

Reformed Theological Seminary/Jackson
ST515 Systematic Theology – Scripture, Theology, Anthropology Syllabus
Fall 2018
Ligon Duncan (with Mike Kruger, Scott Swain, and Duncan Rankin)

Course Description

A study of **Scripture** (inspiration, inerrancy, canon), **theology proper** (God, Trinity, creation, providence) and **anthropology** (man, Fall, sin). Our survey of doctrine will be based on the exegesis of Scripture, with continual reference to historical theology. All along we will remember the crucial nexus between faith and life, doctrine and practice, and thus endeavor to stress the importance of these doctrines for Christian thought, life, and ministry.

Prerequisites

*Students unfamiliar with the discipline of systematic theology should consult J.I. Packer’s *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Zondervan, 1994), and read it in its entirety before the course.

*Students who are wondering about the value of Systematic Theology to preaching should consult the following: J.I. Packer, “The Preacher as theologian: preaching and systematic theology,” in *Collected Shorter Writings of J.I. Packer: 3 Honouring the Written Word of God*, (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Publications, 1999), pp.301-316.; “Preaching and Systematic Theology,” by Donald Macleod, in *The Preacher and Preaching* ed. Sam T. Logan (P & R, 1986), pp. 246-272. John Murray, “Systematic Theology,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), Vol. 4, pp. 1-21.

Course Objectives

The principal aim of the RTS Systematic Theology courses is to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the main doctrines of Christianity. The course aims at introducing the student to the discipline of systematic theology, in particular, to **Prolegomena** (introductory matters to the study of theology, theological method, the task of dogmatics, Scripture) **Theology Proper** (or the doctrine of God), the **Decrees** (creation and providence), and the doctrines of man (**Anthropology**) and sin (**Harmartiology**).

Students should have a competent grasp of the issues involved and a facility to communicate them with some fluency. Some memorization is essential in this process. Theology is both exegetical and historical, sociological and ecclesiastical, biblical and systematic. Tensions often arise when one aspect is stressed at the expense of another.

This is a course in systematic theology—concerned with the answer to a series of interrelated questions: What does the entire Bible teach on a specific issue? How have theologians of the past and present formulated this issue? Answers to these questions are often expressed *confessionally*, and many branches of the church require of their ordained clergy (teaching elders) a commitment to these doctrines in a more or less strict sense. Students ought to be able to handle themselves well in the modern debate over controversial issues. Many students will be examined on these doctrines in church courts, and this objective will also be maintained. Additionally, all good theology should be doxological. Obedience in worship will be the chief objective of this course.

Remember:

“There are theologians in the bottom of hell who are more interested in their own thoughts about God than in God himself.” [C. S. Lewis]

“Theology is the science of living blessedly forever.” [William Perkins, The Golden Chaine (1590), 1]

Students should achieve the following:

1. A basic familiarity with the traditional loci of Christian theology.
2. Acquaintance with the history of Christian thought, particularly its Patristic, Medieval, Reformation, Confessional and Modern phases.
3. Awareness of contemporary challenges to Christian orthodoxy and an ability to assess their strengths and weaknesses.
4. Critical awareness of current trends in Christian theology.
5. Familiarity with the tools and resources available for study of theological issues and an ability to use these tools for independent research and analysis.
6. A sense of theological proportion, enabling the student to distinguish between what is primary and what is secondary in Christian doctrine.
7. The development of a respect for traditional theological formulations together with an ability to critically evaluate them.
8. An understanding of the connection between theology, piety and doxology.

Theological Standpoint

The course will be taught from the standpoint of a personal and ecclesial commitment to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In particular, it reflects the theology of the Reformed tradition as expounded by its best representatives from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries. We will engage in our theological work, seeking to submit all our thinking to Scripture, but greatly indebted to (for instance) the Church Fathers, Calvin, Protestant Orthodoxy, the Scottish Divines, and the Princetonians, and in conversation with the best and most important of the whole Christian tradition. Students who do not come from this theological tradition, or who disagree with it, need to know that their professor will love and respect them anyway! He wants to serve them well by clearly, kindly and warmly articulating systematics from the standpoint of classical, confessional, Reformed theology. It is his opinion that evangelicals of all stripes are well served by familiarity with the Reformed theology—which is Protestantism’s preeminent intellectual theological tradition. We all come from some theological perspective, and that is best admitted out loud and put on the table for all to see.

Teaching/Class Methodology

Lectures will cover all the major topics, but there will not be uniformity. Some topics are more important than others. Some topics are covered adequately in the reading material (when this is the case, it will be pointed out in class). Due to the mixed nature of the classroom, and the tight demands on our time, questions will be necessarily limited, *but welcome*. Special opportunities will be arranged on a voluntary basis for students who wish to ask questions of a, “I don’t understand this,” nature. It is all too easy to slow things down to a snail’s pace if this is not adhered to. Of course, I love hanging around after class to talk and answer questions.

Course Requirements

READING

Required Texts

Mastery is required of the following materials: [1,149 pages]*

Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Eerdmans: **Combined edition, 1996**), {Introductory} 1-186, including Richard Muller's preface. **(ST-1) (186)** {God, Man, Sin} 19-261. **(ST-2) (242)**

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (ICR)* (W/JKP, 1559 edition, Battles trans.), Vol 1:35-366 {I.i.1-II.vii.17}. **(331)**

Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough and What That Means for You and Me* (Crossway: ISBN 978-1433542404), pp. 11-124. **(113)**

B.B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (P&R: ISBN 978-0875525273), pp. 71-348. **(277)**

Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms: WCF 1-9; WLC 1-29; 91-152; WSC 1-19.

Supplemental Texts (on reserve in the library): [779 pages]

Reading of and conversational acquaintance with the following material will be required:

Augustine, *De Trinitate*, BR 60. S4 1956 V.3, pp. 17-36.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, BX 1749. T5 1981 V.1, pp. 458-499.

Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, BR 60. S41 1961 V. 8, pp 1-18; 33-43.

Tertullian, *Contra Praxeas*, BR 60. A52 V. 3 c. 1, pp. 597-632.

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume* (HB) (Baker, 2004), 3-392

John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, BX 8915. M87 1976 V. 2, pp. 3-46.

David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth (or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?)* 1-14, 95-136

John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, BT 103. F73, pp. 543-599.

Karl Barth, "Vestigium Trinitatis," in *Church Dogmatics*, BT 75. B282 V. 1. Pt. 1. c. 2, pp. 333-347.

Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, BX 1751.2. R313., pp. 347-382.

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, BT 202. M5513 1974, pp. 53-65.

Wolfhart Panneberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, BT 75.2. P2613 1991, pp. 20-35.

Clark Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God*, BT 102. 064 1994, pp. 101-125.

The RTS Systematics Tradition

RTS has had four professors produce academic Systematic Theologies, and a fifth has now started.

Morton H. Smith, **Systematic Theology**, GPTS Press (2 vols.)

Douglas F. Kelly, **Systematic Theology**, Mentor (3 vols.)

John Frame, **A Theology of Lordship**, P&R (4 vols.)

Richard Gamble, **The Whole Counsel of God**, P&R (3 vols.)

Michael Allen (Mike teaches at RTS Orlando and is just now embarking on this quest)

Reading Schedule*

1. HB, pp. 3-48. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 71-168. DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*, pp. 11-58. **(190)**
2. HB, pp. 49-146. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, pp. 169-348. DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word*, pp. 59-124. **(344)**
3. ST-1, pp. 1-186. **(186)**
4. ST-2, pp.19-81. HB, pp. 147-172. **(89)**
5. ST-2, pp. 82-164. ICR, pp. 35-116. HB, pp. 173-262. Tertullian, *Contra Praxeas*, pp. 597-632. **(289)**
6. ICR, pp. 116-183. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* (chs 1-11 and 21-27), pp. 1-18; 33-43. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book I, pp. 17-36. **(121)**
7. WCF 1-9. WSC 1-19. WLC 1-29; 91-152. ST-2, pp. 165-180. HB, pp. 263-310. **(64)**
8. ST-2, pp. 181-218. ICR, pp. 183-237; Karl Barth, “*Vestigium Trinitatis*,” in *Church Dogmatics*, I/1: 333-347. **(108)**
9. ICR, pp. 239-255. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a QQ 90-101, pp. 458-499. **(59)**
10. ICR, pp. 255-309. HB, pp. 311-339. John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, II: 3-46. John Frame, *A Theology of Lordship: The Doctrine of God*, pp. 543-599. **(185)**
11. ST-2, pp. 219-249; ICR, pp. 309-340. HB, pp. 340-368. Clark Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, pp. 101-125. **(117)**
12. ST-2, pp. 250-261. HB, pp. 369-392. J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, pp. 53-65; W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, II:20-35. **(65)**
13. ICR, pp. 340-366. David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, pp. 1-14 and 95-136. K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, I:347-382. **(119)**

*Approximate page totals do not include readings from the Westminster Standards.

Class Attendance

Class attendance will be imperative for successful completion of this course.

The use of laptops, internet, text messaging, smart phones and other electronic devices are not allowed during class time. Educational studies are confirming that laptops, etc. are not helping, but rather hindering learning. The very process of taking handwritten notes is very important for student learning.

Students are expected to bring their copies of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the Bible to class every day.

Evaluation

The course will be divided into three parts: précis (30%), term paper (30%) and final examination (40%).

Précis requirement (30%)

A précis is a concise abridgement of a larger treatment, or summary of a particular topic. In this exercise, the student will prepare a (no more than) one page précis of his views and understanding of 6 major doctrinal topics:

1. God	Due	Sept 24
2. Trinity	Due	Oct 15
3. Creation	Due	Oct 22
4. Providence	Due	Nov 5
5. Man	Due	Nov 19
6. Sin	Due	Nov 26

These précis's should be typed. Students may **not** work together on this assignment. A sample précis is given in the appendices section at the end of this syllabus. J.I. Packer does a great job of providing a précis for most doctrines in his book *Concise Theology*. Refrain from merely duplicating his material! The professor has *three* copies of this book already!

Term Paper (30%)

A term paper on an approved topic must be submitted by the final paper deadline of the semester.

Final Exam (40%)

The examination will cover the entire material, including the reading material, and will test the student's competence to integrate it into his overall theological skills. You may expect the examination to require detailed knowledge, comprehensive understanding and the capacity to articulate.

Class Schedule

Aug 27	Class 1: Scripture		
		Sept 3	Labor Day Holiday: No Class
Sept 10	Class 2: Scripture/Canon (Mike Kruger)		
Sept 17	Class 3: God		
Sept 24	Class 4: God		
		Oct 1	READING WEEK: No Class
Oct 8	Class 5: Trinity (Scott Swain)		
Oct 15	Class 6: Trinity (Scott Swain)		
Oct 22	Class 7: Creation		
Oct 29	Class 8: Providence		
Nov 5	Class 9: Providence		
Nov 12	Class 10: Humanity (Imago Dei) (Duncan Rankin)		
Nov 19	Class 11: Humanity		
Nov 26	Class 12: Fall/Original Sin		
Dec 3	Class 13: Sin		
		Dec 7	Term Papers Due

Recommended Books for your library (!)

In addition to the required texts, the following books are highly recommended for your reference during the course and purchase for your personal library.

Systematic Theology

Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (3 vols.)
W.à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (4 vols.)
John Owen, *Collected Works* (16 vols.)
Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.)
Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*
B.B. Warfield, *Collected Works* (10 vols.)
John Murray, *Collected Writings* (4 vols.)
Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*
Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*
Donald Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*
Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*
Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (4 Vols)
Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*

Theological prolegomena (Introduction, Theological Method)

Richard Muller, *The Study of Theology*
John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*
David Wells, *No Place for Truth*

Scripture (Revelation, Inspiration, Authority, Hermeneutics)

Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol.1
N.B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, eds. *The Infallible Word*
Nigel Cameron, *Evolution and the Authority of the Bible*
D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge, eds. *Scripture and Truth*
_____. *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*
Dan McCartney and C. Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*
Packer, J. I. *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*
_____. *God Has Spoken*

Theology proper (God, Trinity, Creation, Providence)

Herman Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*
John Frame *Doctrine of God*
Donald Macleod, *Behold Your God*
Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*
D.G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate*
J.A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?*
Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*

Anthropology (Man, Fall, Sin)

James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*
George W. Knight III, *The NT Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*
John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*
John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*
Iain D. Campbell, *The Doctrine of Sin*

Pastoral Theology

Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*

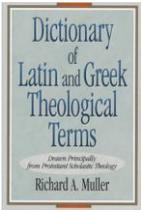
Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*

Patrick Fairbairn, *Pastoral Theology*

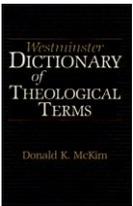
J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*

C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*

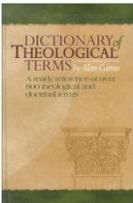
Unsure of a certain term? These should help you.



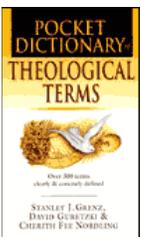
For the 'advanced' student who wants to learn some Latin!



Some 'Barthian' leanings here, so be careful.



From the 'old school'



The \$7 'save my bacon' variety and for those unashamed to admit ignorance!

Contacting the Teacher

My address and contact numbers are below. Catching me can be a challenge; my Executive Assistant, Jan Hyde, or my TAs, Matthew Pinckard and CL Pearce, are probably your best bets for catching me. Appointments should be scheduled through Jan, whose direct line is 601 923 1656.

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Teaching Assistant: Matthew Pinckard mpinckard@rts.edu (in case Matthew is otherwise occupied)

CL Pearce Email: clevipearce@gmail.com. Matthew and CL are both available to answer questions for you about logistical matters related to the course.

nb. Should you attempt to contact me/us by e-mail, please remember that if you sign yourself 'Jim' or 'Sally' I/we may not always know who you are. Please humor me/us by attaching a full name and the course in which you are enrolled. If you are really high-tech, you may attach a photograph too!

Study Guide for the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapters 2-6, 9

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 2 - Of God and of the Trinity

(2.1 There is only one God, who is Spirit, absolute in perfection, does all things for his own glory)

2.1 There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

Modern Translation

2.1 There is only one living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection. He is a most pure spirit, invisible, with neither body, parts, nor passive properties. He is unchangeable, boundless, eternal, and incomprehensible. He is almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, and most absolute. He works all things according to the counsel of his own unchangeable and most righteous will, for his own glory. He is most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. He is also most just and terrifying in his judgments, hating all sin, and will by no means acquit the guilty. (OPC, Modern English Study Version [MESV]).

Rowland Ward's Translation

2.1 There is but one, and only one, living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a completely pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or other limitations of creatureliness. He is unchangeable, immensely great, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, completely wise, completely holy, completely free, and completely absolute. He works all things according to the purpose of his own unchangeable and completely righteous will for his own glory. He is completely loving, gracious, merciful, and long-suffering, abounding in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. Moreover, he is completely just and awesome in his judgments, hating all sin, and he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

Commentary:

The existence of God is not treated speculatively in the Bible, and nor is it in the Confession. In thinking of God we are immediately reminded of God's claims upon us. The description of God as 'living and true', 'infinite in being and perfection, a completely pure spirit' is elaborated in the words 'without body, parts or passions.' Everything that belongs to God is essential to God - he cannot lose a 'part' of himself and still be God; and he is free of all attitudes ('passions') that reflect instability or lack of control. The immensity or vastness of God refers to his omnipresence by which, to use Scripture phrases, 'he fills heaven and earth,' and yet 'the heavens of heavens cannot contain him.' God is incomprehensible in the sense that he alone knows himself perfectly, and creatures can only know him as he wills. ¶ The language used of God in this section is generally Biblical in form and does not follow a rigid progression or classification. (Ward)

Something we learn about God here:

1. There is only one living and true God.
2. God is a pure personal Spirit, without bodily parts or limitations.
3. God possesses all absolute perfections in and of himself.
4. God does all things, righteously, for his own glory.

5. God is maximally loving, gracious, merciful, patient, good, true, faithful, forgiving, generous and just.
6. God hates evil, and is awesome and indefatigable in his pursuit of the just punishment of the guilty.

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 2 - Of God and of the Trinity

(2.2 God is self-sufficient, self-existent, totally independent and sovereign)

2.2 God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

Rowland Ward's Translation

2.2 God has all life, glory, goodness, and blessedness, in and of himself. He alone is all-sufficient in and to himself, nor does he need any of the creatures that he has made, nor are they the source of any of his glory. Rather, he reveals his own glory in, by, to and on them, for he is the only source of all being, of whom, through whom and to whom are all things. He has completely sovereign dominion over them to do by, to or for them whatever he pleases. In his sight all things are open and evident. His knowledge is infinite and infallible, and does not depend upon any created thing, so that to him nothing is conditional or uncertain. He is completely holy in all his purposes, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due whatever worship, service or obedience he is pleased to require from angels, human beings and all other creatures.

Commentary:

“The first part of this section asserts the absolute self-existence of God. When it is said in the original text that God does not derive any glory from his creatures, it means that nothing that contributes to God’s glory has its original source in man. Whatever in us contributes to God’s glory, or the display of it, is ultimately from God himself.

The truths about God in WCF 2 provide the basis for the teaching on the divine decrees in WCF 3. Sovereignty must not be understood as tyranny or arbitrary rule, but the holy rule of the holy God. God’s knowledge extends to the springs of man’s thought and action, yet it is not mere foresight but is independent of the creature so as to be free of all uncertainty. Consequently, God alone is worthy of all worship and all praise.” (Ward)

J.I. Packer helpfully says: “Children sometimes ask, “Who made God?” The clearest answer is that God never needed to be made, because he was always there. He exists in a different way from us: we, his creatures, exist in a dependent, derived, finite, fragile way, but our Maker exists in an eternal, self-sustaining, necessary way—necessary, that is, in the sense that God does not have it in him to go out of existence, just as we do not have it in us to live forever. We necessarily age and die, because it is our present nature to do that; God necessarily continues forever unchanged, because it is his eternal nature to do that. This is one of many contrasts between creature and Creator.

God’s self-existence is a basic truth. At the outset of his presentation of the unknown God to the Athenian idolaters, Paul explained that this God, the world’s Creator, “is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:23-25). Sacrifices offered to idols, in today’s tribal religions as in ancient Athens, are thought of as somehow keeping the god going, but the Creator needs no such support system. The word *aseity*, meaning that he has life in himself and draws his unending energy from himself (*a se* in Latin means “from himself”), was coined by theologians to express this truth, which the Bible makes clear (Pss. 90:1-4; 102:25-27; Isa. 40:28-31; John 5:26; Rev. 4:10).

In theology, endless mistakes result from supposing that the conditions, bounds, and limits of our own finite existence apply to God. The doctrine of his aseity stands as a bulwark against such mistakes. In our life of faith, we easily impoverish ourselves by embracing an idea of God that is too limited and small, and again the doctrine of God's aseity stands as a bulwark to stop this happening. It is vital for spiritual health to believe that God is great (cf. Ps. 95:1-7), and grasping the truth of his aseity is the first step on the road to doing this. (*Concise Theology*)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 2 - Of God and of the Trinity

(2.3 God is One and Triune, and Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct and divine)

2.3 In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Rowland Ward's Translation

2.3 In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The order seen in the external operations of the three persons reflects the eternal reality that each person possesses a property distinct from the others: the Father eternally possesses fatherhood in relation to the Son, the Son is eternally the son of the Father and the Spirit is eternally from the Father and the Son.

Commentary:

The word "trinity" is not found in Scripture, but the doctrine is. The biblical truth of the trinity rests simply on the data of Scripture and is the result of Christian reflection upon the way God has shown himself to be present and active in the world in his mighty acts of salvation. The doctrine is not a simple one, but then God is not simple either. We must accept the information given in Scripture and resist the temptation to ignore or twist any part to make the conclusions easier to our minds.

The English term trinity comes from the Latin word "trinitas." Tertullian (AD c160-c220) contributed the term 'trinitas' to the doctrine of God as it was formulated in the 4th century. He used this term in his writings against Praxeas (AD c215), who had taught that it was the Father who suffered on the cross. But neither Tertullian nor the Councils of the 4th century supposed that they were doing other than setting out and clearing of misrepresentations the teaching about God found in the pages of Holy Scripture.

Well then, how do we state the doctrine? The Shorter Catechism reminds us: 'There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.' Such a statement is seeking to do full justice to the data of Scripture and may be otherwise expressed in three propositions: (i) there is only one God; (ii) the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is each God; and (iii) the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is each a distinct person.

We speak of three persons not because this language is adequate but because the Bible describes the relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in ways analogous to relations among human persons. God is one in being or essence but within the singleness of his being there are three personal distinctions. Put plainly, we may say that God's life is not a solitary, lonely one, but has a richness and fulness reflecting the fact that God is a fellowship. Now to say God is a fellowship is not to say he is a committee, for a committee implies various individuals each with their distinctive origin, and might easily lead us to tritheism, belief in three Gods. To say God is a fellowship is to say that there is an intimacy of loving relationship, and reciprocity in the nature of God.

The last sentence in the 1646 text reflects discussions in the Christian church of the early centuries as believers reflected on the information in Scripture. In essence the church was saying that God is eternally what his revelation in history shows him to be. The Bible shows the Father to be the one who plans, the Son the one who accomplishes and the Spirit the one who brings to fruition the works of Father and Son. This is seen in creation (Gen 1:1-3) and in redemption. Thus, while full deity unqualifiedly belongs to the Son and the Spirit, the subordination of the Son to the Father seen in redemption reflects an eternal sonship, a subordination of *relation* not *nature*, which heightens our wonder at the love of the Father who gave his Son, and at the obedience of the Son who came. The old wording is, however, less than unambiguously clear and hence has been rephrased in an attempt to make it more meaningful. (Ward)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.1 God ordains everything that happens, but isn't responsible for sin and people are not puppets, and what they do matters)

3.1 God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Rowland Ward's Translation

3.1 From all eternity God, by the most wise and holy purpose of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordained whatever comes to pass. He does this in such a way that he is not the author of sin, nor does he force his moral creatures to act against their will, nor is the free working of secondary causes taken away but instead it is established.

Commentary:

Ward says: "God's plan and purpose is like himself - wise and holy. God has decreed the existence of all things, including sin, but his relationship to sin is not the same as his relationship to good, although we cannot explain the mystery involved. Still, God cannot contradict himself. He cannot author sin, cannot force moral creatures to do what their will does not consent to, and he does not destroy the relationship of cause and effect. Rather, just because his purpose embraces all, there is relationship between means used and results obtained. God rules, not chance, so that even what seems to be random is also under his authority."

J.I. Packer explains: "The assertion of God's absolute sovereignty in creation, providence, and grace is basic to biblical belief and biblical praise. The vision of God on the throne—that is, ruling—recurs (1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:2; cf. Pss. 11:4; 45:6; 47:8-9; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 3:21); and we are constantly told in explicit terms that the LORD (Yahweh) reigns as king, exercising dominion over great and tiny things alike (Exod. 15:18; Pss. 47; 93; 96:10; 97; 99:1-5; 146:10; Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Isa. 24:23; 52:7; Dan. 4:34-35; 5:21-28; 6:26; Matt. 10:29-31). God's dominion is total: he wills as he chooses and carries out all that he wills, and none can stay his hand or thwart his plans.

That God's rational creatures, angelic and human, have free agency (power of personal decision as to what they shall do) is clear in Scripture throughout; we would not be moral beings, answerable to God the judge, were it not so, nor would it then be possible to distinguish, as Scripture does, between the bad purposes of human agents and the good purposes of God, who sovereignly overrules human action as a planned means to his own goals (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 13:26-39). Yet the fact of free agency confronts us with mystery, inasmuch as God's control over our free, self-determined activities is as complete as it is over anything else, and how this can be we do not know. Regularly, however, God exercises his sovereignty by letting things take their course, rather than by miraculous intrusions of a disruptive sort.

In Psalm 93 the fact of God's sovereign rule is said to

- (a) guarantee the stability of the world against all the forces of chaos (v. 1b-4),
- (b) confirm the trustworthiness of all God's utterances and directives (v. 5a), and
- (c) call for the homage of holiness on the part of his people (v. 5b). The whole psalm expresses joy, hope, and confidence in God, and no wonder.

We shall do well to take its teaching to heart. (*Concise Theology*)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.2 God knows the future, but his decree is not based on his foresight)

3.2 Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

Modern Translation

2. Although God knows whatever may or can come to pass under all conceivable conditions, yet he has not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future or as that which would come to pass under such conditions. (OPC, MESV).

Rowland Ward's Translation

3.2 God knows everything that may or can occur under all conceivable conditions. What he foresaw taking place in time is part of his decree, as is also the fulfilment of any condition.

Commentary:

God's decree, the content of his foreordination, is not based on his foresight of the future, rather, the future is based on his decree. Ward says: "It has been claimed that some things are not decreed by God but are foreseen by God who acts upon them to bring about certain ends. This theory of conditional decrees is not infrequently advanced to support the notion that God's election of his people is conditioned on his foresight that they will have faith. However, Scripture makes plain that people have faith because God has ordained that they will repent and believe. If God had not fixed the entire future his knowledge to some extent would be imperfect. Moreover, God would be dependent upon a creature, and salvation would not be based on grace but human qualities, and God would be reduced to 'a far-seeing statesman' (R.A.Finlayson). In short, God ordains the end, but also the fulfilment of all the conditions necessary to secure that end. He is not the prisoner of his creation, but its Lord."

J.I. Packer comments: "*Omniscient* is a word that means "knowing everything." Scripture declares that God's eyes run everywhere (Job 24:23; Pss. 33:13-15, 139:13-16; Prov. 15:3; Jer. 16:17; Heb. 4:13). He searches all hearts and observes everyone's ways (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chron. 28:9; Ps. 139:1-6, 23; Jer. 17:10; Luke 16:15; Rom. 8:27; Rev. 2:23)—in other words, he knows everything about everything and everybody all the time. Also, he knows the future no less than the past and the present, and possible events that never happen no less than the actual events that do (1 Sam. 23:9-13; 2 Kings 13:19; Ps. 81:14-15; Isa. 48:18). Nor does he have to "access" information about things, as a computer might retrieve a file; all his knowledge is always immediately and directly before his mind. Bible writers stand in awe of the capacity of God's mind in this regard (Pss. 139:1-6; 147:5; Isa. 40:13-14, 28; cf. Rom. 11:33-36).

God's knowledge is linked with his sovereignty: he knows each thing, both in itself and in relation to all other things, because he created it, sustains it, and now makes it function every moment according to his plan for it (Eph. 1:11). The idea that God could know, and foreknow, everything without controlling everything seems not only unscriptural but nonsensical.

To the Christian believer, knowledge of God's omni~science brings the assurance that he has not been forgotten, but is being and will be cared for according to God's promise (Isa. 40:27-31). To anyone who is not a Christian, however, the truth of God's universal knowledge must bring dread, for it comes as a reminder that one cannot hide either oneself or one's sins from God's view (Pss. 139:7-12; 94:1-11; John 1:1-12)." (*Concise Theology*)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.3 God decrees some people and angels to eternal life and others to eternal death, for the display of his glory)

3.3 By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

Rowland Ward's Translation

3.3 By God's decree, to show his glory, some people and angels are predestined to everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

Commentary:

J.I. Packer says: "The forty and more writers who produced the sixty-six books of Scripture over something like fifteen hundred years saw themselves and their readers as caught up in the outworking of God's sovereign purpose for his world, the purpose that led him to create, that sin then disrupted, and that his work of redemption is currently restoring. That purpose in essence was, and is, the endless expression and enjoyment of love between God and his rational creatures—love shown in their worship, praise, thanks, honor, glory, and service given to him, and in the fellowship, privileges, joys, and gifts that he gives to them. ¶ The writers look back at what has already been done to advance God's redemptive plan for sin-damaged planet earth, and they look ahead to the day of its completion, when planet earth will be re-created in unimaginable glory (Isa. 65:17-25; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1-22:5). They proclaim God as the almighty Creator-Redeemer and dwell constantly on the multifaceted works of grace that God performs in history to secure for himself a people, a great company of individuals together, with whom his original purpose of giving and receiving love can be fulfilled. And the writers insist that as God has shown himself absolutely in control in bringing his plan to the point it has reached as they write, so he will continue in total control, working out everything according to his own will and so completing his redemptive project. It is within this frame of reference (Eph. 1:9-14; 2:4-10; 3:8-11; 4:11-16) that questions about predestination belong.

Predestination is a word often used to signify God's foreordaining of all the events of world history, past, present, and future, and this usage is quite appropriate. In Scripture and mainstream theology, however, predestination means specifically God's decision, made in eternity before the world and its inhabitants existed, regarding the final destiny of individual sinners. In fact, the New Testament uses the words predestination and election (the two are one), only of God's choice of particular sinners for salvation and eternal life (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4-5, 11). Many have pointed out, however, that Scripture also ascribes to God an advance decision about those who finally are not saved (Rom. 9:6-29; 1 Pet. 2:8; Jude 4), and so it has become usual in Protestant theology to define God's predestination as including both his decision to save some from sin (election) and his decision to condemn the rest for their sin (reprobation), side by side.

To the question, "On what basis did God choose individuals for salvation?" it is sometimes replied: on the basis of his foreknowledge that when faced with the gospel they would choose Christ as their Savior. In that reply, foreknowledge means passive foresight on God's part of what individuals are going to do, without his predetermining their action. But (a) *Foreknow* in Romans 8:29; 11:2 (cf. 1 Pet. 1:2 and 1:20, where the NIV renders the Greek *foreknown* as "chosen") means "fore-love" and "fore-appoint": it does not express the idea of a spectator's anticipation of what will spontaneously happen. (b) Since all are naturally dead in sin (i.e., cut off from the life of God and unresponsive to him), no one who hears the gospel will ever come to repentance and faith without an inner quickening that only God can impart (Eph. 2:4-10). Jesus said: "No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (John 6:65, cf. 44; 10:25-28). Sinners choose Christ only because God chose them for this choice and moved them to it by renewing their hearts. ¶ Though all human acts are free in the sense of being self-determined, none are free from God's control according to his eternal purpose and foreordination.

Christians should therefore thank God for their conversion, look to him to keep them in the grace into which he has brought them, and confidently await his final triumph, according to his plan.

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.4 God's predestination and foreordination is particular, unchangeable, certain and definite)

3.4 These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

Commentary:

Rowland Ward comments on 3.3. "In order to display his glorious perfections, and thus to communicate his blessedness to his moral creatures, God has predestined some to everlasting life - 'a great multitude which no man can number.' Others have been foreordained to everlasting death. Notice carefully that *predestination* is used in the Confession only of the saved while *foreordination* is reserved for the lost, and the term *reprobation* is not used. Predestination and foreordination as words are not dissimilar in their basic idea, but it is evident that the Confession follows its own teaching in 3:8, and thus makes every effort to highlight that God's dealings with the saved and the lost are based on different grounds. 'In the one instance we have an act of grace, determined by God's good will; in the other, an act of judgment, determined by the sin of the individual' (John Macpherson). 'Predestination reveals the goal of divine love and grace.... Since a goal is a perfect ideal, damnation is neither a goal nor an ideal. For even if sin and punishment are willed by God this is not an object of his delight as is the salvation of his elect' (R.A.Finlayson, *Reformed Theological Writings*, 1996, 262)."

Of 3.4 he says: "This straightforward section is designed to reaffirm that as the all-wise God is unchangeable and his plan perfect, so all within it is unchangeable. It is not fate or necessity but God's decree that renders events certain."

ANALYSIS WCF 3:1-8

1. The character and scope of God's plan

- a. flows from himself
- b. he is not the author of sin
- c. he does not force moral creatures against their will
- d. he does not put aside ordinary relation of cause and effect

2. God's plan and God's knowledge

- a. God's plan not based on foresight
- b. conditions ordained as well as ends

3 & 4. God's plan and moral creatures

- a. embraces men and angels
- b. predestination to life
- c. foreordination to death
- d. absolutely unchangeable

5 & 6. God's plan and human salvation

- a. Predestination in Christ
- b. reason for choice not in creature
- c. called in time through means of grace
- d. to the praise of God's grace

7. God's plan and human damnation

- a. Sovereign preterition (passing by)
- b. judicial condemnation - 'for their sin'
- c. to the praise of God's justice

8. The proper use of the doctrine of predestination

- a. How, to whom and why it is to be preached

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.5 God's predestination or choosing unto life, is in Christ, unconditional, doxological)

3.5 Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace.

Rowland Ward's Translation

3.5 Those of the human race who are predestined to life, God has chosen in Christ to everlasting glory. This choice was made according to God's eternal and unchangeable purpose and the secret wisdom and good pleasure of his will before the foundation of the world was laid. It arose solely from his free grace and love and was not influenced by or dependent on any cause or condition in the person, whether foresight of faith or good works, perseverance in faith or works, or anything else in the person. God's purpose is that all praise might be to his glorious grace.

Commentary:

A.A. Hodge says: "It [predestination] is not conditioned upon foreseen faith or repentance, but in each case upon sovereign grace and personal love, according to the secret counsel of his will.

(1) It is expressly declared not to rest upon works; but foreseen faith and repentance are works (Rom. 11:4-7; 2 Tim. 1:9).

(2) Faith and repentance are expressly said to be the fruits of election, and consequently cannot be its conditions. They are also declared to be the gifts of God, and cannot therefore be the conditions upon which he suspends his purpose (Eph. 2:10; 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:2; Eph. 2:8; Acts 5:31; 1 Cor. 4:7). "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing" (John 6:37,39). "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (John 10:26). "And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

(3) The Scriptures represent men by nature as "dead in trespasses and sins"; and faith and repentance as the exercise of regenerated souls; and regeneration as the work of God—a "new birth," a "new creation," a "quickenings from the dead." Faith and repentance, therefore, must be conditioned upon God's purpose, and cannot condition it (Eph. 2:1; John 3:3,5; Eph. 2:5,10).

(4) The Scriptures expressly say that election is conditioned on the "good pleasure of God's will": "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace...In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:5,11; Matt. 11:25,26; John 15:16,19).

(5) God claims the right of sovereign, unconditional election as his prerogative: "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:21). If of the same lump, the difference is not in the clay. "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

The ultimate end or motive of God in election is the praise of his glorious grace. This is expressly asserted in Eph. 1:5,6,12. In the chapter on Creation it will be shown that the final end of God in all his works, as a whole, is the manifestation of his own glory. If it be the final end of the whole, it must be the end also of the special destination of all the parts."

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Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.6 God ordains both the end and the means of salvation for the elect)

3.6 As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

Modern Translation

3.6 As God has appointed the elect to glory, so he has—by the eternal and most free purpose of his will—foreordained all the means to that end. Therefore, his chosen ones, all of them being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ and are effectually called to faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season. They are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. No others are redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, except the elect only. (OPC, MESV)

Commentary:

Rowland Ward says of 3.5 – “Notice the time of God’s choice, its nature as an act of grace, its reason as the good pleasure of God (cf. Matt 11:26), and the end in view - the praise of God’s grace. Those predestined to salvation are chosen in Christ. Divine election is not apart from Christ, nor is the end of salvation divorced from the means. As noted in 3:2 so here also is a rejection of the conditional decree theory. If foreseen faith is the ground of election then grace is denied. In fact, faith is a fruit of election, and the gift of God.”

Ward then offers this helpful comment and historical background on 3.6 – “God has ordained the means of salvation, and this section states that he effectively applies those means or causes them to be effectively used. Those who are saved are reckoned as ‘fallen in Adam’ that is, the decree of election is reckoned in order of logic as contemplating men who are already fallen. God did not create men in order to damn them, but he created men who, having fallen through their own disobedience, receive the just reward for their sin unless they are embraced in his gracious election.

A small group of Englishmen in the Westminster Assembly were influenced by the school of Moses Amyraut and John Cameron at Saumer in France. The Saumer theology modified Calvinism by positing that Christ died for the elect absolutely and for the reprobate conditionally, in case they should believe. This half-way house of ‘hypothetical universalism’ received no positive endorsement in the Confession despite the efforts of its sympathisers. However, it has been debated whether or not such views are actually excluded. A.F. Mitchell (*Minutes*, 1874, p. lii) thinks they may not be, but William Cunningham, the great Scottish theologian, is sure they are (*Historical Theology* Vol 2, 327ff) and with this Warfield agrees (*The Westminster Assembly & its Work*, 1931, 144). It is important to note that Cameron held that the absence from the findings of the Synod of Dort in 1619 of words such as the opening words of WCF 8:8 meant his views were not condemned by Dort. So the inclusion of the statement at 8:8 that all for whom Christ purchased redemption have the same effectively applied to them, shuts out the Amyraldian view.”

I would only add the comment that Derek Thomas and Guy Richard have convinced me that this chapter and section does not rule one way or the other on the famous supralapsarian/infralapsarian discussion.

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.7 God passed over the rest and ordained them to just punishment for their sin)

3.7 The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.

Commentary:

Ward says: "Concerning the lost there are two points (1) passing by (what is technically called *preterition*) and (2) condemnation. The passing by is not because of their sin, otherwise all would be passed by and no one could be saved. The passing by is *sovereign* - for God's own reasons but not reasons in the creature. However, the condemnation is *judicial* - for their sin. Grace prepares some for glory, sin fits others for destruction (Rom 9:22-25). Only the deserving go to hell."

Packer says: "Reprobation is the name given to God's eternal decision regarding those sinners whom he has not chosen for life. His decision is in essence a decision not to change them, as the elect are destined to be changed, but to leave them to sin as in their hearts they already want to do, and finally to judge them as they deserve for what they have done. When in particular instances God gives them over to their sins (i.e., removes restraints on their doing the disobedient things they desire), this is itself the beginning of judgment. It is called "hardening" (Rom. 9:18; 11:25; cf. Ps. 81:12; Rom. 1:24, 26, 28), and it inevitably leads to greater guilt. Reprobation is a biblical reality (Rom. 9:14-24; 1 Pet. 2:8), but not one that bears directly on Christian behavior. The reprobates are faceless so far as Christians are concerned, and it is not for us to try to identify them. Rather, we should live in light of the certainty that anyone may be saved if he or she will but repent and put faith in Christ."

Hodge comments: "This section teaches the following propositions: 1. That as God has sovereignly destinated certain persons, called the elect, through grace to salvation, so he has sovereignly decreed to withhold his grace from the rest; and that this withholding rests upon the unsearchable counsel of his own will, and is for the glory of his sovereign power. 2. That God has consequently determined to treat all those left in their sins with exact justice according to their own deserts, to the praise of his justice, which demands the punishment of all unexpiated sin.

This decree of reprobation, as it is called, is the aspect which God's eternal purpose presents in its relation to that portion of the human family which shall be finally condemned for their sins. Reprobation consists of two elements, the negative and the positive. In its negative aspect God does not elect the reprobate, but "passes over" him; in this God is absolutely sovereign, resting upon His good pleasure alone, since those passed over are no worse than those elected. Positively, reprobation is not sovereign, but purely judicial, since God has determined to treat the reprobate according to what they deserve.

This doctrine, instead of being inconsistent with the principles of absolute justice, necessarily follows from the application of those principles to the case in hand. (1) All men alike are "by nature the children of wrath," and justly obnoxious to the penalty of the law antecedently to the gift of Christ to be their Savior. It is because they are in this condition that vicarious satisfaction of divine justice was absolutely necessary in order to the salvation of any, otherwise, the apostle says, "Christ is dead in vain." Hence if any are to be saved, justice itself demands that their salvation shall be recognized as not their right, but a sovereign concession on the part of God. None have a natural right to salvation. And the salvation of one cannot give a right to salvation to another. (2) Salvation is declared to be in its very essence a matter of grace; and if of grace, the selection of its subjects is inalienably a matter of divine discretion (Lam. 3:22; Rom. 4:4; 11:6; Eph. 1:5-7; John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 4:10).

This doctrine as above stated is true- (1) Because it is necessarily involved in the scriptural doctrine of election taught in the preceding sections. (2) It is expressly taught in Scripture (Rom. 9:18; 1 Pet. 2:8; Rev. 13:8; Jude 4). (3) God asserts the right involved as his righteous prerogative (Rom. 9:19-23)."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 3 - Of God's Eternal Decree

(3.8 The doctrine of predestination is to be handled carefully, and is designed to promote the assurance of believers, the praise of God, as well as humility, diligence and comfort)

3.8 The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in his Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.

Modern Translation

3.8 The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, so that men, taking heed to the will of God revealed in his Word and yielding obedience to it, may—from the certainty of their effectual calling—be assured of their eternal election. Thus, this doctrine shall provide reason for praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and for humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all who sincerely obey the gospel. (OPC, MESV)

Commentary:

Robert Shaw says: "The doctrine of predestination is, indeed, a high mystery - one of the deep things of God, which our feeble intellects cannot fully comprehend. In our inquiries about it, we ought to repress a vain curiosity, and not attempt to be wise above what is written. But, since the doctrine is revealed by God in his Word, it is a proper subject for sober investigation, and ought to be published from the pulpit and the press. Calvin justly remarks, "That those things which the Lord hath laid up in secret, we may not search; those things which he hath brought openly abroad, we may not neglect; lest either on the one part we be condemned of vain curiosity, or on the other part, of unthankfulness." Were this doctrine either dangerous or useless, God would not have revealed it; and for men to attempt to suppress it, is to arraign the wisdom of God, as though he foresaw not the danger which they would arrogantly interpose to prevent. "Whosoever," adds Calvin, "labours to bring the doctrine of predestination into misliking, he openly saith evil of God; as though somewhat had unadvisedly slipped from him which is hurtful to the Church." This doctrine, however, ought to be handled with special judgment and prudence, avoiding human speculations, and adhering to what is plainly revealed in the Scriptures. When prudently discussed, it will neither lead to licentiousness nor to despair; but will eminently conduce to the knowledge, establishment, and comfort of Christians.

It ought ever to be remembered, that no man can know his election prior to his conversion. Wherefore, instead of prying into the secret purpose of God, he ought to attend to his revealed will, that by making sure his vocation, he may ascertain his election. The order and method in which this knowledge may be attained is pointed out by the Apostle Peter, when he exhorts Christians to "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure."—2 Pet. i. 10. Their eternal election must remain a profound secret until it be discovered to them by their effectual calling in time; but when they have ascertained their calling they may thence infallibly conclude that they were elected from eternity. Election, then, gives no discouragement to any man in reference to obeying the calls and embracing the offers of the gospel. The invitations of the gospel are not addressed to men as elect, but as sinners ready to perish; all are under the same obligation to comply with these invitations, and the encouragement from Christ is the same to all,—"Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." And the doctrine of election must have a sanctifying and consoling influence on all who sincerely obey the gospel. It is calculated to inspire them with sentiments of reverence and gratitude towards God; to humble their souls in the dust before the eternal Sovereign; to excite them to diligence in the discharge of duty; to afford them strong consolation under the temptations and trials of life; and to animate them with a lively hope of eternal glory."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 4 - Of Creation

(4.1 The Triune God for the display of his glory created the entire world in six days and all good)

4.1 It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.

4.1 In the beginning it pleased the Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - to make known the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, by creating, or making out of nothing, the world and all things in it, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good. (Ward)

Commentary:

Robert Shaw says: "By the word creation we are to understand the production and formation of all things. This section teaches us:—

1. That the world had *a beginning*. This will now be considered one of the most obvious truths that can be stated, but it is one that required to be confirmed by divine revelation. That the world existed from eternity was generally maintained by the ancient heathen philosophers. Some of them held, that not only the matter of which the world is framed existed from eternity, but that it subsisted in that beautiful form in which we behold it. Others admitted that the heavens and the earth had a beginning in respect of their present form, but maintained the eternity of the matter of which they are composed. That the world had a beginning is the uniform doctrine of the Scriptures.—Gen. i. 1; Ps. xc. 2. This is implied in the phrases, "before the foundation of the world," "before the world began." - Eph. i. 4; 2 Tim. i. 9.

2. That creation is the work of *God*. Often does God claim this work as one of the peculiar glories of his Deity, to the exclusion of all others.—Is. xlv. 24, xlv. 12. The work of creation, however, is common to all the three persons of the Trinity. It is ascribed to the Father, - 1 Cor. viii. 6; to the Son, - John i. 3; to the Holy Ghost.—Gen. i. 2; Job xxvi. 13. All the three persons are one God. We must not, therefore, suppose that in creation the Father is the principal agent, and the Son and the Holy Ghost inferior agents, or mere instruments. In all external works of Deity, each of the persons of the Godhead equally concur.

3. That creation extends to "the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible." This is expressly declared in many passages of Scripture: "God made the world, and all things therein."—Acts xvii. 24. "By him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible."—Col. i. 16. This certainly includes angels. We have no reason to think that their creation preceded the period of the Mosaic creation; and they are generally supposed to have been created on the first day.

4. That the world, and all things therein, were created "in the space of six days." This, also, is the express language of Scripture: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is."—Ex. xx. 11.

5. That all things were created *very good*. Everything was good; for it was agreeable to the model which the great Architect had formed in his infinite mind from everlasting; it answered exactly the end of its creation, and was adapted to the purpose for which it was designed.

6. That God made all things for the manifestation of *his own glory*. "The Lord hath made all things for himself," for the manifestation of his infinite perfections; and all his works proclaim his almighty power, his unbounded goodness, and his unsearchable wisdom. His glory shines in every part of the material universe; but it would shined in vain, if there had been no creature to contemplate it with an eye of intelligence, and celebrate the praises of the omnipotent Creator. Man, therefore, was introduced into the habitation which had been prepared for him, and of his creation the next section gives an account."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 4 - Of Creation

(4.2 God created human beings, male and female, in his image, with his law on their hearts, in happy communion with him, and with stewardship over creation)

4.2 After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

Commentary:

Packer says: “The statement at the start of the Bible (Gen. 1:26-27, echoed in 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9) that God made man in his own image, so that humans are like God as no other earthly creatures are, tells us that the special dignity of being human is that, as humans, we may reflect and reproduce at our own creaturely level the holy ways of God, and thus act as his direct representatives on earth. This is what humans are made to do, and in one sense we are human only to the extent that we are doing it.

The scope of God’s image in man is not defined in Genesis 1:26-27, but the context makes it clear. Genesis 1:1-25 sets forth God as personal, rational (having intelligence and will, able to form plans and execute them), creative, competent to control the world he has made, and morally admirable, in that all he creates is good. Plainly, God’s image will include all these qualities. Verses 28-30 show God blessing newly created humans (that must mean telling them their privilege and destiny) and setting them to rule creation as his representatives and deputies. The human capacity for communication and relationship with both God and other humans, and the God-given dominion over the lower creation (highlighted in Ps. 8 as the answer to the question, What is man?), thus appear as further facets of the image.

God’s image in man at Creation, then, consisted (a) in man’s being a “soul” or “spirit” (Gen. 2:7, where the NIV correctly says “living being”; Eccles. 12:7), that is, a personal, self-conscious, Godlike creature with a Godlike capacity for knowledge, thought, and action; (b) in man’s being morally upright, a quality lost at the Fall that is now being progressively restored in Christ (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10); (c) in man’s environmental dominion. Usually, and reasonably, it is added that (d) man’s God-given immortality and (e) the human body, through which we experience reality, express ourselves, and exercise our dominion, belong to the image too.

The body belongs to the image, not directly, since God, as we noted earlier, does not have one, but indirectly, inasmuch as the God-like activities of exercising dominion over the material creation and demonstrating affection to other rational beings make our embodiment necessary. There is no fully human life without a functioning body, whether here or hereafter. That truth, implicit in Genesis 1, was made explicit by the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ: as the true image of God in his humanity as well as in his divinity. The glorified Lord Jesus is embodied to all eternity, just as Christians will be.

The Fall diminished God’s image not only in Adam and Eve but in all their descendants, that is, the whole human race. We retain the image structurally, in the sense that our humanity is intact, but not functionally, for we are now sin’s slaves and unable to use our powers to mirror God’s holiness. Regeneration begins the process of restoring God’s moral image in our lives, but not till we are fully sanctified and glorified shall we reflect God perfectly in thought and action as mankind was made to do and as the incarnate Son of God in his humanity did and does (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29, 46; Rom. 6:4, 5, 10; 8:11).” (*Concise Theology*)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 - Of Providence

(5.1 God rules over absolutely everything and everyone, for his own glory)

5.1 God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

Commentary:

Packer says: “God’s works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions’ (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q.11). If Creation was a unique exercise of divine energy causing the world to be, providence is a continued exercise of that same energy whereby the Creator, according to his own will, (a) keeps all creatures in being, (b) involves himself in all events, and (c) directs all things to their appointed end. The model is of purposive personal management with total “hands-on” control: God is completely in charge of his world. His hand may be hidden, but his rule is absolute.

Some have restricted God’s providence to foreknowledge without control, or upholding without intervention, or general oversight without concern for details, but the testimony to providence as formulated above is overwhelming.

The Bible clearly teaches God’s providential control (1) over the universe at large, Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11; (2) over the physical world, Job 37; Pss. 104:14; 135:6; Matt. 5:45; (3) over the brute creation, Ps. 104:21, 28; Matt. 6:26; 10:29; (4) over the affairs of nations, Job 12:23; Pss. 22:28; 66:7; Acts 17:26; (5) over man’s birth and lot in life, 1 Sam. 16:1; Ps. 139:16; Isa. 45:5; Gal. 1:15-16; (6) over the outward successes and failures of men’s lives, Ps. 75:6, 7; Luke 1:52; (7) over things seemingly accidental or insignificant, Prov. 16:33; Matt. 10:30; (8) in the protection of the righteous, Pss. 4:8; 5:12; 63:8; 121:3; Rom. 8:28; (9) in supplying the wants of God’s people, Gen. 22:8, 14; Deut. 8:3; Phil. 4:19; (10) in giving answers to prayer, 1 Sam. 1:19; Isa. 20:5, 6; 2 Chron. 33:13; Ps. 65:2; Matt. 7:7; Luke 18:7, 8; and (11) in the exposure and punishment of the wicked, Pss. 7:12-13; 11:6. (L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, 4th ed.)

Clear thinking about God’s involvement in the world-process and in the acts of rational creatures requires complementary sets of statements, thus: a person takes action, or an event is triggered by natural causes, or Satan shows his hand—yet God overrules. This is the message of the book of Esther, where God’s name nowhere appears. Again: things that are done contravene God’s will of command—yet they fulfill his will of events (Eph. 1:11). Again: humans mean what they do for evil—yet God who overrules uses their actions for good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23). Again: humans, under God’s overruling, sin—yet God is not the author of sin (James 1:13-17); rather, he is its judge.

The nature of God’s “concurrent” or “confluent” involvement in all that occurs in his world, as—without violating the nature of things, the ongoing causal processes, or human free agency—he makes his will of events come to pass, is mystery to us, but the consistent biblical teaching about God’s involvement is as stated above.

Of the evils that infect God’s world (moral and spiritual perversity, waste of good, and the physical disorders and disruptions of a spoiled cosmos), it can summarily be said: God permits evil (Acts 14:16); he punishes evil with evil (Ps. 81:11-12; Rom. 1:26-32); he brings good out of evil (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 13:27; 1 Cor. 2:7-8); he uses evil to test and discipline those he loves (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 12:4-14); and one day he will redeem his people from the power and presence of evil altogether (Rev. 21:27; 22:14-15).

The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate); all that happens to them is divinely planned, and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice, knowing that all is for one’s spiritual and eternal good (Rom. 8:28).”

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 - Of Providence

(5.2 God's sovereignty does not contradict but rather complements human responsibility)

5.2 Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, he ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

Rowland Ward's Translation

5.2 In relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the absolute Creator, all things happen unchangeably and infallibly. However, in his providence God directs events to occur through the agency of secondary causes. In relation to such secondary causes some events are inevitable, others depend on the voluntary choice of the creature, and others occur dependently and unpredictably. (Ward, modified slightly by JLD3)

Commentary:

Two great biblical examples of this “concurrent operation” of God’s providence are found in 1 Kings 22:1-40 and Acts 27:1-28:6. God is in control of everything but the choices and actions of his creature matter, and are in a very real sense free. Once again, the Confession is taking care to make sure that we understand that Calvinism is not determinism. Don Carson (and other theologians and philosophers) call the biblical view “compatibilism.” Compatibilism is the view that God’s sovereignty and human responsibility are compatible not contradictory. Both/and, not either/or.

Ward says, of 5.2, “Our experience is that a certain end comes to pass as a result of a chain of contingent events. The Bible affirms that such an end is predetermined by God because he has ordained the means as well as the end. It is common for people to say that if God has decreed everything nothing we can do will make any difference. This is false. The truth is that since God has established means or second causes, such means are real. The Confession gives ‘a simple statement of a mystery which cannot be explained: the consistency of a belief in the supreme all-determining first cause, and a belief in the reign of law in nature, and the freedom of action among intelligent creatures’ (John Macpherson).”

J.I. Packer says, of sovereignty and responsibility in general: “The assertion of God’s absolute sovereignty in creation, providence, and grace is basic to biblical belief and biblical praise. The vision of God on the throne—that is, ruling—recurs (1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Dan. 7:9; Rev. 4:2; cf. Pss. 11:4; 45:6; 47:8-9; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 3:21); and we are constantly told in explicit terms that the LORD (Yahweh) reigns as king, exercising dominion over great and tiny things alike (Exod. 15:18; Pss. 47; 93; 96:10; 97; 99:1-5; 146:10; Prov. 16:33; 21:1; Isa. 24:23; 52:7; Dan. 4:34-35; 5:21-28; 6:26; Matt. 10:29-31). God’s dominion is total: he wills as he chooses and carries out all that he wills, and none can stay his hand or thwart his plans.

That God’s rational creatures, angelic and human, have free agency (power of personal decision as to what they shall do) is clear in Scripture throughout; we would not be moral beings, answerable to God the judge, were it not so, nor would it then be possible to distinguish, as Scripture does, between the bad purposes of human agents and the good purposes of God, who sovereignly overrules human action as a planned means to his own goals (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23; 13:26-39). Yet the fact of free agency confronts us with mystery, inasmuch as God’s control over our free, self-determined activities is as complete as it is over anything else, and how this can be we do not know. Regularly, however, God exercises his sovereignty by letting things take their course, rather than by miraculous intrusions of a disruptive sort.

In Psalm 93 the fact of God’s sovereign rule is said to (a) guarantee the stability of the world against all the forces of chaos (v. 1b-4), (b) confirm the trustworthiness of all God’s utterances and directives (v. 5a), and (c) call for the homage of holiness on the part of his people (v. 5b). The whole psalm expresses joy, hope, and confidence in God, and no wonder. We shall do well to take its teaching to heart.”

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 - Of Providence

(5.3 God ordinarily uses means to accomplish his ends, but sometimes without, over or against them)

5.3 God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.

Modern Translation

5.3 In his ordinary providence, God makes use of means, yet he is free to work without, above, and against them as he pleases. (OPC, MESV)

Rowland Ward's Translation

5.3 In the ordinary course of his providence God makes use of means, yet, as he pleases, he is free to work without them, to give them effect beyond what they normally possess, and to work against their ordinary operation.

Commentary:

Ward says: "It is God's wise and good will to use means that are suited to secure the desired end, but God is not bound by his ordinary way of working. What we call a miracle - God working without, above or against ordinary means - is the outworking of God's freedom of action."

Shaw says: "The providence of God is either ordinary or miraculous. In his ordinary providence God works by means, and according to the general laws established by his own wisdom: we are, therefore, bound to use the means which he has appointed, and if we neglect these, we cannot expect to obtain the end. But though God generally acts according to established laws, yet he may suspend or modify these laws at pleasure. And when, by his immediate agency, an effect is produced above or beside the ordinary course of nature, this we denominate a miracle. The possibility of miracles will be denied by none but Atheists."

Of miracles in general, J.I. Packer says: "Scripture has no single word for miracle. The concept is a blend of the thoughts expressed by three terms: *wonder*, *mighty work*, and *sign*. *Wonder* is the primary notion. (*Miracle*, from the Latin *miraculum*, means something that evokes wonder.) A miracle is an observed event that triggers awareness of God's presence and power. Striking providences and coincidences, and awesome events such as childbirth, no less than works of new creative power, are properly called miracles since they communicate this awareness. In this sense, at least, there are miracles today.

Mighty work (work of power) focuses on the impression that miracles make, and points to the presence in Bible history of supernatural acts of God involving the power that created the world from nothing. Thus, the raising of the dead to life, which Jesus did three times, not counting his own resurrection (Luke 7:11-17; 8:49-56; John 11:38-44), and Elijah, Elisha, Peter, and Paul did once each (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Acts 9:36-41; 20:9-12), is a work of this creative power; it cannot be explained in terms of coincidence or of nature taking its course. The same is true of organic healings, of which the Gospels recount many; they too exhibit supernatural re-creating and restoring.

Sign as a label for miracles (the label regularly used in John's Gospel, where seven key miracles are recorded) means that they signify something; in other words, they carry a message. The miracles in Scripture are nearly all clustered in the time of the Exodus, of Elijah and Elisha, and of Christ and his apostles. First of all, they authenticate the miracle workers themselves as God's representatives and messengers (cf. Exod. 4:1-9; 1 Kings 17:24; John 10:38; 14:11; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4); and they also show forth something of God's power in salvation and judgment. Such is their significance.

Belief in the miraculous is integral to Christianity. Theologians who discard all miracles, thus obliging themselves to deny Jesus' incarnation and resurrection, the two supreme miracles of Scripture, should not claim to be Christians: the claim is not valid. The rejection of miracles by yesterday's scientists sprang not from science but from the dogma of a universe of absolute uniformity that scientists brought to their scientific work. There is nothing irrational about believing that God who made the world can still intrude creatively into it. Christians should recognize that it is not faith in the biblical miracles, and in God's ability to work miracles today should he so wish, but doubt about these things, that is unreasonable."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 - Of Providence

(5.4 God is sovereign over even the worst of evil,

but he is not responsible for sin and does not condone any wickedness)

5.4 The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in his providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

Rowland Ward's Translation

5.4 God's almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness are so far-reaching that his providence extends even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and human beings. It is not simply that he permits them, for in a variety of ways he wisely and powerfully sets limits, and appoints and governs them so that they fulfil his own holy ends. Yet the sinfulness involved comes only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, is not and cannot be the author or approver of sin.

Commentary:

The biblical idea expressed in this section is the basis of John Piper's new book *Spectacular Sins* (Crossway). Here's what Piper says in the introduction: "At the all-important pivot of human history, the worst sin ever committed served to show the greatest glory of Christ and obtain the sin-conquering gift of God's grace. God did not just overcome evil at the cross. He made evil serve the overcoming of evil. He made evil commit suicide in doing its worst evil." And the question, the very practical question that Piper (and this chapter of the Confession) want to get at is: "If God governs the sinful acts of men, and all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus, then how are we to think about God's purposes in relation to the devastation caused by terrorists, dictators, murderers, cheats, and abusers? When heart-rending news comes of the latest accident, illness, or natural disaster, can we really believe that in Jesus, "all things hold together"?"

Rowland Ward observes: "It is commonly represented by many Christians, and is the position of the Council of Trent of the Church of Rome, that God's relationship to sin is simply one of permission. However, mere permission or failing to prevent does not exhaust Scripture on this subject. Hence we can understand that the two statements concerning David's numbering of the people are both true: that God moved David to this act (2 Sam 24:1) and that Satan did so (1 Chronicles 21:1). 'In regard to the action itself, which was sinful as produced or performed by Satan and David, God did more than merely permit it...He did do something in the way of its being brought about' (William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*). This is carefully expressed in the Confession, but of course is a matter of difficulty for our minds and is to be handled with great care."

Robert Shaw (sounding like Piper two centuries before him) says: "The most atrocious crime ever perpetrated by human hands was the crucifixion of the Lord of glory; yet it is expressly affirmed that God delivered him into those wicked hands which were imbrued in his sacred blood: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."—Acts ii. 23. At the same time, it is indisputable that God cannot be the author nor approver of sin. To solve the difficulty connected with this point, theologians distinguish between an action and its quality. The action, abstractly considered, is from God, for no action can be performed without the concurrence of Providence; but the sinfulness of the action proceeds entirely from the creature. As to the manner in which the providence of God is concerned about the sinful actions of creatures, it is usually stated, that God permit them, that he limits them, and that he overrules them for the accomplishment of his own holy ends. But the full elucidation of this abstruse subject, so as to remove every difficulty, surpasses the human faculties. We are certain that God is concerned in all the actions of his creatures; we are equally certain that God cannot be the author of sin; and here we ought to rest."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 - Of Providence

(5.5 God exercises a pastoral providence over sin and temptation for the sake of his people)

5.5 The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, his own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

Rowland Ward's Translation

5.5 God, who is most wise, righteous and gracious, frequently leaves his own children to fall for a time into a variety of temptations, and to experience the corruption of their own hearts. This he does to chastise them for the sins they have committed, or to teach them humility by revealing to them the hidden strength of the corruption and deceitfulness remaining in their hearts. He would also bring them to depend more fully and constantly on himself, put them on guard against all future opportunities for sin, and fulfil various other just and holy ends.

ANALYSIS WCF 5:1-7

1. The Nature of Providence

2-3. God's Providence and the use of means

- a. God has ordained everything including means
- b. Means are real
- c. God is not limited by means

4. Providence and sin in general

5. Providence and the sin of believers

6. Providence and the sin of the ungodly

7. Providence and the care of the church

Commentary:

Ward says: "In dealing with his own children God remains sovereign in respect of evil. They sin just as they do good, hence God disapproves the one and endorses the other. But through all, he works his holy purpose toward them."

Shaw comments: "God cannot possibly solicit or seduce any man to sin; for this is inconsistent with the purity of his nature. - James i. 13,14. But, in righteous judgment, God sometimes permits persons to fall into one sin for the punishment of another. He deals in this way even with his own dear, but undutiful, children. Sometimes he leaves them for a season to temptations, and to the lusts of their own hearts, for their trial, or to discover to themselves the latent corruptions of their hearts, to humble them, and to excite them to more fervent prayer and unremitting watchfulness. Thus, God left Hezekiah to try him, that he might know, or make known, all that was in his heart.—2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Sometimes God deals in this manner with his own children to chastise them for their former sins. Thus, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah." - 2 Sam. xxiv. 1."

Hodge says: "Hence in the way of discipline for their own good, to mortify their sins and to strengthen their graces, God often wisely and graciously, though never finally, for a season and to a degree, withdraws his spiritual influences from his own children, and 'leaves them to the manifold temptations and corruptions of their own hearts.'"

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 - Of Providence

(5.6 God exercises a justly judging providence in relation to the sins of the wicked)

5.6 As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden, from them he not only withholdeth his grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had, and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasions of sin; and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others.

Rowland Ward's Translation

5.6 God, as a righteous Judge, deals otherwise with wicked and ungodly people. For their former sins he blinds and hardens them. He not only withholds from them the grace that might have enlightened their minds and changed their hearts, but in some cases also withdraws the gifts he had given them, and places them in situations on which their evil hearts seize as opportunities for sin. In this way he gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and to the power of Satan, with the consequence that they harden themselves, even under those means which God uses for the softening of others.

Commentary:

This is a hard truth, but very clearly biblical. Romans 1:24-28 teaches this truth directly (notice the repetition of the phrase "God gave them up" or "God gave them over"). See also Psalm 81:11-12 and 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). The classic personal examples of this in the Bible are Esau and Pharaoh (see Exodus 4:21 and 14:4), the Lord in his providence judges them and determines not to give them his grace to turn them from their sins, and consequently they do what they themselves desire to do, which ends up leading them to their own ruin. Thus Malachi 1:2-3 tell us that the Lord loved Jacob and hated Esau. And Romans 9 tells us that the distinction between Jacob and Esau is meant to teach us that salvation is all of grace and all of God and not due to our own deserving or efforts – "in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls" (Rom 9:11 ESV).

Ward says: "God's providence also embraces the hardening of men in sin. This is a matter of justice because of their previous sins, and is largely a withholding of his gracious influences. The case of the Pharaoh of the exodus is significant. In the account of the first five plagues he is said to have hardened his heart, and only with the sixth plague do we read also that God hardened his heart. Still, before Moses returned to Egypt to lead his people God had said what he would do to display his power over Pharaoh (Ex 4:21). 'By withdrawing any restraining influences on Pharaoh and by directly challenging his status, the LORD brought it about that the full extent of Pharaoh's stubbornness and opposition became evident. It would thus be manifest that what happened in the release of the Israelites was no voluntary act of Pharaoh, but a victory won over him by the superior power of Yahweh.' (John L. Mackay, *Exodus* (2001), 133)."

Shaw says: "In Scripture, God is frequently said to harden wicked men for their former sins. This he does, not by infusing any wickedness into their hearts, or by any direct and positive influence on their souls in rendering them obdurate, but by withholding his grace, which is necessary to soften their hearts, and which he is free to give or withhold as he pleases; by giving them over to their own hearts' lusts, to the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan; and by providentially placing them in each circumstances, or presenting such objects before them, as their corruption makes an occasion of hardening themselves."

Hodge says: "Hence also God often, as a just punishment of their sins, judicially withdraws the restraints of his Spirit, and consequently whatever superficial gifts his presence may have conferred, from ungodly men, and thus leaves them to the influence of temptations, the unrestrained control of their lusts, and the power of Satan. And hence it comes to pass that the truths of the gospel and the ordinances of the Church, which are a savor of life to them to whom they are graciously blessed, become a savor of death and of increased condemnation to them who for their sins have been left to themselves."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 5 - Of Providence

(5.7 God's special providence is over his church, protecting the church and assuring that all things work together for good for the church)

5.7 As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of his church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.

Rowland Ward's Translation

5.7 God's providence extends to all creatures, but in a very special way God directs it to the care of his church, and arranges all things for its good.

Commentary:

Ward says: "God's care extends to all things but has special reference to the church. It is not that God is a caretaker with little interest in the day to day affairs of the creation. Nor is he the God whom we appeal to simply in order to explain the gaps in our knowledge that we have not yet filled. But he is the God who holds the whole world in his hands and who directs all things to the destined end that all things might be brought under one head, even Christ (Ephesians 1:10 cf. vv 22-23)."

Shaw says: "The providence of God may be considered as general and as special. His general providence is exercised about all his creatures; his special providence is exercised, in a particular manner, about his Church and people. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him."—2 Chron. xvi. 9. God has the interests of his own people ever in view; he knows what is most conducive to their happiness; and he will make all things, whether prosperous or adverse, to co-operate in promoting their good, - Rom. viii. 28. In all past ages, God has watched over his Church with peculiar and unremitting care; he has sometimes permitted her to be reduced to a very low condition, but he has also wrought surprising deliverances in her behalf. The very means which her enemies intended for her destruction and ruin have, by an overruling Providence, been rendered subservient to her edification and enlargement.—Acts viii. 4. The preservation of the Church, in spite of the craft and malice of hell, and of all the pernicious errors and bloody persecutions which have threatened her ruin, is no less wonderful than the spectacle which Moses beheld,—a *bush burning* but not *consumed*. And let us still confide and rejoice in the promise of Christ, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his Church."

Quotes on Providence:

There are no accidents in the life of a Christian. *Rowland Bingham*

I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime, and all was for best. *Robert Browning*

Either directly or indirectly, every providence has a tendency to the spiritual good of those who love God. *Matthew Henry*

Providence has ordered that condition for you which is best for your eternal good. If you had more of the world than you have, your heads and hearts might not be able to manage it to your advantage. *John Flavel*

A firm faith in the universal providence of God is the solution of all earthly problems. It is almost equally true that a clear and full apprehension of the universal providence of God is the solution of most theological problems. *Benjamin B. Warfield*

God is to be trusted when his providences seem to run contrary to his promises. *Thomas Watson*

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 6 - Of the Fall of Man, of Sin and of the Punishment Thereof

(6.1 Even Original Sin has a purpose for God's Glory)

6.1 Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.

Commentary:

J.I. Packer says: "Paul, in Romans, affirms that all mankind is naturally under the guilt and power of sin, the reign of death, and the inescapable wrath of God (Rom. 3:9, 19; 5:17, 21; 1:18-19; cf. the whole section, 1:18-3:20). He traces this back to the sin of the one man whom, when speaking at Athens, he described as our common ancestor (Rom. 5:12-14; Acts 17:26; cf. 1 Cor. 15:22). This is authoritative apostolic interpretation of the history recorded in Genesis 3, where we find the account of the Fall, the original human lapse from God and godliness into sin and lostness. The main points in that history, as seen through the lens of Paul's interpretation, are as follows:

(a) God made the first man the representative for all his posterity, just as he was to make Jesus Christ the representative for all God's elect (Rom. 5:15-19 with 8:29-30; 9:22-26). In each case the representative was to involve those whom he represented in the fruits of his personal action, whether for good or ill, just as a national leader involves his people in the consequences of his action when, for instance, he declares war. This divinely chosen arrangement, whereby Adam would determine the destiny of his descendants, has been called the covenant of works, though this is not a biblical phrase.

(b) God set the first man in a state of happiness and promised to continue this to him and his posterity after him if he showed fidelity by a course of perfect positive obedience and specifically by not eating from a tree described as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It would seem that the tree bore this name because the issue was whether Adam would let God tell him what was good and bad for him or would seek to decide that for himself, in disregard of what God had said. By eating from this tree Adam would, in effect, be claiming that he could know and decide what was good and evil for him without any reference to God.

(c) Adam, led by Eve, who was herself led by the serpent (Satan in disguise: 2 Cor. 11:3 with v. 14; Rev. 12:9), defied God by eating the forbidden fruit. The results were that, first, the anti-God, self-aggrandizing mindset expressed in Adam's sin became part of him and of the moral nature that he passed on to his descendants (Gen. 6:5; Rom. 3:9-20). Second, Adam and Eve found themselves gripped by a sense of pollution and guilt that made them ashamed and fearful before God—with good reason. Third, they were cursed with expectations of pain and death, and they were expelled from Eden. At the same time, however, God began to show them saving mercy; he made them skin garments to cover their nakedness, and he promised that the woman's seed would one day break the serpent's head. This foreshadowed Christ.

Though telling the story in a somewhat figurative style, Genesis asks us to read it as history; in Genesis, Adam is linked to the patriarchs and with them to the rest of mankind by genealogy (chs. 5, 10, 11), which makes him as much a part of space-time history as were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All the book's main characters after Adam, except Joseph, are shown as sinners in one way or another, and the death of Joseph, like the death of almost everyone else in the story, is carefully recorded (Gen. 50:22-26); Paul's statement "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22) only makes explicit what Genesis already clearly implies.

It may fairly be claimed that the Fall narrative gives the only convincing explanation of the perversity of human nature that the world has ever seen. Pascal said that the doctrine of original sin seems an offense to reason, but once accepted it makes total sense of the entire human condition. He was right, and the same thing may and should be said of the Fall narrative itself."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 6 - Of the Fall of Man, of Sin and of the Punishment Thereof

(6.2 The Results of the fall for Adam and Eve)

6.2 By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.

Commentary:

The first effect of the fall was that God broke communion with man. God and man had enjoyed sweet fellowship in the Garden prior to man's rebellion, now all that was ended. Man had indeed turned aside from God. He was at fault for the disruption in his communion with God, but we must understand very clearly that it was God who broke off communion with man. God, because of His attribute of holiness, was unable to associate with the wretchedness which man had become. God poured wrath, indignation, condemnation and curses on Adam. He cursed the serpent (Genesis 3:14,15), He cursed Eve (Genesis 3:16), He cursed the earth (Genesis 3:17) because of Adam and He cursed Adam (Genesis 3:17-19). God was revealing His wrath from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. It is important to note that God took initiative in separating Himself from man. God drove man from the garden (Genesis 3:24). God closed the way for man to approach him. Cherubim stood at the east of the Garden to make sure that no depraved sinner would enter the garden of the Holy God.

A second effect of the fall was that immediately accompanying the first sin was the total depravity of man's nature. This depravity affected every part of man's being. Out of this corruption comes the subjective side of man's broken relations with God. Originally man enjoyed God's presence now he hides from Him (Genesis 3:8). This corruption of nature is passed down to all of Adam's descendants and is itself sin. Thus not only are we responsible for "actual sins," that is, sins that we willfully, knowingly, commit but also we are responsible for the very tendency of our nature to sin. Both are effects of the fall and both are we responsible for in God's eyes. Not until God glorifies His people will this sin nature and its out-workings be finally destroyed.

A third effect of the fall was that the world was cursed because of man's sin. "Cursed is the ground because of you," (Genesis 3:17). The whole of man's environment suffers the consequences of man's disobedience. Now, instead of a world which cooperates in man's labor, man is thrust into a world where labor will be toilsome. Now there will be weeds, thorns, thistles, and parasites for man to battle. Now weather and insects will damage the fruits of his labor. It will lead him to even despise labor. This despising of labor, which, incidentally is quite prevalent in our society, is a result of the fall. Labor is a creation ordinance, only the fall made it toilsome. In heaven we will labor without toil.

A fourth effect of the fall is man's alienation from man. Adam and Eve lived in perfection, before the fall. They loved one another perfectly. The fall brought enmity, distrust and self-centeredness to the relationship. Man seeks to blame the woman for his sin (Genesis 3:12). Man had previously been selfless in his devotion to his beloved but after the fall it was every man for himself. Genesis 3:10 relates this, "I heard the sound... I was afraid... I was naked, so I hid myself." From listening to Adam's words one would not even know he had a wife. Yet Genesis 3:8 says "they heard" and "they hid." Here at the fall is the beginning of self-centeredness. Here at the fall is the beginning of sinful self-preoccupation and self-interest and self-focus. Only when the Lord purges us completely of sin in glory will this sinful "self-love" be at last washed away replaced wholly by the love of Christ.

Finally, spiritual and physical death resulted from it. Not only did man die an immediate spiritual death, he was doomed to die physically. Death of all kinds is a result of the fall. We often say today "He died of old age." This is a misnomer. We don't die of old age. We die of sin. All men's deaths emanate from Adam's sin. Those who cling to Christ as their federal head glory in His victory over death in His resurrection and look to the time we all, the elect, will say with Him, "Death is swallowed up in victory. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (I Corinthians 15:54,57).

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Chapter 6 - Of the Fall of Man, of Sin and of the Punishment Thereof

(6.3 The Imputation of Adam's Sin to the Rest of Humanity)

6.3 They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

Rowland Ward's Translation

6.3 Adam and Eve being the ancestors of the whole human race, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature was conveyed, to all those descending from them in the ordinary manner.

Commentary:

J.I. Packer says: "Scripture diagnoses sin as a universal deformity of human nature, found at every point in every person (1 Kings 8:46; Rom. 3:9-23; 7:18; 1 John 1:8-10). Both Testaments have names for it that display its ethical character as rebellion against God's rule, missing the mark God set us to aim at, transgressing God's law, disobeying God's directives, offending God's purity by defiling oneself, and incurring guilt before God the Judge. This moral deformity is dynamic: sin stands revealed as an energy of irrational, negative, and rebellious reaction to God's call and command, a spirit of fighting God in order to play God. The root of sin is pride and enmity against God, the spirit seen in Adam's first transgression; and sinful acts always have behind them thoughts, motives, and desires that one way or another express the willful opposition of the fallen heart to God's claims on our lives.

Sin may be comprehensively defined as lack of conformity to the law of God in act, habit, attitude, outlook, disposition, motivation, and mode of existence. Scriptures that illustrate different aspects of sin include Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 12:30-37; Mark 7:20-23; Romans 1:18-3:20; 7:7-25; 8:5-8; 14:23 (Luther said that Paul wrote Romans to "magnify sin"); Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19; Hebrews 3:12; James 2:10-11; 1 John 3:4; 5:17. *Flesh* in Paul usually means a human being driven by sinful desire; the NIV renders these instances of the word as "sinful nature." The particular faults and vices (i.e., forms and expression of sin) that Scripture detects and denounces are too numerous to list here.

Original sin, meaning sin derived from our origin, is not a biblical phrase (Augustine coined it), but it is one that brings into fruitful focus the reality of sin in our spiritual system. The assertion of original sin means not that sin belongs to human nature as God made it (God made mankind upright, Eccles. 7:29), nor that sin is involved in the processes of reproduction and birth (the uncleanness connected with menstruation, semen, and childbirth in Leviticus 12 and 15 was typical and ceremonial only, not moral and real), but that (a) sinfulness marks everyone from birth, and is there in the form of a motivationally twisted heart, prior to any actual sins; (b) this inner sinfulness is the root and source of all actual sins; (c) it derives to us in a real though mysterious way from Adam, our first representative before God. The assertion of original sin makes the point that we are not sinners because we sin, but rather we sin because we are sinners, born with a nature enslaved to sin.

The phrase *total depravity* is commonly used to make explicit the implications of original sin. It signifies a corruption of our moral and spiritual nature that is total not in degree (for no one is as bad as he or she might be) but in extent. It declares that no part of us is untouched by sin, and therefore no action of ours is as good as it should be, and consequently nothing in us or about us ever appears meritorious in God's eyes. We cannot earn God's favor, no matter what we do; unless grace saves us, we are lost.

Total depravity entails total inability, that is, the state of not having it in oneself to respond to God and his Word in a sincere and wholehearted way (John 6:44; Rom. 8:7-8). Paul calls this unresponsiveness of the fallen heart a state of death (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13), and the Westminster Confession says: "Man by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (IX. 3)."

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

Chapter 6 - Of the Fall of Man, of Sin and of the Punishment Thereof

(6.4 Original Sins and Our Sins)

6.4 From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Rowland Ward's Translation

6.4 This original corruption makes us completely disinclined, incapacitated, and opposed to all spiritual good, and wholly inclined to all evil. The actual sins that we commit are the fruit of this corrupt nature.

ANALYSIS WCF 6:1-6

1. The entry of sin into the human family
2. The effects of sin for Adam and Eve
3. The effect of sin on their descendants
4. Sin and sins
5. Sin in believers
6. Sin's nature and consequences

Commentary:

Ward says: "There is a biblical realism in this chapter and an absence of theorizing. The Confession does not deal with the origin of sin in God's creation but the origin of sin in the human race. This is all that is important for us. What is commonly called 'sin' is by some held to be the remnants of an animal nature that clings to us despite our evolutionary progress, and for which we are not responsible. The alternative position and the Biblical one is that sin is an intrusion into the original good order of creation and that we are morally responsible to our Creator for it. This intrusion has an historic origin at the beginning of the race: Adam and Eve were not mythical people, but real people who disobeyed God."

Of 6.2 he says: "The result of the first sin so far as Adam and Eve are concerned is now stated. To become 'wholly defiled in all the faculties' (1646 text) does not mean totally defiled in degree but in extent, ie. every part of man's life was affected. The context is that of man's relation with God, whose communion was lost, hence the Larger Catechism Q25 states man is 'utterly disposed, disabled and made opposite to all that is *spiritually* good.' It is not meant to assert the obvious untruth that they are as evil as possible, or that there was nothing of relative good left (see WCF 16:7). As W.G.T.Shedd put it: 'Total depravity means the total absence of holiness not the highest intensity of sin.' [*Dogmatics*, II, 257]"

Of 6.3 he says: "More strictly one would say Adam was the root of mankind and its representative head so that in Adam's fall we all sinned. How we inherit sin may be stated thus: Adam's sin brought guilt and corrupted his nature. We are represented by Adam therefore we are guilty; as an appropriate punishment we inherit Adam's corruption. As a result of our corrupt natures we commit actual sins."

Hodge says, of 6.4, "'From this original corruption' of nature 'proceed all actual transgressions.' It is here taught (1) That all men sin from the commencement of moral agency. (2) That back of this their nature is morally corrupt, indisposed to all good, and inclined to all evil. (3) That this moral corruption is so radical and inveterate that men are by nature "disabled" with respect to right moral action. (4) That this condition is innate from birth and by nature this representation agrees with universal experience. All the children of men, of all ages, nations, and circumstances, and how ever educated, invariably sin as soon as they become capable of moral action. A universal fact must have a cause universally present. This can only be found in the common depravity of our nature."

All this boils down to the point: "we sin because we are sinners, by nature." That is, we are not sinners because we commit sins, but we commit sins because we are sinners. That's why only grace can save us. We are the problem. The solution must come from outside of us.

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Chapter 6 - Of the Fall of Man, of Sin and of the Punishment Thereof

(6.5 Christians are forgiven, but still sin)

6.5 This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned, and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin.

Rowland Ward's Translation

6.5 During this earthly life this corruption of nature remains in those who are regenerated. Although, through Christ, the corruption is pardoned and put to death, both it and everything flowing from it is truly and actually sin.

Commentary:

Ward says: "Regeneration does not bring freedom from indwelling sin in this life. That believers are pardoned for Christ's sake does not relieve sin of its sinfulness, which remains as heinous as ever. The exhortation to believers to 'be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect' (Matt 5:48 cf. 1 Peter 1:15-16) is to be recognised, but in this life it cannot be realized. At various times there have been those who have preached the possibility of perfection in this life, but they must redefine sin to as to allow a lower attainable standard. A famous advocate, the great John Wesley (1703-91), never claimed the experience himself. The state of perfection or 'entire sanctification' claimed by some seems to arise from confusing experiences of God's love with sanctification. Sanctification is not an act, but a progressive work (cf. WCF 13)."

Shaw says: "This section teaches us, that corruption of nature remains in those that are regenerated, and is commensurate with this life. This condemns the tenet of *Christian perfection*; and it is supported by the plainest declarations of Scripture. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."—1 John i. 8. Paul himself says, "Sin dwelleth in me," and affirms, that "when he would do good, evil is present with him."—Rom. vii. 17-21. It has, indeed, been disputed, whether Paul, in that chapter, describes his own feelings, or personates another. We have no doubt that Paul speaks of himself as regenerated, and describes his own state, and consequently the state of every regenerated person; but we do not rest the doctrine upon this single passage, for the conflict there described is represented in other places in language which, by common consent, can only be applied to true Christians. We shall only refer to Gal. v. 17: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

This section also affirms that, even in the regenerated, this corruption, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin. The guilt of it is, no doubt, removed by the blood of Christ, and the power of it subdued by his Spirit and grace; but, in itself, it retains the character of sin. This is affirmed in opposition to a tenet of the Church of Rome. That universal propensity to sin, which we call the corruption of nature, Roman Catholic writers denominate *concupiscence*; and this, they maintain, is no part of original sin, and is not in itself sinful. As they believe that original sin is taken away by baptism, and nevertheless find that this corrupt disposition remains in the regenerated, they conclude that it is no part of original sin, but that it is the natural state in which Adam was made at first; only, that in us it is without the restraint of supernatural assistance which was given to him, and which, in consequence of his transgression, was withdrawn from him and his posterity. In answer to this, it is argued that lust or concupiscence is, in several places of the New Testament, spoken of as sin; particularly in Rom. vii. 7, Paul declares that "he had not known *sin* but by the law;" he then gives an instance of this,—"he had not known *lust*, except the law said said, Thou shalt not covet." Here he expressly asserts that *lust* is *sin*."

This truth is hugely important for the Christian life. We are always simultaneously forgiven and sinners. Sometimes we are told that since we are saved we should no longer think of ourselves as sinners, but rather as saints. While it is true that we are saints, by the grace of God, we are always (as Luther said) *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and a sinner).

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

Chapter 6 - Of the Fall of Man, of Sin and of the Punishment Thereof

(6.6 The Consequences of Original and Actual Sin)

6.6 Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

Commentary:

This section is about what sin deserves. Shaw says: "This section relates to the *desert* of sin. Being a transgression of the law of God, it must, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, or render him liable to punishment. It exposes him to the wrath of God, for "the children of disobedience" are also "children of wrath," *i. e.*, they deserve and are obnoxious to the wrath of God. It subjects him to the curse of the law, by which we may understand the condemnatory sentence of the broken law, which binds over the guilty sinner to all the direful effects of the wrath of God. It likewise subjects him to death, or the dissolution of the mysterious union between the soul and the body. Pelagians and Socinians hold that death is not the punishment of sin—that Adam was mortal from the beginning; and for this reason, those who are born of him must also be mortal. Others, again, both in former and later times, have held that temporal death was the only penalty threatened to Adam, and that this is the only death which results from his sin. Both these opinions are so plainly contradictory to the express declarations of the Word of God, that they are unworthy of serious refutation. In addition to this, our Confession states, that sin exposes the sinner to numerous *miseries*, both in this life, and in that which is to come. Among the *spiritual* or inward miseries to which it renders the sinner liable in this world, the compilers of our Confession elsewhere mention "blindness of mind, a reprobate sense, strong delusions, hardness of heart, horror of conscience, and vile affections;" and among the *temporal* or outward miseries, they mention "the curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes, and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, relations, and employments." And the miseries to which sin exposes in the world to come, they sum up in "everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hellfire for ever."

When we reflect on the loss which Adam sustained by his fall, and on the guilty and corrupted state in which we are thereby involved, and on the manifold miseries to which we are liable, both here and hereafter, let us be deeply impressed with a sense of the dreadful malignity and demerit of sin, - the source of all our woe. Let us not dare to repine against God, or to impeach his goodness or equity, for permitting sin to enter into the world, and making us responsible for the transgression of the first Adam, but rather let us admire the divine wisdom and grace displayed in providing the second Adam, by whose obedience we may be made righteous, as by the disobedience of the first we were made sinners. Let us cordially receive the Lord Jesus Christ, that, being found in him, we may not only be acquitted from the guilt of the first man's transgression, but may be brought, through "the abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, to reign in life by one," even by Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Every sinner deserves the doom described in this section, but God in his sovereign grace spares believers what they deserve, because Christ bore what they deserved in their place. By the way, the claim has sometimes been made that believers, being justified are no longer guilty in God's sight, therefore any guilt that they experience is said to be self-imposed or false guilt. The problem with this view is that it fails to take into account the distinction between 'potential guilt' and 'actual guilt.' In justification God declares a sinner righteous (He does not make him righteous), this remedies the 'actual guilt' of the believer. But the 'potential guilt' remains. So a believer should not expect his conscience to be guilt-free when he sins, for potential guilt still remains on that believer. Only in glorification, when God makes believers righteous, will believers be completely and eternally free from 'potential guilt' and then only because God has graciously removed sin from their lives.

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 9 - Of Free Will

(9.1 The kind of freedom humans possess: “natural, uncoerced, liberty” or “free agency”)

9.1 God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.

Commentary:

What kind of “free will” do humans have? The Confession says that we have the ability to do what we desire to do (“natural liberty, or what philosophers call the “liberty of contingency”).

Ward outlines chapter 9 this way:

1. Human freedom basics
2. Freedom in the state of innocence
3. Freedom in the state of sin
4. Freedom in the state of grace
5. Freedom in the state of glory

He goes on to say: “The Confession states that man has a natural liberty of will which prevents it being determined to good or evil by such causes or influences as would exclude deliberate choice and spontaneous agency. The freedom or bondage of the four possible states of man described in the following sections must be taken in the light of this foundational teaching. In short, the human will is a reality; it is not a delusion as if our will was compelled to choose a certain way by an inbuilt necessity over-riding desire and deliberate choice. Choice is made, it is made freely, and the agent is responsible.

“We must not set the sovereignty of God over against the freedom of man as if the former eliminates the latter so that man has no will of his own but is driven by God’s will or, on the other hand, as if belief in man’s freedom of necessity limits the sovereignty of God. The Bible does not envisage human freedom as freedom from all restrictions or a freedom to act autonomously, nor does it regard God’s sovereignty as a threat to man’s freedom, or vice versa. When, as is often the case, man wants to assert his freedom over against God, he is acting as a rebel enslaved by sin, not as a son who submits to his Father. For the Bible does not regard freedom in an abstract or philosophical way, nor as the opposite of submission, but it regards freedom as realised in submission to God (compare 2 Peter 2:18-19).

“We would do well in keeping very carefully to the Biblical emphasis on the nature of human freedom. A great deal of fruitless speculation and harmful teaching and division has arisen through failure to do so. Much popular thought in Christian circles builds on the idea of freedom as an ability to act autonomously as if man dictates to God who will be saved. This is common in those sections of the Roman church uninfluenced by Augustine (AD 354-430), but it is far more widespread than this. It arose in the 17th century in the form of Arminianism (named after Jacob Arminius) which asserts the freedom of man *over against* God’s sovereignty.

“Those who followed Arminius, perhaps going further than he did, were called Remonstrants. They raised five objections to the Biblical scheme of salvation which gave rise to five answers by the Synod of Dort (1618-19). These are commonly called the five points of Calvinism, although, of course Calvinism is much more than these five points. Arminianism was widely influential in English Methodism and undergirds much popular evangelicalism today. The general idea of the Arminian view is that the will is neutral so that free will is a power of choice that is not controlled by the moral nature of the chooser. However, Christ teaches that the nature of the fruit *is* determined by the nature of the tree on which it grows (Matthew 12:33-35). In a more refined form Arminianism admits that man needs God’s grace to repent and believe, but it is still held that this grace is granted to all with the ultimate decision for or against being in the hands of man because of his ‘free’ will. A current variant is Open Theism”

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Chapter 9 - Of Free Will

(9.2 Unfallen Adam - freedom to do good or evil)

9.2 Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it.

Commentary:

Ward says: “In the state of innocence before Adam’s disobedience, man had freedom for he was created in fellowship with God and ‘very good’. But this position had to be personally and freely accepted; his freedom had to be vindicated by personal choice of righteousness or sin - hence the test in Eden. But if there was the necessity for choice, there was no necessity for the actual choice made. There can be no explanation but the willful abuse of his freedom.”

J.I. Packer helpfully notes: “Clear thought about the fallen human condition requires a distinction between what for the past two centuries has been called free *agency* and what since the start of Christianity has been called free *will*. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and others spoke of free *will* in two senses, the first trivial, the second important; but this was confusing, and it is better always to use free *agency* for their first sense.

“Free agency is a mark of human beings as such. All humans are free agents in the sense that they make their own decisions as to what they will do, choosing as they please in the light of their sense of right and wrong and the inclinations they feel. Thus they are moral agents, answerable to God and each other for their voluntary choices. So was Adam, both before and after he sinned; so are we now, and so are the glorified saints who are confirmed in grace in such a sense that they no longer have it in them to sin. Inability to sin will be one of the delights and glories of heaven, but it will not terminate anyone’s humanness; glorified saints will still make choices in accordance with their nature, and those choices will not be any the less the product of human free agency just because they will always be good and right.

“Free will, however, has been defined by Christian teachers from the second century on as the ability to choose all the moral options that a situation offers, and Augustine affirmed against Pelagius and most of the Greek Fathers that original sin has robbed us of free will in this sense. We have no natural ability to discern and choose God’s way because we have no natural inclination Godward; our hearts are in bondage to sin, and only the grace of regeneration can free us from that slavery. This, for substance, was what Paul taught in Romans 6:16-23; only the *freed* will (Paul says, the freed person) freely and heartily chooses righteousness. A permanent love of righteousness—that is, an inclination of heart to the way of living that pleases God—is one aspect of the freedom that Christ gives (John 8:34-36; Gal. 5:1, 13).

“It is worth observing that *will* is an abstraction. My will is not a part of me which I choose to move or not to move, like my hand or my foot; it is precisely me choosing to act and then going into action. The truth about free agency, and about Christ freeing sin’s slave from sin’s dominion, can be expressed more clearly if the word *will* is dropped and each person says: *I* am the morally responsible free agency; *I* am the slave of sin whom Christ must liberate; *I* am the fallen being who only have it in me to choose against God till God renews my heart.

In his famous book, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, the famous Scottish Pastor and “Marrow Man,” Thomas Boston (1676–1732) tells us that the four states of human nature are: (a) Primitive Integrity; (b) Entire Depravity; (c) Begun Recovery; and (d) Consummate Glory. These four states, which are derived from the Scripture, correspond to the four states of man in relation to sin enumerated by Augustine of Hippo: (a) able to sin, able not to sin (*posse peccare, posse non peccare*); (b) not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*); (c) able not to sin (*posse non peccare*); and (d) unable to sin (*non posse peccare*). The first state corresponds to the state of man in innocency, before the Fall; the second the state of the natural man after the Fall; the third the state of the regenerate man; and the fourth the glorified man.

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 9 - Of Free Will

(9.3 Fallen Humanity - inability to do good, inclination to evil)

9.3 Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

Commentary:

Continuing to think about the “fourfold state” - “It should be noted that in all four states, man is free to choose what to do or not to do according to his will. His will is free because it is not forced or compelled from without. However, his will is determined by his own moral inclinations. This means that while the glorified man will always choose to do good because his heart’s inclination is always to glorify God; the natural fallen man will always do what is evil (in God’s eyes), because his motives are never pure, and never to glorify God. Before the Fall, man was able to choose to do either good or evil, his heart, and so his inclination and disposition, being innocent and not tainted by sin. But Adam’s state was mutable and when Satan tempted Eve, and then through Eve, tempted him, he chose to sin against God by eating the forbidden fruit and so fell from the estate of innocency.”

Ward says of 9.3, “The fall meant that man enslaved himself by his free choice, consequently the term ‘free will’ is a misnomer in much popular usage. For man does not now live in submission to God, but is enslaved by sin. Certainly he still makes free and conscious choices (cf. 9:1), but his prior free act of will has brought him into subjection to evil. He chooses what he desires, but he does not desire God any more. He may do many decent and worthy things in the eyes of men, but he does not choose what is spiritually good. ‘Those who are in the flesh cannot please God’, Paul reminds us (Romans 8:8). Indeed, man claims ‘freedom’ to act independently of God, and this cherishing of autonomy is the expression of self-will and proud rebellion against his Creator. So this is not a freedom to boast about, but a freedom that is slavery. Hence Martin Luther (1483-1545) regarded his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, written in 1525 against Erasmus, as his most important, along with his *Small Catechism*, for in it the fundamental issue was addressed - the hollowness of man’s claim to freedom.

“The last part in the 1646 text reads: *or prepare himself thereunto*. This does not mean *God* does not prepare a person for conversion, nor does it mean that the use of the means of grace is beyond man’s power. Rather, it relates to the common idea of man co-operating with God to bring about conversion - something utterly impossible for the one dead in sin, but something man in his pride likes to suppose he contributes to his salvation.

“It should be clearly noted that the sinful enslavement of mankind through the fall is one for which we are fully responsible. The inability to do what God demands of us does not excuse us since our inability is self-inflicted. In other words, responsibility to obey God’s word does not now imply ability to obey. Second, if our inability is really recognised it produces urgency to find relief, not indifference, as would be the case if we believed we had ability. Third, no appeal to the secret will of God is legitimate if it is used to deny or undermine the reality and sincerity of God’s revealed proposals of mercy made to sinners in the Gospel.”

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

Chapter 9 - Of Free Will

(9.4 Converted Sinners - Free [again] to do good, but conflicted between good and evil desires)

9.4 When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.

Other Confessional Statements

Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, Art. 10 (Episcopal): " The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith, and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

Articles of Synod of Dort, chap. iii., Art. 3 (Reformed): "All men are conceived in sin, and born children of wrath, indisposed to all saving good, propense to evil, dead in sins and the slaves of sin; and without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to correct their depraved nature, or to dispose themselves to the correction of it."

Formula of Concord, (Lutheran): " Therefore we believe that as it is impossible for a dead body to revive itself, or to communicate animal life to itself, in the same degree is it impossible for a man, spiritually dead by reason of sin, to recall spiritual life within himself." lb. p. 653: "We believe that neither the intellect, heart, nor will of the unregenerate man, is able of its own natural strength either to understand, believe, embrace, will, begin, perfect, perform, operate, or cooperate anything, in things divine and spiritual; but man is so far dead and corrupt in respect to good, that in the nature of man since the fall, and before regeneration, there is not even a scintilla of spiritual strength remaining whereby he can prepare himself for the grace of God, or apprehend that grace when offered, or is able in whole or in half, or in the least part, to apply or accommodate himself to that grace, or to confer or to act, or to operate or to co-operate anything for his own conversion."

Commentary:

Ward says: "It follows from man's bondage in sin that the application of salvation must be accomplished by God's grace - by the mighty working of God's power through the Holy Spirit (compare John 6:44,65). This is the context in which our understanding of the following chapters must be understood. Accordingly, effective calling of the elect will not be seen as an arbitrary procedure but as a gracious activity by which the salvation purchased by Christ becomes the possession of those sinners to whom it has pleased the Lord to grant salvation. Being thus brought into submission by the Holy Spirit in the day of *his* power, man's freedom is more than restored, since he has freedom in Christ, that is, freedom through the covenant of grace. He continues to make free and conscious choices but the miracle of regeneration has given him a new nature which enables the choice of what is good once more. Not left to himself but enabled to do and to will what is good by God's grace, he is on the way to glory, the perfection of grace. Although he remains imperfectly sanctified in this life, and so also chooses evil, a decisive break has been made at the entry to the Christian life, the life of freedom in Christ."

Hymn - And Can It Be

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee. (Charles Wesley!)

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 9 - Of Free Will

(9.5 Glorified Saints, unable to sin, perfectly and unchangeably enabled to do good)

9.5 The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone, in the state of glory only.

Commentary:

Ward says: "In this life the believer has freedom from the power of sin but not from its presence. Perfect freedom is only realised in glory when we are perfectly conformed to the image of Christ. Through grace sin has been freely excluded and it has no more place in our lives." Ward quotes Augustine: "Surely, if no Christian will dare say this, 'It is not of God that shows mercy but of man who wills', lest he should openly contradict the Apostle, it follows that the true interpretation of the saying, 'It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy' [Romans 9:16], is that the whole work belongs to God who both makes the will of man righteous, and thus prepares it for assistance, and assists it when it is prepared." Augustine (354-430) in *Enchiridion* 32.

Shaw says: "The human *will* is not a distinct agent, but only a power of the rational soul. It is essential to a soul to have a *moral* disposition, good or bad, or a mixture of both; and, according to what is the prevailing moral *disposition* of the soul, must be the moral actings of the will. Hence there is a great difference in regard to the freedom of the will in the different states of man. In the state of innocence, the natural inclination of man's will was only to good; but it was liable to change through the power of temptation, and therefore free to choose evil. In his natural corrupt state, man freely chooses evil, without any compulsion or constraint on his will; and he cannot do otherwise, being under the bondage of sin. In the state of grace, he has a free will partly to good and partly to evil. In this state there is a mixture of two opposite moral dispositions, and as sometimes the one, and sometimes the other, prevails, so the will sometimes chooses that which is good, and sometimes that which is evil. In the state of glory, the blessed freely choose what is good; and, being confirmed in a state of perfect holiness, they can only will what is good.

"The important truth laid down in the third section concerning man's inability, in his fallen state, to will or do that which is spiritually good, claims some further notice. It has been opposed by various sects. The Pelagians maintained " that mankind are capable of repentance and amendment, and of arriving to the highest degrees of piety and virtue by the use of their natural faculties and powers." The Semi-Pelagians, though they allowed that assisting grace is necessary to enable a man to *continue* in a course of religious duties, yet they held "that *inward preventing grace* was not necessary to form in the soul the *first beginnings* of true repentance and amendment; that every man was capable of producing these by the mere power of his natural faculties; as also of exercising faith in Christ, and forming the purposes of a holy and sincere obedience." The Arminians, in words, ascribe the conversion of the sinner to the grace of God; yet they ultimately resolve it into the free-will of man. In opposition to these various forms of error, our Confession asserts that man, in his natural corrupt state, "has lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation," and that "a natural man is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." This may be confirmed,—1. By the representations given in Scripture of the natural condition of mankind sinners. They are said to be "dead in trespasses and sins;" to be not only blind, but "darkness" itself; to be "the servants of sin;" to be "enemies of God," who are not, and cannot be, subject to his law.—Eph. ii. 1, v. 8; Rom. vi. 17; Col. i. 21; Rom. viii. 7. 2. The Scripture contains explicit declarations of man's inability to exercise faith in Christ, or to do anything spiritually good. - John vi. 44, xv. 5. 3. God claims the conversion of sinners as his own work, which he promises to accomplish.—Ezek. xi. 19, 20, xxxvi. 26, 27; Jer. xxxi. 33. 4. The conversion of sinners is uniformly ascribed to the efficacy of divine grace.—Acts xvi. 14; 1 Thess. i. 6. 5. The conversion of the soul is described in Scripture by such figurative terms as imply that it is a divine work. It is called a creation, - Eph. ii. 10; a resurrection, - John v. 21; a new birth,—John i. 13. 6. If the sinner could convert himself, then he would have something of which he might boast—something which he had not received. - Cor. i. 29, 30, iv. 7. 7. The

increase of Christians in faith and holiness is spoken of as the work of God; which must more strongly imply that the first *beginnings* of it is to be ascribed to him. - Phil. i. 6, ii. 13; Heb. xiii. 20, 21. We only add, that man's incapacity of willing or doing that which is spiritually good, being a *moral inability*, is not inconsistent with his responsibility.

Appendices

Paper Grading Guide

The following criteria will be used in grading all written work for this course, based on a 25% basis

THESIS STATEMENT (5%)

Clear, brief, description of thesis statement (5)

No these statement (0)

DEVELOPMENT (ie. does it have a beginning, middle and end?) (5%)

Coherent (5)

Begins well, but... (4)

Falls apart after the first page (3)

Stream of Consciousness stuff (2)

Can't make head nor tail of this (1)

No paper! (0)

CONTENT (8%)

Shows thorough grasp of the material AND some independent thinking (5)

Shows thorough grasp of the material AND some borrowed thinking (4)

Raises more issues than can be answered (3)

Doesn't contain enough data to deal with the issue (2)

Has virtually no content! (1)

No paper (0)

BIBLIOGRAPHY (3%)

Solid bibliographical content (5)

Adequate bibliography (3)

Inadequate bibliography (2)

No bibliography! (0)

ERRORS (5%)

Shows a thorough grasp of requisite style (Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition 2017) (5)

Some coherent but different style (identified in a footnote on page 1) (4)

Some grammatical and/or typographical errors (3)

Solecisms abounding (2)

Paper written in a language other than English (1)

No paper (0)

Because the paper was late, I have had to reduce your grade by two points per day from the due date, in fairness to your peers.

The grade I have assigned you is based upon your fulfillment of the instructions for the assignment, the overall quality of your presentation, my assessment of your grasp of the subject matter, your skill in communication of the material, and how well you did your work in comparison with your peers in the course.

A Brilliant Example of Exegesis (Reading) and Analysis (Comprehension and Criticism/Appreciation)

I include this 'review' of Anthony Hoekema's work as given by Dr Duncan Rankin in his ST1 syllabus for your edification! Just be grateful that he isn't reviewing something which you wrote! Read, mark and learn!

Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Eerdmans)

This work we can give a qualified endorsement. Its strengths are several. Clearly and simply written, it is one of the few recent works on the doctrine of man, or Christian anthropology, from an evangelical and Reformed perspective. Hoekema also incorporates repeated application to the fields of psychology and Christian counseling/therapy, making it especially relevant to students in the MFT program. There are, however, facets to A.A. Hoekema's work (AAH) which give us some pause in making it required reading for ST1:

1) Hoekema and his audience at Calvin Theological Seminary were all primarily concerned with theology as developed in the Dutch ethnic stream in the Netherlands, Canada, and the USA, making much of the material he references inaccessible to the average American audience.

2) This Dutch milieu skews his treatment in a decidedly Continental direction, focusing on developments in Germany at the expense of Great Britain and America, which have historically adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith as their Reformed subordinate standard.

3) Hoekema gives a vast amount of space to modern theology--especially that of Barth, Brunner, Bultmann, and Berkouwer--at the expense of both the Patristic and Puritan periods.

4) The judgment exercised by Hoekema on certain doctrinal matters is at times rather curious or even inclusivist.

While each of these objections is worthy of sober consideration and due caution, none are so insurmountable as to merit the elimination of this work from the required reading list.

p. vii NB: the chapter headings indicate the major areas of doctrinal interest in Christian anthropology: the image of God and sin

p. 17 G.C. Berkouwer (b. 1903): former Professor of Dogmatics at the Free University of Amsterdam, noted sympathetic critic of Barthianism, and author of the series *Dogmatics in Outline*. See article in *New Dictionary of Theology* (NDT), DOWNERS GROVE: INTERVARSITY PRESS., 1988, p. 89f.

p. 22 Rationality is a prerequisite of true love. Why does AAH make them sound almost antithetical?

p. 24 Is "victim" language appropriate for the Fall?

p. 25 NB: John Murray's treatment of "old self" or "old man". This is vital for a proper view of sanctification.

p. 36 Note the jump across 1000 years of church history! Don't get whiplash! 22

p. 39 love vs. intellect: apples vs. oranges (This is not one of AAH's more brilliant comments about God.)

p. 43f Caution: AAH has relied very heavily upon the dated work on Calvin's anthropology by the Scottish Barthian T. F. Torrance. This early work has been attacked and corrected by Mary Potter Engel's *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology*, in *American Academy of Religion Academy Series*, no. 52, ed. by Susan Thistlethwaite. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988. Torrance asserts--like Karl Barth--that the image of God is not in man but above him only in the person of Christ. AAH does avoid this more radical teaching, in spite of his use of Torrance's tome.

p. 49 NB: Karl Barth's typically negative, protesting stance. Often his protests contain a grain of truth when viewed within their contemporary context. But, be warned: that does not mean his neo-orthodox conclusions should be uncritically adopted. Much of Barth's "I-Thou" musing is not uniquely Christian, being based on the philosophical exercises of Jewish scholar Martin Buber.

p. 51 NB: "On this point Barth does not give us a clear answer." You will find this not to be an uncommon trait of Barth, especially for the non-expert. Be careful not to read your own subjective feelings into Barth's inviting text, a common fallacy in American neo-orthodox circles.

p. 52 It is not clear to me that Brunner draws a historical distinction between Creation and Sin, but rather a logical one. Does AAH see the same?

p. 57 NB: "What Brunner means, I presume,...." Like with Barth's, the non-expert is liable to be either confused or invited to read his own feelings into Brunner's text. The pastoral and theological advice of your instructor is that you focus your own personal reading on the classics, especially Calvin. This will be of much more help in your counseling/therapy work than neo-orthodox tomes.

p. 59 What can unveil "the secret of the whole man"? What limits does this place upon your use of material from natural revelation in counseling/therapy? How important is the Bible to your work?

p. 65 The recurrent theme of "static vs. dynamic" or "being vs. doing" or "noun vs. verb" is of fairly recent origin. Be careful! All "dynamic" systems are not equally valid or correct. What do these terms mean in this context?

p. 73 AAH asserts the primacy of Christ's love in His life. On what grounds does AAH assert this "fact"? [When you discover it, then please let your instructor know!] While it may sound warm and fuzzy, AAH is traveling across very deep theological waters here, which could be developed in a number of liberal/heretical directions. Thankfully, he does not seem to develop this idea to any great extent. You do the same--leave this thread unpulled!

p. 74 Admit it or not, AAH is into Christology here--the study of the person and work of Christ. Unfortunately, he does not expound his Christology here in traditional categories (e.g., according to the *munus triplex* pattern), but instead is using rather vague modern terms. To say that Christ is "wholly directed toward" God or His fellow man is to speak in relational categories without a clear ethical reference to the Word and Law of God. Always make your own foundational principle or commitment clear, especially in the moral realm.

p. 75f AAH follows his non-classic Christological categories in outlining his anthropology. Since Jesus in the perfect *imago Dei*, so we too can be analyzed along AAH's Christological lines. This is not bad, but just don't lose sight of your absolutes in the fog of emotional/relational language.

p. 78 Is AAH's call for social fellowship outside of our own people group a biblical imperative or an encroachment of postmodern multi-culturalism? Were our grandparents any less in the image of God because they didn't interact with other cultures and peoples on a daily basis? NB: the concept of biblical fellowship is being stretched here beyond its biblical intent. Careful!

p. 79 The "cultural mandate" is key: read with care!
23

p. 83 By "structure of man" AAH means man's make-up as body, soul, and their relationship. Each and every part or faculty of man was touched and twisted by the Fall.

p. 86 Note the definitions of "regeneration" and "sanctification." NB: do not confuse emotional excitement per se with sanctification, which is a common American evangelical sin! Just because you feel closer to someone does not necessarily mean you are more sanctified. Just because you are excited by an idea or event does not necessarily mean you are more sanctified.

p. 88 AAH is here developing the concept of a Christian world and life view. What is your world and life view? How biblical (and therefore pleasing to God) is it?

p. 89 The "ecclesiastical aspect" of the image of God in man is an often overlooked fact. Being active in a local biblical church is a sanctification issue, even when you are a busy student. Don't neglect this dimension of your life while at RTS!

p. 93 AAH seems to imply here that all national, cultural, and ethnic distinction will be cleansed in heaven. This is rather speculative, owing more to egalitarianism than the Scriptures.

p. 98 This speculative musing on sex in heaven I find of little help. Perhaps you can enlighten me!

p. 103 NB: AAH (re)defines "self-image" in a more helpful Christian direction.

p. 104 What change in Adam and Eve's self-image SHOULD have occurred due to the Fall? What did God think of them? Should they not think the same?

p. 106 AAH's "realistic image" is quite helpful.

p. 107 Note the definitions of "justification" and "sanctification".

p. 109 Does AAH take the real guilt and real consequences of abiding sin in the believer's life seriously enough? I think not. How should we feel when we sin or when God chastises us for our sins?

p. 111 Too bad AAH balances his treatment with only one key sentence on abiding sin in the life of the believer. A more expanded treatment would be more helpful in this important pastoral care and counseling area.

p. 116 NB: AAH has shifted his argument from a purely exegetical/textual level to a theological level. Train yourself to pick up on such moves!

p. 117 "Redemptive history" is history studied with a view to God's redeeming of His people. Thus, it starts with Adam and moves forward through the Scriptures.

p. 119 AAH's position against the terminology of "the covenant of works" is one of great debate. The Westminster Confession and Catechisms are happy enough using the term. AAH and others in the 20th Century object for the reasons he gives here. We'll deal with this matter in class lecture. However, note that AAH maximizes criticism of terminology and minimizes affirmation of substance to just one sentence. This is unbalanced. While on some levels I prefer the Westminster Larger Catechism's terminology of "covenant of life," I find AAH's simplistic objections inadequate.

p. 123 Were there really "no actual witnesses to some of the events described in Genesis 1-3"? What about God and the heavenly host of angels?

p. 124 Based partly on "recent scientific evidence," AAH concludes that "the literary genre of these chapters is different from that of other historical sections of the Bible." Note AAH's uncritical acceptance of the conclusions of recent scientific study, which is most often based on atheistic presuppositions. Note further that to protect the Bible from supposed errors in this area, AAH leaps to the claim that Genesis is a different literary genre than other sections of the Bible. If he had made even a feeble attempt to derive this claim from the text of Genesis itself, we might be willing to take it more seriously. As stated, this is speculation of the worst sort.

p. 125 Thankfully AAH continues to hold to a literal interpretation of the Genesis narrative, even if he is non-exclusivist in doing so.

p. 126 God told Moses! Aalders' position was also taught 100 years earlier by James Woodrow of Columbia Theological Seminary, who was deposed from the Faculty for such teachings.

p. 127 There is little unique about the literary character of the Genesis narrative. The reckless remedy of genre shifting would be cricket too for many other key passages.

p. 128 Read carefully the first full paragraph!

p. 131 AAH's stress on the mystery of the origin of sin is defensive and perhaps too broad. He is, however, attempting to protect God from the charge of being the author of sin, which in itself is true and helpful. Adam and Eve were strong enough to stand and weak enough to fall.

p. 132 AAH's claim of the irrationality of sin is so broad as to sound like an ontological necessity rather than a moral/ethical fact. AAH is dancing to Barth's tune here. Does God not know the why of sin? Could He not tell us? Certainly this mystery is not deeper than the Trinity or the incarnation. Perhaps one day we shall hear more from Him on the why of sin, if He wishes to tell us!

p. 133 Use this passage of Scripture in discussing sin with those experiencing disappointment, shame, guilt, and fear!

p. 134 NB: the *Protoevangelium* AAH claims: "God's first response to human sin, therefore, is a response of grace." Is this really true? Look at the passage in question. Does not grace follow the condemnation of sin?

BIBLIOGRAPHY on THE HOLY TRINITY

John H. Farrar (RTS Jackson grad) and Ligon Duncan

Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* Vol 1 translated by George Musgrave Ginger edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. pp. 253-310

The 17th century Reformed theologians tackles most of the major heresies that challenged the doctrine of the Trinity. In particular he addresses the Socinians "To understand this primary question which we agitate with the ancient as well as the more modern anti-Trinitarians, take notice that the orthodox faith is this: in the one only and most simple essence of God these are three distinct persons so distinguished from each other by incommunicable properties or modes of subsisting that one cannot be the other-although by an inexpressible circum-*insession* (*emperichoresis*) they always remain and exist in each other mutually." p. 265 Turretin has a section on the modalists starting on page 270 and going to page 282.

The Lord of Glory, A study of the Designations of Our Lord in the New Testament with especial reference to His Deity B.B. Warfield (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1974).

This is another excellent work from the pen of B. B. Warfield. Warfield surveys the entire New Testament for the designations for Jesus Christ. Because of the increasing denials of Jesus' Deity Warfield emphasized all those designations which proclaimed the Deity of Christ. The bulk of book considers the four Gospels.

"The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity" originally in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, General editor by B. B. Warfield found in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 2 Biblical Doctrines* originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by (Baker Book House 1981) pp. 133-172.

Warfield is the late 19th century early 20th century equivalent to John Owen. Even his short articles resemble German panzer divisions rolling across the Dutch country side in the effect they have on error. One of Warfield's main arguments is as follows "*In a word, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are the fundamental proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is as much as to say that all the evidence of whatever kind, and from whatever source derived, that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh, and that the Holy Spirit is a Divine Person, is just so much evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity.*" pp 146

"The Person of Christ" originally in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, General editor by B.B. Warfield. found in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 2 Biblical Doctrines* originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by (Baker Book House 1981) pp. 175-209

B.B. Warfield surveys the teaching of Paul, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the other Epistles, and the teaching of Jesus regarding to the person of Christ. While the thrust of the article is to demonstrate the integrity of the person of Christ as being God and man in one person Warfield does demonstrate the true divinity of Jesus, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

"God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" originally from *The Princeton Theological Review*, v. xv, 1917, pp. 1-20 by B. B. Warfield. found in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 2 Biblical Doctrines* originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by (Baker Book House 1981) pp. 213-231

B.B. Warfield shows how the phrase "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" is a Christian periphrasis for God. Warfield also shows how the periphrasis is also used in many of Paul's closing prayers to "designate the Divine Being to whom the prayer is offered." This article is another example of the Warfield's exhaustive defense of orthodoxy.

"The Christ that Paul Preached" originally from *The Expositor*, 8th ser., v. xv, 1918, pp. 90-110 by B. B.

Warfield. found in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 2 Biblical Doctrines originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by (Baker Book House 1981) pp. 235-252

According to Warfield Paul, the apostle, believed that the Lordship of Jesus Christ pointed to the full divinity of Jesus Christ. Warfield is combating one of the numerous 19th century opponents of Christ's divinity, in particular, W. Bousset.

"God" originally from "A Dictionary of the Bible", edited by John D. Davis, 1898 pp. 251-253 by B. B. Warfield. found in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 9 Studies in Theology originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by (Baker Book House 1981) pp. 109-114

A short article the three stages or three planes of revelation by which God is revealed to man, (a) God, the Infinite Spirit (b) God, the Redeemer of sinners, and (c) God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

"Jesus Christ" form "The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge," vi. pp. 150-160. Pub, Funk & Wagnalls Cl 1910 by B. B. Warfield. found in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 3 Christology and Criticism originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by Baker Book House 1981) pp. 259-310

Warfield demonstrates that the Synoptics, the writings of Paul, the other epistles, Acts, and the Gospel of John all portray Jesus as a supernatural "divine" person unlike the "Lives of Christ" which the 19th century liberals presented.

"The 'Two Natures' and Recent Christological Speculation" from "The American Journal of Theology, xv. 1911, pp. 337-361; 546-568 by B. B. Warfield. found in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 3 Christology and Criticism originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by Baker Book House 1981) pp.259-310

Many 19th century academic theologians revolted against the two natures of Jesus in order to deny that Jesus was fully God. Warfield surveys the revolt and then systematically demolishes it. He says "The significance of this revolt becomes at once apparent, when we reflect that the doctrine of the Two Natures is only another way of stating the doctrine of the Incarnation; and the doctrine of the Incarnation is the hinge on which the Christian system turns. No Two Natures, no Incarnation; no Incarnation, no Christianity in any distinctive sense." (p.259)

"The Twentieth-Century Christ" from "The Hibbert Journal, xii. 1914, pp. 583-602 found in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield vol 3 Christology and Criticism originally published by (New York: Oxford University Press 1929) reprinted by Baker Book House 1981) pp.371-389

This article is Warfield's response to Kenotism. "The idea is that the Son of God, in becoming man, abandoned His deity, extinguished it, so to speak, by immersing it in the stream of human life." (p. 375) Kenotism has reappeared today particularly among certain "Christian" sects.

"The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity explained and Vindicated" by John Owen The Works of John Owen vol 2 edited by William H. Goold first published in this edition by (Johnstone & Hunter 1850-53) reprinted by (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust 1965) pp. 377-454

John Owen was one of the greatest Puritan theologians. Much of his treatise was to counter one of the chief opponent to trinitarian theology Socinius, a 16th century theologian who argued that Jesus was a mere man and that the Holy Spirit was God's energy. Socinius was the forerunner of modern Unitarianism. John Owen is heavy reading but thorough.

"Discourse on the Holy Spirit" by John Owen The Works of John Owen vol 3 edited by William H. Goold first published in this edition by (Johnstone & Hunter 1850-53) reprinted by (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust 1965)

Chapter 3 titled "Divine Nature and Personality of the Holy Spirit proved and Vindicated" specifically affirms and defends the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is fully God and yet a distinct person. See pages 64-92.

Institutes of the Christian Religion Book 1 "The Knowledge of God the Creator" John Calvin Library of Christian Classics Volume XX Edited by John T. McNeill translated and Indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1960)

In book one Calvin attacks Servetus an anti-trinitarian writer who Calvin says "God is assumed to be tripartite when three persons are said to reside in his essence; this is an imaginary triad, because it clashes with ideas which do not truly subsist in God's essence, but represent God to us in one manifestation or another." (p. 147) Calvin refutes Servetus heresy and the tackles the heresy of Valentine Gentile who according to Calvin "From this morass another similar monster has come forth. For certain rascals, to escape the invidiousness and shame of Servetus' impiety, indeed confessed that there are three persons; but they added the provision that the Father, who is truly and properly the sole God, in forming the Son and the Spirit, infused into them his own deity." Calvin marshals Scriptural and Patristic evidence against these and other anti-trinitarian positions.

Summa Theologica St. Thomas Aquinas translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Providence (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics 1981) questions 27-43 pages 144-226

A more philosophical treatment of the trinity but extremely detailed. Aquinas quotes the Bible, the Patristics and other Medieval theologians.

Against Praxeas Tertullian The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol 3 translated by Dr. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans co. 1980) pp. 597-627

Tertullian, an early Latin theologian, answered Praxeas, one the earliest modalists. Praxeas argued that Christ was but the manifestation of the Father. Tertullian's treatise tackles the meaning of "persona" in order to affirm the unity of God while affirming the distinctiveness of the three persons, The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit.

De Trinitate St. Hilary of Poitiers The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Vol IX by L. Pullan and E.W. Watson 1898 (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Co 1980)

The greatest Latin theologian who defended the Nicene creed against the heresy of Arius. According to R.P.C. Hanson in The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1988) Hilary "relies constantly on Tertullian: he followed him in almost every detail (though not quite every detail) of this theology." (p.472) Hilary is not heavily influenced by the theology of Origen or Clement of Alexander. According to Hanson "Hilary is an unusual theologian. He has been called the Western Athanasius. In fact his thought little resembles that of Athanasius, but in originality and insight he is nearly his equal." (p. 477) It is essential to see Hilary as distinct from the Eastern wing of Christendom. He is not derived from them and is not therefore as influenced by Neo Platonism as were Origen and even the Cappadocians.

Contra Gentes Athanasius An excellent critical edition is the Oxford Early Christian Texts Edited and translated by Robert W. Thomson. De Incarnatione by Athanasius is included in the volume. (Oxford at the Clarendon Press 1971)

Athanasius was one of the great opponents of Arianism in the East. His work was highly polemic but firmly based in Scripture even though his use of certain Scriptures such as Proverbs 8:22 are far fetched. (See R.P.C. Hanson in The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1988) pages 417-445.

The Trinity St. Augustine of Hippo translated by A.W. Haddan in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers vol 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Co 1980)

A major Patristic defense of the Trinity. See introduction of William G. T. Shedd in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers vol 3. Shedd argues that Augustine divides his treatise into two lines of defense, Scriptural or exegetical and rational. Augustine's philosophical defense uses the idea that God's personality requires trinity. "the personality of God depends upon the trinity of the Divine Essence--that if there are not interior distinctions in the infinite Being, he cannot be self-contemplative, self-cognitive, or self-communing." (o. 7-8 Shedd introduction)

The Trinity (book 3) Richard of St. Victor in The Classics of Western Spirituality translated by Grover A. Zinn (New York: Paulist Press 1979 pages 373-397)

Richard of St. Victor was a medieval mystic whose work on the Trinity advanced the Church's understanding of the Trinity affects the Church's understanding of love, community and man himself.

MODERN REFERENCES

Creeds, Councils & Christ Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 1984)

Bray gives a popular defense of historic creeds and their necessity for the Christian Church. He starts with the erosion of orthodoxy during the 19th and 20th century. He then goes back to articulate how creeds and confessions functioned in the early Church. He then traces the development of Christian theology in the early Church. He gives an excellent apology for the ecumenical creeds and their Scriptural base.

The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God R.P.C. Hanson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1988)

A recent scholarly treatment of the Arian controversy 318-381 AD. Hanson surveys all the major Pro-Nicene and Anti-Nicene theologians. He clearly differentiates the Latin Fathers from the Greek. The book is carefully written and detailed.

Christ in Christian Tradition vol one From the Apostolic age to Chalcedon (451) Aloys Grillmeier, S.J. translated by John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox Press)

Grillmeier deals with the person of Christ from the Apostolic age to Chalcedon. See in particular his treatment of Tertullian and the word "persona" pages 117-131

The Doctrine of God Christopher B. Kaiser *Foundations for Faith series* (First published by Marshall Morgan & Scott 1982 Crossway Books in America)

A short (152 pages including indexes) treatment of the doctrine of God that includes the doctrine of the Trinity. Kaiser briefly surveys Biblical data and then covers the history of the development of the doctrine of God. It is a good summary treatment. See his contrast between St. Richard of Victor and Thomas Aquinas (page 88-91)

One God in Trinity edited by Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books 1980)

Toon edited a series of articles given at Durham in 1978 by the historical theology group of the British Tyndale Fellowship. The first five chapters deal with the meaning of the Trinity, the Trinity in the New Testament and the Patristic period. The last five chapters deal with 20th century theology and the Trinity, Barth, Lonergan, Moltmann, Process theology and recent British theology. The article on recent British theology is by Brian Hebblethwaite who deals principally with the work of Wiles and Lampe. Unfortunately Hebblethwaite's own methodology poses real problems. *"The doctrine of the Trinity cannot be established simply by citing authoritative texts, whether of Scripture or tradition. Its primary source is certainly divine revelation, but, as Leonard Hadgson saw, revelation is a matter of events, of divine actions in human history and in human lives. Revelation is not opposed to reason. Part of our response to God's self-revealing acts is precisely our rational*

reflection on the sense they make." pages 160-161 The above shows a Barthian view of revelation which undercuts any authoritative formulation on the Trinity or any other doctrine.

Jesus as God (The New Testament use of Theos in Reference to Jesus) Murray J. Harris (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992)

A detailed treatment of all the uses of Θεός for Jesus in the New Testament. Murray tackles John 1:1-14 and John 20:28 as well as all the main passages where Jesus is called God.

Shared Life Donald Macleod (Christian Focus Publications, 1994)

This book provides an ideal beginner's introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity. It is biblical, simple, clear, straight-forward, and practical (without being superficial). For the more advanced reader, it offers other benefits. It is compact and learned--chock full of historical insights, astute theological observations, and strong experiential applications. The simplicity of its style belies the author's grasp and penetration of the subject. Macleod is a master of making difficult things seem simple, without compromising their profundity or detracting from the proper mystery which should characterize our study of God. It furnishes the reader with: 1) an excellent overview of biblical teaching on the trinity; 2) a fine summary of the historical development of the church doctrine of the trinity; 3) challenging practical application of this great truth to daily Christian living; and 4) a helpful response to current attacks on the Christian doctrine of the trinity. All of this, Macleod manages to squeeze into less than a hundred pages.

The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything Fred Sanders (Crossway, 2010)

Dr. Sanders teaches at Biola and is our favorite modern Arminian theologian. This is an excellent book for learning how to articulate the truth of the Trinity and for understanding its practical ramifications. "The doctrine of the Trinity is widely taught and believed by evangelicals, but rarely is it fully understood or celebrated. Systematic theologian Fred Sanders, in *The Deep Things of God*, shows why we ought to embrace the doctrine of the Trinity wholeheartedly and without reserve, as a central concern of evangelical theology. Sanders demonstrates, with passion and conviction, that the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in the gospel itself. Written accessibly, *The Deep Things of God* examines the centrality of the Trinity in our salvation and the Trinity's presence in the reading of the Bible and prayer. Readers will understand that a robust doctrine of the Trinity has massive implications for their lives. Indeed, recognizing the work of the Trinity in the gospel changes everything, restoring depth to prayer, worship, Bible study, missions, tradition, and our understanding of Christianity's fundamental doctrines."

Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith Michael Reeves (IVP Academic, 2012)

"2012 *Preaching* Survey of the Year's Best Books for Preachers. Why is God love? Because God is a Trinity. Why can we be saved? Because God is a Trinity. How are we able to live the Christian life? Through the Trinity. In this lively book, we find an introduction to Christianity and the Christian life that is from start to finish rooted in our triune God—Father, Son and Spirit. Not only do we understand the person and work of Christ through the Trinity, but also prayer, the church and every aspect of our faith. With wit and clarity, Reeves draws from church history down to the present referencing a wide range of notable teachers and preachers. Here is a rich and enjoyable portrayal of the basic beliefs of Christianity that opens up the profound and life-changing truths of our faith."