

# **Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions**

by

**Robert S. Rayburn**

"Premise" Volume III, Number 3 / March 29, 1996

The following essay was a chapter in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).

Creeds serve a variety of purposes in the life of the church. They are a testimony of the church's belief to the world; they offer a summation of Christian doctrine for the instruction of the faithful; and they form a bulwark against the incursion of error by providing a standard of orthodoxy and a test for office-bearers. In these ways creeds also serve to protect and to foster the bond of Christian fellowship as a unity of faith and doctrine, of mind and conviction, and not merely of organization or sentiment.[1]

The earliest creeds, as confessions of faith, served a liturgical purpose and some do to this day. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, in their liturgical usage, foster a sense of belonging to the one, holy, catholic church. Their importance lies not only in the excellence of their form of words but in their antiquity, the witness they bear to the unity of the church through the generations. In worship, creeds give expression to the living connection between contemporary Christians and their spiritual ancestry. The Heidelberg Catechism, which functions liturgically in some Calvinist communions, links the worshiper in a similar way to the epoch of the Reformation and the Reformed tradition.

All of this notwithstanding, creeds have had their detractors. It has been alleged that they compromise the supreme authority of Holy Scripture in the church, that they unlawfully bind the conscience, being extra-biblical standards to which submission is required, and, more often popularly, it is alleged that, by focusing attention on doctrinal formulation, creeds contribute to a barren orthodoxy. It can hardly be denied that creeds have proved through the years a temptation and a stumbling block in all of these ways. However, the necessity of creeds as the authoritative declaration of a tradition of interpretation of Holy Scripture is taught and illustrated plainly in the Bible.[2]

Specific instances of this "creedal" activity could be cited. A confession of the authority of Holy Scripture combined with the particular form of words in the Scripture itself was not, in fact, enough to prevent fatal error from entering the church disguised as truth and orthodoxy. For example, the manner in which the nature of the incarnation and the atonement were first disclosed necessitated certain clarifications and corrections of misunderstanding such as John provided in his First Epistle (4:2-3; 5:6-12) with a view to the errors of Cerinthus and his followers. Similarly, the disclosure of the principle of salvation by grace from the beginning of Holy Scripture and on through the Law and the Prophets, even its emphatic reiteration in connection with the exile and restoration, did not prevent its misapprehension and eventual corruption in rabbinical thought. Biblical authority was not at issue, and was not raised in the New Testament as an issue. Rather, the debate was over the authentic interpretation of the Bible's teaching. The Lord himself and the Apostle Paul were required to restate and to explain in new ways the ancient doctrine of salvation by grace precisely because many who claimed to believe the divine authority of the Scriptures did not, in fact, embrace their true meaning. Paul was also required to restate in another form the teaching of God's Word regarding the resurrection to counteract the error of those who were by then maintaining that the resurrection had already occurred (2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:17-18).

A similar necessity lay behind the deliverance of the Jerusalem Council whose decree, representing the biblical interpretation of the Jerusalem elders and apostles, was then disseminated to the churches in order to strengthen them in the faith (Acts 15:1-32). The doctrine itself was not altered, but it was restated in other words in view of the misunderstanding abroad in the church and then applied in the form of an ecclesiastical deliverance. In this way a pattern was established for and commended to the church. When the Scripture's own form of words is subject to confusion or misunderstanding, the church is duty bound to deliver to its own generation and its posterity a tradition of interpretation.

Whether creedal statements of liturgical origin and usage can likewise be detected in the New Testament is probable, though less certain (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3).<sup>[3]</sup> The *Shema* was in use as a liturgical creed in the synagogue by the time of the New Testament.<sup>[4]</sup> In any case, psalms which functioned as confessions of faith (e.g. 33; 97; 136) provide biblical justification for the

liturgical use of creeds.

So far we have considered creeds and confessions as ecclesiastical deliverances or enactments that function objectively as authoritative statements or definitions of faith for the Church. This is ordinarily how they are treated in the literature of Christian symbolics and it is with respect to creeds so conceived that most of the controversy has been waged, whether concerning the legitimacy of such deliverances or the nature of subscription to them.

However, creeds and confessions function simultaneously at a more subjective level upon the understanding and conviction of the individual minister and church member. It is this second, more pastoral and religious function of creeds, that I want to consider. In particular, I want to pay some attention to how creeds and confessions serve the interests of the minister of the Word and, through him, the congregation. It seems to me especially important to consider the influence creeds have upon the ministry because this is an influence which is clearly in decline in our day and that decline has immense implications.

Creeds and confessions are voices from the church's past. They are the distillation of the church's discoveries of the meaning and the implications of the truth as God has revealed it in Holy Scripture and confirmed it in the experience and the conscience of his people. They are the witness our fathers bear to us across the ages regarding what they considered to be of supreme importance and essential to be conveyed to the rising generations. It is in this sense that creeds are, in its most compressed and authoritative form, the church's "tradition," what is "handed down" from one generation to the next.

It is, alas, precisely because creeds are the church's tradition and the voice of her past that they have fallen into such neglect in our own day. As David Wells has recently argued, "It is the conceit of modernity that the past is nothing more than a dead weight, that constant innovation is the only key to a better life and richer truth."<sup>[5]</sup> This "conceit," Wells has shown, is, wittingly or unwittingly, now widely entertained in the evangelical church and the result has been what Wells describes as an "unhitching" of the church from the past. The church's past thought and experience, particularly as distilled in creeds and confessions, are no longer thought to have the same importance that was once attached to them. Other voices, modern voices, have drowned out the

voice of our fathers speaking from the past. The contemporary church stands ready to teach itself and considers the lessons the modern world can teach it more relevant than the ancient wisdom of our fathers. The immediate effect, Wells has shown, has been the diminution of theology in the thought and life of the church.

But this is a grave mistake. It is invariably God's way to address the future from the past. This pattern is woven into the fabric of the history of salvation. It is the very nature of our faith as Christians to believe that the truth lies behind us in one name, one person, one book, and one event. More than this, every believer's pilgrimage and that of every generation of believers is shaped, directed, and sustained from the past. Abraham was directed toward the future by promises made to him in the past and was sustained by the past record of God's faithfulness. Israel's course of action was charted by the covenant made with her long before and back to which she was pointed again and again. She was renewed in faith and obedience by the reestablishment of spiritual contact with her past, with the mighty acts of God performed beforehand (Psalm 78), and so was the individual believer (Psalm 77). It is for these reasons that recollection and forgetfulness are matters of immense practical importance in the Scripture's exposition of the life of faith (e.g. Isaiah 46:9; Micah 6:5; Psalm 78:11; Hosea 13:6).

Our own lives as Christians are built on and sustained by the accumulated experience, conviction, understanding, and wisdom of our past -all that God has done for us, shown to us, and taught us. It is in the strength of that food that we take the next step in obedience or gain the next insight which then, in turn, becomes still more of the treasury of our past. There are then layers of history to be shaping and directing our lives. At the bottom, the history of salvation is our own history; above that, the history of the people of God is our own family history; and on top of that, there is our own personal history of faith and pilgrimage.

What is true of the individual Christian is likewise true of the church and of the ministry. Its life is sustained through roots that descend deep into the past. The meaning of the life of the church and of the office and work of the Christian ministry is found in the past, a past conveyed to us not only definitively in Holy Scripture but, ministerially, by the church's long experience with God and the Scripture. If anything is plain and unmistakable

from the way in which godliness and faith are taught in Holy Scripture, it is that one moves forward in the life of God by looking backward. Jeremiah's prescription for the people of God in his day took precisely this form: "This is what the Lord says: `Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls (6:16).'"

*O how I long to travel back  
And tread again that ancient track. . . .  
Some men a forward motion love,  
But I by backward steps would move. . . .*<sup>[6]</sup>

It is certainly to be expected that Christians, like the Athenians, will listen to and talk about "the latest ideas" (Acts 17:21), but they must consider and judge those ideas according to the truth that lies behind them. It is when standing on the foundation of not only the Law and the Prophets but the reflection and experience of the church, the vantage point of "the years of the right hand of the Most High," that the church best sees the way forward.

Now, to be sure, creeds and confessions are only part of the witness born to the Christian present by the church's past.<sup>[7]</sup> But they are an important part of that witness. It seems to me that creeds convey from the past to Christians in the present, and especially to ministers, two essential inheritances.

*First*, creeds and confessions convey in the most authoritative, accurate, and perspicuous way the truth as that truth has been grasped in the mind of the church. Benjamin Warfield, in commending the Westminster Standards, said what might be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of many Christian symbols.

*The significance of the Westminster Standards as a creed is to be found in the . . . fact that: historically speaking, they are the final crystallization of the elements of evangelical religion after the conflicts of sixteen hundred years and scientifically speaking, they are the richest and most precise and best guarded statement ever penned of all that enters into evangelical religion and of all that must be safeguarded if evangelical religion is to persist in the world . . .*<sup>[8]</sup>

It is a fact, often enough acknowledged in the histories of Christian thought and doctrine, that the church's grasp of the truth revealed in Holy Scripture has developed in stages and that these stages or epochs were defined by a particularly concentrated reflection on some central element of the gospel

usually provoked by an especially dangerous assault on that truth from within the church itself. The Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds mark such an epoch in the matter of the church's understanding of the person of Jesus Christ as the Reformation creeds do in the matter of justification and salvation by grace.

It was under the pressure of direct attack, in an environment dominated by the concern to frame the church's teaching in the most authentically biblical form of words, and with the aid of the great minds and hearts Providence provided for the task, that the church has, epoch after epoch, settled its mind regarding the great questions of the Christian faith. There were great advances made in understanding between the Apostolic Fathers and the end of the fourth century. Justin and Tertullian and Cyprian had no knowledge of the grand developments at Nicea and in the century to follow that would forever settle the church's mind on the question of the person of our Lord. The godly during the long ages before the Reformation had no benefit from the discoveries of Martin Luther and John Calvin, and they in turn did not have as much light as the following few generations of sanctified reflection would shed on many questions of doctrine. And, in each case, the light that was shed by the Spirit of God upon the mind of the church was then preserved and stored up in the church's writings, especially her creeds, that it might continue to enlighten generations to come.

Abraham Kuyper did not, of course, deny the fallibility of the church's creeds and confessions, but he did not doubt that the circumstances of their formation conferred on them a special authority as declarations of the truth.

*God himself by the mighty deeds of his providential government created a more than ordinary movement in the current of church life; in the midst of this general stirring, took a firmer hold of the spirits of his people; enabled them thereby to pass through a period of deeper spiritual experience of the truth of the Christian religion; and thus in the light of the Holy Spirit there was gradually evolved out of this mighty commotion a clear, distinct, positive conviction, which has been formulated in our Confession. In these symbols, therefore, we possess a part and parcel of the life of our churches. They were given not to a single generation, but to the church of all future generations until the coming of our Lord.*<sup>[9]</sup>

No single man, however gifted, can reproduce in his own thinking the

process by which the church was brought to these convictions regarding the fundamental doctrines that are given expression in its creeds. It is to despise divine providence to suppose that one can or should ignore or minimize the finality that attaches to the definitive formulations of these epochs of reflection on the teachings of the Bible. Of course, each one, and especially each minister, must judge them with Bible in hand. But it is one thing to receive these dogmas "with great eagerness and examine the Scriptures . . . to see if they be true;" another thing altogether to imagine that one can, by oneself, without recourse to or dependence upon the creeds, come to an equally sure understanding of the divine mind.

Creeds, therefore, function much as parents who seek to instill true wisdom in their children. The church's creeds and confessions are the voice of our spiritual ancestry saying to us across the ages: "This is the way, walk in it." The man who feeds himself on this food, who listens carefully to these voices, will be wise and learned precisely in that happy way the son is wise (in Proverbs) who himself learns the lessons the Lord taught his father, and his father's father, and to whom the accumulated understanding of the generations is thus conveyed.

A Christian minister must begin here if he wishes to know the mind of the Spirit speaking in the Scripture, if he wishes to know what the Scriptures really teach regarding their key themes. It is especially his responsibility as the custodian of that truth and as the one charged to proclaim it. If it is the truth that sets men free, if Christians are sanctified by the truth, then it is every minister's sacred responsibility to master that truth and that requires him to sit as a student before the creeds and confessions of the church. The tradition of biblical interpretation distilled and concentrated in the creeds is a hard-won and precious part of any Christian's inheritance. Embracing that tradition is, at the intellectual level, at the level of learning the faith and mastering the truth, the equivalent of Jeremiah's 'asking for the ancient paths.'

*Second*, creeds and confessions convey the truth not only most accurately and clearly, but convey it with its force and brilliance and attraction. The fact is that, by and large, those who have looked most deeply into any revealed truth and felt most gloriously and deliciously the force of that truth have been those whose lot fell in those times when that truth was first comprehensively

and definitively wrought out in the mind of the church or in such a time when that same truth was rediscovered after being lost. In other words, it is often the epochs that produced the creeds, that produced the deepest feeling and appreciation of those doctrines which are given their most authoritative form of words in the creeds. They possess a kind of spiritual *an* in much the same way that hymns deriving from those same periods often bear the authority of a timeless vitality.

Consequently, there is a spiritual power, more or less latent, in the creeds and confessions. They bear witness to the excitement of discovery, the joy of salvation, and the strength of conviction which the truth, once discovered, produced in the hearts of those who composed the creeds as a testament to the illumination God had granted them. The creeds and confessions are perhaps the church's greatest tribute to the spiritual apprehension of and appreciation for the truth as it is set forth in God's Word. As Warfield put it,

*A scientific statement of vital truth, originating in organic controversy, cannot possibly lack in spiritual quality. It is the product of intellect working only under the impulse of the heart, and must be a monument of the religious life.*<sup>[10]</sup>

It is this that accounts for the long tradition of appreciation for and celebration of the force of spiritual inspiration to be found in the creeds. To all those who wished to grow strong in the spiritual life, Warfield recommended reading the creeds next to the Bible itself.

*And this for good reasons. First, because it is ever true that it is by the truth sanctification is wrought. And next, because the truth is set forth in these Creeds with a clearness and richness with which it is set forth nowhere else. For these Creeds are not the products of metaphysical speculation, as many who know infinitesimally little about them are prone to assert, but are the compressed and weighted utterances of the Christian heart.*<sup>[11]</sup>

It is exceedingly important that the force and attractiveness and conviction of the truth be as well conveyed to the present generation. We are highly unlikely to get the good of truths that weigh only lightly upon our minds and hearts. Truth must penetrate, must leave a distinct and durable impression on the heart. But many truths are not the discovery, the treasure-trove, to us that they were to Christians of another day. They strike us as commonplace in a



way they did not strike those who were coming upon them for the first time. This is no doubt a spiritual defect in us, but it is also a fact of life. If we care about our souls and if ministers care about their ministries, they will consider it a matter of capital importance to gain a sense of wonder at these doctrines that once so captivated the godly, consuming their minds and hearts. And creeds can help us here. For as the voice of our spiritual ancestry they convey not only the matter of Christian doctrine but the sense they had of the majesty, thrill, and quickening power of that truth.<sup>[12]</sup>

Robert Murray McCheyne once said of John Muir, a minister friend of his, "Muir is imputed righteousness to the backbone."<sup>[13]</sup> But it is every minister's calling to be imputed righteousness to the backbone, and the hypostatic union to the backbone, and sovereign grace, sanctification, heaven and hell, and all the other great truths of divine revelation to the backbone. And the truest way to seek that power and attraction of the truth in one's heart is to spend time in the company of those who have felt the force of that truth. If a Machiavelli knew the wisdom of taking a few hours from his busy day "to don regal and courtly garments, enter the courts of the ancients and speak with them,"<sup>[14]</sup> how much more should ministers crave the opportunity of communion across the centuries with those who have experienced the full force and glory of any particular truth revealed in Holy Scripture. It was of this necessity that Kuyper was speaking when he wrote:

*Our grasp is so limited and the capacity of our consciousness is so universal, that never more than a part of its slumbering powers can be brought into action at a time. One man must supplement another, and by the very necessity of doing this no individual can avoid being one-sided in his range of thought. Thus the stupendous task which the human mind has to accomplish is naturally and almost imperceptibly divided among mankind. A single finger cannot play upon all the strings; only the ten fingers combined succeed in calling forth sweet harmony from the chords. In this manner, by 'division of labor,' we are protected from wasting our energies on what lies beyond our power. As in social life one ploughs, a second spins, and a third sails the sea, and out of the interaction of these divided labors the full rich life is born; even so it is in the world of thought.*<sup>[15]</sup>

The creeds and confessions are not, of course, the only means by which to

seek that communion of many minds and hearts, the whole body of Christian literature serves the purpose, but they are the beginning and the end of those means as the most authoritative and deliberate account of that historical and corporate experience of the truth.

What is more, gaining a sense of the force of that truth given a form of words in the church's creeds and confessions is absolutely necessary if the ministry is to maintain the whole truth in a biblical balance in the face of new discoveries and new temptations.

Each age has its own questions to answer and its own temptations to face. No doubt it belongs to our age also carefully to reflect upon the Word of God, in active dependence upon the Spirit of God to discover his mind regarding questions the church has not heretofore considered in a definitive way. As was the case with past generations, we too have a duty to pass on to our posterity the accumulated wisdom of our epoch and the light which the Lord has shed upon such matters as the authority of the Bible, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the mission of the church, the nature of the body of Christ, and other such issues that have been forced upon the church's mind in our time as never before.<sup>[16]</sup> Whether this generation of the church will contribute to the confessional tradition depends largely on whether it will, as was the case in former epochs of creedal formation, secure a broad-based if not nearly universal support for such an enlargement of the church's tradition of interpretation.

But it is doubtful that we will gain a true understanding of the Scripture's teaching regarding the great issues of our time if we have not first a living appreciation of the truth already set down over the centuries. If the church's fathers are not speaking to us *viva voce* in our own day, there is a terrible danger that the truth of the ages will actually be corrupted or displaced by what are taken to be the "insights" of a new generation. This is, in fact, what David Wells argues is now happening in the church.<sup>[17]</sup> The point has been well put by John MacLeod.

*There is a well-worn tag to the effect that the Lord has yet much light to break forth from His Word . . . . At the same time as believers have no doubt in regard to this matter, it holds of them in the measure in which they are well instructed and established in the knowledge of the Word that they are equally confident that the further light that is to break out*

*will not cancel nor challenge nor detract from the brightness with which the light of the Word already shines. What is new will only intensify what is old. It will not darken it nor throw it in the shade.*<sup>[18]</sup>

Or to put it another way, even the best intentioned Christians of any age are subject to a tendency to imbalance, to a loss of equilibrium among the truths of divine revelation. It is the witness of the past, clearly heard and firmly held, that prevents the church from losing its balance under the onslaught of the interests, preoccupations, and sins of its own day. He was speaking of books in general, but C.S. Lewis might just as well have been speaking of creeds and confessions in particular.

*Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books.*<sup>[19]</sup>

All the more must this be the case if, as David Wells argues, the great central core of Christian truth is actually being displaced in the church's mind by the dominant, and fundamentally secular, convictions of contemporary culture. The church today will face the challenge of the present, gain the new understanding that is hers to gain and add it to the accumulated understanding of the past only if she has firmly fixed in mind and heart the great truths, the central elements of the gospel which have, generation by generation, been added to the church's store of conviction. It will only be an advance if the church is impressed by new discoveries from God's Word while not at all losing the impression of former discoveries. Especially given the fact that the core of gospel truth has undoubtedly already been fixed in the church's tradition of interpretation, it will be the gravest development if we make room for, say, the doctrine of the body of Christ as a communion of the spiritually gifted only by subtracting, wittingly or unwittingly, the hypostatic union, justification by faith, or the doctrine of divine judgment.

It is the role of creeds to keep current in the mind of the church the convictions to which the Lord has already brought his people as the foundation for the church's present and future life and work. It is the obligation of ministers especially to ensure that the preaching of the church does full justice to the great emphases the Lord has fixed in the mind of the church in the epochs of illumination he appointed for her and led her through,

and all the more if this is the very truth least interesting and least welcome in our day. The Lord has passed his own judgment upon what the church must believe and proclaim. That divine judgment is deposited for safe-keeping in the church's creeds and confessions.

G.K. Chesterton said somewhere, as an apology for his conversion to Catholicism, that "He sought a church that would free him from the degrading slavery of being a child of his time." It is precisely that liberty that every authentic Christian church should confer on its members, the Presbyterian Church chief among them. Christians should be people of their own time only in the sense that they should live the Christian faith in keeping with the circumstances of their own day. They should be in all other respects people of the ages who possess as their inheritance the entire accumulated wisdom and virtue and conviction which their spiritual ancestry has passed down to them.

The discussion of confessional subscription should bear in mind the virtue of creeds in their impression of the truth on the mind and heart of the church. Any form of subscription that does not successfully foster this subjective impression, whatever else it seeks to secure objectively, must finally prove futile and irrelevant because it is incapable of assuring the church's true and living consent to the faith once delivered.

## FOOTNOTES:

- [1] "It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is vitally necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe. It is hopeless to offer Christianity as a vaguely idealistic aspiration of a simple and consoling kind; it is, on the contrary, a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism. And it is fatal to imagine that everybody knows quite well what Christianity is and needs only a little encouragement to practice it. The brutal fact is that in this Christian country not one person in a hundred has the faintest notion what the Church teaches about God or man or society or the person of Jesus Christ." Dorothy Sayers, "Creed or Chaos?" *The Whimsical Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1978) 34-35.
- [2] A defense of creeds against their detractors is ably mounted by James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, vol. 1 (reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960) 289-321.
- [3] See R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 53-65; G. Delling, *Worship in the New Testament* (ET Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 77-91.
- [4] E. Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1979) 448-449.
- [5] David Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 146.
- [6] Henry Vaughan, "The Retreat," *The Complete Poems of Henry Vaughan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1969), 170.
- [7] A similar case, for example, could be made for the importance of reading and attending to church history in general. See D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987) 215-236.
- [8] Benjamin B. Warfield, "The Significance of the Westminster Standards as a Creed," *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 2 (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973) 660.
- [9] Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism and Confessional Revision," *Presbyterian Quarterly*, vol. 5, No. 4 (Oct. 1891) 507-508. Kuyper continues, "This Confession, Calvinists held, did not lie in the ecclesiastical archives as a

lifeless and antiquated manuscript of which each future Synod could dispose at pleasure; but it stood up in the church as a living witness of Christ, insisting upon its rights, until after proper filing of complaint, proof should have been brought forward from the Word of God of its incorrectness on any point. The Confession possessed rights conferred by God and confirmed by history, and could only be deprived of these after due process of law. Only the Word of God stood higher, to it alone it had to strike the flag." Concerning the obvious fact that the creedal tradition is by no means unanimous in its affirmations and denials and in what ways that diversity of conviction and statement can also render a service to the truth, see Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie Der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, vol. 3 (Amsterdam: Wormser, 1894), 372-373.

[10] Warfield, "The Significance of the Westminster Standards as a Creed," 661.

[11] B. B. Warfield, "Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary," *Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 2, 492-493. J. H. Thornwell confided to his journal, "My Bible and Confession of Faith are my travelling companions, and precious friends have they been to me. I bless God for that glorious summary of Christian doctrine contained in our noble standards. It has cheered my soul in many a dark hour, and sustained me in many a desponding moment. I love to read it, and ponder carefully each proof-text as I pass along." B. M. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell* (reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974) 162.

[12] Abraham Kuyper spoke of the combination of "a virile gift of argument" and an "ardent mysticism" characteristically found in the fathers of the church and the necessity of the latter to draw the soul back from abstraction in doctrine and life. "Stress in creedal confession, without drinking of these waters, runs dry in barren orthodoxy, just as truly as spiritual emotion, without clearness in confessional standards, makes one sink in the bog of sickly mysticism." *To Be Near Unto God* (ET reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 15-16.

[13] A. Moody Stuart, *The Life of John Duncan* (reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991) 48.

[14] Cited in A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) 34-35.

[15] Abraham Kuyper, "Calvinism and Confessional Revision," 484.

[16] "Oh let this provoke Christians! We see how light breaks out more and more in every age; as Luther said, 'I see more than blest Austin saw; and they that come after me will see more than I see.'" J. Flavel, "Antipharvacum Saluberrimum," *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel*, vol. IV (London, 1820) 538. What Kuyper wrote in 1891 applies with greater force to the Church's situation in the late twentieth century. "Most assuredly the Reformation has not been the last 'Sturm- and Drangperiode' of the church. Even in these very days our churches are passing through a crisis of the most serious character, which will undoubtedly produce a higher tension of spirits, and thereby lead on to a deeper and richer conviction of faith, whence, as a matter of course, an enrichment of our church standards will result. The chasm that has gradually opened up between our subjective convictions and our objective confessions will have to be filled in due time." Kuyper, "Calvinism and Confessional Revision," 509-510.

[17] David Wells, *No Place for Truth: or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); *God in the Wasteland*.

[18] John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History* (reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974) 239.

[19] *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 202.

### Author

*Dr. Robert S. Rayburn* is the Pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church in Tacoma, WA. Copyright? 1996 *PREMISE*. All Rights Reserved.