



***The Westminster Confession
into the 21st Century***

*Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary
of the Westminster Assembly*

Volume 2





'Maintaining proper Christian faithfulness to historic Christian confessions has become exceedingly difficult in the modern world. Increased transience, growing inter-Christian (and inter-religious) awareness, heightened media saturation all work against the edifying transmission of inherited confessional standards. If the historic confessions are to be preserved for the future, it will take the kind of sympathetic historic description and effective doctrinal argumentation displayed in this book. It is a volume that Christians who adhere to other confessions, or those who feel that Westminster did not say the last word, should value as much as those who believe in the entire adequacy of Westminster for today.'

Mark A. Noll
McManis Professor of Christian Thought
Wheaton College, Illinois



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General Editor
J. Ligon Duncan, III



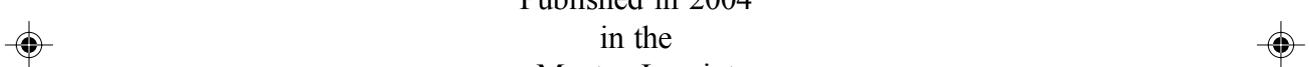
Associate Editors
W. Duncan Rankin
Derek W. H. Thomas
Robert C. “Ric” Cannada, Jr.
Stephen R. Berry
Stephen E. Tindall

MENTOR



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Foreword

Almost a decade ago we marked the 350th anniversary of the English Parliament's ordinance calling for the historic Westminster Assembly (1643-1649/52). Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) has a special interest in the promotion of the study of the Assembly since the Confession serves as our basic doctrinal position. Because we passionately believe these truths, RTS has aimed to produce pastors who believe and promote them in a way that is warmly and winsomely Reformed and biblically ecumenical, spreading the influence of these truths as broadly as possible.

This set of books is published with a view to introducing the student to some of the main issues in the history, theology and literature of the Assembly, and in hopes of spurring new interest in the work of the Westminster divines. Our aims, however, are not merely academic. They are also pastoral and devotional. We hope to provide material that will prove both interesting and helpful to the scholars, ministers, elders, candidates and congregations of the various evangelical churches influenced by the Westminster Assembly.

We catch something of the pastoral and devotional heart of the Assembly in the words of Samuel Rutherford (a Scottish commissioner to the Assembly), speaking of his Savior, Jesus Christ: "I am so in love with His love, that if His love were not in heaven, I should not be willing to go thither." This kind of

passionate adoration of Christ is at the heart of Reformed theology at its best, and that is the sort of devotion we seek to promote through the work of Reformed Theological Seminary: love for God, love for his truth, love for Christ, love for people. Our message is “A mind for truth, a heart for God.”

There is much indeed to feed our souls (as well as to strengthen our minds) which we can learn from these forefathers in the faith. The Westminster Assembly has provided for us both a profound, reverent, moving exposition of the doctrines of the Bible, and a worthy model of the function of truth in the pursuit of godliness.

Personally, my parents led me to memorize the Westminster Shorter Catechism when I was a young boy. Later I was given a copy of the complete Westminster Standards by my home church, First Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, along with all others in that congregation when we completed our secondary education. My parents made sure that copy was packed in my luggage when I left home for undergraduate studies. A number of times as I discussed issues with others at Vanderbilt University, I turned to the Westminster Confession for guidance into the truths of Scripture. In particular the Confession was a great help to me in those days in my understanding and teaching on the subject of assurance of salvation and for my own personal comfort and encouragement in this vital area of the Christian life.

May our Sovereign God use these volumes to reacquaint His people with the rich spiritual heritage bequeathed to them by their Puritan forefathers and to spur them on to further study of their “affectionate, practical” theology.

Dr. Robert C. “Ric” Cannada, Jr.

President, Reformed Theological Seminary
Jackson, MS; Orlando, FL; Charlotte, NC; Washington,
DC; Atlanta, GA, USA
Associate Editor, Westminster Assembly Project



Introduction

This volume is the second in a series of three, all part of a larger scholarly initiative known as the “Westminster Assembly Project,” begun in the early 1990s, with the encouragement of the administration of Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi; Orlando, Florida; Charlotte, North Carolina; Washington, DC; Atlanta, Georgia). As a part of this project, a group of eminent scholars from around the world was approached to participate in the production of literature (both popular and academic) designed to discuss and debate the most important issues in current post-Reformation studies, as well as promote interest in the Westminster Assembly and its work. For more information about the literary products of this project, the reader is referred to the introduction of the first volume.

Suffice it to say that we have been busy for over a decade researching, producing literature and preparing for this multi-volume set of scholarly essays on various subjects related to the work of the Westminster Assembly. Our aim has been to produce something of a symposium on the theology of the Assembly. Perhaps it should be said clearly that not all the contributors are in agreement, though all of us have a regard for the product and importance of the Assembly. Most of us do, however, have a positive assessment of how the Westminster theology (and the larger Puritan/Protestant Scholastic stream) relates to the Reformed tradition as a whole. Consequently, we would argue

for the basic continuity between Calvin and Calvinism, without ignoring developments and discontinuities.

Our purpose is to **inform, challenge, evaluate, and commend**. We aim (1) to inform the reader about the Assembly in its historical, theological, political and social setting, (2) to challenge inaccurate assertions commonly made about Westminster in its relation to both earlier and later Reformed theology, (3) to provide fresh evaluation of its place in and contribution to the Calvinian tradition, and (4) to commend the Westminster theology as a faithful expression of clear-headed Christian thinking for our own generation.

There are many reasons why it is beneficial for the scholars, ministers, elders, students and congregations of the various Reformed churches to study the Westminster Assembly. We have already articulated some of those reasons in the introduction to the first volume. And precisely because such a study is worthwhile, we have assembled contributions from an impressive list of students of Westminster and its context, to provide a window into its work and world.

In this volume, the essays commence with R. Scott Clark's and Joel Beeke's "Ursinus, Oxford and the Westminster Divines." These two outstanding scholars of post-Reformation studies trace an important stream of influence on the federal theology of the Westminster Assembly, and in so doing simultaneously debunk the idea that covenant theology somehow reintroduced medieval "works soteriology" into the Reformed tradition, and show the reformational and continental rootage of the idea of the covenant works (over against those who would either jettison it as scholastic or mistakenly assert it to be late).

David B. Calhoun, master teacher and historian from Covenant Theological Seminary contributes "Old Princeton Seminary and the Westminster Standards." This fine chapter gives a fair and sympathetic presentation of the reception of the

Westminster Standards in the halcyon days of orthodoxy at Princeton. While many polemicists use Princeton like a football or a wax nose, to establish the legitimacy of whatever contemporary views they are seeking to justify or condemn, Calhoun lets Princeton speak for itself.

Douglas F. Kelly tackles the issue of “The Puritan Regulative Principle and Contemporary Worship” deftly and graciously. Kelly, while appreciating historical and theological insights from John Frame and Hughes Old, and allowing for some discontinuity between Calvin and the Puritans on the application of the regulative principle, retains confidence in the language and idea of “the historic regulative principle” (RPW) and then proceeds to apply it to matters of great moment in the modern church, without a hint of the censoriousness that often attends discussions of the RPW and its application, or Reformed evaluations of contemporary worship, for that matter.

Paul Helm’s chapter on “Westminster and Protestant Scholasticism” addresses the oft-heard charge that the Confession’s theology is a degenerate, abstract, arid, philosophical version of the robust, concrete, warm, biblical thought of the Reformers, and Calvin especially. Helm, looking hard at the Confession’s doctrine of providence and comparing it with Calvin, says “not guilty.” Indeed, this whole chapter is a nice entry into a corrective view of the relation of the theology of Calvin and Westminster.

David W. Hall reminds us of the profound piety of the Assembly’s constituents in “Westminster Spirituality.” His chapter is helpful in at least two directions. First, it is another rebuttal of the view that Westminster is all about dead and dry theologizing, rather than “the life of God in the soul of man.” In other words, this chapter reveals in the Assembly a depth of devotion to Christ, enjoyment of God, spiritual experience that dwarfs today’s gurus of spirituality—and yet it displays a solidly grounded,

theologically anchored, biblically derived piety (in contrast to the fluff of today). Second, it challenges contemporary Reformed anti-piety—an anti-piety that parades itself as truly Reformed while at the same time wanting to jettison “piety” as the product of degenerate, Great Awakening era Reformed theology.

Joseph Hall, in “The Westminster Shorter and the Heidelberg Catechisms Compared,” demonstrates the folly of pitting these two catechetical systems of theology over against one another. Rejecting both Schaff’s estimation of the Shorter Catechism and Warfield’s critique of the Heidelberg, Hall appreciatively surveys both and shows the basic continuity as well as some interesting discontinuities.

In “The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy,” Ian Hamilton traces the sad decline of confessional orthodoxy and biblical fidelity in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. This is a morality tale for all contemporary Reformed confessional communions. Hamilton is an expert in the history of Scottish subscription, and this is a distillation of his larger thesis on this subject.

Hugh Cartwright “Westminster and Establishment: A Scottish Perspective” introduces non-British Reformed and Presbyterian audiences to the issue of the establishment principle. Establishment is often viewed by, say, American Presbyterians (at least by some of the few who know anything of it at all) as tantamount to theocracy, inherently Erastian, subversive of religious toleration and the source of all Scottish Presbyterianism’s problems for the last 300 years. But the establishment principle is important for understanding anything of the Scottish Presbyterian tradition. By the establishment principle, we mean the view of church-state relations in which the state is considered to be under obligation to establish a particular church (for example, in England—the Church of England or in Scotland—The Church of Scotland) and work with it for the advancement of the cause of religion in the realm. We may paraphrase William

Cunningham’s description of the principle behind this view in this way: the obligation to advance the cause of God and the Kingdom of Christ lies not only with individuals, but also with rulers and nations.

Professor Nick Needham tackles the tricky issues of “Westminster and Worship: Psalms, Hymns? And Musical Instruments?” He is particularly concerned to give an accurate historical judgment relating to the Assembly’s views and deliverances relating to exclusive psalmody and non-instrumental worship (two aspects of worship held to be essential to “regulative principle” directed corporate worship by many Presbyterian and Reformed bodies). Needham’s conclusions will enlighten and, perhaps, surprise many.

Derek W. H. Thomas addresses “The Eschatology of the Westminster Confession and Assembly” and provides what is perhaps the best concise overview and evaluation of the Assembly’s eschatology available. Thomas is not afraid to probe and critique, but his presentation is as sympathetic as it is informative and is as comprehensive as the constraints of his word limit will allow. It is the perfect entry-point for an intelligent discussion of Westminster eschatology for the student who wants a faithful and judicious guide, and to be pointed to the right questions and categories.

Chi Mo Hong introduces us to “The Influence of the Westminster Confession on the Korean Presbyterian Church.” As the first look at this subject that many of us will have ever read, this chapter helpfully leads us into *terra incognita* and gives us an appreciation for the fruits of faithful, conservative, evangelical, Reformed missionaries to Korea, and more, for the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in establishing and growing Christ’s church.

Philip G. Ryken’s “Oliver Bowles and the Westminster View of Gospel Ministry” reveals to us a little masterpiece of pastoral

theology, Oliver Bowles' treatise on the evangelical pastor. This chapter, like David Hall's, gives us yet another glimpse of the "affectionate, practical theology" of the Assembly, and the warmth and wisdom of their whole approach to the work of the minister.

My chapter on "True Communion with Christ: Calvin, Westminster and Consensus on the Lord's Supper" argues that the Confession helpfully captures the consensus of the Reformed tradition on the much-disputed issue of the nature of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Over against current neo-Reformed sacerdotalism's attempt to hijack Calvin as a proto-advocate of its eccentric view, I suggest that we look at the continuity of Calvin, Tigurinus and Westminster for consensus, and evaluate all historic Reformed teaching on this subject in light of a faithful submission to Scripture (lest we fall prey to an unhealthy traditionalism).

John V. Fesko writes on "The Westminster Confession and Lapsarianism"—a précis of his larger important study of lapsarianism from Calvin to Westminster. Dr. Fesko sketches a picture of the history of lapsarianism in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. As we have noted before, there is a school of historiography that argues that the post-Reformation Reformed theologians under the influence of Ramist logic distorted Calvin's doctrine of predestination through an arid blend of scholastic rationalism. Beza, Turretin, Perkins, Ames, Dort and Westminster usually figure as bad guys who ossified the warm, pastoral, dynamic biblical-theological approach of Calvin into a cold, abstract, metaphysical, schematized system of decrees. Now, let's be clear, this analysis is bunk; and recently a string of outstanding church historians have ably demonstrated its deficiency. Dr. Fesko's work contributes to this historiographical rectification. Indeed, his thesis will catch many by surprise: "the post-Reformation Reformed theologians (the Protestant scholastics) did not distort Calvin's doctrine of predestination but rather

moderated it.” Fesko will argue that Calvin was supralapsarian, while Dort and Westminster are infralapsarian. The former assertion will, no doubt, raise far more eyebrows than the latter, but Fesko’s constructively provocative argument is more than worth the time to ponder, whether you agree with him at every point or not.

The magnitude of the Assembly and its work, the quality of its product, and its significance for the English-speaking world and beyond in successive generations should not be underestimated, but often is today. The Assembly’s theological formulations are a landmark of pastoral theology and the work of the Assembly marks the highpoint of Reformed confessionalism, and thus warrants the further study and consideration that these essays of ours intend to promote.

J. Ligon Duncan, III, BA, MDiv, MA, PhD

General Editor, The Westminster Assembly Project
Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church (PCA), Jackson,
Mississippi, USA
Adjunct Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary
Convener, Twin Lakes Fellowship
Council, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals
Chairman, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood
Secretary of the Board, Belhaven College
Editorial Director, Reformed Academic Press



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Collectively, the whole editorial team here expresses our thanks to the Executive Committee of RTS for its ongoing encouragement and support. Many congregations and individuals have given financially toward the work of the Westminster Assembly Project, among them, the First Presbyterian Church of Yazoo City, Mississippi, James R. "Sonny" Peaster (a trustee of

the Banner of Truth Trust) and A. William May (a Ruling Elder of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson) stand out. Without their gifts, we could not have brought this work to completion.

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All of the editors are grateful to God for our wives and families—all of whom have made their own contribution to this work in different ways. Each of us has been gifted by God with an extraordinary woman with whom we share life and partnership in the work of the Gospel. I'm moved to the realization of that again, even as I write these words. Anne Duncan, Shirley Rankin, Rosemary Thomas, Rachel Cannada, Dana Berry and Sara Tindall have each gladly borne the costs of ministry and have enriched our lives through their self-giving. We rise up and call you blessed.

Soli Deo Gloria

L. D.