

Reformed Thought

Selected Writings of William Young



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edited by
Joel R. Beeke and Ray B. Lanning

introduced by
Paul Helm



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Introduction

*Paul Helm*¹

It is both an honor and a pleasure to be asked to write about Dr. William Young, whose life and Christian confession is celebrated in this selection of his writings. I could say a lot about Bill at the personal level, for our friendship goes back over forty years, to the time when he first mentored and argued with a young apprentice philosopher. But I will in general confine myself to some remarks about the pieces that have been brought together in this book. They are not quite representative of all Bill's writings—for there is nothing here from his books or his voluminous correspondence—but they fully represent, without qualification, Bill's theological, philosophical, and pastoral outlook, which has remained pretty constant over a long lifetime.

Theologically, Bill stands unashamedly in the tradition of the Reformation in his commitment to salvation by grace alone through faith, and to the sufficiency of Scripture for all matters of faith and practice. He gives his own special emphasis to each of these principles. While not in any way minimizing the accomplishment and application of redemption, he lays particular stress on its decree, its origin in the Father's electing and predestinating love. Bill is a decretal theologian, or perhaps it is more accurate to think of him as a decretal thinker. It is God's eternal decree that establishes all contingent truths and accounts for their consistency. Bill is a foe of any appeal to free will as initiating or unaidedly cooperating with God's grace. And in his appeal to the sufficiency of Scripture he in particular upholds,

1. Paul Helm (B.A., M.A., Oxon.) is currently a Teaching Fellow at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. He is the author of many books, including *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), and *Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

and has fought for, its sufficiency for determining the content of Christian worship. Throughout his long career he has championed “purity of worship.” This has set him apart not only from the “whatever Scripture does not forbid is permitted” approach of Lutheranism and Anglicanism, but also from the unashamed pragmatism of the modern evangelical church. Bill is a strongly “counter cultural” Christian.

However, this strong commitment to Reformation principles is not only founded on firm adherence to Scripture itself but also on a recognition of the theological achievements of the Patristic and Scholastic eras, particularly those of Augustine, Anselm (“a genius”²) and Thomas Aquinas. Bill recognizes that the Reformation was a re-formation of the gospel message, and not a revolution. The Reformers conserved and endorsed their Christian past wherever possible, and Bill does the same.

Bill’s overall outlook is quite remarkable, if not at present unique. His natural gifts and God’s special grace have enabled him to combine the study of philosophical issues with a deep interest in the theology of so-called “High Calvinism”—of the Puritanism of Old and New England, the Covenanting tradition of Scotland, and the Reformed Scholasticism and “precisionism” of the Netherlands. Bill’s treatise on “The Puritan Principle of Worship,” and several of his addresses, as well as his discussion of Gordon H. Clark’s view of saving faith, give the reader a sense of how thorough, familiar, and utterly sympathetic is Bill’s acquaintance with this literature. One can well imagine him seated around the table with Samuel Rutherford, William Twisse and Wilhelmus à Brakel, for instance, and discussing with each of them—in English or Dutch, as necessary—the heights of supralapsarianism, or the gross follies of Arminianism or Molinism, or the painful misunderstandings of R. T. Kendall. Bill is completely loyal to this tradition and thus a true theological conservative, increasingly out of sympathy with the changes that have taken place in evangelicalism and in Reformed theology during his lifetime. Besides such writers as these, he has other favorites, such as the epigrams of John “Rabbi” Duncan, the eccentric Scottish Hebraist of the nineteenth century, and the philosophy of Jonathan Edwards.

2. See “Theory and Theology,” chapter 25.

In Jonathan Edwards, Bill found a powerful advocate of determinism, which has fed his own emphasis upon the divine decree. It is clear to Bill that God's counsel, while inscrutable and in that sense mysterious, works through, and by means of, the ordering of the thoughts and choices of men and women who nonetheless remain responsible for their voluntary (and in that sense, free) choices. Edwards provided for Bill a philosophical defense of this view which he already found in Scripture, and which is stated with such elegance and economy in the third chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, "Of God's Decree." Bill writes of himself, "I could be labeled a pretty strong determinist. But I assure you that I am a very soft determinist, in the sense that I take a very hard view with regard to human responsibility. I believe God holds men accountable, and holds men accountable for all kinds of things with regard to which men would like to make excuses for themselves. And this is perfectly consistent with God having, from eternity, foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, including all human actions. If you want to call me a determinist, you can."³

Bill's appropriation of Edwards on the freedom of the will is characteristic of his attitude to philosophy more generally. He employs reason in elucidation of and in defense of the faith. Not infrequently he can be found drawing attention to a logical fallacy in some view he is contending with. But at the same time he is in no sense a rationalist, for he does not require that articles of faith must first meet some *a priori* standard of reason or reasonableness in order to be acceptable. Bill has too sharp a sense of the noetic effects of sin to succumb to this temptation. In this sense philosophy is subordinate to faith, but not because matters of faith cannot be reasoned about. He writes, "I do not know where to draw the boundary line between Christian philosophy and theology. I must confess that if people want to accuse me of being a theologian and not a philosopher when I proceed along these lines, I am willing to plead guilty, and it does not matter too much what label one uses, as far as I am concerned. And this, too, is in the spirit of Augustine, no doubt."⁴ I believe this to be Bill's dominant and enduring view of the relation between theology and philosophy.

3. See "What Is Truth?," chapter 24.

4. *Ibid.*

Bill is emphatic on the primacy of the intellect. So Christian theology is not exempt from intellectual study, for whatever else God's special revelation is, it has the character of propositional truth: it propounds truths for our acceptance. Our normal thought processes and standards of argument are not bypassed in some mystical way, but are to be thoroughly engaged in understanding and analyzing the truths of Holy Scripture. In order to receive the testimony of Scripture with faith, the illumination of the Holy Spirit is indispensable; but the Spirit illumines the propositions of Scripture, revealed truth. There is thus a strong evidential element in faith. The other feature is Bill's insistence on the objectivity of the claims of Scripture against the increasingly skeptical and relativistic outlook of the age. Yet there is nothing in Bill of that supposed antithesis between propositional and personal truth. The proposition is the vehicle of truth, and reliance on the truth of some of these propositions can bring a person to the feet of the Almighty. Bill says, "While readily realizing the riches of scriptural law addressed to the will and scriptural poetry captivating the affections, we must insist on the primacy of scriptural doctrine addressed to the intellect, a doctrine at the same time grounding and pervading the affective or volitional aspects of revelation. Scriptural doctrine is truth expressible in propositional form."⁵ Bill seems to have had little sympathy with much of the recent "Christian philosophy" movement, partly, I imagine, because of its almost uniform emphasis on indeterministic free will, and also because of its failure to appreciate and conserve the Augustinian and Reformed theological heritage.

Bill also has had an enduring interest in systematic philosophy, in metaphysical systems, as can be seen from his admiration for Herman Dooyeweerd, his interest in Hegel (in his book *Hegel's Dialectical Method*), and his appreciation of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, as "a metaphysical masterpiece despite its conclusion that metaphysics as well as ethics and aesthetics is nonsensical."⁶ Bill projected a book on Wittgenstein at one stage but unfortunately it never materialized. His enduring interest in the Austrian philosopher can be seen in his short paper on Wittgenstein and predestination.

5. See "Theory and Theology," chapter 25.

6. See "Modern Relativism and the Authority of Scripture," chapter 23.

However, it is in this area, the relation between systematic philosophy and theology, that one may detect some change or development in Bill's thinking. Because of the systematic character of Reformed theology, there is a natural affinity between it and philosophical systems of ideas. Early on in his career Bill put a good deal of energy into the idea of a "Reformed philosophy." There is his doctoral dissertation, *Toward a Reformed Philosophy* (1952); though even here his interest in and sympathy with Puritans such as Theophilus Gale is evident. And there is his translation, with the late David Hugh Freeman, of Herman Dooyeweerd's *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, undertaken in 1951, a monumental project. Perhaps it was under the influence of Gordon H. Clark during Bill's time at Butler University, ending in 1954, that the idea of a philosophical underpinning of the Reformed faith began to seem less attractive, and *sola scriptura* reasserted itself in all its purity. It is hard to be sure. But what is clear is that his disenchantment with some of the theological consequences of such an approach, particularly the implied appeal to the idea of the covenant as an overarching organizing principle of thought, has become clearer and more public as time has gone on.

In his important paper, "Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism," he sees the intellectual father of Dooyeweerd, that great man Abraham Kuyper, as perhaps unwittingly initiating a new movement: "Neo-Calvinism." It has two emphases, the doctrine of the presumptive regeneration of infants, which for Bill strikes at the heart of experimental religion and at the preaching of the law preparatory to the gospel; and the doctrine of common grace, which has given birth to "cultural Calvinism," an emphasis on the "christianizing" of culture and a marked shift away from the centrality of the *sola gratia* of the gospel. The new movement derides personal religion as "pietism." He writes, "That the Puritans separated religion from daily concerns is a base slander, but the Puritans never succumbed to the error, pointed out by Dr. Patton, as quoted by Dr. Machen, of making much of applied Christianity without being concerned about having a Christianity to apply."⁷ The important theological principle here is that for Bill the law of nature—the obligation mankind has to worship and serve the Creator⁸—precedes any

7. See "Historic Calvinism and Neo-Calvinism," chapter 3.

8. Westminster Confession, XXI, I and VII.

covenant, both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. It is only on this basis that the covenant of works can be made intelligible. In this article he also briefly makes serious criticisms of Dooyeweerd's system and its tendency to theological agnosticism.

It is interesting that despite his sympathy with the "presuppositionalism" of Gordon H. Clark and (I suspect to a lesser extent) that of Cornelius Van Til, one distinctive feature of Bill's thought is that he believes natural theology to be worthwhile. It is typical of him to write, in advocating the need for the theologian to have some skill in logic, that "Contemporary discussions of the theistic proofs, as a matter of fact, involve arguments involving modal concepts such as possibility, necessity, and contingency. Such arguments as the ontological proof and the proof from the contingency of the world require the mastery of an elaborate, technical logical apparatus, if they are to be stated, defended, or criticized effectively."⁹

Pastorally, in his sermons and some of his lectures, the striking thing is Bill's insistence on the need for personal religion to be "experimental." A person's professed faith in Christ should be put to the test; it is not sufficient for that person to conclude that he is a Christian merely from the fact that he believes that he is. The New Testament teaches that a person should examine himself (2 Cor. 13:5), take heed (1 Cor. 10:12), judge himself (1 Cor. 11:31), abase himself before God (Luke 18:14), and be watchful (Matt. 25:13). The presumptuous "easy-believism" of the modern church ignores this teaching at its peril. For Bill self-examination is central to Christian religion, both in its private and public expressions. Paradoxically, God-centered worship provides opportunities for solemn self-reflection of this sort, the wisdom of knowing God and ourselves. Is this subjectivism at odds without Bill's pronounced objectivism in theology? Not at all. It is concerned with the impact of objective truth on the soul, on the self. Is it self-absorption? It may degenerate into that, but in its best expression it is concerned to discern "the life of God in the soul of man."¹⁰ For Bill, Christian theology is not "dry," merely a form of words or a system of

9. See "Theory and Theology," chapter 25.

10. Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man: or, the Nature and Excellency of the Christian Religion* (1677; repr., Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1986).

ideas. Hence both his relief and delight, in his review of Gordon H. Clark's *Sanctification*, when he discovers in that book evidence of a concern for such "experimental Christianity."

The reader will discover that for breadth of scope, wealth of content, depth of understanding, and strength of conviction, not to mention intensity of passion, William Young has few peers. It is a privilege to be able to commend Bill's *Selected Writings* to a wider readership.

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As editors, we wish to thank all the publishers and editors of periodicals who gave permission for the reprinting of various chapters and articles in this book. These sources are detailed in the first footnote of various chapters. This book would not have been possible without their cooperation.

We also thank Vincent Gebhart for his valuable assistance in supplying most of the material for a helpful biographical sketch of our dear friend, William Young, and for working with Dr. Young in proofreading the final manuscript. Thanks, too, to Paul Helm for his excellent introduction and for assisting us with the bibliography, together with Jonathan Beeke, Grace Mullen, and Laura Mustafa. Finally, we are grateful for our typesetting proofreading team, Gary and Linda den Hollander, and for Stan McKenzie's final proofing.

—JRB/RL

Biographical Sketch of William Young

Vincent Gebhart¹ and Ray B. Lanning

It is admittedly difficult to write a biographical sketch of a man whose life has spanned nine decades, and who at the time of this writing continues to contribute to the Lord's work here below. Add to this difficulty the fact that the man's life has been very rich in experience and has had a very powerful influence on the lives of many who have come to know him. William Young has served faithfully, as a university professor of philosophy, academic colleague, theologian, author, preacher, presbyter, pastor, traveling companion, and friend. So this sketch does not claim to be complete but will only include some highlights in order to give the reader at least some information concerning the life and background of this faithful servant of the Most High.

William Young was born in Brooklyn, New York, on May 9, 1918, the son of William Young, Sr., and Miriam Barrus Young. At a very early age he excelled in his studies and entered Columbia University in 1934, at age 16. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1938 in pre-theological studies with a heavy emphasis in the classical languages of Latin and Greek. William was baptized as an infant in the Methodist Episcopal Church to which his mother belonged; later, as a result of a change of residence, mother and son were received into a nearby congregation of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. While at Columbia, he was active in the League of Evangelical Students,² and came into contact with Westminster Theological Seminary

1. Vincent Gebhart studied philosophy at the University of Rhode Island, graduating in 1973. Today he is a regional sales manager for John Crane, Inc., a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Reformed Church of East Greenwich, and a resident of Cranston, Rhode Island.

2. The League was organized by conservative students at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1925, to unite students from seminaries loyal to Scripture and the historic

alumnus Calvin Knox Cummings (1909–1987), General Secretary of the League from 1934 to 1937.

Cummings alerted Young to negative theological developments in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA) that led to the founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in 1936. In the same period, Young made the acquaintance of Westminster Seminary Professor John Murray (1898–1975), who persuaded him of the biblical truth of the regulative principle of worship.³

Young went on to study at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, and by 1941 he had earned both the Bachelor (ThB) and Master of Theology (ThM) degrees. During those years Westminster was a stronghold of Reformed orthodoxy, and the faculty included men such as J. Gresham Machen, R. B. Kuiper, Ned B. Stonehouse, Paul Woolley, John Murray, E. J. Young, and John H. Skilton. Upon graduation Young continued his education, pursuing a Doctor of Theology (ThD) degree at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He was graduated in 1944. His doctoral thesis was entitled, “Development of a Protestant Philosophy in Dutch Calvinistic Thought Since the Time of Abraham Kuyper.” The thesis was later published in the Netherlands under the title, *Toward a Reformed Philosophy*.⁴

During his time at Union Seminary Young applied to enter the ministry of the Word in the OPC. He was ordained as an evangelist and received into the Presbytery of New York and New England on October 8, 1942. From those early days in the OPC, Dr. Young established many life-long relationships with other Reformed men in the ministry, as well as with several congregations in the OPC and elsewhere. One such relationship began late in 1944 when, at the request of John Murray, Dr. Young began to preach regularly for an unaffiliated congregation in Toronto, Ontario,

Christian faith, in opposition to the influence of modernism in academic and ecclesiastical circles, and published a monthly magazine, *The Evangelical Student*, to which William Young contributed a poem, “Leaguers for Christ,” in October 1937.

3. “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or in any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture” (Westminster Confession of Faith, XXI, I).

4. William Young, *Toward a Reformed Philosophy: The Development of a Protestant Philosophy in Dutch Calvinistic Thought Since the Time of Abraham Kuyper* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1952).

known as the Bloor East Presbyterian Church. He served there as stated supply for two years from 1944–1946.

After returning to his family home, now in Queens, New York, for a year or so, Young accepted a teaching position as Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. Dr. Gordon H. Clark (1902–1985) was chairman of the philosophy department at the time and Dr. Young taught courses mainly in the history of ancient and modern philosophy. He taught at Butler from 1947 to 1954. In 1951 Young took a one-year sabbatical leave to travel to Amsterdam in the Netherlands, where he collaborated with Dr. David Hugh Freeman (b. 1924), in the translation of the first volume of Herman Dooyeweerd's philosophical work, *De Wijsbegeerte de Wetsidee*, published in English as *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*.⁵

After leaving Butler in 1954, Dr. Young matriculated at England's Oxford University as a graduate student in Merton College.⁶ He earned the prestigious "BLitt" degree in 1960; the degree was later upgraded into an "MLitt" in 1980. In between the years at Oxford, Dr. Young returned to Bloor East Presbyterian Church, now relocated and renamed as Victoria Park Presbyterian Church, and filled the pulpit for another year. In 1957, fellow Westminster alumnus Dr. Morton H. Smith (b. 1923) recommended him for a teaching post at Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. Soon thereafter he accepted the position as Professor of Philosophy and Psychology, but stayed at Belhaven for just one year. After another brief period of study at Oxford and several preaching engagements at Victoria Park Presbyterian Church in Toronto, he joined the faculty of the University of Rhode Island (URI)⁷ as Professor of Philosophy in 1960, where he taught until his retirement in 1988.

5. Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. by David H. Freeman and William S. Young (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1951). Note, the middle initial "S." attributed to William Young is an error of unknown origin; he has no middle name.

6. Founded in 1264, Merton College boasts today of having been "on the cutting edge of teaching and research for over 700 years." Eminent Mertonians include Sir Thomas Bodley, physician William Harvey, poet T. S. Eliot, and author J. R. R. Tolkien.

7. URI was chartered in 1888 as the State Agricultural Experiment Station and Agricultural School, and was established at Kingston, Rhode Island, as the Rhode Island College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts in 1892. Known as Rhode Island State

In those years the philosophy department at URI had a conservative Christian character, and Dr. Young was able to teach undergraduate courses in biblical thought, the history of Christian thought, and the philosophy of religion. Later, when a master's degree program was instituted, his course load included symbolic logic, philosophical logic, philosophy of language, studies in patristic and medieval philosophy, and studies in modern philosophy from Hegel to the present. He was also free to add courses in classical religious thinkers, including Augustine of Hippo, Jonathan Edwards, and Soren Kierkegaard. In addition to numerous articles and reviews contributed to various periodicals in these years, Dr. Young published two books, *Foundations of Theory* in 1967,⁸ and *Hegel's Dialectical Method* in 1972.⁹

During these years Dr. Young attended several Reformed churches, including Grace OPC in Fall River, Massachusetts, where Dr. David Freeman was the pastor.¹⁰ Following Dr. Freeman's resignation from the pastorate in 1967, several older members at Grace OPC eventually left the congregation. They began holding meetings in Seekonk, Massachusetts, and asked Dr. Freeman to conduct services for them in his home. In late 1972 the Freemans moved to Florida, and Dr. Young took over the services on a full-time basis. The small group now meeting in a Ramada Inn came to be known as the Presbyterian Reformed Fellowship of Seekonk. This small church would play a major part in Dr. Young's life for many years to come.

Dr. Young had severed his ties with the OPC in 1961 when at his request, he was removed from the roll of the Presbytery of Ohio. On January 23, 1976, Dr. Young was received as a ministerial member of the presbytery of the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC). The PRC had been formed

College after 1909, by act of the Rhode Island General Assembly it became the University of Rhode Island in 1951.

8. William Young, *Foundations of Theory* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1967).

9. William Young, *Hegel's Dialectical Method: Its Origins and Religious Significance* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1972).

10. Dr. Freeman shared the conviction of Prof. John Murray and Dr. Young regarding the content of worship song, that there is no scriptural warrant for the use of hymns of merely human composition, and therefore worship song should be confined to the divinely inspired Book of Psalms. During his ministry in Fall River OPC, the book of praise was the Christian Reformed *Psalter Hymnal*; Dr. Freeman used only the metrical Psalms from that volume, an abridgement of *The Psalter* (1912), enriched with selections from the Dutch Psalter translated into English, with their proper Genevan tunes. Dr. Freeman was also Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Rhode Island Junior College, Warwick, Rhode Island, from 1964 to 1972.

under the guiding hand of Professor John Murray in 1965, as a union of two congregations, the former Bloor East Presbyterian Church, now the Victoria Park Presbyterian Church, and Dr. William Matheson's congregation in Chesley, Ontario, once part of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. However, by 1976 the presbytery was reduced to just the one congregation in Chesley, with a remote preaching station in Lochalsh, Ontario. Nevertheless, Dr. Young joined the denomination, as it remained faithful to its founding principles and Reformed distinctives related to the simplicity and purity of the worship of God.

In 1978 Dr. Young led the Seekonk Fellowship into the PRC as a congregation, and the presbytery appointed him to continue preaching as stated supply. In the years following his retirement from URI, Dr. Young was formally called by the congregation as pastor of the church in 1995. He faithfully served in that capacity until 2010. The congregation has long since moved from Seekonk, and is known today as the Presbyterian Reformed Church of East Greenwich, Rhode Island. Rev. Michael Ives is now the pastor, and the church meets in the Rocky Hill Grange Hall, on Route 2, near the intersection with Route 401, in East Greenwich.¹¹

Dr. Young has seen some of the fruit of his pastoral labors. The little church he led into the PRC in 1978 has grown by God's grace, spiritually and numerically, especially in recent years. He continues to serve the PRC as he consults on two important committees in the presbytery. Until very recently he wrote articles and reviews for various philosophical and religious magazines and publishers that requested his written contributions to their publications. Dr. Young resides in his longtime home, "The Shady Maple," in the southern Rhode Island area, and maintains his mailing address at the Department of Philosophy, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, Rhode Island 02881.

11. More information is online at: <http://www.presbyterianreformed.org/eastgreenwich/index.php>

Theology and Doctrine



What Is Experimental Religion?¹

The word “experimental” suggests a scientific experiment. The scientist frames a hypothesis with a view to explaining an observed matter of fact. He then proceeds to test the hypothesis by drawing logical consequences from it, which may or may not prove to be the case. If they do not, the hypothesis is false, and must be given up, or at least be modified. If they turn out to be the case, the hypothesis is verified, and may be held to be probably correct although not infallibly proved.

Now an analogy may be found in the Christian religion. The Christian puts his faith to the test in self-examination, as commanded in 2 Corinthians 13:5ff. Saving faith has consequences that can be observed in the life of the Christian. On the one hand, if the fruits of faith are absent, there is no living or saving faith. One such fruit is perseverance. The “stony ground hearers”² are an example of what has been called “temporary faith,” which has no root and fails, when affliction or persecution puts it to the test. The case of professing Christians relapsing to Judaism is a case in point as set forth in Hebrews 6:4–8.

On the other hand, the observed fruits of faith yield to us no more than a probable verification of the genuineness of faith. Hebrews 6:4ff. provides a striking instance of apparently eminent Christians, who indeed had experienced common operations of the Spirit by the Word, who nevertheless fell away and died impenitent. Not only faith, but every grace accompanying

1. This address was originally two short lectures presented on July 6 and 7, 2002 as part of a Family Conference sponsored by the Rhode Island congregation of the Presbyterian Reformed Church.

2. Matthew 13:5–6 and 20–21.

and following faith must be put to the test. As Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) never wearied of pointing out, the danger of evangelical hypocrisy is very great. This does not detract from the duty or the usefulness of self-examination. We must ever remember that assurance of faith itself is a sovereign gift of the Holy Spirit who renders self-examination fruitful.

The negative value of self-examination is powerfully taught in James 2. A barren profession of faith is diagnosed as a dead faith, akin to the faith of devils, in James 2:19–20. If this is detected, let the convinced sinner seek “the faith of God’s elect.”³

Some cautions are in order, if experimental religion is to be properly understood. First, Christian experience is not to be divorced from doctrine, but on the contrary must be rooted and grounded in sound doctrine. This was the prevalent position of the “Old Princeton” worthies from the time of Archibald Alexander (1771–1851), who along with Charles Hodge (1797–1878) was attacked by Robert L. Dabney (1820–1898) on account of their intellectualism. Experimental religion is not to be identified with anti-intellectualism.

This destructive trend in modern religion is found in the modernist’s exaltation of life over doctrine, as J. Gresham Machen pointed out,⁴ and in the superficial piety, or rather piosity, or much religiosity of modern evangelicals. Experimental religion as described above could be called a corollary of the five points of Calvinism. It takes seriously the question, “Have I the faith of God’s elect, purchased by the Savior’s blood, effectually wrought by the Spirit, preserved to the end, or am I deceived by my deceitful heart to hold a lie in my right hand?” Since a sound experience is rooted in doctrine, and unsound experience is widespread, it is preferable to retain the term “experimental religion” rather than to replace it by “experiential religion.”

Extremes are to be avoided in our conception of experimental religion. It is a serious mistake to suppose that the experience of all true believers must conform to a pattern derived not from Scripture marks, but from the way some eminent saints have been led. Scripture does not define the length of a period of time of conviction of sin that should precede the exercise of

3. Titus 1:1.

4. See J. Gresham Machen, “Doctrine,” in *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), chap. 2, pp. 17–53.

saving faith. Nor does it require the Christian to be able to state the day or hour of his conversion. Some may do so, but it is enough to be able to say, “This one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.”⁵ The Scriptures give marks of grace for the purpose of unmasking hypocrites, not for putting a stumbling block in the way of weak believers, but rather to confirm such in the faith.

Now some consequences of experimental religion may be derived, first, over against the error of presumptive regeneration; and second, regarding the aims, content, and benefit of Christian education.

1. I have introduced the term “hypercovenantism”⁶ to mean an exaggeration of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace by which the assumption of presumptive regeneration, or presumptive election, is made to discourage self-examination as to the reality of one’s faith in Christ and His saving grace. This outlook assumes that children of believers are commonly regenerated in infancy, and need no clear and distinct experience of conversion in later years. Strict, searching self-examination as to this matter is discouraged or proscribed. Professor Robert Rayburn shouts this view from the housetops in his statement reproduced by Douglas Wilson in his periodical, *Credenda Agenda*, with evident approval. Such a view flatly rules out experimental religion as we have described it. It is noteworthy that Rayburn includes James Henley Thornwell (1812–1862) and Dabney along with Alexander, among those whom he opposes for their holding that “Christian children, before reaching an age at which they are able to make a profession of faith can at best only be considered as ‘Christian to be.’ In general they are to be regarded as unsaved until they show evidence of true faith in Christ.” Aside from inaccuracy in the wording, Rayburn’s departure from historic American Presbyterian doctrine and practice is all too evident.⁷

2. Hypercovenantism has obvious implications for Christian education. All the Christian child needs is nurture, not a change of nature. This has

5. John 9:25b.

6. See chapter 3.

7. Steven Schlissel’s ravings in the same general vein are not worthy of consideration.

been the standard view of schools connected with the Christian Reformed Church, and is clearly the view underlying Wilson's program. This is not to approve Arminian methods of child evangelism, nor even to consider the particular function of Christian education to be the conversion of the child.

3. I don't care to speak of "classical education" in the style of Dorothy Sayers as taken over by Douglas Wilson. Not that everything medieval is *per se* evil, but what I can't swallow is the mixture of the *trivium*⁸ and modern child psychology, of which I have even more doubts. The first two elements of the *trivium* are far from trivial. It's a good thing for children to learn Latin, both for vocabulary and syntax, including cases and tense. And logic should be taught quite early, at least Lewis Carol's *Game of Logic*, before the age of 12. Why "classical education" passes over the *quadrivium*,⁹ and despises teaching other subjects (which they have to do in spite of their talk) puzzles me.

4. "Worldview" chatter gets my goat about as much as "culture" talk, especially when the Dutch take it over from German humanists like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832). A Christian "worldview" is a worse subject to invent than "biblical theology," when so-called "Reformed" persons get tired of systematic theology.

5. No doubt the religious teaching recommended by Wilson is colored by his "worldview," not only when the Bible is the subject, but in other subjects where the purity of the content is corrupted by pseudo-Christian interpretation; for example, when one sets the multiplication table to a jingle akin to the choruses that debase public worship. I suggest also an unconscious infiltration of a John Dewey style of progressive education.

8. The first three liberal arts, grammar (Latin), rhetoric, and logic.

9. The fourfold medieval university course of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.