

William Ames and the Westminster Assembly

By Allen Stanton

The importance of William Ames (1576–1633) to the development of Reformed theology has long been entrenched in historical and theological literature. Scholars have often noted his influence on the Netherlands via the Synod of Dort (1618–19) and the *Nadere Reformatie*.¹ Special attention has been directed toward his role in the development of covenantal thought particularly through his most famous pupil Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669).² His contribution to the development of Reformed theology in America has likewise been explored.³ However, his importance to his home country, England, has been largely reduced to puritan casuistry. But in this realm, he has been viewed more as an articulator of his teacher, William Perkins (1558–1602), than an original casuist thinker.⁴ Considerably less attention has been paid to his distinctively theological contributions and influence on the Westminster Assembly. However, there may be cause for reappraisal.

I. WILLIAM AMES AND THE *MEDULLA THEOLOGÆ*

Born in 1576 in Ipswich England, Ames attended Cambridge and earned the B.S. and M.A. degrees. During this time, he came under the influence of the systems of William Perkins and Pierre Ramus (1515–1572).⁵ Ultimately, Ames landed in the Netherlands and earned a reputation as a polemicist against Arminianism and Catholicism.⁶ Although his polemical works were regularly reprinted, his most lasting contribution came with the production of the *Medulla Theologica*, which contained the substance of his theological lectures at Franeker University where he taught from 1622 until just prior to his untimely death in 1633.⁷

Ames' reputation as a theologian continued to grow posthumously as the *Medulla* underwent a second edition in 1634 and a series of translations in Dutch and English that swiftly followed. Furthermore, his *Christianae catecheseos sciagraphia* was published in 1635,

followed in the same year by *De Conscientia*, works which proved his worth as a catechist and casuist as well as a theologian and polemicist.⁸ Each of these were regularly reprinted over the next two decades.

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1. See for example Heinrich Hepppe, *A History of Puritanism, Pietism, and Mysticism and their Influences on the Reformed Church*, translated by Arie Blok (Leiden 1879, translation 1997); and R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (United Kingdom: Paternoster, 1997).

2. Jan van Vliet, *William Ames: Marrow of the Theology and Piety of the Reformed Tradition* (PhD dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002); see also "The Rise of Reformed System: The Intellectual Heritage of William Ames," *Studies in Christian History and Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

3. Although he denies the assumption that Ames was quickly forgotten in England, Sprunger spends little time considering the extent of this influence and accredits his greatest legacy to that of New England. See Keith L. Sprunger, "William Ames in Perspective," in *The Learned Doctor Ames* (PhD dissertation: The University of Illinois, 1963), 278–303.

4. Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 308–334. Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 41–55.

5. Cf. Erland Sellberg, "Petrus Ramus," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (Last Accessed 4/13/2017) URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/ramus/>.

6. See his polemical writings against the Remonstrants in William Ames, *Animadversiones in synodalia scripta Remonstrantium, Quoad Articulum Primum* (Franeker, 1629). His polemic against Catholicism is chiefly found in *Bellarminus enervatus*, 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Joannes Janssonius, 1625–1628).

7. From 1629–1638, *Bellarminus enervatus* was reprinted six times (1629, 1630, 1632, 1633, 1637, 1638). William Ames, *Medulla Theologica Editio ab ante Recognit in locis. Noissima Authore obitum et varys auctd* (Amstelodami: Ioannem Ianbonium, 1634).

8. William Ames, *Christianae Catecheseos Sciagraphia: Ubi Sub*

However, since the publication of the *Biographia Briatannica* in the mid-eighteenth century, scholars have uncritically adopted its position that Ames had been more popular “abroad than in his native country.”⁹

S. *Scripturae textu apposite, singulae Dominicae Catech. Reformatae breviter, solide, docte & perspicue enodantur, & suis Documentis, Usibus, & Quaestionibus Illustrantur* (Amstelodami: Joannem Ianssonium, 1635); *De Conscientia Et Eius Ivre vel Casibus* (Amstelodami, Ioannem Ianssonium, 1635).

9. *Biographia Britannica*, 6 vols (London, 1747–66), I, 135.

10. Sprunger, 284.

11. William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, Drawne Out of the holy Scriptures and the Interpreters thereof, and brought into Method by William Ames, Sometime Doctor, and professor of Divinity in the famous University at Franeken in Friesland. Trnalsated out of the Latine, for the benefit of such who are not acquainted with strange Tongues. Whereunto are annexed certain Tables representing the substance and heads of all in a short view, directing to the Chapters where they are handled. As also a table opening the hard word therein containd. A Work useful for this Season published by order from the Honorable House of Commons* (London: Edward Griffin, 1639); and *Conscience with Power and the Cases thereof. Divided into V. Bookes. Written by the Godly and Learned, William Ames, Doctör and Professor of Divinity, in the famous university of Franeker in Friesland. Translated out of Latine into English for more publique benefit* (London: Edward Griffin, 1639).

12. Sprunger claims that this injunction carried a “propaganda value for the Puritan and Parliamentary cause.” (p.284). William Ames, *An Analytical Exposition of both the Epistles of the Apostle Peter, Illustrated by Doctrines out of every Text. And applyed by their uses, for a further progress in Holinesse* (London: Edward Griffin, 1641). See also the comments of Woolsey, p.58, n.94.

13. See Sprunger, 285.

14. Sprunger 284.

15. Visscher, *Amesius*, 216–17, cited in Sprunger, 284.

16. Some exceptions include B. B. Warfield, “The First Question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism,” *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprinted 2000), VI:379–400, esp.396. Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 58, fn.94. See Jan van Vliet, *Rise of the Reformed System*, 105–156.

17. Sprunger, 286.

18. As quoted by Increase Mather, “To the Reader,” in *The First Principles of the Doctrine of Christ*, by James Fitch (Boston, 1679) and cited in Beeke and Jones, 54.

19. Mitchell, *Minutes*, lxxxiii.

20. Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted, and Vindicated, from the Errors of Papiſts, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially Antinomians. In XXX Lectures Preached at Lawrenciury, London* (London: Robert White, 1648), 246–247. See also the preface of *Spiritual Refining: Or A Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London, 1652); Stephen Marshall, *A Defence of Infant-Baptism: in Answer to two Treatises, and an Appendix to them concerning it; Lately published by Mr. J. Tombes. Wherein that Controversy is fully discussed, the ancient and generally received use of it from the Apostles days, until the Anabaptists ſprung up in Germany, manifested. The Arguments for it from the holy Scriptures maintained, and the objections against it answered* (London, 1646), 118.

21. Robert Baillie, *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time:*

Sprunger maintains that “although Ames left England in 1610 and never returned, there is a great deal of evidence to show that neither the bishops nor his old Puritan friends forgot him.”¹⁰ Ames’ works landed on English soil as early as 1639 with the translation of the *Medulla* into English as the *Marrow of Sacred Divinity* followed by *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* in 1639.¹¹ Just before the Westminster Assembly, his works “by order from the Honorable the House of Commons” were collected in a volume of *The Works of William Ames* which contained the previously mentioned titles alongside his commentary on the epistles of Peter.¹² From the title page it appears that the publishers hoped for an Amesian influence on the Assembly when they described it “a Worke useful for this season.”¹³ Of these works, Sprunger says, they “were eagerly read and the demand [for publication] was not quickly satisfied.”¹⁴ Likewise, Ames’ first biographer, Visscher, claimed that the Assembly used the *Medulla* to frame its documents.¹⁵ The veracity of these statements could challenge the pervasive supposition that Ames scarcely influenced England.

Corresponding with the aforementioned assumption is the failure to consider the possibility that Ames influenced the Westminster Assembly.¹⁶ Even Sprunger, who maintained that Ames greatly influenced the English divines, denied that the *Medulla* substantially impressed the Westminster documents.¹⁷ Yet there is significant evidence to question this conclusion.

Although a complete survey of the divines’ writings would surpass the limits of this paper, a general use of Ames can be found in the writings of the Westminster divines which may establish the likelihood that they used his works in crafting the documents of the Assembly. One of the most influential delegates at the Assembly, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), claimed that, “Next to the Bible,” he esteemed the *Marrow* as “the best book in the world.”¹⁸ Another commissioner, John Philips (1585–1663), the brother-in-law of Ames, likely attended debates with Ames in mind (and perhaps in hand).¹⁹ Anthony Burgess (d.1664) utilized him in his teaching on justification as did Stephen Marshall (1594–1655) in his work on baptism and in his work on grace and assurance.²⁰ The Scottish commissioners Robert Baillie (1602–1662), George Gillespie (1613–1648), and Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) particularly utilized Ames and spoke of him with admiration even when critical of him.²¹

Furthermore, the minutes of the Westminster Assembly record several explicit appeals to Ames’ works. Struthers’ and Mitchell’s collection records two such

occasions by Edward Calamy (1600–1666) and Sydrach Simpson (1600–1655).²² Chad Van Dixhoorn’s collection cites five separate occasions, distinct from those in Mitchell, on which Ames’ name is explicitly invoked.²³ But aside from these explicit references, one may discern the impressions of the *Marrow of Theology* on the divisions, definitions, and distinctions of the Assembly documents, to which this paper now proceeds.

II. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE *MEDULLA* AND WESTMINSTER

Before moving to general considerations of comparison, it would be practical to consider motivation for Westminster’s purported use of the *Marrow*. Several possible motivations exist for the Assembly’s utilization of the *Marrow* alongside or instead of other theological systems. We offer four explanations.

a. *Ramism*. The dissatisfaction with revived Aristotelianism led Pierre Ramus and his followers to propose a modified logical system by which to organize theology.²⁴ Ramism (as it came to be known) found considerable appropriation in the training grounds of the Puritans, Oxford and Cambridge, and had become commonplace among them since the turn of the seventeenth century.²⁵ In his polemical, casuistical, and theological writings, Ames established himself as one of the foremost appropriators of the Ramist system. His *Medulla*, republished just prior to the Westminster Assembly, provided a complete theological system built on the Ramist approach which would have been presupposed by a majority of the Assembly’s divines. This made the *Medulla* a natural resource for the Assembly.

b. *Scholasticism*. Ames and his theological successors likewise shared a commitment to *scholasticism*.²⁶ This commitment to modified Medieval methodology by the divines (perhaps via Ames) can be seen in their utilization of the *disputatio* in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. One example might be found in the doctrine of God, which Medieval Scholastics addressed under three principle questions: *An sit Deus*, “whether God exists?”; *Quid est Deus*, “what is God?”; and *Quantes sit Deus*, “how many Gods?”²⁷ All these elements of scholasticism come together in the catechisms of Westminster, which asked the very same questions. Although this method is not generally associated with catechetical literature, one can clearly perceive the scholastic commitments of the divines in the catechism, which could provide rationale for the Assembly’s use of Ames.²⁸

c. *Brevity*. Scholastic method was utilized for two reasons: clarity and brevity. Its use encouraged the maximizing efficiency of words for the sake of precision

and clarity. Ames’ utilization of this method made the *Marrow* a “theological classic in its day ... a summary of Reformed theology in concise and orderly form.”²⁹ This precision may have provided a motivation for the utilization of Ames’ work to build a succinct confession and catechism.

d. *Genre*. Ames’ *Medulla* provides a summary rather than an extensive treatment of theology. For this reason, Ames avoided entering into disputes. The title *Medulla*, translated “Marrow” or “Substance,” highlights Ames’ intention of producing the essential substance

Wherein the Tenets of the Principall Sects, especially of the Independents, are drawn together in one Map, for the most part, in the words of their own Authours, and by their maine principles are examined by the Touch-Stone of the Holy Scriptures (London, Samuel Gellibrand, 1645), 17; George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English-Popish Ceremonies, Obtruded upon the Church of Scotland. Wherein Not only our owne Arguments against the same are strongly confirmed, but likewise the Answeres and Defences of our Opposites, such as Hooker, Mortone, Burges, Spring, Paybody, Andrewes, Saravia, Tillen, Spotswood, Lindsey, Forbesse, &c. particularly confuted* (1637), Part I. iv.8–9; Part II, i.10; Part III.i.8, iv.82–84; and Samuel Rutherford, *The Due right of Presbyteries, or, A Peaceable Plea, for the Government of the church of Scotland* (London: Edward Griffin, 1644), see especially 205, 227, 413, 455.

22. Alexander Ferrier Mitchell, John Peterson Struthers (editors), *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly of Divines While Engaged in Preparing their Directory for Church Government, Confession of Faith, And Catechisms* (November 1644 to March 1649) (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 26–27, 54.

23. Cf. Chad Vandixhoorn (editor), *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), II:272; III: 107, 358, 365, 494.

24. See Petrus Ramus, *Animadversionum Aristotelicarum, Libri XX. Ad Carolum Lotharingum, Cardinalem Guisianum* (Lutetiae, 1548); and *The Logike of the Most Excellent Philosopher P. Ramus Martyr: Newly translated, and in divers places corrected, after the minde of the Author* (London: Thomas Vautrolier, 1581).

25. See Willem J. van Asselt and Peiter L. Rouwendal, “Distinguishing and Teaching: Constructing a Theological Argument in Reformed Scholasticism,” *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011), 92–94. Frank P. Graves, *Ramus and the Educational Reformation of the 16th Century*, (New York: Macmillan, 1912).

26. For assessment of Protestant Scholasticism see Willem J. van Asselt & Eef Dekker (editors), *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Willem J. van Asselt (editor) *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011); and Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520–1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

27. Richard A. Muller, “Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition” (Inaugural Address, Grand Rapids, 1995), 4–5.

28. The Larger Catechism asks expressly these questions: Q. 2, “How doth it appear that there is a God? (*An sit Deus*)”; Q.7, “What is God? (*Quid est Deus*)” and Q.8, “Are there more Gods than one?” (*Suntne plures uno Deo*).

29. Sprunger, 170.

of theology without divulging into minutia. In Ames' words, it served as a "short compendium for the unlearned ... in hopes of stirring up readers to piety."³⁰ Similarly, the catechisms and confession were intended to provide summaries in a succinct, simple, and memorable way. The terse nature of both the catechism and the *Medulla* allows for favorable comparison.

These suggestions provide plausible rationale for the utilization of the *Marrow* at the Westminster Assembly. In the proceeding discussion, before descending into particulars, a few general comparisons will be made between the *Marrow* and Westminster which may further suggest appropriation: the *ordo theologiae* and *ordo salutis*.

1. Ordo Theologiae

In Ramist fashion, Ames began the opening chapter on "The Nature of Divinity" by dividing theology into two principle heads: faith and duty.³¹ The *Shorter Catechism* divides upon exactly those lines. Questions 1–38 define the content of faith and questions 39–107 describe the duty of man, as summarized in the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. The catechism states that this division constitutes the scope of the Scriptures which teach what "man is to believe concerning God (*quod homini de Deo sit credendum*) and what duty God requires of man (*quidque officii exigat ab homine Deus*)."³² Likewise, both utilized 2 Tim.1:13 as the primary text for proving this bifurcation.

This twofold division stems from Ames' definition of theology as both a practical and theoretical discipline. In

his definition, Ames appropriates the Ramist emphasis on practice while moving beyond him to equally emphasize doctrine. While Ramus defined theology as the "art of living well,"³³ Ames defined it "the doctrine (*doctrina*) of living to God."³⁴ Unlike those medieval scholastics who defined theology as science which referred primarily to the speculative enterprise, and unlike the theologians (including Ramus) who emphasized practice over doctrine, Ames held both together—speculative and practical.³⁵ In this, Ames represents a modified Ramism which, in turn, found appropriation in the *Shorter Catechism*.

Although this Ramist dichotomy appeared in other theological compendiums of the period, such as Amandus Polanus (1561–1610) and Johannes Wollebius (1589–1629), Ames alone enjoyed print in English.³⁶ Commonly known as a "popularizer of Peter Ramus's logic," it is likely that the Ramist bifurcation found in the Westminster Standards can be attributed largely to Ames' influence.³⁷

2. Ordo Salutis

Following the developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a standard post-Reformation *ordo salutis* developed, encapsulated by the Westminster Assembly: election, effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Although this general pattern may be observed in systems prior to Westminster, one aspect stands out—the placement of the doctrine of adoption.

Prior to Westminster, the doctrine of adoption received little attention. If treated as a distinct category it generally found placement as a sub-topic either of justification or sanctification but not as a standalone doctrine. The *Medulla* proves the clearest exception.³⁸ In the *Marrow*, Ames treats the doctrine in this place as a separate locus following and flowing from justification. Likewise, he treats the doctrine with a thoroughness previously unseen in Reformed theology by describing twenty-seven characteristics of adoption.³⁹ This denotes a development from his predecessor William Perkins, who excluded adoption from the *ordo salutis*, and constitutes a significant contribution to Reformed theology that should not be missed. The appearance of adoption in the Westminster Confession as a separate locus placed between justification and sanctification is likely owed to Ames. This will be considered further below.

III. PARTICULAR CONSIDERATIONS

Having considered general commonalities, it would be appropriate to consider particular evidences of the

30. Ames, *Marrow*, 3, 5.

31. Ames, *Medulla*, Book I. Cap.II. §1. *Marrow*, 2.

32. WSC, 3. Latin references in the Confession or Shorter Catechism is taken from Philip Schaff (editor), *The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, vol. III (Reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007):600–703. Here quoted on 676.

33. Petrus Ramus, *Petri Rami Ver Omandui, Philosophiae et Eloquientiae Regii professoris celeberrimi, Commentariorum de Religione Christiana, Libri quator* (Francofurti: Andream Wechelum, 1577), 6. *Theologia est doctrina bene vivendi*.

34. Ames, *Marrow*, 1.

35. For a fuller treatment of this medieval debate and its continuance in the post-reformation age, see Muller, *PRRD* (1987): 1.215–226.

36. Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae christianae* (Hanover, 1609; Geneva, 1626); Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae* (Basel, 1626).

37. See Kendall, 154 and K. L. Sprunger, 'Ames, Ramus, and the Method of Puritan Theology,' *Harvard Theological Review* (1966): 133ff. See also Muller, *Covenant and Conscience*, 308, fn.1.

38. Tim J. R. Trumper, *An historical study of the doctrine of adoption in the Calvinistic tradition* (PhD dissertation: Edinburgh School of Divinity, 2002).

39. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXVIII.

appropriation of the *Marrow* in the literature developed by the Westminster Assembly.

1. Man's Chief End

Shorter Catechism question and answer one memorably asks: "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." The uniqueness of this catechism moved B. B. Warfield to search for its source.⁴⁰ In his quest, he traced the theological flow through various parties and ultimately to Calvin's Geneva Catechism. The Westminster divines adopted Calvin's question nearly verbatim; however, they slightly modified his answer. Calvin answered, "That men should know God by whom they were created." He continued, "What reasons have you for saying so? Because he created us for this, and placed us in the world, that he might be glorified in us. And it is certainly proper that our life, of which he is the beginning, be directed to his glory." Next Calvin asked what was the *summum bonum* of man, and he answers, "the very same. Because without it our condition is more unhappy than that of any brutes."⁴¹

One can begin to discern a common thread in the theology of Calvin and Westminster. Both wish to ascribe man's chief purpose to God and the chief good to knowing him. However, the divines go beyond this to *the enjoyment of God*. Whereas Calvin describes the knowing of God as the *summum bonum* (the highest good), Westminster moves beyond the knowledge of God to the enjoyment of Him (*eodemque frui in oeternum*).⁴² This is an enlargement upon Calvin, which Warfield and Mitchell admit likely came from Ames.⁴³

According to Mitchell and Warfield, the second part of the question ("and enjoy him forever") only finds precedent in two other catechisms aside from Ames: Leo Jud and Gagliardi.⁴⁴ Jud wrote that God had made man so that in all things he should "fear, love and reverently honor" him and "to enjoy him forever" (*aeternum fruamur*).⁴⁵ In his Italian catechism, Gagliardi similarly wrote, "To what end was man created?" answer: "To know and love God and enjoy Him forever."⁴⁶ However, it is unlikely that the divines had been influenced by Gagliardi whose catechism existed only in Italian and Spanish. The Lutheran Jud is more likely, yet less probable than Ames whose works had been readily available in Latin and English and reprinted since 1627.

Upon comparison, there may be more reason to trace the influence to the *Medulla*. Ames wrote:

5. And seeing that, that life of the Creature is most perfect, which comes nearest to the living, and life-giving

God, therefore the nature of Divinity-life is to live to God. 6. Men live to God when they live, according to the will of God, to the glory of God, God inwardly working in them ... 8. But although in this life there is contained as well to live happily as to live well ... and that which ought chiefly and finally to be respected is not blessednesse, which respects our profit, but goodnesse, which is referred to God's glory Therefore Divinity is better defined by that good life whereby we live to God ... 9. Moreover seeing this life is a spiritual act of the whole man, whereby he is carried on to enjoy God...⁴⁷

In this elaboration of the purpose of theology, and thereby of life, one observes a unanimity between *the Marrow* and WSC 1. Like Westminster, Ames grants a singular purpose to life, which he calls the "Divinity-life." In Ramiist fashion, like the divines, he divides that singular purpose into two parts—to glorify God and to live the blessed life, which he later calls the enjoyment of God. However, these are not two distinct purposes but two aspects of living to God which are both accomplished by living consistently with God's word. These similarities emerge more strikingly in Ames' comments in the *Substance of the Christian Religion*.

In his opening Lord's Day lecture, Ames derives several doctrinal points from Psalm 4:6–8. They are thus:

1. Our chief felicity and happiness ought above all other things to be regarded and sought after, and that throughout our whole life.

2. That a man's chief good or happiness cannot be found in the goods of this life.

3. That our true and chief good consists in our union and communion, that we have with God.

4. That joy that the faithful have from the communion that they have with God, in its sweetness, surpasses all other human delights and joys.⁴⁸

40. B. B. Warfield, "The First Question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism," *The Princeton Theological Review*, vi. (1908), 565–587.

41. John Calvin, "Catechism of the Church of Geneva," in *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 91.

42. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III: 676.

43. Mitchell, *Minutes*, 421.

44. Mitchell, *Minutes*, 432.

45. Leo Jud, *Catechismus Brevissima Christianae Religionis Formula, Instituentiae iuventuti Tigurinae, catechizandique rudibus aptata, ad eoque in commune omnium piorum utilitatem excusa, Ad Lectorem* (Tiguri: Christophorum Froscouerum, 1539).

46. Quoted in Warfield, 391.

47. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap I. §9. 'Haec porro vita, cum sit spiritualis actus totius hominis, quo fertur ad Deum habendum.'

48. William Ames, *The Substance of Christian Religion: Or, A plain and easie Draught of the Christian Catechisme, in LII. Lectures, on chosen Texts of Scripture, for each Lords-day of the Year, Learnedly and*

In describing the chief end of man, the Assembly is likely utilizing Ames. Inexplicably, however, after acknowledging the probability that the heightening of the Shorter Catechism's answer had been likely received via Ames, Warfield concludes, "it may very well be that there was no conscious dependence here on any intermediary, but that the Westminster divines ... found a felicitous brief expression for Calvin's thought."⁴⁹ In this, Warfield appears compelled to link Westminster directly to Calvin despite the suggestion of other evidence. Perhaps his context provided this motivation.

Early twentieth century scholarship have been characterized by an increasing emphasis on what some have called the "Solus Calvinus" and anti-Scholasticism.⁵⁰ In the former position, scholars have sometimes treated Calvin as the sole founder of the Reformed tradition to the neglect of other reformers. Consequently, these scholars used the works of Calvin to gauge theological fidelity to the Reformed tradition. In the second position, twentieth century scholars claimed that the appropriation of scholastic method by post-Reformation writers evidenced a deviation from the so-called exegetical theology of the Reformation. Warfield found himself in the middle of these emerging thrusts, and this may explain his avoidance of attributing an Amesian influence on Westminster. However, it seems likely that the divines received the amended teaching of Calvin through Ames. Although Ames did not exclusively teach that a significant purpose in life consists in the

Perspicuously Illustrated with Doctrines, Reasons, and Uses (London: T. Mabb, 1659), 3, 5, 6, 8. Originally published in Latin as *Christiane Catecheseos Sciagraphia* (1635).

49. Warfield, 396.

50. J. V. Fesko, *Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016): 187–204.

51. R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*.

52. Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*.

53. Heppie, 79. Sprunger, 181. "By stressing the will, Ames was seeking to involve man personally in theology and overcome the stifling effects of intellectual assent divorced from piety." Sprunger, 181.

54. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap.III. §1.

55. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap.III. §2.

56. Ames, *Medulla* I. Cap.III. §3.

57. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap.III. §§3–4. His statement, *Pio voluntatis affect*, "a pious affection of the will," appears similar to Calvin's statement that "faith can in no wise be separated from a devout disposition (*bonne affectione*)" "good affection." *Institutes* III.ii.8.

58. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap.III. §§5–6. Muller defines *habitus* as a "disposition; specifically, spiritual capacity, belonging to either of the faculties of soul, i.e., to mind or to will. The scholastics assumed that, in addition to defining the faculties of the soul, they also had to acknowledge the capacities or dispositions of those faculties. A faculty cannot receive a datum or act in a manner for which it has no capacity." Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 134.

enjoyment of God, those who did were few and Ames may have been the best known.

2. Of Faith

In scholarly literature, Ames' understanding of faith, or his so-called *voluntarism*, receives considerable attention with various interpretations. Kendall views Ames' emphasis on the role of the will in faith as the final break of English Puritanism from Calvin's more objective understanding of faith embraced and solidified in the Westminster Assembly.⁵¹ Beeke and Jones, although recognizing development, consider it a consistent development and clarification of a trajectory already present in Calvin.⁵² In a different direction, Heppie and Sprunger understand Ames' doctrine of faith to have risen in reaction to the supposed cold orthodoxy that he found in the Netherlands. According to them, his was a subjective and experiential understanding of faith and theology in contrast to what has been perceived as the overly objective faith of the Reformed Orthodox.⁵³ These varying interpretations require an extensive look at Ames' understanding of saving faith in comparison to Westminster.

The importance of Ames' understanding of faith can first be noted by its placement in the *Medulla*. Instead of beginning with the doctrine of Scripture and proceeding to outline the various loci of theology, Ames begins (after defining theology and providing its order) with the doctrine of faith. Ames defines faith as "a resting of the heart on God (*acquiescentia cordis in Deo*)" in order that we may be "freed from evil" and "obtain all good." The biblical parallel to this is *trust*.⁵⁴ However, Ames considers the various elements of *fides*. First, *fides* contains the element of belief (*credere*), "which signifies an act of the intellect, assenting to produced testimony" (*Credere vulgo significat actum intellectus, assensum testimonio praebentis*).⁵⁵ Saving faith, however, constitutes more than mere belief; it includes the act of the will, which in Scripture is paramount to *receiving*. Here he appeals to John 1:12 where John uses the terms believing and receiving interchangeably. Thus, faith is not just a mental assent, although it includes that, but is an "act of the whole man (*actus totius hominis*), as seen in John 6:35 where Jesus describes saving faith as coming to him."⁵⁶ In short, to rest the heart in God is to assent to the truth of divine testimony and by an act of the will "embrace the good" as it is found in Christ.

He continues, however, by denoting that faith presupposes: 1. Knowledge of the Gospel; and 2. A Pious Affection of the Will Towards God.⁵⁷ That latter is the *habitus* from which faith flows (*habitus ex quo fluit fides*).⁵⁸

Although not mentioned at this point, by this Ames alluded to his doctrine of calling by which a person formerly dead in sin receives the capacity or *habitus* to positively receive God.

Calling, Ames maintains, contains an inward and an outward element. The outward is a “propounding, or preaching of the Gospel or of the promises of Christ.”⁵⁹ This is the preaching of the objective work of Christ which is proclaimed indiscriminately to all, but the obtaining of those things promised belongs only to the elect and, consequently, only they will truly rest upon those promises with a saving faith by virtue of an inward calling of God. Ames defines inward calling as a “spiritual enlightening, whereby those promises are propounded to the hearts of men, as it were by an inward word.”⁶⁰ Through this calling, the receiving of Christ establishes union with him. In so far as this refers to a transition from sin to grace, it is called *conversion*. When used in reference to new life, it is called *regeneration*.⁶¹

Wherein that “principle” or habit of grace is planted in a man, he is completely passive. This implantation of grace “is begotten in the will of man.”⁶² He further elaborates that the will is the prime subject of this conversion, because the mind is not “sufficient to produce this effect, because it doth not take away that corruption which is in the will, neither doth it communicate unto it any new supernatural principle, by verture whereof it may convert it self.”⁶³ Consequently, this can only be accomplished by God, and so in regeneration a person is completely passive.

However, this principle, or *habitus*, in operation necessarily elicits the act of faith or “active receiving,” where it “now wholly leane[s] upon Christ as his savior, and by Christ upon God.” This act of faith can be attributed to two things: 1. The Habit of grace at work; and 2. God’s stirring and moving. This calling is irresistible. Although the will is not coerced, it freely complies with God’s calling.⁶⁴

Ames concludes his description of *fides* by delineating its objects which are first, God “in himself,” and then as Christ the Redeemer, or the promises of God, and essentially the authority of God in His Word. This faith is further described as cleaving, leaning, or resting in God. This stands in contrast to the papists which make faith merely a “general assent” (*assensus ille generalis*).⁶⁵ Furthermore, it always consists of a “special confidence” or “trust” (*includitur tame semper specialis fiducia*) which entails a confidence in the Messiah, or of confidence of union with Christ.⁶⁶ Yet he clarifies that this confidence (*fiducia*) can be spoken

of as a synonym for faith (*fides*) or as a fruit of faith. It depends upon how one is speaking. In the former sense, *fiducia* must be present. But the presence of *fiducia* (trust or confidence in Christ) does not necessarily mean the certainty of salvation (*certitudo*) which is a fruit of faith and varies in degree by the quality of the person’s faith. Consequently, one can have confidence in the Lord (*fiducia*), in the sense of *fides*, without possessing *fiducia* in the sense of certainty (*certitudo*). “Experience ... teacheth that that particular assurance of the understanding (*certiorationem intellectus*) is wanting in some, for a time, who notwithstanding have true Faith lying hid in their hearts.”⁶⁷

In contrast with the assertions of Heppie and Kendall that Ames’ emphasis on the will served as polemic against the “dead orthodoxy” of his peers, it is better to understand Ames’ emphasis on the will as polemic against Roman Catholics. In the *Substance of Christian Religion*, he poignantly exhorts “against Papists, and others, who know nor acknowledge no other faith, but knowledge, and a certain material assent, which may consist with greatest diffidence and most wretched desperation.”⁶⁸

In summary, one can identify four distinct elements in Ames’ chapter on faith. 1. Saving faith is a confident resting or trusting in Christ; 2. Faith stems from the assent to a knowledge of the gospel; 3. Faith emerges as a consequence to God’s implementation of a new nature or *habitus* in the elect; 4. Faith contains some element of assurance, although this varies in degree and can actually be lost in the elect for some time.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider this definition in comparison with Calvin, it must briefly be noted that Ames’ description stands in continuity with Calvin’s definition. In perhaps his most succinct definition of faith, Calvin writes: “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁹

59. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXXVI. § 11.

60. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXXV. §§ 8, 13; Ames, *Marrow*, 111.

61. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXXV. §§ 17, 18.

62. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXXV. § 21; *Marrow*, 112. Italics added.

63. Ames, *Marrow*, 113.

64. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXXV. § 27.

65. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. III. §§ 7–12, 14, 15.

66. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. III. § 20.

67. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. III. § 22.

68. William Ames, *The Substance of the Christian Religion*, 53–54.

69. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.7.

In this definition, one finds the various elements that Ames also espoused: 1. Intellectual Assent; 2. An inward work of God in which the recipient is passive, but in which 3. Trust in God's benevolence (*fiducia*) is produced. Similar to Ames, Calvin also adamantly protests against those who would place faith merely in assent to the exclusion of the inward man. "If we possessed only this one reason, it would have been sufficient to end the dispute: that very assent itself ... is more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding."⁷⁰

Although Kendall seeks to pit Ames' voluntarism against Calvin's so-called intellectualized understanding of faith, the two share considerable unanimity. The bifurcation of voluntarism from intellectualism appears overly simplistic and fails to consider the breadth of Calvin's teaching on faith.⁷¹

Kendall is correct, however, in his assessment that the Westminster divines continued in the trajectory of Ames.⁷² In defining saving faith, the *Shorter Catechism* stated that "Faith (*fides*) in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive (*recipimus*) and rest (*nitimur*) upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered

to us in the gospel."⁷³ As the Confession more fully states, "The principle acts of saving faith are accepting (*proecipui*), receiving (*acceptatio*) and resting (*reception*) upon Christ alone for justification, etc."⁷⁴ Although the Latin nomenclature differs slightly, the English translation captures the conceptual unity between Ames and Westminster.

For both, faith in Christ includes the elements of the mind and the will, yet with priority being granted to the will. Yet prior to the receiving and resting upon Christ, the Spirit of God must effectually call the sinner, which includes "enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills," wherein, "he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel."⁷⁵ On the assurance of faith, Westminster maintains, like Ames, that "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be a partaker of it."⁷⁶

Although great similarity exists between Ames and the divines, it would be difficult to attribute the *Standards* directly to the work of Ames. Nevertheless, Ames stands within a trajectory which insisted that faith be defined as consisting of the intellect and the will. This emphasis upon the will, although not unique to Ames, found its most ardent expression in Ames. Although Kendall may overstate his case, he does give support to an objective emphasis in Calvin and his immediate successors such as Perkins. Although, in our judgment, Ames assumed the objective quality of faith (i.e. Calvin and Perkins), he emphasized the will in saving faith to a greater degree than did his predecessors, a trajectory which Westminster followed.

The teaching by Westminster, which similarly to Ames described faith as "resting and receiving," appears to betray an Amesian influence. Although an exhaustive exploration would extend beyond the purposes of this paper, it should be noted that defining saving faith this way finds little expression in the literature of the time that is purported to influence Westminster. Perkins defines saving faith as "a special persuasion, wrought by the holy Ghost in the heart of those that are effectually called, concerning their reconciliation and salvation by Christ."⁷⁷ James Ussher (1581–1656) defines it as "such a firme assent of the mind to the truth of the word, as flows into the heart, and causeth the soule to embrace it as good, and to build its eternal happinesse on it."⁷⁸ Similarly, John Ball (1585–1640) defines faith as "a beliefe of the promise."⁷⁹ The summarization of faith as "receiving and resting" stands out in Ames and Westminster in a way far more pronounced than that of

70. Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.8.

71. Vliet writes, "Admittedly, some individual Calvinian statements could be taken as privileging the intellect over the will in matters of faith. Yet in light of his entire body of work, the charge that Calvin intellectualized the faith cannot be maintained." See *The Rise of the Reformed System*, 61.

72. Kendall, 151–164.

73. WSC 86. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III: 695.

74. WCF 14.2. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III: 630.

75. WSC 31.

76. WCF 18.3.

77. William Perkins, *A Cloud of faithfull witnesses, leading to the heavenly Canaan, or, A commentarie upon the 11 chapter to the Hebrewes preached in Cambridge by that godly, and iudicious divine, M. William Perkins; long expected and desired, and therefore published at the request of his exegutours, by Will. Crashaw and Tho. Pierson, preachers of Gods Word, who hear him preach it, and wrote it from his mouth* (London: Humfrey Lownes, 1607), 3.

78. James Ussher, *A body of divinities: or the summe and substance of Christian Religion, Catechistically propounded, and explained, by way of Question and Answer: Methodically and familiarly handled. Composed long since by James Usher B. of Armagh. And at the earnest desires of divers godly Christians now Printed and Published. Whereunto is adjoined a Tract, intituled Immanuel, or the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: M. F., 1645), 197.

79. John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace: Wherein The graduall breakings out of Gospel grace from Adam to Christ are clearly discovered, the differences betwixt the old and new Testament are laid open, divers errors of Arminians and others are confuted; the nature of Uprightnesse, and the way of Christ in brining the soul into Communion with himself: Together with many other Points, both doctrinally and practically profitable, are solidly handled* (London: Simeon Ash, 1645), 349.

other definitions of the times. Ames may not have been the only one saying such things by the time of the Assembly, but he certainly said it most often and clearly. Thus, Westminster's definition of faith gives evidence to an Amesian influence.

3. Adoption

Tim Trumper has argued that in the history of the church the doctrine of adoption has been largely neglected. Although the doctrine scarcely appears throughout the patristics and medievals, during the time of the Reformation it began to reappear. In his commentary on Galatians, Luther broached the subject. Likewise, the fatherhood of God became an important motif for Calvin, and it is interspersed throughout the pages of the *Institutes*. Nevertheless, neither theologian treated it as a separate or distinct locus.⁸⁰ The re-discovery of justification *sola fide* gave way to an emphasis on the forensic relationship between God and man that overshadowed the familial one.⁸¹ In this vein, where adoption received treatment, it found placement as one of the benefits of justification.

The first time that the doctrine appears distinctly in confessional literature is that of *Craig's Catechism* (1581).⁸² However, the treatment deals more with discovering the certainty of adoption than a description of the doctrine itself or its corresponding benefits. By "compiling a seminal creedal chapter on adoption the Westminster Assembly signaled a more formal recognition of the doctrine in Reformed theology."⁸³ But where did this idea come from?

Heinrich Heppe located the doctrine in only three theological systems: Andreas Hyperius (1511–1564), Franciscus Burman (1628–1679) and Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633–98) followed later by Wilhelmus a Brakel (1635–1711).⁸⁴ However, Burman, Heidegger, and Brakel's works are too late to have influenced Westminster. Evidence exists to support Hyperius' influence on English Puritanism; however, his treatment of the doctrine does not appear in any extensive sense.

Amongst the English Puritans, Trumper argues that it would be "unfair to claim" they "did not deal with adoption," but "too few of them dealt with the doctrine as a distinct theological locus. Notable exceptions include the Congregationalist William Ames (1576–1633) and his twenty-seven characteristics of adoption."⁸⁵ The only other names Trumper mentions are Thomas Watson (1620–1686) and Herman Witsius (1636–1708), who appeared too late to have influenced Westminster, and Thomas Goodwin (1600–1679) and John Owen (1616–1683), who treated adoption under predestination

and communion with God respectively.⁸⁶ The doctrine also found scanty treatment in the catechism of James Ussher (1581–1656), which followed the same *ordo* as Westminster. However, it was not published until 1645, just two years prior to the publication of the Confession and Catechisms, and its treatment is quite brief.⁸⁷ Instead, the most significant contribution to the doctrine of adoption, published twenty years prior to the codification of it in the Westminster Standards, appears in Ames' *Medulla*. Consequently, a likely Amesian influence on the Assembly may exist at this point.

The appropriation of Ames may be seen in two ways: in the *ordo salutis*, and in the *substance* of the doctrine of adoption. Given that adoption had seldom been treated as a distinct doctrine, it should not come as a surprise that it seldom appeared in the *ordo salutis* of the Protestant *systema*. Westminster marked a decided change in this by moving from effectual calling to justification, adoption, and sanctification.⁸⁸ Following the Assembly, this became a common puritan *ordo*. As stated previously, this found precedent in William Ames.

As to the substance, the Shorter Catechism teaches: "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God (WSC, 34)." The *Confession* elaborates:

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption: by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have His name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.⁸⁹

80. Trumper, 17.

81. Trumper, 19.

82. James T. Dennison Jr. (editor), "Craig's Catechism (1581)", in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008–2014), III:544–606.

83. Trumper, 21. Beeke and Jones claim that it was the first but, as Trumper notes, it was at least second to Craig. See *Puritan Theology*, 538.

84. Trumper, 20.

85. Trumper 22.

86. Trumper, 22.

87. See James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity*, 200–201.

88. WSC 11–13; WLC 69–75; WSC 32–35.

89. WCF 12. Cf. WLC, 74.

When one reduces Ames' teaching on adoption and removes the sections in which he compares human adoption with divine adoption and likewise separates the fruit of adoption, one finds fifteen distinct statements on adoption, whereas the Westminster Confession's treatment reduces to sixteen. When compared, the two appear quite similar. In the Table to the right we have reduced the similarities (and places of distinction) to this simple outline.

One could argue that the similarity of language between Ames and Westminster may be attributable to the Bible as a common source. Many of the things stated about adoption in both, after all, come expressly from biblical descriptions. However, the Divines' separation of adoption as a separate locus and its placement in the *ordo salutis*, innovative in the work of Ames, makes the utilization of the *Marrow* in the crafting of the Westminster Standards far more plausible. Or, to put it another way, it is difficult to imagine Westminster striking out on this new path in the history of Reformed confessions without considering the precedent of it in Ames. Given that the divines were reading Ames, it appears more likely that they did use him than not.

4. Covenant Theology

Although Woolsey argues that Ball and Usher left the most lasting impressions on Westminster's covenant theology, this seems unlikely for two reasons. First, the works of these two men were both published in 1645, when the assembly had been underway for two years, and just prior to the completion and publication of the Confession (1647), Shorter Catechism (1647) and Larger Catechism (1648). This would not have left much time for reflection on Ball and Usher. Secondly, Ames, on the other hand, had been available in Latin since 1627 and in English since 1639. Considering that Ames "was one of the first to build an entire system of Reformed covenant theology,"⁹⁰ it is surprising how little Ames' covenant theology has been considered alongside that of Westminster.

a. *Definition of Covenant and the Covenant of Works.* Both Westminster and Ames describe a covenant as a

Table. Adoption in *Marrow* compared with WCF (Ames; WCF)

1. *It is a gracious sentence/act* (1; 3)
2. *It arises on account of the Son* (2&8; 2)
3. *Flows from but is distinct from justification* (3-5; 1)
4. *The dignity of God's name placed upon them* (7&11; 5)
5. *Adopted as children of God (and brothers of Christ)* (9-10; 4)
6. *Taken into God's family* (12; 7) *benefits of God's Fatherhood:*
 - a. *Call God Father as members of his family* (both)
 - b. *Taught by God* (Ames)
 - c. *Protected by God* (both)
 - d. *Provided for by God* (both)
 - e. *Disciplined by God* (both)
 - f. *Made heirs* (Ames)
 - g. *Have access to the throne of grace* (WCF)
Perpetual conversation (Ames)
 - h. *Pitied by God* (WCF)
 - i. *Eternal Blessedness* (both)
 - j. *Never cast off* (WCF)
7. *Given the Spirit of Adoption* (15; 6)

gracious providence by which God voluntarily condescends to bind himself to his creatures.⁹¹ In approaching a definition, both consider a covenant as consisting in the promise of blessings and the threatening of curses contingent upon obedience or disobedience to certain stipulations as seen most evidently in God's covenant with Adam.⁹²

In this first covenant, God promised life to man based on obedience and threatened death for disobedience. The content of this covenant was a moral law along with the "special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."⁹³ So closely does the law relate to the essence of the covenant that Ames regularly interchanges the words. Although other names are applied to describe this covenant, both utilized the phrase "covenant of works,"⁹⁴ which had been slowly adopted by federal theologians since the second half of the sixteenth century.⁹⁵

In this covenant, God appointed Adam as the covenant representative or "publique person," the "head of man's nature, from whom all good and evil was to be derived to his posterity."⁹⁶ The Larger Catechism says similarly, "The covenant being made with Adam as a *public person*, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind ... sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression."⁹⁷ Likewise, great significance was placed by Ames and the divines on the giving of the tree of life. However, Ames refers to it as a "sacrament," whereas the divines reduce it to a "pledge."⁹⁸

90. Beeke and Jones, 42.

91. Ames, *Medulla* I. Cap. X. §§.1-9; and WCF 7.1, WLC 20.

92. Ames, *Medulla* I. Cap. X. §.9; and WCF 7.2, WLC 20.

93. WLC 92.

94. See Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXXVIII. §§. 4, 9.

95. See D. A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

96. Ames, *Medulla* I. Cap. X. §.30.

97. WLC 22. Italics added.

98. Ames, *Medulla*, I. Cap. XXXVII. and WLC, 20.

Adam's failure to fulfill the terms of the covenant of works and man's fall into sin led to God's enacting a second gracious covenant. Vliet recognizes Ames' emphasis on the Adamic covenant as something of a progression of the federal theology. Vliet claims that the "prominence of this covenant in Ames' thinking [was] something not seen in either Calvin or Perkins."⁹⁹ This concept, however, found significant prominence in Westminster. Although not the creator of the concept, certainly Ames contributed to its development up to the time of the Westminster Assembly.

b. *The Covenant of Grace.* In chapters 39–40 of the *Medulla*, Ames divides his discussion on the covenant of grace into essentially three distinct topics: 1. The Unity of the Covenant; 2. The Diversity of the Covenant; and 3. The Various Administrations of the Covenant.

Ames begins by maintaining that, since its inception, the covenant of grace remained one covenant dispensed through various administrations. Although the essence of the Covenant of Grace is one throughout all its administrations, there are nevertheless differences in these dispensations. Ames claims that the varying epochs denoted advancement from the imperfect to the perfect. He then begins a series of contrasts in which he purports the superiority of the externals of the covenant fulfilled in Christ and those prior to his coming.

Prior to Christ, the covenant administrations were general and dark as they exhibited the Christ to come. The elements of these administrations tended to be "outward and carnal" and the church, as underage, experienced elements of servitude, carnality, and the spirit of bondage and fear. In contrast, in the New Covenant administration, a perfect unchangeable covenant is propounded in a more inward and spiritual manner. Christ is exhibited far more clearly in this covenant, and, rather than the bondage of infancy, the church possesses the Spirit of adoption and full sonship.¹⁰⁰

Ames deals most extensively with the unity and diversity of the various covenant administrations from Adam to the end of the world. He divides his treatment into three sections: before Moses; Moses to Christ; and Christ to the end of the world. In each section, he demonstrates the central unity of the covenant of grace, which is the promise of Christ in the gospel and how each part of the *ordo salutis* (election, calling, justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification) was experienced by the church in each dispensation either by looking to the Christ to come through the various types, or, in the New Covenant, as the Christ who has come. He also traces the way in which each subsequent age saw greater clarity than the previous and, therefore,

the differences in each administration.¹⁰¹ In short, the covenants are all united in what is promised, and the greatest disunity consists in the manner of revelation—in that the old dispensations (prior to Christ) were less clearly revealed than in the New Covenant.

There is great conceptual unity here between Ames and Westminster. As the *Confession* reveals:

This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed . . . is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.¹⁰²

The architectonic appropriation of a two-covenant system (works and grace) in the Westminster Standards is clearly not without precedent and, given the regular utilization of Ames elsewhere, it is probable that his work had been consulted on this topic as well. However, one might wonder about the *pactum salutis*.

c. *The Pactum Salutis.* J. V. Fesko has made the case that there is an implicit assumption in the Westminster Standards of a pre-temporal, intra-Trinitarian covenant that serves as the foundation of the covenant of grace known as the *pactum salutis*. Although some of the divines considered this a separate covenant altogether, others understood it as the pre-temporal extension of the covenant of grace.¹⁰³

Fesko supports this argument by appealing to David Dickson's *The Summe of Saving Knowledge*, which was regularly appended to the Standards. In this document, the *pactum salutis* is distinctly affirmed, of which there is no record of objection. Some divines expressly

99. Vliet, *Rise of the Reformed System*, 41.

100. Ames, *Marrow*, Book I. Chapter XXXVIII. §§2–10.

101. Ames, *Marrow*, XXXVIII, §§11–XXXIX, §1–13.

102. WCF 7:5–6.

103. See J. V. Fesko, *Covenant of Redemption*, and also *The Theology of the Westminster Standards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 163–166.

defended this doctrine in various publications. This, Fesko claimed, was because the *pactum* was the majority report of the divines.¹⁰⁴ However, the Confession's failure to develop an express position on the *pactum salutis* provides "another example of a doctrinal teaching that was not addressed directly by the Standards but left as an orthodox extra-confessional matter."¹⁰⁵

Where did Ames fall on this matter? Did he share unanimity with this implicit majority report of the divines? Although he does not appear to touch upon it in the *Medulla*, he states quite explicitly an acceptance of a pre-temporal intra-Trinitarian covenant between the Father and Son in his *Substance of the Christian Religion*. On the fifteenth Lord's Day, in an exposition of 1 Peter 3:18, Ames proposes the doctrine of the text as: "Christ the Lord Suffered all these evils of punishment, which were due to us for our sins."¹⁰⁶ After describing the different sufferings Christ incurred, Ames proceeded with a second doctrine, that "Christ suffered all these things, neither out of any necessity of nature, neither by constraint, neither by causality and chance, but of his own free choice of wisdom and will."¹⁰⁷ One of the three reasons he gives for this doctrine is that Christ willingly underwent this because, "this was the very thing for which Christ came into the world, according to the form of covenant (*pacti*) made between the Father and the Son, *Isa* 53:10."¹⁰⁸ In that covenant arrangement, between the Father and Son, it was agreed that if "he would undergo that obedience for us," then the guilty should be set free from the penalty of their disobedience as well as of death itself.¹⁰⁹

If, in fact, the *pactum* was the majority report by the mid-seventeenth century, Ames stands in continuity with that developing trend. As in other comparisons between Ames and Westminster, there is a shared unanimity on covenant theology that suggests a potential utilization of Ames' works in the construction of the Westminster Standards. Although the influence is not as apparent as in other areas, given that Ames stands on the cusp of the major federal developments of the 1640s and 1650s, he serves as an important precursor to the movement soon to find solidification in Westminster and, therefore, was a likely source for Westminster's covenant theology.

104. See the early chapters of Fesko, *Covenant of Redemption*.

105. Fesko, *Theology of Westminster Standards*, 166.

106. Ames, *Substance*, 105.

107. Ames, *Substance*, 106.

108. Ames, *Substance*, 107. Ames, *Christianae catecheseos*, 89, "Quia hoc fuit illud ipsum propter quod Christus venit in mundum, secundum formam illam pacti initam inter Deum Patre & Filium, *Es*, 53:10."

109. Ames, *Substance*, 109.

IV. CONCLUSION

Although seeking to establish influence can be a precarious matter, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the Westminster divines utilized the writings of William Ames, particularly his *Medulla*. In the decades leading up to the Westminster Assembly, Ames had been celebrated and widely read on the continent and in England. Translations of his work appeared in the years just prior to the Assembly and with some suggestion that this was done intentionally to influence the divines. The demand for his work required regular republication. The English and Scottish divines both utilized his works prior to the meetings of Westminster and expressly appealed to Ames at the Assembly's meetings.

Furthermore, a comparison of the documents of Ames and Westminster has shown that sufficient evidence exists to confirm the likelihood of the divines' appropriation of Ames in the crafting of its summarizations of fundamental theology. The Ramism, scholasticism, clarity, brevity, and genre of the *Medulla* provides sufficient motive for its use, as does the similarity of theological construction in the *ordo theologiae* and *ordo salutis*. Finally, in some of the hallmark doctrines of Westminster, such as the "chief end of man," faith, adoption, and covenant theology, Ames appears to influence Westminster, or at the very least, he serves as a pivotal figure in the continuity of a theological trajectory.

This essay can in no sense be considered exhaustive. It has only provided some initial considerations which may promote further investigation into the influence of Ames on the Westminster Assembly. Nevertheless, this paper has potentially furthered Ames scholarship in two distinct ways. First, it has challenged the assumption that Ames yielded the most influence on America or the Netherlands with little influence on England. This may also contribute to greater understanding of the internationality of the theological community of the seventeenth century. Second, this essay has confirmed the claims of some scholars (such as Warfield and Mitchell) who assumed without substantiating their assumption, that Ames influenced the Westminster Assembly. In recognizing Ames' likely influence, the reading of the Westminster Standards may be enriched by further reflection on the theology of William Ames as it contextualizes the teaching of the Westminster Assembly. ■