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“THE WITFIELD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY PAPERS”

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Reformed Church Theological Interpretation

This Doctor of Theology Course Paper (hereinafter called “Paper”) presents ideas and ideals that are designed to set forth the Orthodox Position of the Reformed Churches within the Western Church Tradition since the time of the Protestant Reformation of the 17th Century. The Theological Viewpoints presented herein are designed to address criticisms from non-Orthodox Church traditions and from non-Christian or Secular viewpoints. The objective of incorporating non-Orthodox, non-Christian, and Secular viewpoints within this paper is to defend the Orthodox Position of the Reformed Churches and to juxtapose the Reformed Church theology to Roman Catholic theology, since the 17th Century.

The Church of England since the enactment of the “Act of Supremacy of 1534” is a major source of the “reformed” theology as it shall be defined throughout this series. Therefore, this Paper presents theological views that take into account the two wings of the Reformed Church: the “Armenian” wing, which is reflected in the theology of denominations such as Anglicanism, Methodism, Armenian Baptist theology; and the “Calvinist” wing, which is reflected in the theology of denominations such as Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and Reformed Baptist theology. The author here acknowledges that the Whitefield Theological Seminary falls within the “Calvinist” wing of the Reformed Tradition; however, this paper may compare “Calvinist” theology to those of, for example, Thomas Aquinas (Roman Catholic) and John Wesley (Anglican/ Methodist).

Finally, this Paper starts from the viewpoint that the Calvinist principles of biblical interpretation, as reflected in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647*, is the most authentic, accurate Orthodox interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.

Reformed Church Theological Interpretation (Part I)

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¹ See **Appendix A**. The Authorship of the Torah in the Christian Tradition—Did Moses Write the Bible?

PREFACE

The first five books of Moses, known as the *Torah*, is not only the cornerstone of the Christian faith, but also of the legal system in the West, including Anglo-American constitutional law and jurisprudence. The *Torah* is, of course, the “law of Moses,” but this description weakens its actual purpose and objective. For, indeed, the *Torah* is God’s eternal and universal mandate to humankind: it is His eternal law which the whole human race must abide by in order to live, be blessed, and prosper. It is the Alpha and Omega of western jurisprudence, that is to say: it is the eternal and unchangeable law which, at least in the western world, is the foundation of constitutional law.

Heretofore, there have been few forthright studies on “law and religion” that focus on the Bible (i.e., the Old and New Testaments) as fundamental constitutional law in western countries, particularly in the United Kingdom, the United States, and other common law countries. It is the author’s stated objective in this paper, which is written in fulfillment of the academic requirements of Whitfield Theological Seminary, to set forth in broad theological outline and design, the connection of the Bible to western, secular jurisprudence, as well as ecclesiastical polity and doctrine. The tradition of Reformed Judaism and Reformed Christian Theology holds the interpretation of biblical textual language is *sin quo non* when ascertaining an accurate understanding of divine law and mandate. There can be no gainsaying the fact that, under these Reformed Church theological schemata, God’s Providence encompasses all human affairs, including those concerning secular laws, constitutional jurisprudence, courts, political science, and government. This paper sets forth in detail, utilizing and applying the Reformed-Church hermeneutical standards, certain Old and New Testament texts which support the author’s theological conclusion the Bible is was promulgated by its numerous authors to, among other things, be the fundamental constitutional law for human secular governments.

First, this paper shall show (or at least make a good-faith argument) that the plain text of the Bible supports the viewpoint that the Bible is the foundation of secular constitutional law. The primary sources of this paper are as follows:

Part I: Reformed Church Hermeneutics: The Torah

Primary Sources

1. *Genesis* (King James Version)
2. *Exodus* (King James Version)
3. *Leviticus* (King James Version)
4. *Numbers* (King James Version)
5. *Deuteronomy* (King James Version)

Secondary Sources

1. Louis Berkhoff, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (1950).
2. David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (1992)
3. St. Augustine, *Confessions*
4. St. Augustine, *City of God*
5. Roderick O. Ford, *The Law of Moses* (2017)
6. Roderick O. Ford, *Jesus Master of Law: A Juridical Science of Christianity* (2015)

This paper assumes that the theology and writings of St. Augustine of Hippo were foundational to the Protestant Reformation and that both Luther and Calvin held Augustine in great esteem. In making this assumption, the author thus embraces the conclusion reached by Professor David S. Dockery, who writes:

For Protestants, Augustine (A.D. 354-430) serves as the dominant figure in the history of Christian thought and biblical interpretation between the time of the apostles and the sixteenth-century Reformation. For Roman Catholics, Augustine's influence during this period is rivaled only by that of Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274). In the history of philosophy, Augustine is only slightly less important; he was the most influential philosopher between Plotinus, in the third century, and Aquinas.²

² Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, p. 137.

Augustine's *The City of God* held that the Church of Jesus Christ "was equally present in the Israel of the Old Testament as it was with the church in the New."³ This paper likewise embraces an "Augustinian" hermeneutical approach to interpreting the *Torah*, finding "types," "symbols," "allegory," "literal history," and "grammatical" significations that point directly to Jesus Christ and the New Testament. Indeed, the *Torah* also contains what the Apostle Paul describes as the "faith of Abraham." How does the "law of Moses" and the "faith of Abraham" related to each other? And how does the *Torah*, in turn, relate to the Gospels? The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 3:15-29:

¹⁵ Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

¹⁶ Now to **Abraham and his seed** were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to **thy seed, which is Christ**.

¹⁷ And this I say, that **the covenant**, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law [of Moses], which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

¹⁸ For if the inheritance be of the law [of Moses], it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

¹⁹ Wherefore then serveth the **law [of Moses]? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed [i.e., Christ] should come** to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

²⁰ Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

²¹ Is the law [of Moses] then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

²² But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that **the promise by faith of Jesus Christ** might be given to them that believe.

²³ But **before faith [i.e., Christ] came**, we were kept under the **law [of Moses]**, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

²⁴ Wherefore the **[law of Moses] was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ**, that we might be **justified by faith**.

²⁵ But after that **faith [i.e., Christ] is come**, we are **no longer under a schoolmaster [i.e., the law of Moses]**.

²⁶ For ye are all the children of God **by faith in Christ Jesus**.

²⁷ For as many of you as **have been baptized into Christ** have **put on Christ**.

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: **for ye are all one in Christ Jesus**.

²⁹ And **if ye be Christ's**, then are ye **Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise**.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Hence, as per this Pauline text, the New Testament is thus already contained in the Old Testament, because the “seed” of Abraham is “Christ.” For this reason, reformed theologians see the Old and New Testaments as a “unity.”⁴ “Both the Old and the New Testament form essential parts of God’s special revelation. God is the Author of both, and in both has the same purpose in mind. They both contain the same doctrine of redemption, preach the same Christ, and impose upon men the same moral and religious duties.... As the New Testament is implicit in the Old, so the Old is explicit in the New. The doctrine of redemption was essentially the same for those who lived under the old covenant as it is for the Church of the New Testament. This is sometimes forgotten by those who, while recognizing the typical element of the Old Testament, lose sight of the symbolical character of many of its institutions.”⁵

OLD TESTAMENT ←-----→ NEW TESTAMENT

Since the Old Testament and the New Testament present one common theology, the themes and symbols of the Old Testament must be construed being a reflection of a theme or symbol in the New Testament. The Old Testament does not contradict the New Testament, but simply lays the groundwork for a more perfect doctrine that is in the New Testament.

But there is no absolute antithesis. Even in the Old Testament the law was subservient to the covenant of grace. It was not purely an external rule; the pious Israelite had it written on the tablets of his heart (Ps. 37:31; 40:8). They were not saved in any other way than New Testament believers. They needed the same Mediator and the same Holy Spirit, and received the same blessings of the covenant of grace, though not so abundantly, nor in exactly the same manner. The Old and the New Testament are related to each other not merely as type and antitype, but also as bud and flower, as a primitive and a more perfect revelation.⁶

⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1950), Pp. 134-140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Hence, the Reformed theological standard of biblical interpretation is view the “contents of the New Testament” as “the fruit of a long previous development.”⁷ This theological standard takes into consideration the following important biblical components:

1. First, there is the “**mystical sense**” of factual assertions and statements in both the Old and New Testaments.
2. Second, there is the “**symbolic**” **meaning** of facts, persons, assertions, and words that can be found in the Old Testament and which prefigures something in the New Testament.

In addition to this “theological standard,” there is the need to understand “Bible culture,” viz, the times, customs, archeological evidences, history, language, contemporary religious, literary, and legal ideals that co-existed along with the lives and times of the biblical characters in order to discharge the correct hermeneutical interpretation of biblical language and thought. Therefore, the Reformed theologian relies upon the following two additional tools:

1. First, there is the “**grammatical interpretation**” tool, which provides bible scholars and theologians with various rules of thumb for interpreting the key, rare, or archaic words.⁸
2. Second, there is the “**historical interpretation**” tool, which provides bible scholars and theologians with key and relevant information regarding the sociology and history of the time period in which the biblical events occurred.⁹

At the same time, the Reformed theological interpretation uses the theological, grammatical, and historical interpretation tool-kits *simultaneously*, in order to ensure that the Bible’s diversity of styles and grammar do not detract from the spiritual and thematic unity within its sacred texts; or detract from the Bible’s having been *inspired by the same Holy Spirit*¹⁰ even though written by dozens of authors over the span of several centuries.¹¹

⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 67-112.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 113-132.

¹⁰ The proper conception of the Bible is that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit, which gives it its unity. “By inspiration we understand that supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Holy Spirit, by virtue of

Lastly, one of the great gifts of the Protestant Reformation was that it allowed the common man to interpret the Bible for himself, without the intervention of church, priest, bishop, dogma, or confessional standard.¹² This gift led to freedom of conscience, diversity of theological views, and, ultimately, to the democratic world as we know it today. At the same time, the more conservative Reformed Protestant doctrine of “solo scriptura” prohibited Christians from *thinking about the Bible as being subordinate to* what the Roman Catholics had called “natural law” and “the law of reason.” However, most Reformers allowed for “natural law” and “the law of reason” to co-exist, as manifestations of God’s Divine Providence, alongside of the teachings within Bible. But to the Reformers the Bible, as solo scriptura, is “divine law,” and, as such, is self-contained, self-consistent, and self-explanatory.¹³ “[T]hough it be true that the interpreter must be perfectly free in his labors, he should not confuse his freedom with licentiousness.... In all his expositions he is bound by that which is written, and has no right to ascribe his thoughts to the authors. This principle is generally recognized today. It is quite different, however, when the position is maintained that the freedom of the interpreter is also limited by the fact that the Bible is the inspired, and therefore self-consistent, Word of God. And yet this principle must be honored by all Reformed interpreters.”¹⁴

which their writings are given divine truthfulness, and constitute an infallible and sufficient rule of faith and practice.... And when it is said that the writers were guided by the Holy Spirit in writing the books of the Bible, the term ‘writing the books of the Bible, the term ‘writing’ must be taken in comprehensive sense. It includes the investigation of documents, the collection of facts, the arrangement of material, the very choice of words, in fact all the processes that enter into the composition of a book. Inspiration must be distinguished from revelation in the restricted sense of immediate communication of God in words.” Berkhoff, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (1950), p. 41.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 40-65.

¹² Ibid., p. 65.

¹³ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁴ Ibid.

INTRODUCTION:

This paper is a survey of the sixty-six books of the King James Bible, plus several books taken from the Apocrypha and several other sources in an effort to (a) display the Reformed method of theological interpretation of the Bible and to (b) compare the Reformed interpretative method with several other interpretative methods, especially those of the Roman Catholics. The sacred Biblical texts (i.e., the Books of *Genesis* through *Revelation*) are briefly discussed below within the context from two reformed textbooks: (a) Louise Berkhoff's *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* and (b) David S. Dockery's *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church*.

PART I. The Old Testament Law ("Torah")