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"vita vestra abscondita est cum Christo in Deo"
Colossians 3:3

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# The Woman and the Child

Rev. 12

J. Peter Vosteen

It seems to me that as long as I have been alive there have been wars on this earth. I experienced the First and the Second World War, then the Korean conflict—then the battle in Vietnam, Iraq; and still we're at war with Afghanistan and the Taliban. When will war cease? The Lord tells us as long as we're here wars will not cease because of the nature of man. But war in heaven? Have you ever heard about war in heaven? Don't you think of heaven as that wonderful place to which we're going where there's bliss and peace and happiness? But war?

Well, there was war at one time in heaven, so that we may go back and find bliss there. War! war with the woman on one hand and the dragon on the other hand as combatants. We want to see the battle itself and then observe the aftermath in our lives.

Prior to this chapter, John has told us about seals. Seals that were opened on the scroll. Only Jesus Christ could open those seals. Those seals talked about the coming of Christ in conquest, the coming of Satan, and then famine, death, persecution and earthquakes. And then there was silence in heaven for half an hour. We thought that maybe Christ was going to come back at the end of that scenario. But no; instead there was an announcement of trumpets—trumpeting loudly, sounding more and more and more judgment. Why should that have to be? That we have to go through all this persecution and all this turmoil that we find here upon this earth. Well then comes chapter 12 and chapter 13 and they tell us why.

## The Woman as the Church

We read that there is a great and wondrous sign in heaven. You see, John is using symbols to tell us this story. And the first symbol is found in a woman. She is a woman who has conquered and who is radiant—she looks like the sun. She has her feet on the moon. Yes, and she has a crown of twelve stars on her head. Twelve, the number of the church. She is going to give birth to a male child who is supposed to rule the world. You say, "This must be Mary." Oh, is it? That is the natural way we would think of it because, of course, it is Mary who gave birth to the Christ child. But in this symbolic way, you see, John is not just talking about Mary. He's talking about the church, as becomes evident later in the passage, when she is being pursued by the dragon and has to go into the wilderness. This is not Mary. Oh how the church over the centuries has venerated Mary—put her on a pedestal; she's a way to Christ; she's a co-redemptress. But it's not Mary. This is John writing. You remember when Jesus was on the cross that he told John, "Here is your mother"; and he told Mary, "Here is your son" (John 19:26, 27). It was John who was to take care of her. She was an ordinary woman just like the rest of us. She was not immaculately conceived. No! She didn't go into heaven without dying. No!

May the church wake up and understand God's ways as he has revealed them in the Scriptures. Yes, she was a blessed lady in that she was able to bear the Christ child. Oh yes, a blessed lady, but she was not venerated as churches that claim the historic roots of the apostles claim. She was not that kind of person. For when we want to understand the ways of God, we have to understand that it was *the church* that gave birth to the Christ child.

## The Dragon as Satan

There was another great sign of heaven. That great sign was a dragon—an enormous fiery red dragon. Oh yes, it had seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns. It had lots of power you see, as horns (note the book of Daniel) are expressions of power and authority. It also had a perfection of heads. It was not just a double dragon. No, this was a very wise dragon—a very wise dragon that ruled this world. That fiery red color is also found back in chapter 6, verse 4—also a reference to the dragon. We are told very clearly there that the dragon was the serpent or the devil or Satan. Since he was the adversary of God, he now wants to eat the child—to devour him—because he doesn't want that child to be born. He knows that through the birth of that child in Bethlehem, God is going to bring forth his salvation to defeat the sources that have rebelled against him. God is going to take over the absolute rule of all nations through that child. So he's there to devour that child.

But look at how succinctly John speaks of it. The child goes to heaven; the woman goes out into the desert for one thousand two hundred and sixty days (v. 6). That's it. He doesn't elaborate on that at all because that's the way it is. Yes, God is in charge folks! He does his work very clearly, succinctly and powerfully; greater than the power of this crazy dragon.

## Heavenly War

Once we have these two combatants explained for us, we are told that the war is in heaven, not on earth. We look around and see all the wars going on today; we see all the persons who are very much at odds with one another and trying to take over nations—all these things happening on this earth and we wonder when is it ever going to end? In face, it's not going to end. We wonder when the Afghan war is especially going to end with all the money we are pouring into that conflict. But war here, beloved, is in heaven! That's where the war was.

What kind of war was it? God had his angels and Michael as his archangel (v. 7). There they were, fighting for God. On the opposite side was the devil. Oh yes, that's the old serpent who tempted Eve and caused the whole problem on this earth in the beginning. He's not only evil, he's also the devil which means "slanderer". He slanders everybody he can. Also he's Satan—he's the "adversary". He's not on our side. He makes it look like he is so that we think he's on our side, but he isn't—that's who he is.

## Angelic War

The battle is engaged between these angels. There's the war. And when the angels finished, it was God who won. Surprise! God won. Well, he's the Creator of the heavens and the earth; he's the Creator of the universe; he's the Creator of all things that are around us. He is God who is God over all. He has full power—full control! He is sovereign! He is God!

That old Satan deceived himself, didn't he? He thought he could win. What kind of a crazy guy? Right? Well, at the end of the war, he is cast down to the earth and his angels with him (v. 9).

## God Triumphant

Next, we have John exalting in the circumstance. Yes! now has come the salvation, the power,d the kingdom of God and the authority of his Christ. You see how God has engaged in this spiritual battle—this great cosmic battle. And engaging in that battle, God has won. As a result, Satan is cast down to earth and the kingdom of God has come. Christ is now in heaven ruling on the throne at his Father's right hand. The battle is over. That's right. The battle is over in heaven. God has won. And that required that Satan and his cohorts are cast down to earth. You see, there is peace in heaven now, but turmoil upon earth.

You want to understand why we have to live in this world? You want to understand why we have to go through all the things we have to go through? Why there is so much sorrow and sadness in this world? Here is the explanation of it. It's because Satan has come down to earth; this is the place where he is now. You say, "He was there before—I mean he was there trying to devour that woman; he tried to devour the church." Yes, he was at work then, but now he knows his time is short and he is mad. He is so raging mad that he wants to get us. But notice, they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimonial witness (v. 11). They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

You see? The story is told already. The victory is won already. Not only for God and his Christ, but for us as well. That's right. They overcame Satan, not by their own power, not by their own wisdom, not by their own strength, but by the blood of the cross of Christ. Christ accomplished the victory. He fought the battle; he won the battle and we are part of him by faith. We have his righteousness; we have his holiness. We live in him.

## Life in Christ

Oh, I know living in this life is not easy. We're going to talk about that in just a second, but nevertheless, you must have the right mind-set—the mind-set that Christ is in control and that he takes care of you. No matter what happens, it's not a disaster; no matter what happens, it's under Christ's control. If you don't have that mind-set, you can be tossed from pillar to post by every wind and doctrine and by every thought of man—tossed by

all the turmoil that's going on in this world. You may sense that it's hopeless; it's worthless. Look at the number of suicides that are being committed every day. They give up. But you don't have to give up. The war in heaven has been won—has been won by the Lord Jesus Christ and you are now reigning with him in heaven.

That's right. You see life that way don't you? Or do you only think of the things you have to do and all the troubles that you have to go through? And all the problems that are in the family; all the difficulties in the government. Yes, if you listen to that stuff all the time you feel life is terrible. How can you rejoice? You can only rejoice in the Lord. He has won the victory. He has accomplished and conquered. Jesus has defeated Satan.

Notice what John says, "Therefore rejoice you heavens and you who dwell in them" (v. 12). The heavens rejoice! Satan's gone. He can't stand (like he did in the book of Job) before God and accuse you day and night of all these terrible things. He's gone. Notice what else John says, "But woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you." He's filled with fury because he knows that his time is short. That's right. He's working overtime down here. You all know that. You've sensed the problems, haven't you?

**Satan's Earthly War**

Well what's he doing down here? What's the aftermath of this war? The dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth; he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. He didn't win with Jesus did he? Jesus was born; he lived for us; he died and rose again and ascended to heaven. He's ruling. Satan's lost out with Jesus. So what's he doing now? He's trying to work on the church—working on every one of you. He's a roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). He's out there working hard. But notice, the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time—out of the reach of the serpent (v. 14).

What then is the Lord doing in your life? He's taking you out to the desert. Remember the background for that? Israel was suffering in Egypt at the hands of the Egyptian taskmasters. They cried to God and the Lord brought them out into the desert. He protected them and provided for them—thousands upon thousands of people with nothing there in that desert, no stores to buy things. The Lord God provided their food; he provided their water; he provided their clothing so that it did not wear out. God alone did all this in the desert.

**Earthly Pilgrims**

We, who are pilgrims and strangers here, are now in the desert. And what do we do here? We find ourselves in the desert, as those who are citizens of heaven, relying upon the Lord. That's right—relying upon the Lord to provide for us and take care of us. Notice the emphasis of our passage. From his mouth, the serpent spewed water like a river to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent (v. 15). Water—God provided

water from the rock in the wilderness. In Ezekiel 47, God provides the water of life as it flows forth from the temple. Water—Jesus provides the water of life to sustain and keep us (John 7:37, 38). But that devil, in his awful way, spews forth a big torrent of water to rush out into the desert and to kill the pilgrims. It flows forth out of his mouth. But notice—the earth opens up and swallows the water. That is interesting, is it not? For what are people worried about? Wind storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods: we think that the earth is against us. But really the earth swallows up the water (v. 16). God uses even the forces of nature for the sake of his church. He uses all things that go on in this world for the sake of his church. Amazing isn't it? Amazing!

**Seventy Sevens**

For a time, times, and half a time. Have you figured it out? Three and a half years? You say, "We've been on this earth longer than three and a half years since Jesus' time." Oh yes, but do you know your Daniel? This phrase comes out of Daniel 7:25. And it's explained for us in Daniel 9:24-27. That's a whole sermon in itself, but I'll give you the capsule of it so you can see how it fits in here.

For seven sevens—there are seventy sevens that comprise the work of God. In the seven sevens, it's the time from Cyrus's decree for the Jews to go back to Jerusalem. He told them they could leave Babylon and go back to Jerusalem and settle there. From that time of going back to Jerusalem to the time of the coming of Christ is sixty-two sevens—sixty-nine out of the seventy. You have one seven left. Now half a week (half of that time), half of that seven is the time between Jesus' life and death and resurrection and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem (70 A.D.).

What does that leave? A half of seven or three and a half; or, as we see it in other places, forty-two months, one thousand two hundred and sixty days. That is the gospel age. During this gospel age—from Christ's first coming and the destruction of Jerusalem to his coming again the second time—is this three and a half years. God is going to be with us through it all. He will never leave us or forsake us, says Jesus. He will be with us to guide us and direct us. The war of heaven has been fought and has been won. It has been won for us now—we live in that victory in Christ. We claim that victory in Christ. Even though the devil had to be cast down to earth and we are to experience all these troubles, know this—that if you rest in Jesus Christ and live for him and give testimony to him, he will take care of you no matter what.

So congregation, let us learn to rejoice in the Lord and live victoriously in *his* victory.
Let us learn to be his servants—to be pilgrims and strangers here. Amen.

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# Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith: A Review[1]

Scott F. Sanborn

Looking into a still pond, two friends see their reflection. While the reflection looks like them, it is mired by the dross in the pond. So it is when Protestant orthodox biblical theologians look into Watson's book. They find a method of interpreting the Old Testament in light of Paul's own interpretation of biblical texts. But they also see the mire of various higher critical assumptions in Watson. This is especially evident in Watson's view that the Old Testament does not represent a coherent unity but is self-contradictory. Reflection is not reality.

Again, orthodox biblical theologians will discover in Watson a method at odds with E. P. Sanders's view that Paul's quotations of the Hebrew Bible are merely terminological. That is, according to Sanders, when Paul quoted passages in the Hebrew Bible, he only chose those texts because he found terms in them that fit with the argument he wanted to make. For Sanders, Paul was not interpreting the Hebrew Bible; he was simply using it for his own purposes. Since Watson *disagrees* with Sanders on this point, biblical theologians will see a faint reflection of their own views in Watson's book and may think that Watson opposes the New Perspective on Paul. But this would be a mistake. Instead, they gaze into the dross of the New Perspective on various pages of Watson's tome. For Watson's methodological opposition to Sanders mainly indicates that Watson is following another strand of the New Perspective—that developed by N. T. Wright. Watson may be more critical of Sander's view of covenantal nomism than Wright, and if so, that may seem like a good thing; that is, until we wonder whether this arises from the opposite error of believing that the Mosaic covenant itself was purely legal in character. Nonetheless, when it comes to justification, Watson is essentially in agreement with Wright. And here the biblical theologian cannot go.

At the same time, Protestant orthodox biblical theologians will often find themselves in formal agreement with Watson's method once it has been purged of its higher critical assumptions. And since Watson has done an enormous amount of detailed spade-work in examining the texts that Paul quotes and the interpretations he gives to them, trained biblical theologians may find it worth their effort to peer into this reflection and mine out the useful nuggets from the dross. To initiate this process, we will first examine Watson's method, followed by his posture with respect to higher criticism and the New Perspective on Paul. Then we will look at some of Watson's key interpretations of Paul's quotations of the Old Testament, giving our own evaluation of some of Watson's strengths and weaknesses.

[1] Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*. London, New York: T&T Clark, 2004.

## Watson's Methodological Approach

The methodological approach Watson takes in his book is a significant one in the face of so much debate on Paul's view of the law. It also deals with important issues in Pauline hermeneutics. As noted, Watson discusses various passages where Paul quotes the Old Testament. He does this by giving a fairly extensive examination of these texts in their original context in the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes he deals with both the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint. In examining a quotation, Watson also discusses how Paul interprets it, usually examining the context of the epistle where Paul makes the citation.

However, Watson is not satisfied with that. He also compares Paul's interpretation of a particular passage with other interpretations given to the text by Second Temple Jewish authors. Because there is debate about how much later Rabbinic writings reflect the Pharisaic Judaism of Paul's time, Watson does not examine Rabbinic Midrash of the Hebrew Bible. Instead, he looks at the interpretations of or allusions to the relevant texts by the Qumran Community, Jubilees, Baruch, the Wisdom of Solomon, 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra (in spite of the latter's later date).

Watson's examination of the Dead Sea scrolls et al together with the Hebrew Bible and the Pauline texts helps us to see the issues surrounding Pauline interpretation in their broader historical context. Still, the neglect of Rabbinic Midrash may not have been necessary to maintain historical reliability. There are reasons to believe that Rabbinic Midrash also represents patterns of Jewish interpretation carried over from the Pharisaic sect. Those who claim the opposite point to the destruction of the temple and the significant effect it had on the self-perception of the rabbinic community. Nonetheless, historical continuity remained, just as it existed contemporaneously between the Qumran community and the temple cultus. Thus, there is room for further work which assesses these issues of continuity and discontinuity in both groups, comparing and contrasting their interpretive methods with those of Paul.

Still, we believe Watson's approach represents an advance in the field, at least when compared with the other well-known critical works addressing Paul's view of the law. In this respect, Watson clearly distances himself from E. P. Sanders, who believed that Paul only quoted particular passages from the Hebrew Bible because those passages contained *terms* Paul used in his argument. That is, for Sanders, Paul's criterion for choosing quotations from the Hebrew Bible was purely *terminological*. Watson notes his disagreement with Sanders on this point, arguing that Paul quoted texts because he believed those texts taught what he was promoting. Part of Watson's goal in analyzing Qumran and pseudepigraphal texts is to indicate Paul's hermeneutical similarity with broader Jewish interpretation of the period. In this way, he hopes to show that Paul's interpretations of the Hebrew Bible are not merely terminological or fanciful. Instead, they represent responsible, legitimate interpretations of the text. The orthodox biblical theologian will find some of these continuities between Paul and his contemporaries helpful for grounding Paul in his historical context. But with this context in mind, orthodox theologians, unlike higher critics, will want to probe the uniqueness of Paul's

divine revelation; sometimes looking at the interpretations of Paul's contemporaries will make this glaringly obvious.

Watson found much of his initial inspiration for this approach from reading Richard Hays's *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (1993). In it, Hays sought to show that many New Testament passages allude to the Hebrew bible even when they do not quote it directly. Watson mostly restricts his own examination to Pauline texts in which Paul explicitly quotes the Old Testament. Nonetheless, his dependence on Hays indicates that he follows in a line of New Testament studies that indirectly opposes Sanders. My own professor, Hendrikus Boers, believed that Hays's work was a move toward Christian orthodoxy, which Boers opposed. Thus, no doubt, some will see Watson's work as a move toward orthodoxy and a rejection of their own higher critical agendas. But we should not be misled; Watson (no less than Hays) uses higher critical methods whenever they serve his purposes.

## Watson and Higher Criticism

While Watson does not buy into every higher critical interpretation of the text (e.g., the disconnection between Lev. 18 and 26), he is essentially a higher critic with respect to the Hebrew Bible. This is especially evident in his view that there are pluralities of voices within the law which are contradictory. He even ascribes this view to Paul by misusing Gal. 3:19, in which Paul states that the law was "ordained through angels." Watson claims that here Paul implies that different angels gave different aspects of the law. The result is that some texts in the law contradict others—they have different angelic authors. For Watson then, contradictions found in Paul are actually contradictions in the law itself as Paul reads it. But this is a misreading of Paul, who implies nothing of the sort. Watson reads the text as if Paul means to focus on the unique quality of individual angels who might act in contradictory ways from one another. However, Paul states that the law was *ordained*, meaning that it was ordained by the one God who does not contradict himself. The angels were under God's divine supervision, which suggests that they were not individual agents who acted at variance with God or one another. Some may counter our claim by arguing that the Greek word we have translated *ordained* should be translated *commanded* (or *ordered*, *directed*) and that the ones doing the commanding are the angels, not God. However, even if this were granted, their agency is through one mediator, Moses. Thus, Paul does not present a plurality which opposes unity, as if he meant to imply contradiction.

These views of Watson are indeed troubling; however, they are presented infrequently enough that the reader who is aware of them can sort out this mire as it occurs in the book. In our view, higher critical examinations do not play such a large role in his analysis of every text that they undermine the usefulness of his interpretations at a formal level. Still, this book is not recommended for the lay reader, but is better left to the trained eye, those who can sort out the dross and find the truly useful nuggets remaining.

## Sympathetic to the New Perspective on Paul

Watson's assessment of the New Perspective on Paul (hereafter the NPP) is somewhat mixed, though mostly sympathetic. At one time, Watson was a student of N. T. Wright. He says that going through Romans with Wright was an eye-opening experience—one that indicated that the church had often misunderstood Romans. Watson is also sympathetic to E. P. Sanders and his work which sparked the NPP. However, Watson's book may be seen as a large-scale critique of Sander's view that Paul's quotations were merely chosen for terminological correspondence (as noted above). Watson also continually takes exceptions to Sanders interpretation of intertestamental Judaism. In addition, he rejects other standard positions in the NPP. Among these is the view that Paul only opposed the imposition of the *ceremonial* law on Gentile Christians. On the other hand, Watson rightly maintains that when Paul critiques the works of the law as a means of justification, he is including the *whole* law. He is also discussing the justification of both Jew and Gentile. In this respect, Watson is departing from earlier torchbearers of the NPP such as Sanders and James Dunn.

In spite of these factors, Watson shows himself to be essentially sympathetic to the NPP's rejection of the Reformation's doctrine of justification. Following N. T. Wright, he does not believe that justification deals with personal salvation. For Watson, justification is simply a way of discussing the objective historical transition that takes place between the law and Christ. As such, it is Paul's hermeneutic for approaching the Hebrew Bible. It is not, however, a forensic category involving the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Thus, while his historical and hermeneutical insights are illuminating at points, he is ultimately no friend of Protestant orthodoxy. We agree that in his teaching of justification, Paul deals extensively with hermeneutical issues and the interpretation of texts from the Hebrew Bible. But this does not mean that his doctrine of justification is simply swallowed up in the linear historical transition from the law to Christ and Paul's corresponding interpretation of the Hebrew Bible. Instead, it is a forensic, eschatological teaching found in the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers by faith alone at the end of the ages. Watson's failure to make these vertical eschatological connections (in which union with Christ's righteousness is central) reveals his remaining attachments to the NPP.

With these things in mind, we will now look at a number of Watson's analyses of Paul's interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.

## Habakkuk 2:4

Watson first deals extensively with Hab. 2:4 ("the righteous shall live by his faith") because Paul quotes it in Rom. 1:17 and Gal. 3:11. Watson's analysis is very extensive and helpful at certain points. For instance, he shows that Hab. 2:2-3 connects Hab. 2:4 to the concluding prophecy in the book (Hab. 3:17-18). That is, Habakkuk 2:2-3 deals with the vision concerning the appointed time. It is to be inscribed on tablets that the one who reads it may run (Hab. 2:2), moving toward the appointed time described in Hab. 3:17-18. Watson's analysis suggests that those who trust God's word will receive the blessing described at the end of the book. Their justification is thereby tied to their possession of these eschatological blessings. We appreciate these formal connections because they

strengthen our conviction that Hab. 2:4 looks ahead to the eschatological day described in Hab. 3:17-18. In other words, Habakkuk is prophesying the day of eschatological justification. Paul is, therefore, claiming that that day has arrived; it is semi-realized now. God's people have received semi-eschatological justification in Christ.

Despite his helpful suggestions, Watson still presents a flat interpretation of Habakkuk's eschatology, in keeping with his higher critical assumptions. That is, while he does suggest that Hab. 3 looks ahead to the eschatological promises, he does not seem to recognize that the eschatological inheritance is *possessed* in Hab. 3:17-18. For Watson, those in Hab. 3:17-18 are waiting patiently because they are looking ahead to those promises. However, we would suggest that the future anticipation described in Hab. 3:17-18 also suggests an anticipation of and a participation in those blessings before the consummation. That is, Hab. 3:17 speaks of the prophet being denied the blessings of the land. The one who trusts in the Lord even though he does not possess the blessings of Canaan still possesses the substance of those blessings in their eschatological relation. Therefore, those of Hab. 3:17-18 (primarily the prophet himself) are laying hold of the eschatological inheritance by faith before the time. As a result, they are satisfied with this superlative inheritance even while they are denied the inferior inheritance of blessings of the land. This is not to deny that the eschatological blessings will arrive in greater abundance in the future. For even though Habakkuk and others in his time laid hold of these promises by faith (Hab. 3:17), Paul believes that they are possessed all the more abundantly in Christ in the new era (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11). In Christ, the church presently possesses the eschatological blessings of which Habakkuk prophesied, now semi-realized.

Habakkuk promised that God would bring a righteous eschatological inheritance in Christ that can never be cursed. Watson does not understand this. If he had, he might have recognized this theme in Gal. 3:14 and 17 (following Gal. 3:11). Here Paul teaches that the semi-eschatological age has arrived because the eschatological gift of the Spirit is the promised eschatological *inheritance*. That inheritance goes beyond the law. It is heavenly; it is above, and she is our mother in Christ (Gal. 4:26).

It is true that Watson notes Paul's focus on the inheritance in Gal. 3. However, he does not connect this with the heavenly/eschatological inheritance. For Paul, as we see it, the New Testament church now participates in this transcendent inheritance in a way that surpasses Old Testament Israel's possession of it. Thus, we speak of the present period as semi-eschatological. We have moved beyond the Old Testament theocracy and the provisional inheritance of the land of Israel. God alleviated the curse on Israel and caused her to participate in greater blessings in that inheritance to the degree that she obeyed his law. Of course, God only promised Israel blessings in the land because his saints were perfectly justified by grace alone through faith alone. God's Spirit worked obedience in the hearts of his people to keep the law. Thus, it was by grace. Nonetheless, the more Israel kept the law (by grace) the more God blessed her in the land—and the more he took the curse from the land.

However, the inheritance/land itself was never declared perfectly justified and could not be, weak as it was through the flesh. But now in Christ, God has brought everlasting righteousness. He has justified his people in relationship to everything that is their inheritance in Christ. As a result, he has given them a fuller possession of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. That is, he has given them the eschatological gift of the Spirit, foretold by the prophets. This is the essential teaching of Gal. 3.

Unfortunately, Watson does not develop the semi-eschatological nature of the inheritance in Gal. 3. Instead, he simply notes that Paul's use of the term *inheritance* shows that salvation is a gift of grace. Good as far as it goes, but this does not get to the heart of the semi-eschatological fulfillment of the text, which this reviewer believes is at the heart of the issue.

**Genesis 15:6**

Watson's comparison between Abraham and Phinehas (Ps. 106: 30-31; Num. 25:7-11) is interesting, especially when he ties this to 1 Maccabees. Among other things, he suggests that the comparison indicates that Abraham was justified by one act of faith like Phinehas who was justified by one work. In this way, he seeks to argue that Abraham's one act of faith is not to be seen as the culmination of his many works. As Phinehas was justified by one work (even though he had others, Num. 31:6), Abraham was justified by one act of faith, even though he has numerous acts of righteousness ascribed to him in Genesis. But these did not justify him.

However, Watson leaves the impression that Phinehas was actually justified by works. That is, Watson leaves the impression that Phinehas's work was imputed to him as righteousness in precisely the same way that Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness. Perhaps 1 Maccabees, which focuses its heroes on this act, taught this. However, Paul would not have tolerated this claim. Paul applies Ps. 14:1-3 ("there is none righteous, not even one", Rom. 3:10) to every human being throughout history. For Paul, Phinehas is not excluded from this. He is also in need of the justification by grace alone through faith alone articulated in Rom. 3-4.

Further, Watson's exposition suggests that only one act of Abraham's faith united him to God's justifying verdict rather than his whole life of faith. Agreed. Paul teaches that Abraham was fully justified by faith before his circumcision. His accumulated acts of faith did not add up collectively to justify him. At the same time, Paul does not deny that Abraham's continuous faith that followed thereafter continued to unite him to his justifying righteousness, a perfect and complete righteousness that was imputed to him when he was first justified. Thus, when we speak of Abraham's later faith continuing to unite him to his justifying righteousness, we are not speaking here of the Roman Catholic view that justification develops, as if Abraham was not fully justified in Gen. 15 and became more and more justified as his life developed. No, Paul makes clear in Rom. 4:10-12 that Abraham was fully justified in Gen. 15 before he was circumcised. At the same time, his *later* faith must have focused on this same justifying verdict, not something different. That is, the faith that Abraham exercised after Gen. 15 continued to

focus on and unite him to that justifying verdict which was complete and perfect before those operations of faith.

On this point, Paul connects Abraham's faith in Gen. 17 with his justification in Gen. 15 (Rom. 4:17-25). First, Paul asserts that Abraham's faith in the promise that God would make him a father of many nations (Rom. 4:17, Gen. 17:5) was associated with his justification (Rom. 4:22, Gen. 15:6). Second, Paul claims that Abraham's faith that God would bring life to Sarah's dead womb (Rom. 4:19-21) united him to the justifying verdict of Gen. 15:6 (Rom. 4:22). This promise of life to Sarah's dead womb is clearly given in Gen. 17: 15-16, and Abraham appears to have trusted it by Gen. 18:9-15, if not in his obedience to the covenant of circumcision already in Gen. 17 (vv. 23-27). The fact that Paul is not alluding to anything earlier than Gen. 17 is further indicated when Paul states that at that time Abraham was about one hundred years old (Rom. 4:19), and Gen. 17 opens, stating that Abraham was ninety-nine years old (Gen. 17:1). Thus, Paul associates Abraham's later faith in Gen. 17 with the faith and justifying verdict that comes before them in Gen. 15:6 (Rom. 4:22). Perhaps this is because Abraham's exercise of faith in both instances anticipates Christ's justifying resurrection (Rom. 4:25).

## Leviticus 18:5

E. P. Sanders argued that Paul did not believe that Judaism taught a form of works righteousness, only a form of *covenantal nomism*. On this assumption, Paul did not believe that Lev. 18:5 was interpreted in Second Temple Judaism to mean that one would attain *eternal life* by obedience to the law. In fact James Dunn, seeking to support Sanders, denied that eternal life was referred to in Lev. 18:5, interpreting that passage as a tautology. For Dunn, "The one who does these things will live by them" only means 'the one who practices these things will practice these things'. This eliminates any allusion to *life* as the reward of obedience. Watson takes on this assumption of the NPP. He shows that Josephus (also trained as a Pharisee) believed the passage promised *eternal life* for obedience and concludes that it is not unreasonable to assume that Paul believed the same thing. Watson also shows how this phrase is interpreted by Ezekiel to refer to *life* as the *reward* of obedience. Leviticus itself also focuses on life as a reward in Lev. 26 and Watson rightly ties this reward to life in the land.

However, when Watson draws these observations together, we believe he does not give due justice to Paul or Leviticus. For instance, he argues that Leviticus and Paul interpreted the passage differently. For Watson, while Leviticus referred the life promised to life in the land, Paul interpreted it as eternal life. This suggests two things for Watson. First, it implies that Paul did not interpret Leviticus in terms of its own historical context. Second, it suggests that Leviticus's promise had no higher aim than life in the land.

Another flaw in Watson's interpretation is that he undermines grace in Leviticus in the attempt to undo Sander's claim of covenantal nomism. Watson teaches that Leviticus itself does not teach that electing grace stands behind the duty imposed in Lev. 18:5. If pressed with the fact that Leviticus deals with sacrifice, Watson responds that this sacrifice is imposed as a duty. While opposing Sanders with his view that *later Judaism's*

*understanding* of the Mosaic covenant was gracious, not legalistic, Watson also opposes Protestant orthodoxy with its view that the Mosaic covenant *within the Hebrew Bible* is essentially a covenant of grace. This is implied by Watson's view that sacrifice is not more fundamental than obedience and does not form the presupposition of obedience. Instead, he maintains that obedience is as equally fundamental to the covenant as sacrifice and atonement. In this, he seeks to disagree with Sander's ascription of covenantal nomism to Second Temple Judaism. However, in so doing, he wrongly asserts that Leviticus itself does not represent God's sovereign administration of redeeming grace to Israel.

Watson may believe that there are different voices in the law singing a different tune (though he may not apply this to the nature of the covenant). However, Watson implies that the Mosaic covenant (as represented in Leviticus) is not a covenant of grace. It is not even a covenant of grace uniquely legally administered (a position Watson does not consider). Instead, it is a fundamentally legal covenant.

This is a serious flaw in his analysis and puts him again outside the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy. In opposing Watson on this point, we are not denying that the conditional promises of Lev. 18:5 have a unique function within the Mosaic covenant. Nor are we denying that Paul contrasts this unique function to the accomplishment of Christ's work. In this respect, Watson's analysis is formally useful. What we are objecting to is the paradigm Watson is using to account for this contrast. And that paradigm is implicitly one of merit.

Watson's analysis suggests that obedience to the law (a la the Mosaic covenant) was the *material cause* of Israel's continuing possession of the land. In response, we contend that it was only the *instrumental means* by which Israel retained possession of the land. That is, for Watson, Israel's obedience to the law was the ground of her blessings. These blessings were not grounded in electing grace. We on the other hand believe that God's electing and justifying grace of the believing in Israel was the ground of Israel's blessings in the land. This was true both of Israel's initial entrance into the land and of their continual retention of those blessings. The faith and obedience (whether genuine or simply professed) of the whole people was merely the *instrumental means* by which they received those blessings.

Watson may believe that his position is the only way to do justice to the newness of the new era, taught by Paul. If this is the case, we briefly respond here, suggesting how the Mosaic covenant can be essentially a covenant of grace and yet be surpassed by the new age, with its greater abundance of grace. With the coming of Christ, things have changed in degree, not in kind. Christ has taken upon himself the ground of our salvation. He has fully borne the curse of the law. To be more precise, he has swallowed up in this ground something that was previously administered to Israel by the instrumental means of the law. That is, the ground has eternally removed the curse. Therefore, the church no longer receives blessings *as opposed to curses* by the instrumental means of their faith and obedience. This is now unnecessary because the church has already received a curseless inheritance above. This has been imputed to her by grace alone through faith alone. All

that is left is to store up blessings upon blessings by means of faith and obedience.

Watson does not use the phrase "material causation", explicitly claiming that Israel's obedience was the material cause of her land blessings, but we believe this is the implication. Also, Watson does not specifically say that Israel merits the land. However, by essentially making the Mosaic covenant a works covenant, this is the necessary conclusion. Thankfully, Watson does not discuss these matters continuously throughout the volume, but they are in the background. As a result, while making use of his exegetical studies, we must sort out these presuppositions. They do not make the book worthless as it contains a lot of detailed exegetical and historical analysis that is more prominently in the foreground. But they should make us rather cautious.

At least on the subject of merit, we can point to one positive thing in Watson's book. He rejects the view that Abraham merited the land, a view arising from a Jewish misinterpretation of Gen. 22. Watson points to this Jewish interpretation of Gen. 22. Then he states that it is at odds with the Pauline view of Abraham.

## Galatians 3 and Leviticus 18:5

The importance of the Lev. 18:5 quotation in Gal. 3 leads us to another prominent oversight in Watson's analysis. As with Habakkuk, Watson misses the significance of the eschatological inheritance in Gal. 3. This is surprising since he is so thorough in his analysis of Rom. 4 by contrast. Had he done a similar examination of Gal. 3, he would have recognized the significance of the *inheritance* in 3:18. At least Watson recognizes the eschatological import of the Spirit promised to the Gentiles in 3:14. However, since he fails to connect this with the inheritance in 3:18, he misses the fact that Paul is making an accurate interpretation of Lev. 18:5.

As we have stated, Watson believes that Leviticus itself (in its own historical context) speaks of blessings in the earthly land of Canaan, and that seems to be it. (Here he is at one with the Anabaptists of the 16th century.) On the other hand, Paul (as Watson sees it) interprets the promised life of Lev. 18:5 to be *eternal* life. Thus, Watson wrongly sees a disjunction between Lev. 18:5 in its historical context and Paul's interpretation of the passage. But even his assessment of Paul's interpretation of Lev. 18:5 is shortsighted. For while he recognizes that Paul interprets the life in Lev. 18:5 to refer to eternal life, Watson limits this to the eternal life of the individual (*ordo salutis*). He misses the fact that Paul is also (and fundamentally) interpreting the passage redemptive-historically. That is, for Paul (as we see it) Lev. 18:5, in the context of the book as a whole and its interpretation by the prophets, promises the arrival of the historical kingdom of God for perfect obedience, a promise only truly made to and fulfilled by the Messiah.

In other words, Watson believes that Paul is simply speaking of eternal life in its individual sense of personal eschatology, not in its corporate, historical sense of eschatological *inheritance*. However, as we have noted, each of these are half-truths at best. Instead, as we see it, Paul was teaching the semi-eschatological arrival in the present time of the future age—the age foretold by the prophets. He was looking at this future

age in terms of the eschatological gift of the Spirit—the eschatological *inheritance*. And this is confirmed by the connection of Gal. 3:14 with 3:18 and the way they interpret Paul's quotations of the Hebrew Bible in Gal. 3. But here we do not have space to expound upon this chapter and its quotations further.

Paul therefore believed that when Leviticus promised life in the land (Israel's *inheritance*) for obedience, what Leviticus was ultimately promising (hypothetically) was the coming of the *eschatological inheritance* for perfect obedience to the law. There was to Paul's mind an organic relationship between the inheritance of Canaan (in which the Spirit was especially present) and the eschatological inheritance.

Watson does not see this. Is it because he continues to maintain the NPP belief that Paul does not suggest that the law requires *perfect* obedience for life? However, we believe that this NPP view is mistaken. As we see it, Paul did imply that the law requires *perfect* obedience for life. This is because those who are cut off from Christ must be obligated to keep the law in the same way that he did, that is, if they are to obtain life thereby (Gal. 5:3-4). And Christ kept it perfectly. This does not mean that within the context of the Mosaic covenant of grace Israel was required to have perfect obedience as a means of participating in the blessings of the land. Instead, it is only when someone cuts themselves off from the salvation of God that the law requires them to obey it perfectly if they are to have life. But now as sinners, this is morally impossible for them to attain. And as those under God's wrath, it is naturally impossible.

However, from the gracious nature of the Mosaic covenant, E. P. Sanders and his followers wrongly concluded that Paul does not find in Lev. 18:5 a requirement of *perfect* obedience for eternal life. While Watson rejects some of the NPP, he still maintains Sanders's position at this point.

The traditional Protestant view, of course, is that the law hypothetically promises eternal life for perfect obedience. To further support this view, we suggest an argument from the inheritance in Gal. 3. There Paul makes an *organic link* between the *inheritance* in the land and the eschatological inheritance. We believe this implies another organic link—that between the *obedience* required for life in the land and the obedience required for the arrival of the eschatological inheritance. That is, just as the inheritance granted in the eschatological age has the character of eschatological *perfection*, so also the *obedience* required for the coming age must have the nature of perfection. Both the inheritance and the obedience required are eschatological superlatives.

As a result, he who is separated from Christ is obligated to keep the whole law intensively as well as extensively in order to have eternal life (Gal. 5:3). That is, before the coming of Christ, one could live under the bondage of the older administration by faith because one was looking ahead through it to Christ to come. However, if people reject Christ now that he has done his work (Gal. 3:1), they show that they were not looking ahead to him through the law. Instead, they were treating the law as if it were essentially a covenant of works. As a result, they are separated from the life of Christ. In this way, they live under the Mosaic covenant as if it were a covenant of works and they

are obligated to keep it perfectly in order to inherit eternal life thereby. That is, by rejecting the essence of the Mosaic covenant (Christ), they are separate from that essence. Instead, they live only under its formal administration without grace. This is the same thing as living under the covenant of works under which all depraved sinners have lived since the fall of Adam. The law has become purely a covenant of works for them and they live under its absolute curse and bondage.

As a result of Paul's doctrine of human depravity, we must conclude that he considered the promise of life for perfect obedience to be only hypothetical. No sinner would be morally capable of performing it or ontologically capable of averting God's wrath thereby. And this must also be said of the implicit promise that perfect obedience to the law was required to bring the eschatological *inheritance* above. This promise implicitly requires perfection. It demands perfect obedience to the law, one that deals with the sin and curse already upon the world. For Paul, only Christ can accomplish this by his cursed death. Only as a human can he bear the wrath of his fellow human beings. And only as God can he bear infinite and eternal wrath in a moment of time. This is why Paul says, "If righteousness comes by the law, Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21).

## Exodus and Numbers

Watson rightly shows how the beginning of the book of Numbers gives us the exodus generation who die in the wilderness by the end of the book. Paul's statement that "the letter kills" (2 Cor. 3:6) fits with this narrative pattern. The letter that killed in Numbers also works itself out in the historical life of Israel after her entrance into the land. As a result, Paul can write "the letter kills" with respect to the whole old covenant period.

Watson discusses Moses' veil in 2 Cor. 3:13-16 in light of a full discussion of the place of his veil in Numbers. Watson argues that Moses was only veiled after addressing the people and before appearing before God once again. While the text does not state in propositional language the reason Moses veiled his face, it prods the reader to raise this question. Watson discusses non-Pauline responses to this question, including the view that Moses veiled his face so as not to interrupt daily business in the camp. But for Paul, Watson argues, Moses veiled his face so the Israelites could not look upon the *fading* of its glory. Watson believes that Paul is providing a responsible interpretation of the text; he is not simply imposing his views on the passage. We would add to this that Paul has given the proper interpretation of the text. This can be seen from the clues of the old covenant's insufficiency in Numbers (the people die in the wilderness) and from the unreasonableness of other alternative interpretations of Moses' veil, not to mention Pauline inspiration.

Watson's interpretation also presses toward an eschatological understanding of 2 Cor. 3 and 4, which he does not elaborate. Here we focus on 2 Cor. 3:18, "we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." Does Watson mean to imply that, for Paul, we in the new covenant are continually in the presence of the glory of Christ? If so, Watson does not seem to expand this in an eschatological direction.

However, if his interpretation is correct, then God's appearance to Moses is for Paul an eschatological intrusion of the glory of Christ's resurrection life. And that intruded reality has now come to its fullness in the historical realization of Christ's resurrection. So now we all with unveiled faces are being continually transformed by the glory of the resurrected Christ, as we continually behold his glory by faith. Thus, the end of the ages has come upon us. And the fullness of the substance of the law is found in Christ and his everlasting glory.

Watson continues his discussion of Numbers with the theme of death in the wilderness and forbidden desire. In this section, he traces the story of how Israel desired evil things in the desert and then connects this evil desire to 1 Cor. 10 and Rom. 7. In our opinion, he rightly relates Rom. 7 to Israel under the Law. He also makes a necessary qualification here not made by many other New Testament scholars, namely that Rom. 7 does not deal with the wicked wilderness generation but with those who truly loved the law. The righteous in Israel found in themselves similar evil desires, but they struggled against these desires and did not indulge them in a continuous life of wickedness, as we find among the ungodly. Thus, while this is not always clear in his book, Watson seems to imply that Rom. 7 refers to the true saints of the old covenant. In our opinion, this is correct.

Watson supports this by comparing Paul's language of desire in Rom. 7 to the desire of Israel in the wilderness. However, this is only his secondary support. His primary support comes from Paul's emphasis on the transition from the time before the giving of the law to the time afterwards (Rom. 7:9). It is within this framework that he analyzes Paul's language of desiring evil things. Watson's study primarily focuses on intertextual issues in Paul. However, this is a place where his argument could have been strengthened by a fuller analysis of the rhetorical structure of Rom. 7 (though he touches on it).

**The Wisdom of Solomon**

Watson deals with the Wisdom of Solomon, attempting to compare and contrast it to Paul. For instance, he looks at the claim (common among New Testament scholars) that Paul draws on the book of Wisdom in Rom. 1. Watson accepts the view that Paul was probably familiar with the book based on his rabbinic training. However, he believes (contrary to numerous NT scholars) that Paul is not dependent on Wisdom. Instead, Watson believes that Paul is responding to Wisdom by way of contrast.

Watson also compares and contrasts the book of Wisdom's interpretation of the relationship between Exodus and Numbers with Paul's view of the contrast between Genesis and Numbers. The writer of Wisdom often makes comparisons between the Exodus plagues on Egypt and the blessings given to Israel in the wilderness. For example, Wisdom contrasts the plague of turning the Nile into blood (which would have reduced Egypt's water supply) to God's benevolent gift of water to Israel in the wilderness. Watson examines numerous such parallels in Wisdom. He then suggests that Paul, on the other hand, places greater stress on the contrast between the blessings of Genesis and the curses on the wilderness generation (Numbers).

## Deuteronomy 30:12-14

Watson's higher critical views are more prominent in his analysis of Paul's quotation of Deut. 30:12-14 in Rom. 10:6-8. Watson claims that in its original context Moses understood Deut. 30:12-14 to refer to the law, but Paul interprets it "according to the theological logic of the book of Deuteronomy" (438). That is, Paul interpreted it in light of the Song of Moses in Deut. 32 and therefore as a reference to the gospel (473). In this way, one may think that Watson seeks to provide some justification for Paul's interpretation of Deut. 30, one that will persuade his higher critical colleagues who believe that Paul misquoted the passage. However, we should not be misled. Watson clearly shows his higher critical hand in the way he expands upon it, as seen from the following quotation. Watson writes:

> In spite of the reasonableness of the appeal to "choose life", Paul does not find Moses' eloquence to be irresistible. On the contrary, his one citation from this chapter is so extensively rewritten and corrected that it can no longer be ascribed to Moses' authorship. The Righteousness of faith speaks through Moses' words, but also against them (cf. Rom. 10:6-10). The disagreement is profound, and is not simply a matter of minor adjustments or reinterpretations. If Moses is right, and if the question of life or death hinges on law observance, then Christ died and rose in vain. The truth in Moses' words is to be found only in their almost inaudible anticipations of the righteousness of faith. As they stand, they threaten to undermine the very truth of the gospel. Their teaching is summarized in the text Paul likes to cite from Leviticus: "The one who does these things shall live by them" (Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:12, Rom. 10:5) (474)

We not only reject this higher critical discussion but also the interpretation that Watson gives to Paul's use of Deut. 30. In his interpretation of Deut. 30, Watson assumes the higher critical view that to interpret a text in its historical context is to give it one monolithic referent. That is, the text cannot have a reference to its own historical context which is simultaneously prophetic of the eschatological era.

However, we believe that the Hebrew Bible is properly interpreted in terms of the administration of grace at that time which is then simultaneously prophetic of the work of Christ and his administration of greater grace in the new era. This is because the grace of the former era is an intrusion of Christ's grace to come.

Paul recognizes this in the way he contrasts two texts from the Old Testament. He takes two texts from the Hebrew Bible, both of which can be seen in light of the older administration and both of which can be seen in light of their fulfillment in Christ. That is, each text can be understood properly both in relationship to the manner in which they administered God's grace to Israel of old and in relationship to the greater grace that has come in Jesus Christ. Then Paul can contrast one text, interpreted in light of its relationship to the older administration to another text interpreted in light of the new administration. Each text stands on a continuum in the history of redemption and each

has its legitimate organic unfolding in the new era. The key to *answering* Watson's error is to unfold the true organic nature of Paul's quotation of Deut. 30, showing how Paul's interpretation flows naturally out of the organic movement from the older administration to the new. In this way, we will see how Paul legitimately contrasts Deut. 30 to Lev. 18:5 understood in relation to the grace it (Lev. 18:5) administered in the older administration. That is, Paul contrasts Lev. 18:5 (understood in light of the old) to Deut. 30 (understood in the light of the new).

Watson's error also includes the belief that Lev. 18:5 has no prophetic reference, but that it simply refers to the older administration. This is why he interprets Paul's evaluation of Lev. 18:5 (Christ is the *end* of the law) to refer only to the *abrogation* of the law and not also to the *goal* of the law. If on the other hand, Lev. 18:5 finds its *goal* in Christ then it is prophetic of the eschatological era. However, for Watson, not even Paul interpreted it this way. He believes Paul interpreted Lev. 18:5 only in respect to the administration of the law at the time of Moses. Thus, for Watson, Lev. 18:5 is abolished, but not fulfilled.

Watson's position represents the error of assuming that Paul himself held to a monolithic interpretation of texts in the Hebrew Bible just like the higher critic. Watson implies that Paul interpreted Lev. 18:5 only in light of the older administration and he interpreted Deut. 30 only in light of the new administration. However, we believe that Rom. 10 reveals that Paul interpreted both Lev. 18:5 and Deut. 30:12-14 in light of both the older and newer administrations. That is, Paul recognized the fulfillment of Lev. 18:5 (that Christ is the goal of the law) and he recognized the positive element of the law in Israel in the older administration, now fulfilled in Christ. This is the case, even though Paul emphasizes the function of Lev. 18:5 in terms of the administration of grace in the old era and contrasts it to Deut. 30:12-14 seen in light of the greater grace in the new era.

Thus, we will take a brief look at how Paul's use of Lev. 18:5 might be understood in terms of goal as well as abrogation before moving on to Deut. 30:12-14. Watson claims to hold his view because Lev. 18:5 (quoted in Rom. 10:5) sets the law in antithesis to the gospel, thus implying the law's abrogation, not its fulfillment. This antithesis is set out by the adversative "but" at the beginning of the next verse (v. 6). And this "but" contrasts Lev. 18:5 with Deut. 30:12-14.

We admit that a real adversative exists. But this does not mean that the passage needs to be interpreted simply as the law's *abolition* and not also as the law's *goal*. The one does not necessarily exclude the other. Paul can speak of the law's formal administration being *abolished* insofar as Christ has fulfilled it (*abolition* and *goal*). And he can speak of the law's essence coming to its fullness (*goal*) in Christ. Looked at this way, we would suggest that insofar as Paul is contrasting the old covenant to the new *comprehensively*, he is only making a *relative* contrast. On the whole, he is not making an *absolute* contrast. He is only making an absolute contrast within the limited sphere in which the law is abolished. That is, Paul is speaking about an *organic* development from the period of the law to the new era of semi-eschatological righteousness. He is not describing something totally new. From this point of view, Paul can speak about the law as fulfilled. It is *fulfilled* in such a way that its old *formal administration passes away* for God's

people. In this respect, we are treated to a fulfillment that both brings the law to its fullness and abolishes its former administration. Christ is the *goal* of the law.

This is all that is necessary to explain the adversative in Rom. 10:6 which contrast Paul's quotations of Lev. 18:5 and Deut. 30:12-14. To see this, let us briefly consider how Lev. 18:5 has been abrogated and fulfilled. Then we can see how Paul contrasts its abrogation with the positive fulfillment of Deut. 30:12-14. Lev. 18:5 has been abrogated *insofar as* it promised those in Israel a long life in the land to the degree that they were obedient to the law. But it has been fulfilled insofar as Christ has perfectly kept the law and been rewarded with the eschatological inheritance for his people. Thus, that which is loosely called abrogated is so only insofar as it is fulfilled in Christ. This suggests that there are two ways that this passage can be viewed, positively and negatively—from the point of view of fulfillment and of abrogation. In citing Lev. 18:5, Paul focused on its abrogation in light of its fulfillment so that he might contrast it with the positive fulfillment of Deut. 30:12-14 in Christ.

Now we will consider how Paul's positive fulfillment of Deut. 30:12-14 in Christ is dependent upon a positive assessment of the law in the life of Israel under the older administration. As with Lev. 18:5, Paul interprets Deut. 30:12-14 both in light of its positive role in the administration of grace to Israel as well as in its fulfillment in Christ, even though he focuses on the later. This implies that Paul has given us an accurate interpretation of Deut. 30:12-14. He has *not* "corrected" Deut. 30:12-14 so "that it can no longer be ascribed to Moses' authorship", as Watson claims (474).

What is this positive side of Deut. 30:12-14? That the law is fulfilled in Christ himself and his work and takes hold in the lives of his people. That is, the grace of the law administered to Israel of old has come to its fullness in the administration of grace in the new era. Or to be more precise, now the most fundamental aspect of obedience to the law, namely *faith*, is embodied and fulfilled in Christ's people. (Faith has come to its fullness.) Paul is not arguing for neonomianism here, as if faith replaces obedience to the law in such a way that faith becomes the ground of justification. No, rather, faith is the alone instrumental means of justification. And faith is only its *instrumental means*, not its ground or material cause—which is Christ's righteousness alone. In this respect, there is essential unity between the former era and the new.

If there is fundamental unity between the faith of the former era and that of the new era, why does Paul quote Deut. 30:12-14 as if it were prophetic of a greater age of faith in the new? What has changed in the new era? What has changed is that now faith alone is the only instrument by which we receive any covenantal blessings *as opposed to curses*. For now there is no earthly Canaan, whose earthly blessings Israel received by faith and obedience. This earthly Canaan was also a part of this cursed world so that when Israel received these blessings God also *alleviated his covenantal curses on her by means of her faith and obedience*. Now that Christ has borne the curse for his people, their only inheritance is in heaven. And as with all the saints throughout history, Christ has totally abolished the curse separating them from heaven. Thus, when the church receives the blessings of sanctification (and the storing up of heavenly riches) by means of faith and

obedience, she is not now (nor ever has been) deferring some degree of heavenly curse at the same time. The difference in the new era is that this is the only means by which the church receives covenantal blessings. She no longer receives blessings in the earthly Canaan by the instrumental means of faith and obedience. Faith and obedience no longer function as the means of removing some degree of covenantal curse, as they did for Israel in the earthly paradise of Canaan. Instead, now everything that is considered a covenantal curse is shielded from the people of God by the justifying righteousness of Christ. In other words, that justification by faith alone which is essentially the same for true saints in both the old and new eras has now become for new covenant saints also the only means of alleviating covenantal curses. That older function of the law, to be an instrumental means of removing some degree of covenantal curses has been abolished and fulfilled insofar as faith is now the only instrument for receiving covenantal blessings *as opposed to curses*. In this way, faith has come to it fullness and we have been made possessors of semi-eschatological justification in Christ.

In accordance with this, we are suggesting that Paul accepted the fact that Deut. 30:12-14 was speaking about the law as it administered grace to Israel of old.. Thereby, for Paul, the text had a direct relationship to the life of Israel at that time. But in this respect, it was a foretaste of the life to come for Israel. Thus, it also prophesied concerning the eschatological future, of which Paul speaks. That reality has now come in Christ, being semi-realized.

The centrality of Christ is the key to understanding how Paul saw in Deut. 30:12-14 the positive affirmation of the law in Israel as a prophetic anticipation of the greater age of faith to come. That is, the grace of the law in Israel (Deut. 30) was a foretaste of the grace of Christ, which has now been fulfilled in his life, death and resurrection. Christ is the pivot and transition from the older era to the greater administration of the new. This transition is found *in Christ as the fulfillment and embodiment of the law*. Christ fulfilled the law of Deut. 30 (which provisionally promised Israel inheritance blessings by means of her obedience) and thereby Christ brought the eschatological inheritance. In Deut. 30, Moses speaks of the earthly prosperity that would come to Israel for her obedience to the law (Deut. 30: 8-9). Paul's paradigm of fulfillment accords with the fact that Deut. 30:12-14 was speaking about the law and the positive blessings that would come to Israel by means of the law. But for Paul, Deut. 30 also prophesied concerning the eschatological future when Christ would obey the law perfectly and eliminate the curse from everything that was considered the inheritance of God's people. That is, it anticipated the day in which the older function of the law, to be an instrumental means of alleviating some degree of covenantal curses, would be abolished and fulfilled insofar as Christ has now kept the law perfectly. Thereby Christ removed the law from its function of being an instrumental means of receiving blessing as opposed to curse. Faith is now the only instrument for receiving covenantal blessings as opposed to curses because Christ has fulfilled the law in time and space history. In Christ's fulfillment of the law, faith has come to its own.

The positive grace of the law in Israel was a positive intrusion of and anticipation of the grace of Christ, who embodies the law. Watson's interpretation, with that of many others,

assumes that the *word* in Rom. 10 is only the administration or message of faith, not Christ himself. On this assumption, that administration can be viewed as a whole in absolute antithesis to the administration of the law. However, when we see that Paul views Christ as the word, we see that Paul provides the organic link between the older administration and that of the new. Christ was born under the old era, fulfilled it, and thereby brought the new. As a result, the transition from the older administration to the new should be viewed as organic. On the whole, the movement from the old to the new is a relative development, not an absolute antithesis. Therefore, Paul's interpretation of texts from the older administration must be viewed in terms of organic development. This is how, we believe, Paul can use Deut. 30 positively even though from another point of view (if he had viewed it in light of God's administration of earthly prosperity to Israel, Deut. 30:9), he could have contrasted it to the new era.

The fact that Paul believed that Christ fulfilled the law in Rom.10:6-11 (and that he was not simply discussing the faith of Christians) can be seen by the connection between Christ's work and his presence with his people. Verse 8 states "the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." We believe that Paul implies in this text that Christ is the word, the embodiment of the law. That is, he is the fulfillment of the law because the law has been fulfilled by him. This can be seen by the fact that Christ himself (not simply his word in abstraction) is present with his people. There are several indications of this. The movement of verses 6-8 is one indication. When we consider these verses without Paul's parenthetical comments about Christ in verses 6-7, it is clear that Paul is dealing with the "word" that he discusses in verse 8. That is, do not think that you need to ascend into heaven or descend into the abyss to find the word because it is near you. However, when we consider Paul's parenthetical comments about Christ, we realize that Paul is equating Christ with the word. We need not ascend into heaven or descend into the abyss to find Christ just as one need not do this to find the word. Thus, when Paul speaks of the "word" in verse 8, he continues to imply that Christ is associated with the word. That is, Christ is near you. As a result, Paul equates Christ with the word, making Christ the embodiment of the law and its positive *fulfillment*.

This equation of Christ with the word of verse 8 is also followed through in the following verses. Verse 9 states that as a result of the word being near you, Christ is your Lord. Verse 12 implies that when Christ is *Lord* of his people he is *present* with them. Christ is "Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon him." Because he is Lord, Christ's abundance is present with his people. This further reinforces the connection between Christ and the word in verses 6-8 where "the word is near you" (v. 8).

If Christ is associated with the word, he is the embodiment of the word and its fulfillment. He embodies the word that Paul finds in the text of Deut. 30:12-14. This is the maturation of what Paul already implied in Rom. 8:3-4, namely, that Christ is the fulfillment of the law and thereby the law is fulfilled in us. Also, earlier in Rom. 5:18, Paul discusses the one act of Christ's righteousness. Since righteousness here should be considered in light of its Old Testament background, it appears that Christ's one act of righteousness must be the culmination of his whole life of righteousness. Further, Paul finds the exacerbation of transgression in disobedience to the law, suggesting that the

obverse is correct, namely, that righteousness is obedience to the law. The conclusion is that Christ's perfect obedience to the law culminates in his one concluding act of righteousness. Thus, there is every reason to believe that Christ's obedience to the law is within the apostle's purview in Rom. 10:6-8. It also fits with an accurate interpretation of Deut. 30:12-14 in its original context. Therefore, we believe it is the best explanation.

The fact that Paul then relates this to Christians in terms of faith rather than obedience to the law is not a real problem. Paul has already taught that because Christ fulfilled the law, his people no longer live under the older administration of Moses (Rom. 8:1-4). That is, Christ has brought them a semi-eschatological justification through his fulfillment of the whole law, to which they were bound. (Thankfully, Watson believes that the works of the law from which we have been delivered refer to the *whole* law, not simply to ceremonial boundary markers, as E. P. Sanders teaches.) Thus, for Paul, Christ's fulfillment of the whole law finds expression in their justification. The richness of our text (Rom. 10:3-11) is found in the fact that Paul teaches that both justification and the gift of faith, which unites us to justification, is the reward of Christ's fulfillment of the law.

Therefore, we turn to the way in which Rom. 10:8-10 suggests that faith is the gift of Christ's obedience to the law. After equating Christ with the fulfillment of the word, Paul finds its fulfillment in the word's presence in the heart ("in your mouth and in your heart", v. 8). From such a heart, faith arises (vv. 9-10). This suggests a causal dependency of the heart upon Christ for faith. Faith in the heart appears to be one manifestation of Christ's fulfillment of the law and is thus dependent upon him.

At the same time, Paul distinguishes faith in Christ from the semi-eschatological justification that results (10:10). Again, to use the older dogmatic formulation, faith is not the *material* cause of justification, simply the *instrumental* means of appropriating justification. Nonetheless, both justification and the faith that unites us to justification are rewards of Christ's obedience to the law. Justification is the forensic imputation of Christ's obedience to those trusting him. On the other hand, the faith found in their hearts has been infused in them. It appears that Paul's discussion includes both.

This may reinforce the fact that Paul is speaking about the fulfillment of the law, for he is discussing a broad category that includes at least a couple of subcategories. He is not simply discussing one narrow category, namely the contrast between our faith and Israel's obedience to the law, as Watson's interpretation assumes. Instead, Paul's discussion deals with Christ's fulfillment of the law, which has a double result—the imputation of righteousness and the infusion of faith.

This may explain why Paul does not quote every word in Deut. 30:12-14, but instead intersperses it with interpretive comments about Christ as its fulfillment. Paul brings out the implications that were latent in the whole text (even the words that he does not quote) by the way he quotes the passage and comments upon it. That is, in calling for obedience to the law, Paul believed that Moses was ultimately addressing Christ. Thus, Christ's obedience to the law was the text's final referent. Does Paul not say elsewhere that the promises were given to Christ (Gal. 3:16), thereby helping us understand the way he

interpreted promises in Scripture. And he does not limit this to the promises given to Abraham. For he says elsewhere that "as many as may be the promises of God, in him they are yes" (2 Cor. 1:20). Clearly, many of God's promises in Scripture are dependent upon obedience to his commandments. Therefore, this connection suggests the way that Paul also viewed the commandments of scripture. Both the commandments and the promises attached to them are ultimately addressed to Christ and fulfilled in him. And this fits with our analysis of Rom. 10. By using language that brings out the implications of the text, Paul appears to reinforce the notion that Christ's obedience to the word of God is fulfilled in the new age. Christ now embodies that word and is present with his people both by the gift of forensic imputation and the gift of faith.

Therefore, it appears that Paul saw in Deut. 30:12-14 a positive reference to Israel's possession of the law which has come to its fullness in Christ, who is the embodiment of the law. And thus in him, we are possessors of semi-eschatological justification by faith. Paul can interpret a text from the Hebrew Bible in terms of its embodiment in the life of Israel as well as its fulfillment in Christ. And sometimes he can contrast one text from the Old Testament seen in relationship to the older administration of grace to Israel (e.g., Lev. 18:5) to another text in relationship to its fulfillment in Christ and the greater administration of grace in the new era (e.g., Deut. 30:12-14). We believe this undermines Watson's fundamental assumption that Paul found in the law a plurality of voices that contradict one another.

**Baruch**

In his project to compare Paul to intertestamental Judaism, Watson also analyses aspects of Baruch. He shows that Baruch taught that the future Kingdom of God will arrive as a result of Israel's obedience to the works of the Law. The reviewer found this interesting in light of his own views that Paul appears at many points to be opposing the Jewish view that the kingdom blessings are earthly and will come by obedience to the Law. We believe this is what Paul has in mind in Rom. 9:31-32 when he states, "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness did not arrive at *that* law. Why? Because *they did* not *pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works". That is, they pursued the righteousness of the kingdom (i.e., the arrival of that kingdom) as if it came by works. Paul is not simply speaking of their pursuit of individual justification by works in their own personal experience, though this is involved. He is speaking of their pursuit of a historical era of righteousness. This can be seen from the following verse (Rom. 9:33) and its connection to Rom. 10:11-12. Rom. 9:33 quotes Isaiah 28:16; "he who believes in him will not be put to shame". Then in Rom. 10:11-12, Paul interprets the phrase "whoever believes in him will not be put to shame" (v. 11) by suggesting that the fullness of this text applies to the present time in which "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (v. 12). That is, it refers to the eschatological era, now semi-realized in Christ.[2] Therefore Rom. 9:33, which fulfills this same quotation ("…will not be put to shame"), also refers preeminently

[2] This is further enforced by the connection of this passage to Paul's previous claim that he is "not ashamed" of the semi-eschatological revelation of the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:16). Paul's claim here in Rom. 1:16 is in relative contrast to Daniel's shame and disgrace in the former era (Dan. 9: 7-8), which Daniel prophesied would be reversed in the coming age of eternal righteousness (Dan. 9: 24).

to the righteousness of the present semi-eschatological era in which the shame that was upon the people of God in exile has been reversed. This informs what Paul says in the previous verses (9:31-32): "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness did not arrive at *that* law. Why? Because *they did* not *pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works". That is, Israel was pursuing the coming time in which their shame would be reversed by their own obedience to the Law. Israel's error was that they believed that the righteous kingdom would come as a result of their obedience to the Law. And while Watson neglects Paul's refutation of this erroneous view, he does help us by finding it in Baruch.

**4 Ezra**

Watson also analyses 4 Ezra, claiming that Ezra differed from Baruch in some respects. 4 Ezra teaches that the kingdom will arrive on God's timetable, not as a result of Israel's obedience to the law. However, whether an individual Israelite is included in the kingdom will depend on whether he stores up a treasure of obedience to the law. According to Watson, 4 Ezra does not require perfect obedience to the law. But Watson's analysis of this store of good deeds may suggest an older view that each Israelite's inclusion in the future kingdom would depend on whether his righteous deeds outweighed his wicked deeds.

Watson's analysis of Josephus also shows that he believed that Lev. 18:5 applied to individuals and their eternal life. Ezekiel's prophetic warning of life or death for individuals was used in support (Ezek. 33:7-20). The one who is obedient to the law will inherit eternal life (not simply the land of Israel) as a result of that obedience.

The reviewer found these assessments interesting in light of the traditional Reformation view that Paul was critiquing such a Jewish view. According to the Reformers, Paul was not denying that the Jews of his day affirmed some form of grace (as E. P. Sanders was so eager to defend). But at best, for the Reformers, this Jewish view of grace was similar to later Semi-Pelagianism in its synergism. It was also deficient in that it failed to distinguish between Justification and Sanctification. This is essentially what we find in 4 Ezra and Josephus on Watson's analysis, though he does not agree with the implications we have noted in support of the Reformation.

However, the reviewer believes that the Reformation's view of justification is both correct and dovetails with Paul's critique of Jewish eschatology, a la Baruch. Paul interpreted the present in light of the future. Thus, he saw in Israel's belief that they could bring the kingdom by their works, the belief that they could each possess those kingdom blessings by works. That is, if they could bring the righteous kingdom by works, they could possess their own righteous standing before God by works. Paul suggests that the desire to return to the period of the law now that Christ has come is like denying that Christ is the end and goal of the law. It is equivalent to claiming that something other than Christ's death and resurrection (namely human obedience to the law) is the source of kingdom blessings. Paul therefore implies that the only way people could hypothetically attain such blessings by works is if they are perfectly obedient to the law. Israel may not have believed that perfect obedience was the only way to obtain life *by works,* but Paul

did. And Paul realized this was impossible because of human depravity and the curse already placed upon it. Therefore, there is no hope of righteousness apart from Christ both for the arrival of the kingdom and for our participation in it.

Watson, on the other hand, appeals to writers such as N. T. Wright in support of the view that justification in Paul is not related to individual salvation. In this, we see Watson's continued dependence on the NPP even while he tries to jettison some of its main tenets. Beyond this, Watson's view of justification may not be entirely clear. He certainly believes that justification is one of Paul's hermeneutical approaches to interpreting the Hebrew Bible. But what does this mean? Certainly Paul uses the Old Testament in his support of justification and his view of justification grows organically out of the Hebrew Bible. However, we need a more concrete view of how Watson understands this. At best Watson leaves us with the impression that justification means that God's kingdom does not come by means of Israel's obedience to the law, but through the work of Christ. And we are required to trust in Christ alone for this salvation. Of course, justification involves this, but this alone simply puts justification in the realm of the *historia salutis*. It does not define justification in terms of the application of redemption. That is, to use the older dogmatic classification, Watson does not articulate justification in terms of the *ordo salutis*. In this respect, Watson is still a man controlled by the NPP, a perspective, which relegates justification to the historical contrast between the old and the new eras.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, Watson's approach reduces justification to hermeneutics and is eschatologically flat. In accordance with this, he misses some critical connections of eschatological fulfillment. This is especially evident in his failure to connect the justification of the new era with the heavenly *inheritance*. Watson also adopts a higher critical view of Scripture, which undermines his analysis at certain points. He even takes this to the absurd conclusion that Paul himself saw different voices in the law (perhaps coming from different angels) that contradicted one another. This view of Scripture implicitly rejects the organic unfolding of Scripture together with true eschatological intrusion and realization. This is one reason he can so uncritically adopt the view that the Mosaic covenant was essentially a covenant of works for Paul. Paul saw this as one voice at odds with the other voice of the promises to Abraham. And while rejecting E. P. Sanders' view of Paul's use of quotations from the Hebrew Bible, Watson still maintains some key presuppositions of the New Perspective on Paul, especially in his rejection of forensic imputation in justification.

This is not a book for a lay audience. Nonetheless, when read critically (with an eye for his higher critical assumptions) those with advanced theological training can profit from the formal work he has done on the text, especially on the extensive contextual studies of the Old Testament passages Paul quotes.

Among critical circles, Watson's book also provides a needed correction to Sander's view (already under fire) that Paul's quotations of the Hebrew Bible are *not* to be viewed in context. In fact, in the present discussion, Watson's book may represent the most

extensive analysis of these quotations *in context* to date. And following writers such as Simon Gathercole, Watson continues the tradition of critiquing Sander's assumption that intertestamental Judaism is synonymous with covenantal nomism. In these respects the book is useful. Reflection is not reality. Nonetheless, when orthodox biblical theologians sort out the dross, they can find some useful nuggets to expand their horizons. Read with caution by those familiar with the literature on Paul and the Law, this book can provide stimulating reading that can drive you back to the text, where one can find the eschatological riches of divine revelation that Watson himself misses.

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# "To the Hebrews": A Narrative Paradigm

James T. Dennison, Jr.

The title "To the Hebrews" sits atop the oldest extant manuscript of this epistle as it occurs in the Chester Beatty collection jointly housed at the University of Michigan and the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland. Discovered in 1931 in Egypt, the manuscript is labeled P46 (P stands for papyrus). In Greek, the title reads ΠΡΟC ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥC (or, in lower case characters, προς εβραιους) "To the Hebrews". How old is this oldest extant Greek copy of the epistle? Most scholars date it to about 200 A.D. But Philip Comfort makes a credible case for dating it about 150 A.D.[1] Either way, the 2nd century provenance of the papyrus text is assured. The manuscript is virtually complete—only 9:17, 10:21 and 31 are missing from the 13 chapters of the letter. Thus, we have, in the providence of God, a near perfect copy of the Greek text of the epistle to the Hebrews dating about a century or a century and a half from its author putting pen to papyrus. And that copy has the title "To the Hebrews" superscribed over it.

Did the original author place the title over the text of his epistle? Most scholars tell us, "No." They are certain that a later copyist added the title to the text of the epistle. How do they know this? For instance, is the hand in P46 which wrote the title and the hand which wrote the text different? In other words, do scholars detect a difference in the orthography of the Greek P46 in the title from the Greek in the body of the text of the letter? No, they do not. Well, then, how do they know that a copyist added the title to P46? They don't know it for certain; they merely assert it. Because they regard P46 as a copy of the epistle (which we concede), they regard the title as a scribal or copyist's addition to the text on the assumption that the author of the letter would not have placed a title upon it (which we contend is a gratuitous assumption, since P46 is likely a copy of the original author's work—superscription and body-text). Now, let us prick this vulnerable part of academic arrogance. Since they did not see the copyist add the title, their argument is an argument from silence. And we may answer an argument from silence with an equally plausible argument from silence. We assert that the original author placed this title over his epistle as a description of the contents of the letter he composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In fact, we maintain that our assertion is as weighty as the assertion of the scholars who contend that "the copyist did it". We did not see the author do this (which we admit); they did not see the copyist add it (as they admit, if they are forced to). And thus, our suggestion has as much credibility as their suggestion. Hence, it is just as likely that the original author of Hebrews placed the title atop his manuscript as to suggest that a later copyist supplied it. Two equally plausible explanations for the origin of the title leave us with no absolutely certain answer

[1] Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett (eds.), *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts* (2001) 206. The entire Greek text of Hebrews in P46 is given by Comfort on pp. 224-50 (with the title on p. 224). A photo of the page with the title may be viewed at: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/apis/x-3570/6238_41.tif (Click the "Full Image" button at the top of the page for a blow up of the title).

to the question. And all honest scholarship must admit that. We cannot infallibly prove our case; they cannot infallibly prove their case.

However, we would like to add some further considerations below to our case which, in our opinion, makes our argument even a bit more plausible. We confess at the outset of our exposition that these further considerations do not cinch the infallibility of our position (i.e., that the author himself superinscribed the title to his letter). But we do believe that they add further weighty arguments in support of our thesis that "To the Hebrews" came from the author's pen.

## Hebrews as Narrative

The epistle to the Hebrews is a narrative epistle. The narrative it reveals is the story of a journey—a journey or pilgrimage of the eschatological Hebrew for (or on behalf of) the semi-eschatological Hebrews. Or to rephrase my paradigm: the epistle to the Hebrews is the narrative of the eschatological pilgrim for (on behalf of) the semi-eschatological pilgrims. These Hebrews of the end of the age—these pilgrims of the age to come—these pilgrims of the coming age whose sojourn marks the age of the end are mirrored in the Hebrew of the Hebrews—the Pilgrim of the pilgrims—the Sojourner of the sojourners. It is this Sojourner, this Pilgrim, this eschatological Hebrew who mirrors himself in the sojourning pilgrims of the former age—that former age of longing, yearning, believing, possessing the end of the sojourn—the end of the pilgrimage—the end, even in its beginnings. It is these former pilgrims of the former age—from Abel to Abraham, from Enoch to Samuel, from Moses to David, from Jacob to the prophets, from Joseph to the incarnation—whose mirror image is perfectly reflected in the Eschatological Pilgrim (and he in them, as their marvelous mutual union and communion attests). Listen to their confession—the confession of these pilgrims of the former age: "I am a stranger on the earth" (Ps. 119:19); "I am a stranger with Thee [O Lord], a sojourner like all my fathers" (Ps. 39:12—which echoes Abraham's confession in Gen. 23:4, "I am a stranger and a sojourner"); "We are sojourners before Thee [O Lord] . . . as all our fathers were" (1 Chron. 29:15; cf. also Ps. 119:54; Lev. 25:23). These are the pilgrims of the former era who "by faith" (cf. Heb. 11 passim) possessed and obtained the end of their pilgrimage in a heavenly city (Heb. 11:16; 12:22; 13:14).

The narrative of their pilgrimage is a sojourn of faith in God their Lord, whether east of Eden, sacrificing in hope of a final Sojourner, Serpent-Crusher, Dragon-Slayer. The narrative of their pilgrimage is a sojourn of faith in God their Lord, whether atop Mt. Moriah, knife raised over the pilgrim son, the sojourning child, the lad upon whom the promises of death for the pilgrims of that age are life—resurrection-life. The narrative of their pilgrimage is a sojourn of faith in God their Lord, whether huddled in hope beneath the canopy of the angel of death, laying hold of the sprinkling of blood and embarking on a sojourn of freedom for pilgrims under the life-blood of the lamb—exodus pilgrims, sojourners from bondage to liberty under a canopy of cloud and fire. The narrative of their pilgrimage is a sojourn of faith in God their Lord, whether entering in, drawing nigh to the tent of sojourn, the pilgrim tabernacle, the tent of meeting where pilgrim priest and pilgrim non-priest offer up bulls and goats with sighs and tears and deep groanings,

yearning for the end of sojourning, looking for life in the sabbath rest at the end of their pilgrimage, longing for the day when pilgrims could enter beyond the veil and behold the Lord of glory with unveiled faces—no more pilgrim steps, no more plodding sojourn, but rest, perfect rest, seated *visio Dei* before the Holy One himself—journey's end!

**Protological Pilgrims in the Eschatological Pilgrim**

How could it be that these sojourners of faith, these pilgrims of the former age could see the end of their journey so confidently, and so steadfastly possess that final end—that rest afar off? How could it be? Could it be that they were reflections of the Pilgrim of pilgrims, the Sojourner of sojourners, the Hebrew of the Hebrews, the One appointed from the foundation of the world to be a pilgrim as they were, to be a sojourner as they were—the One who would incarnate a Hebrew's life; the One who would sojourn in flesh and blood though he was from all eternity not flesh and blood, but eternally very God of very eternal God. The One who would display his blood in Abel's lamb; the One who would reveal that he is son of the Hebrew Abraham, bound over to death by his Father, yet raised from death because he is the Hebrew with eternal life—with the power of an endless life. The One who would be revealed in the blood of a lamb upon the doorposts of his mirror-reflection pilgrims, aliens in a strange land—bond-servant sojourners of a land of death; this One bearing in his pilgrimage, his descent into Egypt the reproach of their bondage, laying his life-blood upon their pilgrim hovels so they could travel with this Lamb—this Passover Lamb—travel with this Lamb to the land of milk and honey—travel with this One tabernacling amongst them, accommodating himself to their pilgrim mode, drawing them unto his everlasting self by pilgrim sacrifices, pilgrim priests, a pilgrim tent of meeting—mirroring himself in priesthood and sacrifice, in tabernacle and veil.

My thesis is that every element of this New Testament epistle is built upon the 'Hebrews' motif—the pilgrim motif—the sojourn motif. Whether it is the cast of sojourners in faith (chap. 11) or the doxology of the heavenly Jerusalem (chap. 12) or the proto-benedictory "no lasting city here" (chap. 13)—all of which are explicit pilgrimage motifs underscored by our narrator-author in express pilgrimage vocabulary; or whether it is the narrative of the former Hebrews' sojourn in the wilderness after Exodus from Egypt—a sojourn which dominates chapters 3 and 4 and much of chapter 6; or whether it is the cult ritual and personnel coincident with the era of the wilderness sojourn between exodus and conquest of Jericho—that is, the tabernacle ritual of sacrifices and offerings of blood by the tabernacle personnel from the tribe of Levi, especially the high priest, a co-pilgrim priest on behalf of a pilgrim people ministering at a pilgrim sanctuary-tabernacle—a theme which dominates chapters 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

In other words, the epistle to the Hebrews is steeped, is loaded, is freighted with the narrative of the Old Testament Hebrews. And since that narrative imagery from the Old Testament era dominates the stories our inspired author relates—since the dominant image, the dominant plot-line from the Old Testament narratives he recounts is sojourn, is pilgrimage, then I conclude that an accurate reading of our author's focus *is* pilgrims: Hebrews Old and New, sojourners of the former times, sojourners of these last

("*eschatou*"logical, cf. 1:2) times. Protological Pilgrims/Eschatological Pilgrims. And the glue that binds these old and new pilgrims together in a common sojourn of faith from this world to the heavenly city of God—the glue is the Hebrew of the Hebrews, the Pilgrim of the pilgrims—the eschatological Pilgrim himself, who is the Son of God. The Son of the Father as Pilgrim and Sojourner is placed at the forefront of this epistle because our author makes him the Pioneer and Perfecter (12:2) of every faithful pilgrim's sojourn. He is more than Moses; he is more than Levi; he is more than Melchizedek; he is more than Abraham or David or any other pilgrim. He is even more than the angels. He is God ("the exact representation of his nature," 1:3)!! And God pilgrims among us—in the flesh. If he is to bring many pilgrims to glory, he must become flesh and blood as they are. He must incarnate pilgrimage who is the pilgrim's end and goal—whether by faith, in the former times, or by faith, in these last times. Christ Jesus is *the* pilgrim—the eschatological prototype of all believing pilgrims in the history of redemption—the eschatological pilgrim completer and perfecter of the history of redemption—the eschatological pilgrim in whom the pilgrimage of the history of redemption is complete—complete once and for all.

"To the Hebrews"—to the pilgrims of the former age and the pilgrims of the end of the age in narrative style. A letter from the Eschatological Pilgrim who made your pilgrim story his own and completed his own pilgrim story by recapitulating your own.

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# Conquest or Compromise? John Thomson and the Presbyterian Adopting Act of 1729.

Benjamin W. Swinburnson

The name "John Thomson" does not stand out prominently in the history of early American Presbyterianism. It has been nearly sixty-eight years since a journal article or monograph has been published with a singular focus upon his life and work.[1] Where his name does appear, it is not always in a very positive light. An extreme example came from the pen of Charles Augustus Briggs, who referred to him as "a narrow and opinionated man" who "became the father of all the discord and mischief in the American Presbyterian Church."[2] Thomson justly receives the most attention for his role in the controversy surrounding the *Adopting Act* of 1729.[3] This act marked the end of a decade-long controversy in the Presbytery of Philadelphia regarding the proper scope of presbyterial authority, particularly as it focused on the necessity of subscription to creeds and confessions on the part of its ministers. Thomson was a recognized leader of the party of "subscribers," who insisted on ministerial subscription, while Jonathan Dickinson was the leader of the "non-subscribers," who opposed ministerial subscription to any confession.

Nearly all historians have recognized the importance of Thomson's role in passing of the *Adopting Act*. However, assessments of this role differ dramatically from historian to historian, particularly their judgment of how successfully he was able to implement his constitutional-confessional agenda. These differences are in large part due to the partisan nature of the various histories of American Presbyterianism in which such analyses appear. Nearly everyone agrees that the *Adopting Act* set an important precedent for those claiming lineage to the early American Presbyterian church. Questions regarding the precise scope of the act's force were raised almost as soon as it was passed and continued throughout the eighteenth century. In the 19th century, the interpretive lines were drawn according to the division between the Old School and New School parties of

[1] John G. Herndon, *John Thomson: Presbyterian Constitutionalist, Minister of the Word of God, Educational Leader and Church Builder* (Privately Printed, 1943). *Idem*, "Some of the Descendents of the Reverend John Thomson (1690-1753)." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 51:4 (Oct, 1943): 394-404. *Idem*, "The Reverend John Thomson" *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 21:1 (March 1943): 34-59. W.H.T. Squires, "John Thomson: Presbyterian Pioneer." *Union Seminary Review* 32:2 (1924): 149-161.

[2] Charles Augustus Briggs, *American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1885), 186.

[3] The secondary literature on the *Adopting Act* is too extensive to outline in a single footnote. The most recent comprehensive bibliography of the relevant primary and secondary literature is found in the following work: Charles Scott Sealy, *Church Authority and Non-Subscription Controversies in Early 18th Century Presbyterianism*, (PhD diss, University of Glasgow: 2010), 233-56. See also the older bibliography found in: David W. Hall, *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (Oak Ridge: Covenant Foundation, 2001). Our survey of the secondary literature will be necessarily selective, focusing on representative examples of the various schools of thought relative to the *Adopting Act*.

American Presbyterianism. In the 20th century, the division was recast along "Modernist" and "Fundamentalist" lines—an interpretive division that continues to affect historians of American Presbyterianism down to the present day.

Before turning directly to our thesis, it is essential to review the history of interpretation regarding Thomson's role in the *Adopting Act*. In the judgment of most historians, it seems that Thomson was only able to secure a compromise with his non-subscribing opponents, led by Jonathan Dickinson. Though there are several instances of this view in the literature, a few representative examples will suffice. Perhaps the most influential figure of this school is Charles Augustus Briggs. He insisted that the make-up of the committee that penned the *Adopting Act* created a context in which: "The extreme men were…forced to compromise or separate."[4] His assertion that it was "Dickinson [who] shaped the Adopting Act as to make it satisfactory to all parties" makes clear which group he regarded as "extreme."[5] Briggs did not explain in precise detail what form of confessional subscription he believed Thomson was supporting. He only speaks in general terms of Thomson's party as "strong subscriptionists" who advocated "strict subscription" to the confession.[6]

Briggs was followed by Robert Ellis Thomson, who argued that through the *Adopting Act* "an agreement was reached through mutual concessions."[7] The subscriptionists led by Thomson are said to have conceded "the freedom extended to ministers and licentiates to express to Presbytery or Synod the scruples they felt as to any article in the standards, leaving the body to judge whether or not these scruples touched the 'essential and necessary articles of faith.'"[8] For both Briggs and Robert Ellis Thomson, the compromise seems to have come mostly from the subscribing party as opposed to the non-subscribers.

Even the old school Presbyterian Charles Hodge asserted: "It is very evident, indeed, that the act was a compromise."[9] According to Hodge, Dickinson wanted only the essential and necessary doctrines of Christianity to be the condition of ministerial communion, while Thomson wanted the "explicit adoption of the Westminster Confession to be that condition."[10] The compromise was reached in making only the "essential and necessary articles of that Confession" a term of communion. It is not clear to us what Hodge precisely means when he states that Thomson desired an "*explicit* adoption of the Westminster Confession" to be the condition of ministerial communion. Is this a kind of "unqualified subscription," as Trinterud and others would later argue? While Hodge

[4] Briggs, 216.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid, 216, 235, 238.
[7] Robert Ellis Thomson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States*, third ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 27. As Robert Ellis Thomson and John Thomson share the same last name, we will refer to the former by his full name throughout this article.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Charles Hodge, *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: Part I. 1705 to 1741* (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1839), 180.
[10] Ibid.

clearly argued that the *Adopting Act* was in large part a victory for Thomson and his party, he nevertheless viewed it as in some measure a compromise as well.

Perhaps part of Hodge's difficulty arises from his difficulty in obtaining the scarce primary documents that stand behind the controversy. After providing a citation from Dickinson which describes his objections to confessional subscription, Hodge notes: "[t]he above abstract is taken from Mr. Hazard's MSS. The writer has not been able to procure a copy either of Mr. Dickinson's Remarks upon the overture, or of Mr. Thompson's reply."[11] Though we are in general agreement with Hodge's analysis that the *Adopting Act* required a subscription to the Calvinistic system of doctrine contained in the confession, we believe his analysis of the *Adopting Act* as an "evident…compromise" requires further nuance.

In terms of 20th century historiography, it appears that Briggs's interpretation became the prevailing one among historians. This is clearly the case in one of the most influential studies of early American Presbyterian, which came from the pen of Leonard Trinterud. Following Briggs, Trinterud argued: "The Adopting Act of 1729 was therefore a compromise."[12] According to him, the act forced Thomson to give up his demand for "an unqualified subscription" to the confession, accept a limitation of the church's authority to merely an "administrative power," and allow room for a distinction between doctrines which "were necessary and essential to the whole, and others that were not."[13] The compromise, therefore, seems to have come largely from the party of subscribers, rather than the non-subscribers. In fact, Trinterud argues: "The act itself was modeled in great part after the Irish Pacific Articles of 1720 and the ideas of Jonathan Dickinson."[14]

Following Trinterud, Keith Jordan Hardman asserted that it was "Dickinson [who] so molded the *Adopting Act* to make it satisfactory to all parties."[15] He likewise described the act as essentially a "compromise."[16] Commenting on the makeup of the committee that composed the *Adopting Act*, Hardman argues that John Thomson and James Anderson were the only two "strict advocates of subscription;" and that these "two formalists faced defeat unless they accepted compromise."[17]

Sydney Ahlstrom, in his highly influential work, also shares this view of the *Adopting Act*. He referred to it as a "compromise" in which "the idea of subscription" was affirmed, "but with two important qualifications." [18] First, the Synod refused "to make literal subscription to the Westminster standards a condition of ordination," thus making

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[11] Ibid, 171, n. 1.
[12] Leonard Trinterud, *Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterian* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), 48.
[13] Ibid, 46, 49.
[14] Ibid, 49.
[15] Keith Jordan Hardman, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Course of American Presbyterianism, 1717-1747* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania), 62
[16] Ibid, 62.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Syndey E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, second ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 269.

"a distinction between essential and nonessential articles." Furthermore, it was left to the presbytery or synod to decide whether the "candidate's scruples violated the intent of the confession." Secondly, the Synod was made "an administrative and not a legislative body." For Ahlstrom, the compromise represented in "these qualifications…marked a victory for the antisubscriptionist party of Dickinson."[19] Utilizing our own terminology, it is clear that Ahlstrom viewed the *Adopting Act* as a conquest ("victory") for the anti-subscriptionists rather than Thomson.

Bryan F. Le Beau argued along similar lines when he asserted that it was Dickinson (not Thomson) who was "largely responsible for the *Adopting Act* of 1729." [20] Earlier, he argued that the *Adopting Act* was "likely crafted by Dickinson."[21] It was specifically "under Dickinson's leadership" that "the synod had been able to establish a position that struck a balance between freedom of conscience and the need for order."[22] As he states later: "With the exception of E. H. Gillett and Leslie Sloat, who have proclaimed John Thomson the victor, most historians agree with the preceding analysis, which suggests that the Adopting Act of 1729 was a compromise attributable, in large part, to Jonathan Dickinson."[23] Le Beau correctly notes that the majority of scholars (with a few exceptions) have concluded that for Thomson, the *Adopting Act* was a much more of compromise than a conquest.[24]

This long-standing interpretation of the *Adopting Act* has received a more nuanced analysis and critique in the recent work of Charles Scott Sealy. He accurately pointed out that "[w]hile Thomson has been portrayed as a strict Subscriber his overture recognized a need to deal with exceptions…"[25] In other words, previous descriptions of Thomson as calling for "unqualified subscription" need to be revised. In this respect, we believe his work marks an advancement on the previous literature. However, his later statement that subsequent events would force the subscribers "to concede that subscription was not an

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1997), 42.
[21] Ibid, 37.
[22] Ibid, 45.
[23] Ibid, 198, n. 26.
[24] For another example of this interpretation of the *Adopting Act*, see Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), 26-27. See also the assessment of D. G. Hart and John Muether in their article "Turning Points in American Presbyterian History. Part 2: Origins and Identity, 1705-1729" (available online at: http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=51). Hart and Muether agree with the prevailing opinion, arguing that the "Adopting Act appears to be a compromise document." The compromise seems to lie in the fact that "the Act limited subscription to 'all essential and necessary articles' of the Confession of Faith and catechisms." To establish this point, Hart and Muether point to the fact that "[e]ver since then, American Presbyterians have disputed the meaning of 'essential and necessary.'" One might respectfully ask if existence of subsequent dispute can really establish the idea that the *Adopting Act* (or any other act of a civil or ecclesiastical judicatory) was necessarily a compromise. Subsequent dispute may raise the legitimate question of whether the *Adopting Act* was a tenuous compromise, but it does not establish it. That contention must be grounded on the basis of the primary documents, namely, the subscribers's original proposal (Thomson's *Overture*) and the final settlement (the *Adopting Act*).
[25] Sealy, 176.

infallible guard" is not well-founded.[26] As the subscribers had never argued that subscription was such an infallible guard, it is hard to see how such an admission would constitute a concession on their part. Though Sealy provides more nuanced analysis of Thomson's position, he does not directly address the question of whether (and in what ways) the *Adopting Act* represented a compromise between the two parties.

At the very least, our brief survey of the secondary literature has demonstrated that a major group of scholars continue to view the *Adopting Act* as a compromise in which the non-subscribing party was able to extract major concessions on the part of the subscribers. But does this analysis accurately measure up to the testimony of the primary documents? This is a complex question, to which a full and adequate answer would require far more space than we presently have at our disposal. As the *Adopting Act* was part of a much larger Transatlantic debate over the nature of church authority, a full answer to this question would require extensive engagement with that broader context.[27] While important, this context will not be extensively outlined here. Likewise, as the *Adopting Act* was a public declaration representative of the sentiments of a number of individuals, its words and phrases are at least *potentially* open to a variety of interpretations on the part of those individuals. As the later history of the American Presbyterian church demonstrates, there was some concern expressed over the potential ambiguity of some of its phrases—concerns the Synod itself attempted to quell by official declarations in 1730 and 1736.[28] Though important to a comprehensive analysis of the *Adopting Act*, these later declarations will not be addressed here.

It is not the purpose of this article to sort out all of the debates regarding the *Adopting Act*. Rather our focus is on the narrow question of how the *Adopting Act* of 1729 compares with Thomson's printed *Overture* which called upon the church to require subscription on the part of her ministers. To what degree and in what ways does the *Adopting Act* represent a compromise *for Thomson* with regard to his earlier proposal? Our concern is simply to summarize and outline various pieces of evidence that (in our judgment) have not always been adequately dealt with in evaluations of the *Adopting Act*. Far from being an exhaustive and definitive treatment of the issue in its multi-faceted complexity, this paper intends only to bring to light a very narrow aspect of the debate. Put more simply, to what degree can we conclude that Thomson viewed the *Adopting Act* as a conquest or a compromise?

It is our contention that the *Adopting Act* represented a decisive victory for the subscribing party. Far from representing a strategic compromise masterfully engineered by Jonathan Dickinson and the non-subscribers, the act was in fact a definitive conquest

[26] Ibid, 187.
[27] For an extensive and detailed survey of this international context see Sealy, 18-166.
[28] Guy S. Klett, *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1976), 108, 141. It is clear that in 1730 there were some who were "dissatisfied at the Manner of wording our last years Agreement about the Confession &c: supposing some Expressions not sufficiently obligatory on Intrants" (108). But as the Synod goes on to say, the church understands the *Adopting Act* to require candidates to "receive and adopt the Confession and Catechisms at their Admission *in the same Manner and as fully* as the Members of the Synod did that were then present, which overture was unanimously agreed to by the Synod" (ibid).

for the principles of Thomson and the subscribers expressed in their original proposal. In order to establish this thesis, we will first outline the historical background of the *Adopting Act*, and then break it down into its constituent parts. We will then examine each part of the *Act* in the light of Thomson's printed *Overture* calling for confessional subscription, seeking to determine how his proposals differ from or are reflected in the *Adopting Act*. Along the way, we will seek to correct some long-standing errors regarding Thomson's role in the *Adopting Act*, and in this way (hopefully) offer a small contribution to this ongoing discussion and debate.

## The Adopting Act: Background[29]

The American Presbyterian Church was born in the midst of a dramatic transition in the history of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. If the 17th century witnessed the apex of theological precisionization as expressed in these churches' creeds and catechisms, the 18th century marked a transition to an age of deconfessionalization.[30] This transition is evident most clearly in the Reformed Churches of Switzerland, especially that of Geneva. In one generation, the Genevan church moved from requiring subscription the strict orthodoxy of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), to only Scripture and the substance of the Geneva Confession in 1725.

This process of deconfessionalization was also evident in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Britain. The idea of subscription was at the center of a series of controversies in the first decades of the 18th century. The Bangor Controversy (1717), the Salter's Hall Conference (1719), the Belfast Society (1719), and the Simson Affair all revolved around the precise force of confessional authority for subscribing ministers.[31] While this Transatlantic controversy serves as an important background and context for our current topic, it must be underscored that the American debate has a somewhat unique character. While much of the European movement towards deconfessionalization was rooted in a distaste for the theological orthodoxy contained in those confessions, the American subscription focused primarily on issues of church authority and polity.

The American Presbyterian church was born with the formation of the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1706. The minutes of the first meeting contain some partial notes regarding the ordination of one John Boyd, but no mention is made of his subscribing to the *Westminster Confession*. Though some (like Ashbel Green) have argued that the original presbytery did "formally and publicly adopt a particular confession of faith," evidence from the subscription controversy in the late 1720s seems to point in a different direction.[32] One need look no further than the testimony of Thomson himself for

[29] This overview is gleaned from our own reading of the official minute book of the Presbytery of Philadelphia (cited throughout), in consultation with the secondary literature on the *Adopting Act* cited throughout this paper.

[30] For a general discussion of the process of deconfessionalization in later Reformed orthodoxy, see the discussion in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics. The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725. Volume One: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 81-84.

[31] These controversies and the relevant secondary literature are accurately detailed in Sealy, 18-166.

[32] Ashbel Green, "Letters to Presbyterians," *Christian Advocate* 11 (July 1833): 321-25.

evidence to the contrary. In his 1728 overture on confessional subscription, he noted that the practice was "a new Thing, as to the Practice of it, in these Parts of the World, (except among a few)," and that he felt the need to address a concern over "the apparent or real Novelty" of the practice.[33]

The call for confessional subscription at the heart of the *Adopting Act* did not spring up *de novo* in 1729. It was, in fact, part of a much broader movement in the church to more firmly establish its constitution as a consistently Presbyterian church. On September 27, 1721, George Gillespie had overtured the Synod of Philadelphia regarding the more firm establishment of Presbyterianism as the official form of government of the church.[34] Gillespie was motivated, in part, by a number of disciplinary cases involving ministers in the Synod in which he believed the church had been too lax. This overture was carried by a majority of the ministers, but was protested by six men led by Jonathan Dickinson.

Dickinson was elected as moderator of the next Synod in 1723. He opened the Synod with a sermon on 2 Timothy 3:16, which was later published that same year.[35] Near the end of the sermon, Dickinson addresses the issue of subscription to confessions and clearly reveals his opposition to the idea. While he did not deny the usefulness of confessions, he did not believe that the church had authority to impose them upon its members or ministers.[36] This would become the key point in the later dispute between him and Thomson in 1728-29.

Dickinson's sermon clearly had the potential to inflame the latent divisions in the fledgling Synod. But later in the meeting, the protesting ministers brought forward four articles on church government that were able to preserve their unity.[37] These articles affirmed the executive power granted to presbyteries and synods in the execution of church discipline; the church's authority to determine circumstances of church discipline in accordance with the general rules of Scripture; its right to compose directories of worship and recommend them to the lower judicatories; and that appeals can be made from inferior to superior judicatories who have the power to consider and determine them. These were all points essential to the distinctively Presbyterian form of government inherited from the Westminster Assembly. The only potential point of disagreement was their insistence that the acts and decisions of the higher courts not be imposed upon those who conscientiously dissent from them. This emphasis on the right to dissent would become a contentious point between the two parties in the years to come. Nevertheless, in 1723 these articles won the approval of the Synod, resulting in the withdrawal of the protest of the six dissenting ministers.

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[33] John Thomson. *An Overture Presented to the Reverend Synod of Dissenting Ministers* (Philadelphia: Printed [by Samuel Keimer] for the author, 1729) 3. Utilizing seventeenth century language, we might refer to the nascent American Presbyterian Church as one that was "not yet fully constituted."
[34] Klett, 51.
[35] Jonathan Dickinson, *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Synod at Philadelphia* (Boston: S. Gerrish, 1723).
[36] Ibid, 22-23.
[37] Ibid, 57-58.

In 1724 the Presbytery of New Castle began to impose subscription upon its ministers. At his licensure, William McMillian was required to sign the following formula: "I do own the Westminster Confession of Faith as the Confession of my faith."[38] In 1727, John Thomson brought an overture from the Presbytery of New Castle calling for subscription to a confession by all the members of the Synod, but it did not make it to the floor. It was brought up again in 1728, but was deferred until the following year so that a full synod could discuss the issue.[39] Both the overture itself and a response by Dickinson were published that same year (1729).[40]

During the 1729 Synod, a committee was appointed to address the overture that consisted of six members: Dickinson, Pierson, Thomson, Andrews, Craighead, Conn, Budd, and Anderson.[41] On September 19th, the committee finally brought forward its agreement, later referred to as the "Adopting Act."[42]

As the rest of this article consists in a careful comparison of John Thomson's proposal and the agreement, it is important to summarize the *Adopting Act* in terms of its constituent parts.[43] For the sake of this comparison, we can break down the substance of the *Adopting Act* into five parts:

1. The Synod disavowed any authority to impose upon the conscience as well as any legislative power/authority in the church.
2. It expressed a willingness to receive into church membership all whom Christ will admit to heaven.
3. It insisted that ministers (both present and future) declare their adoption of, agreement in, and approbation of the Westminster Confessions and Catechisms. This extends to all of their "essential and necessary articles" which are referred to as "good forms of sound words" and "systems of Christian doctrine."
4. A minister who had scruples "with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms" was to "declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod," and be admitted to the ministry if the "Synod or Presbytery shall judge

[38] Sealy, 175.
[39] Klett, 64-65.
[40] John Thomson. *An Overture Presented to the Reverend Synod of Dissenting Ministers* (Philadelphia: Printed [by Samuel Keimer] for the author, 1729). Jonathan Dickinson, *Remarks Upon a Discourse* (New York: J. Peter Zenger, 1729).
[41] Klett, 102.
[42] By at least 1736, the *Adopting Act* was distinguished into two parts. The first part (done in the morning) was referred to as the "preliminary act" (Klett, 141). The second part (done in the afternoon) was called the "adopting act" (ibid). The validity of the distinction itself became a point of contention for later historians. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address this issue. Our concern is primarily to address the question of how the statements and formulations of the morning session square with Thomson's proposals. For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to both the morning and afternoon decisions (as a whole) as part of the *Adopting Act*. Because the arguments in favor of viewing the *Adopting Act* as a compromise focus largely on the morning act, this will be the primary focus of our analysis.
[43] For the sake of space, we have not included the full text of the *Adopting Act* in the body of this article. The reader is encouraged to have a copy of the act before him, an accurate transcription of which is available online at: http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/subscription/adoptingact.html.

his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government."

5. Ministers admitted into fellowship who had expressed tolerable scruples would be received and treated as is they did not differ in opinion from anyone else.

How do these affirmations square with Thomson's proposal, published in 1729? If the agreement is to be viewed as a "compromise" on his part, we would expect there to be some significant differences between his proposal and the text the *Adopting Act*. Alternatively, if it represents a "conquest" for his cause, we would expect to find essential harmony between them. We contend that a careful consideration of the primary documents lends great weight to the latter option.

**John Thomson's Overture and the Adopting Act Compared: Freedom of Conscience and Legislative Ecclesiastical Authority**

As noted above, the first part of the *Adopting Act* deals very explicitly with the twin ideas of freedom of conscience and the legislative nature of church authority:

> Altho' the synod do not claim or pretend to any Authority of imposing our faith upon other men's Consciences, but do profess our just Dissatisfaction with and Abhorrence of such Impositions, and do utterly disclaim all Legislative Power and Authority in the Church…[44]

According to some scholars, this phrase represents some form of compromise on Thomson's part, or at least reflects the distinctive concerns of Dickinson as opposed to Thomson. For example, Le Beau argued that the act began "much as Dickinson would have it," rejecting any authority of the church to impose on men's consciences.[45] Trinterud went farther, arguing that "[t]he compromise in this Adopting Act involved" the fact that "the Church claimed no more than administrative power."[46] The implication seems to be that Thomson and the "subscribing" party had insisted that even greater power be ascribed to the church courts and that the non-subscribers forced a compromise on the issue. Let us examine Thomson's own words to see whether this analysis measures up to the primary documents.

Throughout his *Overture*, Thomson subtly evidences his awareness of the issue of legislative authority in the church. For example, his call for subscription begins with a statement regarding the fact that "our Synod, as an Ecclesiastical Judicature of *Christ*, cloathed with *ministerial authority* to act in concert, in Behalf of Truth and in Opposition to Error" is empowered to do "something of this Kind at such a juncture."[47] Thomson's choice of words is very important, as Reformed and Presbyterian churches had historically distinguished between ministerial/administrative and legislative authority. Thomson's affirmation of the ministerial authority of the church is in keeping with the

[44] Klett, 103.
[45] Le Beau, 37.
[46] Trinterud, 49.
[47] Ibid, 31 (emphasis ours and Thomson's).

*Westminster Confession* itself, which states: "It belongeth to synods and councils *ministerially* to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience" (*Westminster Confession*, XXXI:2).

The view of the *Westminster Confession* was the consensus position of Continental Reformed and Presbyterian churches as well. The Swiss theologian Francis Turretin, writing about fifty years prior to the *Adopting Act*, explains (in a representative fashion) the orthodox Reformed view of church power. Turretin rejects the idea that "a legislative power properly so called, of enacting laws binding the conscience" belongs to the church.[48] Likewise, he rejects the idea that the spiritual power given to the church is "imperial, royal, monarchical and supreme," as Rome would maintain. Rather, the authority of the church is an "inferior and ministerial power which belongs to his servants."[49] Whether in Geneva or Philadelphia, Reformed proponents of confessional subscription flatly denied to the church any power above that which is purely administrative and ministerial.

Thomson's insistence on the ministerial authority of the church is thus also an implicit rejection of legislative authority. In keeping with the consensus position of both Continental and British Reformed orthodoxy, Thomson affirms the former while rejecting the latter. In other words, Thomson would have no problems affirming the *Adopting Act*'s first point regarding the rejection of legislative power in the church. His affirmation of the distinction is implicit in his printed *Overture* and was representative of much Reformed orthodoxy as a whole.

Thomson also addresses the issue of legislative power in the church and imposition upon men's consciences very directly in his preface to the overture. He specifically addresses an objection to the idea of imposing subscription upon ministers. Stated simply, the objection insisted that because confessions are human documents, confessional subscription would be an imposition upon a minister's conscience which belongs only to the word of God. The full objection, as stated by Thomson, runs as follows:

> *For a Synod to oblige their Members to subscribe the Confession, is an imposing upon Mens Consciences, Things that are of a humane and not divine Authority*; *which Is Tyranny and Persecution, for which we justly blame the Church of* Rome*; Why then should we, or how can we be justified, while we are guilty of an Evil of the same Nature? How can a Person warrantably subscribe any Thing as containing the Articles of their Faith, but the Word of God, without being guilty of idolizing or too much exalting of Mens Works or Words?*[50]

[48] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Volume 3: Eighteenth through Twentieth Topics,* ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Philipsburg: P & R, 1997), 285
[49] Ibid, 275.
[50] Thomson, 13-14.

Thomson believes this objection to be "specious, fallacious and sophistical," as well as "in part nonsensical and trifling."[51] Put another way, he believes that his insistence on subscription would in no way constitute a tyrannical imposition upon men's consciences.

Thomson's answer to this objection involved an extensive explanation of the relationship between Scripture and confessions of faith, as well as the authority ascribed to each. While a bit lengthy, a detailed exposition of Thomson's position will prove helpful later, especially when we examine the precise manner in which he was urging the church to require subscription on the part of her ministers. Furthermore, too many historical analyses of the *Adopting Act* have neglected the nuances of Thomson's position and characterized his position in unhelpful generalizations. His position is therefore both worthy and in need of a precise and detailed analysis. His answer to this objection revolves around three interrelated points.

First, Thomson made a distinction between the doctrinal "Matter" of a confession, and the human modes of expression used to communicate that doctrine. Thomson agreed with the non-subscribers that "for a Church to oblige their members" to accept "any thing not founded upon the Word of God, is indeed Tyranny and Persecution."[52] But it is not tyrannical to impose upon men what Christ "in his Word hath already imposed."[53] On the contrary, such is the Church's "indispensable duty."[54] If the confession "be according to the Word of God," it is therefore the church's "duty to impose or require the Acknowledgement of it."[55] The confession may state Scriptural truth "in other Words," but the substance of its Biblical content is still obligatory.

Thomson plainly admits that the words of a confession are human words "composed by fallible men."[56] While the form is undeniably human, "the Matter is of divine Authority, being contained in the Word of God" and therefore "must of Necessity have the divine Approbation."[57] If the statements of a confession "are agreeable to the infallible Word," they are also "themselves infallible, as to the Truth contained in them."[58] Thomson thus clearly distinguishes between the content and form of a confession—the truth itself and the manner of its expression. The former is regarded as Scriptural in substance, while the latter is merely human. According to Thomson, to reject this idea is tantamount to affirming that apart from direct quotations of Holy Scripture the church is unable to proclaim its infallible doctrine to the world.

Secondly, Thomson argues that it belongs to the nature of a confession of faith to be composed in such human words. For Thomson, a confession of faith that simply repeated the words of Scripture would be no real confession of faith at all. The fact that a confession contains declarations "expressed in our own, tho' imperfect Words" belongs

[51] Ibid, 14.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid, 14-15.
[58] Ibid, 15.

to the nature of a confession itself. Subscription involves owning a confession as a "confession of our faith" and "our own Declaration of our sentiments and Belief in matters of Religion."[59] Scripture, as such, is God's word—"his declaration of his Mind to us."[60] It therefore cannot be, in the nature of the case, a confession of *our* faith in a proper sense of the term. This must involve a "Manifestation of our Thoughts," which Scripture (since it is a declaration of God's thoughts) cannot be.[61] For this reason, it is "a trifling Sophistication, to alledge that *Christians* should own or subscribe the Scriptures, and nothing else as their Confession of Faith."[62] The Scriptures are an "Object of our faith," which "in order of nature" is "prior to our faith." But our confession is "a Declaration, a manifestive Sign of our acts of Faith or Believing, and therefore posterior in the Order both of Nature and Time to our faith it self."[63]

Further, Thomson argues that a Confession of Faith "is a Declaration of the Sense and Meaning in which we understand the Scriptures."[64] We cannot do this by simply "repeating or acknowledging the bare Words of the Scriptures;" and therefore "it should be expressed in Words that we acknowledge of our own" and in "Words differing from the Words of the Scripture, at least in Part."[65] Confessions of faith, therefore, "must be humane, that is, our own."[66] It follows then that it is "nonsensical" to evade the arguments for subscription by asserting that one is "willing to subscribe to the Scriptures."[67] The Spirit of God has already "sufficiently subscribed them by the many Marks and Characters of the Author's image instamp'd upon them."[68] For us to speak of subscribing to the Scriptures (except to say that we "testify that we believe them to be divine") "is…to cast great Affront upon the Scriptures and their Author."[69] Since subscription is "an Instrument to own it by writing as our Act and Deed," it would be blasphemous to subscribe to the Scriptures in this sense. It would be tantamount to claiming that we were the author of Scripture. What these proponents of subscription to the Scripture really mean, therefore, is that they are willing "by writing to bear Witness that they acknowledge the Scriptures to be the Word of God."[70]

In sum, for Thomson, a confession of faith in its very nature consists in our own (human words) by which we express (albeit in an imperfect form) the infallible substance of Scriptural teaching. The idea of "subscribing" to the Scriptures thus violates the nature of subscription (as defined above by Thomson), and is really only a declaration that we affirm Scripture to be the word of God. Thus, subscription to a confession (provided it is Biblical in content) does not constitute the imposition of human doctrine on the

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid, 16.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid, 17.
[65] Ibid, 17-18.
[66] Ibid, 18.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid, 18.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid, 19.

conscience of the believer. Since the content/substance of the confession is Biblical, it is merely a reaffirmation of what Scripture itself teaches (albeit in an imperfect, fallible form).

Thirdly, Thomson answers the objection by emphasizing the voluntary nature of confessional subscription. For him, subscription is not an unlawful imposition on the minister's conscience (as the non-subscribers insisted) because "it is their own voluntary Act, and refers only to themselves."[71] Subscription is not imposed by force or coercion and each minister is being asked to do so *voluntarily*. Though it might be further objected that subscription "*would be an Imposition with respect to these ministers that are unwilling to subscribe*," Thomson answers: "let none subscribe but those who are willing, yea think it their Duty so to do, until such Times as they be convinced."[72]

Still further, it might also be objected that "*the imposition remains; because if there be any who are now Members that are unwilling to subscribe; such will be obliged either to subscribe, or to separate*."[73] Here Thomson treads carefully, perhaps sensing that the church faced a potential rupture over the issue. He argues that since a decision has yet to be made on the matter, "it is hard to say, whether Subscribers or Non-Subscribers would be obliged to separate."[74] Thomson hypothetically turns the argument back on his opponents: if the Subscribers, who feel conscience-bound to require subscription in the church, do not win the day, will they not be forced to separate from the church? Will that not be a violation of their conscience with respect to the constitution of the church? The Subscribing party "on good Grounds, may esteem it an Imposition to be obliged to continue in the Neglect of what in Conscience they conceive to be…a necessary Duty incumbent upon them."[75]

In the *Adopting Act*, the infant American Presbyterian church clearly renounced "any authority of imposing our faith upon other men's consciences" and utterly disclaimed "all legislative power and authority…in the church." As we have shown from his printed *Overture*, Thomson was in full and complete agreement with these statements. Not only does he flatly reject the idea that the church has authority to impose upon a minister's conscience, he also utilizes a sophisticated and carefully crafted series of arguments to free his position from that very charge. Therefore, the inclusion of these statements in the *Adopting Act* cannot be construed as a compromise on Thomson's part in order to satisfy the objections of the "non-subscribing" party.

**Willingness to Receive all Christians into Membership**

The second thing the Adopting Act insists upon is the church's willingness to "admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven." This statement must be understood in terms a

[71] Ibid, 20.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid, 21.

distinction (evident in the Adopting Act) between membership in the church ("fellowship in sacred ordinances") and "the Ministers of this Synod" or the "ministerial communion" of the church. The *Adopting Act* requires subscription on the part of the church's ministers, but not on the part of her members.

There is no indication that such an affirmation would require any compromise on the part of Thomson. Throughout his printed *Overture*, he makes it clear that the issue at hand was *ministerial* subscription to a confession. In other words, ministerial communion would be open only to those who publicly adopted a confession of faith, while membership in the church required only a credible profession of Christianity.

Thomson began his *Overture* by noting the different degrees of responsibility laid upon Christians in their various stations to defend the truth. He first notes that "it is the unquestionable duty of every *Christian*, according to his Station, and Talent, to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel against all Opposition."[76] But this duty "is in an especial Manner incumbent upon the Ministers of the Gospel, by virtue of their office."[77] Here a distinction is clearly drawn between a minister and a layperson, as well as their respective degrees of responsibility. The minister, by virtue of his office, has a greater degree of responsibility to defend the truth than a layperson.

Later he explains that his overture is specifically that the church, by a "publick judicial Act of our church," adopt a "particular System of Doctrines" to be "the Articles or Confession of our Faith."[78] In other words, Thomson was arguing that a confession of faith "be received as such by a conjunct Act of the Representatives of our Church, I mean by the Synod."[79] These "Representatives" are referred to as "the Synod," and consist of the ordained ministers and elders in the church. The adoption of a confession was to serve as a "Bar provided to keep out of *the Ministry* those that are corrupt in Doctrinals."[80] Thus, Thomson was proposing that the Synod oblige every Presbytery "to oblige every Candidate for the ministry to subscribe or otherwise acknowledge, *Coram Presbyterio*, the said Confession of theirs."[81]

Dickinson (Thomson's non-subscribing antagonist) seems fairly aware of the fact that his opponent was only arguing for a *ministerial* subscription to the confession. In his *Remarks* upon Thomson's overture, he argues that for the sake of consistency he "should therefore move for an *Act* of *Synod*, that all the Ministers within our Bounds, enjoin a *Subscription* upon every Member of their respective Congregations; and that too upon Pain of Exclusion from their sacred Fellowship."[82] Dickinson's point was to utilize this *reductio ad absurdum* argument to show that (as he put it to Thomson) "if your Conclusion will follow from these Premises" not only ministers, but also congregations *should* be required to subscribe to a confession. The fact that Dickinson found it

[76] Ibid, 25.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid, 28.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid, 29.
[81] Ibid, 31-32.
[82] Dickinson (1729), 5.

necessary to utilize such an argument is solid proof that Thomson was never explicitly arguing for such a thing in the first place.

It must be admitted that the particular phraseology of the *Adopting Act* does reflect Dickinson's wording. In his 1722 sermon, Dickinson argued that

> We may not so much as shut out of Communion, any such Dissenters, as we can charitably hope that Christ won't shut out of Heaven: But should open the *Doors of the Church* as wide, as Christ opens the *Gates of Heaven*; and *receive one another, as Christ also received us, to the Glory of God*.[83]

This is markedly similar to the *Adopting Act*, which insisted that the Church is

> …willing to receive one another, as Christ has received us to the glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the kingdom of heaven…

The likeness is especially evident in the dual reference to Romans 15:7, as well as the allusion to Christ admitting his saints at "*the Gates of Heaven*" or "the kingdom of heaven."

Although the phrase reflects Dickinson's previous phraseology, there is no indication that Thomson would have disagreed in the least in his statement. On the contrary, his *Overture* made clear that he was only insisting on subscription to a confession on the part of ministers. This element of the *Adopting Act*, therefore, cannot be used as a basis for viewing it as a compromise on Thomson's part.

**Adopting the Confession: Essential and Necessary Articles, Good Forms of Sound Word and Systems of Christian Doctrine**

Perhaps the most significant controversy surrounding the *Adopting Act* concerns the precise meaning of the terms used to describe the sense in which the *Confession* is to be adopted. The famous paragraph reads as follows:

> And do therefore agree, that all the Ministers of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine; and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the confession of our faith.[84]

Our point here is not to determine precisely the exact meaning of the words as they may have been potentially interpreted by the various members of the Synod. Rather our concern is to discern whether or in what degree the words themselves would have been

[83] Dickinson (1723), 22-23.
[84] Klett, 103.

agreeable to Thomson and whether his acceptance of them would have constituted any degree of compromise on his part. The key words in dispute are those that refer to "the essential and necessary articles" of the confession. The reference to "good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine" is important as well, as these words reflect Thomson's own stated concerns in his printed *Overture*.

We will now examine all these phrases in light of Thomson's previously published comments. The first statement of the *Adopting Act* concerns the fact that the Synod is to adopt the Confession and Catechisms in terms of "all the essential and necessary articles." What precisely is the import of these words? Is the Synod only requiring subscription to the fundamental articles of Christianity or do they refer to the more distinctive elements of Reformed Calvinism contained in the *Confession*?

The most recent research on this subject has argued against the former interpretation. Charles Sealy has argued with reference to the 1729 *Adopting Act* that

> …the choice of the wording 'essential and necessary' rather than 'fundamental' was significant. That is, they were insisting on subscription, not to the Fundamental Articles of Christianity, but the doctrines essential to the system in the Westminster Confession.[85]

Sealy seeks to prove this point by appealing to the Irish Synod that "debated the distinction between the terms in their declaration on the Trinity."[86] Thus, the phrase "essential and necessary articles" must be interpreted as an alternative to "fundamental articles," in view of the international context (of which the American Synod was undoubtedly aware). The phrase "essential and necessary" therefore had reference not to the fundamental articles of Christianity, but to those articles which were an integral part of the Calvinistic system of doctrine contained therein.

The question before us, however, concerns what Thomson regarded as the "essential and necessary articles" of the Confession. Clearly for him this included *at least* the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Thomson's *Overture* contains a heading which refers to the "Ingress and spreading of dangerous Errors" among the church.[87] He also called upon the church to "prepare for War" and "to fortify it self against all Assaults and Invasions that may be made upon the Doctrine it professeth according to the Word of God."[88] Though he reassured his fellow presbyters of his hope that "there are (as yet) few or none among us (especially of the Ministers) who are infected with any gross Errors or Heresies in Doctrine," he also believed that "we are in no small Danger of being corrupted in Doctrinals, and that *even as to Fundamentals*."[89] Clearly, at the very least, Thomson was concerned to preserve the fundamental doctrines of Christianity with his overture for subscription.

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[85] Sealy, 181.
[86] Ibid, 144.
[87] Thomson, 25.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid, 28 (emphasis ours).

But is Thomson arguing for something more? Admittedly, it is hard to answer in precise detail what articles or phrases Thomson might have been willing to allow ministers to scruple. Things do become a little clearer when we examine Thomson's own discussion of what constitutes fundamental articles of Christianity. In the course of his effort to prove that the church "is in no small Danger of being corrupted in Doctrinals, and that even as to fundamentals," Thomson cited "*Arminianism*, *Socinianism*, *Deism*, *Free-thinking*, etc." as examples of such corruption.[90] Later he drew attention to the fact that many sound ministers have had their zeal to preserve the truth "very much blunted" through cowardice and indifference.[91] Such ministers "think that they ought to bear with others, tho' differing from them in Opinion about Points that are mysterious and sublime, but not practical nor fundamental, such as Predestination."[92]

In response to this, Thomson admitted that "the precise Point of Election and Reprobation be neither fundamental nor immediately practical." Yet taken "complexly as it takes in the other disputed Points between *Calvinists* and *Arminians*" such as universal grace, non-perseverance of the saints, conditional election, etc., the matter was quite different.[93] In this complex or systematic sense, Thomson stated that predestination is "such an Article in my Creed, such a *fundamental* of my Faith, that I know not what any other Articles would avail, that could be retained about it."[94]

This last statement is especially important. It shows that Thomson viewed the essential doctrines of "*Calvinism*" over against "*Arminianism*," taken in a complex and systematic sense, as fundamental articles of Christianity. In other words, these doctrines form so much the substance and systematic core of Christian doctrine that an alteration in one of them necessarily entails an alteration in many others. Thus, even if we were to interpret the phrase "essential and necessary articles" as the "fundamental articles of Christianity," this would still (at least for Thomson) be a reference to the essential doctrines of the "*Calvinist*" scheme of doctrine over against "*Arminianism*, *Socinianism*, *Deism*, *Free-thinking,* etc."

Thus when the *Adopting Act* refers to the *Westminster Confession* "as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine," it is referring (in the mind of Thomson) to *at least* the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, which Thomson regards as the distinctive Calvinistic system of doctrine. Ironically, read in this way the phrase "essential and necessary articles" in no way weakens the subscriber's affirmation of the Calvinistic system, but rather raises it to the strongest level possible. For Thomson, the Calvinistic system, considered in this complex sense, *is* fundamental Christianity.

Read in light of the primary document, this wording of the *Adopting Act* would not have required a compromise on Thomson's part. Even if (for the sake of argument) we assume

[90] Ibid, 28, 30.
[91] Ibid, 30.
[92] Ibid, 30-31.
[93] Ibid, 31.
[94] Ibid, 31 (emphasis ours).

that the *Adopting Act* required no more than a subscription to the fundamental articles of Christianity, we still do not necessarily end up with such a forced compromise. Even if all Thomson secured was a subscription to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity *loosely defined*, it would still have been a victory for the principles of the subscribers rather than the non-subscribers.

It is sometimes forgotten that what Dickinson and the non-subscribers argued for was not a "loose" form of subscription to the *Westminster Confession*. Rather they were explicitly opposed to requiring subscription to *any* man-made creed. Dickinson stated this quite bluntly when he spoke of those who "(as I do) Scruple subscription *to any human Composure*."[95] According to him, "even these essential Articles of Christianity, may not be imposed by Civil Coercions, temporal Penalties, *or any other way whatsoever*."[96]

Dickinson went so far as to extend his argument to ecumenical creeds like that formulated at the Council of Nicea. He writes:

> The *Synod of Nice* did indeed impose *Subscriptions*; but what was the Consequence, but horrible Schisms, Convulsions and Confusions, until the Church was crumbled into Parts and Parties, each uncharitably anathematizing one another?[97]

This only led to the need for the subscription to more creeds:

> When one Council was conveen'd after another, to draw up new *Creeds*, and impose new *Subscriptions*, until almost every Article of Christianity was both condemned and established. This was the *Mark* set by Providence upon the first *Subscription* of this kind, that was ever imposed in the World…[98]

Clearly, if Dickinson opposes subscription to what is perhaps the most universal of Christian creeds—the Nicene—he will also oppose subscription to anything beyond it.[99]

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[95] Dickinson (1729), 31 (emphasis ours).
[96] Dickinson (1723), 23.
[97] Dickinson (1729), 7.
[98] Ibid, 7-8.
[99] It must be underscored that Dickinson's opposition to subscription did not stem in the least from any opposition (on his part) to Calvinistic dogma. Indeed, in his *Remarks* he makes clear that he is concerned not only with Arianism and Socinianism, but also the "inconsistent Calvinism" represented in Amyraldianism: "Look into the Reformed Churches of *France*, and you'll find almost every *Synod*, a black roll of apostate Hereticks, who had not only Subscribed but swore to their *Confession*; And so did the Siuers *Amirand* and *Testard* again and again, notwithstanding the dangerous Errors they held; and at length publish'd, to the just Alarum both of the *Gallican* and other Reform'd Churches" (11). Incidentally, this is an interesting confirmation that the early American Presbyterian Church was not only anti-Arminian, anti-Socinian, and anti-Deist, but also anti-Amyraldian and anti-Saumur as well. Dickinson's concern was not whether Calvinistic orthodoxy would be required of the church's ministers, but only over the proper means to maintain and preserve it. Indeed, part of his argument against subscription is that (in his view) it is actually ineffective and counterproductive in attaining these ends.

Therefore, even if all that was required in the *Adopting Act* was a subscription to the fundamental articles of Christianity (defined in a minimalistic sense), it still represents a *principial* compromise on the part of the non-subscribing party led by Dickinson. As Charles Hodge correctly noted,

> It is obvious…that President Dickinson belonged to that small class of persons who are opposed to all creeds of human compositions…It is evident that his objections had not a very firm hold even of his own mind; for he joined in the adoption and imposition of the Westminster Confession, the very year these remarks were published. It matters not with what latitude he either received it himself or imposed it upon others. His objection was not to a long creed, or to a short one, but to any creed of human composition, and such is the Westminster Confession in all its parts, essential and non-essential.[100]

Granted, *if* all the *Adopting Act* required were a subscription to the fundamental articles of Christianity, it would also represent a compromise on the part of the subscribers. They (as we have argued above) seem to have been arguing for a subscription to the Calvinistic system of doctrine articulated in the confession. But it would still have been a clear victory for the principles underlying the subscribers' position.

**Good forms of Sound Words and Systems of Christian Doctrine.**

This tentative conclusion leads us to a consideration of the two other phrases used in the *Adopting Act* to describe the manner in which the Confession and Catechisms are to be adopted—as "good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine." Both of these phrases clearly reflect Thomson's usage in his printed *Overture*.

For example, when answering the non-subscribers' objection that "*we have no Account of any Confessions of Faith in Scripture*, *beside the Scripture itself*," Thomson answered with a possible example of a confession of faith referenced in the Scriptures. He appeals to Hebrews 5:12, which "blames these *Hebrews*, for their Ignorance of the *first principles of the Oracles of God*."[101] For Thomson, "this seems to signify, that then Christians had Systems or rudimental Principles of Faith, collected out of the Word, and reduced into Order for facilitating the Learner's Labour."[102] In these "Systems" "there are some Principles spoken of as prior, and others following in order" thus expressing a systematic "Order of Priority and Posteriority."[103] These statements make clear that what Thomson had in view in adopting a confession is the systematic principles that expressed an order of priority and posteriority, thus forming a particular scheme of doctrine. For Thomson, this scheme, as we have shown above, is that distinctively expressed in Calvinism.

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[100] Hodge, 171-72.
[101] Ibid, 9.
[102] Ibid. Note especially the use of the plural ("Systems"). This reflects the *Adopting Act*'s (rather odd to modern ears) use of the expression "systems of Christian doctrine."
[103] Ibid, 9-10.

Later, in the *Overture* itself, Thomson seeks to establish the necessity of subscription by pointing out that in the church "we have not any particular *system of Doctrines*, composed by ourselves or others, which we…have adopted to be the Articles or Confession of our Faith."[104] Here again the substance of the phrase found in the *Adopting Act* (systems of Christian doctrine) is expressly utilized by Thomson. The shift of the plural from "system" to "doctrine" is immaterial, as the opposite formulation has already been utilized by him (as noted above).

Thus, the inclusion of the phrase "systems of Christian doctrine" does not represent a substantial change from or compromise of Thomson's position as outlined in the *Overture*. The same can be said of the phrase "good forms of sound words." As this is a phrase lifted directly from 1 Timothy 1:13, it is not necessary to detail it here. Though Thomson does not utilize this particular phrase in his *Overture*, it is completely agreeable to the position outlined therein.

## Exceptions and Scruples

Another highly disputed phrase in the *Adopting Act* regards the allowance for ministers and candidates to declare "any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms" which shall not keep him from the ministry "if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government." Much debate has occurred over what precisely would constitute allowable scruples. Our purpose here is not to enter specifically into this controversy, but only to determine whether or to what degree this allowance in principle constituted a compromise on Thomson's part.

As noted above, many scholars like Leonard Trinterud have argued that Thomson's proposal was equivalent to a "demand [for] an unqualified subscription to [the Westminster Standards] of all entering the Synod."[105] This does not accurately represent the testimony of the primary documents (of which Trinterud otherwise evidences a thorough acquaintance). In his printed *Overture*, Thomson had explicitly mentioned (more than once) the possibility that certain ministers may be concerned about particular scruples to the confession and had made suggestions as to how to deal with them.

As discussed above, Thomson had already made a distinction between the "Matter" and the "Words" of the Confession. The words are "composed by fallible men," which "[fall] short of that Perfection that the Scripture justly claims," and "fall short of scriptural Perfection, as to manner of expression."[106] The issue for Thomson was never over whether every word, phrase, jot or tittle of the Confession would be obligatory upon ministers. Rather, his concern was over the "Matter" of the Confession, which he believed was "agreeable to the divine Matter" which also "must of Necessity have the divine approbation."[107] According to him, "so far as they [i.e., the words of the

[104] Ibid, 28 (emphasis ours).
[105] Trinterud, 46
[106] Thomson, 14-15.
[107] Ibid.

Confession] are agreeable to the infallible Word, [they] are themselves infallible, as to the Truth contained in them."[108] It is clear that Thomson was more than willing to admit imperfections in the words and particular manners of expression of the Confession. His point was to argue that the matter or substance of the truth expressed in those fallible, imperfect words was of divine authority insofar as they agree with or express the infallible truth of the Scriptures.

It is this distinction between the words and the matter of the Confession that informs Thomson's later discussion of potential scruples to that Confession. For example, while discussing a possible schism that may result from imposing a requirement for subscription upon ministers, Thomson writes:

> If there be any who can instance any Particulars in the *Westminster* Confession, etc., that are unsound, no doubt they will be heard, and if they can make good their Objections against it, they will be allowed of; but grant that there should be some Clauses or Paragraphs, that upon Examination should be found, or judged either unsound or unsafe; I see not why these should be a just Reason to refuse subscribing to what is acknowledged to be Orthodox, unless we could either procure or compose one that is less exceptionable.[109]

Here Thomson expressly admitted that if anyone can "make good their Objections against" a particular of the Confession, "they would be allowed of." He also proposes the possibility that the church might deem certain particulars or even whole paragraphs of the Confession to be unsound or unsafe. In such an instance Thomson seems to allow the possibility that they could adopt the orthodox portions of the Confession without the objectionable portions.

More explicitly, towards the end of his preface to the *Overture*, Thomson writes directly about the possibility of scruples:

> …and if there should be any Paragraphs or Clauses at which some may scruple, there are rational Methods according to Charity and Piety, to have such Scruples removed in a regular Way, and it's a Pity to deprive a whole Church of the Benefit of such an excellent Confession, for the Scruples perhaps of a few, or for a few Scruples about some particular and lesser Points of Religion.[110]

Thomson's comments here are in complete accord with his broader understanding the nature of a creeds and confessions. The Confession seeks to express the infallible "matter" or "substance" of the truth in the "fallible" and "imperfect" words of men. Further, it seeks to express what he calls a "system of doctrines," specifically, the system of Calvinism over against Arminianism, Socinianism, Deism, Libertinism, and even

[108] Ibid, 15.
[109] Ibid, 13.
[110] Ibid, 24.

Amyraldianism.[111] Given these parameters, it is quite possible that a particular minister may scruple certain "Paragraphs or Clauses" of the confession. This possibility does not seem to "make or break" Thomson's proposal. In such instances, he believed that "there are rational Methods according to Charity and Piety, to have such Scruples removed in a regular way."[112] Such "Scruples perhaps of a few," which concern only "some particular and lesser Points of Religion" should not be the occasion to "deprive the whole Church of the Benefit of such an excellent Confession."[113]

What is articulated clearly in Thomson's *Preface* is also intimated in the *Overture* itself. The fifth part of Thomson's overture calls for the Synod

> …To enact, That if any Minister within our Bounds shall take take [sic] upon him to teach or preach any Thing contrary to any of the said Articles, unless *First* he propose the said Point to the Presbytery or Synod, to be by them discussed, he shall be censured so and so.[114]

Implicit in this point is the possibility that a minister may preach or teach something contrary to the confession, if the presbytery or synod were to so determine. Granted, the emphasis is upon the limits placed upon ministers in terms of deviating from the confession, rather on the potential liberty they might be granted. But the possibility is still clearly assumed. A minister is not to preach or teach anything contrary to the confession "unless *First* he propose the said Point to the Presbytery or Synod." This language clearly allows for the possibility of "approved scruples" among the subscribing ministers. In other words, Thomson's *Overture* itself included a mechanism by which possible objections or scruples to the *Confession* could be dealt with.

Put simply and directly, this is clearly not an insistence on "unqualified subscription," or "literal subscription" as Trinterud and Ahlstrom have argued.[115] Likewise, Robert Ellis Thomson's contention that the Synod's granting "freedom…to ministers and licentiates to express to the Presbytery or Synod the scruples they felt as to any article in the standards" was a "concession" on Thomson's part simply runs counter to the plain testimony of the primary documents.[116] Thomson was fully aware of the possibility that certain ministers might scruple minor points of religion or certain words or expressions in the Confession. He was also fully open to considering "rational Methods according to Charity and Piety" in order to remove these obstacles to subscription. The last phrase ("Charity and Piety") is especially important, as it is in essential harmony with the *Adopting Act*'s last point, namely, that they would treat any ministers expressing minor scruples "with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly love, as if they had not differed from us in such Sentiments."

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[111] In support of the idea that the early American Presbyterian church was hostile to Amyraldianism, see footnote 99 above.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid, 32.
[115] Trinterud, 46; Ahlstrom, 269.
[116] (Robert Ellis) Thomson, 27.

Thomson's proposals in dealing with scruples conform quite well with what the Synod finally agreed upon. His hope was that his proposal would be one that the whole church would "unanimously concur in Measures that make for Peace and Unity among us."[117] In the afternoon session of September 19th, 1729, the Synod declared that all the ministers "after proposing all the Scruples yt any of them had to make against any Articles and Expressions" in the Confession and Catechisms "have *unanimously agreed in the solution of those scruples*."[118] Thus, the church declared "the sd. Confession and Catechisms to be the Confession of their faith, *excepting only some Clauses in the 20. and 23. Chapters*."[119] In conclusion, the Synod gave thanks for the "Unanimity, Peace and Unity which appeared in all their Consultations and Determinations relating to the Affair of the Confession."[120] Thomson's hope had been realized, and the Confession and Catechisms were adopted in a way essentially harmonious with what he had proposed.

## Conclusion

There are many more issues that are worthy of attention in relation to the *Adopting Act* of 1729. Chief among them is the question of whether the church would allow exceptions beyond those mentioned in the afternoon session (namely, the clauses in the 20th and 23rd chapters). Further, if the *Adopting Act* is in essential harmony with Thomson's proposal, how do we explain Dickinson's approval and acceptance of it?[121] Did he change his previous position (as Hodge had suggested), articulated both in 1722 and earlier in 1729? Or did he simply interpret the *Adopting Act* in a way that fit his previous proposals? Still further, how do we sort out some of the possible confusion over the precise import of the phrase "essential and necessary," which delimits the scope of the Synod's adoption of the confession? Even if Thomson intended it to refer to the "Calvinistic" system of doctrine (as we have argued above), it is *possible* (in spite of its objective clarity or lack thereof) that others might interpret it in another sense. While important, these questions are

[117] Thomson (1729), 22.
[118] Klett, 104.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] While a thorough analysis of this question is beyond the scope of this paper, we cannot resist bringing forth one piece of evidence which may help to resolve the difficulty of Dickinson's acceptance of the *Adopting Act*. In a letter from Mr. Jedidiah Andrews to Dr. Benjamin Colman, dated April 7, 1729, we have an interesting description of this dilemma on the part of the non-subscribers. Andrews wrote that the church "is not likely to fall into great difference about subscribing the Westminster Confession of Faith" (cited in Hodge, 168). He asks Colman, "Now what shall we do? They will certainly carry it by numbers; our countrymen say they are willing to join in a vote to make it the confession of our church, but to agree to making it a test of orthodoxy, and term of ministerial communion, they will not…Nevertheless I am not so determined as to be uncapable to receive advice, and I give you this account, that I may have your judgment as to what I had best do in the matter. Supposing I do believe it, shall I, on the terms above mentioned, subscribe or not" (Ibid)?

This last sentence perhaps provides the most plausible explanation for the non-subscribers acceptance of the *Adopting Act*. Though contrary to their formal principles regarding the place of creeds in the church, subscribing to it did not force them to violate any material-theological principle of doctrine. Put another way, both the subscribers and non-subscribers were strict Calvinists, common heirs of a joint theological tradition. The disagreement was over church polity, not theology. Faced with the choice between succeeding from the church and acquiescing in the subscribers demands, they chose the latter in order to preserve the church from schism.

beyond the scope of this paper, which has focused specifically to what degree *in Thomson's mind* the *Adopting Act* (at the time of its ratification) was potentially in harmony with his previous proposal.

We have listed no less than five distinct elements of the *Adopting Act*, all of which can be interpreted in harmony or in agreement with Thomson's *Overture*. Whether it is the Synods disavowal of legislative authority to impose upon men's consciences, their willingness to receive all true Christians in the church, their insistence that the Confession of Faith be adopted "as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine," or the allowance for ministers to express scruples to "articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government," every aspect of the *Adopting Act* had been principally addressed and affirmed in Thomson's printed *Overture*. Contrary to much 19th and 20th century scholarship, the testimony of the primary documents lends significant weight to the thesis that Thomson himself could have viewed the *Adopting Act* of 1729 as much more of a conquest than a compromise.

# Reviews

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Machiel A. van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009. 277pp. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6227-3. $20.00.

This is a pleasant, informative and well-written read. The author (Reformed pastor in the Netherlands), translator (Reinder Bruinsma) and publisher are to be commended for making it available to the English-reading audience. We have cameos of twenty-four *amis de Calvin*, a few of whom are in fact *ennemis de Calvin* (notably, Ami Perrin). Where possible, we are shown a likeness (woodcut, medallion, etc.) of the individual at the beginning of his or her sketch (approximately 10 pages each). Where this is not possible, we have a veritable gallery of portraits of Calvin himself. Van den Berg adds footnotes (but sparingly and judiciously), a supplementary bibliography (showing the range of his reading, which is very much up-to-date as of 2006) and an index: all of this makes the volume even more useful and attractive. In combination with recent full-length biographies of Calvin (Cottret, Selderhuis,[1] Van 't Spijker,[2] Gordon). This work will provide occasional additional detail together with a balanced assessment of the Calvin-'friend' relationship.

My one disappointment is the cheap shot the author takes at the Puritan Sabbath (90), which demonstrates his own abominable ignorance not only of Puritan practice, but also the Lord's day sanctification of the Reformation era by the Waldensians (cf. the Confession of Angrogna [1532][3]), the Emden Dutch Calvinists (Question 42 of the Large Emden Catechism of 1551[4] and Question 11 of the 1554 Emden Catechism[5]), the Rhaetian Confession of 1552,[6] Theodore Beza's Confession of 1560,[7] the Hungarian Reformed believers (their *Confessio Catholica* [1562][8] and the Confession of Tarcal [1562] and Torda [1563][9]) and even Calvin himself, if we may credit the latter's Sermon on Jeremiah 17: "God wished there to be a day upon which all Christians would rest from their labors to devote themselves to His service. . . . Now, if we do not observe this practice, we show well that we do not take God seriously. When Sunday rolls around, those . . . who did not have a chance to play all week, devote Sundays to pleasurable outings. They seem to think that the day of rest was ordained expressly for them to take up their favorite pastimes . . . Now, it is a very bad sign for us when we do not observe

[1] Cf. my review "*Exsul, Peregrinus, Viator*: Selderhuis on Calvin, A Review." *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 24/2 (September 2009): 40-50.
[2] Cf. my review *Calvin: A Brief Guide to His Life and Thought* (Willem van 't Spijker). *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 24/1 (May 2009): 58-64.
[3] Found in James T. Dennison, Jr., compiler, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* [hereafter *RCET*], 1:284.
[4] *RCET*, 1:598-99.
[5] *RCET*, 2:59; cf. also p. 55.
[6] *RCET*, 1:682-83.
[7] *RCET*, 2:328.
[8] *RCET*, 2:606-607, 640-43.
[9] *RCET*, 2:748.

this regulation [the fourth commandment]. Our Lord rested on the seventh day to teach us to sanctify this day of rest".[10]

In these pages, we meet: Claude d'Hangest to whom the young Calvin dedicated his first published work—the commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia* (1532); François Daniel, lifetime friend, honored humanist, though a committed Roman Catholic; Nicholas Cop, likely the friend who provoked Calvin's break with Rome; Louis du Tillet, the friend who refused to join Calvin in breaking with Rome, while accusing Calvin of "schism"; Pierre Robert Olivétan, who lit the lamp of the Word of God for his cousin to follow; Renée de France, a regal friend and duchess sympathetic to Calvin and the Reformation—protectress of the Huguenots; John Sinapius, for whom Calvin acted as a match-maker, gaining him the hand of his beloved bride, Françoise de Boussiron; Simon Grynaeus, the Basel professor who directed Calvin to Strasbourg in 1538, following the latter's exile from Geneva; William Farel, fiery red-head who steadfastly directed Calvin to the free grace of God and Christ Jesus (even boldly rebuking him in the name of that sovereign author of grace); Pierre Viret, another friend whom God arrested by the thunderous passion of Farel; Martin Bucer, Calvin's often over conciliatory tutor (irenicism becoming obstructionism) during the Strasbourg years—the best years of Calvin's life (by his own testimony); Philip Melanchthon, Luther's bosom friend and dear to Calvin as well; Idelette de Bure, his pious wife and "best" friend of all; Benoit Textor, attentive, semi-eschatological physician who labored in behalf of the Eschatological Physician to extend Calvin's earthly life and labors; Antoine Cauvin/Calvin, friend and more—blood brother; Laurent de Normandie, fellow Noyonese, who like Calvin, fled to Geneva and in 1548 became a noted book publisher and tradesman; Ami Perrin, a friend in 1541 (urged Calvin's return to Geneva) who became an implacable enemy by 1555 and whom Calvin labeled a comedic Caesar (megalomaniac); Nicolas des Gallars, Calvin's *famulus* or "trusted servant" and loyal secretary, who was the latter's envoy to the court of King Edward VI of England in 1551; Lord and Lady de Falais, Dutch refugees in Geneva, who became loyal to the heretical hater of Calvin, Jerome Bolsec, and thus disloyal to Bolsec's nemesis, John Calvin; Galeazzo Caracciolo, a genuine Italian friend, disciple of Peter Martyr Vermigli, who reconstituted and organized the Italian Church in Geneva in 1551, whose famous divorce from his intransigent Roman Catholic wife is a textbook case of Calvin's careful exegesis and casuistry; Guillaume Budé, a teacher of Calvin during his Paris years (1530s), yet a Roman Catholic loyalist, on whose death, his widow and several of his children sought refuge with Calvin in Geneva in 1549; Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's magisterial successor and comrade with Calvin in the 1549 Consensus against Roman Catholic and Lutheran ubiquitarian doctrines of the Lord's Supper; John Knox, ex-galley slave and pastor of the English refugee congregation in

[10] "Sermon 20 on Jeremiah 17," in *Sermons on Jeremiah by Jean Calvin*, trans. by Blair Reynolds (Edwin Mellen Press, 1990) 225-26. Special note should be taken of Calvin's remarks on the sanctification of the Lord's day in "Sermons Five and Six on Deuteronomy 5:12-15" (*John Calvin's Sermons on the Ten Commandments,* trans. by B. W. Farley [1980] 97-132), esp. his remarks on those in Geneva who turned the Lord's day into a holiday for their own pleasure (pp. 109-110). Cf. my own comments on this sermon in *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532-1700* (1983/2008) 6, n.19. An honest reading of these primary confessional documents from the 16th century testifies to what may be called a more widespread 'Puritanical' reading of the fourth commandment. Calvin's pointed remarks are an echo of that practical Sabbatarianism.

Geneva (1555, 1556-1559), earning him a place among the famous 'four horsemen' statuary which stands in Geneva today; Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in 1564 and son in the faith—much loved by Calvin ("Calvin's spiritual son . . . became the father of Calvinism" [248] on the former's death). The friends help characterize the man; the man leaves his imprint on the character of the friends. A mimetic paradigm? perhaps, perhaps! In Christ, perhaps.

We are grateful to the sovereign Lord for the man and his friends and the system of doctrine contained in the inspired Scriptures which Jean Cauvin of Noyon, France has bequeathed to us via Iohannes Calvinus's monumental labors in Geneva, Switzerland.

—James T. Dennison, Jr.

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Thomas A. Robinson, *Ignatius of Antioch and the Parting of the Ways: Early Jewish-Christian Relations*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009. 285pp. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-59856-323-8. $27.99.

In 1988, Thomas Robinson released *The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church.* The Bauer involved was Walter Bauer, more famous for his contribution to BAG (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [1957]). In that book, Robinson was focusing on the infamous *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzeri im ältesten Christentum* (1934)—English translation *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (1971). In fine, Robinson undressed Bauer's blatant revisionist thesis which itself created a paradigm shift in NT and patristic studies, namely the so-called 'trajectory' theory that claimed that orthodox Christianity was the result of the triumph of Christian power groups who succeeded in suppressing other nascent Christian communities with the charge of 'heresy'. Thus, orthodoxy in the early church was just the name for the supremacists and triumphalists, i.e., those whose greater clout and power squashed the primitive Christian diversity movement. If this sounds like a post-modernist crock, Bauer was in truth a John the Baptist to the issue. According to Bauer, there never was any such thing as Christian orthodoxy—not in the apostolic period, not in the 2nd century, not until the iron fist of Constantine, Athanasius and Nicaea. Christianity of the first three hundred years was a primeval ooze, teeming with fertile and pregnant diversities, each of which was unique, credible and worthy of the name of the inspiration which spawned this religious multi-culturalism—Christ-ians (Marcionite Christ-ians in Mesopotamia; Gnostic Christ-ians in Asia Minor; Ebionite Christ-ians in Palestine, etc.). Sadly, come the alliance of the dominant ecclesiastical personalities with the imperial personality, all minority fecundity was still-born or worse—brutally aborted.

On this theory of the evolution of Christianity, heresy preceded orthodoxy (or so Bauer argued). Out of the primal sludge of unChristianity emerged Christianity. After all, religion is just like amoebas, euglenas, paramecia (protozoan → metazoan): less complex evolves to more complex. So Bauer transposed the Darwinian transformation of species

into transformation of heresy. Neat! On the ever progressive development of the species *Christianus*, *haeriticus heterodoxus* becomes *triumphalis orthodoxus* (with, of course, a little nudge from the political ecosystem known as *Constantinus*). And in truly evolutionary and progressive fashion, even today 'orthodoxy' continues to develop to higher and more enlightened politically correct, multi-cultural and unbiblical revisionisms (the modern application of the ancient paradigm).

Bauer's thesis raged like an epiphany through the halls of the academy. Finally, a convenient theory to explain how nasty so-called orthodox Christianity was. For those seeking yet one more modernist deconstruction of historic Biblical Christianity (such as Rudolf Bultmann, Helmut Koester, James M. Robinson, James D. G. Dunn, Elaine Pagels), Bauer was a God-send. Just what the unorthodox doctor ordered. A prescription that would poison orthodoxy once and for all.

Robinson picked Bauer apart piece by piece until his theory was in shambles. And the key to Robinson's deconstruction of Walter Bauer?—primary documents. Carefully sifting the sources of the first three Christian centuries, Robinson demonstrated that Christian heresy was just that—a departure from the well established and accepted Christian orthodoxy—itself derived from Christ Jesus himself, the NT apostles and their writings.

With the present volume under review, Robinson now lays his ax to the root of yet more absurd revisionism—this time as it relates to Antioch (where believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ were first called "Christians", Acts 11:26) and her early 2nd century bishop, Ignatius. Once again playing the role of the ornery contrarian, Robinson ventures into the fray to slay the agenda-mongers hip and thigh. And just what is the nature of this fray? Without the jargon of obfuscation so typical of so-called scholarly and academic discussions, the battle is over whether or not Christianity is distinct from Judaism or whether they are joint religious varieties of multi-cultural Semitism made ever more religiously syncretistic and correct by Greco-Roman mythopoeism. In other words, much current asinine 'scholarship' rejects the terms "Judaism" and "Christianity" because these two groups show religious similarities, not theological dissimilarities. Thus, if Ignatius in his primary document epistles does assert dissimilarities between Judaism and Christianity (in fact, asserts that Christianity replaces Judaism and Judaism is a distinct and separate religion), our modern effete 'scholars' will (in effect) call him a bigot and a liar, or massage his vocabulary into pluralistic religious mush.

Such fatuous modern academic narcissism is not scholarship; it is the re-imaging of Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch in the likeness of the particular "me" who is writing to justify this specious nonsense. Says Robinson, all of this revisionism is agenda in search of a "religious polysystem" (219, borrowing from Daniel Boyarin), which (surprise! surprise!) makes 1st and 2nd century religion look just like avant-garde 20th and 21st century religious multi-culturalism. And, of course, Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch must be deconstructed to this agenda in order to reconstruct Ignatius and Christianity in the image of contemporary cultural religiosity (the socialist state is 'god'; the welfare department is 'savior'; the liberal mass media is the infallible 'interpreter';

the tyrannical 'democratic' multi-millionaire icons and their despotic groupies are the 'church'; the sacred hour is the 'evening news'; the authoritative text is the ever evolving 'word' from the scions of liberal socialism; and the sacraments are the 'subsidies' and 'graft' which the ruling elite distribute to the robotic peons under their thumb—peons kept nursing at the teat of the almighty state by its messiahs).

Robinson's thesis does not surprise us—at least, those of us who read primary documents (like the NT and Ignatius's letters). Especially students of Geerhardus Vos who have been sated with the "new" thing God in his Triune Being has done down through the history of redemption. The "new thing" to which the NT apostles invite all religious systems—Jewish and pagan alike—is the eschatological grace of heaven's eternally Only-Begotten Son of heaven's eternally Begetting Father via heaven's eternally Proceeding Spirit of regeneration. Here is life eternal for Jew and pagan alike—union with God the Son, communion with God the Father, fellowship with God the Holy Spirit and life (eternal life) in the city of that Triune God—life (eternal life) in the Kingdom of Heaven. To our modern culture as to Ignatius's culture as to the apostle Paul's culture—come and welcome to the new creation in Christ Jesus, who is the fullness of the OT Scriptures (as he is the fullness of the Godhead) and eternal life from the dead in his eschatological resurrection from the dead.

But what about Ignatius himself? What does Robinson teach us? First (as Robinson details), there have been several fresh Ignatius studies in recent years, including monographs by Allen Brent (*Ignatius of Antioch: A Martyr Bishop and the Origin of Episcopacy* [2009]), Paul Trebilco (*The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* [2004]), John-Paul Lotz (*Ignatius and Concord* [2007]) and Charles Brown (*The Gospel and Ignatius of Antioch* [2000]). Robinson assesses them critically. Second, the question of the extent of persecution of Christians in the 1st and 2nd century A.D. Roman empire continues to be the focus of penetrating research—most recently John Granger Cook, *Roman Attitudes Toward the Christians: From Claudius to Hadrian* (2010); we await the forthcoming *An Anatomy of Persecution* by Oliver Nicholson. As a case in point, the martyrdom of Ignatius focuses our attention upon the 'local' vs. 'ecumenical' suppression of Christianity by the Roman imperium. Robinson's study inclines the answer to the 'local' side of the debate.

Ignatius was bishop of Antioch, arrested by Roman authority, transported across Asia Minor in chains, embraced his destiny as conformity to Christ in seven letters and likely died in the arena at Rome.[1] But what precisely was his offense, such that Rome would arrest and execute him? Robinson concludes that Ignatius was the victim of Jewish and/or Greco-Roman hostility towards Christianity. Though "the puzzle of the [specific] crisis in Antioch remains unsolved" (201), Robinson contends that synagogue opposition to Christianity (they objected to the inclusion of Gentiles in the body of 'faith' without submission to Jewish ritual law, as well as [in their opinion] the demonic claims of Jesus of Nazareth—all this well-documented in the book of Acts) and Greco-Roman hostility to Christianity (because it was a religio-social force at odds with the established pagan state religion—all this well documented by Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Tacitus, Pliny, Trajan,

[1] Cf. my "Ignatius of Antioch." *The Outlook* 53/9 (November 2003): 10-13.

etc.) are the cusp if not the core of the answer. On either count (or both together), Ignatius was worthy of death. But Ignatius was the minister of a revolutionary "new" thing (149ff.)—proclaiming the passing away of Judaism in and through Christ Jesus, while opening the gates of heaven to Jew and Gentile equally in and through Jesus Christ. Judaism would have none of this; paganism would have none of it either because neither would acknowledge the advent, claims and work of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. But for Ignatius, this was the only way to God and glory. The incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ made Judaism passé and paganism passé. The antithesis which is found in the Son of God and life in him embraces the eschatological, not the worldly (paganism); embraces the eschatological, not the earthly (Judaism). Ignatius stands at the "parting of the ways" in a twofold sense: Judaism has been superseded and transcended; paganism has been annulled and voided—both made "of none effect" by the gospel. A careful reading of the primary documents from Ignatius's pen reveals his possession of his Savior, his participation in the death and resurrection of his Savior, his identification with suffering on behalf of and in union with his Savior. And it is those primary documents which remain the martyr's witness against the revisionism of the post-modern era. Our thanks to Robinson for the magisterial volume; it has been worth the 20-year wait.

Let me conclude with some observations on the ecclesiological issue that surfaces in the title "bishop of Antioch". Robinson asks whether Ignatius was a bishop "in any meaningful sense" (2)? The answer is that he does use the term in his letters (95). Robinson then states that Ignatius "clearly views the bishop as the primary authority in the early church" (97). And yet, on the very next page, Robinson admits that Ignatius constantly calls for "submission to the presbytery" in his primary documents. How do we reconcile these two ecclesiological elements? Robinson leans towards episcopacy (with Allen Brent). But may we play the rôle of contrarian at this point? The duplicate or twofold language or vocabulary (terminology) here is no less confusing than that of the inspired apostle Paul in his Pastoral Epistles (more primary documents!). Paul uses "bishop" and "presbyter" as interchangeable synonyms (cf. Titus 1:5, 7; cpr. Acts 20:17, 28). The Episcopal term suggests shepherding; the Presbyterian term suggests rule. One presbyter may become *primus inter pares* for the sake of order in the presbytery. That is, what modern Presbyterians may call the "moderator" is not an elevation of office or authority—it is a "one among equals" keeping of "good order" in the meeting of the presbytery. Hence, Ignatius uses the title/term "bishop" to indicate his rôle within the "presbytery". He is *primus inter pares* ("one among equals") and not *primus supra pares* ("one above/over equals").

Ignatius was a Pauline Presbyterian as well as a Pauline Episcopalian. The nuance is not in ecclesiastical power, but in ecclesiastical rôle and function. In sum, in this reviewer's opinion, Ignatius's ecclesiology, rightly understood, is no threat to historic Presbyterian polity. He is as Pauline as our Presbyterian forbears.

—James T. Dennison, Jr.