

# Protestant Reformed Theological Journal

---

VOLUME XXXVI

April 2003

Number 2

---

## **In This Issue:**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Editor's Notes .....                             | 1  |
| Setting in Order the Things That Are Wanting (7) |    |
| Robert D. Decker .....                           | 2  |
| A Comparison of Exegesis:                        |    |
| John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas (3)               |    |
| Russell J. Dykstra .....                         | 10 |
| In the Space of Six Days (2)                     |    |
| Mark L. Shand .....                              | 23 |
| The Relationship of the Reformed Churches        |    |
| of Scotland, England, Western and Eastern Europe |    |
| From the 1500s to the 1700s                      |    |
| Chris Coleborn .....                             | 46 |
| Book Reviews .....                               | 68 |



ISSN: 1070-8138

## Editor's Notes

Russell J. Dykstra presents the third installment of his four-part series on "A Comparison of Exegesis: John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas." According to the professor, two main differences emerge, which clearly indicate serious differences in the interpretation that the two men give of Ephesians 1:1-14 and 6:10-17. Dykstra finds plenty of Medieval scholasticism in Aquinas' exegesis. Also, Aquinas used the Latin Vulgate. Calvin, on the other hand, was able to work with the Greek, and this resulted in a correct translation and, therefore, correct exposition.

Mark L. Shand presents the second part of his series titled, "In the Space of Six Days." He concludes convincingly, "The approach to the days of Genesis 1 that prevailed at the end of the eighteenth century is almost unrecognizable when compared with the one that parades itself in the halls of theological learning at the end of the twentieth century. What has led to the change? Quite clearly, it is not greater exegetical insight, but so-called scientific discoveries."

Chris Coleborn relates a fascinating account of "The Relationship of the Reformed Churches of Scotland, England, Western and Eastern Europe from the 1500s to the 1700s." Rev. Coleborn draws lessons from two characteristics about this relationship: 1) There was a mutual respect, care, and help of one another in spite of differences. 2) There were principles that undergirded the managing of their differences and similarities. Can we today learn lessons from these in our own ecumenical work with others with whom we differ, but share a "like precious faith"?

Undersigned continues his exposition of the Epistle to Titus.

RDD

---

# Setting in Order the Things That Are Wanting

## An Exposition of Paul's Epistle to Titus (7)

**Robert D. Decker**

Again we remind the reader that this exposition of the Epistle to Titus was originally given in the form of "chapel talks" by the author during the weekly Wednesday morning chapel services at the seminary. The author began the exposition in the 1997-1998 school year and completed the series during the second semester of the 1999-2000 school year. The exposition is being published in the *Journal* with the hope that it will prove helpful to a wider audience of the people of God in their study of this brief epistle in the sacred Scriptures. So that both those familiar with the Greek language and those who are unable to work with the Greek may benefit from this study, all references to the Greek will be placed in footnotes. The translation of the Greek text is the author's. We present this exposition pretty much as it was spoken in the chapel services, application and all. Perhaps this will help the reader gain some insight into what goes on in the seminary.

### **Chapter Two**

#### **Verse 11**

For the grace of God bringing salvation (or, which brings salvation) hath appeared<sup>1</sup> to all men.

The text begins with the conjunction "for,"<sup>2</sup> which indicates

---

1. In his *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, A.T. Robertson translates this second aorist passive indicative form of the verb *epiphainoo*, "did appear."

2. *Gar*, in the Greek.

that this eleventh verse states the ground or reason for the preceding context. In other words, Titus must speak the things that become or befit sound doctrine. And that which befits sound (healthful) doctrine are all the various exhortations that Paul commands Titus to bring to the aged men, the aged women, the young women, the young men, and the servants or slaves. In bringing all these exhortations, Titus himself must be a pattern (example, model) of good works. Why must these admonitions/exhortations be brought to the aged and younger men and women and slaves by Titus the preacher? Why must Titus be an example of good works? The answer is: because the grace of God bringing salvation hath appeared to all men.

The fact that this is true leads us to a proper understanding of the identity of the “all men” mentioned in the text.<sup>3</sup> Well known, it is, that Arminians, Pelagians, and Universalists pounce on a text like this, claiming that it proves their teaching that God in the end saves all men head for head, soul for soul. Or at least they claim that texts like this prove that God makes salvation in Christ possible for and available to all men on the condition that they accept God’s well-meant offer of the gospel and persevere in the faith.

That this position is false is evident from the fact that not all are saved! Scripture teaches that God, before the foundation of the world, elected some in Christ to everlasting life and glory. For these and these alone Christ made the perfect atonement on the cross and was raised from the dead and exalted to the Father’s right hand. Further, Scripture teaches that God, from eternity, repro-bated others in the way of their own sinful wickedness to damnation (see, e.g., Tit. 1:1; Eph. 1, 2; Rom. 8, 9, 10, 11). Israel is God’s chosen, not the other nations in the Old Testament era. Add to this the fact that not all Israel is saved. Scripture makes plain that it’s only the spiritual seed that God has chosen to salvation; the natural seed God hates and destroys (Jer. 30 and Rom. 9). The overwhelming testimony of Scripture (and this great truth is reflected powerfully and eloquently in the Reformed confessions) is that God

---

3. *Pasin anthroopois*, in the Greek.

---

saves only those whom He loves, predestinated, and graciously elected in Christ from eternity.

That the Arminian, Pelagian, Universalist teaching is erroneous is also plainly evident from the immediate context here in Titus two. The preacher must exhort all these various members of the church because the grace of God bringing salvation hath appeared to all men, i.e., to all classes and stations of men: aged men, young men, aged women, young women, free men and women, and Masters and slaves. Indeed, God is no respecter of persons. God elected and saves His beloved in Christ out of all nations, classes, and stations in life. All these are one in Christ according to Galatians three (study the entire chapter, but note especially verses 26-29).

To all these "... hath appeared the grace of God bringing salvation."<sup>4</sup> Grace has a variety of meanings in Scripture. The fundamental, root meaning of the term is loveliness, charm, or beauty. From this root meaning is conveyed the following meanings:

1. It often means the unmerited favor given by God to His people in Christ. An example of grace used in this sense is found in Ephesians 2:8-10, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Another example of this meaning of grace is found in Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...."
2. Grace sometimes refers to that which is its fruit, viz., salvation itself. II Peter 3:18 speaks of the necessity of growing in the "grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ...." Grace in this verse is the grace of salvation in Jesus Christ.
3. Then too, there are a few instances in the New Testament where grace means thanks or gratitude for the wonderful blessings of salvation given us by God in Jesus Christ.

---

4. "*Epephanee...hee karis tou theou sooteerios*," in the Greek.

Whatever the particular sense in which grace is used in a passage (and this is true of this 11<sup>th</sup> verse of Titus 2 as well), it is God's grace. The text speaks of the grace of God.<sup>5</sup> This means that grace is an attribute or characteristic or virtue of God's divine being. God is the God of all grace, the gracious God. God is the God of infinite, perfect beauty and loveliness in all the virtues of His divine being.

This being the case, God is the source of all grace. There is no other grace than God's sovereign and particular grace shown to His chosen in Jesus Christ. Think of what this means! God by the power of His grace takes us and all of His elect in Christ, undeserving, totally depraved by nature, sinners who are able to do no good at all, God takes us out of the misery, the filth, the ugliness of our sins, and out of the curse of His wrath into the glory of His own covenant fellowship. This has the emphasis in the text, for it's "the grace of God that bringeth salvation..." (see footnotes 4 and 5).

Still more, even our gratitude for that salvation is the gift of God's grace in Christ. Thanks, after all, is the believer's whole life of sanctification. It's walking, living in obedience to God's law. And that is possible only by the power of the Holy Spirit who works that grace in us!

This grace of God, which brings salvation, "*hath appeared or did appear*" to all men (see footnote 1 on this verb). The grace of God that brings salvation has been clearly shown to all classes of men. It has appeared in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's grace was shown when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. God's grace appeared when Jesus spoke gracious words, healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons.

God's grace appeared especially when Jesus suffered the agonies of hell under the wrath of God (which we so richly deserved) on the cross for our sins and for the sins of all those given Him by His Father. God's grace appeared when Jesus arose from the dead on the morning of the third day. When Jesus was exalted to the Father's right hand in glory, God's grace appeared.

---

5. "*hee kaaris tou theou sooteerios.*"

---

It was shown when the exalted Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church. And God's grace *will* appear in all of God's glorious beauty and power when Jesus comes again to destroy the present heavens and earth and create a new heaven and earth (II Pet. 3).

That grace of God which brings salvation in Jesus appeared to men of all classes and stations in life: to men like Peter, James, John, and the rest of the apostles; to women like Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene, Salome, and others; to aged men and women like Simeon and Anna. To younger men and women; even to babes, whom He took in His arms and blessed with all the blessings of salvation; to rich men like Joseph of Arimathaea, Nicodemus, and the young ruler whom Jesus loved; to poor beggars like blind Bartimaeus — to all of them was shown the marvelous grace of God in Jesus. In one word, Jesus and the grace of God bringing salvation have appeared to lost sinners of every class and station in life!

By means of the preaching of the Word, the chief means of grace, God's saving grace in Christ Jesus continues to appear to His elect. Preaching, yes! That is the chief task of the minister of the gospel. To you students who aspire to the great calling of the ministry comes the call of God, "Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine." Speak that blessed gospel of God's grace in Christ to all in the congregation: aged and young, men and women, rich and poor. And when by God's grace you are called and ordained by Christ through His church, show yourselves as examples of good works!

To educate by lecture and by the example of our lives, and in this way to prepare you students for the wonderful calling of the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, is what this seminary is all about. May God in His mercy and grace in Christ give us the grace we need faithfully to instruct and faithfully to receive that instruction so that our pulpits and mission fields may be occupied by godly, competent, faithful pastors and teachers. In this way our churches will not be tossed about by the winds of false doctrine, but will grow up into their head Christ and speak the truth in love!

## Verse 12

Teaching us (or instructing us) in order that, denying (renouncing or forsaking) ungodliness (lack of reverence toward God, impiety) and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present age.

This verse tells us what that “grace of God bringing salvation” teaches us. In one word, it teaches us or instructs us to live a sanctified life in this present age. The grace of God instructs us to deny, in the sense of renouncing or forsaking, ungodliness and worldly lusts. “Ungodliness”<sup>6</sup> means lack of reverence toward God. One who is ungodly scorns, blasphemes the holy name of God. He’s impious. That ungodliness is the wicked expression of his deep-seated hatred of God and His Christ and His church. He lacks any reverence at all towards God. The ungodly are without godliness. We need to renounce it and forsake it and have nothing to do with it.

This involves not merely quietly renouncing, forsaking ungodliness in our own lives. It means we actively renounce ungodliness. When, for example, we observe the ungodly cursing, swearing, blaspheming God’s holy name or sarcastically ridiculing God and His Christ, we admonish them and call them to repent and warn them of the judgments of the holy and righteous God. We must have zero tolerance for ungodliness. And certainly this also means we must fearlessly and sharply preach against ungodliness.

We are further instructed to forsake worldly lusts.<sup>7</sup> “Worldly” must be taken in the sense of the world of unbelief and sin, the fallen world, which has the character of this present corrupt age. “Lust” is to desire that which God forbids. This is all that one finds in the ungodly world (see I John 2:15-17). Hence we must not love that world, but renounce it.

Worldly lusts take on a variety of forms. It may be sexual lust, adultery, fornication. It may be a carnal desire for the pleasures of sin, pursuing our own pleasures rather than worship-

---

6. The Greek has *asebeian*.

7. The Greek has *taskosmikias epithumias*.



---

ing the Lord. It may be a love of money, a desire to amass a fortune. It may be a craving for power.

All these worldly lusts we are instructed by the grace of God to renounce and forsake. We must actively fight against them and put them away from us. We must have nothing to do with them. Again, we preachers must understand that this must be a part of our preaching. We must warn God's people to renounce ungodliness and worldly lusts. The danger that God's people yield to these lusts is real. It is only a very small remnant in the churches today who take this with any degree of seriousness. Worldly lusts abound. Let us be warned and let us be resolved by the grace of God to forsake and renounce these worldly lusts.

Positively, the grace of God instructs us to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present age. These are the very opposites of ungodliness and worldly lusts. "Soberly" conveys the ideas of to be of sound mind, to exercise self control, to curb one's passions, to be temperate and discreet.<sup>8</sup> This means we may not be drunkards. No drunkard inherits the kingdom. This also means that we must be spiritually sober. We must exercise self control and be temperate. We must not be given to passions. Only in this way are we able to discern right from wrong, good from evil.

God's grace also teaches us to live righteously. "Righteously" means justly, agreeably to right, uprightly.<sup>9</sup> We live righteously when, by God's grace, we think, speak, and act in obedience to God's will expressed in Scripture and summed in His Law. Living righteously is loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and loving the neighbor as ourselves.

Finally, we are instructed by God's grace to live godly, which means with reverence toward God.<sup>10</sup> How this needs emphasis in our day! We must be in awe of God. He is, after all, the sovereign Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. He's the God who saved us in Jesus Christ from our sin and death. He's the God before whom the angels do cover their faces and cease not

---

8. *Soophronoos*, in the Greek.

9. The Greek has *dikaioos*.

10. The Greek has *euseboos*.

to cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. 6:3). This one, only, true, and living God we must reverently fear and worship.

And thus we must live. Living godly is more than a formal confession of faith, more than attending church. It's all that and more! It's living godly in our homes with our spouses and children. It's living godly at work and at play. It's living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil age.

If God's people are to be instructed by God's grace in that kind of living, they will need faithful preachers of the Word. They will need men of God who give themselves now to preparation for that great work so that in days to come they may be able faithfully, diligently, courageously, and prayerfully to preach the Word. ●

---

# **A Comparison of Exegesis: John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas (3)**

**Russell J. Dykstra**

The aim presently is to examine a specimen of the exegesis of Aquinas and Calvin in light of the comparison of these two giants in their traditions made in the previous two articles. The specific comparison will be taken from the exegetical work of these men in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Ephesians 1:1-14 is chosen because it is a doctrinal passage, and one in which a particular doctrine of controversy is set forth, namely, predestination. The second passage is Ephesians 6:10-17, because it is a more practical application of the truth to the lives of the believers.

Aquinas' exegesis of Ephesians was delivered as lectures, almost certainly in the period of his teaching in Italy from 1259 to 1268. Most scholars believe that they were given while Aquinas was teaching in the court of Urban IV in Orvieto (1261-1264).<sup>1</sup> They were transcribed by Reginald and approved by Thomas Aquinas before publication.

Exactly when Calvin wrote his commentary on Ephesians is not known, but it was printed in 1548, about the same time as his commentaries were published on Paul's epistles to the Galatians, Philippians, and Colossians.<sup>2</sup> They were reprinted in 1556 and again in 1557 with some revision.<sup>3</sup> He began his series of forty-eight sermons on Ephesians in 1558.<sup>4</sup>

---

1. Matthew L. Lamb, O.C.S.O in the introduction to the *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, by Thomas Aquinas (Albany: Magi Books, Inc., 1966), p. 28, citing Mandonnet.

2. W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, translated by Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 96-97.

3. Parker, *Calvin the Expositor*, p. 187.

4. de Greef, *Writings of Calvin*, p.112.

Both Calvin and Aquinas like to explain a book in its context, which begins with an introduction to the book. Calvin customarily gives "The Argument" of the book at the beginning of the commentary, or in the first sermon on a given book. Often these introductions are a concise, even gripping, exposition that sets forth plainly the theme of the book and, if it can be determined, the purpose for which it was written. His introduction to Ephesians, however, is not such an argument. Calvin supplies a bit of history on the city of Ephesus, and then gives an overview of the Epistle by summarizing the contents of each chapter.

In the *sermon* on Ephesians 1:1-3, Calvin gives a slightly more concise, though not much more descriptive, summary of the epistle when he says,

The sum of this Epistle which I have now taken in hand to expound is that St. Paul confirms such as had been already instructed in the gospel, in order that they might know that that is what they must rest upon, as upon the true and perfect wisdom, and that it is not lawful to add anything to it.<sup>5</sup>

Aquinas, characteristically, has a general scheme for all the New Testament books, and that under the theme of grace. "The gospels give us the origin of grace; the letters of Paul give us the power of grace; while the other books give us the realization of grace."<sup>6</sup>

In Aquinas' introduction to this epistle we find the three elements noted earlier: 1) allegorizing; 2) scholastic distinctions; and 3) references to the Glosses. The introduction is framed by an allegorization of Psalm 74:4, *I have strengthened its pillars*. Aquinas puts those words into the mouth of Paul, and makes the

---

5. John Calvin, *Sermons on The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), p. 7.

6. Thomas Aquinas, *Principium Fratris Thomae de Commendatione et Partitione Sacrae Scripturae*, p. 439, quoted by Thomas Franklin O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) p. 69.

---

*pillars* to be the "Church's faithful at Ephesus." This is apparently Aquinas' statement of the theme of the epistle.

The manner of dividing up the passages indicates a formal difference in exegesis between Calvin and Aquinas. The respective divisions are as follows:

### **Ephesians 1:1-14**

| <u>Aquinas' Lectures</u> | <u>Calvin's Commentary</u> | <u>Calvin's Sermons</u> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1-6a                     | 1-6                        | 1-3                     |
| 6b-7                     |                            | 3-4                     |
| 8-10                     | 7-12                       | 4-6                     |
| 11-12                    |                            | 7-10                    |
| 13-14                    | 13-14                      | 13-14                   |

### **Ephesians 6:10-17**

| <u>Aquinas' Lectures</u> | <u>Calvin's Commentary</u> | <u>Calvin's Sermons</u> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 10-12                    | 10-13                      | 10-12                   |
| 13-17                    | 14-20                      | 11-17                   |

This comparison reveals that Calvin and Aquinas agree little on how best to divide the text of Scripture in these passages.

The study of the exegesis of Aquinas and Calvin will be in two parts. This article contains an overview and will set forth those elements in their exegesis of Ephesians 1:1-4 and 6:10-17 that illustrate similarities and differences. The final installment (in the next issue of the *Journal*, D.V.) will examine the passage Ephesians 6:14-17 to compare how Aquinas and Calvin developed the concepts of the armor of salvation.

---

7. This and all quotations from Aquinas will be from his *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Albany: Magi Books, Inc., 1966). Since the quotations will be from the lectures in which he comments on the specific verses, the quotations can be easily found and no references will be given. Similarly, all quotations from Calvin's exegesis will be from his *Commentary on Ephesians* in *Calvin's Commentaries*, Translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), Vol. 21, and no references will be given.

**Thomas Aquinas' exegesis of Ephesians 1:1-14 and 6:10-17**

Consistent with his own testimony concerning the text of Scripture being the Word of God, Aquinas gives attention to the *words* of the text. In verses 1-6a, e.g., he discusses the terms apostle, grace, peace, and discusses the significance of the copula *and* between God and Father, etc. However, Aquinas' treatment of this passage might best be described as "superficial," though admittedly such a judgment is somewhat subjective. His commentary does not ordinarily develop the concepts, but lists ideas or implications connected with them. More detailed analyses are found in areas where the schoolmen were wont to dwell, as, for example, the discussion of God's will and possible causes and effects of God's will.

There is considerable evidence of medieval scholasticism in this exegesis. Five examples are noted.

First of all, Aquinas (1:6) gives the classic scholastic distinction between two kinds of grace — *gratia gratis data* and *gratia gratum faciens*. He opts for the latter in this passage — sanctifying grace.

As noted above, in his discussion of topics Aquinas is fond of providing divisions and subdivisions of the material. Having explained the salutation and greeting (1:1-2), Aquinas asserts that verse 3 is the heading of a large section that includes chapters 1-3. He writes: "Then when he says **Blessed be God...** in giving thanks, he strengthens them in good [recall Aquinas' introduction, RJD], and he does this in three ways." These three ways amount to chapters 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Next he divides chapter 1 into three parts: 1) blessings to all believers (vv. 3-7); 2) blessings to the apostles (vv. 8-12); and 3) blessings especially to the Ephesians (vv. 13ff.). Aquinas then further divides section one (blessings to all) into six parts. And he subdivides some of these to yet another level. He is constantly listing, but expounding little— four advantages of election, six characteristics of predestination, etc.

Thirdly, at times Aquinas employs the scholastic method of developing concepts according to the often tedious style followed in the *Summa*. He uses this in his treatment of 6:10 — "Someone might say.... He replies.... An objection: ...I reply...." And later, "I reply in two ways."

---

The fourth illustration of medieval scholastic influence is seen in the treatment of angels. In the exegesis of 6:12, Aquinas sets forth the scholastic doctrine of angels, complete with three levels of angels and the various distinctions among the angels at each level.

The final example (there are more) to be cited is Aquinas' reason as to why the blessing of God is greatly to be desired (1:3). The desirableness is connected with its *efficient cause*, its *material cause*, its *formal cause*, and its *end*, all of which Aquinas finds in verse three. This clearly reflects scholastic method and scholarship.

Aquinas makes use of several outside sources, as is evident from explicit reference. In the passages under consideration, it is evident that he employs Glosses, philosophy, and the church fathers.

**Glosses** — Aquinas acknowledges that he is following a Gloss on verses 6-7, even though he admits that it "seems to be a far-fetched interpretation." He refers to Glosses also in 1:10, 1:11, 1:14, and 6:12. In the entire commentary on Ephesians Aquinas makes reference to the Glosses at least thirteen times.<sup>8</sup>

**Philosophical influence** — In explaining Ephesians 1:4, taking adoption to be a *process*, not an event, Aquinas uses a philosophical argument to prove that this adoption (process) must "occur through the natural son" [i.e., Jesus]. Why? "It must be through contact with fire that something starts to burn since nothing obtains a share in some reality except through whatever is that reality by its very nature. Hence...." In addition, in 6:12, Aquinas quotes "the Philosopher" (Aristotle) to substantiate the exegesis he proposes.

**References to the fathers** — In these passages, Aquinas quotes Augustine twice (1:4, 11); he refers to Origen once and rejects his interpretation.

**References to apocryphal books** — To the other sources employed by Aquinas could be added apocryphal books. Admit-

---

8. Aquinas' *Commentary of Ephesians*, fn. 4, p. 270.

tedly, Aquinas does not consider this to be a reference “outside the Bible.” It is noted here for the sake of contrast with Calvin, who does not quote any apocryphal books in these passages. It should be noted that the number of references to apocryphal books is exceedingly small in comparison with the references to other passages of Scripture. In the passages under consideration, Aquinas refers to Ecclesiasticus in Ephesians 1:12 and 6:11, and to Wisdom in the Prologue and in 6:14.

An essential element of exegesis is that it must be free from the control of a church — not serving simply to substantiate church dogma. Aquinas does not always display such freedom in his exegesis. There are instances where Aquinas’ exegesis seems to be unduly influenced by the doctrine of the church, if not actually skewed to support the church.

**On saints** — Aquinas differentiates between the faithful and the saints (1:1 — ... *to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus*). He gives two possible interpretations. It may be that Paul means, “I, Paul, write about morals to those who are holy through the exercise of virtue, and about faith to those who believe with true knowledge.” Or it may mean “to the saints who are the elders and perfect [members], and to the faithful who are less experienced and imperfect.”<sup>9</sup> The church’s longstanding doctrine was that only some believers are saints, and thus are to be venerated. The practice of canonization was first officially practiced by Pope John XV in 993; and Pope Alexander III, in 1170,

---

9. Aquinas’ *Commentary of Ephesians*, p. 43. The fact that Aquinas worked from the Latin rather than the Greek may have contributed to his erroneous explanation. The Greek is τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφέσῳ καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. The Greek would indicate that the “saints in Ephesus” are the same individuals as the “faithful in Christ Jesus,” since in the Greek both are governed by the one definite article (τοῖς) and joined by καὶ. The Latin does not specify the same grammatically (*sanctis omnibus qui sunt Ephesi et fidelibus in Christo Iesu*) and would make it possible for Aquinas to interpret the phrase as he does.



---

made canonization the exclusive right of the pope.<sup>10</sup> Both options given by Thomas Aquinas preserve the church's doctrine and practice concerning saints.

**On predestination and merit** — Aquinas discusses the relation between merit and election and really adopts semi-Pelagianism, though he rejects the views of the Pelagians (significantly, identified thus: those “who held that the source of good works exists within ourselves”). Aquinas insists that “the reason for predestination is the will of God alone.” Yet he maintains that “in the realm of what is willed, effects are a motive for the divine will in such a way that a prior effect is the reason for a later one.” This corresponds with the scholastic device of allowing merit to be, in some way, a cause of predestination. With this logic, God wills to give grace to a man so that he does good works. The good works become the merit for salvation. For this reason God wills to predestinate this one to eternal life. In this way the scholastics could hold to merit in predestination (merit being the foundation of the Romish sacerdotal system), and yet claim that it was all of God, and even a free choice of God, as Aquinas does in this commentary.

One of the remarkable features of Aquinas' exegesis is his reliance on the Vulgate, as has been noted. This reliance has an immense and significant impact on the exegesis of Aquinas. It is striking that many of the differences in the exegesis of Aquinas and Calvin are due to Aquinas' use of and reliance on the Vulgate. Six concrete examples are here given.

1. In his exegesis of Ephesians 1:4, Aquinas understands the *καθὼς* (*according as*) to mean that God elects *in the same way* that He blesses, namely, by grace. The Vulgate's translation (*sicut*, meaning *as* or *just as*) opens the way for this interpretation. Calvin translates *καθὼς* with *quemadmodum* (*in what manner*), and understands this to mean that God blesses according as He chose us, i.e., that election is the foundation and cause of the blessings.

---

10. Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1979), vol. IV, p. 442-445.

2. It soon becomes evident that the division of the sections in chapter 1 has significance. While Calvin treats verses 7-12 as a unit, Aquinas excludes verse 7 from the section. This difference in division is due to the fact that the section 1:8-12 is expounded in radically different ways by Calvin and Aquinas. From the start, Aquinas sees this section as describing blessings to the apostles (and thus the clergy) which do not apply to the laity. Calvin does not so distinguish. How does Aquinas arrive at this position?

First, he claims that the first person plural pronoun, having been used five times in verses 3-7, and each time including all believers, suddenly in verses 8-12 refers only to the apostles. He does not give the grounds for the shift in the antecedent.

However, erroneous doctrine, combined with the Vulgate's translation, gives the bad directions for Aquinas to proceed down this path. The first instance is in verse 8, where for ἡς ἐπερίσσευσεν ἐν ἡμῶς (*Wherein he hath abounded toward us*, KJV, referring to the riches of God's grace) the Vulgate has *quae superabundavit in nobis* (*which [grace] hath 'superabounded' in us*). [Calvin translates the Greek: *Qua exundavit in nos* (*Which hath overflowed in us*). The point is that the Vulgate leads Aquinas to interpret this to mean that God gives a grace to apostles above and beyond what He gives to others. Why? They are the pastors of the church. In addition, he says, "Greater dignity was preordained by God to some saints, and hence he infused grace more abundantly into them." So, the obvious conclusion is that to the clergy of the church, as pastors, God gives a grace above what the laity receive! [Incidentally, the verb περισσεύειν is used in Romans 15:13; 2 Cor. 8:7, 9:8, and other places, where the reference is obviously to all believers, not just to apostles or clergy. Aquinas is not using Scripture to interpret Scripture.]

The second significant impetus to this exegesis comes in verse 9, where the Vulgate translates μυστήριον (*mystery*, KJV) as *sacramentum* (the word from which *sacrament* is derived). [Note: Calvin translates it *arcano*, i.e., *secret* or *hidden*]. Although Aquinas does not interpret the word as an official sacrament of the church, this would be another reason for making verses 8-12 to refer to apostles, namely, *they* received the *sacramentum*.

---

The third significant translation irregularity is in verse 11, where the Greek is ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκληρώθημεν, i.e., *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance*, KJV. (Note that the verb means literally *to obtain by lot*, referring to the believers' inheritance, as Israel received her inheritance in Canaan from God through the casting of the lot. See Joshua 18ff.) However, the Vulgate has *In quo etiam sorte vocati sumus*, i.e., *In whom also we have been called by lot*. [Calvin translates it *In sortem adnosciti sumus*, i.e., *In whom we have received by lot*.] The significance is that Aquinas believes this to refer to the special calling that the apostles had, although he does not identify the calling of the apostles by lot. He rather goes on a long excursus about the lot and how it is no longer used to call men to office.

However, especially in this last verse, Aquinas' exegesis is noticeably incomplete, and of poor quality, particularly for a man of his ability. He does not deal adequately with the text. For example, he fails to face the fact that the next phrase returns to predestination (*being predestinated according to the purpose...*), thus linking these verses to the previous verses that set forth the predestination of all believers. That, even though (surprisingly!) he does connect this verse with Romans 8:30 — "And whom he predestinated, them he also called."

We might add that Aquinas is also following the lead of a Gloss from Lombard's *Magna glosatura*. Additionally, he believes he is following the patristic father Ambrose, though the editor of the commentary (Lamb) maintains that Aquinas is reading this also in Lombard's *Magna glosatura*, and that this is an erroneous reference to Ambrose.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin does not make specific reference to any of this exegesis in his commentary. One almost gets the feeling that he is aware of it, but refuses even to honor it by mentioning it. Some evidence for this is found in his comments on verse 11, which directly reject all that Aquinas teaches. He writes,

---

11. Aquinas' *Commentary of Ephesians*, fn. 28, p. 275.

**Hitherto he has spoken generally of all the elect** [contra Aquinas, who makes distinctions as to whom Paul addressed, RJD]; he **now** begins to take notice of separate classes. When he says, *WE have obtained*, **he speaks of himself and of the Jews**, or more correctly, of all who were the first fruits of Christianity; and afterwards he comes to the Ephesians. **It tended not a little to confirm the faith of the Ephesian converts, that he associated them with himself and the other believers**, who might be said to be the first-born of the church. As if he had said, “**The condition of all godly persons is the same with yours; for we who were first called by God owe our acceptance to his eternal election.**” [Bold emphasis mine, RJD.]

3. In 1:13, for the Greek ἐσφραγισθήτε (from σφραγίζειν, to set a seal upon, to seal), the Vulgate has *signati*, which emphasizes the mark or sign. Calvin translates it *obsignati* – *to seal*. The exegesis differs in that Aquinas deals with this as a mark like a brand on cattle. Calvin is able to expound the deeper meaning of a seal and the “certainty” it gives.

4. In 1:14, the Vulgate translates ἀραβὼν with *pignus*, *pledge*. Aquinas explains this idea, then notes that a Gloss gives the word *arrha* (*earnest*) as an alternate reading, adding, “and perhaps this is a better reading.” He discusses briefly the concept of an earnest, but does not stray far from the official translation of the church, “Nevertheless, it can also be a pledge....” Calvin translates the term *arrhabo* (earnest money), and so expounds it.

5. In 6:10, for the Greek ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ (*in the power of his might*, KJV), the Vulgate has *in potentiae virtutis eius*, and thus Aquinas begins to expound on the *virtues* of God’s power. Calvin rather translates this *in robore potentiae ipsius*, and explains it accordingly.

6. In 6:13, for the Greek κατεργασάμενοι (a participle from κατεργάζειν, *to perform, accomplish*), the Vulgate gives *perfectis*. The effect on Aquinas’ exegesis is an excursus on whether or not one can stand perfectly, quite beside the point. Calvin translates the term *peractis*, which has the same basic meaning as the Greek.

---

In general, it should be noted that Aquinas is willing to allow for differences in exegesis. One example of this is found in his exegesis of Ephesians 6:12 — on the meaning of “in high places.” Aquinas sets forth two possible explanations and expresses no preference.

### **John Calvin’s exegesis of Ephesians 1:1-14 and 6:10-17**

One of the first notable features of Calvin’s exegesis of these passages is his careful attention to the text. He often gives justification for his translation when it differs from the Vulgate or Erasmus. He writes on Ephesians 1:2: “Most of the Greek copies want the word *all*; but I was unwilling to strike it out, because it must, at all events, be understood.” On 1:4 Calvin brings out the Greek meaning for “before him.” In his exposition of 1:5, Calvin compares the Greek εἰς αὐτόν and ἐν αὐτῷ, and later in the verse quotes the Greek ἐχαρίτωσεν ἐν χάριτι (*He hath made us accepted in the beloved*, KJV) and expounds it. Likewise, commenting on 6:11, Calvin cites the Greek for “the wiles” of the devil.

Calvin is not only concerned with the words of the text, he seeks the precise meaning of the original Greek words. In his comments on 1:10, Calvin notes that “in the old translation it is rendered (*instaure*) *restore*; to which Erasmus has added (*summam*) *comprehensively*. I have chosen to abide closely to the meaning of the Greek word ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι, because it is more agreeable to the context.” Calvin chose the translation *recolligeret, to gather together again*, which is the meaning of the Greek. In addition, on 1:14 he writes, “Περίποιήσις, which we translate *the possession obtained...*,” i.e., as Calvin translated it, *acquisitae possessionis*, where the Vulgate has simply *adquisitionis*.

We find in this exegesis of Calvin very few specific references to outside sources. His reference to church fathers in these passages is but one — Chrysostom on 1:3. No references to philosophers are to be found, or even philosophical arguments. In fact, Calvin denigrates the latter in his comments on 1:13. He writes, “The true conviction which believers have of the Word of God, of their own salvation, and of religion in general, **does not**

**spring from the judgment of the flesh, or from human or philosophical arguments, but from the sealing of the Spirit....**" [Emphasis mine, RJD].

Calvin, like Aquinas, is willing to allow for differences in exegesis on specific passages. This is evident from 1:4 on the exact meaning of "love." Yet, though he gives more than one possible meaning, he does express his preference as to the correct meaning.

Calvin is far more polemical in his exposition of Ephesians than is Aquinas. While Aquinas condemns only the views of Pelagius and of Origen, Calvin exposes the errors of many. He rejects the claims of the Jews (1:3), contrasting Christ and all the "Jewish emblems, by which the blessing under the law was conveyed." He rejects the teaching of the Sorbonne, namely, that God foresaw how man would act and on that basis chose some because they were worthy (1:4). He castigates the "licentious," who would use election as an excuse to sin (1:4).

In addition, Calvin rejects the perfectionism taught by Catharists, Celestines, and Donatists (1:4). He criticizes the "sophists" for allowing merit to play a part in the reason for election, and later, for robbing God of glory (1:5). Calvin opposes the Church of Rome's doctrine of penance (1:6): "As if the blood of Christ, when unsupported by additional aid, had lost all its efficacy." He denounces unspecified persons who, "whenever they are unable to discover the reason of God's works, exclaim loudly against his design" (1:10). And he condemns the Manicheans for "their wild notion of two principles" (6:12).

As a general observation, we note that Calvin is called the theologian of the glory of God, and this element is found in his exegesis of Ephesians. In 1:4 Calvin notes that the phrase "that we should be holy" is the immediate purpose of God, not the final one. The "glory of God is the highest end, to which our sanctification is subordinate." Accordingly, he is a foe of all notions of merit in man. (Cf. comments on 1:4; 5, etc.)

In 1:14 he writes, "The frequent mention [in this passage] of the glory of God ought not to be regarded as superfluous...." In addition, Calvin lays down (1:14) what could almost be termed an

---

underlying principle of polemics, if not of exegesis: “We may likewise observe, that there is not a more effectual method of shutting the mouths of wicked men, than by shewing that our views tend to illustrate, and theirs to obscure, the glory of God.”

Briefly to sum up what this comparison has revealed, we notice some similarity between these two notable scholars, but much more divergence. The primary similarity is that both men pay attention to the words of the text. And it has been noted that both men were wise enough to allow for divergence of opinion as to the exegesis of a given passage. On the other hand, there are significant differences. Aquinas refers to outside sources far more than Calvin. The style of Calvin’s exegesis is noticeably freer than the scholastic method followed by Aquinas. Aquinas’ exegesis tended to be bound to church doctrine, resulting at times in a forced meaning. And the fact that Aquinas was bound by the Vulgate translation, while Calvin was able to use the original Greek, has a significant impact on the exegesis that resulted. Aquinas was often led astray by the translation with which he labored.

... to be concluded. ●

---

# In the Space of Six Days

## (2)

Mark L. Shand

### Significant Changes Post-1800

The early nineteenth century saw the science of geology reach a state of maturity. Geologists concluded that various rock formations required thousands, if not millions, of years to be formed. For many in Reformed ranks, such thinking disturbed the accepted biblical account of the origins of the earth. How could such long periods of time be found in the Genesis creation account?

The Scottish theologian Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) obliged with an answer which involved a reconsideration of Genesis 1:2.<sup>1</sup> Put simply, Chalmers maintained that there was a creation (Gen. 1:1), followed by a catastrophe (Gen. 1:2) and a re-creation (Gen. 1:3ff.). His views were adopted subsequently by C. I. Scofield and incorporated into his *Reference Bible* and so received widespread dissemination.

The reconstructionist theory or gap theory, as Chalmer's theory became known, asserted that the six days of Genesis 1 were not, as had previously been thought, days of creation, but rather days of reconstruction or re-creation. It was argued that God had initially created a perfect world. However, this original creation sustained a terrible catastrophe as a result of the fall of Satan. This catastrophe occurred between the first and second verses of Genesis 1; hence the name "gap theory." According to the majority of the proponents of this theory, Genesis 1:2 should have been translated, "and the earth *became* without form and void," thereby allowing for changes to have occurred in the original form of the creation.

---

1. Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (William B. Eerdmans Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954), p. 135.



---

Following the catastrophe, the world was said to have been left alone by God for millions of years, and during those years the various geological changes identified by science occurred. Then, somewhere around 4000 B.C., God reconditioned the earth in six literal twenty-four hour days. In this way, geology and Scripture were thought to be harmonized.

The gap theory represented a concession on the part of theologians to the demands of geology that the crust of the earth required a great deal of time for its formation. For a while, there was a measure of peace between the theologians and the geologists. However, that peace did not last, because geology began to make further concessionary demands. It soon became apparent that the problem presented by geology was not just the need for long periods of time, but there were also issues concerning sequence. Geology maintained that rocks presented a sequence among themselves and that fossils buried in these rocks provided a key to interpreting the sequence of those rocks.<sup>2</sup> This presented theologians not only with a problem as regards time, but also with respect to sequence. The gap theory could accommodate time, but it was mute as regards the issue of sequence. Therefore, theologians felt compelled to develop a further theory that would accommodate the new demands of geology. Geology was a demanding taskmaster, and the theologians became her compliant servants.

The problem was resolved to the satisfaction of some with the age-day or Concordist interpretation of Genesis 1. Geologists Hugh Miller, James Dana, and J. W. Dawson argued that the days of Genesis 1 were periods of time representing the geological and biological history of the earth. The name Concordistic theory arose from the stated design of the theory, which was to harmonize the geological record with the creation account in Genesis 1.

The main argument in support of this theory concentrated on the Hebrew word יום. It was noted that יום in Scripture did not always signify a period of twenty-four hours. Therefore, it was claimed that יום could refer to a considerable or even indefinite period of time. Genesis 2:4 was pointed to in support of that

---

2. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

proposition, as were also Job 20:28, Psalm 20:1, and Ecclesiastes 7:14. Attention was also focused on the seventh day of the creation week, with respect to which Scripture made no reference to the morning and evening as was done with the other six days. From this it was deduced that the seventh day was of permanent duration and that *ipso facto* the other six days could also be treated as long periods of time. In short, the conclusion was that *נֶאֱמַר* should be treated metaphorically and not literally. The problem of reconciling so-called science with Scripture had again been solved.

Further challenges to the long accepted interpretation of the creation account in Scripture emerged in the area of biology with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859. While the work occasioned great interest in the scientific community, it was not viewed initially as representing any serious or irreconcilable conflict with Scripture. Suggestions as to the extent to which the hypotheses might be pressed occasioned some disquiet, but it was not until Darwin himself spelled out the implications in his subsequent work, *The Descent of Man*, in 1871 that the assault on the biblical account of creation was fully appreciated.

By the late 1860s many of the orthodox leaders of the Presbyterian churches in the United States had imbibed the claims of science, with the result that they abandoned the idea of a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 and six twenty-four hour days of creation. They rapidly assimilated the gap theory or the day-age theory into their theology. There were few who maintained a literal view of Genesis 1 in the face of the claims of science. The capitulation was swift and widespread.

The change in thinking from the approach advocated by Dick is evident from the following observations made by the editor of the *Presbyterian Quarterly*. He wrote:

In an article entitled "Is the Science of Geology True?" the writer observed that the Bible is not a book of science and that it was not meant to anticipate all future inventions or discoveries in philosophy and science.... The writer affirmed that Christians should no longer hesitate to admit that geology had established beyond a shadow of a doubt,

1. That the earth, instead of originating six thousand years ago, had

---

existed through an indefinite period, safely expressed by millions of ages.

2. That Creation taken in its largest sense, instead of being accomplished in one of our weeks, was a gradual work through countless ages.<sup>3</sup>

Debate over the proper interpretation of Genesis 1 & 2 flourished throughout the 1850s, with various writers offering new slants on the Genesis account. Taylor Lewis, a Dutch Reformed professor at Union College, suggested that “create” did not mean “to bring into existence from nothing,” but that it bore the meaning “to bring into existence from pre-existing materials.” From this he concluded that the primary meaning of the term “day” as employed in Genesis 1 was a cycle of indefinite duration.<sup>4</sup>

Even the most conservative institutions were affected. In 1868, Princeton Theological Seminary appointed James McCosh as president of the Seminary.<sup>5</sup> Within a week of his arrival, McCosh had raised the eyebrows of many by securing to himself the dubious honor of being the first leading American clergyman openly to espouse the theory of evolution. He contended that evolution was simply “the method by which God works.”<sup>6</sup> McCosh was entirely in “favor of evolution properly limited and explained.” At least his theological conscience was not totally seared, in that he denied the evolution of the human race, claiming that to maintain such a position would be in direct contravention of Scripture.<sup>7</sup>

---

3. *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* (June, 1852), pp. 84-87.

4. George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 144, 145.

5. Princeton Theological Seminary was the leading Presbyterian seminary in North America at that time.

6. James McCosh, *The Religious Aspect of Evolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), p. 58.

7. Peter J. Wallace, “Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield and the Darwinian Controversy” <http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/warf.txt>, p. 2.

Attempts to reconcile Scripture and science found few detractors within Princeton. Charles Hodge (1797-1878), who was professor of Exegetical and Didactic Theology at the Seminary from 1840-1878, initially favored the gap theory. However, by the 1860s his views had changed. He began to espouse the day-age theory. Significantly, the catalyst for his change in thinking did not originate from his interpretation of Scripture. Rather, Hodge concluded that the day-age theory accorded more closely to the fossil record than did the gap theory; hence the change.<sup>8</sup>

His approach was consistent with his view of the relationship between Scripture and science. In his *Systematic Theology*, which was first published in 1872, Hodge declared:

Christians have commonly believed that the earth has existed only a few thousands of years. If geologists finally prove that it has existed for myriads of ages, it will be found that the first chapter of Genesis is in full accord with the facts, and that the last results of science are embodied on the first page of the Bible. It may cost the church a severe struggle to give up one interpretation and adopt another, as it did in the seventeenth century, but no real evil need be apprehended. The Bible has stood, and still stands in the presence of the whole scientific world with its claims unshaken.<sup>9</sup>

In Hodge's view, scientists had done much to illuminate Scripture, and for this "the friends of the Bible owed them a debt of gratitude for their able vindication of the sacred record."<sup>10</sup> Clearly, Hodge was prepared to concede that if the idea of an old earth could be established, then Genesis 1 would need to be reinterpreted accordingly.

David Calhoun, commenting on the attitude of the faculty at Princeton to so-called science during the period of Charles Hodge, opines:

---

8. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Hendrikson Publishers, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 570-574.

9. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 171.

10. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 573.

---

The seminary professors believed that science and theology were allies in establishing the truth. God is the author of both Scripture and creation; so the Bible properly interpreted, they believed and taught, could not conflict with the facts of nature properly understood.<sup>11</sup>

Hodge opposed Darwin's evolutionary theory, but his basis for doing so was narrowly confined. In 1874 he published *What is Darwinism?* He concluded, in answer to the question posed in the title to his book:

The denial of final causes is the formative idea of Darwin's theory, and therefore no teleologist can be a Darwinian.... We have thus arrived at the answer to our question, What is Darwinianism? It is Atheism. This does not mean, as before said, that Mr. Darwin himself and all who adopt his views are atheists; but it means that his theory is atheistic, that the exclusion of design from nature is ... tantamount to atheism.<sup>12</sup>

The fundamental objection that Hodge raised against Darwin's theory concerned his denial of design, not that it conflicted with a literal interpretation of the creation account in Genesis 1. Hodge wrote, "It is neither evolution nor natural selection, which gives Darwinianism its peculiar character and importance. It is that Darwin rejects all teleology, or the doctrine of final causes." He continues, "...as it is this feature of his system which brings it into conflict not only with Christianity, but with the fundamental principles of the natural religion, it should be clearly established."<sup>13</sup>

The thinking at Princeton is also reflected in the writings of Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-1886), who was the son of Charles Hodge and who succeeded his father as Princeton's systematic theologian in 1877.

---

11. David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1996), vol. 2, p. 11.

12. Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (New York: Scribners, Armstrong and Company, 1874), pp. 155-157.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

A. A. Hodge offered the following assessment of the results of modern geological science in his *Outlines of Theology*, which were first published in 1860, but later revised in 1878.

*The results of modern geological science clearly establish the conclusions — (a) That the elementary materials of which the world is composed existed an indefinitely great number of ages ago. (b) That the world has been providentially brought to its present state by a gradual progression, through many widely contrasted physical conditions, and through long intervals of time. (c) That it has successively been inhabited by many different orders of organized beings, each in turn adapted to the physical conditions of the globe in its successive stages, and generally marked in each stage by an advancing scale of organization, from the more elementary to the more complex and more perfect forms. (d) That man completes the pyramid of creation, the most perfect, and the last formed of all the inhabitants of the world.... In general, however, there is the most remarkable agreement between the Mosaic Record and the results of Geology as to the following principal points. The Record agrees with science in teaching — (a) The creation of the elements in the remote past. (b) The intermediate existence of chaos. (c) The advance of the earth through various changes to its physical condition. (d) The successive creations of different genera and species of organized beings — the vegetable before the animal — the lower forms before the higher forms — in adaptation to the improving condition of the earth — and man last of all.<sup>14</sup> [Emphasis MS]*

Concerned with the implication of human evolution for the Genesis account, A. A. Hodge followed his father in admitting the possibility of animal evolution, though unproven, while rejecting human evolution as being incompatible with Scripture.

Consistent with the views that he had expressed in his *Outlines of Theology*, A. A. Hodge found it necessary to reinter-

---

14. A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1949), pp. 245, 246.

---

pret the meaning of chapter 4:I of the *Westminster Confession*. He attempted to do so in this fashion:

This section, using the precise words of Scripture, Ex. xx.11, declares that God performed the work of creation, in the sense of formation and adjustment of the universe in its present order, "in the space of six days." Since the Confession was written the science of geology has come into existence, and has brought to light many facts before unknown as to the various conditions through which this world, and probably the stellar universe, have passed previously to the establishment of the present order. *These facts remain in their general character unquestionable, and indicate a process of divinely regulated development consuming vast periods of time.* In order to adjust the conclusions of that science with the inspired record found in the first chapter of Genesis, some suppose that the first verse relates to the creation of the elements of things at the absolute beginning, and then, after a vast interval, during which the changes discovered by science took place, the second and subsequent verses narrate how God in six successive days reconstructed and prepared the world and its inhabitants for the residence of man. Others have supposed that the days spoken of are not natural days, but cycles of vast duration. No adjustment thus far suggested has been found to remove all difficulty.<sup>15</sup>  
[Emphasis MS]

A. A. Hodge was not alone in his attempts to manipulate the express teaching of the *Westminster Confession*. Alexander Mitchell (1822-99), Professor of Divinity and Ecclesiastical History at St. Mary's College, St. Andrews from 1868 to 1892, wrote in his work on the *Westminster Confession*:

There are two or three topics of minor importance which I could not take up in the introduction to the "Minutes of the Assembly," but which in consequence of prevalent misunderstandings I should like to notice on this occasion.... The first to which I advert is the question so often and confidently propounded of late, that the

---

15. A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 82, 83.

Confession represents the creation of the world as having taken place in six "natural and literal days," which almost all orthodox divines now grant that it did not. But the whole ground for the assertion is furnished by the words "natural and literal," which they have themselves inserted. The authors of the Confession, as Dr. A. A. Hodge has well observed, "simply repeat the statements of Scripture in almost identical terms, and any interpretation that is fairly applicable to such passages of Scripture, as Gen. ii.3 and Exod. xx.11, is equally applicable to the words of the Confession. It is quite true as he adds, "that since the Confession was composed, ... new arguments have been furnished against interpreting the days mentioned in the above passages of Scripture as literal days. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the figurative interpretation of the word "days" in these passages originated in modern times, and was altogether unknown to the men who framed the Confession. To prove it is a mistake it is not necessary to have recourse to the ingenious conjecture, that some of the Cambridge men in the assembly may have been acquainted with the manuscript work of Dean Colet, preserved in their archives, and only given to the public in our own time, in which the figurative interpretation of the days of creation is maintained.... There is no lack of evidence, in works published before the meeting of the Assembly, and familiar to several of its members, to show that the figurative interpretation had long before Dean Colet's time commended itself to several scholars and divines.... The figurative interpretation therefore of the six days of creation is no make-shift of hard-pressed theologians in the nineteenth century. It was held by respectable scholars and divines, from early times, and was known to the framers of our Confession; and had they meant deliberately to exclude it they would have written not six days but six natural or literal days."<sup>16</sup>

---

16. Alexander F. Mitchell, quoted by J. Lignon Duncan in "Animadversions on Alex Mitchell's View of the Westminster Assembly and the Days of Creation" <http://capo.org/cpc/duncan.htm>. Mitchell's argumentation is unconvincing, in light of the views previously noted of the Westminster divines. He lived in a theological climate in nineteenth century Scotland which virtually demanded that the expression "in the space of six days" be re-interpreted to accord with scientific theory. It is also specious to argue that the framers of the Confession would have



---

Francis Beattie, in his commentary on the Confession, which was published in 1896, attempted his own revision of the Confession. He wrote:

Next the Standards teach that the world was made in the space of six days. Here secondary creation comes chiefly into view, and the way in which the result of primary creation in chaotic form was reduced to an orderly cosmic condition during a period of six days is described. It is not necessary to discuss at length the meaning of the term days here used. The term found in the Standards is precisely that which occurs in Scripture. Hence, if the word used in Scripture is not inconsistent with the idea of twenty-four hours, or that of a long period of time, the language of the standards cannot be out of harmony with either idea. *There is little doubt that the framers of the Standards meant a literal day of twenty four hours,* but the caution of the teaching on this point in simply reproducing Scripture is worthy of all praise. *The door is open in the Standards for either interpretation,* and the utmost care should be taken not to shut that door at the bidding of a scientific theory against either view.<sup>17</sup> [Emphasis MS]

Similarly Edward Morris, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, while acknowledging that the Westminster divines intended a literal interpretation to be given to the days of Genesis 1, nonetheless was prepared to lay aside the meaning of the Confession in light of the demands of science.

The declaration as to the time occupied in this work of creation is simply an index of theological opinion in an age *when geologic investigations were in their infancy*. Members of the Assembly were doubtless acquainted with the suggestion of more extended periods, found in theological writings even as far back as the age

---

been aware of other interpretations of Genesis and so, if intent on excluding other views of the days of creation, would have employed the terms "six natural or literal days." This fails to recognize that the literal view of Genesis 1 was the prevailing view among the Reformers.

17. Francis R. Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standards* (Southern Presbyterian Press, Greenville, SC, 1997), pp. 80, 81.

of Augustine, who declared (Civ. Dei XI:6) that it is difficult or perhaps impossible for us to say or even to conceive what kind of days the six creative days actually were. But the language of the confession, *in the space of six days*, must be interpreted literally, because this was the exact view pronounced by the Assembly. Yet there are comparatively few who now adhere to the literal interpretation of the inspired record in Genesis: a very large proportion at least so far modify that interpretation as to regard creation as produced through six prolonged periods, and by a progressive exercise of divine energy, — each of these periods recording itself by incontestible evidences in the forming world, and each directly tributary to the more complex and matured period of development that succeeded it.<sup>18</sup> [Emphasis MS]

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) was Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology at Princeton from 1887-1921. He also rejected the literal interpretation of Genesis 1 with respect to the days of creation. Interestingly, Warfield spent little to no effort in explicating the text of Genesis 1-3. Part of this was doubtless out of deference to his Old Testament colleagues, but equally important was his conviction that the Bible did not teach science.<sup>19</sup> Warfield was even so bold as to assert that the question of the antiquity of man “has of itself no theological significance. It is to theology a matter of entire indifference how long man has existed on earth.”<sup>20</sup>

Warfield’s views led to his tinkering with the genealogies of the Old Testament. He claimed that the genealogies were not intended to provide chronological information, but were “only an adequate indication of the particular line through which the descent in question comes” and can be frequently compressed to meet the purposes of the author. Consequently, he argued that any amount of time could have elapsed between the creation and

---

18. Edward D. Morris, *Theology of the Westminster Standards* (Columbus, Ohio, 1900), p. 202.

19. Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

---

Abraham, leaving the question of the antiquity of man to scientific determination.

Warfield was conscious that his views appeared to be in conflict with those expressed by Calvin. Therefore, he went to considerable lengths to establish to his own satisfaction that Calvin was not particularly concerned with the details of how God created the world. In reshaping Calvin's teaching, Warfield drew a sharp distinction "between the primal act of creation of the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and the subsequent acts of moulding this created material into the forms which it was destined to take." He contended that Calvin's treatment of the subject was "devoted rather to the nature of the created universe than to the mode of Divine activity in creating it."<sup>21</sup> He suggested that while Calvin naturally understood the six days of creation in a literal sense, Calvin believed that Moses, "writing to meet the needs of men at large, accommodated himself to their grade of intellectual preparation"<sup>22</sup> and that therefore the Mosaic record was not exhaustive.

Warfield was convinced that to retain the spirit of Calvin's doctrine of creation,

it was requisite that these six days should be lengthened out into six periods, — six ages of the growth of the world. Had that been done Calvin would have been a precursor of the modern evolutionary theorists ... (for) he teaches, as they teach, the modification of the original world stuff into the varied forms which constitute the ordered world, by the instrumentality of secondary causes, — or as a modern would put it, of its intrinsic forces.<sup>23</sup>

In his lectures, Warfield taught that Christianity and evolu-

---

21. Benjamin B. Warfield, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Creation," *The Princeton Theological Review*, vol. 13, 1915, p. 190.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 210. Warfield's interpretation of Calvin was subsequently opposed by John Murray in "Calvin's Doctrine of Creation," *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 17, 1954, pp. 21-43.

tion were not necessarily antagonistic, "provided that we do not hold too extreme a form of evolution." He concluded:

The upshot of the whole matter is that there is no necessary antagonism of Xty [sic] to evolution, provided that we do not hold to too extreme a form of evolution. To adopt any form that does not permit God freely to work apart from law & wh. does not allow miraculous intervention (in the giving of the soul, in creating Eve &c) will entail a great reconstruction of Xian [sic] doctrine & a very great lowering of the detailed authority of the Bible. But if we condition the theory by allowing the ~~occasional~~ [sic] constant oversight of God in the whole process, & his occasional supernatural interference for the production of *new* beginnings by an actual output of creative force, producing something *new*, i.e., something not included even *in posse* in preceding conditions, — we may hold to the modified theory of evolution & be Xtians [sic] in the ordinary orthodox sense. I say we may do this. Whether we ought to accept it, even in this modified sense, is another matter, & I leave it purposely an open question.<sup>24</sup>

The difficulties occasioned by his interpretation of Genesis 1 were not lost on Warfield, particularly as regards the creation of man. This became evident in a review which he wrote of James Orr's *God's Image in Man*. In that work, Orr argued for the entirely supernatural origin of Adam, body and soul, on the grounds that the complex physics of the brain necessary for human consciousness made it impossible to postulate a special origin for the mind distinct from the body. Warfield responded to Orr's assertion by suggesting, "If under the directing hand of God a human body is formed at a leap by propagation from brutish parents, it would be quite consonant with the fitness of things that

---

24. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Lectures on Anthropology* (Dec. 1888), Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, as quoted in David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987), pp. 118, 119.

---

it should be provided by His creative energy with a truly human soul.”<sup>25</sup>

The rejection of the literal interpretation of “days” in Genesis 1 was not confined to the mainstream Presbyterian Churches in the United States, but was also to be found within the broader Reformed community.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was an outspoken critic of Darwin’s evolutionary theory. In *Evolutie*, published in 1899, Kuyper described Darwin’s theory as “a newly thought-out system, a newly coined doctrine, a newly formed dogma, a newly arisen faith, which, comprising and dominating all our life, takes its stand directly opposite the Christian faith and can erect its temple only upon the ruins of our Christian Confession of Faith.”<sup>26</sup> However, while Kuyper vigorously opposed “the system,” he did not consider the acceptance of the evolutionary concept fundamentally unacceptable to Christianity. He writes:

An entirely different problem is that so often discussed in England whether religion permits, as such, the spontaneous evolvment of the species in the organic world from one single primary cell. That question, of course, without reservation, must be answered in the affirmative. We should not impose our style upon the Chief Architect of the universe. Provided he remains, not in appearance, but in essence, the architect, he is also in the choice of his style of architecture omnipotent. If it thus had pleased the Lord not to create the species as such, but to have one species arise from the other, by designing the preceding species in such a way that it could produce the next higher, the creation would have been just as wonderful.<sup>27</sup>

Kuyper also allowed for the possibility that the days of

---

25. Benjamin B. Warfield, “Review of *God’s Image in Man* by James Orr” *Princeton Theological Review* (1906), p. 557.

26. Abraham Kuyper, *Evolutie* (Rectorale Oratie, Vrije Universiteit, 1899), p. 7 quoted in Jan Lever, *Creation and Evolution* (Grand Rapids International Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1958), p. 228.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Genesis 1 could be equated to longer periods of time by arguing that the first three days of Genesis were extraordinary days whose length could not be determined.<sup>28</sup>

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), who was Professor of Systematic Theology at Kampen (1882-1902) and latterly at the Free University of Amsterdam (1902-1920), contended that the matter of time did not belong to the essentials of the faith and so was open to a variety of opinions on the days of Genesis 1. His personal preference was to refer to those days as simply extraordinary days. Writing in *Our Reasonable Faith*, Bavinck states:

The whole work of creation — according to the repeated testimony of the Scriptures — was completed in six days. There has, however, been a good deal of difference of opinion and freedom of speculation about those six days. No one less than Augustine judged that God had made everything perfect and complete at once, and that the six days were not successive periods of time, but only so many points of vantage from which the rank and order of the creatures might be viewed. On the other hand, there are many who hold that the days of creation are to be regarded as much longer periods of time than twenty-four hour units. Scripture speaks very definitely of days which are reckoned by the measurement of night and morning and which lie at the basis of the distribution of the days of the week in Israel and its festive calendar. Nevertheless Scripture itself contains data which oblige us to think of these days of Genesis as different from our ordinary units as determined by the revolutions of the earth. In the first place we cannot be sure whether what is told us in Genesis 1:1-2 precedes the first day or is included within that day. In favor of the first supposition is the fact that according to verse 5 the first day begins with the creation of light and that after the evening and the night it ends on the following morning. But even though one reckons the events of Genesis 1:1-2 with the first day, what one gets from that assumption is a very unusual day which for a while consisted in darkness. And the duration of that darkness which preceded the creation of light is nowhere indicated. In the second place, the first three days

---

28. Christian Reformed Church of America Agenda 1991, Report 28, "Committee on Creation and Science," p. 385.

---

(Gen. 1:3-13) must have been very unlike ours. For our twenty-four hour days are effected by the revolutions of the earth on its axis, and by the correspondingly different relationship to the sun which accompanies the revolutions. But those first three days could not have been constituted in that way. It is true that the distinction between them was marked by the appearance and disappearance of light. But the book of genesis itself tells us that the sun and moon and stars were not formed until the fourth day. In the third place, it is certainly possible that the second series of three days were constituted in the usual way. But if we take into account that the fall of the angels and of men and that also the Flood which followed later caused all sorts of changes in the cosmos, and if, in addition, we notice that in every sphere the period of becoming differs remarkably from that of normal growth, then it seems not unlikely that the second series of three days also differed from our days in many respects. Finally, it deserves consideration that everything which according to Genesis 1 and 2 took place on the sixth day can hardly be crowded into the pale of such a day as we now know the length of days to be. For on that day according to Scripture there occurred the creation of the animals (Gen. 1:24-25), the creation of Adam (Gen. 1:26 and 2:7), the planting of the garden (Gen. 2:8-14), the giving of the probationary command (Gen. 2:16-17), the leading of the animals to Adam and his naming them (Gen. 2:18-20), and the sleep of Adam and the creation of Eve (Gen. 2:21-23).<sup>29</sup>

The twentieth century saw a continued rejection of a literal six-day creation account. There was little change in Reformed and Presbyterian thought in the early years of the century.

Westminster Theological Seminary, which was established in 1929, adopted essentially the same position as had Princeton before it. J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), one of the founders of Westminster, was reluctant to be drawn into the debate over evolution. Nonetheless, even he was prepared to acknowledge the possibility of a providentially guided evolution as God's way of

---

29. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, translated by Henry Zylstra (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956), pp. 172, 173.

working in certain spheres through nature. However, he insisted that the first two chapters of Genesis and the fall of man necessitated the creative power of God, in sharp distinction from evolution, "at the origin of the present race of man."<sup>30</sup>

Within the Reformed camp, John De Vries, a professor of chemistry at Calvin College, maintained that the age of the earth was in the order of two billion years. He developed his thoughts and his interpretation of Genesis 1 in *Beyond the Atom*, which was first published in 1948. There he advocated the period theory, in which each day in the creation account was considered to be an indefinite period of time. This theory was popular with evangelical scholars in the 1950s and 1960s.

Furthermore, the Dutch theologian G. H. Aalders in his commentary on Genesis, wrote:

There have been many attempts to measure the creation day which God first established in terms of our standard of measuring time. There are still those today who are convinced that the creation days were simply 24-hour days. This is certainly without any substantiation in Scripture.... It will always remain an idle effort to measure the length of the creation days. It behooves us to humbly limit ourselves to the data given in the text of scripture.<sup>31</sup>

The late 1950s saw the development of the framework theory as a means of explaining the creation account. Nico H. Ridderbos, Professor of Old Testament at the Free University of Amsterdam, was one of the early proponents of this view. In his book *Is There a Conflict Between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?* published in 1957, Ridderbos asks concerning the author of Genesis:

Does the author mean to say that God completed creation in six days, or does he make use of an anthropomorphic mode of presentation? Did he arrange the works of God in a given scheme ... or framework...? ...These surely are anthropomorphic expressions.

---

30. Calhoun, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 360.

31. G. H. Aalders, *Genesis* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1981), pp. 58, 59.



---

Similarly one must take seriously the possibility that the account of creation in six days is no more than a mode of presentation. God is the Eternal One.<sup>32</sup>

Ridderbos supported his contention by pointing to the eight works of creation, four of which occurred during the first series of three days, with the remainder occurring during the latter three days. He focused upon the similarities of the works of separation during the first three days and to the fact that day 1 corresponded to day 4, day 2 to day 5, and day 3 to day 6. He appealed to the artistic arrangement of the creation week and concluded that the dominant feature was the literary framework.

He was not alone in his thinking. Meredith Kline and Bernard Ramm also fostered this view of Genesis 1. Henri Blocher added his voice in support of the framework theory,<sup>33</sup> as have C. John Collins,<sup>34</sup> Lee Irons,<sup>35</sup> and Mark D. Futato,<sup>36</sup> to name but a few. Blocher postulated that the author of Genesis used patterns employing the numbers 10, 3, and 7. For example, the words "God said" were employed ten times; three times with respect to mankind and seven times as regards the rest of creation. Appealing to

---

32. Nico H. Ridderbos, *Is There a Conflict Between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957), pp. 30, 31.

33. Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1984).

34. C. John Collins, "How Old is the Earth? Anthropomorphic Days in Genesis 1:1-2:3," *Presbyterian*, vol. 20, (1994), pp. 109-130. Collins is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary.

35. Lee Irons, "The Framework Interpretation: An Exegetical Summary," *Ordained Servant*, vol. 9, January 2000, pp. 7-11. Irons is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

36. Mark D. Futato, "Because It Had Rained: A Study of Genesis 2:5-7 with Implications for Genesis 2:4-25 and Genesis 1:1-2:3," *Westminster Theological Journal*, vol. 60, 1998, pp. 1-21. Futato is an associate professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in California.

such literary considerations, Blocher maintained that the Genesis account had been artistically crafted and stylised, which in turn suggested that the author was employing artistic patterns which were not intended to refer to literal periods of time.

Jan Lever, Professor of Zoology at the Free University of Amsterdam, in his influential work *Where Are We Headed?* also supported a species of the framework theory. Lever wrote:

The Bible was written in times when people had far less factual knowledge about the world than we have. They had no telescopes, no microscopes, no laboratories. They knew nothing about electricity or about radioactive substances. As far as factual knowledge of the world is concerned, they had little more to go by than daily experience. It constituted the picture of reality of that time, now thousands of years distant. And it need not at all surprise us that the writers of the Bible also shared this picture of reality, for their notions were completely embedded in it.<sup>37</sup>

While the majority of theologians rejected a literal interpretation of the days of Genesis 1, there were those who continued to assert that Genesis 1 should be taken literally. Referring to the theory of the periods, Herman Hoeksema, of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, asserted:

It is not a product of serious exegesis of Holy Writ. One did not proceed from the certain testimony of Scripture. Rather it is a very weak and defective apologetic attempt to maintain the reasonableness of faith in the light of the facts of science. This method is not the method of faith, but that of the wisdom which is from below, which is earthly.... The attempt to explain Genesis 1 in such a way that it presents the world as having been created in a six fold period of thousands or millions of years is from an exegetical point of view to be considered as a total failure.<sup>38</sup>

---

37. Jan Lever, *Where Are We Headed?* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970), pp. 16, 17.

38. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1966), p. 179.

---

Edward J. Young (1907-1968), who was Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1946 until his death, also supported a literal interpretation of Genesis 1, though as the following quotation demonstrates, he was open to the period theory. Young wrote:

1. The pattern laid down in Genesis 1:1-2; 3 is that of six days followed by a seventh.
2. The six days are to be understood in a chronological sense, that is, one day following another in succession. This fact is emphasized in that the days are designated, one, two, three, etc.
3. The length of the days is not stated. What is important is that each of the days is a period of time which may legitimately be denominated יום ("day").
4. The first three days were not solar days such as we now have, inasmuch as the sun, moon and stars had not yet been made.
5. The beginning of the first day is not indicated, although from Exodus 20:11, we may warrantably assume that it began at the absolute beginning, Genesis 1:1.
6. The Hebrew word יום is used in two different senses in Genesis 1:5. In the one instance it denotes the light in distinction from the darkness; in the other it includes both evening and morning. In Genesis 2:4b the word is employed in yet another sense, "in the day of the LORD God's making."
7. If the word "day" is employed figuratively, i.e., to denote a period of time longer than twenty-four hours, so also may the terms "evening" and "morning," inasmuch as they are component elements of the day, be employed figuratively. It goes without saying that an historical narrative may contain figurative elements. Their presence, however, can only be determined by means of exegesis.
8. Although the account of creation is told in terms of fiat and fulfilment, this does not necessarily exclude all process. In the second work of the third day, for example, the language suggests that the vegetation came forth from the earth as it does today. This point, however, cannot be pressed.<sup>39</sup>

---

39. Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1979), pp. 103, 104.

The interpretation of “days” in Genesis 1 continued to generate considerable discussion in Reformed and Presbyterian circles to the end of the twentieth century, though the dominant thinking was to marry Scripture with the findings of science.

In 1988, the Synod the Christian Reformed Church in America (CRC) appointed a study committee composed of representatives from the areas of natural science, philosophy of science, and theology with the following mandate:

To address the relationship between special and general revelation as found in Belgic Confession Article II and in Report 44 of the synod of 1972 focusing primarily on the implications for biblical interpretation and the investigation of God’s creation. This task should include, but not be limited to, such matters as the following: The concept of “vehicle/packaging/contents,” the designation of Genesis 1 as “primeval history,” the creation of Adam and Eve in God’s image, the fall into sin, and the doctrines of creation and providence as they relate to evolutionary theory. The task should also include an investigation of the difference, if any, in our subjection to God’s special and God’s general revelation.<sup>40</sup>

The report concluded *inter alia*:

Since the question of the time of creation and the age of the earth has been discussed among us for the greater part of this century and since the theological judgment has been widely accepted among us that the age of humanity or of the universe is of no consequence for maintaining orthodoxy, we judge that the question concerning how things came to be is the more crucial one in the contemporary debate. Of course, these two questions are intertwined. Yet we also judge that *the early chapters of Genesis contain highly stylized and compressed accounts of history and that, consequently, they do not intend to establish and are not suitable for establishing either a specific pre-Abrahamic chronology or the time of creation.*<sup>41</sup>  
[Emphasis MS]

---

40. Christian Reformed Church of America Agenda 1991, Report 28, “Committee on Creation and Science,” p. 367.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

---

The extent and nature of the debate within Presbyterian churches in the latter part of the twentieth century is evidenced, not only by the Statement issued by the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, but also by a report given in 1997 by Bryan Chapell, the president of Covenant Theological Seminary.<sup>42</sup> With reference to what he described as “new standards of holiness that threaten the unity of the church,” and specifically to the church’s understanding of the creation accounts in Genesis, Chapell observed:

The creation issue, quite frankly, is surprising to us since for generations there has been an informed allowance for differences among Bible-believing Presbyterians about how best to interpret these accounts, so long as they were believed to be accurate and historical.... First, let me say that Covenant Seminary has not changed its position on this issue in its 40 years of existence. That position is that the Genesis accounts are entirely true, factual, and historical. No one here denies God’s creation out of nothing, the historicity of Adam and Eve, the special creation of man, the reality of the Fall. No one here endorses Evolution.... All of our professors affirm that the first chapter of Genesis can be reasonably interpreted as teaching that God’s creative activity occurred in six solar days. Not all of our professors, however, believe that this is the best interpretation. Please note that I have not said that any of our professors deny the facticity or historicity of the Genesis account.<sup>43</sup>

What sort of double speak is this? If one holds to the facticity or historicity of the Genesis account, surely one holds to the literal

42. Covenant Theological Seminary is the national seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). This report received the full support of the Board of the Seminary, which urged that it be widely distributed.

43. Bryan Chapell, “Covenant Theological Seminary ’98-’99 President’s Goals and Report” prepared for Executive Committee Meeting on 5 December 1997, <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Flats/1631/chapell.html>

view of the six days of creation. To contend otherwise gives a new meaning to historicity.

Chapell continues:

There is currently a degree of debate about what the Westminster divines believed about the length of the creation days when the Confession was draft. It is unquestionable that the scholars of that era knew of the ancient debates regarding the creation days. The fact that they did not specifically limit the days to 24 hours in the Confessional statements is taken by most of the notable Confessional commentators and historians to indicate that the divines allowed a degree of latitude on this issue.... What seems most apparent, however, is that the timing of the creation days was not really an issue at the time of the Assembly, and so, clearly definitive statements were not made (and probably were not intended to be made) on this issue. Whatever view one currently holds, it is probably a stretch to insist that the Westminster divines definitely endorsed it.<sup>44</sup>

The approach to the days of Genesis 1 that prevailed at the end of the eighteenth century is almost unrecognizable when compared with the one that parades itself in the halls of theological learning at the end of the twentieth century. What has led to the change? Quite clearly, it is not greater exegetical insight, but so-called scientific discoveries.

... to be continued. ●

---

44. *Ibid.*

---

# **The Relationship of the Reformed Churches of Scotland, England, Western & Eastern Europe from the 1500s to the 1700s**

**Chris Coleborn**

(The following “after-dinner” address was delivered at the close of a Church Conference in Brisbane in July 2002. Some who heard the address requested a written copy, as it was not recorded. Bear in mind the address attempts to deal only briefly and principally with the subject. No doubt the matters raised could and should be elaborated upon, and perhaps further qualified. However, it is passed on in the form in which it was delivered for the interest of those who wished a written copy, and as the basis for further prayerful thought and study.)

Our purpose is to make some observations on the relationship of the various Reformed churches of Continental Europe and Britain during the 1500s to the 1700s.

I believe that these observations have great relevance for us today. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ does not exist simply as a contemporary organization. It is made up of all tribes, nations, and people of all ages as gathered and kept by Christ Jesus. There is an organic link, then, between those fathers and mothers in the faith who have gone before us and us who profess the faith today. The truth is, we are to “walk in the footsteps of the flock” (Song of Solomon 1:8) and “stand in the way and look for the old paths and walk therein...” (Jer. 6:16).

One application of the truth of the organic link and unity of Christ’s church in all ages is, I believe, that lessons can be learned by us today from the way our fathers of the Reformed churches of the 1500s-1700s dealt with one another in their similarities and

differences. The principles of their dealings with one another can be transposed, I am persuaded, into our contemporary situation, to help us in our dealings with one another as churches in the age in which we live.

We must remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, as the head of His church, providentially and historically raised up true churches, Reformed churches, in various nations of Europe in the 1500s to the 1700s. Now, while these churches had a like common and precious faith, they also differed in various ways in their doctrine, government, and worship. The Reformed churches of Jesus Christ of Europe, with their various similarities and differences, were like a large family with different members or branches.

I think that a good case could be made for saying that historically there were four major branches of the one family of the Reformed church and faith. They were:

- I. The French/Swiss branch
- II. The Dutch/German branch
- III. The Eastern European and British Episcopal branch
- IV. The British Presbyterian branch

Though they had differences with one another, let us note these two things about their relationships to one another, and draw the following two lessons from them.

- I. There was a mutual respect, care, and help of one another in spite of differences.
- II. There were principles that undergirded the managing of their differences and similarities.

**I. There was a mutual respect, care, and help of one another in spite of differences.**

We can observe that there was a real care and help of one another in that the courts of the various Reformed churches and their leaders, with their various backgrounds, kept in contact by a constant and large flow of correspondence, seeking and offering in a respectful way advice and support. For example, there still exist copies of a large body of correspondence between the various



---

reformers to one another, which illustrates this type of contact very well.<sup>1</sup> An example of this is Henry Bullinger, the pupil, friend and successor of Zwingli. Schaff writes of him,

He was in friendly correspondence with Calvin, Bucer, Melancthon, Laski, Beza, Cranmer, Hooper, Lady Jane Grey, and the leading Protestant divines and dignitaries of England. ... This correspondence is an interesting testimony not only to his personal worth, but also to the fraternal communion which then existed between the Anglican and the Swiss Reformed Churches.<sup>2</sup>

We may also note that the various Reformed churches had, and showed, a brotherly esteem and regard for one another for what they held in common, and that they maintained a desire for contact and unity in the essentials in spite of the differences they had. You recall how Thomas Cranmer wrote to John Calvin and spoke of the need of mutual care and help in the faith, and how Calvin replied and said he would cross many seas to promote greater unity in the faith.<sup>3</sup>

Cranmer wrote, among other things, to Calvin,

... nothing tends more effectually to unite the Churches of God, and more powerfully to defend the fold of Christ, than the pure teaching of the Gospel and harmony of doctrine. Wherefore I have often wished, and still continue to do so, that learned and godly men, who are eminent for erudition and judgment, might meet

---

1. See, for example, *The Letters of John Calvin*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1980; *The Zurich Letters, 1558-1559 & The Zurich Letters, Second Series, 1558-1602*, The Parker Society, Cambridge University Press, 1842; *Original Letters, No 1 & 2*, The Parker Society, Cambridge University Press, 1847; *The Works of John Knox*, Ed. David Laing, Johnstone & Hunter, Edinburgh, 1844, vol. III and especially vol. VI.

2. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, vol. 1, pp. 390-391.

3. *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, The Parker Society, Cambridge Press, 1846, pp. 431-432 & *The Letters of John Calvin*, op cit., pp. 130 ff.

together, and, comparing their respective opinions, might handle all the heads of ecclesiastical doctrine, and hand down to posterity, under the weight of their authority, some work not only upon the subjects themselves, but upon the forms of expressing them. Our adversaries are now holding their councils ... shall we neglect to call together a godly synod, for the refutation of error, and for restoring and propagating the truth? ...Farewell. Your very dear brother in Christ, Thomas Cranmer.

Calvin responded (quoting in part),

Your opinion, most distinguished Sir, is indeed just and wise ... no remedy can be devised more suitable than if a general meeting were held of the devout and the prudent, of those properly exercised in the school of God, and of those who are confessedly at one on the doctrine of holiness. ...And then I am aware that English matters are not so all-important in your eyes, but that you, at the same time, regard the interests of the whole world. ...This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the Churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in any repute amongst us.... Thus it is that the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding. So much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were on account of it. ...Now, seeing ... Churches, though divided on other questions, might be made to unite, I think it right for me, at whatever cost of toil and trouble, to seek to attain this object. ...Adieu, very distinguished Archbishop, deserving of my hearty reverence. May the Lord continue to guide you by His Spirit, and to bless your holy labours.

Recall, too, how the various reformers from the different Reformed churches visited one another and often served in one another's churches. There was a flow of men and ideas between the various branches of the Reformed churches. There are various outstanding examples of this care and support of one another. Think, for example, of the Italian reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, who served in the Genevan Reformed Church and in the Reformed Church of England, where he also was Regius professor at Oxford. He also contributed to the compilation of the Second Helvetic Confession, and was respected in Scotland, where his teaching was

---

appreciated.<sup>4</sup> What a shame that fathers in the faith such as this reformer and his works are not better known and appreciated.<sup>5</sup>

Consider also how Martin Bucer, the Strasbourg reformer, served not only the Swiss churches, but also the English Church in the days of Cranmer and Edward VI and had an influence upon the Scots with regard to their worship.<sup>6</sup>

John Knox served not only the Reformed Church of Scotland but also the Church of England, and served for a time in Geneva and in France.<sup>7</sup>

The academic Scot George Buchanan, an early leader of the Reformed church there, was widely respected and honoured on the continent. He was professor of various universities on the continent and First Moderator of the Church of Scotland and tutor of James VI.<sup>8</sup>

The most influential Scot reformer after Knox was Andrew Melville. He not only served the Scottish Reformed Church, but was a professor in the Geneva academy with Reformer Beza and had strong ties with the French Reformed Church.<sup>9</sup> What a flow of communication and mutual service there was between the various branches of the Reformed churches, in spite of their differences.

Let us note, too, how the different branches of the Reformed churches, for all of their differences, consulted with one another on their actions and problems, such as advice on the acceptance and approval of their particular confessional standards. There was extensive correspondence between the Reformed Church of the

---

4. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Revised Edition, J.D. Douglas, General Editor, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978, Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire Vermigli), p. 769, *et al.*

5. Peter Martyr, *The Common Places*, Translated and gathered by Anthonie Marten, Thomas Vautrollier, 1574.

6. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, *op cit.*, Bucer (Butzer) Martin, pp. 162-163, *et al.*

7. *Ibid*, Knox, John, pp. 570-571, *et al.*

8. *Ibid*, Buchanan, George, pp. 163-164, *et al.*

9. *Ibid*, Melville, Andrew, p. 648, *et al.*

Lowlands and other Reformed churches, including those of England, Scotland, France, and the German States, re the Arminian controversy, the Synod of Dort, and the acceptance of the Canons of Dort.<sup>10</sup>

This care, consultation, and help of one another in the formulation of various churches' confessional standards was also seen when the different Reformed churches of the three kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland sought to gather, in one assembly, godly and learned divines to draw up a Confession of Faith to bring a closer union of faith and practice among them.<sup>11</sup>

Note, too, how the Presbyterians of England and Scotland made use of the Irish Articles of the Episcopalian Archbishop James Ussher of Armagh, as the basis for the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>12</sup> The noted historian Schaff, writing on the Irish Articles, which were the work of Ussher (who was a close friend of the noted academic divine Vossius,<sup>13</sup> of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands), writes:

In all these particulars they prepared the way for the doctrinal standards of the Westminster Assembly. They were the chief basis of the Westminster Confession, as is evident from the general order, the headings of chapters and subdivisions, and the almost literal agreement of language in the statements of several of the most important doctrines.<sup>14</sup>

Another example of this consultation and cooperation between the different branches of the Reformed churches is seen

---

10. *Ibid.*, Dort, Synod of, pp. 309-310, *et al.*

11. *Ibid.*, Westminster Assembly & Westminster Confession, pp. 1035-1036; *The Westminster Confessional Standards*, Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Inverness, 1970, The Solemn League and Covenant, p. 355 ff., *et al.*

12. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, *op. cit.*, Ussher, James, p. 1005, *et al.*

13. See the entry *Vossius* in the Schaff-Herzog, Cyclopaedia.

14. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1977, vol. 1, p. 665.

---

when the Swiss churches wrote to various other Reformed churches regarding their Second Helvetic Confession, seeking their opinions upon it. Various other Reformed churches, such as the German, French, Hungarian, Polish, Scottish, Dutch, and English, then in various ways approved of it.<sup>15</sup>

The respect, care, and desire for biblical unity of the different branches of the Reformed churches also expressed itself in those different branches and their leaders desiring a universal council above that of national general assemblies or synods. They desired a council or synod where all branches could meet to deal with matters of mutual concern and agreement, and how to manage their differences. We have already referred to the correspondence of Calvin and Cranmer on this matter, but other fathers of a later date also desired such a council. For example, the Reformed Church of Scotland's Church Order lays down precedents and directions for such an assembly.<sup>16</sup>

The various Reformed churches prayed for, and had a concern for, one another in their trials and life as churches. They gave aid, refuge, and support to persecuted brethren from other Reformed churches. In these practical ways they showed their unity and care of one another. There are some very moving incidents of this care and showing the mercies of Christ to one another. It is simply a matter of historical record that the Reformed Church of the Netherlands showed its brotherly care for the Eastern European Reformed churches by ransoming from slavery and captivity brethren who had been captured by Muslims in Eastern Europe. Monuments to this remarkable care may still be seen in Eastern Europe.<sup>17</sup>

---

15. *Ibid.*, p. 394; David Calderwood, *History of the Kirk of Scotland*, Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1843, vol. 2, p. 331.

16. *A Copious and Comprehensive Summary of the Laws & Regulations of the Church of Scotland, from A.D. 1560 to A.D. 1850*, Alexander Forbes, Aberdeen, 1852, Book First, Title XVIII, Of a General Council of Protestants, pp. 250-251.

17. I recall, at a meeting conducted by the Rev. B. Woudenberg in the early 1990s, he gave a talk on a trip he had made to the Reformed Churches of Romania, and showed a slide of such a monument.

Another example of such care is seen in *The Westminster Directory for Public Worship*, where there is a section calling on the Reformed churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland to pray for the Reformed Queen of Bohemia and the Reformed churches there as they faced severe persecution from both Muslims and Roman Catholics. In part they were,

To pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations ... for the deliverance of the distressed churches abroad from the tyranny of the antichristian faction, and from the cruel oppressions and blasphemies of the Turk; for the blessing of God upon the reformed churches, ... for the comforting of the afflicted Queen of Bohemia, ... and for the restitution and establishment of the ... Elector Palatine of the Rhine....<sup>18</sup>

The care of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands to their brethren of the Reformed Church of Scotland and England in times of severe persecution is well documented. They sheltered them, gave them respect by allowing them to have their own worship and congregations. Some Scottish and English Presbyterians at times also became ministers in the Dutch churches, and one, William Ames, after attending the Synod of Dort, where his theological acumen became apparent, became professor of theology at Franeker, and finally rector. He attracted students, not only from the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, but also from all over Europe.<sup>19</sup>

---

18. *The Westminster Confessional Standards, op. cit., The Directory for the Public Worship of God, Of Public Prayer before the Sermon*, Page 377-378.

19. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, op. cit., Ames, William*, p. 36; *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, Org. Ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, I.V.P. Downers Grove, Illinois, 1993, *Netherlands*, p. 623. William Ames also, though a professor serving the Dutch churches, wrote on and defended that understanding of the Reformed faith on worship represented by the Presbyterians of England and Scotland. See for example his work *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship*, photocopied by Still Waters Revival Books, from his 1633 edition.

---

When one Reformed church was not able to train its ministers, another would come to its assistance and help in the training of its ministers. This was so even when there were serious differences on the matter of worship. A classic example of this is James Renwick, the Covenanter, and a stalwart not only of the doctrines of the Reformed Church of Scotland, but also of its worship and government, who was trained in Holland. He was sent to the University of Groningen with the support of equally staunch Scottish Reformed men Donald Cargill and Richard Cameron. He was also examined and ordained by a Classis of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.<sup>20</sup>

Let us not underestimate the close ties that existed between the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and of Scotland during the 1600s. Many Scottish students made their way to the different Dutch universities. Dutch theologians such as Gisbert Voetius and Hermann Witsius, among others, attracted Scottish students. Their writings were also held in repute in England and Scotland. In the period of the "killing times," a considerable number, including John Livingstone, Richard Cameron, and James Renwick were both trained and ordained by men in the Dutch Reformed Church. Other such Scot worthies as John Brown of Wamphray, Robert MacWard, and William Carstares also spent many years in the Netherlands.<sup>21</sup>

Various Reformed churches, with real differences in their ecclesiology (both Episcopalians — some Erastian — and Independents) and worship, met together in a general assembly to seek to compose symbols that would more closely unite them and Christ's cause. Note that there were three National Reformed Churches who met at the Westminster Assembly — the Scots, Irish, and English with such differences.

See how they cared for one another in that they also gave assistance to one another with their Church Order. A perusal of the Scots Reformed Church Order, as found in *A Copious and Com-*

---

20. *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, op. cit. Netherlands, p. 623, & Renwick, James, p. 709.

21. *Ibid.*, Netherlands, p. 623.

*prehensive Summary of the Laws and Regulations of the Church of Scotland from A.D. 1560 to A.D. 1850*, shows from the often quoting of the French Order the Scots' indebtedness to the French Reformed Church for their Church Order.

There were exchanges of pulpits between men of the different Reformed churches, even when there were deeply held differences of worship and government. One delightful anecdote that illustrates this occurred when Samuel Rutherford, one of the great Scottish reformers of the Second Reformation in Scotland, was pastor at Anworth. The Episcopalian Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher, Primate of the Church of Ireland, preached from Rutherford's pulpit. The circumstances of this quaint and yet significant incident are as follows.

A passing traveler came to Anworth, and on the eve of the Sabbath knocked at the manse and begged for rest and shelter. He was kindly received by the Rutherfords and joined in the evening family worship. During the worship he was asked, in the catechism time, how many commandments there were, to which he replied, "eleven." Samuel Rutherford was surprised that his visitor, being a mature and educated man, did not know better.

It seems that Rutherford was walking outdoors early on the Sabbath morning and heard a man praying in the garden. It was the stranger. From the man's lofty spirit of devotion, Rutherford guessed he was no ordinary person, and as soon as possible asked him his name. The stranger confessed he was the scholar and Episcopalian divine James Ussher, who had to pass by Anworth on his way back to Ireland, and wished to spend the Sabbath with Rutherford, but was not sure of his reception, Rutherford being a Presbyterian and Ussher an Episcopalian. Rutherford, however, warmly welcomed Ussher and asked him to preach that day. It is recorded that when Ussher gave out the text of the sermon, "*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another*," Rutherford exclaimed from the midst of the congregation, "*the eleventh commandment!*"<sup>22</sup>

---

22. Some doubt the authenticity of this anecdote, but it is widely reported as factual. See, for example, Thompson, A., *Samuel Rutherford*, R.T.B.S.S. Edinburgh, 1884, p. 31 ff.; Bonar, A., *Memoir and*



---

Observe also how the different Reformed churches embraced one another's confessional standards as their own — thus witnessing to the inherent unity of the Reformed faith among the different churches. It is striking to note how the earlier Continental Catechisms, such as Calvin's, was adopted by various other Reformed churches, including the Reformed Church of Scotland. Not only the Reformed churches of Germany, the Netherlands, and Eastern Europe, but also the Scottish Reformed Church adopted the German Reformed Church's *Heidelberg Catechism*. Both Calvin's Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism remain to this day official Catechisms of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Truly, the Reformed churches had a common unity in their understanding of the fundamental great truths of the Word of Almighty God. They strove for this unity as expressing their belief in the catholicity of the faith and of Christ's true church on earth. This unity can truly be seen in the basic solidarity of the Reformed symbols.

Now, what should be particularly noted is this. This cooperation, contact, respect, and care of one another was not at a time of compromise and weakness of the Reformed churches. Rather, this sort of relationship existed at a time in history when the Reformed churches were at the time of their greatest strength and influence — the classical period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

So the first point and lesson I believe we can draw from our fathers in the faith of old for ourselves today is this: we should seek to have contact, cooperation, in those things in which we agree. We should have a respect and care for one another, inasmuch as we hold to a like confession of the faith as found in our historic Reformed symbols. We need that catholic view of the church and faith.

---

*Remains of R. M. M'Cheyne*, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1966, p. 609; Loane, M., *Makers of Religious Freedom*, I.V.F. London, 1960, p. 63; Smellie, A., *Men of the Covenant*, Banner of Truth, London, 1960, p. 65. Even if the incident did not occur, we know from the way in which both Rutherford and Ussher conducted themselves it is entirely consistent with their convictions.

**II. There were principles that undergirded the managing of differences and similarities.**

We can learn a valuable lesson, I believe, in how we ought to relate to one another from how the various branches of the Reformed churches managed their differences.

It is striking that the various branches of the Reformed churches did not major on the differences they had at the cost of the broad faith they had in common. The truths they particularly held in common were their view of revelation and authority, God, Christ's Person and work, the nature of man and salvation.

However, this does not mean they thought their differences unimportant. They saw all truth as sacred and important, and any differences were treated seriously and with care and respect. There was none of that modern notion of sacrificing differences under the guise of a mere formal unity of the churches.

Now let us carefully note this! There is something else of significance that we should note about their differences. This basically had to do with matters of worship and of the government of the church.

In the area of worship, various branches differed quite sharply in the application of the principle of biblically-regulated worship. Some returned to the use of instrumental accompaniment in worship. Some continued to hold to the observance of "holy days." Some persisted in the use of formal liturgies in worship. Some still maintained an Episcopal form of government of the church.

Well, how did they manage their differences? How did they view them?

The attitude of the Scottish Reformed Church and the Presbyterians of England is really that of all branches of the Reformed Church. The crucial point was this! They distinguished between the *marks* or *essence (the being)* of the true church and its *well being!*<sup>23</sup>

---

23. James Bannerman, in his work *The Church of Christ, Banner of Truth*, London, 1960, vol. I, pp. 54 ff. discusses these distinctions and something of their ramifications.

---

For example, the three marks or “notes” of the true church are spelt out in the *First Scotch Confession*, Chapter XVIII. There we read in part:

...The notes, signs, and assured tokens whereby the immaculate spouse of Christ Jesus is known ... we believe, confess, and avow to be, first, the true preaching of the Word of God.... Secondly, the right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed to the Word and promise of God.... Lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s Word prescribes.... Wheresoever then these former notes are seen, be the number so few above two or three, there without all doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ....<sup>24</sup>

This confessional statement very clearly spells out what is of the *being* or essence of the church.

We ought to be struck by the fact that neither worship nor government is placed among the marks or essence of the true church. The reason was that such matters were seen as of the well-being of the church.

Our Reformed fathers clearly emphasized a difference of importance of order in the different theological loci — or divisions in the systematic study of biblical truth. The loci of *Theology Proper* (the knowledge of God’s being and attributes), *Anthropology* (the nature and state of man), *Christology* (Christ’s person and work), *Soteriology* (the study and understanding of the work of salvation), were seen as far more crucial to the faith than the locus of *Ecclesiology*. *Ecclesiology* has to do with the study and understanding of such things as polity (church government) and liturgics (worship). The earlier loci had to do with the essence of the faith and of the *being* of the church, and the last locus had to do with the *well-being* of the faith and the faithful.

---

24. For this Confession in Modern English, see Knox, John, *The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland*, Ed. Cuthbert Lennox, Andrew Melrose, London, 1905, Knox’s Confession (The First Scotch Confession), p. 353.

There were certain practical consequences flowing from this distinction and understanding. Firstly, it influenced how the church was defined. Now particularly note how the compilers of the Westminster Confession defined the church. And remember, this is the confession of the Puritan Presbyterians of England and the Covenanters of Scotland, with their profound commitment to as pure a worship and as consistent a biblical government as could be implemented, and who were prepared to suffer death for their convictions in these matters. For all their particularisms and keen consciences, they would not go beyond the revelation of the Word of God, and so felt constrained in all obedience to the Lord of the church, to define it in the most broad, catholic terms. They confessed:

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion: and of their children... (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV, Section II).<sup>25</sup>

Again we need to note that the fathers at the Westminster Assembly refused to make worship and government to be marks of the true church. They held to and practiced a unity and cooperation on the basis of the essence or being of the faith.

Now we need to ask, did they then make their differences merely matters of indifference? Certainly not! If not, then how did they view those churches with which they had differences? Did they unchurch them because of the differences? Did they refuse to enter into communication and fellowship with them because of the differences? Obviously not.

The way they viewed the matter was twofold. First, they acknowledged that the matter of the true church is not black and white. Certainly there is the true church. Certainly there is the false church. But there can be within the true church degrees of

---

25. *The Westminster Confessional Standards*, the Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Eccieslitho, Inverness, 1970, p. 107 ff.

---

consistency to the truth. The Westminster Confession put the matter thus:

This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them (Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, Section IV).<sup>26</sup>

Thus, our fathers did not believe that we have to “unchurch” a church because we may believe that in various ways they may be inconsistent or in error in their biblical understanding. They did not sever their connection with a church because they believed that what that church practiced was to some degree inconsistent with the truth as they understood it. Their practice and their confessions showed this to be so. An example of this is to be seen in the Church of Scotland’s view (in its Church Order) of the basis upon which Reformed churches would meet in a General Council. They met because of their mutually holding to that which was of the *being* of the Church, and would seek to manage those differences which related to the *well-being* of the church as God directed them to do so. A lesson for us. The Order stated, among other things of such a general council,

Most of the churches being already bound and obliged to own and maintain that Confession of Faith, which they have by their canons authorized and approved; and their being an universal harmony in the doctrine contained in all the confessions of the reformed churches; the work of a general council as to matters of faith, would, in all probability, be sweet and easy: And if in what relateth to the worship, discipline, or government of the church, there should be some misunderstandings, God should even reveal this unto them. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things, Phil. iii. 15, 16.<sup>27</sup>

---

26. *Ibid.*

27. *A Copious and Comprehensive Summary of the Laws & Regulations of the Church of Scotland, from A.D. 1560 to A.D. 1850*, Alexander

Secondly, how did our fathers view themselves in their relation to those churches in which they felt there was error in worship or government? They recognized that none should be proud and self-righteous in their relationship with other true churches. Thus they went on to confess:

The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error... (Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, Section V).<sup>28</sup>

Further, they believed that all true churches and believers, as much as lies within them, are bound to work for a biblical fellowship and unity.

Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing other such spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus (Westminster Confession, Chapter XXVI, Section II).<sup>29</sup>

When the Scots and English Presbyterians believed that there were violations of biblical principle in worship and government, not merely matters of indifference or simply different application of commonly held principles, they dissented, and recorded their dissent, with their brethren on those matters. But they would not break their unity with them. In this way they freed their consciences from any implication in what they considered to be a compromise of truth and Christ's cause. (Much the same thinking is behind the practice of "dissent" in our Church Order).

An outstanding example of this conviction and practice is seen in that, when the Reformed churches of Switzerland produced

---

Forbes, Aberdeen, 1852, Book First, Title XVIII, Of A General Council of Protestants, p. 251, No. 4.

28. *The Westminster Confessional Standards, op. cit., ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

---

their Second Helvetic Confession, the Scottish churches sent a brotherly letter of warm appreciation for the Swiss churches' work in drawing up such a confession. However, at the same time, they qualified their approval and their fellowship with those churches by making it clear that the Reformed Church of Scotland would not have anything to do with the observance of so called "holy days," for which, they believed, no warrant could be found in the Word of God.<sup>30</sup>

So, the Scots were prepared to stand firmly for their distinctives, though they accepted that those distinctives belonged to the *well-being* and not the *essence* of the church. It is simply a matter of historical record that the Reformed believers of Scotland and the Presbyterians of England would rather sacrifice all of this world's goods, even one's life, rather than be required to do what the Continental and English (Episcopal) Reformed churches required. To them, matters of government and worship, though not of the essence of the church, were yet vital matters of their own personal convictions and faith. Cameron writes of the Scots and quotes them,

The attitude of the Scottish reformers was made perfectly clear in 1566 in a well-known reply to the Swiss Churches in which approval was given to the Second Helvetic Confession with the exception of the passage concerning the festival of our Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension and sending the Holy Ghost upon His disciples. These festivals, obtain no place among us, for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day among us than what the divine oracles have prescribed."<sup>31</sup>

---

30. David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 331. In the same place, p. 332 ff., an example of a brotherly letter to the Reformed Episcopal Church of England on a matter of worship (dress of ministers for it) is to be found. The Scots vehemently opposed such things, but would not treat the English reformers as anything less than brethren.

31. *The First Book of Discipline*, Ed. J. K. Cameron, St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, p. 88, fn.10.

It was not contrariness, then, that motivated the Scottish and English Presbyterians. They believed the introduction of such things trespassed upon the prerogatives and office of Jesus Christ as King of the church and His glory. This was the spirit that animated them. There is a reference in H. Merle d'Aubigne's writings to a visit he made to Scotland, where he discussed with some of the Reformed church ministers their view of worship. He was struck by the fact that the Kingship of Jesus Christ over His church was basic to their thinking and practice in the matter. There is also an anecdote in one of the old books about the Covenanters, where an Episcopalian of otherwise Reformed persuasion was visiting Scotland during the "killing times." He met a staunch Covenanter, one of many who were suffering much for their conviction that only Christ could tell them how to worship and to order their church, not the king. The Episcopalian was surprised that the Covenanter was prepared to fellowship with him when he knew that he had a credible faith and walk. The Covenanter explained that his views on worship and government did not destroy the unity of the faith. What were at stake though, he explained, were the good of the church and the due recognition of the glory and rights of King Jesus. The Covenanter was prepared to fellowship on the basis of the true religion, but not prepared to sacrifice what he understood to be tied to the good of Christ's cause among them.

It should also be clearly understood that while the Scots saw the worship and government of the church (and for that matter their English Presbyterian counterparts) as very important, they just would not make them a fourth mark of the true church! They would not permit such matters to stop them from holding in esteem and care those Reformed churches that differed from them in such matters.

To such as the Scottish Reformed Church, no truth of God was unimportant. They believed the glory of God was involved in the least truth He has given to us to understand and in which light to live — even in matters that involved the well-being, not the essence, of the church. They perceived that the good of souls and the health of true biblical Christianity were involved in such matters. They believed that the Bible and history showed that if



---

they were to let go of such things, the church could then drift spiritually, and all sorts of unhealthy spiritual diseases could afflict it. The leaven would work until finally a point could be reached, over time, when she finally could apostatize from even the essential marks of the true church.

One English Presbyterian explained his concern by way of the quaint illustration of the rooks' nests. These noisy birds build colonies of nests that are used from year to year. One could drive the pesky birds away, but unless the nests were also removed, the rooks would return. Some matters of worship and government for which the Presbyterians of Scotland and England believed there was no scriptural warrant were seen by some other Reformed churches as indifferent things. Among them were such things as the surplice, government by bishops, and the use of candles or the organ in worship. True, they might not be abused as they had been by the pre-Reformed church, but if left, the "rooks" would be likely to return one day.

Thus, the Scottish Reformed Church dissented from what some other branches of the Reformed churches were doing in the government and worship of the church, even to the point of suffering greatly. Yet, for all that, they would not break the basic "unity" of those churches. They had a holy horror of schism.

John Knox, addressing the matter of the differences between the Reformed Church of Scotland and the Reformed churches of the Continent, wrote concerning such differences:

... so, albeit that we did both consider them and condemn them, yet we usurp no authority above our brethren, but refer all men to their own judge, and do reverence all congregations (i.e., Churches) who agree with us in the principals of our faith.... Albeit in all ceremonies there is not uniformity; yea, and albeit that in some heads of doctrine, also there appear repugnance, yet will we not break brotherly concord, providing that we agree in the principals.<sup>32</sup>

---

32. See Knox, John, *The Works of John Knox*, "Answer to a Jesuit Name Tyrie," Laing Edition, Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1846, vol. 6, p. 511.

Thus our Reformed fathers in Scotland classed ecclesiology (liturgics and polity) as not of the *essence* of the true church, but of its *well-being*. The differences that the Reformed Church of Scotland had with various other Reformed churches was generally in the area of ecclesiology, and not theology proper, Soteriology, Christology, etc. We believe that Calvin and the Reformed fathers on the Continent also had this understanding.<sup>33</sup> For example, Calvin writes,

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults.

What is more, some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with the church. For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like. Among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of faith.<sup>34</sup>

There is, then, I believe, a lesson for us in how our fathers managed their differences. We would do well to consider the principles that undergirded their thinking and how they managed

---

33. Consider, for example, how, though Calvin was personally convinced biblically against such things as "holy days," and was persuaded of Presbyterian Church Polity, he still felt able to labor in a church that held to the essentials or being of the Reformed faith, though it observed "holy days," and to encourage and appreciate other churches that also held to the heart and substance of the Reformed faith, though they practiced Episcopacy.

34. Calvin, John, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Trans. John T. McNeill, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975, Book IV, Ch. I, Section 12, pp. 1025-1026.

---

this matter. We need their principles so that we do not needlessly cause one another to stumble, and thus weaken our witness. We need their principles so that we can truly be a help to one another, but at the same time not sacrifice our consciences and convictions.

## **Conclusion**

Of course, differences in other loci did arise in due time. The essential unity of the faith was rent by the Arminian controversy in the Netherlands in the early 1600s, the Amyrauldian controversy in France and Switzerland in the mid-1600s, and the promotion of species of these errors (among others) by such men as John Davenant and William Laud in the mid-1600s in England, and the Marrow Controversy in Scotland in the early 1700s.

The issue of modern modified Calvinism, with its slide into the issue of common grace and the related matters of a universal love and desire in Christ for the salvation of all men, is one that afflicts the professing Reformed churches today. There is a departure in many ways among different Reformed churches from the historic Reformed faith as expressed in our creeds.

Yet, I think it true to say that, to varying degrees, faithful churches of the four different branches of the Reformed churches still exist throughout the world, and we ought to seek to appreciate them and to contact, encourage, and help them where we are able.

Contact with such churches, of course, raises the question, to what extent does the issue of common grace and related matters debar our contact with otherwise historic Reformed churches? It is, after all, in the earlier loci and at the heart of our faith! Is it so important that we make it a mark of a true church? I personally draw back from that, though it is a most serious error.

Perhaps one place we could start to “walk in the footsteps of the flock” (Song of Solomon 1:8) and “stand in the way and look for the old paths and walk therein...” (Jer. 6:16), is to seek a gathering or conference or “assembly” of those denominational churches, individual congregations, and particular men who are committed to sovereign particular grace and the historic faith as expressed in our Reformed creeds. In that way we could begin again the calling we have to care for one another in a like precious

faith, and mutually to seek to uplift the Lord in all His great wonder and glory — the God of our salvation. ●

---

# Book Review

*The Trinity*, by Roger E. Olson & Christopher A. Hall. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. Pp. vii + 156. \$15 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

*The Trinity* is a fine introduction to the doctrine expressed by the title. The authors trace the development of the doctrine of the Trinity from the earliest church fathers through the medieval and Reformation theologians to the leading contemporary theologians, Barth, Moltmann, Rahner, and others. Along the way, they sketch the trinitarian thought of the leading theologians.

The book notes the tension between a stress on the oneness of being and a stress on the threeness of persons, as well as the benefits and dangers of the respective emphases for Christian theology and life.

The twentieth century has seen "the revival and revitalization of trinitarian thought in Christian theology" (p. 95). The notable trinitarian heresies have

all reappeared, including modalism and tritheism, although the authors are hesitant to judge anyone's teaching heretical.

Two prominent teachings in contemporary theologians are the "social analogy" of the Trinity and a rejection of the immanent Trinity. The former intends to do justice to God's threeness of persons as the communion of love. The latter denies that there is a triune being behind the revelation of the Trinity in Jesus Christ (the economic Trinity).

An additional benefit of the work is its directing the attention of the student of the doctrine of the Trinity to the most important works on the Trinity. A student will want to read, among others, Tertullian's *Against Praxeas*, Augustine's *The Trinity*, Athanasius' *Four Discourses against the Arians*, Karl Rahner's *The Trinity*, and John D. Zizioulas' *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. The last part of the book is an

extensive bibliography of works on the Trinity in English, complete with comment on the works listed.

*The Trinity* is part of a series, "Guides to Theology," which is advertised as a new

"series of readable and brief introductions to theology." If the other works are like this one, the series will prove very valuable to the lover of theology. ■

---

---

***Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise***, ed. Willem J. vanAsselt & Eef Dekker. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. 311 pp. \$24.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The latest volume in the series, "Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought," is a compilation of papers on the relation of post-Reformation Reformed theology to the theology of the Reformation and on the relation of the theology of the Reformation to medieval theology. The issue is scholasticism. The authors of the studies included in *Reformation and Scholasticism* defend post-Reformation Reformed theology against the charge that it departed from the biblical theology of the Reformers, seduced by the prospect of spinning doctrinal systems out of the dogma of predestination

by logical deduction. The scholasticism of the Reformed theologians who followed Calvin and of the Reformed confessions of the seventeenth century concerned method, order, and system, not the content of theology. Beza, Dordt, and Westminster did not depart from the theology of John Calvin.

Especially helpful for an understanding of scholasticism, the distinction between scholastic method and scholastic theology, and the issues in the debate are the three opening chapters by Richard A. Muller, Cornelis Augustyn, and Willem van't Spijker.

In places, the work is heavy going. Antonie Vos is more abstruse and obscure than any scholastic, Reformed or medieval. Plowing through, the reader is rewarded for his labors by the valuable insight, here and there, into the *content* of the theology of the Reformation and

---

of individual Reformed theologians. Fritz G.M. Broeyer observes that

Those who adhered to the strict Calvinist view of double predestination [in England and in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries] were of the opinion that criticisms against this doctrine of election and rejection would finally result in a return to Rome. As soon as the emphasis was laid on God's foreknowledge of human behavior, instead of his decision regardless of that behavior, the notion of righteousness through works would creep in by a backdoor once again. After all, salvation and damnation would then depend too much on the good works of believers (pp. 174, 175).

W.J. vanAsselt contends that Voetius and Cocceius objected, not to the method of

medieval scholasticism but to its semi-Pelagian content.

The roads of Voetius and the scholastics part when it comes to the content of their scholastic theology. For example, their conception of grace and free will is unacceptable to Voetius. In this respect, Voetius like Cocceius had no good word to say for the medieval and more recent Roman Catholic scholastics. He had no hesitation in saying that scholasticism conceived in this way was a corrupt theology that led many true believers in the Church astray (pp. 234, 237, 238).

The last chapter, by Dr. Bert Loonstra, is a carefully crafted "yea, hath God said?" directed against the clarity of Scripture, the truth of the church's dogmas, and the possibility of revelation. ■

---

---

***Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicals in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam***, by Timothy C. Tennent. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002. Pp. 270. No price given (pa-

per). [Reviewed by Robert D. Decker.]

To his credit Dr. Tennent rejects the notion that, "The Christian gospel is ... one among many different paths to God.

Christianity is ranked side by side with religions such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism..." (p. 9). The author believes that Christianity is the only true religion. He is an "Exclusivist."

Tennent does, however, believe that there must be honest, open dialogue with the adherents of the world's religions. This honest, open dialogue is characterized as follows: 1) It must be done without compromising the Christian faith in any way. 2) In this dialogue, we must listen and respond to the objections to the Christian faith brought by Muslims, *et. al.* 3) The aim or purpose of inter-religious dialogue must be to bend every effort to convince the adherents of the world's religions of the truth of Christianity. In other words, our aim is that God will use the dialogue to convert them to faith in Jesus Christ.

Included in this opening section is a summary of the views regarding the relationship of Christianity to the non-Christian religions. Summed and evaluated are the views of: Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism. In his evaluation of Inclusivism and Pluralism, the author is sharply critical of the

views of John Hick, and rightly so.

In the main section of the book, Tennent presents "dialogues at the round table" with adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. These dialogues are all based on Tennent's missionary experiences and encounters with adherents of these religions. This is followed by a section on Case Studies and Tennent's conclusion.

There are four basic "ground rules" for these dialogues. 1) "All differences of opinion or perspective should be shared honestly without being pejorative." 2) "No one is permitted to exploit abuses present in a religion that are at odds with widely accepted beliefs and practices." 3) The questions, responses, clarifications, and rejoinders must all pertain to the central theme being discussed. 4) There must be no compulsion. For example, when the dialogue is complete, a Buddhist is free to remain a committed Buddhist.

It is precisely at this point that the author comes far short of where he and we should be. The trouble lies in the methodology and approach. The word "dialogue" denotes a conversation in which two or more per-



sons reason together on a given subject, in this case the objections Christianity has towards the world religions and the latter's objections to Christianity.

The Bible dictates how we relate to the non-Christian religions and how we do mission work among them. We can do no better than to follow the model of the apostle Paul, who was made all things to all men that he might by all means save some (I Cor. 9:19-22)! Neither Jesus nor Peter dialogued with the Jews at "the roundtable!" Paul did not dialogue at "the roundtable with the Gentiles" who worshiped a multitude of idols in the pagan world of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D.

To illustrate our point we take just one example, viz., Paul's farewell meeting with the elders of Ephesus as recorded in Acts 20. In verse 18 Paul speaks of "...after what manner I have been with you at all times or seasons." How was Paul with these formerly unconverted Ephesians? He tells us how in the verses that follow.

In verse 20 Paul says, "I have shown you...." The verb translated "shown" means, in the Greek, "to announce." It

refers to a formal proclamation of the gospel! In that same verse Paul continues, "...and have taught you...." The verb "taught" means, in the Greek, "didactic (teaching) discourse." Paul did not dialogue, but he went preaching and teaching publicly and from house to house.

That this is true is plain from verse 21, where Paul says he went about, "Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The verb "testifying" means, in the Greek, "earnestly to charge, to witness." This, according to verse 24, is "the ministry" which Paul had "received of the Lord Jesus, to testify (the same verb as used in verse 21) the gospel of the grace of God." It is interesting to note that our English word "martyr" is derived from this verb. Missionary preachers are often made to suffer persecution and martyrdom for their earnest testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

The apostle goes on to say, "And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more" (v. 25).

"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men" (v. 26).

"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (v. 27).

The verb translated "preaching" (v. 25) means, "to officiate as a herald." The herald was the official of the king who was charged with proclaiming the message of the king throughout the kingdom. The kingdom is God's kingdom. The citizens of the kingdom of God are the elect, redeemed in Christ's cross and resurrection. The Herald is Christ, whose voice is heard by those men lawfully called through the church to herald (preach) the Word of God. The essence of the message brought by the heralds is Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The verb translated "declare" (v. 27) is the same as the

verb translated "shown" (v. 20; cf. above).

Finally, the apostle told the Ephesian elders that he "ceased not to warn everyone..." (v. 27). "To warn" means "to admonish, warn, exhort."

It ought to be obvious that the apostle did not sit down with the Ephesians and have friendly dialogue concerning their objections to the Christian faith! Publicly and privately he faithfully proclaimed the imperative of the gospel call, "repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!" After this manner he labored among them. After this manner must the church through her missionary preachers labor among the adherents of the world's religions. No "roundtable dialogue," just good, solid exposition of the Word of King Jesus is what is needed! ■

---

---

***Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work***, ed. John W. Stewart and James H. Moorhead. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. Pp. x + 375. \$25 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

From this collection of essays on the life, thought, work, and influence of Charles Hodge, one can learn much about Hodge. From it, one can learn even more about the theological modernists who write most of the essays.

---

The book publishes the lectures given at a symposium on the campuses of Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1997. The symposium remembered the two hundredth anniversary of Hodge's birth.

Much is made of the historical and philosophical influences on the Presbyterian theologian. Almost nothing is said of the influence of Reformed theology — Calvinism. Hodge himself explained himself and his life's work in terms of the theology of John Calvin as systematized in the Westminster Standards, which Hodge believed to be the doctrine of the Bible, the Word of God. It does not take a first-rate historian to judge that Hodge's self-evaluation was right. Any attempt to know Charles Hodge and his work that ignores Reformed theology must fail.

As for Hodge's thought, the book concentrates on his political and social teachings. The essayists are especially drawn to Hodge's views on slavery and on the secession of the Confederate states in the middle 1800s. There is a fascinating account of Hodge's efforts to keep the Presbyterian Church united despite the political division. Ri-

chard J. Carwardine mentions that at the height of passions over the secession of the South, Hodge courageously refused to join his fellow delegates in singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at a celebration of the Lord's Supper that was part of the activity of the General Assembly. For refusing thus to mix patriotism with the spiritual worship of the Supper, Hodge incurred the wrath of the patriotic zealots. It was at this same Assembly that Hodge voted against the Gardiner Spring resolution calling on Presbyterians to declare their loyalty to the Federal Government as an act of their Christian faith.

The writers are obviously delighted with Hodge's concessions to Darwinian evolutionary theory and with his willingness to accommodate Scripture to that infidel theory.

There is almost nothing in the book of Charles Hodge's theological thought. Virtually the only exception is Hodge's doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. This is explained, not as Hodge himself explained it, as his believing reception of Scripture's own teaching about itself in II Timothy 3:15-17 and other places. Rather, the authors attribute Hodge's doctrine

of inspiration to his own psychology and to certain philosophical presuppositions.

Ignoring as it does Hodge's Christian and Reformed faith and Hodge's Calvinistic theology, the book cannot fulfill the promise of its title.

But it tells us a great deal about Hodge's modernist critics, some of whom are Hodge's successors at Princeton Seminary. They are slaves of historicism, spiritual children of the anti-supernaturalists who repudiated Hodge by the reorganization of Princeton Seminary in the 1920s and who excommunicated Hodge's theology in the person of J. Gresham Machen in the 1930s. Everything is to be explained by the natural forces of history, including the waning of the influence of Hodge's theology in Presbyterianism in the United States:

In the end neither his learning nor his ascendance could protect his worldview from being swept under by the tide of historicism. At Princeton itself a remnant of loyalists did continue Hodge's work, but in the twentieth century even they were forced to abandon ship and ended marooned on the margins of American culture (p. 60).

An example of historicism is Allen C. Guelzo's sarcastic evaluation of Hodge's position on slavery. Hodge held that slavery as such cannot be condemned as sinful, but that the actual form of slavery that prevailed in the South was sinful. Hodge referred to the mistreatment of slaves by the slaveowners' breaking up marriages and families and other cruelties. Guelzo criticizes and ridicules Hodge's position, attributing it to various historical, social, and even personal pressures and motives.

Should not a historicist be more sympathetic to a Charles Hodge, who found himself subject to all the complicated and powerful historical pressures of 1861 in the United States? And should not a historicist be more modest about his own firm stance against slavery as such, since his stance too is due merely to historical influences? Besides, it behooves him to keep in mind that a century or two hence society may again practice slavery as something right and good, if history, the lord and god of all events and of all values, should move that way.

The deeper issue is that Guelzo and most of the other contributors never reckon with

the *basis* of Hodge's position on slavery. That basis was Scripture's refusal to condemn slavery as such as sinful. The modernist critics of Charles Hodge shrewdly ignore the basis of Hodge's position in Scripture. They have good reason for doing so. If they were to treat this basis, they would have to reveal that they also regard Scripture as nothing but a historical document, shaped and formed by mere human and other historical forces. They would then subject the apostle Paul to the same sarcastic criticism that they direct against Charles Hodge.

Striking in this contemporary appraisal of Charles Hodge is what is not said. There is not a word of praise of Hodge for reverencing Holy Scripture. There is no commendation of the Presbyterian theologian for defending the cardinal doctrines of Scripture and the creeds in a time of doubt and unbelief. There is no recognition of the long-time professor for instructing thousands of pastors to teach the doctrines of grace.

The book contains a valuable bibliography of works by and about Charles Hodge, some forty pages worth. ■

---

---

***Boyd's Handbook of Practical Apologetics***, by Robert T. Boyd. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997. Pp.251. No price (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Boyd's book is not a classic textbook on Apologetics. It is rather a defense of the integrity of Scripture over against modern attacks on it. But again, the defense is not so much that of a biblical and Reformed defense of the doctrine of inspira-

tion and a well-developed doctrine of Scripture. As its subtitle suggests, it is more a defense of Scripture over against scientific and historical arguments against it. The sub-title reads: "Scientific Facts, Fulfilled Prophecies, and Archaeological Discoveries That Confirm the Bible."

The book is divided into three sections. The first section deals with science and the Bible and attempts to explain the Bible's data within the frame-

work of science, and prove the accuracy of Scripture by various scientific facts. The second section deals with fulfilled prophecy and points out how many prophecies have been literally fulfilled, although here the author gets into prophecies of the coming of Christ in which his eschatology is askew. The third section deals with archeological discoveries that support Scripture's assertions. This is the longest section of the book.

In Boyd's efforts to explain various teachings of Scripture in the light of science and various scientific discoveries in the light of Scripture, things can and do go badly wrong. One example is the treatment of "black holes," which astronomers have recently discovered. Concerning these, the author writes the following. After speaking of these "black holes" as empty spaces in heaven and referring to one such empty space in the north, he says, "What is the significance of the 'black hole' in the north to the Bible believer? Since the Bible does mention it, some are of the opinion that it is the dwelling place of God Himself. There is no need for light there 'for God is light' (I John 1:5). We have already been reminded that God

is in the 'height' of heaven (Job 22:12). The psalmist tells us that His throne is in heaven (Ps. 11:4), and Isaiah 66:1 informs us that 'heaven is [His] throne'" (p. 52).

Statements such as this are poor science, poor exegesis, and a denial of some truths of God, here a denial of God's infinity: for Solomon acknowledges, in his great intercessory prayer at the dedication of the temple, that the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain God (II Chron. 6:18). They do more harm to the Christian cause than many arguments against Scripture. A philosophy professor was fond of reminding us that "a poor argument for the truth will often do more harm than a good argument against it."

I am well aware of the fact that it is not easy to draw a line between "proof" for the Bible's integrity and evidences of the Bible's integrity. If by "proof" of Scripture's integrity we mean proof outside of Scripture itself that the Bible is the infallibly inspired Word of God, proof that can be used to persuade unbelievers, then such exercises lie outside biblical Apologetics. The Bible contains its own proof. If men do not accept that truth, the blame must not be laid

on the Bible as being inadequate to establish its own veracity. The blame must be laid on sinful man. Empirical "proof" will never convince the unbeliever. "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And if wicked men still clamor for more proof (as they did already in Jesus' day) it remains true for all time: "If they will not hear Moses and the prophets, they will not be persuaded if one should rise from the dead."

But this is not to deny that the believer can enjoy some aspects of a book such as this. For one thing, it certainly is the calling of believers (and particularly our Christian school teachers who teach science) to develop science within the givens of biblical revelation and to explain scientific data, which is to be accepted as correct, in the light of God's Word. This is a pleasant and exciting task, and

we have those within our schools who do this. It is also possible and likely that a believer who already accepts the truths of Scripture as infallible truth will find his spirit lifted up as archaeological discovery shows that biblical prophecy has been literally fulfilled, that all of science is certainly more clearly explained in the context of God's great work of creating all things in six normal days than in any theory of evolutionism, and that the events of history clearly demonstrate the signs of the coming of Christ. Many things in this book can be read with pleasure. It is the title that bothers me: "Apologetics"? I think not.

The book is very simply written and can be read by young people and adults. But the reader must keep in mind that God's Word stands in its own strength. ■

---

---

***Arius: Heresy & Tradition***, by Rowan Williams. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002. Pp.xiii, 378. \$20.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

Arius was the father of Arianism, a deadly heresy in the early part of the fourth century which tore the church apart and was the immediate occasion for the Council of Nicea (A.D. 324).

The church had struggled, almost from the beginning of the post-apostolic era, over the formulation of the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church was persuaded from the very beginning that God the Father was God; that Jesus Christ was God; and that the Holy Spirit was divine. But how to formulate that truth in such a way that it repudiated the errors of pagan polytheism on the one hand, and, on the other hand, maintained the truth that there is only one God, was a problem that took at least two centuries to solve.

As the church was searching for answers to this most basic question, theologians throughout the empire were proposing answers of one sort or another. All of these proposed solutions were rejected by the church as failing in some important respects to do justice to the biblical teachings. The great, though frequently heretical, Origen, who lived at the turn of the third century to the fourth, had suggested that the relation between the Father and the Son was one of generation. He was really the first theologian to do this, and it was, from a certain point of view, an important step towards the final answer. The

trouble with Origen's solution was that he made the act of generation an act of God's will, rather than making it a personal attribute, which was part of the essence of God Himself. By making generation an act of God's will, he opened the door to a denial of the absolute divinity of Christ. That which God wills is outside His divine being.

Arius was influenced by this teaching of Origen and so came to the conclusion that Christ was less than divine. Christ was divine, though only in a limited sense. Christ was as near being God as it is possible to be. Christ was eternal, though created. Christ was high above all men, but a creature for all that. Christ was a son of God, the highest son and most glorious son, but not *the* Son of God. Arius appeared on the scene with a solution that appealed to so many that far and away the majority followed his teachings. It was the greatest threat to orthodoxy that the church had faced.

Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Wales and formerly Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Oxford, wrote this book and published it in 1987. This present work is a revised edition of what



---

has to be a sort of definitive work on Arius and his heresy.

Although Williams rejects the theology of Arius and maintains the orthodoxy of the creedal statement formulated by Nicea, he is sympathetic to Arius in many respects. He considers Arius a theological conservative who was interested in maintaining the sovereignty of God in His works. He speaks highly of Arius as a man and ascribes to Arius good motives in teaching what he did. He takes every opportunity to give to Arius' views as good an interpretation as possible, and to explain Arius' "heresy" in ways which all but excuse the man of his sin.

Without passing judgment on all Williams' arguments in defense of Arius, and even conceding that there are many historical reasons for Arius' teachings, it remains a fact that when Nicea set forth the doctrine of Scripture clearly, concisely, and as the official position of the church, Arius refused to accept that creed. A man may, for lack of complete understanding of the theological issues or because the doctrine is not yet clearly developed, propose wrong solutions to problems. That does not make him a heretic. But when the church finally comes

to a decision on what Scripture teaches, and officially sets down that doctrine as the truth, and when its creedal formulations cannot be overthrown with Scripture, then for one to disagree makes him a heretic. If Arius loved the truth, he would have cooperated with the delegates at Nicea in searching for the biblical teaching on the subject and he would have accepted Nicea's formulation when it was all over.

Williams is right, however, when he describes Arius' views as being basically rationalistic. Arius was indeed the first rationalist to deny Christ's divinity—though he was certainly not the last to do so. Williams is also right when he puts the entire controversy into the context of a discussion of the relation between the traditions of the church and new ideas proposed as the church strives to understand the truth more fully. What is missed in the discussion of the book is a proper sense of the history of the development of the truth of Scripture: Truth is always a fuller and more detailed development of doctrines which the church has already established as the truth of God's Word. The church performs her calling well when, with deep

devotion to the guidance of the Spirit of truth in the past, she goes on to develop these truths more fully. Development of doctrine is never innovation, totally fresh insights, novelties, along with a rejection of what the church has stated in past centuries.

Williams' book is the definitive book that it is because it deals extensively and exhaustively with almost everything that relates to the question facing Arius. Included are a detailed description of pre-Nicean events in the history of the church, much of which is speculative because of the dearth of documentary evidence; descriptions of the life of the church in Alexandria (from which Arius and his opponent Athanasius came); careful examination of all extant documents bearing on the case; analyses of earlier heretics and their possible influence on Arius; and extensive studies of theological and philosophical questions that were present in the church and that shaped and molded the discussion and debate over Arius' views.

In defense of Arius, the author insists that Arius has often been misinterpreted and that, therefore, views ascribed to him

were not his at all. He also justifies Arius by explaining away, on the grounds of circumstances, the heresies with which Arius has been charged. He contends that the surviving documents of Arius' own writings are scanty and that much of what is known of Arius' teaching is found in writings of Arius' opponents. He argues that Arius was motivated by a desire to purify the church from harmful residues of earlier beliefs. But in the end he is forced to agree with Nicea (it is a confession of his own [Anglican] church). But the controversy, Williams argues, had the good result of effecting a more mature church, which was more monolithic and unified.

The purpose of the book is thus stated:

To trace the political and intellectual pre-history of the Nicene crisis and to attempt to understand the odd fact that Arius was at once a radical and a figurehead for conservatism is to gain some perspective on what might be called the paradigmatic stresses and temptations of Church and theology. 'The perils of modernizing Nicaea' are not to be minimized, and I hope to have avoided too

---

much grossly anachronistic misreading; but we are dealing here with developments that determined the future course of Christian theology and that still haunt contemporary discussion. Even those who believe, as I do not, that Nicaea represented a damaging or mistaken shift in the history of doctrine are bound to consider how it has shaped and continues to shape Christian speech and prayer. As for those content to affirm the faith of Nicaea, they too have questions to answer as to the nature of doctrinal continuities, questions which the very *fact* of a doctrinal crisis in the fourth century that presses upon us. This book is meant as an attempt to give focus to some of these questions, in the hope of assisting a little the enormous contemporary task of critically appropriating once again the

heritage of doctrinal history – and, more remotely but more importantly, assisting that proclamation of the gospel which must be the goal of all doctrinal exploration and reappropriation.

Finally, we ought, I think, to reduce the whole controversy to the simple yet potent argument of Athanasius, that great defender of the divinity of Christ: Of course, Christ is the Son of God. Only God can save us from our sins, for we cannot save ourselves. Christ has to be fully God because we are saved by Christ. That is the end of all argument.

The value of the book is enhanced by several important appendices and by a collection of pre-Nicene and Nicene creedal documents. ■

---

---

***The Systematic Theology of John Brown of Haddington***, by John Brown, with an Introduction by Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson. Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications. Obtainable from Reformation Heritage Books at [RHbookstore@aol](mailto:RHbookstore@aol).

com. Pp. xliii - 576. No price given (hardcover). [Reviewed by Herman C. Hanko.]

The blurb on the back cover of the book gives us the information we need to appreciate this book.

John Brown (1722-1787) of Haddington was the leading minister in the Associate Synod during the formative years of eighteenth-century Scotland. He was a devout Christian, a gifted preacher, and a prolific writer of theology. He began life in obscure poverty, without advantage of wealth, position, title, or education. Yet God favored him with unusual gifts and an enormous capacity for hard work.

Brown taught himself Greek while working in the fields. He became a man of deep spiritual experience with skill in preaching the doctrines of free grace and piety....

Brown was well-known as a theologian in his day but has since been overlooked, although recently a biography and some of his expository work have been published. His systematic theology, *A Compendium View of Natural and Revealed Religion*, is based on his seminary lectures and is notable for its evangelical eloquence and biblical centrality.

It contains more than 26,000 proof texts and numerous exegetical insights along with a consistent covenantal emphasis, experiential depth, and compelling applications. This single vol-

ume of Reformed systematic theology is rich in content and an indispensable tool for students, pastors, and professors of theology.

John Brown was minister in Haddington during the years of the Marrow controversy. Although not yet a minister during the time of the controversy itself, he was affected by it and went with the Secession Churches who split from the established church a few years after the controversy. He went through another split in the ranks of the Secession Churches and came to know well the troubles which plagued Presbyterianism in Scotland. He served as pastor of the Haddington congregation for thirty-six years.

His *Systematic Theology* is an important one, for it gives us the theological thinking of the Secession Churches, which Brown reflects in his writings. These churches were led by the "Marrow Men," and "Marrow theology" influenced the theological position of the Free Churches of Scotland to the present.

It is impossible to give in this review a summary of all Brown's theology, but a few points will suffice to show its importance.

---

He was solid on the doctrines of the historic Christian faith, including the doctrine of sovereign and double predestination. In fact, there are places in his lengthy treatment of this subject where he becomes almost supralapsarian. The major place he gives to the doctrine shows how important it was in his thinking.

Brown reflected current thinking when he developed the truth of God's covenant. He held to a covenant of works with Adam which included parties, terms, conditions, the promise of eternal life, and the penalty of death. He gives an extremely detailed analysis of the doctrine and emphasizes, as was characteristic of Scottish theologians, the federal relation between Adam and the human race as the head of the covenant of works. Nor is it surprising that Brown taught a *pactum salutis* that was a covenant between the first and second persons of the Trinity.

I was particularly interested in Brown's view of the call of the gospel and its relationship to the atonement of our Lord. I was interested in his view of this because the Marrow Men were condemned by the Synod of the Presbyterian Church for teaching, among

other things, a well-meant gospel offer. The Marrow Men were also the fathers of the Secession Churches of which Brown was a part.

Interestingly, Brown is somewhat ambiguous on this question, even though he is, on the whole, solid. He taught that the offer of the gospel to all is a manifestation of God's goodness to mankind in general. In connecting this to the atonement of Christ, he writes:

This satisfaction (of Christ's atonement) being infinitely excellent in itself, fulfilled in a nature common to men, and thus equally suited to every man's case, a sufficient foundation was laid (sic) for a general and indefinite invitation of them to receive and rest on it, as their justifying righteousness before God—and all of them, according to their degree of connection with the elect, receive manifold gifts, offices, or outward accommodations, which otherwise they would not...;—though indeed reprobates enjoy these things as *consequents*, rather than as proper *fruits* of the death of Christ with respect to them (p. 299).

It seems as if he finds in

Christ's atonement some kind of juridical basis for God's goodness to all men, a goodness expressed in the offer of the gospel. Whether this goodness to all men is meant as an objective fact or whether it is indicative of God's attitude of favor to all men is not clear from Brown's treatment of the doctrine.

But he writes further:

It is manifest that Christ, in his intercession, prays only for his elect, John xvii.9.—Now, his intercession in respect to its object, is of the same extent with his atonement, I John ii. 1, 2. Nor will common sense allow, that he would lay down his life for any person for whom he would not intercede.... The tenet of Christ's dying equally for all men, or for any that are not elected and actually saved, is pregnant with the most glaring absurdities, viz. That as but few of mankind, comparatively taken, are actually saved, God hath in a great measure lost his end, in his principal work of men's redemption....

He then goes on to list many other glaring absurdities implicit in a universal atonement, and concludes that par-

ticular redemption is the clear teaching of Scripture. Brown considers this doctrine so important that he spends a great deal of time giving and answering all the objections that evil men bring against the doctrine.

Surprisingly, there is little ecclesiology (a bit more than 25 pages) and no eschatology in the book. And troubling is the absence of references to and explanations of the creeds; not even the Westminster Confessions. The last part of the volume is devoted to a treatment of the Decalogue and "the gospel, in its matter, use, difference from, and connection with the law." This treatment of the law and the gospel reflects thinking common among eighteenth and nineteenth century Puritans: a kind of antithesis between law and gospel, the law serving one purpose and the gospel another. Although this is perhaps closely associated with a covenant of works, it surely does not reflect the emphasis of Scripture by which we are taught that law and gospel are basically the same. God's law, after all, enlightens the mind and purifies the heart (Ps. 19); and one need not read very far into Psalm 119 to discover marvelous works of

---

salvation which the law is capable of doing.

The value of the book is enhanced by a fairly lengthy biography of John Brown of Haddington.

The historical value of the book, however, makes it an important addition to any theologian's library. ■

**Contributors for this issue are:**

**Chris Coleborn**, a minister emeritus of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.

**Robert D. Decker**, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

**Russell J. Dykstra**, professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

**David J. Engelsma**, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

**Herman C. Hanko**, emeritus professor of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, Grandville, Michigan.

**Mark L. Shand**, pastor of the Winnaleah congregation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.