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Description

_Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal_ is the online theological journal of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. _Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal_ is provided freely by RPTS faculty and other scholars to encourage the theological growth of the church in the historic, creedal, Reformed faith. _Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal_ is published biannually online at the RPTS website in html and pdf. Readers are free to use the journal and circulate articles in written, visual, or digital form, but we respectfully request that the content be unaltered and the source be acknowledged by the following statement. “Used by permission. Article first appeared in _Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal_, the online theological journal of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (rpts.edu).”

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As I write this edition of *From Rutherford Hall*, my heart is full of praise and thanksgiving to God. We have hosted this week a visiting team from the Commission on Accrediting of the Association of Theological Schools. It has been a marvelous experience to tell the team of the wonderful blessings of God over the years since we were last reaccredited.

Among several other things, the visiting team came to chapel today, and they heard a wonderfully clear and Spirit-filled gospel presentation from Romans 4 by one on our graduating seniors. How great it was to have the ATS team here today to hear such a clear gospel presentation!

Accounting language is used in Romans 4 to discuss the heavenly transaction that goes on when a sinner repents of his sin. Depending on your translation, words like “credit”, “impute”, “count”, or “reckon” are used to describe what scholars call the doctrine of double imputation. The first transaction for those of us who repent of our sin and put our trust in Christ is that our sins are placed on Christ at Calvary. He who knew no sin became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21). All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned to our own way, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

Simultaneously, the perfect righteousness of Christ is credited to our account. Christ, the last Adam, did what the first Adam did not do—He lived a life of sinless perfection. And the righteousness of that perfect life is now credited to us through faith in Him. To finish II Corinthians 5:21 referenced above, He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. When we were hopelessly in debt with no means of repayment, God got us out of debt by placing our sin on His Son. But then, wonder of wonders, He gives to us a bank full of Christ’s righteousness. Amazing grace!

We know that the visiting team was glad to be with us. They told us so over and over again. And we were glad to host them. And personally, I was especially glad that they got to hear the gospel. That is what we need to hear from our pulpits week after week. As you read through this journal, remember where it all begins. It begins before the foundation of the world and is worked out in time and history as God takes away our hopeless indebtedness and replaces it with a bank full of Christ’s righteousness. Praise God for such a great salvation.

For Christ and His Kingdom,

Jerry F. O’Neill
A Recent French Reformed Theologian:  
Auguste Lecerf  
Prof. Thomas G. Reid, Jr.  

Librarian and Registrar  
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Introduction

Around 1930, Auguste Lecerf opened the door of his apartment on the Left Bank of Paris to find a female professor standing before him. She was interested in talking with someone about Calvinism, and a friend had suggested that she seek out Lecerf, whom the friend termed “the last of the French Calvinists.” But strikingly, Lecerf has proved to be, not the last of the French Calvinists, but the first of the modern French Calvinists.

Lecerf's Life

Ironically, Auguste Lecerf was born, not in France or in a French colony, but in London, England, and did not have a drop of French blood in his veins. His mother, Elisa Romenetti, had a British and Italian ancestry. His father was a Scottish nobleman, with whom his mother had an affair while she and her husband took refuge in England after they participated in the ill-fated Paris Commune of 1871. Lecerf was born on 18 September 1872, and his mother’s husband, René Lecerf, permitted Auguste to use his name.

Auguste Lecerf’s parents were not simply irreligious; they were consciously anti-clerical and atheistic. To their dismay, they discovered that Auguste was plagued by religious questions. “Why”, he would ask, “do the church bells ring?” When they could not answer his question, Auguste would burst into tears.

The Lecerf family took advantage of an amnesty and returned to Paris. There, Auguste’s religious interest took a serious turn. At the age of twelve, he passed a Protestant Sunday School in session. Entering, Auguste was challenged by the message of the teacher. Later, Auguste purchased a Bible, and began to read it. Years later, he was to confess that it was on reading Romans 9 through 11 that we was converted to Christ, which is not so surprising when one considers that his father’s family was Jewish.

As a teenager, Auguste Lecerf was browsing along the banks of the Seine River in Paris, when he spotted a worn copy of Calvin’s magnum opus, The Institutes of the Christian Religion. Perusing the book, he felt drawn to its clear teaching on divine sovereignty, just what had struck

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1 While this story is included in several studies about Lecerf, I have not been able to establish an authoritative source for it, nor its date or the identity of the female professor.

2 Thomas Reid, Interview with Pierre Marcel, 7 June 1978.


him several years before in reading Romans. Lecerf’s theological identity had now been established: he was a Calvinist.

Falling seriously sick when he was seventeen, Lecerf beseeched God to heal him, with the promise to consecrate his life to God’s service if God responded to his prayer with healing. Auguste recovered, and, searching for an avenue of service, he spent a short time at a Roman Catholic school near Angers, in the Loire River Valley southwest of Paris. Dissatisfied there, he returned to Paris, and was baptized and admitted as a communicant member of the Reformed Church of the [Holy] Spirit.

Believing that the Lord was leading him into the ministry, Lecerf entered the Preparatory Theological School at Batignolles in the Paris region, despite strong parental opposition. Immediately following, he studied at the Protestant Theological Faculty (or Seminary) of Paris from 1891 to 1895, where “he was noted both for his exceptional gifts for grammar and philology and by his passion for questions about dogmatics.” In order to more fully discuss theological questions, Lecerf formed a small study group in 1893 – the so-called “Calvinistic Trinity” – with two other students. The Faculty, established by and for theological liberals, was hardly a happy place for the young Calvinist. Yet, to earn his baccalaureate degree in theology, Lecerf presented a distinctively Calvinistic thesis on “Determinism and Responsibility in Calvin’s Theology”. The quality of the work both theologically and technically is striking.

The Seminary refused to permit Lecerf to continue on to his doctorate, due especially to his rejection of evolutionary theory. Already married (in 1893) and father of a son Jean (in 1894), Lecerf entered the pastoral ministry. Three daughters were later born to his marriage to Andrea Elisabeth Céré: Renée (1896), Esther (1897), and Jeanne (1899). Following Mrs. Lecerf’s death in 1953, one of Lecerf’s disciples, Jean G. H. Hoffmann (1906-1987) bore this witness to her important role: “The person of Madame Lecerf is inseparable from that of her husband, with whom she shared the struggles to manifest in all its purity a theological viewpoint to which the whole atmosphere of the century was excluded from the outset.” But Mrs. Lecerf was no more an unpleasant ideologue than was her husband. Hoffmann goes on in his eulogy to ask, “How many times have we not found from her understanding and true sympathy?”

Although Lecerf was closer theologically to the Evangelical Reformed Churches than to the Liberal Reformed Churches, the former denomination refused him entry, while the second received him, since their largeness of spirit permitted each pastor to preach and minister as he chose best. In that context and time, liberals were “liberals”! Lecerf was ordained on 2 February 1895.

6 Lecerf, Etudes Calvinistes, 6.
7 “Auguste Lecerf”, Rapport annuel, 11.
8 Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français 87, no. 2 (avril-juin 1938): 226-227. The translation from French into English is the author’s, here and throughout the paper.
9 The thesis was published, as was expected at the time: Le déterminisme et la responsabilité dans le système de Calvin (Paris: Henri Jouve, 1895).
10 Interview with Marcel.
11 Renée and Jeanne died rather young of tuberculosis.
1896 in his home congregation, the Reformed Church of the Spirit in Paris. He served as auxiliary pastor for one year, 1895-1896, in Elbeuf in the Department of Seine-Maritime. Next, Lecerf was named full pastor at St. Lô-Le Chefresne, in the Department of the Manche, where he ministered from 1896 to 1902. Despite the fact that these two churches were in the liberal camp, and despite three liberal pastors having served before him, Lecerf discovered to his astonishment that both parishes were filled with people who were Trinitarian in their beliefs. Those wily liberals had mouthing enough orthodox words that the faithful had naively taken them in their Biblical sense and thus remained orthodox. During Lecerf’s next pastorate, at Courseulles-sur-Mer in the Department of Calvados (1902-1908), the state and the church were separated in 1905. He and his Courseulles Church associated with the churches in the third French Reformed synod, the Jarnac Synod, before returning to the Liberal Reformed Synod in 1912 with the rest of the Jarnac Synod. In Normandy, one the local priests was saying black masses; twice, Lecerf calmed a lynch mob searching to kill the priest. His next pastorate took him to Lunéville in the Department of Meurthe-et-Moselle, from 1908 until 1914.

Despite his intellectual bent, Lecerf was an excellent pastor, although not a great orator. Years later, he urged his students to engage in the following routine: arise at five in the morning, study Hebrew for one hour, study Greek for one hour, and pray for one hour. He modestly admitted that he had only followed his own counsel about half the time.

At the outbreak of World War I, Lecerf was called up as a chaplain, never to return to the pastorate. At the close of the War, he moved with his family to Paris, where his hope of devoting himself to theological studies was limited by financial woes, necessitating that Lecerf take up several jobs. He served three institutions as part-time Protestant chaplain. In 1922, Lecerf began work as an “agent” of the Protestant Bible Society of Paris, where his linguistic gifts were put to work on its mammoth project to prepare a Centennial Bible in honor of the Society’s one hundred years of ministry. Ironically, throughout his tenure at the Bible Society, Lecerf opposed the Society’s liberal translation policies.

From 1922 on, Lecerf taught at his alma mater, the Protestant Seminary of Paris, which described itself as “a Faculty which has the honor to incorporate within its bosom representatives of all the currents of Protestant thought.” Lecerf began by teaching Greek and English, but he later provided instruction also in Hebrew and Latin; he could speak fluently in English, and read Dutch and German as well. Several students requested a more regular instruction in dogmatics from a Reformed perspective. Thus were born the weekly “free” lectures in Reformed theology which Lecerf gave to large audiences until 1936. Lecerf earned his Th.M. and Ph.D. degrees at the Seminary in 1931 and 1938. In the former case, the candidate, before the public defense of his thesis, presented a public lecture on a theological subject given to him on short notice. Pierre Marcel reports,

Dean H[enri] Monnier chose the subject of the public lecture ... He gave Lecerf

13 On D-Day in 1944, Canadian troops came ashore near Courseulles on Juno Beach. Both St. Lô and Courseulles were devastated in the intense fighting following the Allied invasion.


15 Interview with Marcel.


17 Completed only in 1947, twenty-nine years after the centenary.

intentionally the most difficult question in Reformed theology: prevenient grace. Auguste Lecerf, with his usual aplomb, having suspected the intentions of his friend, confided to us a week before he had been given the subject, “I suspect Henri Monnier wants to give me the subject of prevenient grace. It is the most difficult question. There is nothing about it in the Reformed bibliography.”

Despite the difficulty of the task before him, Lecerf lectured, according to one eyewitness, “brilliantly” on “common grace”, even granting with a big grin that God worked even in Arminians.

Such a talent even the Paris Faculty could not suppress forever. So, in 1936, at the age of sixty-four, Lecerf became Professor of Reformed Dogmatics. He thus entered a period of public notice and acceptance beyond anything he had hitherto enjoyed. Students reported later that Lecerf’s theological lectures were spiced with memorable comments like, “Men, when you preach, you do not know what you are accomplishing,” and “Men, never doubt the power of the Holy Spirit.” Pierre Marcel writes of his favorite Lecerf quotation:

In a formula both striking and accurate, without the slightest contradiction, both on the theological and psychological planes as well as the philosophical, professor Lecerf loved to repeat, “We believe in a God sufficiently powerful – because He is all-powerful – to realize freely concerning creatures what he wills necessarily concerning Himself.”

Marcel adds, “Voila the all-powerful God, the Scriptural God. There is no other.”

Lecerf supported the move toward organic unity among the divided Protestant denominations in France, leading to the formation of the Reformed Church in France in 1938. He argued that the unity of the church should take priority over its purity, the latter being “something eschatological”. Lecerf served as a member of the united denomination’s Commission on Female Ministries. Lecerf prepared a report on such ministries in the New Testament, observing that, “Women can speak in reunions which do not have the character of an official convocation of the people of faith ... It seems to us that one can take from the preceding texts applicable directives for female ministries of charity and even teaching in the contexts of evangelization, missions, and catechism.”

Lecerf attended the First International Conference of Calvinists in London in 1932, where he spoke on “The History of the Reformed Faith in France”. Lecerf was present at the Second Congress in The Netherlands, in October, 1934, where he considered the subject, “The

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20 His address was printed in La revue réformée 11, no. 3 (1960): 27-33.

21 Interview with Marcel.

22 Pierre Ch. Marcel, Review of Calvin directeur d’ames, by Jean-Daniel Benoit, in La revue réformée 1, no. 1 (avril 1950), 44.

23 Ibid.


Sovereignty of God according to Calvinism”.

Lecerf co-directed the Calvinistic Theology Congress in Geneva in 1936, where he addressed the subject of “Election and Sacrament”. Lecerf travelled to Edinburgh, Scotland, in July, 1938, for the final Calvinistic Conference before the outbreak of World War Two, bringing greetings from “the members of the Calvinist Society of France [and] of the Calvinistic probationers and students of the Faculty of Paris ... [and] in the name of congregations and also of isolated believers who share our faith.”

Lecerf received two honorary doctorates, the first in 1937 from St. Mary’s College, the theological faculty of the University of St. Andrew’s in Scotland, and the second the following year, from the University of Debreczen, Hungary, of the Reformed Churches in Hungary, although he was unable to travel there to receive the award in person, due to tensions in Europe.

Lecerf was a fervent patriot and, burdened by the French defeat of 1940 and weakened by the privations of the German occupation, he died rather suddenly in Paris on 1 September 1943, aged seventy.

**Lecerf’s Writings**

Auguste Lecerf’s first published work, as already noticed, was his undergraduate thesis. Observing all of his writings, one must conclude that, “the theological corpus of Lecerf represents a remarkable unity,” as had the work of John Calvin four centuries earlier.

In his undergraduate thesis, Lecerf intended to defend Calvin’s concept of both “absolute determinism” and “complete responsibility”, the expressions which Lecerf chose to describe Calvin’s thinking. Lecerf contrasts Calvin’s view with the slightly divergent positions of fellow reformers Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Martin Luther (1483-1546), and Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), but especially with the opposing viewpoint of the Dutch theologian Albert Pighius (1490-1542), with whom Calvin had conducted a debate by pamphlet.

Most of the Protestant reformers begin their reference to God’s predestination and man’s responsibility with reference to God’s omniscience. Calvin prefers to start with man’s sense of dependence upon God. Because men believe, salvation is all of grace; because not all believe, predestination must be true.

God’s providence is His absolute will, “but this action, purely regulatory, does not carry any

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29 “Auguste Lecerf”, Rapport annuel, 11.

30 Lecerf, Le déterminisme et la responsabilité, 56.

31 Ibid., 13-16.

32 Ibid., 17.

33 Ibid., 20.
moral transformation in the world.”34 But such a transformation of man is vitally necessary, as God left man free to fall into sin, and man, represented in Adam, did so.35 “Original sin makes us truly worthy of the wrath of God and is indeed the pivot of man’s responsibility.”36 Nevertheless, God can accomplish much in man short of regeneration, but only irresistible grace transforms a person into what pleases God.

Having described Calvin’s method and system, Lecerf proceeds to defend Calvin’s view against five major attacks. First, to those who argue that predestination leads to lawlessness, Lecerf critiques the false assumption that to struggle against sin is useless, if one is elect. Doing so forgets that election has its goal in the believer’s sanctification.37

Second, to those who maintain that predestination requires that God either defend evil or He is a hypocrite, Lecerf has recourse to distinguishing the two wills of God, the revealed will and the secret will, while insisting that, because God is One, “the will of God is simple and one.”38

Third, to those who ask how people can be punished for sin if they are predestined, Lecerf explains, “God does not create evil in us; he finds it … This voluntary perversity, it is we.”39

Fourth, to those who observe than man has a sense of being free, undercutting if not contradicting predestination, Lecerf responds: Just because one does not feel determined does mean that one is not.40

And fifth, to those who argue that, if God is sovereign in predestination, then we should blame Him and not the sinner for sin, Lecerf replies and concludes his work: “To believe in predestination in the Calvinistic sense is to believe in the justice of God, despite all appearances[,] and to affirm thus His right to be our legislator and our judge.”41

Auguste Lecerf published only a few articles before he settled in Paris. During his quarter of a century there, he wrote many articles for virtually all the French Protestant magazines, usually in defense of the Calvinistic position on some theological question. He also penned a few articles of Biblical exposition and some concerning current affairs. His few book reviews were almost exclusively concerned with philosophical tomes. Lecerf’s output may have been relatively modest, but he wrote in an easy style that was understandable to the average church member.

The only other books which Lecerf published during his lifetime were the two volumes of his

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34 Ibid., 30, 33, 34.
35 Ibid., 38–42.
36 Ibid., 42.
37 Ibid., 69.
38 Ibid., 72.
39 Ibid., 88.
40 Ibid., 78.
41 Ibid., 121.
Introduction to Reformed Dogmatics in French. The English translation by André Schlemmer was published posthumously in London by Lutterworth Press in 1949 in one volume. The first French volume represents the thesis he submitted in 1931 to the Paris Faculty for the equivalent of the Th.M. degree, the second for his doctorate in 1938. Together, the two volumes represent a monumental effort to found the Christian religion on such a basis that it will appeal to modern, post-Kantian thinkers. These volumes show their author to have been widely read in both modern theology and philosophy, for only such a scholar could have attempted such a work. Indeed, Lecerf was part of the active philosophical scene in Paris between the Wars, being a good friend of Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), among many others.

The Introduction is not easy reading. Prof. John Murray (1898-1975) of Westminster Seminary, hardly a master of light prose himself, made this observation in his review of the English translation of the Introduction. Here is a list of the most important difficulties. First, the structure is not always clear, with Lecerf providing extended book reviews of often obscure volumes. Second, the language is very sophisticated, both theologically and philosophically. Third, the subject matter demanded that Lecerf introduce several substantive ideas from English or Dutch into French nomenclature. Nonetheless, Lawrence Gilmore, writing in the Westminster Theological Journal of the two French volumes, opines: “Lecerf’s work on dogmatics is a gain for the Reformed theology. Like other real Calvinism of the present day[,] it is less showy than the dialectical writings, but it represents genuine progress.”

As its name implies, the Introduction is not truly a Dogmatics, for it was concerned with the prolegomena issues of systematic theology. In the face of the long-entrenched French rationalistic tradition, Lecerf tries to establish the possibility of religious knowledge. In the face of rationalism’s infiltration of Christian theology, Lecerf attempts to show Calvinism to be the only true and Biblical religious knowledge. Thus, his work might be better characterized as a philosophy of religion rather than as a Dogmatics as such.

The first volume of the Introduction is particularly characterized by an apologetical concern. In it, Lecerf attempts to determine whether religious knowledge is even possible. This question he answers affirmatively by the use of what has been called a “moderate critical realism”. Gustave Lagny describes this concept as follows:

**Realism**: for faith is considered as the organ of true knowledge and not only ethical experience. **Moderate**: because the knowledge of faith is not only analogical; it is only

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43 Born into a Protestant family, the famous French philosopher converted to Roman Catholicism.


46 Pierre Bergelin made this observation about the first volume in “Le christianisme et la philosophie”, *Foi et vie* 33, no. 41 (septembre 1932): 661.

the relative knowledge of mysteries. Critical: (Lecerf sometimes says transcendental): for, because of total depravity, religious knowledge is acquired exclusively by faith, soli fide.48

The second volume of the Introduction is easier reading than the first. Lecerf begins by setting out his methodology and his apologetic stance. In the second part of the volume, he contrasts theism, deism, and pantheism, the three sole possibilities, as he sees it, for Christian thought. Next, he dismisses the agnostic and atheistic pretensions of possessing the truth. Lecerf then deals with the problem of determinism and indeterminism. He concludes that the sovereignty of God frees man from the horns of this dilemma: “the problem of evil”, for instance, has been transformed into “the mystery of evil”.49

Lecerf maintains that Dogmatics must be “orthodox”, that is, it must be in agreement with the main lines of Christian belief as set out in the creeds of the early church. And Dogmatics must be “Protestant”, for Scripture alone is our authority.50

Lecerf weakens his argument in four ways. First, he is not content with B. B. Warfield’s classic formulation of the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible.51 For instance, he quotes approvingly Jan Ridderbos (1879-1960), who wrote, “Human languages ... are ... imperfect vehicles for the transmission of human thoughts and, a fortiori, divine thoughts.”52

Second, Lecerf was obviously moving from the semi-rationalist apologetics of nineteenth century Calvinism to the presuppositional apologetics of the twentieth.53 However, Lecerf continues to give man’s reason the formal possibility of discovering the truth, undercutting the fact of man’s total depravity.54 Indeed, volume 2 is better than volume 1 in this regard, showing progress in Lecerf’s thought in the six intervening years.

Third, Lecerf seems to have too much ignored the growing threat to Reformed orthodoxy from Karl Barth (1886-1968).55 While it is true that Lecerf could read Barth in the original German, it is also true that, “the influence of German or American theologians in French Protestantism is in direct relation with the moment of their translation.”56 Since Barth was not substantially translated into French until well into the 1930s, Lecerf believed that he could forego publicly

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49 Introduction II, 123.

50 Lecerf devotes several chapters to the subject of Scripture, considering its inspiration and authority, the canon of both Testaments, and the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, which convinces man that the Bible is the Word of God.


52 Lecerf, Introduction I, 246.

53 Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) and Gordon H. Clark (1902-1985) pioneered this apologetical stance, following Lecerf by a generation.


55 As late as 1938, Lecerf makes a soft remark about Barth as “the genial one restoring reforming theology”. Lecerf, Introduction II, 22.

criticizing Barth.57 Lecerf was privately critical of Barth,58 and told his classes in the early 1930s that “it is necessary to listen to Barth more as a ‘prophet’ than as a ‘dogmatician’.”59 Overall, in Lecerf’s extant writings, he is more critical of Puritanism than he is of Barthianism.

Fourth, Lecerf uncritically accepted Abraham Kuyper’s doctrine of “common grace”.60 Lecerf freely admitted the influence of the Dutch Reformed tradition on his thinking, including as well Valentin Hepp (1879-1950) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921),61 and many other Dutch Reformed names appear in Lecerf’s writings from the flourishing period in this tradition at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.62 French philosopher Alain Probst observes about Dutch neo-Calvinism, “Auguste Lecerf was very influenced by this current of confessional dogmatics.”63 Lecerf’s commitment to common grace is most obvious in his lectures, published posthumously, on “Sin and Grace”.64 In this long article, Lecerf teaches that Calvinists do not distinguish between the “pagan” and the “sacred”, but rather make the distinction between “particular grace” and “common grace”.65 Sin makes both kinds of “grace” necessary, since, where sin abounds, grace must abound even more (Romans 5:20), even if it is not salvific.66 Lecerf writes:

“Common grace” has for its field of action the temporal domain, and has for its goal to maintain or restore in sinful man the image of God in the large sense ... the religious and moral instincts. This grace engages the personal responsibility of the sinner when it puts him in the presence of the law and the Gospel ... because [this grace] formally brings to him the power, the ability, to obey. [Such grace] is resistible.67

The indebtedness of Lecerf to Kuyper is obvious here; this concept does not come from classic Calvinism, which has refrained from using the word “grace” (or its related terms) in any but a

57 Lecerf was succeeded as Professor of Reformed Dogmatics at the Protestant Seminary of Paris by the Barthian Pierre Maury (1890-1956). But even Barthianism ran out of steam in French Protestantism by the late 1950s, to be replaced by more radical dialectical theologies. Ibid., 326.

58 Letter of Marcel, 4.


60 Kuyper developed his thinking in the mammoth three volume set, De gemeene gratie (Leiden: Donner, 1902-1904), never translated into French.


65 Lecerf, Introduction II, 56.


salvific sense and confessionally limits God’s favor to the elect. 

The Introduction was intended to be just that. Lecerf prepared several chapters on various subjects within the theological encyclopedia, but he did not finish much of the project before his death. John Murray wrote, “We cannot but regret that the author [of the Introduction] had not furnished us with the fruit of his labors in the various loci of systematic theology.” Yet, the Introduction had its impact: Bassam Madany (1928– ), Arabic language broadcaster for decades on the Christian Reformed Church’s Back to God Hour, has written that, “The Lord used this book, as well as a study of Calvin’s correspondence, to bring me to a complete conversion to the Reformed faith.” Lecerf’s son Jean, late in his life, became a financial supporter of Madany’s work.

Some of the unpublished chapters in the Dogmatics were published posthumously, although Lecerf had prohibited their publication. Mrs. Lecerf gave permission for those he had prepared for publication to thus see the light of day. A number of Lecerf’s more significant published articles were gathered together by André Schlemmer (1890-1972) under the title Études Calvinistes (Calvinistic Studies) and published in 1949. A few of Lecerf’s articles were translated into English and published in The Evangelical Quarterly and other journals.

Following the publication of the English translation of the Introduction, both F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) and John Murray lamented in their reviews of that volume that Lecerf had not been sufficiently appreciated during his lifetime. More than seventy years later, the same can be said, especially outside the Francophone world.

Lecerf’s Influence

An anonymous reviewer in the Bulletin of the French Protestant Historical Society observed of Auguste Lecerf in 1932: “Does it not seem strange, and humiliating, in the homeland of Calvin, that pure[,] Calvinistic theology has not had a representative in a long time, since, can it be, Pierre du Moulin? There now exists an absolutely authentic one.” Du Moulin had died in 1658! But would Lecerf prove to be “the last of the Calvinists”?

For decades, Auguste Lecerf’s only open supporter in the French Reformed Churches had been

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68 Editor’s Note: This view presented by the author does not represent the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary on the subject of common grace, which is consistent with the Testimony of the RPCNA (16.4)

69 Murray, Review, 184.


71 Ibid., 26.


74 Bruce, Review, 69-70; Murray, Review, 184.

his seminary friend Marcel Cadix (1874-1951?), who presided at Lecerf’s internment. André Jundt (1877-1947), who taught alongside Lecerf at the Protestant Seminary, wrote in 1938 that Lecerf “defended this cause [Calvinism] for many years, during which he was almost its sole defender.”76

With his work in Paris among students from several institutions and especially from the Protestant Seminary, Lecerf’s influence in the lives of many of the future leaders of the French Reformed Churches grew into an identifiable movement. A periodic evening for theological discussion that the Lecerfs sponsored in their apartment developed into the French Calvinistic Society. The formal founding of the Society occurred on 10 December 1926, at the Library of the French Protestant Historical Society. Lecerf served as President, and Emile Doumergue was elected Honorary President. The Second Article of its statutes outlined these two goals for the Society: “To study and to propagate Calvinism, considered to be a strong and progressive element in Christian thought; to make known the person and works of Calvin and Calvinistic religious literature.”77 Article 3 committed the Society to working within the existing church structures, no matter what might happen, or had happened, to the church’s confession of faith.

The Society planned to work by means of conferences and publications of Calvin, Calviniana, and classic Reformed writers (Article 4). And so it republished, in modernized French, Calvin’s Catechism (with the Confession of La Rochelle and the Belgic Confession) in 1934,78 Calvin’s Thoughts on the Holy Spirit in 1936,79 and Calvin’s Institutes in four volumes from 1936 to 1939.80

The Society desired to have close contact with similar Reformed organizations in other countries, with a view to establishing a worldwide Reformed association (Article 5). The four Calvinistic conferences, held at London (1932), the Hague (1934), Geneva (1936), and Edinburgh (1938), were the first fruits of Lecerf’s and others’ dreams of such an organization. These Calvinists were to succeed only after World War II, with the founding of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action in 1955.81

The French Calvinistic Society almost immediately began publication of a Bulletin, with Lecerf as editor. He served in this capacity until his death; the Bulletin continued to be printed until 1946. It was published irregularly, especially during the War years.

Regular conferences, sponsored by the Society were held until the outbreak of World War II. The membership grew gradually from forty-four in July, 1927, to a peak of three hundred, as Lecerf’s Calvinistic movement progressed.82

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81 The Association seems to have disappeared during the 1980s (its International Reformed Bulletin ceased in 1981), not having survived into the second generation of its supporters.

82 The Society seems to have faded away in the 1970s as its first generation of leaders passed away.
The most prominent of Lecerf’s disciples for many years was Pierre Marcel, who should have succeeded Lecerf as Professor of Reformed Dogmatics at the Protestant Seminary, but was snubbed by the liberals. Lecerf had arranged for Marcel to study in the Netherlands with Herman Dooyeweerd at the Free University of Amsterdam, with that very goal in mind. Marcel remained in the pastorate for his entire life of ministry, much of it in St-Germain-en-Laye, west of Paris. Following the demise of the Bulletin of the French Calvinistic Society, he established La revue réformée in 1950, which has appeared four or five times yearly ever since. Within its pages, Marcel published the works of Lecerf which were essentially ready for the press before his death. Marcel also published translations of significant Reformed works from Dutch and English, such as by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and John Murray, as well as translations of important creedal documents such as the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Canons of Dordt in modern French. Finally, Marcel encouraged a generation of French Reformed writers to think and to write, by giving them a platform for their literary productions. Three of Marcel’s own books have been so significant that they have appeared in English translation: The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism; The Relevance of Preaching, and In God’s School: Foundations for Christian Life.

A little younger among the disciples of Lecerf was Pierre Courthial (1914-2009), who served as a pastor in the Ardeche Department, Lyon, and Paris, in which last congregation his parishioners included members of the Peugeot family of car manufacturers. In 1974, Courthial left his prominent position in Paris to serve as dean of a new Reformed Seminary in Aix-en-Provence. Following the reunion of so much of French Protestantism in 1938, a small remnant of the Evangelical Reformed Churches of France remained outside the united denomination. Two years later, they established a seminary in the university city of Aix-en-Provence. After functioning for a quarter of a century, the Seminary closed down, having never found a clear Reformed voice.

But the Evangelical Reformed Churches did not give up on theological education. The Seminary was reopened in 1974 with a new name declaring its Reformed theological convictions: The Free Reformed Faculty of Theology. Help from the United States through President Edmund Clowney (1917-2005) of Westminster Theological Seminary, and from the British Isles, the Netherlands, and French-speaking Switzerland, permitted the institution to survive and, in French terms, flourish. Before his death, Pierre Marcel transferred La revue réformée to the Reformed Seminary in Aix, which still publishes it. Over time, La revue réformée has become more distinctively French in the source of the majority of its articles, as more Reformed writers have become available to write for it. The Seminary established a publishing house, Éditions Kerygma, which has been very active in expanding the Reformed bibliography in the French language, particularly of modern language versions of Calvin’s commentaries.

83 London: James Clarke, 1953.
86 The Seminary did graduate Aaron Kayayan (1928-2008), who, during pastoral service in France, became the preacher for the French language Back to God Hour of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, eventually moving to the Chicago area. He produced a significant corpus of Reformed works, written and recorded.
87 In 2011, the name was changed to La Faculté Jean Calvin, the John Calvin Faculty.
Pierre Courthial not only wrote for *La revue réformée*, but also served on the editorial team of a monthly magazine *Ichthus*, which did much to popularize Calvinism in the French speaking world between 1970 and 1996. A number of books came from his pen during his decade of service in Aix-en-Provence and during the early years of his retirement.\(^{88}\)

Some other publishers have also arisen to meet the need for French Reformed books, one related to Evangelical Press in England led by Jean-Claude Souillot, and Excelsis, in the Drôme Department, which, however, mostly publishes non-Reformed literature.

But there remains no Reformed denomination in France today, although several have some desire to be so, including the remnant Evangelical Reformed Churches and La Mission Timothée (The Timothy Mission), which is Reformed Baptist in its theological orientation.

It is clear that Lecerf’s reformational movement has experienced very mixed results, which prompts the following question: is there anything in Lecerf’s theology and conduct which has inhibited the growth of the influence of Calvinism in France and the Francophone world?

One possibility is Lecerf’s view of Scripture. In his zeal to avoid what he considered a mechanistic concept of the inspiration of the Bible among some seventeenth century Reformed theologians, Lecerf all but admits that there are errors in the Bible, though what he terms “small ones”.\(^{89}\) Such admissions could do nothing but weaken the movement against the continuing frontal attacks on Scripture which French Calvinists have endured.

Second, Lecerf did not distinguish clearly enough between his own theology and that of Karl Barth, until so late that Barth’s expanding influence quickly surpassed his own. As late as 1936, Lecerf viewed the Barthians as co-belligerents with him and his Calvinistic associates against the reigning liberal establishment.

Third, Lecerf was too polite to his non-Calvinistic theological foes, making it seem as if the issues which divided them were simple ones of little importance. Lecerf claimed in 1935, “We do not judge heretics, neither the modernists; we do not say that they do not have the Holy Spirit.”\(^{90}\) However, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) had trenchantly pointed out more than a decade earlier in his book *Christianity and Liberalism* that the two viewpoints constituted two different religions.\(^{91}\)

Fourth, Lecerf did not have a clear ecclesiology, which would lead to the formation of a truly Reformed Church in France. For instance, he interpreted the Parable of the Yeast (Matthew 13:31-43) as if the loaf is anything that claims to be a church, the yeast is the Calvinist.\(^{92}\) Jesus

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\(^{91}\) J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923). I have found no references to Machen in Lecerf’s papers, although many to Machen’s professor B. B. Warfield (1851-1921).

\(^{92}\) Lecerf, *Introduction II*, 218.
Himself interpreted this parable to express the idea that the Christian serves like yeast in the context of the world, not the church. Related to this weakness is Lecerf’s embrace of Kuyper’s “common grace” idea, which tends to break down the delineation between the church and the world.

Fifth, Lecerf simply did not write and speak enough. Buried in the pastoral activities of successive, remote parishes and effectively silenced by the church authorities for decades, Lecerf did not have the time to see his movement firmly established before the onslaught of World War II rendered him largely silent under the German occupation. For instance, had he completed his intended Reformed Dogmatics, the movement would have been greatly to see his movement firmly established strengthened.

But Lecerf did leave behind a legacy, perhaps more precious than many books. He left behind people, French men and women, who had been searching for Biblical Christianity and had found it through his works, something that has continued in the past seventy years through the legacy of Lecerf. We are now well into the third generation of those whom Lecerf has influenced. Much remains to be done; indeed, much can be done, as the sovereign God of Lecerf blesses such efforts.

Pierre Marcel was once asked why Lecerf had enjoyed such an impact in so many lives in such difficult circumstances. He replied, “Auguste Lecerf incarnated his message.” Not too shabby an epitaph!

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93 Interview with Marcel.
An Excerpt:
From Inscrutability to Concursus

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Introduction

Benjamin B. Warfield has always been a favorite theologian of mine. As a seminary student, I heard the likes of R. C. Sproul and Sinclair Ferguson offer their own admiration for this great man. At the time, none of my peers seemed to know much about him personally. Perhaps the only story I heard was that of his husbandly devotion to his beloved and invalid wife, Annie. However, the writings of Warfield were most impressive to me. Here was a brilliant man with a balance of wit and wisdom. At one moment, he could pierce the heart of the argument with theological acumen while in the next explain that the arguers had retrieved their logic from the wastebasket of the past and wrapped it in the swaddling clothes of rationalism before offering it to the church as a “new idea.” Warfield had the gift of challenging theological nonsense. We need that today.

So, when Dr. Lane G. Tipton suggested that I do a little digging in order to discover the identity of that “certain school of writers” Warfield mentions who appealed to the divine-human personality to explain the Bible as a divine-human book I was hooked. However, that initial question led me to think not only about the analogy that Warfield used to describe the Divine-human relationship in the authorship of the Bible but the mode of inspiration itself. And what I have uncovered from the primary sources is a picture of a theologian doing theology at an extremely high level.

Archibald Alexander Hodge had invited young Warfield into a theological controversy with Union Theological Seminary and particularly Charles Briggs. Both Hodge and Warfield described the American theological landscape at that time with regard to inspiration as underdeveloped and in need of improvement. Warfield would invest nearly the remainder of his life in this work. Consequently, Warfield’s doctrine of Scripture might rightly be called a doctrine under theological construction.

However, before the eyebrows begin to rise, let me explain what I mean. When Warfield was twenty-nine years old, Western Theological Seminary called him to the chair of New Testament Literature and Exegesis. During his inaugural address, he said of the Westminster Standards, “I sign these standards not as a necessary form which must be submitted to, but gladly and willingly as the expression of a personal and cherished conviction.” In other words, for Warfield, the confessional standards of the Westminster Assembly supplied both a theologically orthodox place to stand and room to move. Therefore, the construction that we will witness is an exegetically, Biblically, apologetically, and confessionally orthodox construction, but it is construction nonetheless.

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2 Ibid, 419.
I realize that what I offer in the following pages may be described as a new perspective on Benjamin B. Warfield. However, I would describe it a bit differently. I have gotten close enough to the man to see how human he really was, and that has simply added to my already extensive admiration. Warfield began his career faithful to the Scriptures and the standards of the church; and as he matured in both life and faith, he grew to love both more and more, not less. Of course, he did not love the standards because they were equal to the Scripture, but because the standards are the norma normata or the rule that is ruled by the norma normans, which is, of course, Scripture. Warfield is the kind of model we need today. That is, we need men like him, men who end their career with more love for God’s Word than when they started. Though the limitations and failures of this work are, of course, my own, it is this Warfield that I hope you will see in these pages.

The World Closer to Home

In 1874, Henry B. Smith, who had studied the new methods in Germany, retired from his post at Union Theological Seminary due to ill health. Smith believed that Charles August Briggs was the right man to replace him. Charles Briggs, having graduated from Union Theological Seminary and having studied for three years in Germany, was strongly recommended by Smith and Philip Schaff for the position of professor of Hebrew and cognate languages at Union Theological Seminary. Briggs happily took up Smith’s mantle, determined to be an advocate for the critical methods he had learned while abroad.

Briggs was the type of man who had no shortage of political savvy or personal determination. Having failed to establish an international theological journal with Scottish cooperation, Briggs saw an opportunity at home. Realizing in the wake of the New School/Old School reunion of 1869 that the opportunity was ripe to establish a forum wherein the methods of historical criticism could be freely aired and judged, Briggs acted.

After Briggs’s appointment, he urged President William Adams of Union Theological Seminary to write Princeton Theological Seminary, suggesting the creation of a theological journal for both institutions to oversee. The purpose of the journal would be “to treat all subjects in a broad and catholic spirit, comprehending those historical phases of Calvinism which combined in the Presbyterian Church at the reunion.” Princeton agreed and a New York publishing company distributed the first edition of the Presbyterian Review on January 11, 1880, to several hundred subscribers.

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6 Mark S. Massa, Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 51.

7 Calhoun, Princeton Seminary, 83.


9 Calhoun, Princeton Seminary, 84.
In keeping with the journal’s aim “to give the freshest results of Biblical criticism and historical investigation,” and his own desire to vindicate Biblical criticism in the Presbyterian Church, Briggs submitted, for the October 1880 issue, a historical account of the William Robertson Smith trial in Scotland.10 Smith had been summoned before the ecclesiastical bar for teaching and popularizing in essays, books, and most visibly, the Encyclopedia Britannica, German critical conclusions about the Hebrew Scriptures.11 According to Briggs, of all the various articles written by Smith, “the one on the Bible, gave great offence” to the orthodox contingent in the church for three reasons:

(1) By their bold and fearless rejection of views long established in the church, and regarded by most people as inseparable from orthodox views of the inspiration and authority of the Bible as the Word of God; (2) by the confident and assured statement of opinions that were strange to the British and American public as if they were unquestionable and accepted by all competent scholars; (3) by the bald statement of theories that were ordinarily associated with Foreign Rationalists in their attacks on the Christian religion, without those qualifications and explanations that would be expected from an evangelical Presbyterian, in separating himself from them.12

Briggs’s agreement with Smith manifested itself in the tone and content of the article. For example, with a stroke of the pen he dismissed “the competency of the church courts to judge the veracity of the complicated new critical theories.”13

In Briggs’s zeal, he played his cards for all to see. The statement went beyond the purview of the journal’s stated purpose, and more to the point, beyond the judgment of Briggs’s coeditor, A. A. Hodge. Not surprisingly, Princeton Seminary’s A. A. Hodge responded with a note suggesting disagreement with Briggs’s assessment of the case. Perhaps Hodge expected Briggs to withdraw the article, but retreat was not in the script that Briggs was writing.

After personal correspondence, it was agreed that a full and frank discussion of the issue that had vexed the Scottish church should be dealt with in a series of eight articles, to begin in April 1881, only after the Scottish church had decided the fate of Robertson Smith.14 Both “sides,” Hodge, Briggs, and two additional scholars each of their choosing, would reasonably and calmly argue their case. And so, the incident began a remarkable exchange of essays in the Presbyterian Review from April 1881 to April 1883, not to mention the introduction of a new and welcomed voice into the discussion.

The opening salvo in the series came from A. A. Hodge. The article was simply titled “Inspiration.” Hodge chose to write the first part providing a definition of inspiration and exfoliating its presuppositions, genesis, and emphasis. For the second portion, which would be apologetic in nature, Hodge secured the help of a young theologian by the name of Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. And so began a theological rivalry that would continue for at least a decade.

13 Calhoun, Princeton Seminary, 84–85.
14 Massa, Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism, 57–58.
Warfield and Briggs and Inspiration

The series of articles decided upon by Hodge and Briggs moved ahead as planned, and for three years the debate was carried on in, for the most part, scholarly and measured tones by several well-selected exegetes and theologians. The acerbity of Briggs himself stood out as the primary exception. Following the Hodge/Warfield article published in the April 1881 edition of the *Presbyterian Review*, Briggs answered with his “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration” in July of that same year.

The two articles were markedly different from the outset. Hodge and Warfield began their article with an attempt to move the discussion concerning inspiration forward in a manner consistent with historical theological development. For Hodge and Warfield, the debate was an opportunity to clarify theological constructs already rooted in Scripture and then stretch them toward their full exegetical and confessional capacity. In this case, the subject was the word or idea of inspiration and these men took the opportunity to clarify the issues surrounding this aspect of the doctrine of Scripture, especially its mode of inspiration.

At the outset, Hodge and Warfield took notice of how the word *inspiration* was used to express the entire agency of God, which produced that divine element which distinguishes Scripture from all other writings. Their concern to posit “a definite and never-varying sense” of the word *inspiration* was the result of “the embarrassment which is continually recurring in the discussions of this subject.” From the beginning, these men declared a desire to move forward, not an agenda, but a theological position based on Scripture and confession.

What is more, these men did not think of themselves as innovators, but instead understood their actions to be consistent with the praxis of constructive historical theology. Consider the following statement from the opening pages:

15 William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 78. Cf. Benjamin B. Warfield, “The One Hundred and Third General Assembly,” *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 2 (1891): 495. Warfield writes, “Among these problems . . . was the disposition to be made of the appointment of Prof. Charles A. Briggs, D.D., to the recently established chair of Biblical Theology in Union Seminary. This disposition was not made in the spirit of irritation towards Dr. Briggs; but in that same spirit of patient forbearance with which the Church has for so long borne with what it deems his unfortunate manner.”


17 Ibid., 225.

18 Ibid.

19 At this point, it may be helpful to at least acknowledge the article by Theodore Letis titled “B. B. Warfield, Common-Sense Philosophy, and Biblical Criticism” (American Presbyterian 69, 3 [Fall 1991]). Letis argues that Warfield was innovative, and worse, his innovations led to Princeton’s subsequent embrace of higher criticism within a decade (cf. 184, 186.) Several criticisms of Letis’s thesis might be made, but we will simply provide three. First, Letis does not deal with the genuine theological construction in which both Warfield and Hodge were willing participants. This lack of historical and theological context does not allow Letis to situate Warfield’s exegetical work in its proper place. Second, there is no attempt to deal with Warfield’s article “The Rights of Criticism and the Church,” in which he distinguishes his view of criticism from that of unbelieving criticism, which was something that Letis’s discussion could have benefited from on page 182. Third, it is simply historically irresponsible to suggest that the breakdown at Princeton occurred as a result of Warfield’s view of criticism. A reading of Ned B. Stonehouse’s *J. Gresham Machen* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2004) would bear out some of the political and theological trends which led to the demise of theological orthodoxy at Princeton Seminary.
The history of theology is full of parallel instances, in which terms of the highest import have come to be accepted in a more fixed and narrow sense than they bore at first either in Scriptural or early ecclesiastical usage, and with only a remote relation to their etymology; as, for instance, Regeneration, Sacrament, etc.  

These men obviously understood themselves to be engaged in legitimate theological activity that both had learned at the same theological well. Consider these words from Charles Hodge, professor of systematic theology at Princeton, the alma mater of both Hodge and Warfield:

The true method of theology is, therefore, the inductive, which assumes that the Bible contains all the facts or truths which form the contents of theology, just as the facts of nature are the contents of the natural sciences. It is also assumed that the relation of these Biblical facts to each other, the principles involved in them, the laws which determine them, are in the facts themselves, and are to be deduced from them, just as the laws of nature are deduced from the facts of nature.

Taken at face value, Hodge and Warfield were attempting to bring precision and clarification to an often muddled and unclear discussion and doing so according to what they understood as proper theological method.

Ironically, it did not take long to illustrate the need for the precision for which this part of the article called. An editorial appeared in the July 1881 edition of the Presbyterian, which accused Hodge and Warfield of having reduced the theory of verbal plenary inspiration “to that of mere providential superintendence over its external production.” Warfield responded the very next month. One can almost hear the exasperation in Warfield’s tone when he wrote, “How anyone could see in the Presbyterian Review article any lowering of the claims of inspiration, and especially the lowering asserted in your editorial, simply amazes me.” Warfield continued to clarify once again the distinction between God’s providence and the divine element of inspiration.

The point was obvious; clarity was certainly the need of the hour in this discussion and for good reason. Both Hodge and Warfield understood that “the prevalent habit of ‘concession’ to the world’s thinking” is “the mother of all heresy.” And for most of the nineteenth century, theology had been hospitable to Kantian thinking in Schleiermacher who had started with a definition of religion and then sought to prove that Christianity was the most satisfactory form of the impulse thus far developed.

Having understood the Kantian theological concessions of the nineteenth century, Hodge and Warfield articulated their concern with precision: “The only really dangerous opposition to the church doctrine of inspiration comes either directly or indirectly, but always ultimately, from

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22 Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, Inspiration, ed. Roger R. Nicole (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker, 1979), 75. (Editorial, Presbyterian, July 30, 1881.)

23 Ibid.

24 Warfield, Selected Shorter Writings, 2:675. (“Heresy and Concession,” Presbyterian Messenger, May 7 1896.)

some false view of God’s relationship to the world.” With the influx of the New Theology and its stress on divine immanence and radical transcendence, Hodge and Warfield recognized the trend toward pantheism, which would eventually lead to the denial of special revelation.

Nevertheless, Hodge and Warfield prove themselves to be neither theologians who balance one extreme with another nor ones who minimize important doctrines for fear of being misunderstood. Thus, for them, there is no fear in the assertion that “the whole genius of Christianity . . . presupposes the immanence of God in all his creatures, and his concurrence with them in all of their spontaneous activities.” Hodge and Warfield realized that a sound view of inspiration and especially its mode required a right view of God’s relationship to the world.

Thus, in order to explain that the currents of God’s divine activities not only flow around us and within us, without interfering with personal attributes or free rational activities, the doctrine of divine immanence must not be feared but maintained. What is clear from these pages is that Hodge’s and Warfield’s view of nineteenth-century liberalism’s distortions of the doctrine of God did not discourage them from maintaining a robust view of God’s immanence.

What is more, it is not in spite of but rather because of their bold view of immanence that Hodge and Warfield were able to affirm a mode of inspiration that they believed would maintain God’s special revelation amid dangerous pantheistic theological trends. Consequently, Hodge and Warfield went on to identify superintendence as the essence of the mode of inspiration distinguishing it from other providential activities. Thus, the God who is transcendent works within his creatures immanently to produce his word. Hodge and Warfield lay emphasis on the idea that a correct understanding of mode in an age of radical immanence will preserve the idea of a special revelation.

Briggs saw things differently. But his opening paragraph betrayed an internal struggle. He readily admitted to seeing himself as a man caught between two extremes with himself as a mediator. Whereas Hodge and Warfield begin without so much as a greeting but instead open with a discussion on the etymology of the word inspiration, Briggs admits his own reluctance, hesitation, and even fear, “lest in the present state of the question we may be unable to satisfy extreme men on either side, and thus be caught in a place where two seas of intensely hostile prejudiced elements meet.” Therefore, Briggs announced his plan to seek a middle way, writing,

We embark upon the enterprise, therefore, as a voyage of exploration, not expecting to solve all difficulties or to escape dangerous issues or to avoid mistakes or even blunders, but to do what we may be enabled to do, honestly and faithfully to contribute to the solution of the problem, with an assurance of the absolute authority of the Word of God, a conviction that Truth is mighty and will prevail over our prejudices, a trust that the currents of Criticism since the Reformation have not flowed up to the present crisis in vain, and at the same time with a sincere desire to be corrected by our brethren in those

26 Hodge and Warfield, “Inspiration,” 227.
27 Ibid., 227.
28 Ibid., 228.
29 Ibid., 226.
matters in which we may unconsciously drift astray.\textsuperscript{31}

While the Hodge/Warfield article is unquestionably constructive, the Briggs article is exploratory and cautious and sets out little hope of resolving difficulties.

Consequently, Briggs’s article has the appearance of being far less helpful than that of the Hodge/Warfield article. What is more, despite its exploratory intent, the article’s tone seems aggressive and even reactionary. Briggs frequently implies or states that constructive theology is traditionalism, dogmatism, or scholasticism, all of which Briggs views in a negative light. Thus, Briggs is led to pronounce a verdict upon the type of theological construction that he sees in the Hodge/Warfield article.

The dogmatic scheme is too often the mould into which the gold of the Scriptures and the silver of the creed are poured to coin a series of definitions, and fashion a system of theology which not only breaks up the concrete and harmonious whole of the Scriptures into fragments, stamping them with the imprint of the particular conception of the theologian in order to their reconstruction.\textsuperscript{32}

According to Briggs, Hodge and Warfield were attempting to make their private opinions the official doctrine of the church.\textsuperscript{33} Several years later, Briggs would go so far as to describe the dogmatic “opinions” of Hodge and Warfield as “false doctrine circulating in a tract bearing the imprint of the Presbyterian Board of Publication, among our ministers and people, poisoning their souls and misleading them into dangerous error.”\textsuperscript{34} In fact, rounded off Briggs, “No more dangerous doctrine has ever come from the pen of men.”\textsuperscript{35} Likely, Briggs earned his reputation for acerbity through statements like this one.

However, Briggs claimed that he did not deny the right of dogmatism itself.\textsuperscript{36} So long as dogmatism is in the harness with the methods of criticism, it has a right to proceed with its labors; but otherwise, its natural tendency is to cry out against criticism.\textsuperscript{37} This comment is perhaps one of the most difficult statements to understand in the Briggs article, since just a few pages earlier he described these views (i.e., traditional, dogmatic, scholastic) as tares in a field of wheat.\textsuperscript{38}

Nevertheless, according to Briggs’s article, the way forward is to be found in the new science of Biblical criticism, minus the systematic and logical exfoliation of Biblical doctrines. Alternatively, as Briggs might summarize the situation, standing over against dogmatism is

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 554.
\textsuperscript{33} Charles Augustus Briggs, \textit{Whither? A Theological Question for the Times} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889), 64.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Briggs, “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures,” 558.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Cf. Charles Augustus Briggs, \textit{The Authority of Holy Scripture: An Inaugural Address} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 41. Briggs writes, “We have undermined the breastworks of traditionalism; let us blow them to atoms.”
criticism. For Briggs, this criticism meant studying the text of Scripture in the original languages, clinging to the inductive methods of scientific investigation, and not shrinking back from serious historical investigation of Scripture.\textsuperscript{39}

But for Briggs it also meant, as he would say in his 1891 inaugural lecture, “A new doctrine of God is one of the greatest needs of our time.”\textsuperscript{40} Briggs, in a footnote to this comment, indicates that the reader should consult his 1889 book, Whither?, for further details. There, Briggs accuses A. A. Hodge of allowing his dogmatic tendencies to ignore the idea that God is a living God.\textsuperscript{41} However, what Briggs says at the end of this section is most interesting: “Dr. Isaac Dorner has rendered an inestimable service to the church in reasserting the doctrine of the living God.”\textsuperscript{42}

Both Hegel and Schleiermacher figured prominently and explicitly in Dorner’s theological and philosophical background, and both profoundly influenced his methodology.\textsuperscript{43} Barth observed that Dorner was able to combine both in his system which enabled him to point beyond other theologians of his day.\textsuperscript{44} However, this move beyond Schleiermacher and Hegel appears to have taken the shape of more, not less, speculation about God. As a result, Barth finds Dorner’s theology ambiguous and “even in detailed points it proved to be a significant source of error.”\textsuperscript{45} But what is important for us at this point is to realize that Dorner is “in the vicinity of Schleiermacher,” which means that, in faith, there is no absolute knowledge of God because, to a greater or lesser degree, Dorner had been fundamentally concessive to Kant.\textsuperscript{46}

Briggs, who studied under Dorner while in Germany, wrote to Henry B. Smith of Dorner’s “magisterial methodology,” a method that he announced he would utilize in his own scholarship.\textsuperscript{47} The unavoidable conclusion is that Briggs had bought into the fundamental ideas that motivated nineteenth-century liberal theology.

However, it might be argued, as M. James Sawyer does, that Briggs’s doctrine of immanence was, in fact, not driven by the pantheistic tendencies of nineteenth-century Protestant liberal theology, but rather was balanced with an equally strong concept of transcendence.\textsuperscript{48} There is even some evidence of this view in his controversial 1891 inaugural address.

But Sawyer also admits that Briggs did make statements that might be interpreted as “a blanket

\textsuperscript{39} Briggs, “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures,” 558.

\textsuperscript{40} Briggs, The Authority of Holy Scripture, 46–47.

\textsuperscript{41} Briggs, Whither?, 94.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} Massa, Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism, 39.

\textsuperscript{44} Karl Barth, Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century (London: SCM, 1972), 563.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 564.

\textsuperscript{47} Massa, Charles Augustus Briggs and the Crisis of Historical Criticism, 41.

\textsuperscript{48} Sawyer, Charles Augustus Briggs and Tensions in Late Nineteenth-Century American Theology, 61.
denial of the supernatural in the traditional sense.”

For example, in 1904, in the *American Journal of Theology*, he wrote:

> If it should ever transpire that all miracles could be explained from the use of appropriate means, and all that is called supernatural could be summed up under the category of law, the real facts, the real doctrines of our religion would not change; but only the methods of their explanation. Which is more glorious a God who is always interfering with his own laws, or he who has so perfected his laws that they brook no interference [sic]?

This statement alone gives the reader the sense that Briggs was buying more and more into the view of immanence that arose from the nineteenth-century liberal theology that had been drawn from the well of Romantic theologians like Schleiermacher and Dorner. Briggs seems to emphasize the immanence of God to the extent that everything is supernatural.

If what we have argued concerning Briggs’s view of immanence is true, we would expect to see implications in his understanding of Scripture; and that is exactly what we see. In Briggs’s 1881 article, he makes two points over the course of his paper that help us to situate his view of inspiration within his understanding of God’s immanence. First, according to Briggs, the word of God is strictly and purely an instrument which conveys divine truth. For Briggs, this meant that the Bible contained the divine word as a receptacle but was not itself that word. Briggs draws out the natural implication of his position: the Spirit’s word and the written word are two separate things. To put it another way, the written word is not necessarily the Spirit’s word or even necessarily the Spirit’s production. The Bible itself is simply a “means and not ends; they are avenues to God, but not God.”

Second, according to Hodge and Warfield, inspiration, as defined in their article, “accounts for nothing whatever but the absolute infallibility of the record in which the revelation, once generated, appears in the original autograph.” This was not the case for Briggs. He repudiated terms like providential care and superintendence when describing the external production of the Bible. These actions are what an immanent God does naturally.

Therefore, as Briggs understood it, inspiration is that which lies behind the external letter of Scripture, but not in the way dogmatic theologians like Hodge and Warfield would describe superintendence. Rather, it is a divine afflatus or impulse “which enlightened and guided holy men to apprehend the truth of God in its appropriate forms; assured them of possession of it,

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 62.


52 Ibid., 563.

53 Ibid., 572.

54 Briggs, *The Authority of Holy Scripture*, 27.


57 Ibid.
and called and enabled them to make it known to the Church by voice and pen.”

Warfield’s criticisms, therefore, seem to be on target. Despite the appearance that Briggs’s radical view of immanence follows the likes of Schleiermacher and Dorner, in the end Feuerbach is still grinning, because all is still anthropological.

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Book Review:
A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament¹
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Gone are the days when the British evangelical Donald Guthrie could write a comprehensive thousand page *NT Introduction* combined with a companion massive *NT Theology*. Current NT research requires specialization for scholars to be able to keep abreast of the mountain of literature published in their field. With the growing information comes the need for a revised NT Introduction that is faithful to God’s word and incorporates God honoring biblical-theological insights. It is into that gap that Michael Kruger (RTS Charlotte President and Professor of NT) has moved. From the deep teaching resources found at a multi-campus institution like Reformed Theological Seminary, Kruger was able to ask colleagues to contribute introductory material from their specialized fields. Thus, we have a multi-author text written by nine colleagues who have the same view of the inerrancy of God’s word as well as the biblical precision to write from a distinctly reformed perspective. The best approach to review such a text is not to give a mini-summary of its contents but simply to highlight a few of the issues addressed in some of the sections as well as several of the advances proposed by the authors. Analysis will begin at the gospels and move through the NT.

The gospels, as a unique genre, will record Christ’s life and work in a fashion that will be different from anything that had been written before. ² Even though there are various gospels, since the whole Bible has one ultimate author, believing students can expect a similarity of message among the four.³ Concerning the first gospel, while the name Matthew appeared at his call (9:9), the gospel’s author did not identify himself as such.⁴ Some evangelicals are not certain

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² While still unique, Benjamin Gladd, “Mark”, in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 62, insightfully argues that it is good to see Mark fitting into a form of Greco-Roman biography which had the purpose of informing “the readers of the hero or protagonist and invite the readers to believe that same message.” Thus, the four gospels are about Jesus the protagonist of the narrative.

³ Ibid., 62-63 helpfully underlines the importance of “eyewitness testimony” which bridges the gap between the historical Jesus and the gospel narratives by cutting the supposed presupposition of long oral gospel development without such testimony. Such living testimony was highly valued in the ancient world.

⁴ The title, which ascribed the gospel to Matthew, appeared about 125 AD at the earliest- and is not inspired. Yet, Reggie M. Kidd rightfully argues that the gospel always circulated with the title and provides early patristic citations of the title. See Kidd, “Matthew”, in Kruger (ed.), *Introduction to the NT*, 30.
of the time of this gospel’s composition, but a good estimate is around 63-66. There is no scholarly consensus on Matthew’s structure. Matthew’s purpose (proving that Jesus was the messianic Son of God) was also manifested in his writing style.

Benjamin Gladd rightfully approaches Mark by underlining the importance of eyewitness testimony - which eliminates the need to find a long oral development of the gospels. The author, John Mark, who was not one of the twelve, had close interaction with a number of apostles. He was a companion of Peter and Paul and wrote his gospel in the early 60’s.

Robert Cara points out some of the unique aspects of Luke’s Gospel, and determines that there is sufficient evidence to hold that it was written before 70, more likely by 62, when Paul was under house arrest in Rome. He also deals with the best way to relate Luke’s gospel and the book of Acts, whether it should be Luke and Acts or Luke-Acts, and makes a good argument to view the two works separately with no contradiction between them.

Finally, Michael J. Kruger argues persuasively that John’s Gospel (written by John the son of Zebedee) is a combination of eyewitness history and deep theological vision. He rightfully places John’s gospel in its historical setting - in reaction to Christian expulsion from the synagogue at the end of the first century. The Gospel is divided into four main sections and presents a Jesus who is messianic and kingly.

Acts is a theological interpretation of the early church’s history that is also historically accurate and closely related to both the gospels and epistles. As the author of Acts, Luke articulates the same main themes found in his gospel account. With the preaching of the gospel came a call to

5 Contemporary scholars conclude it was written after 70. Some have argued that it was best to leave the question open. However, Kidd, “Matthew”, 31 rightly argues that it appears that temple practice was still continuing at the time of composition.

6 Matthew was dependent upon Mark- 90% of Mark appears in this gospel. However, Matthew writes in a more concise (and correct) Greek and was less concerned with chronology than either Mark or Luke. One way to analyze that structure is to start with the sermon on the mount (Chapters 5-7), then move to Jesus’ address to his disciples (Chapter 10), followed by the parables of the kingdom (Chapter 13), then discipleship or life in the Church (Chapter 18), and finally the eschatological discourse (Chapters 23-25). See Kidd, “Matthew” 29-32.

7 His writing style grants that there are variations among the three synoptic gospels. While each represent either direct or indirect eyewitness accounts, there are different presentations of Christ’s temptations and the timing of cleansing the temple. See Ibid., 32-33.

8 Gladd, “Mark”, in Kruger (ed.), Introduction to the NT, 62-64.

9 Ibid., 65.


13 Ibid., 117-20. Kruger carefully steers the reader through the morass of skewed interpretations like J. Lewis Martyn’s notion of the gospel written as an account of the Johannine community.

14 Ibid., 121-23. The four sections are a prologue, book of signs, book of the passion, and epilogue. Kruger nicely organizes John’s presentation of Jesus under three headings: Christ as only God, Christ as bringer of life, and Christ as fulfillment of the OT.
repentance.\textsuperscript{15}

Turning to Paul’s writings, from internal evidence, the Roman Church appears to have been composed predominantly of Gentiles, but included some Jewish Christians as well.\textsuperscript{16} While there is scholarly debate as to the place of this Prison Epistle’s composition, there is sufficient justification to state that they are authentic Pauline letters.\textsuperscript{17}

Moving to James and Jude, if James the Just wrote the epistle, then it would probably be very early—perhaps written even before Paul’s epistles.\textsuperscript{18} The issues involved in dating Jude relate to its relationship to 2 Peter (twenty of twenty-five verses in Jude are similar to 2 Peter) and the opponents identified in the letter.\textsuperscript{19}

Internal evidence from the book of Hebrews does not appear to be decisive regarding the epistle’s audience.\textsuperscript{20} Concerning the time of composition, both the earlier (before the destruction

\textsuperscript{15} Cara, “Acts,” 144 summarizes these themes under two heads, a primary purpose being to confirm readers in the faith by giving an account of God’s special providence over the early church and secondarily to: “emphasize the one, unified church that, by God’s Word, expands geographically, ethnically, and redemptive-historically.”

\textsuperscript{16} The contents of Rom. 1 is related to the question of his audience. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and the Roman Christians seem to fall into that category. Other internal evidence for a Gentile character to the church is: Rom. 1:13; 9:3ff, 10:1f; 11:13, 23, 28, 31; and 15:15ff. Waters, “Romans”, in Kruger (ed.) \textit{Introduction to the NT}, 172-73 makes a compelling argument that explains the nature of the congregation. First, Claudius made a decree expelling the Jews from Rome. However, Claudius died in 54 and under Nero the Jews (and Jewish believers) were able to return. Thus, there had been a considerable influx of Jewish Christians three to four years before Paul’s epistle. This interpretation helps to explain Paul’s concern for the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers. Another problem connected to ascertaining the audience is that some see Rom. 16 as possibly part of an epistle that was sent to Ephesus.

\textsuperscript{17} Composition place options are Caesarea, Rome, and Ephesus. The highest probability for Col., Eph. and Phil. is Rome. Bruce A. Lowe, “Philippians” in Kruger (ed.) \textit{Introduction to the NT}, 291 mentions that Paul’s imprisonment may have been in Ephesus, Caesarea, Rome, or, less likely, Corinth. Waters, “Ephesians”, in Kruger (ed.) \textit{Introduction to the NT}, 269-70 correctly argues that while there are numerous problems they are not sufficient to overthrow the traditional position relative to authorship.

\textsuperscript{18} If none of those three James’ was the author, then it could be dated much later. While some scholars choose a late date, probably written during Domitian’s reign (around 90), a better option is Lowe’s estimate of the 40’s or 50’s. See Lowe, “James”, in Kruger (ed.), \textit{Introduction to the NT}, 439-40.

\textsuperscript{19} Simon J. Kistemaker, “Jude”, in Kruger (ed.), \textit{Introduction to the NT}, 509-12 argues that there is insufficient evidence to determine which writing is dependent upon which. If 2 Peter is dependent upon Jude then Jude was written in the mid-60’s; and if Jude copied from 2 Peter, then it was written from the mid-60’s to the 70’s or 80’s. There is also insufficient evidence to determine who the opponents were except that they held to antinomianism.

\textsuperscript{20} While some evangelicals argue that no one can reach a dogmatic conclusion, Kistemaker, “Hebrews”, in Kruger (ed.), \textit{Introduction to the NT}, 416 cogently argues that it was written to Christians who lived abroad and greets friends back home in Italy.
of the Temple) and later schools (some time in the 80’s) make strong arguments.  

Turning to the last book of the NT, the “historic” and the “literal” parts can refer to actual historical places and circumstances, but the text is meant to communicate more than simple chronological history. For example, the great city of Babylon can refer to a historical metropolis located in the Middle East. Yet, “Babylon” can also represent more than a particular city existing in the first century. Babylon is thus a “symbol”. However, the visions themselves must be understood as symbolic. What objects John saw in his visions (whether a lamb, a prostitute, or locusts) were presented to him in symbol form, not in the form of historical persons or events. Some sections of Revelation double back and cover the same ground from different perspectives. Hill capably deals with the four major interpretative approaches to Revelation, siding with what he terms the “idealist” approach- which views the text as having to do with principles and historical conditions that are meaningful in every age.

In conclusion, Kruger and his team of scholars should be congratulated for a job well done. The book should prove to be a standard textbook in colleges and seminaries but is written in a style that will hold the interests of laymen as well.

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21 The early date argues that Hebrews had to have been written while there was still sacrificial worship in Jerusalem- that is, before the Temple was destroyed in 70. Other scholars think that its composition was perhaps as early as 70, but more likely between 80-85. Related to the epistle’s dating, it appears that the persecution that had occurred has now past, but a war was looming in the near future. It is possible that the looming conflict is the Bar Cochba war during which time Jerusalem was renamed and Jews were not allowed to enter the city. In his most recent writing, Kistemaker acknowledged that most commentators argue for a date prior to 70, but “Hebrews”, Introduction to the NT, 415: “a somewhat later year is not unrealistic and may even be preferred. Undoubtedly, it would be safer for the author to write a letter on the priesthood of Jesus in a place away from Jerusalem and in a time after the demolition of the temple than in a time when it was still standing.”

22 Charles E. Hill, “Revelation”, in Kruger (ed.), Introduction to the NT, 520-21: “It is an ‘apocalyptic’ prophecy, employing symbolic visions and extended symbolic narratives.” Chapters 2 and 3 also use an epistolary form and the book is an epistle addressed to seven churches. “…it is probable that seven were chosen as a symbol of universalism, making the book relevant for all churches.” “Characteristics of such writings include heavy use of visual symbolism, the appearance of heavenly visitors, otherworldly journeys, depictions of the end of the world or of postmortem existence, stark dualism, periodization of history, and use of pseudepigraphy.”

23 Some of the symbols are interpreted within the book of Rev. itself, for example the stars and lampstands, the harlot and the fine linen. See Hill, “Revelation”, 522.

24 Thus, the detailed description of the locusts (9:9-7), says Hill, “Revelation”, 523: “may simply be for the sake of building up the image of monstrous, hideous, hellish beings or influences and may not correspond in a one-to-one way to some nonsymbolic referent.”

25 This recapitulation, says Hill, “Revelation”, 524: “prevents us from assuming that everything in the book happens in chronological succession.”

26 The historicist approach, held by most of the protestant reformers, saw events in Revelation unfold in chronological order. The preterist approach requires early authorship and limits Revelation’s message to the first century. The futurist premillennial approach argues from a literal and linear standpoint that after the introductory chapters the book concerns only the last generation on earth. The most helpful interpretation, the idealist approach, avoids ahistorical abstractions. Hill, “Revelation”, 521-22.
Neither Jew nor Gentile: 
The Musings of a Modern Covenanter on Racial Reconciliation

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Introduction

Several months ago, I was at a large Christian university. I was there for a conference, and a campus tour was offered during an afternoon break. On the tour, the guide pointed out the significant racial diversity of the student body. Indeed, there were students from many different ethnicities on that campus. But they were mostly huddled together in ethnically monotone groups.

Another conference participant on the tour noted that trend, and he later made a comment that stuck with me. But I need to explain one further detail about my fellow conferee before I relate his comment. This fellow conferee was an orthodox Jew. His remark reflected his view of the situation as it appeared through the lens of his Jewish theology. Viewing the ineffective effort, as he saw it, to integrate the races on that campus, my conversation partner simply observed that this was further indication God designed the races to live separately.

I share that anecdote because it illustrates one of the foundational controversies between a Christian and a Jewish view of ethnicity that goes all the way back to the conflicts between the New Testament Apostles and the Jewish rulers of that day. Racial integration was the first, social revolution which the Gospel brought to the New Testament world. And the New Testament presents interracial communion as one of the hallmarks of the redeemed in Christ.

Prior to the ascension of Christ, all the religions of the world were ethnically defined. Each nation had its own religion. Even Yahweh, the God of Israel, was a national deity; but, as the only true God, Yahweh always promised more. To Abraham, he promised, “I will make of you a great nation,... and in you all the families of earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2–3). To David and his heirs, the Lord said, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage...” (Psa. 2:8; cf., 2 Sam. 7:9). Elsewhere in the Psalms, our Old Testament forefathers sang, “All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord” (Psa. 86:9). The Prophet Zechariah, standing in the rubble of Jerusalem, boldly declared, “Peoples shall yet come, even the ... nations shall come ... to entreat the favor of the LORD...” (Zech. 8:20–23). Prior to Christ’s ascension, only Israel worshiped Yahweh. But when Jesus rose to his heavenly throne, all those old promises came to pass. That was the day when Jesus announced, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matt. 28:18–19). For the first time in world history, religion was decoupled from race. The communion of

1This article is based on the text of a talk originally presented on January 14, 2017, at the College Winter Conference in Converse, Indiana, hosted by the Lafayette Reformed Presbyterian Church.

As is the nature of anecdotes, this experience is offered merely as a picture—in this case, a window into a traditional distinction between Christianity and Judaism. Further attention to actual Jewish teaching on the topic would be required before offering a critique of modern Judaism.
Jews and Greeks as one in Christ has been—since the ascension of Jesus—a defining tenet of the Christian faith. Racial reconciliation is not, itself, the Gospel; but it is fairly close to the heart of the Gospel.

Paul shows us how central racial communion is to the Christian faith in his letter to the Galatians. Reporting on an occasion when even Peter fell into the segregation mindset of the age, Paul wrote, “When [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face... For... he drew back [from eating with Gentiles] and separated himself [to eat with Jews]... But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I [confronted Peter] before them all...” (Gal. 2:11–14).

“Not in step with the truth of the Gospel”—those are Paul’s words to describe racial prejudice. Jesus “himself is our peace ... and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles, and he has united them “before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (Eph. 2:14; 3:14–15).

In this article, I want to encourage racial reconciliation in two ways. First, I want to review some history. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) has a great and honorable heritage opposing racism. In the early centuries of this country, our Covenanter forefathers were active opponents to the slavery of Africans and the forced removal of Native American Indians from their lands. Our Covenanter heritage on racial issues is one we can look back upon to encourage us to take up the torch, today.

The second thing I want to do is to offer five steps to take toward racial reconciliation. I readily admit that I am not an expert on racial issues. But, actually, one of the things we need is for more of us who have not been attentive enough to racial reconciliation issues in the past to make it, now, a point of active attention.

Early American Covenanters on Racism

For my review of history, I must acknowledge the work of Joseph Moore, a historian with Gardner-Webb University. In 2015, Moore published a book called, *Founding Sins: How a Group of Antislavery Radicals Fought to Put Christ into the Constitution*. It is the best resource, to date, on the American Covenanters and their witness against two sins at the foundation of our country.

The first sin which our Covenanter forefathers protested was the failure to acknowledge Jesus as the king of nations. Our Reformed Presbyterian forefathers testified against the secular framing of the American Constitution from the start. The second sin our church forefathers protested was our nation’s hypocrisy concerning race: claiming that “all men are created equal” while simultaneously asserting the inferiority of the colored races, enslaving Africans and taking away the lands of Native American Indians.

There were, of course, other abolitionist movements in early America. However, in the words of Joseph Moore,

[The] Covenanters mounted a witness against the sin of slavery unlike any other in both North and South. First, their antislavery ideals antedated even the Quaker abolitionist movement; Covenanters were some of the first people in Britain or America to take a public stand against the institution. Second, they created a unique biblical interpretation that did what neither abolitionists in the North nor pro-slavery Christians in the South
were able to accomplish: they reconciled biblical literalism, with its clear sanction of slavery, and abolitionism...\(^2\)

The Covenanter hermeneutic was powerful. Many of the biblically conservative churches in early America were pro-slavery. Many Old Testament texts affirm slavery, and the New Testament contains numerous exhortations for slaves to obey their masters. The pro-slavery movement cited Scripture on their side. For this reason, conservative churches committed to biblical authority were often pro-slavery. Meanwhile, abolitionists tended to build their arguments on the general spirit of the Gospel without engaging the Bible’s pro-slavery texts. Abolitionists tended to be the so-called “liberal” Christians who felt free to dismiss the relevance of biblical references to slavery as antiquated. They pressed instead for the “ameliorating influences of the Gospel”\(^3\) to eclipse whatever else the Bible might have once endorsed. It was the Covenanters who managed to thread the needle, offering a unique argument that was both rigorously biblical and thoroughly committed to racial equality.

The most important statement of that argument was Alexander McLeod’s 1802 tract, *Negro Slavery Unjustifiable*. McLeod begins that tract with the sober warning in Exodus 21:16, “Whoever steals a man and sells him, and anyone found in possession of him, shall be put to death.” From there, McLeod assembles a thoroughly biblical argument that ably addresses the objections and difficult Bible passages on slavery to show how the pro-slavery movement misconstrued key texts. The clear statement of Exodus 21:16 is consistently upheld throughout the rest of Scripture. “I plant myself upon the inspired Word,” McLeod asserted. From that foundation, in the words of Moore, McLeod “argued that American slavery failed the biblical test, text by text. The Hebrew experience of servitude was dramatically different from the American institution of slavery.”\(^4\)

I will not review the detail of that Covenanter exegesis here, but Moore summarizes its unique power, noting, “biblical literalism ... [had become] the hallmark of southern pro-slavery arguments... [But the Covenanters] turned that hermeneutic on its head. Instead of occupying the high ground on biblical slavery, [McLeod] claimed, pro-slavery Christians actually were not literal enough.”\(^5\) The Covenanter testimony in the time was unique and powerful.

The Covenanters did more than testify, however. They also worked. The Covenanters, while a small denomination, were nonetheless heavily involved in the Underground Railroad, helping move escaped slaves to freedom. Geneva College—at that time located in Ohio—served as a center for organizing RPCNA work in the Underground Railroad. Furthermore, unlike the pacifist Quakers—one of the largest groups behind the Underground Railroad—“the Covenanters held no reservations about employing firearms in a righteous cause.”\(^6\) Those pursuing fugitive slaves knew this. As a result, according to Moore’s research, runaway slaves were rarely recovered while under Covenanter protection.

The Covenanters also welcomed black slaves and free blacks into church membership. They baptized their children, and Moore even found an RPCNA minister’s diary with several entries


\(^3\) J. R. W. Sloane’s expression, quoted in Moore, 96.

\(^4\) Moore, 96.

\(^5\) Moore, 93–4.

\(^6\) Moore, 98.
in the 1780s indicating that he had conducted interracial marriages. Even though it was often illegal to do so, Covenanter churches developed Sunday school programs in slave-holding states that provided black slaves with both religious catechism and taught them how to read.

The Civil War broke out in 1861. The Covenanters generally regarded the war as God’s judgment on America for slavery. In the words of Reformed Presbyterian minister James Wallace early in the war, “That slavery is the immediate or proximate cause of the war, can hardly be doubted by any whose eyes are open... [And that] God intends to destroy slavery by this war, is almost equally certain.” Many Reformed Presbyterians joined that fight to end slavery. According to Moore’s research, “Geneva College ... saw most of its students leave in order to fight. Two of the sixty-seven students who served in the North rose to become generals, [and] twelve were killed.”

During the thick of the war, a delegation of Covenanter ministers met with President Lincoln in the White House. They urged him to pursue corrections of both America’s founding sins: to amend the Constitution to abolish slavery; and to amend the Constitution to acknowledge Christ’s reign and the authority of his law. The abolition of slavery, of course, did eventually follow. Admitting the reign of Christ did not, though some effort was made. President Lincoln did include a Constitutional amendment to recognize the Lord’s reign among the proposals in an early draft of his 1865 State of the Union address. However, according to the diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln, the Cabinet universally opposed the idea, and Lincoln dropped it from his legislative agenda.

For our Covenanter forefathers, those two causes were connected. Without submitting to Christ’s reign and law, America is apt to adopt all manner of immoral laws—not just slavery and racial prejudice. The Civil War did bring an end to slavery; but not, unfortunately, a national commitment to the laws of King Jesus. In December of 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed, abolishing racial slavery. That was a huge achievement. But, as one Reformed Presbyterian minister stated, even emancipation would not be enough without “[the] repeal of every enactment which is based upon a distinction of color” from American law. That struggle continued.

During the years following the Civil War, Reformed Presbyterian Missions invested in efforts to start schools for freed slaves in South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Washington D.C., and most successfully in Selma, Alabama. In 1874, the RPCNA founded Geneva Academy, later renamed Knox Academy, in Selma. The school grew to well over 800 students by the early 20th century.

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7 Moore, 193 n. 17.

8 In an openly published 1847 article, South Carolina Covenanters wrote, “If the institution of slavery be so corrupt and brittle a thing as to be endangered ...[by making slaves] acquainted with the Scriptures ... then let slavery go to the winds... If to sustain and perpetuate the relation between master and servant it is necessary to keep the Bible out of the hands of the latter, and to hold him in spiritual darkness—then that relation must be radically wrong and utterly indefensible.” (Moore, 105.)

9 Moore, 114.

10 Moore, 118.

11 Moore, 115.

12 Moore, 120.

13 Moore, 96.
and occupied a three-story school building. The school continued until 1937, when it was incorporated into the Selma Public Schools. A Reformed Presbyterian congregation was also planted in Selma in 1875—one year after the school was started. The first pastor of that congregation was also the first African-American minister in the RPCNA, Rev. Lewis Johnson.

Arguably, the significant groundwork laid by Reformed Presbyterians—alongside Baptists, Methodists, and others laboring in Selma—provided the fertile soil that made it a leading center of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. At that time, under the pastorate of Dr. Claude Brown, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Selma joined over a dozen other churches to support the Voting Rights March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.

The Covenanter testimony against prejudice focused primarily on relations with African-Americans. However, the Covenanters were also vocal opponents to President Andrew Jackson when he proposed measures to remove Native American Indians from their lands. Answering a direct petition from the RPCNA, President Jackson acknowledged “the zeal which animates your board on behalf of the Indians.” Nevertheless, Jackson’s policies were passed into law, leading to the now infamous Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the so-called, “Trail of Tears.”

Many Reformed Presbyterian Sunday School classes today teach the history of our Scottish Covenanter forefathers. But there is much to learn (and, much to critique) in our American Covenanter ancestors, as well—particularly in the matter of racial equality. Though a small denomination, the Lord has been merciful to grant us a noteworthy heritage testifying to the reign of Christ and to love for one’s neighbor across racial lines. But heritage is not enough. Racial prejudice still persists in America, today. In the current social climate, our Covenanter heritage encourages us; but it also convicts us. The testimony of history calls to us and charges us not to be silent, but to renew our testimony for racial equality.

As one minister who is, admittedly, a newcomer to this frontier, I would like to offer five proposals to promote racial reconciliation. My proposals will focus primarily on race relations between whites and African-Americans. Of course, racial issues are much broader than caucasians and blacks. But America is still laboring under the weight of our particular sins against the African heritage among us, and it is this racial dynamic which is at the nub of the issue.

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16 Simons, 15.


18 Moore, 95.

19 Cf., for example, the starkly lower rates in white-black interracial marriages contrasted with other interracial marriages, as reported by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11–12.
Five Proposals

1. Do not be content defending orthodox doctrine. In the opening verses of his epistle, Jude wrote: “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). In those words, Jude tells us that the letter he wrote was not the one he wanted to write. He wanted to write a letter about “our common salvation”—the common fruits of our life together in Christ. But, in the crisis facing the church, he found it necessary to write “appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” There is a tone of regret in that line, although a clear note of priority as well.

Contending for the orthodoxy of our faith is clearly the apostolic priority for the church. Yet, it ought to grieve us when we are so consumed with doctrinal orthodoxy, we are at a loss to devote attention to our shared experience of salvation’s fruits. In this light, we ought to cherish the holy contention for orthodoxy that is the heart and soul of our Reformation heritage. But we ought never be content to end our work there.

Today, Roman Catholicism and the so-called “liberal” protestant churches have captured the high ground in most social issues—though not always asserting a biblical position for those issues. It ought not be so. We must hold fast to the Reformed heritage that prioritizes contention for doctrinal orthodoxy, but we must add the heart of Jude which longs to do more than that.

Do not be content defending orthodox doctrine: pursue godly social justice as well.

2. Listen ... in order to learn. The 18th and 19th chapters of Genesis recount the Lord’s judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. Before he judged the sins of those cities, he sent two angels to investigate the petitions of their victims. The Lord said to Abraham, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me...” (Gen. 18:20–21). That was not an angelic survey looking for holes in the petitions of the oppressed, but a demonstration of the Lord’s commitment to fully hear out their complaints and to judge accordingly.

It is a fundamental principle of justice to give full attention to the cry of the oppressed. The underprivileged are often dismissed, discounted, or disqualified. Yet it is to their voice that our God turns his ear of compassion. Those of us who live in white, privileged communities cannot pretend to understand what it means to grow up black in America—until we take time to listen to the voices of those who do, because it is their life experience.

In a 1992 interview with Christianity Today, Pastor Tony Evans remarked, “The concerns of black Americans are not of dominant concern, by and large, to white evangelicals.”21 White Americans (and white evangelicals) generally do not understand what African-Americans are talking about when they raise concerns about race—unless they give full attention. There is a desperate need to stop assuming we understand the issues, and instead to open our ears to listen.

There might be many reasons—especially as Christians—to be critical of movements like Black Lives Matter. However, we must not let critiques of what is wrong in such organizations justify...

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ignoring the genuine voices of appeal they carry. Sign up for email newsletters from racial justice organizations. Read books that amplify the charge of racial injustice.\textsuperscript{22} Have the charity to look past what is theologically troubling in some of these movements, and turn your ear to hear the cry of the oppressed.

3. \textit{Do not just lose your prejudice, reverse it.} The American Founding Fathers were courageous men of vision and principle. They had flaws—many quite serious.\textsuperscript{23} Nevertheless, our society holds their memory with honor. But we Christians ought to let the words of Jesus further instruct us as we remember the great men and women who built this nation: Jesus said, “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...” (Matt. 20:26–28).

The great men and women who, quite literally, \textit{built} this nation were broadly men and women of color. It was, quite literally, on their backs that many of the rocks and stumps of the wilderness were removed for agriculture, and that bricks were laid to build cities. Rather than simply removing racial prejudice, we ought to reverse it and hold our African-American neighbors in high esteem as descendants of our nation’s builders.

According to the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and its assessment of period data,

\begin{quote}
It is inconceivable that European colonists could have settled and developed ... America ... without slave labor. Moreover, slave labor ... produce[d] the major consumer goods that were the basis of world trade during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: coffee, cotton, rum, sugar, and tobacco. In the pre-Civil War United States,... slave-grown cotton, provided over half of all US export earnings..., [and] the North developed a variety of businesses that provided services for the slave South...\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Slavery was a crucial component of the American enterprise.

There should be no room in the church or in civil society for racism. But there is much room for honor. We ought to retrain ourselves as Americans to regard our African-American neighbors with particular honor as another category of our nation’s Founding Fathers and Mothers: the builders of America.

4. \textit{Cross-cultural friendships are important, but not enough.} In a study published in 2000 called \textit{Divided by Faith}, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith document the different perspectives of white evangelicals and African-American Christians on the nature of America’s racial problems.\textsuperscript{25} When white evangelicals are asked about prejudice, they typically define the

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\textsuperscript{22} One book which I recommend as a good starting place for Christians concerned about this issue is, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, \textit{Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{23} Contrary to the popular proposition of the Religious Right that America was founded as a Christian nation, Reformed Presbyterians have consistently testified that our nation was not founded as a Christian nation, nor were the Founding Fathers all pious, God-fearing men as popularly remembered.


problem in individualistic terms. For most white Christians, the racial breakdown in our culture is one of individuals failing to respect other individuals. Thus, the solution is thought to be, as one major Christian ministry (Promise Keepers) framed it, “One man getting to know another across racial lines, establishing an honest friendship.”

Of course, friendships are an essential aspect of racial reconciliation. But that is not all. White evangelicals often suppose that, so long as we can point to our own friendships with a few neighbors of color, they have done their part. But African-Americans generally see the problem differently. Cecil Murray, senior pastor at First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, explains, “White evangelicals need an at-risk gospel... Calling sinners to repentance means also calling societies and structures to repentance—economic, social, educational, corporate, political, religious structures... The gospel at once works with [the] individual and the individual’s society: to change one, we of necessity must change the other.” In other words, interpersonal friendships are very important; but friendships must be joined with a reformation of institutions.

The term “systemic racism” is often used to make this point. There are two ways in which racism goes beyond a personal vice and takes on a systemic dimension.

**Legalized racism.** The most obvious form of systemic racism is when there are actual laws in place that legally privilege one race over the other. Legalized slavery and legalized segregation are examples. Thankfully, it is no longer legal in this country to have separate water fountains, separate schools, or separate seating areas based on race. It is no longer legal to hinder African-Americans from registering to vote. However, it would be naive for us to assume that changing the laws is the end of the process for recovery from legalized racism. Even after removing racist legislation, we need to further support efforts toward restitution from its long-term damage.

For one example of the long-term impact of legalized racism in America, consider the federal Homestead Act of the 1860s, which continued in effect until the 1930s. Under that act, “the U.S. government provided about 246 million acres of land (much of it taken from Native Americans... ) at low or no cost for about 1.5 million farm homesteads... Those [households] who gained access to these wealth-generating resources were almost entirely white.” According to one study published in the year 2000, roughly 46 million Americans today are the descendants of those homesteaders, the heirs and benefactors of the “leg up” start which that Homestead Act provided for families taking root in the New World. Now consider the opposite: those whose introduction to America was on slave plantations, and the multi-generational impact of that impoverishment exacerbated by generations of additional legal constraints. Centuries—literally centuries—of legalized racism has a much more tangled and long-term impact on the station of descendants than can be fixed simply by repealing the laws. Untangling the mess that follows from sin is always difficult. But it is our duty, as Christians, to insist on the effort since restitution is a fundamental principle of God's justice in Scripture (e.g., Exod. 22:1, 18–19; Deut. 15:12–18; cf., Exod. 12:35–36).

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26 Emerson, 118.


28 The term *systemic racism* was first coined and defined by Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (New York: Routledge, 2014).


In American society, debates about scholarships, employment quotas, and other forms of “reparations” are an effort to find ways to satisfy this duty of justice. Many white Americans are nervous about such measures for many reasons. Some fear the possibility of greed and abuse on the part of recipients of such benefits. Some react to the unfairness of such advantages, simply because they are blind to the unfairness of their own station that these measures seek to balance out. Others think that a single gesture of restitution ought to be enough; but the reality is, there have been many generations of cumulative white advantage in America that have gradually created the present advantages of white communities. It will similarly require many generations of reparative measures to accomplish something approaching just restitution.

As Christians, we must be sensitive to the complexities and huge challenges of social restitution; but, we also should be at the forefront of sacrifice and love supporting just and appropriate efforts in that process. Even if legalized racism has been largely eradicated by the Civil Rights Movement, restitution for its impact is far from complete.

**Unchecked racism in office.** A second form of systemic racism occurs when individuals bring their personal prejudice into official positions, and they are not held accountable for it. To cite one example often discussed in today’s news: when an individual police officer mixes official authority with personal prejudice, there must be avenues for recourse and accountability. When those avenues do not exist or are not working, institutional reforms are needed.

Consider a different personal sin as an analogy: suppose an individual caught up in the throes of greed becomes a police officer. That greed is a personal sin that needs personal sanctification; and it needs to be kept from impacting his or her work. If that officer, motivated by personal greed, were to use his or her authority at a traffic stop to require a bribe, there ought to be systems in place for the wronged citizen to obtain justice against the officer. If there is no effective system for that justice, the failure is no longer strictly the officer’s personal greed. It would be systemic injustice. The same holds true for prejudice—when it goes unchecked.

We don’t want to believe that such unchecked racism happens in 21st century America. We want to believe that the end of legalized racism in the 1960s was the end of racism, altogether. But King Solomon exhorts us not to be surprised by systemic injustice “under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 5:8 warns, “If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched [that is, protected] by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.” The Scriptures tell us not to be surprised or deny that it could be so, when the camaraderie of officials gets in the way of their duty to uphold the people’s justice. These things happen. But it is evil, and the voice of righteousness will seek its reform.

I have used the example of police officers, simply because it is a real example frequently in the press. The faithfulness, honor, and selflessness of the vast majority of American police officers is remarkable and must not be disparaged. But all leaders in government and businesses—and in the church—are sinful humans. Systems must be in place to keep various personal sins—such as sexual harassment and greed, as well as racial prejudice—from becoming institutional injustices. Both anecdotal testimony and statistical data indicate that too many systems of accountability are not working properly in our society.

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There is a rising cry in our day—backed by prison population statistics, wealth gap numbers, employment and housing studies, and a host of other data—that systemic racism of both kinds persist in America. Sadly, some forms of this outcry have turned violent. We must not let the injustice of certain expressions of this anger lead us to dismiss the petition altogether. There are no easy answers. Let the mess following in the wake of America’s founding sins remind you that it is always simpler to avoid sin in the first place. Cleaning up the mess afterward is always costly and complicated. But biblical repentance, redemption, and social reconciliation require our commitment to pursue that effort.

Christians must continue to pursue personal friendships across racial lines, but we also need to do more than make friends. We need to support institutional reforms.

5. Pray for more pastors, elders, and deacons of color in the RPCNA. The racial character of a church congregation ought to reflect the diversity of the community in which it ministers, and we should pray for a day when the Reformed Presbyterian Church is much more diverse than we are now. There are a number of congregations in the RPCNA, today, that are leading the way into greater interracial ministry. We should promote those efforts and learn from them. We can also learn a key lesson for expanding multi-ethnic ministry from the Apostles in the Book of Acts.

The New Testament church had its earliest roots in the immigrant and refugee communities of Jerusalem. Luke tells us this in Acts 2:8–11: at that time “there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven... Parthians and Medes and Elamites and [many other lands]...” These were not visiting pilgrims, but diaspora Jews who had immigrated from abroad. The first explosion of growth in the Jerusalem church was among the Jewish immigrant populations—speaking different languages and having different cultures—than the native Jews of Jerusalem. But this also led to a context where prejudice was likely.

In Acts chapter 6 we read about such prejudice: “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution” (Act 6:1). This was “systemic racism” in the church that needed new structures to hold it in check. The Apostles’ solution is remarkable.

New officers were elected to oversee the ministries where this prejudice was appearing. We generally recognize this event as the initial ordination of deacons. What is most remarkable is the cultural identities of the officers elected. Luke names all seven of them beginning with Stephen. Without exception, all seven are Hellenistic names. The last one is especially striking: “Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch” (v. 5). Nicolaus was a Gentile who had converted to Judaism, prior to becoming a believer in Jesus.

John Polhill writes, “The twelve apostles convened the community and ... they select[ed] seven representatives from the Hellenist group to meet this need. Seven men, all with Greek names,

33 For an overview of these statistics, see, www.raceforward.org/videos/systemic-racism.


35 Technically, they were all Jews—but it was an intercultural conflict. The term “Hellenists” refers to the Greek-speaking, immigrant populations. The “Hebrews” were those who, as natives to Judea, would have spoken Aramaic (a form of Hebrew). Luke reports that there was a conflict that arose over a neglect of the Greek-speaking widows in the church’s care ministries.
were chosen.” Craig Keener adds, “[Now] the food distribution program is assigned to seven Hellenists. Because they belong to the offended minority, they have special sensitivity to both the minority’s needs and perceptions... Because they are genuinely people of the Spirit, they can be trusted not to treat the Hebrews or others unjustly.” The Jerusalem Church ordained new leaders from among the previously marginalized community: the Hellenists.

This appointment not only brought an end to the previous prejudice, it also had a surprising impact on church growth. In the very next verses, we read, “Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen” (Act 6:9). The appointment of Hellenistic leaders within the Jerusalem church not only resolved the immediate racism crisis, but it also led to an advance of the church’s ministry into the Greek-speaking world—beginning among the Greek-speaking immigrant synagogues in Jerusalem.

These measures undertaken by the Jerusalem church provide an inspiring pattern for our prayers and labors, today. Historically, the RPCNA had a strong ministry among the African-American communities of the pre- and post-Civil War period. Sadly, like many American churches today, we have developed into a largely “one color” denomination. But as racial tensions rise, there can be no better time than the present for us to re-assert our Gospel testimony against prejudice—and to pray for the Lord to raise up more pastors, elders, and deacons of other races to take up leadership within this branch of Christ’s church.

Conclusion

Covenanters have always had a commitment to address, biblically, the issues of the day. As one Reformed Presbyterian minister, J. R. W. Sloane, stated to his fellow pastors in the abolitionist era, “rebuk[e these] great national and political sins... This kind of preaching is not only legitimate, but the very kind which, in this age—when national iniquity is coming in like a flood—is especially demanded.”

Many Reformed Presbyterians have been active in pro-life efforts. We have undertaken, in recent years, to speak to pressing sexual issues like homosexuality and gender confusion. But another leading issue of our day—racial prejudice—is a topic very close to our heritage as Covenanters. Compassion for the immigrant and the refugee, and true restoration and honor for our neighbors of color, ought to be a preeminent feature of the testimony of the RPCNA in the coming years.

May the emerging generation of Covenanters hear this call and help the church walk “in step with the truth of the Gospel” in this matter of racial reconciliation.

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37 Keener, 2.1279.

38 “These subsequent chapters ... provide ... a transition between the Jerusalem church and the beginning of the Gentile mission. [That transition begins with] the bicultural Hellenist faction in the church...” (Keener, 2.1247.)

39 Moore, 114.
What is Typology?:
An Excerpt from The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Job
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“For your first lesson in typology, take out your laptop and place your pinky on the A key, your ring finger on the S key, and your middle finger on the D key...” Sighs and groans emanate from my students as I attempt this joke every year in the classroom, but that never stops me from trying it again the next year. On one occasion, a bright-eyed student carefully placed his fingers as instructed, and looked up at me anticipating further direction. I knew I had to begin at the beginning, and focus on the basics, which is what I hope to do in this chapter.

What is typology? In spite of its technical sound, and the many involved treatments of it, the crux of Biblical typology is not difficult to explain or understand. In essence, it is the way that God used history to bring His promises to life. God’s plan of redemption, brought to its fullness in the work of Christ, was not carried through history on words of prophecy alone, but touched down in the life and experience of God’s people, as particular individuals and events illustrated and animated the promises and provisions of God in the Covenant of Grace. More specifically, the person and work of Jesus Christ was imprinted on the history that led to His incarnation, through people and events that were invested with prophetic meaning by God, offering glimpses of the coming Savior, and reassuring God’s people of the promise of His coming.

This makes typology a vital link between the Old and New Testaments, and gives us a fresh reassurance of the continuing power and relevance of the Old Testament as a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Most words with the “-ology” suffix denote the study of a certain branch of knowledge, and “typology” is no different. In one sense, it refers to the study of Biblical types. However, typology is not merely an academic discipline. It is the term we use to describe the Bible’s own method of using people, events, or institutions, to foreshadow a greater reality yet to come. The type is the foreshadow; the antitype is the reality.

The English word type comes from the Greek word typos, which is used variously in the New Testament, usually translated as “form,” “image,” “pattern,” or “example.” It is used in such contexts as I Timothy 4:12, where the Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy to “be an example (typos) to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” In some texts, however, it is clear that typos is used as a more precise term to designate those elements of Old Testament history that were designed to foreshadow New Testament realities. Paul refers to Adam as a type of Him who was to come, explaining how Adam foreshadowed Christ in his representative capacity (Rom. 5:14-21). The writer of Hebrews, contrasting the heavenly, high priestly ministry of Jesus with the earthly ministry of human priests, characterized the latter as those “who serve the copy (typos) and shadow of the heavenly things” (Heb. 8:4, 5). While typos came to have this technical sense in the New Testament, not all types are labeled with this term. By a simple metaphor, Paul posits the typology vested in the Paschal Lamb: “For indeed Christ, our
Passover, was sacrificed for us” (I Cor. 5:7).

To summarize, *typos* is a general term in the New Testament, but used in a more specific way to refer to elements of Old Testament history that foreshadow the person and work of Christ. We call these elements *types*. However, the foreshadowing of Christ by historical events, people, and institutions goes well beyond the few instances where the word *typos* is used to describe it. This system of foreshadowing we call *typology*.

What are the main characteristics of types, or, how do we know one when we see one? In his classic work *Typology of Scripture*, Patrick Fairbairn gives us an adequate starting point:

> There are two things which, by general consent, are held to enter into the constitution of a type. It is held, first, that in the character, action, or institution which is denominated the type, there must be a resemblance in form or spirit to what answers to it under the Gospel; and secondly, that it must not be any character, action, or institution occurring in the Old Testament Scripture, but such only as had their ordination of God, and were designed by Him to foreshadow and prepare for the better things of the Gospel.¹

The first element of typology identified by Fairbairn is “a resemblance in form or spirit” between the type and the antitype, which is a condition in need of a caveat. Not every superficial parallel between the Old and New Testaments is an instance of typology, but only that which substantively foreshadows the work of God in redemption. Typology does not amount to literary déjà vu, meant only to delight the reader with subtle connections. It is God’s method of illustrating and authenticating divine promises on the stage of history, and as such, typology will always reflect the promise and fulfillment of His work of redemption.²

Fairbairn’s second qualification is that a genuine type must be designed by God to foreshadow and prepare for the better things of the gospel. If it is designed by God, then Scripture can be our only infallible guide for identifying a true type, and understanding its significance. Typology is not the art of making creative or intuitive connections within the Bible. It is an exegetical discipline that must be textually controlled. If types are designed by God, they will be accompanied by Biblical evidence that substantially validates their typological purpose and meaning.

What, then, is the Biblical criteria for which we should look? Sidney Greidanus offers four helpful measures of a genuine type.³ First, a genuine type must be historical. That is, it must be an actual event, character, or institution from Old Testament history. Second, it must be theocentric, meaning that the symbolic message conveyed by a type must directly relate to the character, works, or promises of God. Third, a type must exhibit significant analogy with its antitype in the realm of theological meaning, rather than in superficial details. Fourth, the relationship of the type to the antitype must exhibit significant escalation, meaning that the antitype is always superior in the qualities that were more dimly reflected in the type.

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¹ Patrick Fairbairn, *Typology of Scripture*, Foreword by Peter M. Masters (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1989), 46.

² Geerhardus Vos writes, “The bond that holds type and antitype together must be a bond of vital continuity in the progress of redemption. Where this is ignored, and in the place of this bond are put accidental resemblances, void of inherent spiritual significance, all sorts of absurdities will result, such as must bring the whole subject of typology into disrepute.” *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 146.

To these measures, a fifth criterion should be added, that Old Testament types are *prophetic* in nature, and were meant to be understood in tandem with, and as illustrations of, the literary prophecies and promises of the Old Testament. They were meant to have value, not only to those who see them retrospectively, but also to those who originally experienced them. After all, types are foreshadows, not aftershadows.

Of course, Old Testament believers did not have the advantage of the clarity of the gospel that dawned with the coming of Christ and the completion of the New Testament. It is certain that many gospel truths, which we see so clearly, were not nearly as distinct to them. We cannot say with certainty how much they understood or did not understand about the historical types and literary prophecies that made up their experience of faith, but there is little reason to believe that the typology of the Old Testament took place all around them while they themselves were utterly unaware of it. The types of the Old Testament are described as a “shadow of the good things to come” (Heb. 10:1), but a shadow is still a shadow, after all.

If we understand that types had original prophetic meaning and do not only serve a retrospective purpose, then two important implications follow. The first implication is that typology in the Old Testament is not necessarily circumscribed by the New Testament. In other words, there can be types in the Old Testament that are not identified or discussed as such in the New Testament. Granted, the apostolic writers lose few opportunities to point them out, but the presence of New Testament commentary is not an absolute criteria for identifying a genuine Old Testament type. There is no indication, and no reason to presume, that the types identified as such by the New Testament exhaust the typological content of the Old Testament. Geerhardus Vos comments:

> The mere fact that no writer in the New Testament refers to a certain trait as typical, affords no proof of its lacking typical significance. Types in this respect stand on a line with prophecies. The New Testament in numerous cases calls our attention to the fulfillment of certain prophecies, sometimes of such a nature that perhaps we might not have discerned them to be prophecies. And yet we are not restrained by this from searching the field of prophecy and looking in the New Testament for other cases of fulfillment. The instances of typology vouched for by the New Testament writers have nothing peculiar to themselves. To recognize only them would lead to serious incompleteness and incoherency in the result.\(^4\)

Great care must be taken, and substantial proof must be sought, when discerning Old Testament types not identified as such by the New Testament, but the prospect remains open.

The second implication is that Old Testament types will ordinarily be accompanied by some textual indication of their prophetic value in the original context, if indeed they had such value to their original audience. It may be faint, but *something* will give the original audience of the text an intimation, at least, when a person, event, or institution bears prophetic meaning beyond itself. A type in the Old Testament will show itself by how it is described, how it is reacted to, or how it impacts the life and faith of the believing community. The full meaning, or ultimate fulfillment of the type is never fully disclosed to its original audience, yet there is almost always some textual indicator that typology is in play, when the import of a particular person or event distends beyond its historical provenance into the realm of prophecy.

The purpose of Biblical typology may be discerned from two different outlooks, namely, from Old Covenant and New Covenant vantage points. From the former perspective, typology served to breathe life into the promises of God by personifying and illuminating the promise of

\(^4\) Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 146.
redemption. We may think of types as living sermon illustrations that brought the words of prophecy to life. Types are what gave the Covenant promises their movement and embodiment in history, so that divine promises became palpable, and anticipation became experiential. It is truly a wondrous method of divine reassurance that redemption was built into the very fabric of history, and that history itself was moving toward its crescendo in Christ.

From the New Testament vantage point, the outlook is different. Living in the full light of the Advent, we may wonder what present value the Old Testament types have in the life of faith and in our perception of the work of Christ. Why bother with shadows when the light has fully shined? Allow me to answer the question with an illustration.

When I was a boy, my mother used to take my brothers and me to a local park, where there is a beautiful covered bridge spanning a stream. We spent many summer days playing, swimming, and fishing in that stream. My mother was an amateur artist in those days – more talented than many “professionals”, in my opinion – and would often take her canvas, easel, and paints to pass the time while her boys explored the creek. Her efforts produced a beautiful rendering of that covered bridge, which hangs in my home to this day, and still conjures the most pleasant memories in my mind. To me, that painting is priceless. I would not trade it for the Mona Lisa.

Today, the park with the covered bridge is only a short drive from my home, and I can take my own children there on lazy summer days. The covered bridge and the stream are just as I remember them, and I am always delighted to take in that scene again. However, my mother’s painting – a mere image of the covered bridge and stream where I used to play – arouses thoughts of a different value. Even though I can return to the actual park itself any time I choose, the painting preserves my mother’s impression of it, along with the many memories of happy days spent there. Invariably, when I return to that scene in the park, I compare it to the painting in my mind’s eye, and relish every detail that coincides between the type and the antitype.

Our heavenly Father has, in a sense, painted the impression of His Son on the canvas of history. Christ has come in the flesh, but Old Testament types preserve historical reflections of Him that retain their own particular power to move our hearts and strengthen our faith. Typology adds historical depth to our understanding of the person and work of Christ, and just as a painting augments and interprets certain features of its subject, typology draws our attention to the features of the Gospel that God Himself meant to accentuate over the course of history. Therefore, the unique value of typology is not lessened by the coming of Christ. If anything, it continues to add to our complete understanding of His person and work, as He is revealed in His fullness over the span of both Testaments.

It is important, however, to recognize that there will be significant elements of contrast between the type and antitype, for this is part of what defines their relationship. Whatever points to Jesus Christ will necessarily be outshined by Him. When any mere man or earthly event is given the lofty purpose to prefigure Christ, we should expect to find a principal point of correspondence bundled in myriad details of contrast. A type is not only meant to reflect its antitype, but to bring praise to what is perfect through its own imperfection. Therefore, the study of Old Testament types is surely not an end unto itself. It achieves its purpose, and we receive its benefit, only if the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted as He should be.

Drawing the aforementioned points together, typology is defined as God’s selective use of Old Testament people, events, and institutions to serve as living prophecies of His covenant promises, centering upon the Person and work of Jesus Christ, for the reassurance of the faith of His people in all ages.