

## The Legacy of Old World Conversion: A Shared Practical Divinity in William Perkins & Samuel Rutherford

By Nathan Strom

John William Nevin (1803–86)<sup>1</sup> and his biographer D. G. Hart<sup>2</sup> are two among many who evaluate the American Presbyterian New Side-Old Side controversy as a contest pitting English Puritan influence against Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism. A scholarly consensus has risen amongst historians of American Presbyterianism tracing back to Trinterud’s re-examination of the topic.<sup>3</sup> Historiography on the New Side-Old Side controversy has consistently treated the controversy in light of more stark dichotomies that emerged later. Furthermore, the American controversy is often isolated from what was happening in the British Isles.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the doctrine of conversion is viewed through the lens of the enthusiasm or theatrics of later developments, particularly the “new measures” of Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875) and those he influenced.<sup>5</sup> Though

understandable, such readings of colonial American Presbyterianism are anachronistic.

The present article tests the idea of a clash between English Puritan<sup>6</sup> and Scotch-Irish ideals. One could hardly dismiss that ethnopolitical factors from the old country influenced life in the colonies. Narrowly stated, the question animating this study is this: did variant (and perhaps competing) theologies of conversion compound or exacerbate ethnopolitical tensions between English and Scottish protestants before the Enlightenment’s triumph? This article takes an initial step in what the present author hopes will become a much larger project. What follows is a comparison of the theologies of two significant figures in the English Puritan and Scotch Presbyterian traditions, respectively: William Perkins (1558–1602) and Samuel Rutherford (1600–61).

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1. Darryl G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2005).

2. Darryl G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2000).

3. This schema can be observed in George Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and The New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought & Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale, 1970), pp. 39–40; idem., “The New School Heritage and Presbyterian Fundamentalism” *Westminster Theological Journal* 32, no. 2. (1970): 131–132; Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1949), pp. 15–37; Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), pp. 14–15; D.G. Hart and John Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2018); Lefferts A. Loetscher, *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), pp. 1–2.

Charles Briggs, *American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early*

*History* (New York: Scribner, 1885) seems to stand outside this scheme. Briggs’ work is difficult to evaluate as it was written under increasing pressure from conservatives in the Presbyterian church and is, therefore, at times tendentious. Charles Hodge stands outside the consensus, arguing for a close connection between the Puritans and Presbyterianism, especially Old Side and Old School Presbyterianism. See Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1705–1741* (Philadelphia: William S. Martein, 1839), pp. 20–25.

4. See Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625–1760* for an often overlooked counter-example. More recently, Charles Scott Sealy, “Church Authority and Non-Subscription Controversies in Early 18th Century Presbyterianism” (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 2010).

5. Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

6. Having used the word several times already, something like a definition or explanation of the word “Puritan” is in order. The word’s origin and history are well-documented. See Matthew Vogan’s “Fresh Directions in Rutherford Studies” in *Studies in Puritanism and Piety* 1:1 (2019), pp. 3–27. For this article, I am using the term to describe those who resisted the Elizabethan compromise by pushing for greater alterations to Henry VIII’s “reformation.”

Why these two figures and not others? Both men lived well before the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. They were therefore indebted to medieval theological methods, albeit (more or less) modified by Ramism.<sup>7</sup> This puts them upstream of any Enlightenment-era influences cited by historians of colonial Presbyterianism.

Additionally, both men had successful careers teaching theology at universities important to international Protestantism. Perkins was a Cambridge Fellow from 1584 to 1594, and he served as Lecturer at St. Andrew the Great from 1584 to 1602. Rutherford spent several years as a university teacher. He was appointed as Regent of Humanity at Edinburgh University in 1623.<sup>8</sup> Burgh records indicate that Rutherford was charged with fornication and resigned under pressure in 1626.<sup>9</sup> Rutherford returned to university work in 1639. The University of St. Andrews elected him as Professor of Divinity at New College where he served shortly before his death in 1661.

These positions invested Perkins and Rutherford with influence over men who filled pulpits and academic posts on both sides of the Atlantic. Perkins taught such men as William Ames (1576–1633), Richard Sibbes (1577–1635), James Ussher (1581–1656), John Cotton (1585–1652), Thomas Hooker (1586–1647), and Thomas Shepard (1605–49). Some claim his influence extended to the likes of John Winthrop (1588–1649) and Roger Williams (c. 1603–83). Many of Scotland's ministers would have passed through Edinburgh and St.

7. On the philosophical heritage of Protestant orthodoxy see Willem J. Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, trans. Albert Gootjes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), esp. pp. 46–67, 83–139.

8. John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and The British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 37.

9. Rutherford's biographers debate the accuracy of the charge. A summary of the arguments is found in Coffee, *Mind of...Rutherford*, pp. 37–38.

10. The majority opinion is that ca. 1560 was a transition point between the Reformers and what is described as the period orthodoxy, with Reformed, Luther, and Counter-Reformation iterations. This chronological boundary, though arbitrary as all historical boundaries are, has several important factors going for it. For our purposes, many Reformers passed from this life by 1560's. Luther himself died in 1546. Destined to lag behind Luther, Martin Bucer and Philip Melancthon trailed him by 5 and 14 years respectively. The Reformers joined the church triumphant at the following junctures: Zwingli and Oecolampadius in 1531; Cranmer in 1541; Vermigli in 1562; Calvin in 1564.

11. Arminius, Analysis cap. IX ad Romanos, cum Aphorismis, in *Works*, 3.485–519 and idem., = A Dissertation on the True and Genuine Sense of the Seventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, in *Works*, 2.471–683. I am indebted to Richard A. Muller, "Arminius and the Reformed Tradition," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70:1 (2008): 19–48 for this citation.

Andrews. It is reasonable to conclude that their views are representative of the broad contours of English Puritanism and Scottish Presbyterianism, respectively.

Furthermore, both men were fully engaged in the work of reformation as intellectual quartermasters and parish ministers. Their vision(s) of reform reached the highest levels of national policy. Nevertheless, their writing engaged the theological and practical realities of church life: the *ordo salutis*, the nature of the human conscience, the art of preaching, pastoral counseling, the faith of covenant children, and the administration of the sacraments. Consequently, their writings are valuable sources for testing the existing scholarly consensus surrounding theologies of conversion.

Finally, the chronology of the men's lives allows us to examine how a Scottish Presbyterian may have reacted to English Puritan views. Rutherford post-dated Perkins, and likely encountered Perkin's influence and ideas. In this way, Perkin's practical divinity provides the backdrop for Rutherford's work in the Scottish kirk.

#### PERKINS: A SCHOLASTIC, A REFORMER, & A PASTOR

##### *Reformed Scholastic Anthropology: A Late Sixteenth Century Theological Cottage Industry*

Perkins and his contemporaries inherited an unfinished theological enterprise from the Reformers. Taking 1560 as the transition point,<sup>10</sup> the period of early orthodoxy yielded the differentiation of competing orthodoxies: Lutheran, Reformed, and Counter-Reformation (Catholic). Key was the emergence of Reformed confessions, including the *French or Gallican Confession* (1559), *Scots Confession* (1560), *Belgic Confession* (1561), and *Heidelberg Catechism* (1561).

Although the Lutherans completed the Augsburg Confession in 1530, there was no sanctioned Protestant alternative until the completion of the Reformed Confessions. Differentiation is the *sine qua non* of the confessionalization and codification process that defines Protestant and Counter-Protestant Orthodoxy. The Reformed Confessions provided an alternative to Lutheranism. In short, the period of early orthodoxy closed with a differentiation process. Once boundaries are drawn, however, they must be defended and maintained.

Jacobus Arminius posed problems for the Reformed orthodox in the late 1580s and early 1590s. Arminius was writing two treatises during this time: one on Romans 9 and a later one on Romans 7.<sup>11</sup> While they were not published for several years, Arminius was presumably

teaching this content in lectures and sermons before their publication.<sup>12</sup>

In each of these works, Arminius<sup>13</sup> claimed he was being faithful to the Dutch Reformed tradition expressed in the *Belgic Confession* and *Heidelberg Catechism*, even as he called for their revision. His theology had become influential due to his teaching post at the University of Leiden. His colleagues in the Dutch Church saw matters differently. This dispute led to the synod at Dordrecht from 1618 to 1619. The resulting *Canons* officially settled the Arminian question for the international Reformed community. While the polemical struggle continues to the present day, the *Canons of Dort* have been regarded as expressing standard Reformed dogma since 1619. Perkins's teaching and publishing career coincided with the Arminian controversy.

The hot topic in Protestant theological polemic was coordinating God's sovereign decrees with the doctrine of man. Richard Muller states it elegantly when he writes,

As much as the debate over the order and structure of the divine decree says about God, it says still more about human ability—indeed, the divine capability in the work of salvation must be presented in such a way as to meet precisely the needs brought about by human inability. What is more, the nature of the human predicament—the level and precise character of human inability—can only be identified when the inward workings of the human soul, understood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as consisting in intellect, will, and the affections, have been spelled out in some theoretical detail.<sup>14</sup>

During this period, virtually every notable theologian was publishing proposals, each one working to coordinate the needs of human inability and the provisions of the divine decree. It was a veritable theological cottage industry.<sup>15</sup> Perkins was no exception. He was content to inherit much from the Reformers—especially Beza's apparatus—in both *loci* referenced above. His *Golden Chain* even included Beza's construal of the *ordo* as an appendix.

Similarly, Perkins was happy to receive earlier conclusions regarding the dualism of body and soul (*anima*). He also adopted views concerning the faculties of the soul (*facultates animae*) and the powers (*potentia*) of the soul relatively unchanged. This can be seen in the opening chapter of his *A Discourse on Conscience*.<sup>16</sup> There he notes the soul has two principle faculties: understanding and will. These faculties are not parts of

the soul, which is simple in and of itself. Rather, they are distinct modes of the soul's operations. He gives temporal priority to the understanding, calling it the wagoner of the wagon.<sup>17</sup>

The will is the faculty we use to do or not to do, to choose or to refuse something. The affections are joined to the will. That is, they do not comprise a third distinct faculty. Rather, they are a sub-faculty, depending upon the will. Whenever the will pursues a course of action, it makes some end the goal of its acting (Helm, *Human Nature*, p. 105). This pursuit and this goal affect the soul. Corruption or virtue is wrought and there is a corresponding expression of the emotions. These emotions include—for example—joy, sorrow, love, hatred, grief, and longing (Perkins, *Works* 8.7).

The conscience—perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively—is not the mediator between the will and the affections. It is linked to the intellect or (practical) understanding, but different than the affections (Perkins, *Works* 8.7). If the affections are a sub-faculty, we might say the conscience is a supra-faculty. For Perkins, it comes prior to the discursive use of intellect. It is a power arising immediately within the soul. Perkins explained,

“...conscience is not a bare knowledge or judgment of the understanding from whence knowledge and judgment proceed as effects. The Scriptures confirm this, in that they ascribe sundry works and actions to conscience, as accusing, excusing, comforting, and terrifying. These actions could not thence proceed, if conscience were no more than an action or act of the mind. Indeed, I grant it may be taken for a certain actual knowledge, which is the effect thereof. But, to speak

12. Muller, “Arminius and the Reformed Tradition,” p. 41.

13. On the life and thought of Jacobus Arminius see Keith Stanglin & Thomas McCall, *Jacobus Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Caspar Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius, D.D.* (trans. John Guthrie; Nashville: Stevenson & Own, 1857); Richard A. Muller, “Arminius and the Reformed Tradition,”; idem. “Arminius and the Scholastic Tradition,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 24:2 (1989): 19–48.

14. Richard A. Muller, “The Priority of the Intellect in the Soteriology of Jacob Arminius,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55:1 (1993), 55–56.

15. On the development of the doctrine of man in the 16th and 17th centuries, see the opposing treatments: Paul Helm, *Human Nature from Calvin to Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018) and Richard A. Muller, *Providence, Freedom, and the Will in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2022).

16. Pages 1–112 in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol 8. Edited by J. Stephen Yuille.

17. Perkins, *Works*, 8.7.

properly, this knowledge must proceed from a power (*potestas*) in the soul, the property whereof is to take the principles and conclusions of the mind and apply them, and by applying either to accuse or excuse.... The proper end of conscience is to determine of things done ... for it determines or gives sentence of things done by saying unto us: "This was done; this was not done. This may be done; this may not be done. This was well done; this was not done." (Perkins, *Works* 8.8).

Perkins may appear contradictory insofar as he proposed that conscience precedes discursive reasoning but is applying the mind's conclusions. Taken statically, it would present an irreconcilable inconsistency. Considered dynamically, however, it becomes perfectly consistent. The soul is in the process of development through acquiring knowledge and through judging its actions. The diagram below illustrates the progression as Perkins describes it:

The soul acts → judges act → acquires knowledge in judging → re-acts → judges re-act → ...→...→

The soul cannot help but judge its own actions. This in turn produces knowledge in the soul. This new knowledge becomes part of the dataset the soul will use in judging its future actions. The cycle then repeats with every action of the soul.

18. Joel Beeke & Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), pp. 471–480.

19. Influential early accounts of Perkins' life can be found in Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State* (Cambridge, 1642), pp. 88–93; Fuller, *Abel Redivivus: or, The Dead Yet Speaking. The Lives and Deaths of the Modern Divines* (London, 1651), pp. 431–40; Samuel Clark, *The Marrow of Ecclesiastical History, Contained in the Lives of One Hundred Forty-Eight Fathers, Schoolmen, First Reformers, and Modern Divines Which Have Flourished in the Church Since Christ's Time to This Present Age* (London, 1654), pp. 850–53.

20. Beeke, *Meet the Puritans*, pp. 473–474; Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), appendix (n.p.).

21. Michael P. Winship, "Weak Christians, Backsliders, and Carnal Gosþelers: Assurance of Salvation...", *Church History* 70, no. 3 (2001): 462–81.

22. George Yule, "Theological Developments in Elizabethan Puritanism," *The Journal of Religious History* 1, no. 1 (June 1960): 16–25. Yule's essay stands squarely in the Calvin versus the Calvinists school of thought. This scholarly consensus has been roundly critiqued by a group of scholars with Richard A. Muller at its head. Muller has essentially done for scholarship on Reformed orthodoxy what Heiko Oberman did for Luther scholarship a generation earlier. Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel & Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

23. Yule, "Theological Developments," p. 20.

The above-quoted paragraph from Perkins' *Discourse on Conscience* is important for two reasons. First, it shows that Perkins inherited his theoretical apparatus directly from the scholastic tradition—building on Aristotle, Aquinas, and the Reformers, especially Beza and Zanchi. He was truly a scholastic theologian. Perkins also developed that tradition by distinguishing the work of the conscience (judging) and the effects it produces in the soul (knowledge). Interestingly, Perkins makes a marginal note indicating his rejection of Aquinas's conflation of the two (Perkins, RHB, *Works* 8.7n2). This means Perkins's move was a calculated one. He was intentionally altering the inherited form for a particular reason. We turn now to that reason.

#### *The Politics of Reform in Perkins Day*

William Perkins's life almost exactly spanned the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603). Elizabeth ascended to the throne in November of 1558 and reigned until her—and the Tudor dynasty's—demise in 1603. William Perkins was born to Thomas and Anna Perkins in 1558. Little is known about his early childhood. His time as a pensioner at Cambridge suggests Perkins came from near Gentry.<sup>18</sup> Perkins completed his bachelor's degree in 1581 and a master's degree in 1584. During his time at Cambridge, Perkins was tutored by Laurence Chaderton and had friendships with Richard Rogers and Richard Greenham.<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned, Perkins quickly became a Fellow at Christ's College, Cambridge, and a lecturer (preacher) at Great St. Andrews Church. Perkins enjoyed a comparatively settled life in Cambridge. Perkins never moved anywhere else. This placed him in a hotbed of political and theological reform. His settled living situation allowed Perkins to achieve a wide readership, outstripping even Calvin, Beza, and Bullinger in his own time.<sup>20</sup>

Michael Winship helpfully outlines the intellectual, political, and pastoral context that Perkins inherited.<sup>21</sup> Historians of this period prioritized either ecclesiastical politics or pastoral practice. Winship persuasively argues that English Puritan practical divinity was motivated by both pastoral concerns and a particular vision of theological and, therefore, national reform.

George Yule has described the political context of Perkins's and other Puritans' emphasis on piety as the result of a failed ecclesiological revolution.<sup>22</sup> Thomas Cartwright, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, provided the intellectual and social power in this attempted ecclesiological coup.<sup>23</sup> He lectured on the Acts of the Apostles and criticized the diocesan form of Episcopacy. So influential was Cartwright that by 1573, the Bishop

of London complained to Heinrich Bullinger that many were falling prey to the idea the Presbyterian form was the only biblically legitimate form of government.<sup>24</sup>

Remaining within the institutional structures of the church, Presbyterian Puritans attempted to set up a rival administrative structure. Yule calls this ‘the classis movement.’ This was an attempt to undercut the state-controlled bishops tasked with enforcing Elizabethan conformity. The Puritan Ministers of Parliament (MPs) even crafted a bill in Parliament to abolish bishoprics.<sup>25</sup> John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury, warned Elizabeth about the real damage this new governmental form would cause.<sup>26</sup> These Presbyterians had one thing in common with Elizabeth: an uncompromising spirit. This led to an impasse: would their consciences allow them to conform if Elizabeth abolished the presbyteries and enforced conformity? Many Puritans, including Perkins, remained within the Church of England. Yule concludes:

The change from the Puritanism of Thomas Cartwright is marked but when one considers the dilemma the Puritans were in by the intransigence of Elizabeth against any alteration in Church government, it is understandable. The Puritan preachers and writers—Perkins, Sibbes, Preston—were not permitted to speak of the government of the Church and its corporate reformation, so they spoke mainly of personal reformation, and provided help for each man as he went past Doubting Castle and through Vanity Fair on his way to the Celestial City.<sup>27</sup>

Winship argues that Yule’s thesis is basically correct, but a decade late. Yule argued the transition happened in 1592. Winship sees precedents earlier, prior to Perkins’ publishing on the topic of conversion and assurance of salvation. Perkins did not launch a new reformational project. He refined an existing one.

#### *A Further Reformation: Perkins’ Practical Divinity*<sup>28</sup>

The prospect of a national Presbyterian church seemed grim. Those committed to uncompromised reform turned to the private and personal dimension of reformation. J.I. Packer summarizes the connection well when he writes,

“To be sure, ‘renewal’ is not a word that they [the Puritans] used; they spoke only of ‘reformation’ and ‘reform,’ which words suggest to our twentieth-century minds a concern that is limited to the externals of the church’s orthodoxy, order, worship forms and disciplinary code.

But when the Puritans preached, published, and prayed for ‘reformation’ they had in mind, not indeed less than this, but far more... The essence of this kind of ‘reformation’ was enrichment of understanding of God’s truth, arousal of affections Godward, increase of ardour in one’s devotions, and more love, joy, and firmness of Christian purpose in one’s calling and personal life. In line with this, the ideal for the church was that through ‘reformed’ clergy all the members of each congregation should be ‘reformed’—brought, that is, by God’s grace without disorder into a state of what we would call revival, so as to be truly and thoroughly converted, theologically orthodox and sound, spiritually alert and expectant, in character terms wise and steady, ethically enterprising and obedient, and humbly but joyously sure of their salvation. This was the goal at which Puritan pastoral ministry aimed throughout, both in English parishes and in the ‘gather’ churches of congregational type that multiplied in the mid-seventeenth century.”<sup>29</sup>

Perkins’ role in this was to articulate a theologically grounded way that pastors could help professors discern whether they were in the state of grace, or not.

Winship summarizes the specifics,

“Early puritan [sic] ministers shared the emphasis on ethical empowerment with later ones, but they differed in one crucial aspect. So central was the doctrine of assurance that they, like the early continental Reformers, tended to equate it with faith itself... Early puritan [sic] ministers presumed that moral empowerment sprang from assurance of salvation. It did not, however, in the first instance, prove it.” (Winship, *Weak Christians*, p. 465)

This identification of faith and assurance created significant pastoral problems. First, its inherent logic often proved devastating to those weak in faith. If assurance was of the essence of faith, then a lack of assurance was taken as proof of not having faith. On the other hand,

24. Zurich Letters, pp. 29ff. Sandys Bishop of London in a letter to Bullinger. Cited in Yule, p. 21.

25. Yule, “Theological Developments,” p. 21

26. J. Strype, *Whitgift, III*: p. 236. Cited in Yule, p. 22.

27. Yule, “Theological Developments in Elizabethan Puritanism,” p. 24.

28. This section is indebted to Matthew Payne’s “William Perkins’ Doctrines of Faith and Assurance Through the Lens of Early Modern Faculty Psychology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 83:2 (2021): 316–36.

29. J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (reprinted edition; Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), pp. 26–27.

the logic could work in the opposite direction. One could feel comparatively good about his or her accomplishments, causing one to assume she possesses saving faith. There is then precious little despairing of self. These are what Winship, following George Gifford, labels “carnal gospelers.”

Pre-Perkins Puritans noticed and responded to these pastoral problems. Ministers intuitively sought to encourage weak Christians by noting evidence of conversion and faith in their lives. Perkins’s friend Richard Greenham earned a reputation for being a capable counselor of such Christians.<sup>30</sup> Ministers also sought to stir presumptive, complacent professors. They pressed the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Perkins’s Cambridge tutor stated it baldly:

“Therefore to stop the slaundersous [sic] mouth of the adversary, and to terrifie[sic] the secure and presumptuous professor: we conclude that workes [sic] are necessarily required, not only for doing [sic] of the Father’s will: but also for the declaration of our faith, for the confirmation of our hope, for the separating of us from all infidels and hypocrites.”<sup>31</sup>

These were important steps in pastoral practice, but the best pastoral practice is grounded in solid, durable dogma. In the twilight of the 1580s, no theoretical, theological foundation had been established (at least not in England)<sup>32</sup> to undergird the pastoral work of Chaderton, Greenham, and others. Perkins’s theological task was to rethink the identification of assurance and faith. Perkins devoted his best and final years to working out this question.

Perkins wrote his first treatise on the doctrine of

conversion in 1588: *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration, Whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace*. In subsequent works, Perkins would elaborate on his initial treatise, but the basic shape of his program changed little. He might slightly alter terminology or consolidate various steps, but the substance of his contribution remained the same.

In total, Perkins wrote eight works touching on the doctrine of conversion:

*Treatise...Unto A Declaration* (1588)  
*Golden Chain* (Latin 1590; English 1591)  
*Foundation of Christian Religion* (1591)  
*On the Nature & Practice of Repentance* (1593)  
*On the Combat of the Flesh and the Spirit* (1593)  
*Exposition of the Creed* (1595)  
*Grain of Mustard Seed* (1597)  
*Three Books on Cases of Conscience* (posth. pub., 1604)

It is not difficult to establish that this was one of Perkins’s signal contributions to a developing Puritan practical divinity. Perkins made a key move to strengthen the doctrine of assurance. Up to this point, assurance was measured against its fully grown form. Perkins instead focused on the seed form, particularly the mustard seed form. He opened his treatise by that name stating: “It is a very necessary point to be known: what is the least measure of grace that can befall the true child of God, lesser than which there is no grace effectual to salvation?”<sup>33</sup>

Perkins thus aimed to describe the precise boundary between effectual and “ineffectual calling,” with special attention paid to Gifford’s “carnal gospelers.” This switch from maximal to minimal is key for at least three reasons. First, the weak Christian is prone to measure herself by what she lacks, not what she possesses. Pointing to potential fullness does little to alleviate her anxiety. Second, it seeks out that precise boundary between true believers and false professors aiming not to exclude, but rather to realize full inclusion in Christ. This is why assurance and conversion were so closely bound up for Perkins. Third, it distinguishes gospel assurance from its bastard cousin, pharisaical fleshly self-righteousness.

Gospel assurance is not had at the end of some moral reformation project, but it is produced through the working of faith in a Christian’s heart. Perkins identifies faith and assurance, relating them as a seed to the fully grown tree. Matthew Payne rightly notes that Perkins distinguished faith and assurance by viewing them as two stages in a process of organic growth (Payne, *Perkins’ Doctrines* p. 325).

30. Winship, “Weak Christians, Backsliders, and Carnal Gospelers,” p. 470.

31. Laurence Chaderton, *Excellent & Godly Sermon*, p. 8

32. Richard Muller seeks to show ways in which Perkins developed the work of Theodore Beza, especially his *Tabula*. Richard A. Muller, “Perkins’ A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo Salutis?,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 1 (1978): 68–81. See also Richard A. Muller, “Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (1980): 308–34. There were also parallel developments happening in the Low Countries during the 16–18th centuries. These developments also had an impact on the American heirs of the continental Reformed tradition. See Cornelis Pronk, *A Goodly Heritage: The Secession of 1834 and Its Impact on Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and North America* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), esp. pp. 1–38 for an overview.

33. *The Works of William Perkins*, edited by J. Stephen Yuille (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 8.643.

Perkins even discussed preparations for faith. In light of later concepts of so-called “preparationism,” it is important to note that Perkins emphasized divine initiative. “He [God] prepares the heart that it may be capable of faith” (Perkins, *A Treatise on whether...*, 8.467). Perkins outlined four things required for the heart to be prepared for salvation: knowledge of the Word, sight of sin, sorrow for the sin, good despair.

What is remarkable about these preparations is that Perkins considered them to be less than saving faith. Indeed, the first portion of Perkins’ *Treatise whether...* delves into how far the reprobate might go in making a profession of faith. In terms of the faculty psychology of Perkins’s day, his doctrine of conscience is relevant to the question of conversion.

In both faculties (intellect and will), there is a remnant of the image of God. The will remains free in relationship to natural objects; it is able to choose that which is outwardly good. The intellect retains notions of good and evil. The conscience, as a *supra*-faculty, thus also retains its judicial function, even prior to regeneration. It is thus placed between man and God so that man knows God’s judgment of him. (Payne, Perkins’s Doctrines, pg. 326). This is why we might expect the unregenerate person to give some response to the things of God.

Distinguishing between the knowledge the reprobate and the elect have of God’s word, Perkins says the reprobate’s knowledge is only general and confused because it is not joined “with a feeling and inward experience of the thing known” (*Treatise on whether...*, 8.468). Similarly, the elect possess “a free and frank heart” in connection with living in light of this knowledge.

The distinguishing mark between the true believer and false professor is that the former’s desire for God sees Christ himself as his most precious end.

After the consideration of God’s mercy in Christ, he comes in the second place to see, feel, and from his heart to acknowledge himself to stand in need of Christ, and to stand in need of every drop of his most precious blood. Third, the Lord stirs up in his heart a vehement desire and longing after Christ and His merits. (*Treatise on whether...*, 8.473)

Here Perkins described the least measure of faith, that mustard seed one must have to be a Christian.

And it may be thus described (as the least measure of faith), when a man of a humble heart does not yet feel the assurance of the forgiveness of his own sins, and yet he is persuaded they are pardonable, desiring that

they might be pardoned, and therefore prays to God that He would pardon them and give him strength to leave them. (*Treatise on whether...*, p. 475)

This least measure of faith marks the conversion of a sinner. Many years will pass before the Christian attains full assurance. Full assurance, or the greatest measure of faith, is when a Christian has “a full persuasion of the mercy of God, for it is the strength and ripeness of faith” (*Treatise on whether...*, p. 476).

What implications does this have for pastoral practice? The pastor’s job is three-fold. It is first to help the candidate discern his heart’s posture toward Christ. Is he fearful only? Or, is there some longing after Christ? Does he have only a sense of guilt that flows from pride, or might there be a confident apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ? To his *Treatise on Whether...*, Perkins appended a dialogue between a pastor and a believer wrestling with assurance. He undoubtedly meant it as a model for other ministers to follow in their parish.

The second pastoral implication is the necessity of partnering with the conscience to terrify those lost in sin. In his *The Art of Prophesying*,<sup>34</sup> Perkins encouraged the preacher to use the law so that ignorant and unteachable unbelievers would be “pricked in heart and terrified.” This was done so they might become teachable. Further, those made teachable still needed to be made to sorrow over sin. This too was done through preaching the law. One can imagine Perkins’s advice also being practiced in the counseling office.

Third, Perkins described how God might use desertions in the life of a Christian, terrifying the conscience. God uses such desertions to disclose some hidden sin to the believer and revive the hidden graces of the heart that he might prevent future sins. This information is meant to arm the believer—and his pastor—to understand those seasons when confidence may wane. This would allow the believer to attain the full assurance Perkins described by holding more singularly to the unfailing mercy of God.

Based on what we have considered, Perkins laid a theological foundation for a new Puritan practical divinity. He applied a Reformed scholastic faculty psychology to the problem of assurance and conversion. He developed a dynamic and progressive view of faith. This allowed him to link conversion to assurance, while simultaneously distinguishing the two. In this way, Perkins furnished future pastors with important theological tools and categories as they carried out their ministry.

34. See especially *The Works of William Perkins* (vol 10., ed. by Joseph A. Pipa and Stephen Yuille (2020), pp. 335–336.

*Rutherford: A Pastor Equipped For His Task*

Turning to Samuel Rutherford on the theme of conversion, it must be noted that this Scottish Divine has received hardly the attention he deserves. Before the 1997 publication of John Coffey's dissertation, *Politics, Religion, and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, there had been no modern biographical treatment of Rutherford.<sup>35</sup> In Coffey's estimation, Rutherford died knowing everything he worked for was disintegrating. His conquest for a godly Scotland was giving way to a trans-Atlantic shift "to religiously pluralistic societies and from the Reformation to the Enlightenment" (Coffey, *Politics...*, p. 29). Coffey's work stimulated interest in Rutherford. A decade later, Guy Richard's *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford* was released.<sup>36</sup> More recently, Matthew Vogan has edited and published an introduction to Rutherford's theology.<sup>37</sup> There is a growing interest in Rutherford<sup>38</sup>, and Reformation Heritage Books is currently working on an edition of Rutherford's *Works*, as many have not been reprinted since the seventeenth century and others have never been translated out of Latin.

Rutherford is known most widely for his pastoral letters. His work on political theology and ecclesiology is a formidable but distant second in notoriety. Third, and sometimes overlooked, is his role at the Westminster Assembly. According to Coffey, Rutherford

35. Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

36. Paternoster Studies in Christian History and Thought. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008.

37. Matthew Vogan, ed., *Samuel Rutherford: An Introduction to His Theology* (Edinburgh: Scottish Reformation Society, 2012).

38. The most scholarly publication is Aaron Clay Denlinger, ed., *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology (1560–1775)* (London: T&T Clark, 2015). Those interested in Rutherford studies are encouraged to track down Matthew Vogan's "Fresh Directions in Rutherford Studies" in *Studies in Puritanism and Piety* 1:1 (2019), 3–27.

39. See Robert Arnold, "Was Samuel Rutherford A Mystic?" *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2:1 (2010): 182–196. Perkins has also been called a Pietist. He even receives a chapter in Blackwell's *The Great Theologians* series on Pietism. See Raymond A. Blacketer, "William Perkins (1558–1602)," pp. 38–51 in *The Pietist Theologians*, edited by Carter Lindberg (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005). The perspective taken in this article is that Perkins was a Reformed Scholastic theologian, and that Puritanism, like Presbyterianism, was a distinct historical reality from Pietism. Whatever family resemblances may exist among these historical movements, conflating them would commit the historical fallacies of anachronism and reification. In this way, this article is indebted to Johannes Wallman. See Johannes Wallman, "Was ist Pietismus?" *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 20 (1994): 11–27; Carter Lindberg, "Introduction," pp. 1–20 in *The Pietist Theologians*.

40. Carl Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), pp. 183–189.

the controversialist was forgotten; Rutherford the Evangelical mystic remained" (*Politics...*, p. 5). Like Perkins, Rutherford attracted ill-fit labels as subsequent generations grappled with his life and thought.<sup>39</sup>

This article is concerned with Rutherford's pastoral practice and the scholastic theology undergirding it. In the appendix to his handbook on history writing,<sup>40</sup> Carl Trueman addresses the question of continuity between figures set together in any historical inquiry. This question is pressing for two reasons. The challenges posed by Richard A. Muller and Willem Van Asselt against the older scholarship on post-Reformation theology have been described as debates about continuity versus discontinuity. Second, the present article poses something of a continuity versus discontinuity question. Trueman frames the question by emphasizing historical texts as actions. A given writer is *doing* something—in addition to writing—when he publishes a given text. For our present purposes, we might ask, "Were Rutherford and Perkins doing the same or similar things when they wrote?" In terms of continuity, Trueman outlines three lines for evaluating continuity: doctrine, philosophical framework, and questions or problems.

Rutherford and Perkins' shared philosophical framework is beyond doubt. Both men had received a properly scholastic education. They both adopted an essentially Aristotelian outlook mediated through the thought of Petrus Ramus. The remainder of this article demonstrates that Rutherford applied the doctrines articulated by Perkins to certain pastoral problems, much as Perkins had encouraged in his *A Treatise Tending unto a Declaration, Whether a Man Be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace*. In short, the article contends that the previous paragraph's question should be a resounding, "Yes!"

Rutherford made a distinction between true believers and false professors. Rutherford used this distinction in his preaching and letter writing during his pastoral and educational ministry. Rutherford's corpus offers us a unique insight into the practical pastoral dimensions of his ministry and career. Many of his writings began as sermons, especially noteworthy for the present study are his published communion addresses. His letters also document his counseling ministry to many friends and other correspondents.

*A Durable, Dogmatic Foundation*

One of the direct connections to Perkins's theology of conversion is Rutherford's belief in preparations occurring before conversion. As with Perkins, Rutherford did not view these preparations as works of the law. In his

*Christ Dying & Drawing Sinners to Himself*, he explicitly rejected the idea—saying that humiliation, sorrow for sin, and desire for a physician “do no more render a soul nearer to Christ and saving grace, than the want of these dispositions... Not any protestant divines, I know, make true repentance a work of the law going before faith in Christ.” (pp. 279, 281). Rutherford was aware that some viewed preparations as actions one might take to merit grace or favor from God.<sup>41</sup> Rutherford clearly operated assuming preparations were a known, albeit contested, topic amongst Scottish clergy. For some of Rutherford’s contemporaries, these “preparations” were no longer seen as works God wrought in the soul, but dispositions or actions being produced by man’s work.

Nevertheless, Rutherford advocated for ministers to draw on these steps in their ministry. “To believe and not be humbled, and despair of salvation in yourself, is to presume.” (p. 286) What’s more, Rutherford advocated preaching the terrors of the Law,<sup>42</sup> and preaching wrath even to believers. Responding to the objections of Tobias Crisp, Rutherford held that we ought to let professors know “if they believe not, and walk not worthy of Christ, in all holy duties; their faith is fancy, and a dead faith, and the wrath of God abides on them, and they are not believers.” (p. 285) At the very least, Rutherford’s expressions resembled the theology articulated by Perkins. There were movements of the soul prior to conversion, not works rendered by the will of man.

Rutherford’s views on the conscience also resembled Perkins’s thinking. Admittedly, Rutherford did not write a treatise on the conscience, nor did he expound a faculty psychology like Perkins. He appears to have assumed it. In his *Influences of Grace*, Rutherford described the workings of conscience in the unregenerate (citing Judas as an example) and of the damned—still presumably unregenerate—by making a distinction. The unregenerate conscience operates in a two-fold way: it is awakened penally or awakened sinfully. Awakened penally, the conscience “primarily gnaws and torments itself for sin as punished.” The sinfully awakened conscience will excuse itself by blaspheming God, accusing Him of a miserly withholding of grace. Though not exact, this distinction is remarkably like Perkins’s descriptions of the remnant of God’s image and what corruption our conscience has inherited from Adam.

Finally, Rutherford places the boundary between false professor and true believer in much the same place. Having denied that one might be confident through “preparations,” Rutherford placed the transition in an apprehension of the mercy and love of Christ. He wrote,

“As a constellation is not one single starre, but many; so the converted soule observeth a confluence, a bundle, an army of free loves, all in one cluster, meeting and growing upon one stalk... that I was not sleeping when it was spoken, free love; that the Holy Ghost drove that word into the soule, as a nayle fastened by the Master of the assembly, it was free mercy: so that there’s a meeting of shining favours of God, in obtaining mercy; and this would be observed.” (*Christ Dying*, p. 277)<sup>43</sup>

*Applying Truth about Hearts to Problems of the Heart* Rutherford’s ministry in Anwoth<sup>44</sup> involved ministering to the hearts of congregation members. His pastoral letters disclose the regularity with which Rutherford engaged the issue of assurance of salvation. He regularly received correspondence from those doubting their salvation. His preaching ministry has been described as embodying a plain style in line with the *Directory for Publick Worship* he later helped produce. Rutherford also aimed at the affections as much as the intellect in his vivid illustrations. Rutherford’s preaching style was criticized by the pseudonymous John Curate in *The Scottish Presbyterian Eloquence*. During the Restoration era, conforming ministers criticized Rutherford’s use of metaphor and imagery as “turning Religion into unaccountable Phansies and Enthusiasm’s [sic].”<sup>45</sup>

In his *Communion Sermons* and his *Trial & Triumph of Faith*, Rutherford used the concept of desertions in the Christian life. “Christ’s sanctified cross droppeth honey; Christ’s gloomings, and sad desertions, though to the believer they be death and hell, yet have much of heaven in them.” (*Trial & Triumph*, p. 259) The language takes an amorous turn in his communion address. “It is true, sense and feeling wither, for it is not its time of year to grow; but now under these desertions humility grows, feeling of guilt grows, the love and longing to be kissed with the kisses of His mouth grows, a care to seek God’s face grows, and smells sweetly like the rose in June.” (*Communion Sermons*, p. 221).

41. *Christ Dying & Drawing*, pp. 239–240, 257.

42. “Ane Catechisme Containing the Soume of Christian Religion,” in A. F. Mitchell (ed.), *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (London, 1886), p. 201. I am indebted to Matthew Vogan, “Samuel Rutherford’s Experience and Doctrine of Conversion” *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal* 5 (2015): 35–62, for this citation.

43. Quoted in Vogan, *Rutherford’s Experience and Doctrine of Conversion* p. 53.

44. On Rutherford’s ministry in Anwoth, see Bruce McLennan, *Samuel Rutherford of Anwoth: A Study in Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2022).

45. Matthew Vogan, “Samuel Rutherford and the Theology and Practice of Preaching” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 17 (2021): 100.

In his letters, Rutherford addressed the bairns (children) and the lairds who had written him or who had been committed to his charge. One correspondent stands out from the rest: John Gordon, the Younger, of Cardoness. He stands out because he was the object of Rutherford's pastoral affection and fervent evangelism as a covenant child. Living as a profligate and brutish with his wife, John Gordon the younger of Cardoness was the recipient of many of Rutherford's letters. Rutherford encouraged the young man to consult his conscience. Not unafraid to threaten, Rutherford spoke not only of hell but also of the worldly punishments of a deformed conscience and the harm done to his family (*Letters of Rutherford*, p. 258). Rutherford was not content that Gordon should acknowledge the doctrines of the *Scot's Confession*. He pressed the young man to reform his ways, but also to cherish Christ above all others. Rutherford's final letter to the younger Cardoness hints that Mr. Gordon had been soundly converted to Christ.

#### THE LEGACY OF CONVERSION & COLONIAL PRESBYTERIANISM

English Puritanism and Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism bestowed distinct legacies on subsequent generations of Protestants. Their comparative subtleties need further study which accounts for the theological, social, political, and personal factors. As it relates to the doctrine of conversion, however, we have seen there is more affinity than rivalry.

In her overlooked work, Marilyn J. Westerkamp shows the Scotch-Irish origins of many of the so-called innovations of the First Great Awakening in Colonial America. These were not innovations, as much as they were carryovers from an earlier period of history in Scotland and Ireland. Westerkamp's *Triumph of the Laity* was a notable exception to a trend in American Presbyterian scholarship, which has almost uniformly isolated the American and British contexts. Recently, historical scholarship has begun to speak of Trans-Atlantic perspectives on the theological developments of the 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>46</sup> This is a welcome advance as it provides an additional guard against reading the historical data in the uncertain light of present-day theological

debates. More work is required to situate colonial Presbyterianism within its trans-Atlantic context. Questions for further inquiry include: what role did controversies prevalent at the four ancient Scottish universities have on Scottish, Irish, and American ordination practices and debates? What did local church sessions and presbyteries practice related to church membership and admission to communion seasons?

This article has attempted to show that two leading figures of English Puritanism and Scottish Presbyterianism had a shared set of beliefs and common pastoral practices in connection with a theology of conversion. They shared a common theological psychology, a common philosophical framework, and they applied that framework in substantially similar ways. The current scholarly consensus among historians of American Presbyterian scholarship, therefore, needs revising. There may have been rivalries between English Puritan and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in the colonies, but one thing is clear. They did not arise from competing doctrines of conversion or competing conceptions of what it means to truly be a Christian. ■



Samuel Rutherford (c. 1600–1661)

46. Examples include Mark Jones & Michael A.G. Haykin, *A New Divinity: Transatlantic Reformed Evangelical Debates during the Long Eighteenth Century* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018); Charles Scott Sealy, "Church Authority and Non-Subscription Controversies in Early 18th Century Presbyterianism" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2010); Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).