

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_evangelical\\_quarterly.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php)

## “POPULARIZING” THEOLOGY

A FORMER Professor of Homiletics in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey, U.S.A., Rev. W. M. Paxton, D.D., exhorted his students to “popularize” theology. One good way to begin is to circulate and teach the Westminster Standards, the Confession of Faith, and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Statistics seem to show that this effort has been neglected by the three leading Presbyterian denominations in the United States, though all three retain these formulas as their doctrinal basis. In a number of recent years the United Presbyterians have averaged a circulation of six copies a year, not enough to supply their seminary graduates. The southern Presbyterians (Presbyterian Church U.S.) of late may have circulated annually less than a thousand copies and the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. annually a thousand or more. But if the ideal is that most Presbyterian families should have one or more Bibles, a dictionary, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and a copy of the Westminster Standards, all three denominations are below that attainment. In the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. a question asked of every candidate for the offices of elder, deacon, or for licensure to preach, is, “Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?” In this Church there are over fifty thousand elders and twenty-one thousand deacons. It is estimated that most of them do not possess a copy of this Confession; and a thousand copies a year for the entire denomination confirms this impression. One modification of the above statements is the fact that all three denominations circulate thousands of the Shorter Catechism.

To remedy this inconsistency, must we urge that Presbyterians cultivate Presbyterianism? And is that sectarian? The majority of the elect for centuries, as we may suppose, have been saved through the work of Evangelical denominations; hence it is an utter misrepresentation to say that they injure the Church universal. The denominations are admirably adapted to earthly conditions. “Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church” is a command addressed to all, in a sanctified emulation. Formerly Presbyterians did excel; for we may point to the Reformation, which was largely a

Presbyterian movement. And if a gracious revival leads them to study their Scriptural creeds, a new generation may arise, mighty in the Scriptures, and prepared for every good work. From the history of creeds, Presbyterians should know that they have the best of such formulas, and should regard them as talents, to be actively used and propagated to the ends of the earth. Their advancement need not injure any other Church, but stimulate them also in sacred studies.

This does not mean a partisan zeal for the word Presbyterian. Important branches of the Presbyterian family in Europe have never borne that designation. The words Presbyterian, Calvinist, Reformed, do not occur in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. Defections in Great Britain and Ireland showed that a Unitarian Church can call itself Presbyterian. Let a Presbyterian preacher omit to mention the saving doctrines of the Gospel, and his Church is tending toward a Unitarian condition. Modernism seems like a concealed group of heresies. Give us an open heresy, and a trained theologian and Presbyter may know what to do, as there are no new heresies. Doctrines preached in America as novelties have been heresies exploded fifteen centuries ago. But what a problem, a modernism that can sign orthodox formulas and omit to preach the Gospel! The way to teach atheism in public schools is by omitting to mention God. The atheistic character of evolution as it is often taught is due to its omission of God's work of creation and providence. That first vowel, “ a ”, in atheism, is suggestive, as Paul uses it in Ephesians ii. 12, “ Having no hope, and *atheoi*, without God in the world ”.

Volumes have been written in praise of Presbyterian government. But in the other two types of Church government, the Episcopal and Congregational or Independent, there have been Calvinists, zealous and learned, as among Presbyterians. Any type of Church government requires vigilance, to counteract human infirmities. Those who belong to one type of government may exhibit phenomena of another type. Episcopal authorities may be influenced by a powerful congregation; an association of Independents may adopt usages similar to those of Presbyterians; and a Presbyterian Superintendent or Secretary may be as dictatorial as an archbishop. Dr. Thomas Scott was loyal to the Church of England. Many years after his death, his *Force of Truth*, the story of his gradual conversion to Calvinism,

was republished by the Presbyterian Board of Publication in Philadelphia; and Presbyterian hearts have been stirred, and Presbyterian eyes moist, in reading that narrative. This little volume has a "Recommendatory Letter" by Rev. Dr. Samuel Miller of Princeton, N.J., and eight tactful, instructive letters from John Newton, which were a factor in Dr. Scott's conversion. As to Calvinism among Independents, if we class John Owen among them, his prolific writings unmistakably declare his position. Among Presbyterians the chief danger may not be in administration, but rather concerning their Calvinism. Without intelligent, consistent, earnest Calvinism, a Presbyterian is either immature or, worse, a Samson shorn of strength.

It would be absurd to imagine that a Presbyterian's salvation is complete when he obtains a copy of the Westminster Standards, and that we may attribute to it the magic supposed to reside in good luck horseshoes, in a Pennsylvania Dutch incantation, or in the coins that rattled in Tetzels' coffers as he sold indulgences. But we are justified in regarding the study of them as a good beginning in theology. Any sort of Bible study is often unpopular, yet we must attack the problem, even if reminded of the New England professor's saying, that "the human mind has an infinite capacity for resisting the entrance of knowledge." It would be an advantage to students to know these Standards before entering the seminary. Fifty years ago there were high schools or academies that taught Greek, and colleges that not only had Greek instruction during part or all of their course, but Hebrew classes also in their senior year. Now, a large proportion of students enter theological seminaries without knowing either Greek or Hebrew alphabets, so that the curriculum is dislocated, burdened with the strain of remedying these defects, and many students are not as well furnished for their ministry as in former years.

And the students here may find themes for sermons. By far the most of the printed matter in our editions of the Standards consists of the proof texts or Bible readings accompanying them. Perhaps more than eight hundred passages are quoted to illustrate the ten commandments, a discussion occupying a fifth or more of all the pages of Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and probably unsurpassed. An impressive theme is the four aggravations of sin (L.C.Q. 151), each exemplified in Absalom's career. A fair outline of a Christian life is the "improvement" of baptism

(L.C.Q. 167). And a limitless field of illustration from Christian reforms and missions is indicated in the rules (Nos. 6 and 7) of the Larger Catechism for the “right understanding” of the commandments. And other themes, the way of salvation, faith, repentance and the “diligent use” of the Word, sacraments and prayer. The greater part of the Confession states the common Evangelical faith; and as to the Calvinistic chapters, we may now refer to some American experience.

The late Rev. W. G. T. Shedd, D.D., was a New School Presbyterian professor in Union Theological Seminary, New York City; but wherever the New School differed from the Old School he took the side of the Old School Presbyterians, and with eminent literary ability. He opposed the movement in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. to revise the Westminster Confession, and republished some articles in 1893 in a little volume, *Calvinism Pure and Mixed. A Defence of the Westminster Standards*. He said, in his preface, “The controversy has disclosed the fact that some Presbyterians deny that God may justly pass by mankind in the bestowment of saving grace; and assert that common grace may become saving grace by the sinner’s co-operation; that original sin is not deserving of eternal death and therefore that infants are not liable to it; that Westminster Standards teach that all the heathen are lost, and that the autographs of the inspired writers contained more or less of error. The writer endeavours to show that the first opinion is fatal to the doctrine of Divine sovereignty in election; that the second is Arminian synergism, not Calvinistic monergism; that the third destroys the doctrine of infant salvation, by making it only a quasi-salvation and a matter of obligation on the part of God; and that the fourth and fifth are mis-statements of the contents of the Confession.” He observed that this movement confirmed his opinion that “the revision of a creed is *latitudinarian* in its nature and influence”. The creed should be reaffirmed, not revised.

He replied (p. 7) to an objection that the Confession is not sufficiently liberal. “But read and ponder the following statements: ‘Repentance unto life is an Evangelical grace, the doctrine whereof is to be preached in season and out of season by every minister of the Gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ. It is every man’s duty to endeavour to repent of his particular sins, particularly. Every man is bound to make private confession

of his sins to God, praying for the pardon thereof, upon which, and the forsaking of them, he shall find mercy. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men. Prayer is to be made for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter, but not for the dead. God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth, and in secret each one by himself. God in His Word, by a positive moral commandment, binds men in all ages. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that He freely provideth and offereth to sinners a mediator, and life and salvation in Him. The ministry of the Gospel testifies that whosoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and excludes none that will come unto Him. God is able to search the heart, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfil the desires of all.' These declarations, scattered broadcast through the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, teach the universality of the Gospel and exclude no creature from its benefits."

And he gave full answers to the proposed omission of preterition (p. 43). "What is preterition? It is God's passing by a sinner in the bestowment of *regenerating*, not of common grace. All men are blessed with common grace"; (p. 51) "Any sinner who complains of God's 'passing him by' in the bestowment of regenerating grace after his abuse of common grace, virtually says to the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity, 'Thou hast tried once to convert me from sin; now try again, and try harder.'" He believed such an omission would show a "lopsided" decree. His clear reasoning is displayed in his chapters on the "Double Predestination to Holiness and Sin", and on Common and Special Grace. In Church periodicals he endeavoured to "popularize" theology, and in what was the most widespread discussion of the Westminster Standards ever known in America.

While hymnology uses language that is not technical, Calvinism has a prominent place in it, and millions sing the "Five Points" of Calvinism. And preterition is sung in the current lines, "Pass me not, O God my Father, Sinful though my heart may be", and "While on others Thou art calling, Do not pass me by". People who were supposed to be Evangelical Arminians have shouted "Amen!" to an untechnical Calvinistic sermon. A lady said to the late Rev. Dr. A. A. Hodge of Princeton, N.J., "I cannot believe as you do, that

whatever will be, will be ! ” “ Well, madam, ” said he, “ would you have me believe that whatever will be, won't be ? ”

In *The Westminster Assembly and its Work*, by the late Rev. Dr. B. B. Warfield, he says (p. 61), “ The Westminster Confession has occupied a position of very wide influence. It has been issued in something like two hundred editions in Great Britain and in about one hundred more in America. It was rendered into Latin in 1656 ; and into Gaelic in 1725 (often reprinted). More recently it has been translated into Hindustani (1842), Urdu (1848), German (1858), Siamese (1873), Portuguese (1876), Spanish (1880 and again 1896-7), Japanese (1880), Chinese (1881), Arabic (1883), Gujurati (1888), French (1891), as well as into Benga, Persian, and Korean (as yet in MS.). It thus exists to-day in some seventeen languages and is professed by perhaps a more numerous body than any other Protestant creed.” He adds (pp. 363-4) as to the Gaelic version of 1725, “ It was the last version prepared by the Church of Scotland or under its auspices ; and indeed the last but one which has hitherto emanated from a British source. Missionaries of the Irish Presbyterian Church have in our own day put forth a version in one of the languages of India (Gujurati) ; but with this exception it seems that there has been no translation of the Confession made by British hands since 1725. The task of giving the Confession to the world in its several languages has been taken up since 1842, however, with some energy by the American Presbyterians ; and eleven versions have been made by them during the last sixty years. . . . It is to be hoped that root will ultimately be taken by all and that many more will shortly be added to their number. The Presbyterian Churches owe it to their own sincerity to see that their doctrinal Standards, embodying, as they profess to believe, the very truth of God which is revealed in the Scriptures, are put in the possession of all whom they can reach with their propaganda. Otherwise, how shall they give an account of the ‘ talents ’ entrusted to them ? ”

But that should be only a beginning. Theological works have been largely in three elect languages, all Teutonic, English, Dutch and German. Augustine and Calvin have messages for the Church Universal, and not for Aryan peoples only. Church history shows how important in the Reformation and since has been the circulation, the translations of Calvin's *Institutes*. But

is it true that Swedenborg's works, to say nothing of Mrs. Eddy, are better endowed for dissemination than those of Calvin ? Error goes to and fro in the earth, and walks up and down in it, and is lavish in publication and translation. Here is an unfortified gap in Christian lines. The ministers of rising Churches in Asia and Africa must study Greek and Hebrew, the languages used by the Holy Spirit in the original Scriptures ; and in Church history, commentaries and theology. They should have at least a three-foot shelf of books, later more than a ten-foot one. The missions should train not only converts, but theologians. In conflict with principalities and powers, the Churches must be fed with meat as well as milk. Christendom, like Cæsar's Gaul, is of three parts or linguistic families, Teutonic, Slav and Latin. The Slavs dominate most of Europe and Northern Asia, having perhaps more than two hundred millions. Latin Europe and Latin America may count two hundred millions more. But Evangelical and Calvinistic theological literature available for Slav and Latin nations leaves much to be desired. Where are the endowments, adequate ones, for producing in dozens of languages the needed theological works ? We still do not have in English the work of Turretin, "the Aristotle of theology". In the United States are pastors of ability whose *res angusta domi* prevents their purchasing the volumes that would make preaching more effective ; and for their benefit a larger Boudinot Fund is needed. Accordingly, every Evangelical man who knows the value of Christian theology should cry aloud and spare not, till the Churches awake to strengthen this neglected part of missions ; and surely this Gospel must be "according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith".

CHARLES EUGENE EDWARDS.

Pittsburgh, Pa.