

The Old Testament at Old Princeton

By Benjamin Shaw

INTRODUCTION

I have divided the topic into four parts. First, who the men were who taught Old Testament and related topics at Old Princeton up until the restructuring of university and seminary in 1929.¹ Second, the scholarly context in which they carried on their work. Third, how those men dealt with that context. Fourth, what guidance their experience might give us today.

WHO THEY WERE

*Archibald Alexander*²

We don't normally think of Archibald Alexander (1772–1851) as being an Old Testament professor. However, since he was the first, and for a year the only, professor at Princeton, he taught everything, including Hebrew and Old Testament introduction. These fields were not his area of specialty, yet he made competent use of the materials available to him. He remained the primary instructor in these fields until Charles Hodge was appointed Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature in 1822.

With regard to Old Testament languages, Alexander taught Hebrew and Syriac. With regard to the Old Testament itself, Alexander taught the whole spectrum of what today would be called introduction. That is, he dealt with matters of text and textual criticism, the ancient versions, and the origin and development of the canon of Scripture. He also taught Old Testament history.

It was during Alexander's tenure as Old Testament teacher that the results of German critical scholarship began to come into the United States. Though Alexander made an effort to keep up with these developments, his lack of facility in German, and the other demands on

his time kept him from doing so in any really adequate fashion. He did, however, recognize the importance of these developments, and what the results of their influence might be on the church.

*Charles Hodge*³

Following a year of specialized study in Hebrew after his graduation from the seminary in 1819, Charles Hodge (1797–1878) began his career at Princeton in 1820 as instructor in Greek and Hebrew. In 1822, at the age of 25, he was appointed Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature, relieving Archibald Alexander of the responsibility. In addition to teaching the biblical languages, he was now also responsible for teaching biblical criticism, hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) and Jewish antiquities. While this last sounds like archaeology, it was really more Jewish and Old Testament history. Hodge's treatment of all these areas was probably more thorough and more up-to-date than Alexander's. This was in part due to the year of specialized study that he had, as well as his personal interests. It is an interesting coincidence that in the year Hodge was appointed to that professorship, Jean-Francois

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1. See D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 121, 126–29, 132, 147; and Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (1954; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 409–29.

2. For his life and work see James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander, D.D.* (1854; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1991) and Lefferts A. Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).

3. For recent biographical considerations of Hodge's life see Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011).

Champollion deciphered the Rosetta Stone, opening up what has become the modern field of Egyptology.

Much of Hodge's instruction in biblical criticism dealt with what today is called textual criticism—that is, the evaluation of the ancient manuscripts and versions with an aim to establishing the correct reading at places where variant readings exist. Thus he was familiar with, and required his students to be familiar with, the various ancient versions, as well as the history of the development of the Hebrew text.

With regard to hermeneutics, Hodge emphasized the following: first, the importance of knowing the original languages of Scripture; second, the importance of the ancient versions; third, the importance of parallel (or related) passages for determining the correct meaning of a given passage. At the time there were no works available to Hodge equivalent to our modern hermeneutics textbooks. Thus, Hodge's approach to hermeneutics developed out of his own interests, and what he saw as the key difficulties of the text.

As for Jewish antiquities, this covered not only Old Testament and Jewish history; it also covered Jewish institutions and ceremonies, and manners and customs. Hodge was particularly interested in the tabernacle, not so much for its own sake or as a matter of understanding ancient religious practices, but rather for its theological significance.

In 1825, Hodge established the *Biblical Repertory*, which provided a publication for the evaluation and critique of developments in theology and Biblical studies, particularly dealing with the approaches coming out of Germany. Hodge spent the years 1826–28 studying in Germany. It is commonly assumed that Hodge went there for the purpose of familiarizing himself with the work of Friederich Schleiermacher (the father of theological liberalism) and other German theologians. He did accomplish this, but his primary purpose was to study with the dominant conservative Old Testament scholars there, while also studying the new developments in Old Testament study and in theology. This exposure strengthened his teaching upon his return. Though his teaching from 1828 to 1840 generally covered the same material as it had in the period from 1822 to 1826, the latter period probably evidenced a greater urgency, based on the reality of the situation in Germany, and its increasing influence on biblical studies in the English-speaking world.

Joseph Addison Alexander

In 1840, Hodge moved to the professorship of Exegetical

and Didactic Theology, turning the reins of the Old Testament department over to Archibald Alexander's son, Joseph Addison (1809–1860) who was 31 years old at the time. Addison had previously served as instructor in Oriental (that is, Near Eastern) and Biblical literature. He spent the years 1833–34 studying in Europe at the Universities of Halle and Berlin, perfecting his grasp of the developments in Old Testament studies. His classes covered essentially the same subjects as his father's had, but with the insight and experience of the expert who had studied abroad. In addition to his teaching, Alexander contributed some forty articles to the *Biblical Repertory* during the time he served as Professor of Oriental and biblical Literature (1838–1851). In addition to the articles, he also published commentaries on Psalms and Isaiah. The latter, published in two volumes in 1846 and 1847, serves as a digest of the disputes over the authorship of the book of Isaiah. Alexander included virtually every significant commentary on Isaiah in the course of his work. The commentary on the Psalms was much briefer, being to some extent a condensation of Hengstenberg's massive German commentary, thus making Hengstenberg's conclusions available to an English-reading audience.

William Henry Green

In 1851, J. A. Alexander shifted from Old Testament to Biblical and Ecclesiastical History, leaving the Old Testament department to the 26-year-old William Henry Green (1825–1900). Green had served as a Hebrew instructor for the seminary from 1846–1849, and had then served two years as stated supply of the Second Presbyterian Church in Princeton. Taking over the department of Old Testament from Alexander in 1851, Green served as the pillar of Old Testament instruction at Princeton for the next half-century. Thus, if any name is associated with Old Testament studies at Princeton, it is that of William Henry Green. In addition to his teaching, which was essentially the same set of subjects as his predecessors had taught, Green published some forty-one articles in the *Biblical Repertory* between 1850 and 1867. He also published a response to Bishop Colenso (of which more later) dealing with the authorship of the Pentateuch. He published a well-received and widely used Hebrew grammar in 1866, with a second edition appearing in 1891. He also published extensively on the whole issue of the authorship of the Pentateuch. This issue was perhaps the most important issue in late nineteenth-century Old Testament scholarship. In addition to these more technical publications,

he published extensively in Sunday school magazines and other popular journals. It is difficult in hindsight not to see the professorship of Green as a sort of Golden Age in Old Testament studies at Princeton.

John D. Davis

Davis (1854–1926) had spent two periods studying in Europe (1879–81, 1884–86), learning the latest developments in Old Testament studies from the German masters themselves. He served as a Hebrew instructor under Green between 1883 and 1888 except for the time he spent in Europe. From 1888–1892 he served as the Professor of Hebrew and Cognate Languages, and from 1892–1900 he served as Professor of Semitic Philology and Old Testament History. Then in 1900, he was selected as the successor to William Henry Green as the Professor of Oriental and Old Testament Literature. He held this post until his death in 1926. While Davis was an able scholar, it is clear from his publications and from the lecture notes that he was carrying on the Princeton tradition regarding the Old Testament in a half-hearted way. While he defended the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, it seems clear that he did not think this to be the issue that his predecessors, especially Green, had. He was willing to consider that Noah's Flood was probably local, and that the primary significance of the creation narrative is religious as opposed to scientific.

Geerhardus Vos

Vos (1862–1949) was not a successor to either Green or Davis. After studying in Europe from 1885–1888 (from age 23 to age 26), he served as Professor of Theology at Calvin Seminary from 1888–93. In 1893 he was called to Princeton as Professor of Biblical Theology. He held this post until 1932, and remained as professor emeritus until his death in 1949. However, after he was granted emeritus status, he lived for two years in Pennsylvania, eight years in California, and the last eight years of his life in Grand Rapids. While Vos' approach to biblical theology was important to conservative Reformed thought, it seems to have come too late to have been of any real help to Princeton. In addition, after World War I Vos virtually stopped writing the insightful reviews that he had contributed to the *Princeton Theological Review*. Also, his heavy Dutch accent and rapid lecture style did not endear him to students, though he was influential on some of the better students who took the time to understand him. Nonetheless, it appears that after his move to emeritus status, he retained no substantive connection

to Princeton, which had changed so radically just before the end of his service as full professor in 1932, just three years after the reorganization of Princeton.

Robert Dick Wilson

Wilson (1856–1930) spent the years 1881–83 studying in Europe, cementing his knowledge and understanding of developments in Old Testament studies. He then served as professor at Western Theological Seminary⁴ from 1883–1900. In 1900 he was called to the post of Professor of Semitic Philology and Old Testament Introduction at Princeton, a post he held until the reorganization of the seminary in 1929, when he left to join the newly formed Westminster Theological Seminary. Wilson was a brilliant linguist, with a comprehensive knowledge of his field. He was much more dedicated to the defense of Old Princeton views than was his contemporary John Davis. However, he chose to focus his work on the Book of Daniel. Perhaps he considered that Green had sufficiently defended the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch, and that Alexander, in his commentary of Isaiah, had sufficiently defended that position. Unfortunately, to quote one author, “Wilson's scholarship, therefore, was often highly technical, theologically barren, and had little appeal to a general audience.”⁵

Oswald Thompson Allis

Allis (1880–1973), following study in Europe from 1907–1910, was appointed instructor in Semitic Philology, a post he held until 1922, at which point he was made assistant professor. Given the length of time he served the school, one wonders if the fact that after almost twenty years of teaching he was still in a junior faculty position is related to his theological commitments and the changes that were already taking place at Princeton. While he published a number of articles in the *Princeton Theological Review*, his major publications did not come until after his separation from Princeton. In those latter publications, it is clear that he was still committed to the views of Old Princeton, and had little concern for the increasingly liberal character of mainstream

4. Western Seminary was founded in Allegheny, Pennsylvania (1827) by the Presbyterian Church USA. Founding professors Luther Halsey and John Nevin were Princeton products “and they did their best to transplant the Princeton plan, curriculum, and textbooks” (David Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, 2 vols. [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994], 1:164).

5. Marion Ann Taylor, *The Old Testament in The Old Princeton School (1812–1929)* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 272.

biblical scholarship. Those latter writings included a treatment on the authorship of the Pentateuch and a critique of Dispensationalism. While his book *The Five Books of Moses* was a critique of the still standard view of the origins of the Pentateuch, he was unable to find a “suitable” publisher for the work. It was eventually published by Presbyterian and Reformed (now P&R) and found an audience among conservatives, but it was widely ignored by the larger academic community. His book *Prophecy and the Church* was more of an intramural work, directed against dispensationalism. Again, it was published by Presbyterian and Reformed and was once again ignored by the larger academic community.

WHAT THEY FACED

In Old Testament Studies

Some medieval Jewish scholars expressed doubts about the Mosaic origin of some parts of the Pentateuch. In the seventeenth century, the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes expressed those same doubts in a fairly detailed section of his great work, *Leviathan*. The philosopher Spinoza, in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, expressed the same doubts. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, doubts about the Mosaic origins of the Pentateuch became more widespread, with the views especially taking root among Enlightenment-influenced clergy and theological professors in Germany. But while these views became more widespread, they remained largely in the academy, and among skeptics such as Spinoza and Hobbes, in part because no adequate alternative explanation of the origin of the Pentateuch was being offered. This changed in the mid-eighteenth century when a French physician by the name of Jean Astruc proposed that Moses had used two separate documents in composing the Book of Genesis. One of these used the name Yahweh for God, the other Elohim. While Astruc’s proposal was limited to the Book of Genesis, other scholars picked up on the proposal, and by the time of the founding of Princeton Seminary, the view was widespread, at least in German academic circles, that the Pentateuch was not the product of Moses, but that it was a much later product composed from different sources that had originated in different places and in different times throughout the existence of Old Testament Israel.

These views were, of course, contrary to the view of Scripture found in the Westminster Standards. They called into question the frequent testimony of the Pentateuch itself to Moses’ writing, to the constant

identification of the Pentateuch in the rest of the Old Testament as “the Law of Moses,” and to the testimony of Jesus that “Moses wrote of me.” While at the time of the founding of Princeton those propounding these views were largely German, the views spread throughout Western Europe and increasingly into America over the course of the nineteenth century.

At the same time that German scholarship was raising doubts about the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch, it was also raising doubts about the origins of the book of one of the best-loved Old Testament prophets—Isaiah. Under the influence of the documentary investigation of the Pentateuch, and influenced as well by a certain skepticism regarding miracles and predictive prophecy, scholars began to propose that probably only the first 39 chapters of the book originated with Isaiah of Jerusalem in the eighth century BC. The remainder of the book, it was argued, reflected a Babylonian background (especially chapters 44–45 with their explicit references to Cyrus). Thus, many scholars proposed that the last 27 chapters of the book originated with a formerly unknown disciple of Isaiah, who lived and prophesied in Babylon during the last years of the Babylonian exile.

Also during the nineteenth century, the Book of Daniel came under attack. Porphyry, in the third century, had argued that Daniel had been written during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, that is, during the second century BC. In that case, of course, it could not have been written by Daniel, as the book itself alleges. The view of Porphyry was resurrected in the nineteenth century and became the standard view among skeptical scholars.

It was in this climate of rampant skepticism among Continental biblical scholarship that Princeton Seminary was formed. The views regarding the Pentateuch, Isaiah, and Daniel were only the tip of the iceberg. The entire Old Testament began to come under attack, and to be presented as a historically unreliable collection of late material heavily dependent on other ancient writings for its content. Such ideas were certainly contrary to traditional views of the origins of the Old Testament, but more specifically were contrary to the orthodox views to which the faculty at Princeton was committed. Thus, the task laid out for them was from the very beginning an apologetic task.

In Archaeological Studies

In the same year that Princeton Seminary was founded, the ancient city of Petra, perhaps best known today for providing the backdrop of the movie “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade,” was discovered by the Swiss

explorer Johan Burckhardt. In the preceding year, the site of ancient Babylon had been discovered, though not extensively excavated. In 1817, the temple of Ramesses I was discovered by the Italian archaeologist Giovanni Belzoni. In 1822, working from the Rosetta Stone, Jean Francois Champollion deciphered the language of the Egyptian hieroglyphs. In 1849, a large number of clay tablets were discovered at the site of Nineveh, which had itself been discovered in 1844. In the 1850s Babylonian and Assyrian texts, written in the Akkadian language, were translated. They provided sources for Mesopotamian history that had been previously unknown. Given the skeptical predilections of the European academic community, it is not surprising that these discoveries served to encourage further doubt about the historical reliability of the Old Testament. The results of all the explorations and investigations culminated in 1872, when George Adam Smith published a flood account found among that clay tablets that had been discovered in Assurbanipal's library at Nineveh. This resulted in what has become known as the Babel-Bible Controversy. The contention was that the Bible, particularly the opening chapters of Genesis were not original. They were instead Babylonian and Assyrian stories borrowed and reworked to fit into an Israelite framework. It was contended that the Israelites came into contact with sources only during the Babylonian Captivity. Hence, these opening chapters of Genesis were not only unoriginal, they were very late, and tell us nothing really at all about the historical origins of either mankind in general, or the Israelites in particular.

In Theology and Culture

In addition to the developments in Old Testament studies and archaeology, theological studies were in a major transition in the nineteenth century. One of the professors under whom Charles Hodge studied while in Germany was Friederich Schleiermacher, who has since become known as the Father of [theological] Liberalism. The doubts about orthodox theology that had sprung to life with the Enlightenment were nurtured by the developments in theology. Schleiermacher in some sense attempted an apologetic presentation of the Christian faith seen most clearly in his work *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*.⁶ However, his abandonment of an orthodox view of the Bible simply laid the groundwork for a more widespread rejection of Christianity and the Bible by those same cultured despisers. In the nineteenth century though, the liberal Christianity espoused by Schleiermacher and his successors found a

ready audience. This was in part due to the fading of a vigorous Protestantism. But it was also due to larger cultural changes.

The nineteenth century was the age of the Industrial Revolution. It was the age of the British Empire under the reign of Queen Victoria. It was the age of the rapid spread of information by means of the printing press and the telegraph. It was not the age of discovery, as in the discovery of new worlds in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Instead it was the age of discovery in science and in archaeology. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was the age of evolution. We ordinarily associate evolution with Darwin and biology, but the idea of evolution was in the air before Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species*.⁷ Further, after the publication of that work, the idea of evolution was applied to almost every area that could be considered. In that new age, a religion tied to the old Bible simply seemed not to fit any more.

HOW THEY RESPONDED

It is clear that the Old Testament faculty throughout the period of Old Princeton saw their task as essentially apologetic. Old Testament was their field. The integrity of the Old Testament was under serious attack. Therefore, it was necessary that they defend the Old Testament against its cultured despisers. Any true apologetic has two sides—the negative and the positive. On the negative side, it must show the weaknesses of its opponents. On the positive side, it must set forth its own character, demonstrating how it answers the questions that both sides face. That was the task that faced the Old Princeton Old Testament faculty. Not only must they show the fundamental weaknesses of the critical proposals, but they must also demonstrate how the Old Testament was to be read in light of its character as divine revelation, and in the face of the difficulties pointed out by the critical scholars.

The Biblical Repertory

The *Biblical Repertory* was founded by Charles Hodge in 1825, and the entire Princeton faculty contributed to

6. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799); *On Religion Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1893).

7. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: J. Murray, 1859).

it regularly. It was, in the parlance of the day, a review. That term meant something different than it does today. So, for example, if one were to turn to the book review section of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, one would find there presentations on a number of books. In each case, the reviewer gives a description of the content of the book and an evaluation of the book. What did the book set out to do, and did it accomplish that task? If the book did not accomplish the task, why did it not? If it did, how well did it do so? A review in the nineteenth century sense is different. It reviews the times and publications. Thus, articles may deal with a contemporary issue without any reference to a particular work. Or, in dealing with a number of books on the same topic, it may not give a clear presentation of content and accomplishment. Rather, the article may simply use the books as a point of departure for dealing with an issue or issues common to all of them.

In the articles in the *Biblical Repertory*, the Princeton Old Testament faculty members sought to do two things. First, they presented to their readers the current developments in Old Testament scholarship. This made available to their readers the substance of works not only in English, but also especially in German. In addition to this, however, they were at pains to show how these developments affected the understanding of the Bible. They also, in criticizing many of the critical views, sought to show how an orthodox reading was to be carried out, and how it made better sense of the text than did the critical view. In this way, the faculty members carried on their teaching beyond the classroom, reaching former students as well as other readers.

Joseph Addison Alexander

In addition to the material he contributed to the *Biblical Repertory*, the major work that J. A. Alexander produced while he was still teaching Old Testament was his commentary on Isaiah. The reader today who picks up that commentary without some preparation will likely lay it aside pretty quickly. It is almost unreadable to the unprepared reader. One feels dumped into the minutiae of German and American scholarship on Isaiah as it existed in the 1840s. However, the prepared reader can still make good use of the work. The important thing is to remember what Alexander is doing in this commentary, because he does not make himself clear on that in the way that a modern writer might. What Alexander is doing is presenting a tour through the Book of Isaiah to the student or minister who might be working through the book. He works through Isaiah verse by verse, dealing

with the issues of each verse as they come. He includes the views of the latest scholars, whether orthodox or not. Alexander is thus continuing his role as a teacher, summarizing the views that were current in the academic marketplace. He shows the weaknesses and strengths of the various views, emphasizing not only the utility of what we today might call a “holistic” reading of the book, but showing also that such a reading matched the actual character of the book much better than the approaches that sought to divide Isaiah into the work of two or more authors widely separated in time. The modern reader who comes to Alexander’s commentary must come with a good sense of the overall outline and development of thought in Isaiah, or he will quickly become lost in the details of Alexander’s presentation. But the prepared reader will quickly discover any number of useful insights into Isaiah, as well as discovering that the essential views and issues regarding Isaiah haven’t changed that much in the last 170 years.

William Henry Green

Green’s publications in the *Biblical Repertory* show the breadth of his reading and study, something not apparent from the collection of books that he published. The latter focused on the Pentateuch, which Green rightly saw as the primary battleground in Old Testament scholarship in his day. In those articles and reviews in the *Biblical Repertory*, Green showed the same desire to teach outside the classroom that appears in Alexander’s *Isaiah*. But two publishing episodes show clearly how Green responded to the issues of the day. In 1865, John William Colenso, the Anglican Bishop of Natal in South Africa, published the work *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*. This book set forth the current critical views that dismissed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. It was the first major appearance in English of these views, and was addressed to a popular, rather than to an exclusively academic audience. As such, it had the possibility of doing more damage to the faith of the American church than material published in other languages, in journals, or in academic books. Green quickly responded with his first major work, *The Pentateuch Vindicated from the Aspersions of Bishop Colenso*. This work set out the agenda for the bulk of Green’s future work. Over the succeeding thirty-five years, Green painstakingly built a case against the criticisms of the traditional view of the Pentateuch, that is, that it was almost entirely from the hand of Moses. He also showed the weaknesses of the case mounted by the critical scholars against the

traditional view. Thus, two of his other major works are *The Unity of Genesis* (1895) and *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (1896).

In the period 1888–1890, Green entered into a published debate on the Pentateuch with William Rainey Harper. This was published in the pages of the academic journal *Hebraica*, which was published by the University of Chicago, of which Harper was then president. This debate painstakingly laid out the cases pro and con regarding the origin of the Pentateuch, with Green taking the defense of the traditional view of Mosaic authorship, and Harper defending the current academic view, that the Pentateuch originated late in the life of ancient Israel, and had very little connection, if any, with Moses. It is a valuable debate, though requiring the patience of Job⁸ to work through. In some sense, the significance of the debate is not in the content, but in the timing. It is perhaps the last time that an extended defense of the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch appeared in a mainstream academic journal. By the time of Green's death in 1900, in spite of the efforts of Green and others, the critical views had won the day, and the Documentary Hypothesis regarding the origin of the Pentateuch became regarded as one of the hallmarks of academic orthodoxy.

Geerhardus Vos

Vos served as Professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton for almost forty years. During that time, he published frequently, including many insightful reviews in the seminary's *Princeton Theological Journal*. However, seen in the broader arena of Old Testament studies in that period, Vos' work was always out of step. In the 1890s, when Vos began to teach at Princeton, there was little interest in the academic community in biblical theology. The areas of interest were source criticism (the origins of the Pentateuch), the developing discipline of form criticism (Genesis as legends and sagas), and the (evolutionary) history of the religion of Israel. Princeton was probably the only seminary other than Calvin at the time where such views as Vos' would have been heard. When biblical theology did come into vogue in mainstream Old Testament studies, it was from Germany, with the works of Walter Eichrodt and Gerhard von Rad. Both of their Old Testament theologies appeared originally in the 1930s. Furthermore, their approaches to the subject were quite different from that of Vos, and also clearly in thrall to critical, rather than theological, orthodoxy. Thus, the entire teaching career of Vos at Princeton was divorced from the main currents of Old

Testament studies at the time. Vos' work has survived largely due its influence on his contemporary, conservative Reformed scholars at Westminster Theological Seminary. Vos' name is rarely seen outside of the circles in which it is currently popular, and his influence on contemporary versions of biblical theology is almost nil outside of those same conservative Reformed circles.

The fact that Vos ceased to do much in the way of academic publishing after World War I makes one wonder if he did not already see that Princeton was losing its place and its influence, and he buried himself more and more in the limited sphere of his biblical-theological studies.⁹

Robert Dick Wilson

In 1900, Robert Dick Wilson was appointed the William Henry Green Professor of Semitic Languages and Old Testament Criticism at Princeton. For the next twenty-nine years, he labored to defend the orthodox views of the Bible as had Green. Wilson was a brilliant linguist who had mastered some forty-five languages. The Book of Daniel drew Wilson's attention as Isaiah had that of Alexander, and as the Pentateuch had that of Green. While Wilson published widely on all things Old Testament, his major work remains the collection of essays published in two volumes as *Studies in the Book of Daniel*. The first volume appeared in 1917, published by Putnam, a general publisher in New York, with no especially academic orientation. The second volume appeared posthumously in 1938, published by Revell, an evangelical publishing house founded by D. L. Moody and his brother-in-law Fleming H. Revell. It was reprinted in one volume by Baker in 1979. In the essays published in these collections, Wilson interacted with the proposals of mainstream critical scholars, such as S. R. Driver and H. H. Rowley. Driver complained that Wilson did not understand what he was saying, misinterpreted his views and, as a result, was dealing with straw men. Now the record is not entirely clear on this. One can read Driver and Wilson and conclude that

8. Due to the polemical nature of much of his published work, one of his significant books is often overlooked and that is *The Argument of the Book of Job* (1881). Here you find the scholar giving a clear, readable explanatory tour of this OT book.

9. *Biblical Theology* (1948) was Vos' most influential publication and appeared in 1948, the year before his death. Other noteworthy publications include *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930), *The Kingdom of the Church* (1951), *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (1980), and *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (2001). The reader will note some publications are posthumous.

Wilson misunderstood Driver, or one can conclude that Driver himself was unclear, that Wilson's understanding is certainly possible, and the Driver is then using his own lack of clarity as an excuse to avoid the force of Wilson's criticisms. To a great extent, however, Wilson was ignored by the larger academic community of his day. The views he held, and the positions he defended had become old-fashioned, and simply were not held in the best circles. Wilson's work did, however, serve to encourage other conservative scholars, and doubtless many ministers as well, who held to the old views, not finding the new ones better, but not having Wilson's intellectual resources to deal with the critics on their own. In addition, it should be noted that most of Wilson's essays were not published in academic journals, nor his books by academic presses. Instead, many were published in and by more popularly oriented, distinctively evangelical publishers. The Old Princeton views were no longer heard in the academy.

Interestingly, Wilson's views about the Aramaic of Daniel, which he held against Driver and Rowley, have been vindicated by later scholarship. This fact, however, has not served to dissuade critical scholars from holding to a late (i.e., second century BC) date for Daniel, because ultimately the view is not based on the character of Daniel's language.

Oswald Thompson Allis

Allis, as was noted above, served as junior faculty at Princeton from 1910 until the reorganization of the school in 1929. The fact that he never achieved the position even of Associate Professor makes one wonder if his theological views had something to do with it. The character of the seminary was clearly in transition by the time Allis joined the faculty. The older character of the school, while still evident in Wilson, Allis, Warfield, and others was certainly changing, as was the character of the church that Princeton served. The signers of the Auburn Affirmation certainly included more than a few Princeton graduates, and even by the mid-1920s, Fundamentalists were beginning to move from the mainline churches into independency, or into more conservative denominations. As with Wilson, the views of Allis regarding the Old Testament were increasingly out of line with those that were deemed acceptable in the larger academic arena. Thus, when Allis looked to publish his *The Five Books of Moses* (a critique of the Documentary Hypothesis and defense of Mosaic authorship),¹⁰

10. Oswald Thompson Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (1943).

11. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (1945).

he was unable to find a "suitable" publisher, by which one is to understand that no ordinary publisher of academic works on the Bible would touch it. It was eventually published by Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, due to Allis's friendship with Samuel Craig. But in essence, and without disrespect to the publisher, P&R was in those days a vanity press. Allis's book *Prophecy and the Church* was also published by P & R a couple of years later.¹¹ The important thing to note is that this second work is a critique of dispensationalism. It was thus seen by the academic community as reflecting an intramural debate within Fundamentalism, and it could thence be safely ignored by the academic mainstream. As with Wilson, most of Allis's essays were published in evangelical journals and magazines, while his books were published by P&R. The line that had begun with Archibald Alexander, and Charles Hodge, with a desire to give an orthodox account of the Old Testament to a broader scholarly community, had come to an end.

LESSONS

Keeping Up

First, the history of Princeton makes it clear that it is essential that faculty members keep up with developments in their disciplines. Most of the Princeton Old Testament faculty spent time in Europe, learning the latest developments from those who were promulgating them, not from secondary sources. As far from the mainstream as the Princeton Old Testament department was by 1929, it could not be said of any of them that they were not conversant with the latest developments in their field. As an illustration of this, I offer the story of a conversation I had with a retired UPCUSA minister in the mid-1970s before heading off to seminary. He was theologically liberal, though he had attended Princeton before the reorganization. The one thing that he said that stuck with me was that he resented C. W. Hodge coming into theology class, lecturing from his grandfather's old, yellowed, lecture notes. Now this may have been simply a liberal student's perception, but he came away from the classes with the conviction that Hodge had not kept up; that he was out of date and out of touch.

It is particularly important today that conservative Reformed scholars be up-to-date with their fields, though this must be balanced with the fact that disciplines have so exploded that it is probably impossible for any one person to keep up with the whole field. In 1969, R. K. Harrison published an Old Testament introduction that ably covered the entire field of Old Testament

studies. Such a work is no longer possible, due to the way Old Testament studies have detonated. There are so many sub-specialties in the field that even graduate schools largely focus on particular areas, and are largely known for their areas of specialty. But as conservative Reformed scholars, we are sufficiently out of the mainstream of academic theological studies that it does not help us or our students to be out of date and out of touch.

The Importance of Orthodoxy

It is important for seminary faculty to be orthodox not only in their beliefs, but also in their teaching as well. This must apply across the board. While it is clear that the Old Testament faculty, at least these eight men, were soundly orthodox, other faculty members, perhaps, were not. In addition, Princeton was a seminary of the PCUSA, which controlled the board, which also controlled the hiring. Given that throughout the latter part of the life of Old Princeton the church it served was becoming more and more liberal, this was no doubt affecting the orthodoxy of the faculty. But take, as an example, the case of James McCurdy. McCurdy graduated from the seminary in 1871, and served as tutor and instructor at the seminary from 1873–1882. At that point he left to spend three years studying Assyrian and Semitics in Germany. After that, he went to Toronto, where he was eventually the head of the Oriental (Near East) department. At some point along the way, he adopted not only the Documentary Hypothesis regarding the origin of the Pentateuch, but other higher critical

views as well. But Dr. Green had strongly urged him to stay at Princeton and teach. But had McCurdy already adopted those views contrary to the Old Princeton positions? It's hard to say, but perhaps his personal integrity, as well as a personal affection for Green, led him leave. Others invited to join the faculty may not have had the integrity that McCurdy did, and over time, the character, not only of the PCUSA, but also that of Princeton, changed, and not for the better.

Being Outside the Mainstream

For the first half of the life of Old Princeton, the Old Testament faculty was solidly in the mainstream of at least American Old Testament scholarship. But as time passed, the Princeton positions moved more and more to the periphery of Old Testament studies. This was not because Princeton moved, but because the discipline did. So by the time Robert Dick Wilson began teaching, his publications were either in the *Princeton Theological Journal* or in evangelical journals and magazines. The Princeton view was no longer acceptable in the mainstream. O. T. Allis found this out to his chagrin when he went to publish his *The Five Books of Moses*. An academic publisher for the book could not be found. Today, confessional Reformed Old Testament studies are even farther out on the fringe of biblical studies. Anyone committed to those positions must be content to operate outside the mainstream. Any move to join the “big boys” will almost certainly result in confessional compromise, and the weakening of the church that comes with it. ■

In Brief: Revision Or Reaffirmation?

Professor Warfield has sent to the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly the following letter, declining to serve on the Committee of Revision appointed by the last Assembly. PRINCETON, N. J., June 25, 1900. To the Rev. Dr. William Henry Roberts, D.D., LL.D., Stated Clerk of the General Assembly.

MY DEAR DR. ROBERTS :

The intimation you have sent me of my appointment to the committee, authorized by the last General Assembly, “to consider the whole matter of the restatement of the doctrines most surely believed among us,” reached me duly. I am deeply sensible of the honor of such an appointment, and as well of the duty of the servants of the Church to address themselves diligently to the tasks assigned to them by its highest court. Nevertheless, I am constrained to ask to be relieved from this service. There are circumstances arising from illness in my family, and others arising from losses sustained lately in the teaching force of the Seminary in whose immediate ser-

vice I am employed, which would require me to hesitate to undertake additional labors at this time. But I should not be true to myself did I not say frankly that the decisive reason moving me to request release from service on this committee is an unconquerable unwillingness to be connected with the present agitation for a revision of our creedal formulae in any other manner than that of respectful but earnest protest.

I cannot think that the violent assault upon certain of our confessional statements—statements which are clearly Scriptural and as clearly lie at the centre of our doctrinal system—in which the agitation originated, was a fitting occasion for a movement of this kind, or for any action of the Church except the rebuke of the assailants by the courts to which they were directly amenable. I cannot think the precipitate action of a few presbyteries following these assaults with a request for some review of our confessional position

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history irrelevant. Indeed, as Christianity becomes simply moral renewal with no necessary ground in history, the historicity of Christ, and not simply his resurrection, becomes negotiable. He functions as a moral example and, as such, there is no need for him to be an historical person; he could just as easily be a character in one of Aesop's Fables or Jane Austen's novels.

This is far worse than Docetism. At least the Docetists thought that God came down even if he may just have had a mere appearance of humanity. On liberal principles, Christ could ultimately be a fictional character and do the same thing. His historicity may not be denied in an absolute sense, but the relevance of his historicity is entirely negotiable.

Warfield does a good job of pointing out that this makes Christianity really a form of Gnosticism. What is important is knowledge of moral principles revealed by Christ. Christianity becomes a knowledge that is

given to some, preeminently to critical German philosophers. The rest of us have simply to hold on to their coat tails and trust that they know what they are doing. In the process, Christ is relativized. To borrow the phrase from Warfield's article, you have a Christ-less Christianity because it is not his person or his entry into history which is important. The vital things are the timeless ideals and the moral principles which he exemplifies. By contrast, the gospel for Warfield is the historic reality of the incarnation of Christ and the actions that he performs.

Summarizing the liberal position, Warfield declares that "all the great religious forces of Christianity—trust in the Living God, elevated moral self-respect, sincere love of men—are quite independent today of all question of the historicity of Jesus" (*Christology*, 316). I have a fear that the same might well be true of much contemporary conservative American Christianity. ■

In Brief: Revision Or Reaffirmation?

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other than unwise. I cannot believe that the Assembly acted with that regard for the peace of the Church and the integrity of its testimony to the truth which is becoming in our highest court, when it paid such heed to these few discordant and, as I must believe, ill-considered overtures that it ignored the eloquent silence of five-sixths of the Presbyteries of the Church and precipitated an agitation as to its doctrinal standards upon the whole Church. My conviction is clear that, in the circumstances, it was rather the duty of the Assembly, in fulfillment of its high function of guardian of the truth professed by this Church, to reaffirm the doctrines that had been assailed; to quiet the disturbance that had been raised; and, by renewed hearty commendation of our Standards to the churches under its care, to strengthen in them a firm and intelligent attachment to these Standards and their forms of sound words. It is greatly to be feared that the effect of its contrary action, by which on so small an occasion it has invited every Presbytery to subject the fundamental law of the Church to searching inquisition, will be to foment carping criticism and discontents if it be not taken in some quarters as a license to unrebuked assaults upon the very bond by which our churches are held together, and on the very substance of the truth delivered into our keeping by the great Head of the Church. It is my hope and prayer that the Presbyteries may be led by the Divine grace to avert these dangers and to repair the evil already done, by entering an effective protest against this whole movement through a reaffirmation of their hearty loyalty to the system of doctrine brought to such admirable expression in our Standards.

In my own person at least I feel constrained to make this protest and reaffirmation with the utmost emphasis, and I am unwilling to enter into any relations which may seem to any to lessen this emphasis in any degree. I am thoroughly out of sympathy with the whole movement of which the work of this committee is a part. I desire above all things to see the Church pass quietly away from this disturbing agitation concerning its fundamental beliefs, which form the basis of its unity. It is an inexpressible grief to me to see it spending its energies in a vain attempt to lower its testimony to suit the ever changing sentiment of the world about it. I would fain see it, rather, secure in the peaceful possession of its well-assured doctrinal system, and animated by an enthusiastic loyalty to it and to the Standards in which it is expressed with such singular clarity and power, go forth in strength to win the world to the evangelical truth it has drawn from the Scriptures and professed through so many years of struggle and suffering, of progress and triumph. That God may bless the Church through these coming months with a double portion of the knowledge of His truth and of wisdom from on high, and with a double portion of holy courage to believe in its heart and to reassert in the face of whatever unbelief or doubt the whole truth that He has delivered to its keeping, is my constant and fervent prayer.

Will you kindly, my dear Dr. Roberts, communicate to the Moderator of the Assembly this my request to be released from service upon the committee, and make my excuses in whatever manner may be proper.

I am very truly yours,
Benjamin B. Warfield.