the book's fourteen chapters focus on Old Testament material, the final three chapters (constituting roughly 20% of the book) explore the exodus theme's development in the New Testament.

This popular-level volume is both accessible and stimulating for thoughtful readers, regardless of their academic background. Though Morales was not necessarily writing for fellow scholars, The Gospel Coalition (TGC) recognized his work with a 2020 Book Award in the category of Academic Theology. Morales successfully straddles the line between popular theology and academic biblical studies. Not only is his writing style engaging and readable, but his exegetical observations and theological claims are undergirded by a depth of scholarly research evidenced in the body and footnotes alike.

A casual perusal of the stacks in a library or display in a bookstore might lead readers to assume wrongly that Morales has written a brief commentary or Bible study on the book of Exodus. Though Exodus receives more direct treatment and attention (four chapters) than any other single book of the Bible, Morales' goal is not to provide readers with an exposition of any one book of the Bible. Rather, Morales identifies and analyses the Bible's narratives (and theology) of redemption, which he presents as patterned after Israel's historical exodus out of Egypt.

Morales argues that throughout the biblical canon, the biblical theme of redemption manifests in ways that hearken to Israel's exodus both before and beyond the event itself. Toward that end, the volume proceeds in three parts. After making initial observations about mankind's exile-like alienation from God's life-giving presence in the Garden of Eden and the life of Abraham as a series of departures and deliverances anticipating the exodus event, Morales establishes the theme of redemption in the exodus pattern set by Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. Second, he explores the exodus theme's expansion in the ministry and message of Israel's prophets as they predict the prophesied second exodus. Finally, he explains the fulfillment of the exodus theme in the realization of the new exodus in Christ Jesus and its application to the New Testament church.

Morales' presentation of the exodus pattern as the substance of the Bible's theme of redemption engages with exegetical material that fits squarely into Israel's national experience of divine salvation. Readers are to gather from this book that Israel's exodus out of Egypt both manifested and set the pattern that is subsequently reenacted in Israel's sacrificial system, and prophetically fulfilled in Christ. The primary concern of the book's argument is to set forth the exodus pattern as an organizing principle that helps readers make sense of the various details of the Bible, such as descriptions of the sacrificial system, records of geographic movements, prophetic allusions, and particular miracles. These biblical details are arrayed in support of the thematic unveiling of mankind's exodus-like redemption from sin and death into God's life-giving presence.

But can the exodus theme account comprehensively for all the multifarious purposes, genres, and details of the Scriptures? Morales does not directly answer that query, as his aim is more modest. He restricts his focus to the three obvious exodus movements of the Bible, together with supportive material for which there is a direct narrative connection: Israel's exodus out of Egypt, Israel's prophesied second exodus (arguably—though not without some controversy in academic

literature—distinct from the remnant of Judah's restoration from exile), and the new exodus fulfilled in Christ. While the aims and intended audience for the book demand a high degree of selectivity, the final result suggests to readers that certain canonical material (e.g., sapiential literature and great swaths of historical, prophetic, and epistolary content) is very nearly dispensable in the pursuit of an overarching organizing theme or motif for understanding the Bible. Such separation of the canonical tapestry into fabric on one hand and frills on the other is emphatically not Morales' intent. In the Author's Preface, he explicitly states that exhaustively to "trace allusions to the exodus from Genesis through Revelation" would not serve "the accessible, introductory nature of the ESBT series" (xii). This volume is an introduction to one biblical theological theme; it is not—neither is it intended to be—a comprehensive biblical theology of that theme. The pressing methodological issue in this introductory biblical theology of redemption is twofold: defining the biblical data that constitute the exodus theme and tracking how that data is transmitted through the biblical canon as the exodus theme is developed exegetically and theologically.

Surveying Israel's Exodus

Israel's exodus out of Egypt (heretofore referred to as the exodus event) is both the prototype and the database for all subsequent biblical development of the exodus theme. It is from the archetypal exodus event that Morales derives the discreet elements that recur thematically in subsequent books of the Bible. In a term borrowed from Michael Fishbane, Morales describes the exodus event as a 'mythos,' that is "a paradigmatic story and life teaching through which an objective past recurrently gave way to a subjective event of the present" (4). To borrow two more terms utilized by Fishbane, the exodus event supplies the fundamental scriptural 'traditum,' or exegetical content of thematic traditions, that later biblical authors exegetically interpret, develop, and apply by way of an unfolding 'traditio,' or process of transmission of said content.[1] In alluding to the written record of the exodus event—and its constituent thematic elements—God's people express their hope for redemption by referring or alluding to the mighty deeds of their divine Deliverer in the past.

What are those discreet elements? What are the biblical data that constitute the exodus theme? Though he nowhere collects and presents individual exegetical or thematic items in a list format, Morales identifies and gathers them in the first and lengthiest part of the book, drawing from the Israelites' situation prior to their deliverance from slavery, exodus out of Egypt, forty-year sojourn in the wilderness, and eventual arrival in the Promised Land. On the eve of the exodus event, Israel had grown numerically from an extended family of refugees into a vast nation full of life and vitality, though enslaved to the anti-creational Pharaoh. Morales casts their historical situation in terms uniting it at once to the Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:28, humanity's exile-like expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and the devastating judgment forewarned by the nation's as-yet future prophets: Israel had enjoyed "God's creation blessings amidst their exile in Egypt" (38). Israel's bondage to slavery in Egypt as a form of exile parallels the situation of the nations. Morales writes, "As a witness to the nations of God's plan for their salvation, Israel's exodus was ordained as a deliverance corresponding to the exilic situation of the nations" (38).

In the exodus event itself, key details attend the Israelites' liberation from slavery and departure from Egypt. These details are revelatory as God—resolved to restore His people to communion with Him in the Promised Land—makes Himself "known through the mighty acts and fatherly compassion that comprise Israel's deliverance out of Egypt" (40). The knowledge of Yahweh and His name, His signs and wonders (expressive of new creation), His victory over the draconian Pharaoh (and Egypt's pantheon of idols), and His deliverance of the Israelites through impenetrable darkness and the deathly waters of the Red Sea (both of which symbolize the figurative Egyptian grave from which the Israelites emerge) are important not only for the exodus event itself, but also for the transmission of the exodus theme and its development as a divinely enacted new creation in later biblical texts. Morales writes for example,

> In other places in Scripture, however, the theology of creation is given in more poetic ways, portraying God as a mighty warrior who conquers the waters of chaos, personified by the sea dragon that lives in those turbulent waters. As a power that humanity is unable to tame, often dark and turbulent, the sea readily came to symbolize chaos in the ancient world, the forces of darkness and power of evil, even death. Not only was the sea itself personified, but it was also embodied as a monster within the sea. Job brings the two together when he cries out to God: "Am I a sea [*yam*] or a sea dragon [*tannin*] that you set a guard upon me?" (Job 7:12) (55).

Indeed, in the written record of the exodus event and its thematic development elsewhere in Scripture, themes of creation and redemption come together. In the exodus, Egypt was the land of death, darkness, and chaos, ruled by the murderous and anti-creational Pharaoh who sought to interrupt and stop God's creational blessing in the fruitful multiplication

1. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 6.

of Israel's life by exterminating the children of Israel. Thus, the exodus event is Israel's redemptive deliverance out of a creational conflict between life and death, order and chaos. The particular features and details of Israel's exodus experience which Morales highlights relate directly to the chosen people's translation from deathly peril to living in security.

Much like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Pharaoh is an agent of death, whereas God is the champion of life in the redemption and new creation of His chosen people. The exodus event is encapsulated in the Passover, by which God exercises full control over death, causing it to pass over His people even as it visits the household of their chief antagonist (66). The Passover meal involved the death of representative lambs or young goats as sacrificial substitutes for the firstborn sons of Israel, the smearing of blood on the doorposts and lintels of Israelite abodes, and the sharing of Passover meals among the people.

In discussing the Passover, Morales relates the association between circumcision and the Passover to one of the most dramatic episodes in the life of Moses. In this, Morales seeks to lend support to the personal identification of the man Moses with the nation of Israel in a particular experience of divine redemption. Expounding on Exodus 4:24–26, Morales notes, "the scenario appears to involve God's death threat to Moses, who is spared through the circumcision of his son, with the blood of circumcision applied to Moses' feet…. The pattern of a divine death threat avoided through the application of blood surely does bring us into the realm of Passover theology" (75). In the drama accompanying his return to Egypt from the household of Jethro, "Moses had experienced a Passover deliverance himself even before the plagues in Egypt had begun. As Israel's mediator, Moses was also Israel's forerunner in deliverance" (75). The personal deliverance which Moses experienced, as Morales' exegetical argument goes, parallels and anticipates Israel's national "Passover deliverance" in the exodus event.

Is this connection between the circumcision of Moses's son and the substitutionary sacrifice of the Passover a legitimate one to make? Exodus 4:24–26 is notoriously difficult as perhaps the most obscure passage in the narrative portions of the book of Exodus. However, it is the case that circumcision was clearly obligatory for participation in the Passover meal (Exod. 12:48). From Genesis 17 forward, circumcision is the sign of an individual's interest in God's covenant with His people in the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham and then extending to Abraham's descendants. Likewise, the Passover meal signifying God's acceptance of a substitutionary sacrifice in the place of Israel's firstborn sons is reserved for those in covenant with Yahweh who instituted it. Insofar as circumcision is a covenantal rite and Zipporah's words in the second half of Exodus 4:25, "You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me," refer to the blood of her son whom she circumcised, the connection Morales makes is reasonable. However, Morales' conclusion that Moses experienced "a Passover deliverance" rather than a more generically covenantally significant deliverance in this episode hinges on reading the first half of Exodus 4:25, "Zipporah took a flint and cut off her sons' foreskin and made it touch at his (i.e., Moses') feet," as anticipating specifically the application of the Passover lamb's blood to the doorway of Israelite homes. Though Zipporah's words in the second half of the verse explicitly—if somewhat ambiguously –refer to the shedding of her son's blood, it may be better to conclude that Moses experienced a deliverance that bears marks of God's covenant dealings with Israel in general rather than a deliverance that particularly anticipates the Passover itself. Either way, the deliverance of Moses in Exodus 4:24–26 can be understood as connected—at least indirectly—to Israel's deliverance in the Passover, which is the main point that Morales makes in this section.

Not only was Moses a sympathetic mediator for the enslaved Israelites on the way to liberation, but he was also a singularly authoritative intermediary between Yahweh and the people, as evidenced by his mediation of the covenant delivered through him at Mount Sinai (83). Morales remarks that it is Moses who repeatedly ascends the mountain to meet with Yahweh, and it is Moses who descends from his unique audience with Yahweh to deliver God's commandments to the redeemed nation. The verbs describing Moses's ascent and descent are repeated throughout the narrative concerning Israel's encampment at the base of Mount Sinai, with his ascending functioning as a verbal metonymy for his role as Israel's representative to God and his descending functioning as a verbal metonymy for his role as God's representative to Israel. Through the exodus event, Moses functions as both prophet of God and priest for the people, in addition to acting as authoritative judge and governor of the nation during their deliverance from Egypt and sojourn through the wilderness.

As seen above, Morales argues that the shedding of blood and the movement of God's servant as the mediator between God and the people are significant details drawn from the life of Moses described in Exodus and experienced by Israel in the exodus event. In the shedding (and possible application) of his son's blood by circumcision, Moses is spared from an otherwise justly deserved death sentence (Exod. 4:24–26), and God through Moses directs each household of the Israelites to apply the blood of an unblemished male lamb (Exod. 12:5) to the family's doorway (Exod. 12:7, 22, 23) for the Passover. Moses ascends and descends Mount Sinai to perform his ministry as God's intermediary (Exod. 19, 24) and Israel's intercessor (Exod. 32–34), respectively. As God works redemption for His people in later biblical history, the pattern set in the life of Moses replays with modification. Morales notes that these

two phenomena (sacrificial shedding of blood and mediatorial movement) are aspects of Christ's ministry of redemption (81f, 85f, 88), an observation he will develop in his later treatment of the exodus theme in the Gospel of John (159–72).

The remainder of Morales' examination of exodus material concerns the cultic practices of the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings. Morales describes the ritual service of the tabernacle and the exodus event as mirror "rites of passage" marking the journey of the Israelites into God's life-giving presence as they are redeemed from slavery and reconciled to Him (97). Though Morales' chapter-length summary of his earlier scholarly work published in *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*[2] and *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured*[3] is appropriately incorporated at this point to bring additional details into the project at-hand, it fundamentally refers back to the two essential themes discussed above (sacrifice and mediatorship). In making the connection to the anticipated perfect sacrifice to-come for the reconciliation of God to men, Morales writes, "But the true lamb, who would descend into death and then be raised up into heaven, would yet be provided" (103). What the intricate web of details about the Levitical sacrificial system clarifies in Morales' argument is how the people of God are identified with the promised servant of God who would be consecrated as Messiah into service for the redemption of the people in a new exodus. The background which Morales rehearses at this point is important for his development of the argument that God's messianic servant identifies with Israel in the message of the prophet Isaiah.

forthtelling covenantal movements

Having established the theme of redemption, Morales proceeds in the second part of the book to explore the theme's expansion and transmission in prophetic literature. Morales summarizes the theology of the prophetic corpus: "that Yahweh God would indeed judge his people with the scattering of exile for their wicked apostasy but that he would also restore them back to himself in such a way that the nations would be gathered in as well" (114). Grounded in the terms of the Mosaic covenant delineated in Deuteronomy 29 and 30, the message of the prophets recalls God's faithfulness, retells God's redemption of Israel from slavery, forthtells covenantal threats, and predicts restoration from exile.

The bonding agent between exodus and exile is God's covenantal dealings with His people, prefaced by His deliverance of them (Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). Morales writes, "As covenantal movements, exodus and exile are signals for the people's relationship with God" (115). Both exodus and exile move from redemption, through consecration, and to consummation in the Promised Land. This pattern is typified and reenacted in the liturgy of both tabernacle and temple: from purification, through consecration, and to fellowship with God. Inextricably associated with the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to His people Israel as narrated in these sacred movements is the promise of blessing for the nations, rooted in the calling of Abraham (Gen. 12:3).

Morales highlights Isaiah's message of blessing for the nations whom God will raise up beside Israel as His possession. Referring to Isaiah 19:21–25, Morales writes, "Wondrously, the nations will be embraced by Yahweh in a relationship akin to Israel's: 'my people.' As with Israel, the nations will experience an exodus of deliverance that will lead to a covenant relationship with Yahweh" (117). As God works a second exodus with universal extensive effects—blessing the nations of the earth, beyond merely the people of Israel—He simultaneously works a radically intensive effect upon those whom He redeems. The prophets promise both an expansion of divine blessing to encompass the nations and an intensification of God's redemptive work. Not only will God draw men of every nation to His holy mountain (Isaiah 2:2), but He will work redemption in the hearts of men. Morales writes, "In the second exodus proclaimed by the prophets, however, Yahweh God would do a work *within* the hearts of his people—the deliverance would include an inward, spiritual exodus" (119).

The call and promise of inward redemption and reformation is not novel to the prophets. Morales shows how the prophets' message is rooted in that which Moses foretold in the closing chapters of Deuteronomy. However, the prophets take this 'Moses tradition' and develop it through the language of escalation. The work of inward redemption promised in the second exodus is far greater even than the initial work of physical deliverance out of Egypt. Drawing from Jeremiah 16:14–21, Morales writes, "The second exodus will so far exceed the wonders of the old exodus that even the exodus-defined name "Yahweh" will call to mind the second exodus rather than the first" (121). What exactly is this second exodus? As suggested by the bittersweet expressions of the restored remnant of Judah in Ezra 3:12, the pre-exilic prophesies of the second exodus are not fulfilled in the initial reversal of exile.

Morales explains that the prophesied second exodus is distinct from the return from exile. The prophesied second exodus has five elements which are absent from the experience of the remnant that returns to the Promised Land, making that physical return from exile a partial fulfillment of prophecy, at most. The glorification of Yahweh's Name among the nations, the reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom, the reemergence of an Elijah-figure as the forerunner of the Messiah's earthly

2. L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A biblical theology of the book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, 37 (Nottingham, England: Apollos/InterVarsity Press, 2015).

3. L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*, Biblical Tools and Studies, 15 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2012).

ministry, the outpouring of God's Spirit upon His people, and resurrection from the dead are five prophesied features of the second exodus that are left unrealized in the Judean remnant's return from exile. Morales dedicates much of his ninth chapter to connecting these promises of Old Testament prophecy to their fulfillment in the Person and work of Christ in the New Testament. It is in Christ—and not physical return from exile—that the prophesied second exodus finds its ultimate fulfillment. In fact, he writes provocatively, "the return from Babylon, significant though it surely was, had been but a subdued and tragic parody of the original exodus" (122). What then is the theological function of the physical return from exile? It seems that Morales wants his readers to understand that the remnant's return to the Promised Land as "a dim foretaste of the new exodus" functions primarily to whet the appetite of the faithful believer for the "final and permanent deliverance" (122) they would experience only when God's appointed messianic servant would come to save them once and for all.

The next two chapters examine the prophetic descriptions of the Messiah as God's Servant in whom are fulfilled the promises of the prophesied second exodus. The work of God's prophesied Servant is fundamentally one of transforming God' people Israel (i.e., Zion) into all that God intended His covenant community to be. Morales presents a three-part structure for Isaiah 40–66 as he outlines the prophesied transformation of Zion through the work of God's Servant. He writes, "the focus of the second half of the book of Isaiah moves from Israel as failed servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 40–48), to the mission of an obedient and suffering servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 49–55), to the renewed mission of the servants of Yahweh, who are disciples of the servant (Isaiah 56–66)" (136).

Throughout, Morales emphasizes that the Servant is no mere substitute for Israel, but is Himself an embodiment of God's covenant people who are spiritually united to Him. Morales writes, "The servant does not replace corporate Israel but is himself an Israelite who embodies Israel" (140), much like Moses was before Him. Again, he reiterates, "No mere substitution, the servant dies for Israel to die with him; he is raised up for Israel to be raised up with him—herein lies the *crux* of Zion's transformation" (143). In chapter eleven, Morales then proceeds to cast the Servant of Isaiah as the Moses of the second exodus, a new David, and a manifestation of Yahweh God in the midst of His people. The individual Servant of Isaiah's prophecy is He who brings about Israel's transformation in His divine Person and perfect work of redemption. This reading of Isaiah's Servant songs in chapters 40–66 is given a necessarily abbreviated treatment due to the limitations of the series of which this book is a part.

Nevertheless, it is here that Morales makes a profound—but all too brief—comment on the connection between his redemptive-historical project in this book and the poetic literature of the Old Testament. He writes, "The shape of lament and thanksgiving found in the psalms, of affliction and deliverance, suffering and glory, death and resurrection, forms an *exodus pattern* engraved deeply on the soul of God's anointed one, the Messiah and shepherd of Israel" (152). Perhaps due to space constraints or a desire to maintain a sharp focus on material drawn from the Pentateuch and the prophets, Morales contents himself with this brief comment as he brings together Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 to develop the profile of the Servant figure as both Davidic and Moses-like in his suffering servant-leadership in the second exodus, referring as well to Adam Hensley's recently published study on the Psalter.[4]

Exodus Fulfilled

The final three chapters of this volume present New Testament expressions of the redemption theme. What Morales seeks to show from John's Gospel and the Pauline epistles is how the New Testament both echoes the exodus event and brings to fulfillment the promises of the prophesied second exodus in the culminating work of Christ and His Spirit in the new exodus. In the earthly ministry of Christ as presented in John's Gospel, Jesus transforms the old creation into a new creation, lives a life of humiliation unto assured exaltation, and sheds His sinless blood such that the waters of spiritual renewal may flow freely to His people. It is Christ Jesus who is spotlighted in the Gospel as God's ultimate Passover Lamb in this new exodus. Furthermore, it is Christ who therefore baptizes—purifies and consecrates—God's people with God's Spirit so that they can then dwell with Him in His life-giving presence.

Morales presents Christ's death and resurrection in unity as the keystone of His redemptive work recorded in the Gospel of John. It is by the death of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God that atonement is accomplished for the people of God, and the Passover imagery is central to this all-important work of Christ. The feast of Passover is "mentioned in the Gospel of John more than in any other Gospel" (160), thus setting the Messiah's work within the narrative and theological context of Israel's remembrance and reenactment of the exodus event. Christ's miracles bear the marks of the exodus event in the turning of water into wine (John 2:1–11; 4:46) just as Moses turned the waters of the Nile into blood (Exod. 7:14–25), and in the raising of a ruler's dead son back to life (John 4:47–54). The "I am" sayings recorded in John's Gospel (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1) echo both Yahweh's revelation of Himself to Moses from the burning bush as "I am that I am" (Exod.

4. Adam D. Hensley, *Covenant Relationships and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 666 (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

3:14) and divine "I am" declarations attending the second exodus (Is. 41:4; 43:13).

In this exodus-rich context, Jesus is presented as the "Lamb of God" and "Son of God" in such a way that there is no denying the theological significance of Christ's death and resurrection. God's own firstborn Son works redemption from sin and its effects by His sacrificial death and victory over the power of the grave. Even the cross upon which Christ bled and died "has become the doorpost of the world" as Christ's shed blood "takes away the sin of the world" (164). The efficacy of Christ's work for all mankind is subtly expressed in the garden settings and Edenic allusions Morales explores in this chapter (169–172), demonstrating in vivid narrative detail how Jesus reverses the exile from the Garden of Eden and enters into the new creation life by His sin-atoning death and glorious resurrection. However, in much the same way that the construction of the tabernacle complex ends in a crisis as Moses and the priests cannot enter to perform their work due to the overwhelming presence of God (Exod. 40:35), so too theological tension exists in John's Gospel. How can any mere man enter the new creation after Jesus?

Morales answers this question—and resolves the tension at this point—by appealing to Christ's gift of the Spirit. By the Spirit, "the Son renews humanity and creation and brings his people into his Father's household, leading them in a new exodus" (173). Morales continues his sustained treatment of John's Gospel in a second chapter dealing particularly with the work of the Spirit as the gift of Christ the Son to His people. Much like the unified message of the prophets, John's Gospel uses water imagery to express Christ's pouring out of the Spirit upon His people (174). Not only does John present Jesus as abundantly filled with the Spirit, but he records how Jesus breathes out the Spirit of God upon His disciples. Commenting on this crucial act of the risen Christ in John 20:22 and relating it to the Spirit of God's revivifying breath in Ezekiel 37:9–10, Morales writes, "In breathing out the Spirit, Jesus is raising old creation Israel up from the dead so that here stands not only the new humanity, but the renewed Israel of God—the new creation Israel" (177). This act bestows new life upon the covenant community as a renewed humanity and also reveals Jesus Christ the Son of God as God the Son. God alone "breathed into the nostrils of Adam, giving him life" (177) in Genesis 2:7. The psalmist testifies likewise to the unique prerogative of God to breathe—or send out—His life-giving Spirit (Ps. 33:6; 104:30). In the speech of Elihu in Job 33:4, the truth is proclaimed that "the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of *Shaddai* gives me life" (177). It was God Himself to whom Ezekiel made his appeal in 37:9, "O Spirit, breathe on these slain that they may live!"

The giving of God's Spirit renews the life of Israel and impels the disciples on their mission of world-evangelization by gospel-proclamation to the ends of the earth. This life-giving event triggers a global life-giving ministry into which the followers of Christ enter with spiritual vigor that comes by the immediate blessing of God the Son. In the concluding chapter of this volume, Morales shows just how good the gospel message carried forth by Christ's Spirit-empowered disciples is. The message of the resurrected Jesus holds forth the world's only hope for deliverance not only from death, but from sin. Morales writes, "Resurrection alone offers genuine hope and deep peace in the face of our own death, amid our battles with sickness and suffering, broken relationships and loss—and in the face of the evil within ourselves" (187). That "evil within ourselves" is sin, in all its gory power and defiling waste. Using the case study of the Apostle Paul and his theology, Morales shows how the resurrection is at the heart of the gospel message (188–195). Nothing short of resurrected life from the dead can manifest the power and goodness of God demonstrated in the new exodus of which Christ is both Passover Lamb and embodiment of Israel.

In conclusion, Morales competently and convincingly presents the Bible's message of redemption as a sustained development of the exodus theme from Genesis through Revelation, notwithstanding some exegetical connections that may come across as overly figurative. As he does so, he focuses most on the bedrock material of the Pentateuch and how this material is transmitted by Israel's prophets and fulfilled in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. The lack of sustained engagement with either the sapiential literature of both Testaments or a more varied sampling of narrative literature is a deficiency of the book, necessitated no doubt by the focus and aims of the project. There simply is not enough room in a 200-page volume to address the thorny issue of how best to relate the sapiential and poetic literature of the Old Testament to the redemptive history of Israel, especially when some of that literature seems so detached from the primary narrative of Israel's exodus, exile, and restoration. Biblical theologians continue to face the challenge of incorporating the various forms of literature found in the Bible into a cohesive biblical theological whole without either flattening the distinctive features of each genre or giving short shrift to the more difficult-to-place kinds of material.

Rather than instigating frustration among readers, the selectivity of this (and similar) introductory volumes should inspire reading and writing that pushes into the gaps. For example, how does the exodus theme find expression in the book of Job, with the suffering holy man's cries for redemption and longing for vindication, apart from the covenant people of God? Are there exegetical connections to make between Exodus and Esther, especially considering that the latter narrative of deliverance curiously avoids making any explicit reference to Israel's divine Redeemer? Does the separation and reunion

of the lovers in Song of Solomon reenact the movement of alienation or exile through exodus to life-giving fellowship with God? Morales' work would have been strengthened with an additional chapter helping readers to relate the sapiential and poetic literature of the Old Testament to a biblical theology of redemption in terms of exodus movements and traditions. If nothing else, these and similar questions are indicative of the fact that readers of this volume will surely be rewarded with a more mature and informed desire to continue further investigation into the biblical theological approach represented by this book, perhaps using the recommended reading listed after the concluding chapter as a helpful starting point.▪

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Psallo

Psalm 115:1–9

The metrical translation you have before you is the Scottish Metrical version (1650), coupled with a new tune. This is a very honest translation of the Hebrew text here in Psalm 115, and presents the inspired text of the Psalmist (who is anonymous) with clarity, divine exclusivity, and perhaps, with a hint of derision aimed at the "idols of the nations," as we shall see.

Commentators are divided as to when in Israel's history this Psalm was written, as Rev. W. S. Plumer summarizes in his work on the Psalter:

> Both the date and authorship of this Psalm are uncertain. It has been ascribed to Moses at the Red sea, to David at the beginning of his reign, to Mordecai and Esther, to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, and to Hezekiah. The discussions on this subject have failed to produce conviction in the mind of others than their authors. This ode suits many times in the history of Israel. The prevailing impression is that it was composed during a time of great trial. Calvin: "It is obvious that this Psalm was penned when the church was deeply afflicted;" Tholuck: "A Psalm of prayer and praise, composed in a time of Pagan oppression;" Pool: "The occasion of this Psalm was to manifest some eminent danger or distress of the people of Israel from some idolatrous nations." Yet it is not a despondent song. Indeed it expresses strong confidence in God. This is so true that Clarke speaks of it as "a triumphal song, in which the victory gained is entirely ascribed to Jehovah." Scott, who thinks it was perhaps written during Sennacherib's invasion, dates it B. C. 710; Clarke, B. C. 535.[1]

This understanding, that the Psalm was written during a time of distress or persecution, seems to flow from verse two, where the enemies of God derisively wonder aloud where the God of Israel has gone. There have been many times in Israel's history when such mistaken confidence and disbelief in the true God was the undoing of her enemies.[2] This Psalm is given to the people of God who might hear such a taunt in their own ears, uttered by God's and their enemies, that it would prove an encouragement to them as they sing it, as is often the case even in our own day.

The Psalms begins with the heart-cry of every believer in the Lord—"Not unto us, O Lord, but to thy Name give glory." There are several applications we ought to make from this opening statement. The first is that the Lord's own vindication of His Name is indeed for the good of His people. Assumed in this celebration of the Name of God is that the Lord will vindicate His Name in His covenant promises to His people. This is assured to us in the next phrase, where we read that it is for the Lord's mercy and truth's sake. The Hebrew is emphatic, repeating the preposition before each substantive noun, "*for* thy truth, and *for* thy mercy's sake." Literally, the Hebrew preposition לְ in this instance should be understood as *on account of*, or as the Scottish Metrical Version has it, *for the sake of*. As for the nouns themselves, they are said to belong to God Himself, *His* mercy, and *His* truth. The word translated mercy is here חֶסֶד meaning *covenant fidelity*, or *faithfulness*. This word introduces the idea of God's fidelity to His Name and promises, along with the word translated as truth, אֱמֶת (from which we get our English, *Amen*), that God speaks the truth, knows the truth, is "truth itself,"[3] and so is utterly trustworthy in all His promises and Word. So we learn that when the Lord glorifies His own Name in showing Himself faithful to His promises, this is also for the blessing and salvation of His people, with whom He has covenanted in Christ.[4]

The second application is the palpable humility in such an expression. The worshipper, singing this Psalm, confesses that it is his desire for the Lord to be glorified, rather than himself. There are many passages of Scripture which bear this principle out, and in an age of "selfies" and other narcissistic social media, this is a refreshing confession in the mouth of the Psalmist. In an age of the intentional and habitual seeking of earthly recognition, and in such seeking, attempting gathering as much honor and accolade from others as possible, this Biblical principle is welcome in the mouth of the worshipper of the Great and Glorious God. While self-promotion seems the standard fare of politics, business, romance, fitness, and many other pursuits, sadly, even religious or spiritual pursuits, this Psalm calls us to a recognition of the glory which belongs to the only one who is worthy, before Whom we must learn to bow, and tends to the promotion of reverence, humility, and awe.
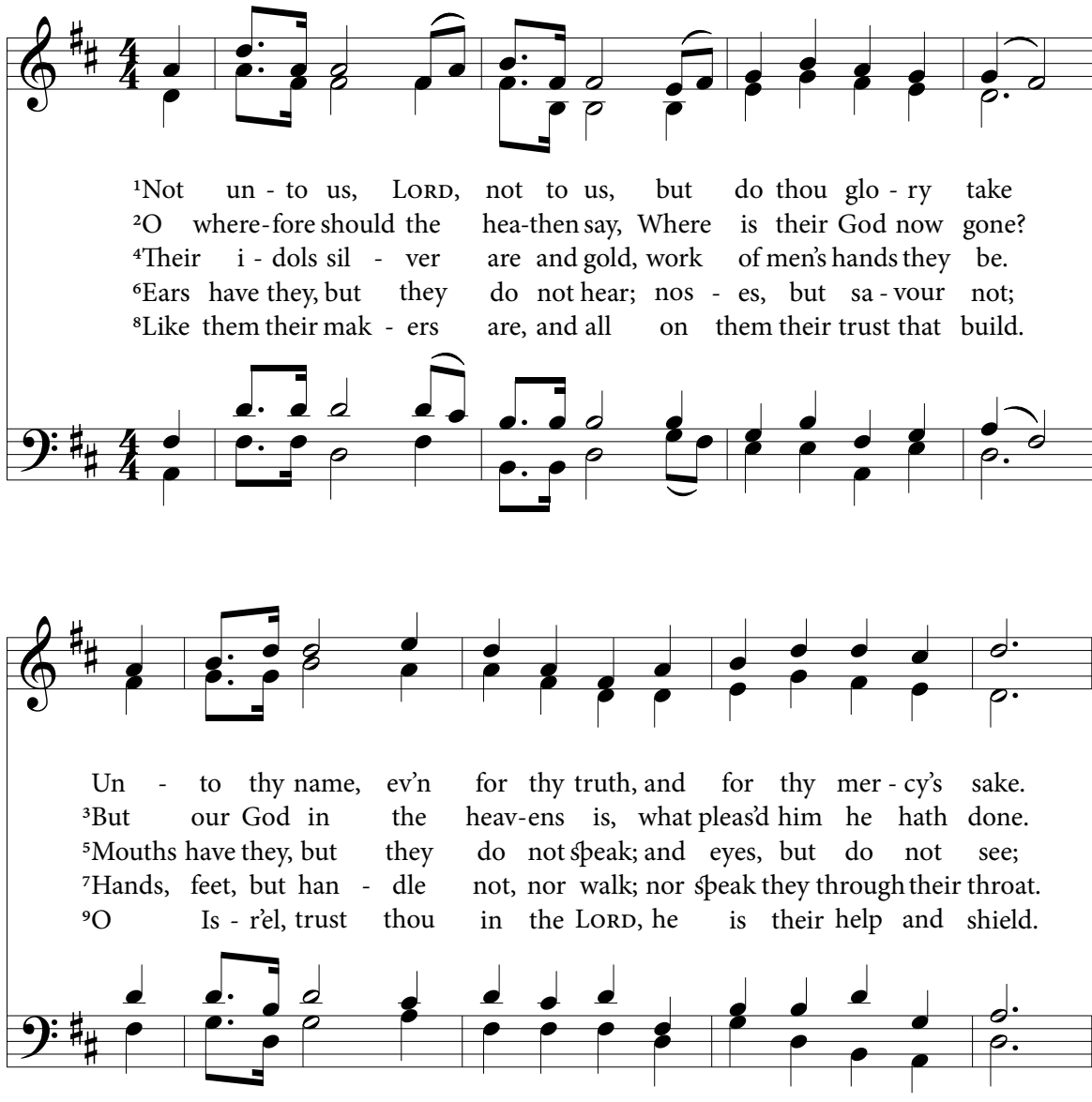
Continued on Page 323.

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1. William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms: Being a Critical and Expository Commentary, with Doctrinal and Practical Remarks on the Entire Psalter* (Philadelphia; Edinburgh: J. B. Lippincott Company; A & C Black, 1872), p. 994.
2. See Psalm 42:3, 10; 79:10; 2 Kings 19:10–19; Micah 7:10; Malachi 2:17.
3. See Westminster confession of Faith, 1.4.
4. See Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 31.

Psalm 115:1–9

Lo-Lanu Todd L. Ruddell



Antiquary

Did George Gillespie embellish his Notes recorded during the Westminster Assembly?

Introduction

A debt of gratitude is owed Chad Van Dixhoorn for his work producing a critical and full text of the minutes of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, as well as his other work flowing from that gift that continues to give.[1] However, it is the case in such a mammoth undertaking, with hundreds of historical personalities involved, and often the vaguest of references, that sometimes the finer details were not nor simply could not be pursued to a full and accurate detailing. For example, in editing the notes George Gillespie made during the Westminster Assembly for a new edition, this writer found more than one instance of a vague reference given in the assembly for which Dr. Van Dixhoorn offered his best stab at a resolution, that Gillespie's notes, his other works, or works by the assembly, offered paths to more correct resolutions. These and such like, are on the order of innocent mistakes. One does not have an unlimited amount of time to search out every opaque citation and sometimes there is simply not a ready resolution and a work or person cannot be identified.[2]

More serious, and certainly unfortunate, is when a character flaw of a prominent figure in the history of the assembly is assessed, when a little further investigation would have prevented spreading such a charge on the historical record. This is the subject for this year's entry for this regular space in *The Confessional Presbyterian*. In offering to correct a Scottish bias and embellishment to much of the history of the Westminster Assembly, Dr. Van Dixhoorn addressed the legends surrounding George Gillespie, and specifically the story of the David versus Goliath exchange that took place between the Scottish commissioner and the English Erastian John Selden, the famed Orientalist, and a member of the House of Commons delegation appointed to attend the Westminster assembly. Supposedly at the end of the exchange, Selden in defeat exclaims that all his life's work had been swept away by the arguments of the young Scotsman. The tracing of this legend, what is true, what likely is not, and its origins, have been treated elsewhere.[3] However, it is in the context of discussing this legend, that Dr. Van Dixhoorn brings up a discrepancy in Gillespie's account of the assembly, where the notes of an intended reply to Selden are given at the end of one session, when it is clear from the minutes that Gillespie actually did not speak until the start of the next session.

> Gillespie places his speech after Selden's on 20 Feb. 1644 when it was actually delivered on 21 Feb.; Gillespie does not record any of the rebuttals made to Selden on 20 Feb. and it is possible that he spent the remainder of the morning framing his reply, which was delivered the first thing on 21 Feb. Mitchell notes (with some minor inaccuracies) that Gillespie's account of his own speech allows for the grammatical possibility that he was not intending to convey that he actually spoke to Selden on 20 Feb. But without the minutes, or Lightfoot's account, Gillespie's account most clearly suggests that he issued an immediate, erudite rebuttal to Selden, as Hetherington inferred.[4]

From this he concludes, "Gillespie appears to inflate the coherence and effectiveness of his own contributions, relocating his speeches in order to make conversations flow better and his contributions seem more logical."[5] Dr. Van Dixhoorn underscores this again in his life of Gillespie in his brief biographies of the Westminster divines, dismissing Mitchell's kinder reading this time,[6] writing, "A complex

1. Chad Van Dixhoorn, *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, 5 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2012).

2. Chad Van Dixhoorn's work on the minutes was a monumental task, and he had hundreds of often vague citations to try to track down, and this is not pointed out as any sort of a knock against the quality of the work overall, but simply to note and offer a few corrections. See for instances, *The Shorter Writings of George Gillespie*, vol. 3 (Naphtali Press & Reformation Heritage Books, forthcoming 2023/24), pp. 297 n2, 303, n2, n3, 311 n3, 326 n1, 341, n1, 320-321 n2, 393 n1 and 444 n3.

3. See "George Gillespie versus John Selden" in the Introductory Essays in *The Shorter Writings of George Gillespie*, volume 1 (Naphtali Press and Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), pp. 80–98.

4. *Minutes*, 1.26 n28. Hetherington, who had access to and could have stood corrected by Lightfoot's account (and in fact the editor of *Works* notes "Lightfoot places this in the session of the 21st"), does not date the Selden-Gillespie encounter, or tie it explicitly to the February 20 entry in Gillespie's notes, but he does give the subject as Matthew 18. That was the topic of debate in sessions 158 and 159, February 20, 21, 1644. All the accounts of the legend going back to Robert Fleming's written 22 years after Gillespie's death, portray Gillespie as giving an immediate reply. See *Shorter Writings of George Gillespie*, 1.86. It may very well be that, with Hetherington, that those recounting the beginnings of the legendary encounter, drew the idea of an immediate reply from the placement of his notes at the end of the session in which Selden spoke. This, along with the things Gillespie said to Patrick Simson, his cousin, who told Robert Wodrow, may be the kernel of truth around which the later embellishments were woven. Ibid., p. 82–83.

5. *Minutes*, 1.26.

6. See Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its history and Standards, being the Baird lecture for 1882* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1897), pp 296, 297 n1.

prodigy, Gillespie humbly admitted his shortcomings in public, but improved on his performances in his private journal."[7]

There is no arguing with the fact that from a strict reading of Gillespie's notes without the benefit of the *Minutes* or Lightfoot's *Journal*, one will conclude that Gillespie answered Selden on February 20 instead of on February 21, the day he actually gave a reply. However, it will be argued shortly, that this of itself does not sustain the theory that Gillespie did this intentionally to make his efforts look better for posterity, or what have you. Rather, after examining a few instances to show a consistent pattern as far as how Gillespie used his notebook, it will be clear that vainglorious motives need not be assessed.

Gillespie's Notes

The notes which George Gillespie made during meetings of the Westminster assembly, subcommittee on the directory for worship, the Grand Committee, and other records, survive in two volumes that were part of the Advocates Library Wodrow collection, which is now part of the National Library of Scotland.[8] The notes were transcribed by David Meek for the collected works of Gillespie published in the mid-nineteenth century.[9]

William Hetherington downplayed or at least hoped the loss was not great in noting the fact that out of between eight and fourteen volumes of notes that once are said to have existed, only this small portion transcribed had survived.[10] At the time, Hetherington only knew that Lightfoot's journal survived and had been published, and did not know the minutes themselves had been preserved. The benefit of having all three of these is in comparing them. Routinely, one account provides information the others do not. While at times Lightfoot and the minutes preserve a lot of the discussions, often they are incredibly brief.[11] Therefore, there is great value in having Gillespie as a third witness, and it is almost certainly a great loss that this portion is apparently all that survives.[12]

Gillespie wrote notes not only to record the debate but to write any response he intended to give while the speaker and subsequently others were speaking. He distinguishes these notes most often with "Answer" (abbreviated "ans."), or sometimes "I answered," or "I said," and less commonly "I answer to Mr. Goodwin", "I answer to Mr. Selden." Five times he has "I replied," but never uses "I reply," as Mitchell mistakenly writes, though surmising tense, e.g., "answered" versus "answer," may indicate whether the note was written before or after he spoke.[13] Gillespie's usual practice is to jot down answers point by point, and then make use of his notes when he had the opportunity to speak subsequently in a session. Sometimes, as in Session 306, he marshals all his "answers" in one speech at the end of the session.[14] Other times Gillespie wrote fuller notes of intended replies to a speaker's arguments, but more often wrote a point made by the speaker, such as Thomas Goodwin, and immediately write "answer," and give sometimes just the briefest of note for a mental reminder for any reply, and continue jotting down the speaker's points and brief answers till the speaker finished, perhaps continuing writing his answers while others stood to speak before he himself did so. Or, it may be the case that he made his notes for replies once the speaker finished, which may also explain why he does not record some of the speakers, because he was preparing notes for his own reply. Whatever the case, when he was called on and recognized to

7. *Minutes*, 1.120.

8. National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Wodrow Papers, Wodrow MSS, octavo 5, no. 1 (Wod.Oct.V, ff. 1–184); Wodrow MSS, quarto 72, no. 2 (Wod.Qu.LXXII, ff.45–82). The octavo volume has notes from February 2, 1644 to May 14, 1644 (ff. 1–108r), and September 4, 1644 to January 3, 1645 (ff.117–177), and additional records (ff. 178–184). The quarto is an abstract of the octavo, lacks the notes from September 4 onwards, and ends with notes on the subcommittee for the directory. There is an 18th century copy of the octavo volume, made for historian David Dalrymple, "Notebook entitled 'the Question of the Presbytery Stated February the 2nd 1644,' alternately titled in another hand 'Minutes of the Westminster Assembly,' by Mr. George Gillespie for Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes." 215 leaves. NLS MS.25387.

9. *Works of Mr. George Gillespie*, The Presbyterian's Armoury (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1844–46).

10. Wodrow wrote in 1707 that six octavo volumes of notes on the assembly survived, while later in 1722 he commented that between 12 and 14 volumes still remained in the hands of Gillespie's grandson, a minister of the Church of Scotland. See *Shorter Writings*, 1.43–45, and the original preface to the notes following this preface. The number six is given in Robert Wodrow *Analecta: or, Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences; mostly relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: for the Maitland Club, 1842–1843), 1.160. Elsewhere in *Analecta*, James Stirling recounts that Gillespie simply had several little notebooks of notes on the assembly (*Analecta*, 3.112). The number of 12 or 14 is given by Wodrow in a letter in 1722, for which see *The Correspondence of the Rev. Robert Wodrow*, Volume 2 (Edinburgh: Printed for the Wodrow Society, [1843]), p. 661.

11. John Lightfoot appears to have wearied of the lengthy debates as time progressed and falls to summarizing what took place in his *Journal* of the proceedings. He often complains of the long speeches of Goodwin and Nye. Also, he frequently was away at Great Munden, Hertfordshire, where he was rector, a position to which the assembly had appointed him.

12. For instance, see January 2, 1645, where Gillespie's notes provide the only and thus valuable record of that session's activities. "Notes of the Westminster Assembly," October 17, 1644, in *Shorter Writings of George Gillespie*, vol. 3, p. 458.

13. Mitchell, ibid. "The manuscript Minutes coincide with Lightfoot's *Journal* in assigning Gillespie's speech not [to] the session of 20th but to that of 21st February. In Gillespie's own Notes it is introduced at the close of the account of the former session with the words, "I reply," not I replied, and may simply embody a brief outline of the reply he was to make on the following day."

14. See "Notes of the Westminster Assembly," October 17, 1644, in *Shorter Writings*, vol. 3, p. 449, n1, n2.

speak, he rose and would give a detailed point by point rebuttal.[15] Sometimes though, as with the reply to Selden, and on other occasions, he for various reasons was not afforded opportunity to speak. In that case, he wrote out a fairly full reply taking up the end of his notes for that the session, which he actually used in a speech at the start of the next session. In other instances, he was able to reply similarly in the next session or at least make some use of the notes in a later session.[16] However, often it is not clear from examining Lightfoot and the minutes, whether he had opportunity to speak. Because the minutes and Lightfoot are far from exhaustive, it is more likely he did speak along the lines of his intended "answers," unless something makes it clear that he did not (the question was called, etc.). In such unclear instances, whether he did or he did not actually get to speak, the notes give us at the very least the outlines of his intended reply to various speakers.

There are some imperfections or at least questions that arise from Gillespie's notes of the assembly. In a couple of instances, the notes under one date actually belong under another,[17] and there are occasions of misdating.[18] Also, Gillespie has what are styled *memorandum* sprinkled throughout his notes. It appears that the term is applied rather broadly to anything he wished to mark or highlight, including things said in the assembly debates,[19] or, more commonly, comments on or a clarification about something that occurred in the assembly,[20] or in two instances at least, to mark notes for speaking that apparently were not used in the assembly that day but were at least partially used in later sessions.[21]

According to Robert Baillie, while there was some disorderliness in how speakers were chosen, the prolocutor recognizing the speaker whom the members most loudly called for next, once recognized he was allowed to speak as long as he liked.[22] In some instances, this either may not have been strictly true, and a speaker paused, allowing some replies before continuing, or, if this rule was sacrosanct, there are some incongruities in Gillespie's account that are difficult to reconcile.[23] As to these imperfections, the obvious first must be stated, that Gillespie was not clerking for the benefit of the Westminster assembly but making notes for his own use. There is not the same level of completeness nor accuracy expected compared to a clerk's work. Judging from the added subtitles alone, it seems clear that his notebook was primarily to record the debates on topics he thought important to the goal of uniformity of worship and church government between England and Scotland, for which he was there to contend with his fellow Scottish commissioners.[24] But add to this the inability to record everything even if one were not at the same time crafting replies to speak, and imperfections and incongruities are no doubt to be expected that cannot always be reconciled with the other two accounts, which are far from complete records as well.

Did Gillespie rearrange his notes to make himself look better?

While the solution to this question has already been forecast, as answered by how Gillespie used his notebook, it remains to address the question more directly and with a more careful examination. Did Gillespie alter his notes of this answer to Selden and other speeches to make his role appear more important or more impressive, or rather than that vain exercise, was the notebook functioning as he intended it?

It is instructive to compare his entry for February 20 to Lightfoot's *Journal* more fully than just to observe the out-of-sequence placement of Gillespie's reply to Selden.[25] Lightfoot begins with intelligence concerning a request to send someone to answer a Baptist in Hertfordshire and an order from the House of Lords to hasten their work, which sparked a debate. Then Calamy reintroduced the subject of the meaning of *ecclesia* from the previous day, which sparked a debate between the Presbyterians and Goodwin and Nye, which devolved into a discussion of church censures. Just before Selden spoke, Calamy and Goodwin had a back and forth exchange over excommunication, ending with Calamy stating, "This church in Matthew 18 signifies a church consisting of more congregations than one; for that this is the common signification of the word

15. There are many examples of this, but for one, see the brief note for March 1 and the longer record of the speech in the minutes, "Notes of the Westminster Assembly, in *Shorter Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 319, n4, 320.

16. See "Notes of the Westminster Assembly," in Shorter Writings, vol. 3, February 9, p. 282, September 20 (session 289), p. 413, March 7, with possible answer on March 11, p. 329.

17. See March 6/5, p. 323, and March 6, ibid., p. 327.

18. This errors may have existed originally, or they may have been misread by the author of the later copy, or the transcriber of the copy, Mr. Meek, may have misread the text. See March 12–14, 1644, ibid., pp. 332ff.

19. See ibid., p. 434.

20. See ibid., pp. 417, 455.

21. See ibid., pp. 385, 440.

22. Robert Baillie, *Letters & Journals,* in *Works*, vol. 13 (Edinburgh: Ogle, 1841-42), 2.108–109. Cf. *Minutes*, 1.49.

23. See for instance, "Notes of the Westminster Assembly," in *Shorter Writings*, vol. 3, page 288.

24. The notes no doubt could have aided the Commissioners when corresponding with their church back in Scotland. It was also useful for bringing up prior points Gillespie made that no speaker had answered. See for example, September 20 (Session 289) referring to the prior session of September 19, "Notes of the Westminster Assembly," in *Shorter Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 410–415.

25. See John Lightfoot, "The Journal of the Proceedings of The Assembly of Divines, from January 1, 1643, to December 31, 1644," in *Works*, volume 13 (1824), pp. 163–168.

in Scripture." To which Rutherford then said, "The many arguments brought against the proposition have not spoken to it; for though it be granted that particular congregations may excommunicate, yet doth it not conclude against dependence upon the presbytery." At this point, Selden spoke up and gave the Erastian opinion on censures. Then Nye spoke with "arguments he used to prove that 'there is no power over another power,' and these he dilated exceeding long as he useth to do: and was about to proceed to shew that there is no necessity,' when he was taken off as speaking nothing to the question, but he would not be taken off: and would not be convinced that he was besides order; whereupon there was some heat, and it was called to try it by vote; but the Lord Say and others gainsaid it,—so that it was declined: and so we adjourned."[26]

In his notes, Gillespie begins only with a summary of Calamy's statement, omitting all else, including Rutherford's statement, before recording Selden's speech and the answers of Herle and Marshall. He then notes at least some of Nye's statements, which as Lightfoot noted along with the contention, ate up the rest of the time and ended the day's work. It is certainly possible that it was during the "heat," that Gillespie wrote out a reply to Selden, and it is at this point after noting Nye's remarks that in his notes Gillespie gives his "I answer to Mr. Selden." While it is abbreviated by omissions, Gillespie nowhere reorders the prior debate. He only tacks on the notes of his reply to Selden following Nye's remarks rather than under the next heading of February 21, the day he actually spoke. If he had wanted to highlight his answer to Selden, he would have inserted his reply right after Selden's speech. With the debate of the next day headed Feb. 21 beginning with Young's reply to Selden, it almost appears to be a simple mistake of putting Gillespie's words before the heading break instead of right before the words of Young, which is the order Lightfoot and the *Minutes* record them. Indeed, if Gillespie were keeping a journal, how natural would it be to simply have written an outline of what he wanted to say in his notebook, while others were speaking, which was clearly common practice, and then the next day at the assembly begin a new dated entry once his remarks were completed?

Two other things are apparent if we compare Gillespie's notes for his reply to Selden with what the *Minutes* record.[27] His remarks are much longer in the *Minutes*, 30% addressing Selden and the rest answering Nye from the previous day. Lightfoot writes, "we fell upon the work of the day upon Matthew 18 and Mr. Gillespie first began: and first began to answer to Mr. Selden, who held this place to mean a civil court, which he confuted with these reasons…. Then fell he upon some objections of the Independents—which when he was falling upon, I was called out by a friend. But, as I was informed, he spake very home, and very sharply, and very largely."[28]

In his notes, Gillespie not only omits the reply to Nye from the text of his reply to Selden, but he also does not record it in his notes for the session of February 21. If Gillespie were looking to highlight or improve his own performance in his own notes, leaving out any mention of his strong rebuttal to Nye does not seem to be consistent with that motivation.[29] Indeed, if he is representative of the Scots view of threats to their cause, Baillie was not at all afraid of Selden and thought him arrogant, insolent, and absurd, and easily answered.[30] In his letter recounting the sessions that included the one of February 21, it is clear he viewed the Independents as the main threat to a uniform presbyterianism in the three kingdoms,[31] which would make Gillespie's omission of his answer to Nye the more inexplicable if he was arranging his notes to make himself look better.

In the notes of February 21, we may have more evidence of how Gillespie used his notebook. After Gillespie and Young spoke, and an exchange between Selden, Young, and Coleman on excommunication that was called to order because the assembly had not taken up that subject yet, Nye gave his reply in which he accused Presbyterianism of being subversive to the state, which brought cries from Henderson and others which eventually the assembly voted as out of order (recorded by Lightfoot). Then speeches were made by Marshall and Lord Wariston, which took some time, and then Vines spoke. In his notes, between Nye's comments (omitting any notice of the uproar as do the *Minutes*) and Vines, Gillespie omits the others and has written his answer to Nye.

> Answer. 1. All this anticipates the wisdom and judgment of the parliament, who can best judge of state inconveniences. 2. We are now to search the Scriptures. 3. It

26. Lightfoot, pp. 166–167.

27. See Sessions 158 and 159 (February 20 and 21, 1644), Van Dixhoorn, *Minutes*, 2.518–533 and Gillespie's speech, ibid., pp. 525–527.

28. Lightfoot, p. 167, 168.

29. There are other examples where Gillespie is recorded as speaking in the minutes, but he makes no mention of it in his notes. See for example September 20 (Session 290), where he spoke three times, and October 8 (Session 279), "Notes of the Westminster Assembly," in *Shorter Writings*, vol. 3, pp. 417, 436 n1, f38 n2.

30. Baillie, 2.265–266. If an exchange between Selden and Gillespie received some significant exaggeration, so too has Selden's reputation. In his biography, Dr. Van Dixhoorn writes: "Selden volunteered (sometimes incorrect) information to the assembly as an antiquarian and as an authority on Jewish history. Lionized though he was by his fellow parliamentarians in the assembly [members of the House of Commons], Selden's actual contributions related chiefly to the relationship between church and state and the impact of his speeches has been exaggerated." Van Dixhoorn, *Minutes*, 1.136.

31. Baillie, Public Letter, Aprile 2d [1644], *Letters and Journals*, 2.145. It was Session 159 wherein Gillespie gave his reply to Selden and Nye, that Nye then contended in reply that Presbyterianism was subversive of the state, which Baillie mentions in this letter for that period of sessions. He mentions Selden not once in the whole letter.

> contradicts his own *Apologetical Narration*, that they have no state ends to comply with, no commonwealths to mould. 4. We can tell, from our experience in Scotland, that our General Assemblies and their commissioners do not weaken but strengthen the state; and malignants have been more afraid of the church censures than of the civil. 5. Their own way is more formidable for rupture and mischief.[32]

Neither Lightfoot nor the *Minutes* record this. Rather than being more proof of padding out his notes to make himself look good to anyone later reading his script, may this not rather be evidence of the use of his notebook? While the uproar was going on and while Wariston and others were speaking, it would seem he jotted down a brief outline for an intended reply to Nye but was not afforded opportunity to speak that day, and since the assembly voted to close the question, neither had he the opportunity to make use of the notes for a reply the next day. This would seem to align with the use of the notes for answering Selden.

Indeed, on February 23 (Session 161), there is a similar gap and omission of speakers in his notes, and Gillespie has written an answer to Nye, which that day he did have opportunity to deliver in reply, and is given with some variation in the *Minutes*. Another example occurs on February 26 (Session 163), where Gillespie has written out an intended reply at the beginning right after the statement of the debate question, and he omits noting several speakers (because writing what he wanted to say), but the debate does not go in the direction of the answer he's crafted, and despite making a suggestion to change the course of the discussion, it continues on, and he has no occasion to make use of the statement he had crafted, which of course does not appear in any form in the *Minutes*.[33]

Therefore, it would appear the use of Gillespie's notebook was not just to record what was said but also to make notes for statements and replies when he clearly could not record what was being said at the same time. If he was recognized, he would have the opportunity to reply in that session and did so from these notes, or if the next day the question had not been closed, he would have the notes if the opportunity arose to give a reply that day.

Of the portion of the speech addressing Selden, Gillespie's notes are the fullest text, Lightfoot's are a bit briefer but very close in content to Gillespie's, and the *Minutes* are similar but lacking seven or more lines left blank between the sixth and the midst of the seventh point. They do not witness anything extraordinary, being essentially the same for substance. The substantially longer address to Nye's arguments preserved in the *Minutes* seem to bear out Baillie's belief that the Independents were the main adversary to address, and it is again puzzling if making himself look better in the debates was driving the arrangement of his notes, why Gillespie would completely omit any text of the answer to Nye, which he could have appended as far as he recollected it if that was indeed his motivation. In fact, the one explanation why he has no text for it in his notes, that he spoke extemporaneously, would seem to make the answer to Nye the more extraordinary of the two parts of his speech.

Having edited and gone through the entirety of George Gillespie's "Notes of the Westminster Assembly," with this question in mind of whether he embellished his notes, this writer sees no evidence of that, either in the "legendary" answer to Selden, or at any other date. Rather, in keeping with his manner, the natural explanation that he wrote his notes for a reply at the end of one session to use if he had opportunity the next day, as long ago pointed out by A. F. Mitchell, sufficiently explains the case that nurtured this charge. There is no need to see in this a deliberate distortion, or "improvement," of what actually transpired, from some vain pursuit by George Gillespie to make his part in the Westminster Assembly look better to his own fancy or for any eyes he may have thought might later read his notes.

Chris Coldwell■

32. Notes of the Westminster Assembly, in *Shorter Writings*, volume 3, p. 308.

33. *Minutes*, 2.553. Gillespie, Notes, p. 29. The question debated was the multitude of teaching elders in the church of Jerusalem. Gillespie's "for which I argue" focuses on the apostles, whereas the rest of the assembly focused on proving a larger number. His reply, which never was given, does not appear in the minutes, and his objection to try to move the discussion to how he thought it should go does not appear in his own notes. His objection to moving the debate to no avail was, "One word for expediting. It seems not necessary to be debated for the proofe of poynt in question whether '120' were preachers or Barnabas." Lightfoot words it, "We needed not to insist upon this 'medium' for it is enough that the twelve apostles did preach, and preach daily." *Journal*, pp. 181–182.

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The History of the Formation of the Standing Judicial Commission. **Continued from Page 74.**

Second, the first fifty years of the PCA has been one of growth and development. The ethos that gave birth to the PCA is in some ways still present. However, the denomination has changed since those early days. This is apparent in the way the Assembly handles judicial cases. The Assembly originally handled all matters directly, excusing commissioners from the floor to go act as committees, reporting back to the Assembly with recommendations. After a decade of growth and the process of Joining and Receiving, the Assembly sensed that it needed another mechanism to handle the growing number of cases. Hence, today we have the SJC and the Committee on Constitutional Business to assist the Assembly. The development of the SJC mirrors the growth and evolution of the denomination as a whole: going from a regional denomination with no regular judicial cases to a national denomination with a much larger, regular load of judicial cases.

Third, the formation of the SJC was a complicated and messy process. The Ad-Interim Committee that recommended the formation of a permanent judicial commission had several reports returned to it for further work, had new members added to it by the Stated Clerk, and had numerous minority reports for almost all of its significant recommendations. In hindsight, the wisdom of both the majority and the minority reports are apparent. The Minority was correct that the formation of the SJC would lead to a change in the culture and ethos of the denomination. The formation of the SJC was a by-product of larger issues of identity that the denomination was grappling with in the 1980s. The Majority proved to be correct in saying that a denomination the size of the PCA could not keep up with the number of complex cases coming before it. That simply would not have been sustainable with the number of cases the SJC has to handle each year. The conflict between the Majority and the Minority arguably made the formation of the SJC a better reflection of both the PCA's historic commitment to non-hierarchical Presbyterianism and the fact that the growth of the denomination necessitated more efficient mechanisms for the work of the Assembly.

Finally, the history of the SJC in the last twenty-five years shows that the concerns of the Minority regarding the Assembly's ability to debate the actions of the SJC were well founded. The issue has been most acute regarding instances where presbyteries invoke BCO 34-1, asking the SJC to assume original jurisdiction over teaching elders in cases relating to doctrine. Arguably, the most contentious judicial case involving 34-1 that came to the floor of the Assembly was the John Wood Case. The Wood case was a very rare instance where the Assembly overrode the SJC, instructing them to take up the 34-1 requests and investigate the accusations of women preaching.[77] In other contentious matters, then Assembly's inability to deliberate upon and reverse SJC decisions (except where a sufficient number of dissenting members may file a minority report) has been problematic. One thinks of the Peter Leithart and Greg Johnson cases. In Leithart's case, the SJC argued that they could not retry the charges against Leithart, even though there was clear evidence of a strong presumption of guilt and problems with the prosecution of the case. A request for the Assembly to have the case reheard by the SJC from Iliana Presbytery was ruled out of order. The Assembly was not allowed to debate the merits of the case and an objection by a member of the Assembly was ruled out of order because the Assembly cannot debate SJC cases.[78] The case of Greg Johnson contained a highly complex set of issues in which the SJC decided not to try Johnson for his views on gender and sexuality. The Minority of the SJC was one vote short of being able to file a minority report, which would have allowed the Assembly to debate the merits of the case.[79] These cases demonstrate a fact that all churchmen learn: the process of discipline is complicated, complex, and often convoluted. The Assembly delegating its authority to a commission to handle discipline, particularly in doctrinal cases, without retaining the ability to debate and review cases at will is, as Knight and Ferg argued, problematic. Perhaps the next fifty years will see the BCO continue to evolve by allowing the Assembly to debate cases handled by the SJC when important or novel doctrinal issues are at stake.

Ecclesial Unity and Creation Doctrine. **Continued from Page 162.**

If the text of Genesis on the days of creation is held as inerrant, divine revelation, but the days as a literary device, there is a two-fold divergence from a six-day view: (1) the durational markers have been removed, (2) a different literary/genre hermeneutic is employed. Removing the durational marker opens the possibility of allowance for either old-earth creationism (an ancient initial creation, with punctuated occasions of special creation across the ages) or old-earth theistic evolution. In relation to the adoption of an alternative literary/genre hermeneutic, the answer of the question of how and where in Genesis a hermeneutical transition takes place

77. The Presbyterian Church in America, *The Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 2000), p. 275.

78. The Presbyterian Church in America, *The Minutes of the Forty-First General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 2013), pp. 39, 83 (footnote 4), pp. 583–614.

79. The Presbyterian Church in America, *The Minutes of the Forty-Ninth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, vol. II* (Lawrenceville, GA: Committee on Christian Education and Publication, 2022), pp. 730–822.

to historical narrative, and whether the same hermeneutical principles apply to other parts of Scripture, could move into second- or first-rank doctrinal divergences.[58]

Faithfulness and Patience

In the epistle to the Romans, the inspired apostle Paul gives a statement of core Christian confession for salvation: "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). Yet, the testimony of Scripture to which a Christian will and must be committed to is certainly far wider and greater than this. Even where we say that one *can* be a Christian with minimal, core belief, this does not negate saying that a Christian *must* hold to a much larger sphere of belief, as he or she comes to read, hear, and learn more of the Scriptures. Even Paul's basic statement in Romans 10:9, while in one way simple, is at the same time profoundly rich and deep theologically in the truth it states—and it is inseparably connected to the galaxy of truth revealed in the whole of the Scriptures. Christians are whole-Bible people: we are to believe all that God has revealed in His Word (2 Pet. 1:21). At the same time, we are sinful, weak, and fallible in this present world, and we need the teaching of the Word and Spirit to come to clearer and more full understanding of and commitment to the Bible. The Westminster Confession of Faith helpfully reminds Christians that "particular churches are more or less pure … [and] the purest churches under heaven are subject to both mixture and error."[59]

This article has argued that there are clear lines in creation understanding where biblical doctrine may be so violated that ecclesial unity is an impossibility; at the same time there are areas where errors and diverging understanding do not rise to this level. We must exercise wise patience, lovingly praying and working together for a greater clarity and unity in biblical understanding, while remaining watchful and active against the erosive reality and implications of error. We can do so with confident dependence on the God who has given us His Word, knowing He preserves His church, and delights to lead His children "into all truth" (John 16:13).▪

58. VanDoodewaard, "Hermeneutics and the Quest for the Historical Adam" in *The Quest for the Historical Adam*, pp. 277–80.

59. Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.4–5.

Psallo: Psalm 115:1–9. **Continued from Page 303.**

Hear the inspired Word of the Lord in a few other selected passages of Holy Scripture, pertaining to this temptation:

> "It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory." "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips." "For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth." "Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself."[5]

These and many other Scriptures point us away from the spirit of the age and remind us that the standard of goodness, holiness, truth, justice, etc., is that which God Himself is and does—and that all [others] have sinned and fall short of *His glory*.[6] When we call upon the Lord to vindicate His Name, ask Him to advance His cause among us, as an application of these requests we call upon Him to humble us and to give repentance from our natural pride and self-advancement. Our Lord Jesus will speak of this to His opponents, those who doubted of His Messiahship. He tells them, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only?"[7] Here our Lord makes clear the principle that if we honor ourselves and seek to receive honor from men, as the Scribes the Pharisees, we impoverish ourselves of the honor that comes from God only. He will promote this thought in the Sermon on the Mount, speaking of alms-giving, prayer, and fasting in such a way so as to be seen of men, seeking our own glory. His sentence upon that procedure is "they have their reward."[8] That is, they sought the recognition of others, and that is all they received, including all its worthlessness. Immediately following that instruction, He declares, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," including the treasure of the esteem of men.[9] Our day presents a tremendous opportunity, and with it great temptation, to "come in our own name," "seek honor from men," or to "be seen of men." This Psalm is an inoculation against this spirit of our age, laying our honor in the dust, and seeking rather the glory of God, reminding us that this kind of earthly honor accompanies those who, as it is written in Psalm 49, are laid like sheep in the grave.[10]

5. Proverbs 25:27. Proverbs 27:2. 2 Corinthians 10:18. Psalm 49:18.
6. Romans 3:23.
7. John 5:43–44.
8. Matthew 6:1–18.
9. Matthew 6:19.
10. The entire Psalm is of great use in this regard, but especially when the Psalmist (as descendant of the Levite Korah who sought a glory and honor outside of his place) relates that man who is had in such earthly honor is as the beast which perishes. See Psalm 49:18–20.

Another application from the opening verses of this inspired Hymn is that no matter what the taunts of our enemies, we have a clear answer from the mouth of the Lord: "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."[11] Our lives are not lived or interpreted according to our temporal circumstances, for we walk by faith, and not by sight. Earlier we referenced 2 Kings 19:10–19, and the history of the siege of Jerusalem by the forces of Assyria, led by Rabshakeh.[12] All appearances were that Jerusalem was about to fall as Samaria had fallen in the north. As a part of the prayer for deliverance that King Hezekiah offered to the Lord in those days, he also prayed,

> Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, and have cast their gods into the fire: for they *were* no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the LORD, *even* thou only.[13]

The parallel is clear. Hezekiah asks not for deliverance for the sake of himself or his people, not primarily for their relief, but that the Lord would show Himself to be the true God, over against all other so-called gods. As Biblical Christianity comes under greater and greater scrutiny, and as persecution looms larger and larger on the horizon, those who sing Psalm 115 and others like it, will have that verbal reinforcement of walking not by sight, but by faith in the God who does whatsoever He pleases in the earth and heaven, taking comfort that no weapon formed against the people of God will prosper, and every tongue that rises against them shall be condemned.[14]

This sovereignty of God is on full display in verse three, as the phrasing by the Psalmist is universal and unlimited. The use of the perfect verb tense in Hebrew gives this a sense of purposeful finality—"All that God pleased, He did." Viewed from the divine perspective, it is accomplished, certain, and sure. God is in the heavens, unrestrained by any creaturely weakness—He is the heavenly God, uncreated, all-powerful, unlimited in His work and desire, and so He purposes and does all He pleases, and is uninfluenced from without. For the Psalmist this means that even the taunts of the wicked, and the persecuting circumstances under which the people of God find themselves, are not outside of the purpose and doing of God. He works, and none can restrain His hand to tell Him, "What doest thou?"[15] He works good and glory even in the calamities and afflictions of this world, and will do in them beyond what we can ask or think. Circumstances come and go, the advantages of the people of God rise and fall, their credit with the world waxes and wanes, but God works all in all, and that not without direction, but indeed with great providential purpose and care of all His own, advancing His own glory. Implied in this declaration is the same truth Christ spoke to Pilate, when before that unbelieving governor. Pilate believed he had some kind of determinative authority over Christ that demanded His deference and reverence. Instead, Christ reminded the earthly governor that he himself was on a leash which extended from heaven itself, confidently and infallibly asserting, "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."[16] This is the declaration of God's people in every afflicting and persecuting circumstance, for these things to do come upon us by chance or happenstance, our times are in the Lord's hands.[17] When calamity or persecution comes, when affliction or trouble strikes, the people of God are never left without direction from the Word of the Lord, and are therefore never without hope and confidence in the promises and care of God.

In verses four through seven, the Psalmist, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, develops a taunt of his own. Our God is in the heavens, uncreated, the idols of men are created—made by men, the works of their hands. They are not living, but dead—men do not create living things. Our God is the living God, a Most Pure Spirit,[18] and the Creator of men, who ought to give Him glory and reverence, with awe. Instead, they give their gold and silver to idols, fashioning false gods that cannot save. These gods of the unbelieving world do not speak, see, hear, smell, handle, nor walk. That is, they have nothing to declare, are insensible to the world around them, can do nothing at all, and cannot go about anywhere, unless they are carried by their makers. This in contrast to the true God, who does all that He pleases to do. The people of God are here called away from every competitor to the true and living God in their thoughts, affections, hearing and obeying; in their faith, resting upon Him, trusting in Him, and being loyal to Him. We may with some equivocation say that the idols of our age are not "gold and silver" in the same way that those of old were. We may even say some "idols" speak today, in that some entertainment or political figures serve as idols for many. But truly, if they speak not according to the Word of the Lord, it is because there is no light in them.[22]

11. Psalm 115:3.
12. See also Isaiah chapters 36–37.
13. Isaiah 37:18–20.
14. 2 Corinthians 4:8–18; 5:6–9; Isaiah 54:17.
15. Daniel 4:35.
16. John 19:10–11.
17. Psalm 31:15.
18. WCF 2.1.

The end of the worshippers of such idols is clear—they shall be made like them: blind, deaf, dumb, impotent, and finally, truly without those signs of life, dead.

Our brief essay ends with verse nine, which opens the rest of the Psalm with the phrase: "The LORD is their help and shield." The imperative precedes the declaration, calling upon the people of God, "Israel" to trust in the Lord, for He is the help and shield of His people. Note that this trust is not empty, without content. We are counseled here to come to the Lord in childlike trust that although our enemies are too strong for us, although they taunt and deride, and looking at outward circumstances only, they ask, "where is your God?" Our answer, as the people of God, is that we have a Protector that they cannot see, and do not hear, who is our Help, our Stay and Support, our Redeemer and Savior, who protects and preserves us, securely in His eternal Kingdom.

The Editors

For fuller biographies see the prior issue.

General Editor: Chris Coldwell. Mr. Coldwell has been general editor of The Confessional Presbyterian since the first issue in 2005. Through Naphtali Press, he has edited and published new editions of classic Presbyterian and Reformed books since 1987, and currently copublishes the series Naphtali Press Special Editions with Reformation Heritage Books.

Managing Editor: Zachary G. Groff, M.Div. Rev. Groff is Pastor of Antioch Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Woodruff, SC.

Editors: C. N. Willborn, Ph.D. Dr. Willborn is Senior Pastor-Teacher of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Adjunct Professor of Historical Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Taylors, SC and Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D. Dr. Smith is the pastor of Atlanta Reformed Presbyterian Church (RPCNA) in Atlanta, Ga. He also serves as Chancellor of Tyndale International University, Los Angeles. He has published books and articles on a wide array of topics, including church history (*The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*), religious history (editor, *Religion and Politics in America: An Encyclopedia of Church and State in American Life*), women's history, Biblical studies, and the doctrine and history of worship (co-editor, *Worship in the Presence of God*). His latest book, *Race, Church, and Society*, deals with race relations, was reviewed in issue 17 of *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal.

Alan Strange, Ph.D. Dr. Strange is Professor of Church History and Theological Librarian for Mid-America Reformed Theological Seminary and also serves as the associate pastor for New Covenant Community Church (OPC) in Joliet, Illinois. He teaches the course for the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC on the Form of Government and has written extensively on church polity.

Wayne Sparkman, Th.M. Mr. Sparkman is director of the The Historical Center of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) which serves as the archives of record for four conservative Presbyterian denominations: (1) the Presbyterian Church in America [1973–ongoing]; (2) the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod [1965–1982]; (3) the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (General Synod or New Light) [1833–1965]; and (4) the Bible Presbyterian Church, Columbus Synod/Evangelical Presbyterian Church [1956–1965].

David C. Noe, Ph.D. Rev. Noe is Emeritus Professor of Classics at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and an experienced translator of Reformation and Post-Reformation works. He is Pastor of Reformation Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids. His classes available worldwide can be found online at LatinPerDiem.com.

Editorial Assistance: The editors thank for assistance with this issue, Carl Betsch for Psallo and Noel Henley for proofreading, and Andy Wortman for his assistance with production and distribution of the journal.

Errata for Previous Issues

Issue 18 (2022): The reader will kindly note the following corrections noted by attentive readers.

Page 7. "No less an individual than Archibald Alexander…." Read "Archibald Alexander Hodge".

Pages 9–10. "…an understanding at odds with the (Jeffersonian) understanding of the Republic…." Dabney was actually a Jeffersonian politically. Jefferson affirmed the former compact theory (evidenced, for example, by his Virginia Resolutions).

Page 10. "(whose wife was a first cousin of Dabney's wife)" The women were both Morrisons, but there seems to be no way to connect them as first cousins.

Page 10. Contrary to the author's claim, Dabney was in agreement with most of his southern Presbyterian contemporaries and forebears in condemning the African slave trade, while defending the maintenance of the institution of slavery.

Page 37. "he would die there in 1896". Read "1898".

Page 225. "according to E. T. Thompson's PCUS perspective". Read "W. E. Thompson's".

In Memoriam

David C. Lachman (1939–2023): A Tribute

"A gentleman and a scholar"—the twin term seems oft so trite. Nevertheless, it is an apt description of David C. Lachman.

David was a gentleman in so many ways—polite, respectful, calm, quiet, peaceful, unflappable, and indeed gentle. At an early age—when he was six years old—he had been conquered by God's grace, and the resulting Christian character shone through for more than seven decades. His care for those in need was demonstrated when he was a caseworker, walking without fear on streets in dangerous neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

David was also an eminent scholar. He earned five academic degrees from four institutions: B.A. (Houghton College), M.A. (University of Pennsylvania), B.D. and Th.M. (Westminster Theological Seminary), and Ph.D. (University of St. Andrews in Scotland). His dissertation on the Marrow Controversy was published by the Rutherford House. He was one of the general editors of the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*. And he co-edited *Worship in the Presence of God: A Collection of Essays on the Nature, Elements, and Historic Views and Practice of Worship*, published in 1992.

Producing that 400-page book took a decade, taken up with recruiting authors, cajoling them into turning in their chapters, and a painstaking, word-by-word and comma-by-comma reviewing of their submissions. I was the other co-editor of that volume. It was my brainchild, but without David's careful editing work and patient dealing with other authors, coupled with the intellectual respect he commanded, it would never have come to fruition. This book was the first one in the twentieth century that promoted not just certain elements of worship (such as Psalmody) but the whole doctrine of worship from the perspective of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the work's significance is the fact that a noted writer who has vehemently rejected the regulative principle of worship felt compelled to write a whole book attacking *Worship in the Presence of God*.

In addition to this collection of essays, David's other major contribution to the literature of the doctrine of worship was a 2005 article he co-authored for *The Confessional Presbyterian*, "Reframing Presbyterian Worship: A Critical Survey of the Worship Views of John M. Frame and R. J. Gore."

David's academic prowess was put to good use in the classroom, as he taught courses at Westminster Theological Seminary and Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. But his church history expertise also came in handily in his chosen profession, which was that of antiquarian bookdealer. For almost half a century, he transported treasures of the British Isles to America, importing tons of tomes—duty free, he would gleefully note, as antiquarian collectibles are not subject to tariffs. What made him particularly successful was his virtually encyclopedic knowledge of books and Bibles.

Another aspect of his scholarship was his writing introductions to various reprint editions of old books. Examples include two works by James Durham, *The Dying Man's Testament to the Church of Scotland, or, A Treatise Concerning Scandal*; and *A Commentary upon Revelation*; a book by Thomas Murphy, *Pastoral Theology: The Pastor in the Various Duties of His Office*; and a magisterial volume by George Gillespie, *Aaron's Rod Blossoming; or, the Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated*. He wrote three entries for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, and contributed a chapter to *The Doctrine of the Church*, an audiobook featuring Westminster Seminary faculty members.

David became one of the key suppliers of rare Bibles to multiple prominent displays, private and public. Again, another example of his scholarship being put to practical use.

And there was another dimension where his scholarly ways served a public good, which was his life as a churchman. Ordained as a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), he took his churchly duties seriously. He often attended presbytery and General Assembly meetings. He served as a parliamentarian of Philadelphia Presbytery, and also on the Assembly's Committee on Constitutional Business.

And he was not afraid to engage in ecclesiastical battle, when such became necessary. Like the founder of Westminster Seminary, J. Gresham Machen, a minister who was known as "Mr. Valiant-for-Truth," and an academic who was no ivory-tower theologian, David was willing to fight for what he believed. As acknowledged by everyone, he was principled, and not hesitant to do what he thought was right, no matter the cost.

David employed his intellectual and writing talents in ecclesiastical journalism. For several years, as part of a reform movement within the PCA, he edited a magazine called *The Presbyterian Advocate*. In a way reminiscent of the efforts of the *Presbyterian Journal*, which had exposed doctrinal decline in the Southern Presbyterian Church, *The Presbyterian Advocate* tirelessly targeted bureaucratic gibberish. Consideration of his journalistic efforts leads me to note that though he was respected, he was not always loved—in point of fact, many times, he was feared by churchmen, not because he was mean-spirited, but because they instinctively understood that he had a better grasp of the principles at stake.

His going on the offensive theologically speaking should not be viewed as being contradictory to his general genteel nature. David was like a Medieval noble knight who respects women, is kind to children, and can even be compassionate toward his opponents. At the same time, with lance-like accuracy, David punctured pomposity and skewered inconsistency. One memorable editorial, which pointed out the nonsense in a particular denominational publication, ended with words from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky": "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves Did gyre and gimble in the wabe."

That last anecdote illustrates another side to David, which was his sense of humor. He enjoyed a good joke—and he could laugh at himself, too.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that in addition to everything else, David was a friend. I knew him for four decades. He often lent a sympathetic ear to me as I wrestled with various struggles, whether personal or in the ministry. Many a time during the period when we were putting together that book on worship, and even after we had completed it, I would call him at, oh, around midnight, and talk into the wee hours of the morning. I thereupon was anointed by the Lachman children of having attained, along with others, the honorable status of being one of the "lunatic fringe."

David C. Lachman was a good man and a great man. He may not be known as widely as some of today's PCA superstars, but his contributions to church history will be celebrated in generations to come. At times, it takes the fog of war dissipating before we can see clearly who the true heroes and the truly significant figures are. I can think of at least three ways that his work will be seen by historians as impactful.

One, he set a pattern of faithfulness—of commitment to principle—which can encourage others to follow.

Two, he was fundamentally correct on the principles for which he contended.

Three, his actions demonstrate both tactical and strategic positioning. For example, David's journalistic endeavor was a harbinger of today's bloggers—largely laymen—who are active in the current reform efforts in the PCA. Also, his writings on worship helped lay the foundation for a rediscovery of historic Presbyterian worship.

A gentleman and a scholar. A churchman and a friend. Dr. David C. Lachman lived a full life. I will miss him. I already miss not being able to pick up the phone and give him a call (even if, in recent years, doing so was at more reasonable hours!). But I look forward to seeing him again, robed with the Redeemer's righteousness, and engaging with him in perfect worship that will be pure and entire, throughout all eternity.

Sometimes, in reflecting on heaven, David would say that he didn't know exactly what it would be like, except that it would be far more wonderful than we could imagine. Indeed. May God give all of us that childlike, wonder-filled faith and hope on our pilgrimage toward the Celestial City.

Frank J. Smith■

Obituary

Dr. David C. Lachman (27 October, 1939–27 August, 2023) went to be with the Lord at the age of 83, after a period of slow decline beginning in 2018. He died peacefully in his own bed at his home of 41 years in Wyncote, PA, surrounded by his wife and three children. He is survived by his wife of 51 years, three children, and 12 grandchildren, his sister and brother, and relatives.

David was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to the late Charles Jr. and Anna Lachman. He was the oldest of their three children. His parents moved out of the city to North Hills when he was two. Apart from his periods of study in upstate NY and Scotland, a brief stay in L'abri, and a lengthy overland trip from Switzerland to Singapore and back, he lived in the Philadelphia area his whole life, turning down teaching opportunities in other parts of the world to stay near and care for his much beloved widowed mother.

David was an academic and a highly respected scholar in the field of Scottish church history. He obtained a B.A. at Houghton College, a B.D. and Th.M from Westminster Seminary, a M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from the University of St. Andrews. His painstakingly researched dissertation on the Marrow Controversy was the first scholarly treatment of the subject and remains the definitive work on it. He was a skilled editor, which combined with his expertise in Scottish Church History, led him to become an editor of the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* and *Worship in the Presence of God*, as well as many smaller projects. He wrote scholarly introductions to a number of modern reprints of old Scottish Presbyterian works.

David was a committed Bible-believing Christian, having been led to the Lord by his Grandma Lachman at the age of six. He was firmly committed to "the love of the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Inspired by men such as J. Gresham Machen, John Bunyan, and David Hay Fleming (a careful historian), he aimed to emulate them in standing valiantly for Biblical principles (1 Thessalonians 5:21). After careful and protracted study, he was principled and consistent in resolutely holding fast to what he understood the Bible says is true and right.

He was an elder in the Presbyterian Church in America for many years, and cared for the weakest and most vulnerable in his local congregation. He served as parliamentarian of the Philadelphia presbytery, and faithfully attended the General Assembly virtually every year. As moderator of the Presbytery, his reputation was one of meticulous even-handed leadership, such that no one could discern his personal opinion

on the topic at hand. His zeal for truth and righteousness led him to take the role of editor of the Presbyterian Advocate, a whistleblower magazine seeking reform in the church. It also contributed to his zeal to see the best old books put into the hands of Christ's people, by recommendations for study, selling antiquarian editions, and encouraging the republication of quality theological works.

David was an antiquarian theological bookseller, as he often said "specializing in books printed before 1700." He started selling books while studying in Scotland, when he realized that if he could sell one book for a profit, he could buy several more for his own library and to support his growing family in the process. While he was a bookseller, he was always a book buyer—a treasure hunter and preserver of history—who sold so that he could search for more good books to collect! On his return from Scotland, he taught part-time at Westminster Theological Seminary for a brief period, but soon turned to full-time bookselling, as he disliked academic politics. He built up his business from nothing by diligent hard work. Over more than 30 years and countless trips to the UK, he transported innumerable books across the pond from Great Britain to the USA. In a quiet, behind the scenes way, the books he sold, combined with his deep knowledge of church history and love for the Lord, impacted countless ministers, theologians, book publishers, seminaries, and professors on a personal, spiritual, and academic level.

His business dealings brought out his godly character, as he was scrupulously honest in his treatment of his customers. He tried to set fair prices for his stock and would never intentionally sell anything for more than it was worth. He would often sell a book on commission instead of buying it, to get the most he could for his customer. He was righteously indignant at dealers who would cheat customers and had a special heart for generous treatment of widows, many of whom turned to him to sell their husband's libraries. Over decades this earned him a sterling reputation for being trustworthy, as he exhibited the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22-23) in all his dealings.

David was also a family man and a good friend to many. He was committed to caring for his mother in her old age. His children were deeply influenced by his commitment to family worship and faithfulness to the church. They fondly remember going on many business trips all over the USA as a family and individually to the UK. His house was always open, and he often invited his customers to the home and always allowed his children to sit, listen, and talk to them (often deep into the night), which led them to have friendships with many of those who came. Often the lines were entirely blurred between customer, ecclesiastical colleague, and dear friend.

A memorial service was held on Friday, September 1, 2023 at 6:30PM (EST) at Christ Covenant Presbyterian Church, 220 South Norristown Rd, Warminster, PA 18974.▪

