

Series Introduction

The last two decades have seen a revolution in the way in which scholars have come to understand the nature and development of Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was in this context, and to further this scholarly revolution, that Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia established the Craig Center for the Study of the Westminster Standards in 2002. The center provides a forum for promoting scholarly study of the history and theology of the Westminster Assembly, the various documents that it produced, and the way in which these documents have been received and used over the years.

As part of this project, the Craig Center has joined forces with P&R Publishing Company to commission a series of books, including monographs and collections of essays, that reflect this agenda. Each volume stands within the trajectories set by this new scholarship and takes seriously the theological content of Reformed orthodoxy while not naively divorcing that content from its historical or ecclesiastical context. Yet in doing this, these books do not become simply examples of antiquarianism or historicism. In fact, our desire is that this approach will free the past from the shackles and constraints of the agendas of the immediate present and thus allow voices from history to speak meaningfully to the world of today. It is thus the hope of the Craig Committee that both church and academy will benefit from this series for many years to come.

Carl R. Trueman
Chair of the Craig Committee

Foreword

W. ROBERT GODFREY



In the midst of growing political and social turmoil—leading to civil war and the execution of a king—commissioners called by the English parliament began to meet in 1643. Over a period of years they worked in the precincts of Westminster Abbey in London to compose standards that they hoped would guide a newly reformed church in Great Britain. Their work was prodigious and profound, manifesting remarkable balance and solidity in light of the chaotic conditions that often surrounded them.

The commissioners to this Westminster Assembly did not see themselves as religious revolutionaries, tearing down an old church to erect a brand-new one. They saw themselves as reformers who could at last bring the churches of England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland into great conformity to the Word of God, to each other, and to the Reformed churches of continental Europe.

This Assembly is best remembered today for the Westminster Confession of Faith and the catechisms that it prepared. But unlike those who embrace the modern tendency to reductionism, the members of the Assembly knew that a reformed church needed more than a summary of its official doctrine. The commissioners also prepared a form of church government to structure the official organization of the church. In addition, they prepared a Directory of Public Worship to guide the churches in meeting with their God. And they arranged for the preparation of a Psalter as the praise book for public worship.

The fruit of the work of the Assembly had little effect in England. The triumph of Independency over Presbyterianism in England

during the Commonwealth and the restoration of episcopacy under King Charles II prevented that. But in Scotland and in Presbyterian churches around the world, the work of the Westminster Assembly had great and blessed effect.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, most Protestant churches in America find themselves in very serious turmoil and trouble in the very areas about which the Assembly worked and wrote with such care. In the evangelical, Pentecostal, and Reformed churches we see great confusion and error on doctrine, church government, and worship.

The depth of the current disarray in evangelical churches is well documented in a book by Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, provocatively titled *Is the Reformation Over?* This book largely examines the changes in the relations between the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical churches in the last fifty years. The contention of the book is that Roman Catholics and evangelicals are much closer to each other in theology and practice than they were fifty years ago and that while the differences that remain are not trivial, many evangelicals now rightly recognize Roman Catholics as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Noll and Nystrom list a number of evangelical weaknesses (“ecclesiology, tradition, the intellectual life, sacraments, theology of culture, aesthetics, philosophical theology, or historical consciousness”) and note that evangelicals in these areas “almost always” find some help in the Roman Catholic tradition.¹ Modern evangelicals seem seldom to look to the great Reformed and Lutheran traditions of the Reformation for help. In fact, Noll and Nystrom’s book illustrates—largely unintentionally—how little evangelicals know or understand the concerns and work of the Reformation. Indeed, this book—again unintentionally—is further evidence that the evangelical tradition is as different from the Reformed tradition as it is from Lutheranism or Pentecostalism.

To speak just of the Reformed heritage of the Reformation, one could not charge the Reformed with a lack of concern for ecclesiology.

1. Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 71.

Much study was undertaken and many books written on that subject, exploring the fullness of biblical teaching. (If the Reformed had a fault, it was not the neglect of ecclesiology, but a failure to maintain a clear witness to and practice of biblical Presbyterianism.) On tradition and historical consciousness, the Reformed studied with care the ancient fathers and medieval theologians, recognizing both value and errors in their work. The intellectual life of Reformed scholars has been second to none for over four hundred years. On sacraments the Reformed thought deeply, and they wrote widely on baptism and the Lord's Supper. They also made them an integral part of Christian worship and experience. The Reformed contributions on culture, aesthetics, and philosophical theology have been significant, especially in Dutch Reformed circles in the last hundred years.

Many evangelicals, in their pursuit of vital religion, abandoned their Reformation heritage in most of the areas of weakness highlighted by Noll and Nystrom. It is not surprising that they should find their own tradition to be shallow and impoverished. Yet it is very disappointing that they seem so driven by the pursuit of religious experience that they find more affinity with the human inventions of Rome than with the biblical, confessional commitments of the Reformed.

Dr. Wayne Spear has spent much of his ministry teaching the theology contained in the Westminster Standards. It is right that he should be honored at his retirement with a volume of essays examining the riches of the work of the Westminster Assembly. Our prayer should be that the solid Reformed teaching exemplified in his life and in this book may help reform the churches in our day according to the Word of God. Perhaps more than at any other time since the Reformation, churches today need biblical doctrine instead of human ideas of truth. They need biblical church government rather than government by offices of human contrivance. They need biblical worship rather than the vain pursuit of human rites and practices. The Reformation is not over. The Reformation is needed more today than ever, and the wisdom of the Westminster Standards is more relevant today than at any other time in recent memory.

Editor's Preface

ANTHONY T. SELVAGGIO



This volume is a celebration of Reformed systematic theology. It celebrates the theology that emerged during the years of the Reformation and reached its high-water mark at the Westminster Assembly. Celebrating systematic theology is vitally important in our current theological climate. The current trend in theological studies is to neglect traditional systematic theology. Many modern theologians have eschewed the topical and rational approach of systematic theology in favor of practical and narrative approaches. This trend is both unfortunate and dangerous. The intent of this volume is to encourage the church to once again focus on *theology*, the humble study of God through his self-revelation. Given this intent, it is therefore fitting that the volume include contributions from those engaged in systematic theology from a variety of Reformed denominations and from several different nations. It is also fitting that the volume begin with an inspiring and thoughtful essay entitled “The Vitality of Reformed Systematic Theology.”

This volume is also a celebration of the teaching career of Dr. Wayne R. Spear, who taught systematic theology at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for over thirty years. Dr. Spear taught me the value of the traditional approach to systematic theology. The most noteworthy aspect of Dr. Spear's approach to teaching systematic theology was his insistence on using both the Bible and the Westminster Confession of Faith as the primary references. Dr. Spear recognized that systematic theology flows from the Bible itself and that there is no better summary of

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Reformed systematic theology than the Westminster Confession of Faith. He unashamedly and unapologetically taught “confessional” Reformed systematic theology. Therefore, it is fitting to honor him with a collection of essays that touch on some of the great themes and theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith. In order to specially honor Dr. Spear, two of the essays in this volume were written by former students, C. J. Williams and me, and one was written by Dr. Spear’s successor, Dr. Richard Gamble.

In this book the reader will be exposed to the theological topics at the core of Westminster’s theology, topics such as justification, adoption, the kingship of Christ, the doctrine of Scripture, the Lord’s Day, covenant theology, the atonement, and Christian liberty. These topics served as pillars of the theology that was forged in Westminster Abbey in the seventeenth century and, if the church is to adhere to the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3 NASB), must continue to serve as pillars of the Reformed church in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Introduction

JERRY O'NEILL



On more than one occasion I have heard my friend and colleague Dr. Wayne Spear lecture on the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). No one is more qualified to do so. His knowledge and thoroughness in covering this subject so dear to his heart are evident to all. But when his lectures come to the latter half of the twentieth century and the early days of the twenty-first century, they omit the one man who has arguably had the most profound influence on the RPCNA for the last half-century.

In these lectures, Dr. Spear rightly discusses the continuing impact of the late J. G. Vos, and he carefully explains some of the important decisions made by our synod over these years. He mentions presidents of the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (RPTS) who have provided formal and informal leadership for the denomination because of their labors at the denominational seminary. He notes pastors such as Kenneth Smith, Roy Blackwood, and Edward Robson, who have been tremendously used by the Lord in our generation. But his humility keeps him from even considering in this context the one man who many of us think has done more than anyone else to shape pastors and ultimately congregations within our denomination in the last generation: Wayne Renwick Spear.

Dr. Spear served as professor of systematic theology at RPTS for thirty-five years. At the time of his retirement in the summer of 2005, he had spent exactly half his life serving his Lord, and his denomination, in this capacity. During many of those years he also taught church history, taught homiletics, or served as dean of faculty.

But it is not merely the fact that he served for thirty-five years in one ministry position that is so impressive. Many others in the church who have been blessed by God with good health and perseverance have labored in Christ's kingdom for an equal number of years. But few have labored more faithfully and more ably than this humble servant of the Lord.

I count it an honor to have served on the seminary faculty with Dr. Spear. He was my teacher of systematic theology when I was a student at RPTS, and I still have (and occasionally use) the notes that I took in his classes. When I returned to the seminary to serve in my current position, Dr. Spear's counsel to me in his role as dean of faculty was invaluable.

I have also had the privilege of serving with Dr. Spear in the various courts of the church—the session in the North Hills of Pittsburgh, the Presbytery of the Alleghenies, and the Synod of the RPCNA. His has always been a voice of reason in such settings. Younger men often do much of the talking in these meetings, but when Dr. Spear speaks, others listen—and learn. His service to the church has sometimes been public (chairing the Geneva College Board of Corporators, for example) and sometimes private. But he always serves humbly and without fanfare. Few who read this book will have any idea of the myriad ways in which he faithfully serves Christ and his church behind the scenes.

As intimated earlier, Dr. Spear's teaching has tremendously influenced my theological convictions, as it has those of so many others who have studied at the seminary both before and after me. He has the uncanny ability to read difficult and complicated theological works, understand what the authors are trying to communicate, critique these works from a biblical perspective, and then explain it all to others who might not even be able to wade through the original material.

Dr. Spear's knowledge of theology and church history is remarkable. Seldom is he without an answer to a student's question. Sometimes a student will ask a question on an obscure subject about which few others in the class have any knowledge whatsoever. Certain students seem to have the desire to stump the professor with these kinds of questions. But all of us who have sat in Dr. Spear's classes can recall how he will often pause (sometimes for a considerable length

of time), reach back into his vast memory reservoir—almost appearing to be thumbing through his mental Rolodex—and pull out an answer that just “blows away” everyone in the class. Not only will he recall the author and the book from which he draws his answer, but he will be able to quote the author who addressed the point under consideration almost verbatim.

Dr. Spear’s teaching is known to be clear, systematic, and thorough. Occasional stories, illustrations, and wise proverbs that inject both clarification and humor into his lectures also mark his teaching. Some of these were passed along from those who taught him in a previous day; some are his own. One example, given to budding preachers as they consider the preferred length of sermons, is Spear’s Law: “If it is long, it had better be good!”

One story that Dr. Spear likes to tell his students in his doctrine of salvation course is passed along from one of his former professors at Geneva College about a student who was falling asleep in class just as his Bible teacher asked him whether he could explain how the sovereignty of God in election could be reconciled with the biblical teachings of human responsibility and free will. The student heard his name called, but had not heard the question. Rather than admitting this, he replied, “Yesterday I knew the answer to that question, but today I have forgotten it.” To this the professor replied to the class, “This is indeed a great tragedy. Only two persons in all of history have known the answer to my question. One is God, and he has chosen not to reveal the answer to us. The other is our brother here, and he has forgotten!”

I’m reminded of one illustration that demonstrates Dr. Spear’s ability to use a modern-day parable to drive a particular teaching home. When discussing the topic of redemption, he tells a story passed on to him by a former pastor of his. The story is about a young lad who, with great and loving care, built a small wooden boat. It was without any question his prized possession, and he frequently played with the boat in the small creek near his home. One night he left the boat by the creek, attempting to secure it safely to a nearby tree before he went home for the evening. During the night, a storm came up and the boat was swept away, to the boy’s deep chagrin. Sometime later, though, the boy walked by a secondhand store, and he spotted

his prized little boat. Quickly he ran home, gathered together all his money, and returned to the store to purchase the boat that had once been his. As he carried the boat out of the store, he looked at it fondly and said, "Little boat, you are twice mine. I made you, and now I have bought you back." How better can you teach such a profound biblical truth?

Dr. Spear was born into a preacher's family on July 24, 1935. His father, Norman, died shortly before Wayne's twelfth birthday, and he spent his teenage years on his uncle's farm in Bovina Center, New York. This agricultural background did much to shape his personality and interests, and to this day he owns, loves, and carefully tends to Haflinger horses on his small farm in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania, several miles north of Pittsburgh.

While in high school Wayne demonstrated the gifts and interests that would mark his later life when he developed an original outline of the book of Romans. At a time in life when most of us were pursuing sports or other temporal pleasures, Wayne was giving serious time to the study of God's Word. He did enjoy sports and other recreational activities, but his life was already balanced and Christ-centered.

While a student at Geneva College, Wayne distinguished himself in the classroom, ran cross-country, and fell in love with Mary Grace McCracken, whom he married after his first year at seminary. Although Wayne himself is not quick to confirm the following account, a widespread rumor has it that during his senior year of college, he not only aced the comprehensive examination in Bible, which was his major field of study, but also took the comprehensive exam in science and scored higher than all the science majors. (In those days, students were required to pass a comprehensive exam in their major field of study before graduation. Also in those days, Geneva's science department was highly esteemed, with medical schools gladly accepting most Geneva students who applied.)

After graduating from RPTS in 1960, Wayne spent six years in pastoral ministry before pursuing graduate studies at the request of Synod—at Princeton Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary (where he received a Th.M.), the University of Pittsburgh, and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (where he received his Ph.D.).

In 1970 he began his teaching responsibilities at RPTS, where he taught until he retired.

Because RPTS has been the site of most of Dr. Spear's ministry over the years, and because the seminary is not well known to many in the Reformed and evangelical communities, it seems appropriate in these words of introduction to say just a little about the institution. An understanding of RPTS will help you, the reader, understand the context of this man's labors.

The seminary was founded in 1810, one year after the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America had been officially organized. The establishment of the seminary was one of the first acts of the new synod and demonstrates the priority that this fledgling church placed on preparing pastors for the gospel ministry. RPTS is the fifth oldest seminary, and the oldest evangelical or Reformed seminary, in the United States.

For many years, consistent with how other seminaries of that era operated, a professor of theology was elected by Synod and the students of theology came to study with him wherever he ministered. When the pastor-professor moved to serve a different congregation, the seminary moved with him. In its first forty-six years, RPTS operated in at least five different locations, depending on where the lead professor was serving as pastor.

In 1856 the seminary was moved to a permanent location in what is now called the North Side of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1923 RPTS was moved to its present site in Point Breeze, in Pittsburgh's East End. This beautiful site was originally a mansion built by a retail magnate near the end of the nineteenth century, and has been extensively remodeled and enlarged to house the seminary.

For many years the seminary primarily served Reformed Presbyterian students preparing for pastoral ministry or the mission field. In the last half of the twentieth century the ministry began to expand to include students from a wide variety of evangelical and Reformed churches. In 1973 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania granted RPTS the authority to offer the Master of Divinity degree, and in 1994 the seminary was accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.

Today the seminary is, in the judgment of those of us who are called to serve there, a very special place where the blessing of God's

Spirit seems most evident. God has, in his grace, enabled RPTS to remain firmly committed to the historic Reformed faith in its teaching while ministering to students from various cultures, nations, and denominational backgrounds. Students find the seminary to be a haven, a safe refuge, an ideal environment in which to learn the great truths of the historic faith.

The seminary also houses the Center for Urban Biblical Ministry, which works with Geneva College to provide associate's degrees for students in our city. We also provide a site for Geneva College to offer modular courses leading to a bachelor's degree in community ministry in a nontraditional evening-school format. On this one site, therefore, a student can get an associate's degree through the Center for Urban Biblical Ministry, a bachelor's degree in community ministry from Geneva College, and either a Master of Theological Studies degree or a Master of Divinity degree from RPTS.

The seminary's great desire is to be faithful to the Word of God and the mission he has given us. In God's grace, Dr. Spear has played an enormous role in enabling us to fulfill this mission for the last thirty-five years.

Because RPTS has historically been a seminary where teaching was emphasized, with little time available for professors to do research and writing, Dr. Spear has not been a prolific author and is not as widely known as some who spend much of their time writing books. Nevertheless, *The Theology of Prayer*, his first book, printed in 1974, was revised and updated in 2002 under the title *Talking to God: The Theology of Prayer*; and a new book critiquing the neoorthodox theology of Karl Barth is (at my writing of this) soon to be published. Dr. Spear has also written scholarly journal articles and contributed chapters for books edited by others. He is a respected scholar in Reformed academic circles and was asked in 1993 to present material in London, in conjunction with the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Dr. Spear's life and ministry were seriously threatened in 1986. While running near his home in Gibsonia, he experienced a splitting headache and realized that something was seriously wrong. He went to the emergency room of a local hospital and was diagnosed with an aneurysm in his brain. Thankfully, in response to the urgent prayers

of many people and under the care of a skilled physician, the Lord spared his life, and he has had no further trouble as a result of the aneurysm.

When I first joined the RPTS faculty in 1995, Dr. Spear was already thinking of his retirement. He was quite concerned that younger men be given the opportunity to serve; and he was concerned that after his many years at the seminary, he might be growing stale in the classroom. But in the providence of God, he was asked to go with a team of men to Romania in the summer of 1997 to teach at a small seminary there. This experience seemed to recharge his batteries, reinvigorating him for his teaching responsibilities back home. He enthusiastically returned to RPTS in the fall, and taught with vigor until his recent retirement.

Personally, I look forward to seeing much of Wayne in his retirement. Not only do we serve on the same session in the North Hills of Pittsburgh, we also share certain members of our families. Wayne's youngest son, Sam, is married to my oldest daughter, Meg, and they have seven children. What a blessing for my wife, Ann, and me to share grandkids with Wayne and Mary Spear! But Wayne and Mary don't share all of their grandchildren with us. They have a total of twenty-four as of this writing, and the Lord may have others to come. Truly they have been blessed to see their children's children, and to see God's covenant promises extend from one generation to the next.

On behalf of the entire RPTS community, it is my great joy to introduce Wayne Spear (and his wife, Mary) to the readers of this volume. My prayer is that the Lord will use this work for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and that Wayne and Mary will be richly blessed all the days of their lives. They have given selflessly to Christ's work; may they be greatly rewarded for their labors of love.