

**A “Conversation” with Richard Pratt’s
“Westminster and Contemporary Reformed Hermeneutics”**

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[Bracketed RED Text Comments]

Introductory Comments from Richard Pratt

In an earlier issue of our Weekly Magazine at *Third Millennium*, we published the text of a talk I gave at the *Westminster Confession for Today Conference* in July, 2006. My assigned task was to speak about current trends in Reformed hermeneutics and to compare them with the Westminster Standards. I received a number of nice responses from professors at several Reformed seminaries, and I am grateful for their encouragement.

Recently, a friend called my attention to a response to my talk that appears on Dr. Peter Enns’ website. I was surprised that Dr. Enns thought my little talk warranted a response, but I appreciate him taking so much time to write down some of his thoughts. Although I did not mention Dr. Enns by name in my original paper, he has voluntarily incarnated himself into the discussion.

I do not feel it is necessary to engage in a public conversation about these matters. My views can be found in much more detail elsewhere. I regularly teach on these subjects in a number of seminaries. I have written a lot about them in a variety of places, including in my books *Every Thought Captive* and *He Gave Us Stories*, and in my commentary on *1 and 2 Chronicles*. I am also the general editor of a series in Old Testament interpretation that will address similar issues in the next year or so. As far as I am concerned, my talk completed my service in these matters by calling the attention of our presbyters to anonymous but dangerous trends in my denomination, the *Presbyterian Church in America*. In

my estimation, Dr. Enns' responses are of such ecclesiastical consequence that the courts of the church should guide the future of any conversation.

Even so, I thought it would be interesting to those who come to the *Third Millennium* website to see Dr. Enns' responses. I did not want any of you to miss the opportunity to think more about my original talk and to know what Dr. Enns thinks about it.

Below is a copy of the entire text of Dr. Enns' reaction as it appears at <http://peterennsonline.com/ii/a-conversation-with-richard-pratts-westminster-and-contemporary-reformed-hermeneutics/>.

Introduction

In June of 2006, Dr. Richard Pratt, formerly of RTS-Orlando, and now fulltime with "Third Millennium Ministries," a wonderful organization he founded, gave an address at the PCA General Assembly. I was not present, but, being a ruling elder in the PCA myself, I was quickly apprised of the event.

Although Pratt (the last name is used throughout for convenience, not a sign of disrespect) nowhere mentions my name specifically, and in fact goes out of his way to refer to "those in our circles" and similar such phrases, it is quite clear to me and others who have either read or heard the lecture, that my book (*Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, Baker Academic, 2005 [hereinafter *I&I*]) was very much his foil. The topics covered, not to mention some of the very phrasing of the lecture, are very similar to *I&I*, and so there is little doubt in my mind that *I&I* was prominently, if not predominantly, on his mind. He mentions at the outset that this topic was assigned to him, although it is not clear by whom, or what the parameters of the assignment were.

Since the lecture was first given, a good number of people in the PCA have approached me asking if I planned to respond. Initially I had no interest in doing so, but the intervening months have led me to a different conclusion. I respect Pratt tremendously, and nothing in my subsequent comments should be interpreted otherwise, but his argument is, in my view, very helpful as a way forward in current debates. His understanding of the nature and task of biblical scholarship, his particular understanding of the role of WCF (*Westminster Confession of Faith*), esp. chapter 1, in adjudicating issues raised in modern scholarship, not to mention the rhetorical dimension of giving a talk such as this in a potentially divisive environment, all leave me somewhat concerned, and I feel direct interaction is appropriate.

As you will see, my comments are not in the form of a traditional "response." Rather, I have reproduced Pratt's lecture (as found at

<http://www.thirdmill.org/magazine/search.asp/keyword/THgod/category/th/site/iii>
[m\)](#) and interspersed it with some of my reactions, counterpoints, etc., bracketed and **in red**. I trust this presentation style will not prove too annoying, especially since I often “interrupt” Pratt in mid-sentence. Also, readers will likely find that I have repeated a point here and there. I have tried to avoid such repetition, but it is prompted by the repetitions in Pratt’s lecture. Despite the problems, I have taken this approach because I am committed, as much as circumstances will allow, to try to model a more conversational approach to airing theological differences. A “response” connotes finality, at least it does to me, and I do not wish to communicate such a posture.

Let me also add that I have benefited from Pratt’s work in the past; indirectly through his students, directly through some brief conversations we have had over the years, and through his book [He Gave Us Stories](#), which I still recommend and will continue to do so. I must state, however, that I am having trouble finding on the pages of this lecture the Pratt I thought I knew. Perhaps that is wholly a matter of my dull perception, but this is a bit disappointing to me. At many junctures I simply stopped reading and thought to myself “he can’t possibly mean this,” or “surely he must understand the implications of what he is saying here.” Perhaps, then, readers of this exchange can understand what is a tone of exasperation and frustration at various junctures in my comments. I do not want to exacerbate a conflict, but I am truly miffed at certain points in this lecture how a man of Pratt’s experience can present the issues in the way he does.

My aim here is to state as plainly as I can what my disagreements are, neither making insinuations nor veiled accusations. Where I might express a tone of exasperation or frustration, I ask that readers not interpret this as a rhetorical move but as an honest expression of my thoughts.

I have no doubt that Pratt feels strongly about what he presents here as vital to the future of the Reformed faith. So do I. Having strong opinions, however, does not define truth. My hope is that people with similar concerns, on both sides of the debate, might benefit, if even in some small way, from the exchange below.

Peter Enns, November 2007

Westminster and Contemporary Reformed Hermeneutics

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This year marks my 28th year of serving as a teaching elder, first in the Reformed Presbyterian Church and then in the PCA. It also marks my 21st and last year of serving as a full time professor at Reformed Theological Seminary. These bodies that I have served — the PCA, RPCES and Reformed Theological Seminary — have at least two things in common. First, they have drawn much of their theological orientation from a revival of historical Calvinism in the 1920's and 1930's under the leadership of J. Gresham Machen. Machen and his associates form what I often call the neo-Calvinist or American neo-Calvinist movement. Second, they have required their teachers to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith (hereafter "Westminster" or "the Confession"). They have required this subscription on the belief that the Confession contains the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. This confessional tradition is not the tradition in which I was raised, but it is the tradition that I have identified as my theological home as an adult believer for all these twenty-something years.

Now my assigned task (not a task of choice) today is to speak to you of an issue that's related to the conference title *The Westminster Confession Today*. And I have entitled my presentation "Westminster and Contemporary Reformed Hermeneutics." The thesis of my presentation is rather straightforward, so I can give it to you very quickly. I am convinced that in our neo-Calvinist branch of the church, hermeneutical discussions are at a crossroads. I am also convinced that the wisdom of our heritage, reflected in the Confession, [It may be too early to tell at this juncture, but Pratt here seems to assume a "static" tradition rather than a developing one. This will likely prove important for understanding his argument below.]

has the ability to guide us through many of the choices we are going to have to make in the field of hermeneutics in the not too distant future.

It goes without saying that the Confession touches on biblical hermeneutics in many different ways, [Actually, I don't think it goes without saying. It needs to be demonstrated, which, as we will see below, Pratt does not do.]

but time is only going to allow us to talk about a few of those ways. And so I'm going to talk about three main issues: first, the divine origin of Scripture; second, the historical reliability of Scripture; third and finally, the harmony of Scripture.

1. Divine Origin of Scripture

The first issue I wish to address is the Confession's stance on the divine origin of Scripture as it compares with tendencies within recent biblical scholarship in our circles.

Now, I think we all know it very well, perhaps too well, that one overriding characteristic of critical biblical scholarship in the modern period has been its emphasis on the human origins of Scripture. [This is not correct. The issue in critical scholarship is not an *emphasis* on human origins, but holding human origins as *exclusive*, i.e., at the *full* expense of ultimate divine origin. Pratt's comment here, no doubt intended as an innocuous point of departure, is actually a misstatement that will be seen to affect his subsequent comments.]

In contrast with the patristic, medieval and early reformation periods of the church, the fundamental orientation of modern biblical hermeneutics has been that the Bible is a human book. [Pratt must certainly be aware that it is in the modern period that historical matters became much more prominent. I do not expect patristic authors to address the OT in its ANE context, for example. This "grand witness of the church" is a false argument.]

Awareness of the ancient writers' contexts and their intentions within those historical contexts has been the key that unlocks manifold insights that we now have into the Bible. In their more radical forms, these critical approaches to Scripture have utterly denied any connection at all between God and the Bible. [This is correct, in its more *radical* forms. It is important to note that Pratt here seems to be allowing fully for a "critical" stance that is *not* "radical." This would prove promising, but, unfortunately, he does not seem to follow through below.]

The Scriptures are counted as nothing more than a collection of ancient books whose status does not differ from other ancient Jewish writings like the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the assortments of recently discovered texts from Qumran and other lesser known collections. Of course, some critical scholars have tried to rescue the Scriptures for religious use in Jewish and Christian communities by attributing some kind of divine qualities to the Bible. But, by and large, critical biblical hermeneutics has undoubtedly looked at the Bible first and foremost as an ordinary, human book. [This paragraph, and these

last two sentences in particular, read to me more like setting up a straw man. Pratt's statements are sweeping, reductionistic, and would be rejected by many scholars, Reformed, evangelical, or otherwise. Nothing will be gained from this kind of utterance.]

Unfortunately, for several generations now biblical scholars in our branch of the church have pursued advanced studies under the tutelage of critical scholars. As a result, viewing Scripture as a human creation has found its way in varying degrees into our circles as well. [There are several steps missing here. Pratt paints a reductionistic picture of critical scholars *imposing* a human view of Scripture upon unsuspecting, perhaps naïve, young students. The problem is that these students, for over 100 years now, have been presented with heretofore unknown historical evidence that challenges “pre-critical” statements such as WCF. Moreover, the humanity of Scripture is integral to the nature of Scripture, a point that will be missing almost entirely in Pratt's argument.]

And as many of you know, I am among those who have this kind of professional training. So, I am convinced that much can be learned about the Bible when we place it in the hands of its human authors. [It would a tremendous help if Pratt were to put these thoughts in writing and engage constructively and specifically the data he is trained to handle in *interaction* with WCF. What I sense happening here, however, and will be confirmed below, is that the WCF plays a much less constructive theological role than it could.]

But in recent decades the humanity of the Bible has been stressed so much that the divine origin of the bible has increasingly become a footnote, a secondary qualification, one of those marginal teachings that we add by saying things like, “Oh yeah, I believe that too.” [Again, sweeping statements such as this may have a certain rhetorical effect, but I would know several people, including myself, who might feel quite misrepresented already at this early stage in the lecture. Pratt's description of the hermeneutical problem is one I do not recognize as valid.]

Now, there should be no doubt in our minds that the Scriptures have both divine and human origins. [Actually, I would say that Scripture ultimately is most certainly of *divine* origin, but comes to us through full human agency, so that the product we have, Scripture itself, is—by God's wisdom—something that is fully human and divine.]

Paul, for instance, not only spoke of all Scripture being “God-breathed” or inspired, as we all know, but also referred to David as the author of Psalm 32 (in Romans chapter 4). We know these facts are true, we know them well and we affirm that both are true. So, my concern today is not whether or not the Bible should be treated as inspired by God or written by people; both of these are certainly true. My concern is with the ways biblical scholars in our circles have stressed the human origins of Scriptures in ways that have shifted away from the emphasis of our confessional heritage.

As we consider what the Confession says about the divine and human origins of Scripture, it may surprise some of us to realize that the humanity of Scripture is not mentioned a single time in the first chapter of the Confession. I find that to be remarkable. [I don't find it remarkable at all. WCF 1 is not a "doctrine of Scripture," where the humanity of Scripture is wisely kept at bay. It's purpose is to draw a polemical line in the sand against anything else other than Scripture that would claim to be the final court of appeal with respect to "His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life" (as 1.6). In brief, WCF says Scripture is our final appeal, not Rome. To appeal to WCF 1 in the current hermeneutical debate is misplaced. A Reformed doctrine of Scripture would need to address the two elements that Pratt himself states as being non-negotiable elements of Scripture: its divine and human *origin* (to use Pratt's word).]

As the Westminster Assembly composed a doctrine of Scripture [It is not a *doctrine of Scripture*. It is a statement on Scripture's *supreme authority* for the church (which is certainly *part* of a doctrine of Scripture).]

that reflected its distinctive outlooks, it did not once mention the human origins of Scripture. The only hint of human involvement at all appears in 1.2 where we read that the canonical books were "given by inspiration of God," and 1.8 where we read that they were "inspired by God." But these implicit acknowledgments of human involvement are the only times that the Confession speaks in the first chapter of human involvement. Apart from this, the first chapter of the Confession speaks only of the divine origins of the Scriptures.

At one point Westminster does mention writings of [So as to avoid confusion, Pratt should insert "solely" here, since he himself regards Scripture as being of human origin.]

human origin. In 1.3 we read that "The books commonly called the Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration ... are of no authority [Again, the central issue WCF is after is clearly biblical authority.] in the Church, nor are to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings." In the language of the Confession "human writings" is a category that applies to writings outside of the Canon. Westminster speaks of the issue in binary terms: there are two kinds of writings in the world: "human writings" and the Bible. [I agree, but the Bible is not, by contrast, a divine book, but, as Pratt himself implies, a "divine/human" book. It is that human dimension that requires positive, constructive theological articulation, not, as Pratt seems to be doing, giving it a quick nod of approval and then casting it aside so one can get one with the true business of talking about Scripture.]

Notice how much the Confession positively stresses the divine origins [Is the plural a typo? It is repeated below but not consistently throughout the lecture.] of Scripture. First, the opening chapter describes the bible as "Holy Scripture," a term that I do not hear very often in our circles, not even in our liturgies. It uses

this terminology four times in 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, and 1.5. In 1.2 the expression “Holy Scripture” is closely linked to the expression “the Word of God written.” From the Assembly’s point of view, the sacred character of Scripture is not derived from the believing community treating it as sacred; it is not a quality granted to Scripture. It is a holiness that derives from the fact that it has its origins in God; the Scriptures share in the holiness of God from whom they come. [I am in agreement with Pratt here, although I do not draw the same conclusions about Scripture’s human dimension as Pratt does.]

In addition to this, the first chapter explicitly acknowledges the divine origins of the Bible by calling it “the Word of God” four times (1.2,4,8), as well as by claiming in 1.6 that “the whole counsel of God ... is ... set down in Scripture.” As we have said, Westminster confesses that the Scriptures are “given by inspiration of God” (1.2) and “inspired by God” (1.8), but one can hardly imagine a more radical way of pointing to the divine origins of Scripture than we find in 1.4. There God is called “the author” of Scripture. Yes, Westminster actually calls God the “author” of the Bible. [I have no quibble with the thoughts expressed in the last two paragraphs, and neither would some other scholars “in our circles” that Pratt is chiding. At this point it seems to be that Pratt is setting up an argument concerning proper emphasis. What Pratt does not do, here or below, is discuss concretely what the proper “balance” perhaps should be between the divine and human.]

Now, what has become a concern of mine during the decades of my ministry is that this confessional orientation has become increasingly absent from our scholarly discussions of the Bible. I am not at all concerned with the oft quoted comments of men like B.B. Warfield, E.J. Young, John Murray and the like on the importance of the human dimensions of Scripture. That is not my concern here. These men stood boldly both in their professional choices and in their writings for their commitment to the supernatural, divine origins of Scripture in ways that anchored and colored every aspect of their concern for the human origins of the Bible.

On the contrary, my concern is that in recent years the human origins of Scripture have virtually pushed consideration of the divine origins of Scripture off the table. Instead of emphasizing that Scripture is God’s word and adding to it the qualification that it came through human instruments, increasingly the focus of many of our scholars has been to emphasize that Scripture is a human book and to add only the occasional aside that it also comes from God. [As I see it—assuming for the sake of argument that such a sweeping statement carries a degree of truth—Pratt should ask not only *whether* such a trend exists but *why*. I respect Pratt’s experience, but I and others whom Pratt supposedly has in mind are also actively raising children, involved in the lives of God’s people, care deeply for the church, have been engaged in the full-time study of Scripture for over many years, etc. The question I often hear is, *given* that Scripture is ultimately from God, *how* can we think constructively about all these data that

argue clearly for its historical situatedness? It is not clear to me whether Pratt think this is an important question, but, in my years of experience, *many* would find Pratt's direction here unhelpful.]

I can recall years ago as a student how my heart rejoiced when I met or read a critical scholar who made mildly positive gestures toward the idea that the Bible is somehow more than merely human. But now I find myself feeling the same way when I occasionally find subtle gestures in that direction in scholarly writings by our scholars. I understand that our biblical teachers want to distinguish themselves from naïve Christian fundamentalism with its host of simplistic, even docetic, outlooks on the Bible. But frankly, I think that the energy given to this task is misplaced. Rarely have I encountered radical fundamentalism in our denomination. [My experience has been the opposite.] And even when it does appear, I have found that the better way to correct that extreme is to stress the divine origins of Scripture as our basic commitment to which we add other considerations, and not to create doubts about our basic commitment to divine inspiration. [Pratt seems to be making rather serious accusations toward some scholars of *creating* doubts in people's minds. I think, rather that the doubts are already there. I would add that my experience is very different from Pratt's. A fundamentalist understanding of the divine/human nature of Scripture is common, within and without "our denomination," and it can be a stumbling block.]

There is a very important hermeneutical observation I want to make at this point. In an imaginary world, we might think that we could approach these issues with perfect balance. But this ideal hardly reflects the reality of our condition. In discussions of many issues, we tend to settle on one orientation as more basic, more central than others. [Unfortunately, it is Pratt who may be living in an imaginary world, where the words of a 17th century confession of faith, read in a particular way, carry unquestioned and full authority in contemporary debates. The real world I live in, where people love and want to submit themselves to Scripture, but struggle because of its human dimension, does not allow us the luxury of "choosing sides." I would rather encourage people to engage the "incarnate" Scripture the Spirit has given us, this "divine/human" document, rather than, contrary to the nature of Scripture, chose one over other. This is where the incarnational analogy is helpful. For both Christ and Scripture, the divine is more "basic" in the sense that both are solely by divine *initiative*. However, with both Christ and Scripture, the result of this divine initiative is something where we must conclude that, without the human, they cease being what they are.]

One becomes, as it were, our default drive, that conceptual framework out of which we operate except for those times when some software leads us momentarily to another frame of reference. That default drive, the more basic conceptual framework, determines to a great extent our priorities and our emphases in very significant ways. And the default drive of the Confession is the divine origin of Scripture, not its human origin.

In recent years, a number of scholars have drawn analogies from the doctrine of Christology to help us think through the divine and human origins of Scripture. So, allow me to sum up my views along Christological lines as well.

In Christology we all confess that Jesus was very God and very man. The issue before us is not which of these claims is true, nor is the issue whether or not it is legitimate to emphasize one or the other for strategic purposes at any given moment. As I am accustomed to saying, "Because the deck of life is always shifting, balance can be nothing more than momentary synchronicity." No doubt, when dealing with the challenge of docetism, the humanity of Christ should move to center stage. My question is this. Which of these truths does wisdom dictate ought to be the more basic conceptual frame of reference out of which we should see the other? [Well, according to Pratt's own statement in the previous sentences, it depends on the "moment" at hand.]

Should our default orientation be primarily to think of Christ as divine and to explore his humanity in this light? Or should it be primarily to think of Christ as human and to explore his divinity in that light? We might be able to imagine a world in which we could explore both directions with equal vigor. After all, these beliefs do form webs of multiple reciprocities. But in reality, individual human beings and their theological traditions never do this. Individuals and traditions move into such issues with priorities, and the choice of these priorities is of critical importance. [I find Pratt's argument here to be somewhat forced and out of accord with my own experience and those of many others. He is also saying, in essence, that we should give up on the idealistic task of thinking of Scripture as a mutually essential divine/human entity, and rather pick one or the other as ultimately more important and "work from there." If the question is posed this way, *of course* one will pick the divine. But this is a false dilemma that, at the end of the day, will make it very difficult indeed to explain, for example, why Gen 1 looks like ANE myths, or why Hebrews 3 looks like Qumran pesher, or why the law of Moses looks so similar to the Code of Hammurabi but comes at least 200 years later. There are, I would contest, theologically and hermeneutically constructive answers to these kinds of questions, but Pratt's approach will not help us get there. It is also worth noting at this juncture that it is *liberals* who also dichotomize the divine and human, but rejecting the former for the latter. The correct response is not Pratt's, to do likewise (albeit in opposite fashion), to embrace the former at the expense of the latter, but, in true Reformed fashion, to articulate a doctrine of Scripture that gives positive and vibrant value to its divine *and* human elements.]

Now, there can be little doubt that while our tradition affirms the full humanity of Christ, it stresses his divinity. A quick survey of the literature makes this quantitative disparity obvious. And in this respect our tradition follows the hermeneutical orientation of the New Testament as well. The New Testament

and our tradition understood that Christ was a human being who came from God, but taking this as our basic orientation can too easily lead us to misconstrue what kind of human being Jesus was. As much as the New Testament reveals that Christ was truly a man, it is intent on making it clear that he is not an ordinary man. Instead, New Testament writers stressed Christ's divinity because they were devoted to displaying Christ as a unique man, untainted by the Fall, well-acquainted with supernatural influence, holy in all his ways, even from his conception by the Holy Spirit. The traditional stress on Christ's divinity displays wisdom in its basic choice of orientation.

And, in much the same way, this is why the tradition has stressed that the Bible is the Word of God. We have known that it is fair to say that the Bible is a human book that comes from God. But making this formulation our hermeneutical centerpiece can easily lead us to misconstrue what kind of human book the Bible is. The Bible is not an ordinary human book; it is a unique human book, untainted by the Fall, well-acquainted with supernatural influence, holy in all its ways, because it is the work of the Holy Spirit. [Pratt's next step should be to put his formulation into practice, to show how his supposedly more careful emphasis on the divine origin of Scripture will do a better job of explaining the historical data. To lay out a theory, especially in as rhetorical a manner as Pratt is doing here, obliges him to demonstrate that theory's persuasiveness. The rhetoric here is very disappointing to me.]

Westminster's stress on viewing the Bible as God's Word represents wisdom that we should imitate today. It indicates that the primary way we should acknowledge or approach Scripture in our confessing community is to be preoccupied with and to affirm with fervency that the Bible is of divine origin, and then to explore how this belief should define what we mean by the humanity of Scripture. [This is where I would expect more hermeneutical self-consciousness by Pratt. Surely, everything depends on what one assumes is a necessary property of a book of divine origin. Moreover, Pratt seems to assume that he can apprehend that divine standard and then confidently assess how we think of the human dimension, when in reality it is only through the Bible, *in its divine/human wholeness*, that the divine is understood for what it is. And it is here that an incarnational model is helpful: we only understand what God is like through the incarnate Son. We do not come to the incarnate Son with a ready made conclusion of what God *should* be like. This is one of the mistakes the Pharisees made and had been repeated throughout history. Rather, it is only through the incarnate Son, in his humiliation and exaltation, that we can grasp what the Father is like. So too with Scripture: it is in concert with, not despite, its human element, that God's glory is revealed. This approach, I would argue, is in principle much more Reformed than what Pratt is arguing. It also assigns a healthier and more biblical role to WCF as a subordinate standard.]

To sum up, what I'm saying is that Westminster focuses on the divine character of the Bible much more than it does on the human character of the Bible. And the

wisdom is this: that your default drive, your main or primary orientation on any issue, will have tremendous effects on the conclusions you draw with respect to secondary orientations. Because we cannot pursue both orientations with equal vigor, [It still escapes me what would lead Pratt to say this, other than rhetorical strategy.] we need to choose carefully which of these two serves as the melody line and which is the harmony line. And I'm proposing to you that one of the most serious issues arising in our circles these days is which will be the melody line for us. Is the Bible fundamentally divine or is the Bible fundamentally human? [This is a false dichotomy that I resist resolutely. For Pratt's argument to find a convincing audience, he would need to speak not in principles and generalities, but demonstrate how such a posture as he is articulating here will lead to more pleasing and persuasive conclusions, not for the critical community, so to speak, but for the very people of faith Pratt is concerned to protect from an unhealthy focus on Scripture's humanity. I would propose that a constructive way forward is to speak not of the divine and human at odds, over against each other, and then force a decision between them (guess which side will win?!). It is to stress the "bothness" of Scripture. That is our "default drive." I should also point out that Pratt's plan to have the divine as his "primary orientation" to serve as the "melody line" presumes a mediating stance beyond Scripture by which to make such assessments. How, one might ask, does Pratt or anyone else know the divinity of Scripture well enough apart from Scripture itself, which is not a "divine" book but, most obviously, a divine/human book? The wedge Pratt seems intent to drive between the divine and human is, in my view, in some tension with our Reformed heritage and with Scripture itself.]

2. The Historical Reliability of Scripture

To illustrate the importance of this hermeneutical orientation, I want to point to two ways our choice of primary and secondary orientations with respect to the divine and human origins of Scripture affects the way we view two traditional dimensions of the doctrine of Scripture. First, I'd like to look at the issue of the historical reliability of Scripture.

It has been said more often than I can recall that one of the most wonderful things about Westminster is that it makes no comments about the historical reliability of Scripture. I wish that I could say that that the comment was from outside of our circle, but it is not. I can understand how someone who doubts this doctrine might come to this conclusion. After all, predispositions do often obscure subtleties and implications of texts like the Confession. It has also been argued that Westminster does not comment on historical reliability because the Westminster Divines were unaware of archaeological data that has come to light in the last 150 years. Well, it is true enough that they were not acquainted with modern archaeology. But we are ever so mistaken if we actually think for a moment that Westminster does not advocate for the historical reliability of Scripture in the face of challenges from unbelief. By the time Westminster was

written, serious challenges had already been raised against the Bible's historical reliability. There is plenty of evidence on its pages to indicate that this was a concern at the Westminster assemblies. [Personally, I would like to see this evidence. Regardless, the external evidence over the past 150 years is of a quantitatively and qualitatively different kind than anything the Westminster divines were aware of. This is *not* a criticism of the divines, but more of Pratt, who knows very well the *unique* challenges contemporary readers of Scripture confront. Pratt is skirting difficult issues by suggesting that the divines were more or less on the same page as we are today and "look how *they* handled things." In my opinion, this borders on disingenuousness.]

In all events, the hermeneutical orientation of Westminster toward the divine origin of Scripture creates an expectation of Scripture, an expectation that is quite relevant to the issue at hand. Listen to 1.4:

The authority of Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God. [I am certainly not suggesting that Scripture's authority derives from anything other than its divine origin.]

Notice first that this passage deals with a concern for historical reliability. [Where? There is a logical leap in Pratt's argument here.] It focuses on the authority of Scripture [Correct, on the *authority* for what we believe, rather than on Rome's authority] to tell us what we are to "believe"; it does not simply refer to moral authority that we are to obey. [Correct: as 1.6 puts it, it pertains to all things pertaining to "His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life." Historical reliability is not in view, not because the divines didn't wrestle with it (I don't know if they did, or to what degree), not because it is unimportant, but because it is not germane for the purpose of the confession.]

Here we see a division of the content of Scripture familiar to those at Westminster. As the Shorter Catechism Question and Answer number 5 remarks, "The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man." There are two main or principle teachings of the Bible. First, what "ought to be believed," including all the factual claims that the Bible makes about God. [I am at a loss for where Pratt sees this in either WCF or in the WSC and why he would make such a groundless claim and present it as self-evident.]

As we will see, this includes historical events in the Scriptures because they are presented in connection with God and his ways. [This statement is vague, unhelpful, and assumes the point to be proven. We shall see whether Pratt will flesh this out, as he claims he will.]

Second, those moral commands that are given to us, our duty in Scripture.

Among those things that the Confession and catechisms catalogue as beliefs we are to hold concerning God, the Westminster Standards list the biblical records of what God has done in history. So, Westminster 1.4 addresses the authority of the historical claims of Scripture. [Again, to say the least, this would need to be argued carefully and demonstrated, not simply assumed and stated. I could be wrong, but it seems to me that Pratt is trying to hook an argument somewhere in the Confession. I don't think 1.4 can bear the weight of the argument or, I feel, where the argument is going. Here is 1.4 in full: "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."

It is inexplicable to me how Pratt can appeal to this sentence in the context of the debate before us.]

Notice how this paragraph reflects the hermeneutical orientation of the Confession toward divine authorship. Why are the facts [This is a word that Pratt introduces, which is laden with baggage in the contemporary debate, but that finds no support in the section of WCF 1 to which he appeals. This is beyond logical fallacy in my opinion: it is a reading into the WCF.]

of Scripture to be believed? In the first place, two options are denied. On the one hand 1.4 says, "not upon the testimony of any man," and on the other hand it says, not on the basis of any "Church." Now, the latter option, the testimony of any Church, refers most directly to the Roman Catholic claim that the authority of the Scriptures depends on authorization by the Church of Rome. This controversy, as you all know, is well attested in Reformed literature. But Westminster also addresses the option of "the testimony of any man," [Including Pratt or any church council, WCF 31.4 and more importantly 1.10] another cardinal view of historical Reformed theology. The authority of Scripture is not subject to but above the judgments of human beings, no matter who they may be, including philosophers, scientists, historians, biblical scholars or any other kind of human authority. [I agree wholeheartedly, but I do not see the force of the argument for the topic at hand. In fact, the points Pratt makes here undercut the arguments he has made thus far. I fear that an investigation of the non-negotiable human dimension of Scripture is being framed by Pratt as a challenge to Scripture's authority. I can only say that I for one have never made that argument, directly or implicitly.]

But in the second place, Westminster insists that the authority of Scripture is "wholly" dependent "upon God." [Right, its authority.] Now, it is important to note something here. Westminster 1.4, which we continue to quote, is not a reference to the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit for the authority of Scripture. That issue is dealt with in 1.5. Instead, paragraph 4 displays the foundation of biblical authority by appealing to the divine origins of Scripture and to theology proper. On the one hand, the authority of Scripture depends "wholly on God" because he

is “the author thereof.” [No problem thus far.] In other words, Westminster insists that we should believe in the authority of Scripture even in historical matters [Another logical leap. Again, I am at a loss how Pratt can jump from WCF 1.4, which speaks of Scripture’s authority, to a discussion of historical matters raised by modern scholarship. The context of WCF does not support Pratt’s assertion.]

because it is of divine origin. But on the other hand, in a strikingly important parenthetical comment at this point, Westminster also makes it clear that the divine origin of Scripture is a vital consideration because of the doctrine of theology proper, or the character of God. The Scriptures are authoritative because they come from God “who is truth itself.” Catch the logic here. God is truth itself. Therefore, the Scriptures which are authored by him are truth. [So far so good.] To deny the historical, factual truthfulness of Scripture is to call into question the very character of God. [This is a rhetorically appealing conclusion to come to, but I think Pratt himself knows the issues are far more intricate. Perhaps the most unfortunate misstep in this line of argumentation is that Pratt does not articulate (because he is assuming) just what “historical,” “factual,” and “truthfulness” mean. By what standards does he judge these things? It seems Pratt’s “default drive” is not so much the divinity of Scripture as it is he own assumption about what divinity entails. I, however, would like to see what Scripture itself—not a *tour de force* handling of WCF—can tell us about *in what sense* Scripture is “historically, factually, truthful.” Pratt has done work in the Chronicler’s history, which he will elude to briefly later. He certainly understands that the Chronicler provides a history of Israel that is not just a shade different from the Deuteronomistic Historian, but an alternative reading of that history for a postexilic audience. Now, in what sense does Scripture’s divine origin (with which I am in full agreement) help us arrive at a solution that safeguards the historical facticity of CHR in the way that Pratt seems to be looking for? Perhaps better, do not the very data of Scripture drive us to consider a model of “God speaking historical truth” that moves us in a very different direction than what Pratt would like to see?]

Now, as we all know, this declaration of the authority of Scripture in its factual claims has not been ignored in our tradition. In many respects, it was the reason Machen and other fundamentalist Presbyterians began their denominations. [Machen left for a number of reasons, but the “factual claims” of Scripture does not define those reasons exhaustively. Doctrine of Scripture was certainly one of them, but as pressing was the doctrine of Christ. In any event, Pratt cannot call upon the specter of Machen to aid him in his argument here, although I admit it has a certain rhetorical effect, as if to imply the sad current state of affairs is a repeat of the 1920s.]

Moreover, in large measure the same issue sparked the division of the Southern Presbyterian church that gave rise to the PCA. In fact, the historical reliability of Scripture has been the signature conviction of our church’s history. [This is an overstatement at best. Our tradition has been much more subtle than Pratt is

allowing.] It has been so central in our branch of the church that our ordination vows include an affirmation of biblical inerrancy. While not a confessional term, our tradition has viewed the concept of “inerrancy” merely as an explication of what is already included in the Confession in the term “infallible.” The term “inerrancy” is relatively novel, but the concept that the Bible is true in all of its factual claims simply reflects our Confession. [Pratt’s definition of inerrancy as “true in all its factual claims” says too little and too much. Bandyng about terms like “fact” and “true” without addressing how Scripture’s own behavior helps us nuance those terms contributes to polarization and confusion.]

Our belief in the historical or factual reliability of Scripture has been a mark of our ecclesiastical identity through all of these years. [It is worth repeating, since Pratt wishes to make such a strong point of it: what precisely does Pratt mean by “historical or factual reliability”? I believe that Gen 1 is historically reliable in that it presents the creation of the world as an act of Israel’s God, not a pantheon. Is that good enough for Pratt, or does his doctrine of God/truth/Scripture require something more? Does it require me to believe in 6 literal 24 days? A “raqia” in the sky? These are not conundrums; I think they can be easily answered, but I am not sure how much leeway Pratt’s position allows for.]

Now, it goes without saying that our views on these matters are laughable in modern critical circles — utterly laughable. Those who are acquainted with biblical archaeology face many conflicts between scholarly interpretations of Scripture and scholarly historical opinions. Those acquainted with fields of paleontology, geology and biology cannot escape the fact that the Scriptures conflict with the majority of scientific opinions in leading academic communities. In fact, the idea that the Scriptures are entirely historically reliable is so far from plausible in critical circles that anyone who claims such a notion is simply dismissed as ignorant or dishonest. [It is not clear from this paragraph whether Pratt acknowledges whether the problems raised in modern criticism are actual problems, or just the by-product of unbelief. If the former, he needs to address them. If the latter, I say he is wrong.]

Unfortunately, in recent years a very similar attitude has risen among our own scholars. Anyone who still believes that the Scriptures are historically reliable in detail [Which details? All of them? As a biblical scholar with 30 years teaching experience, does Pratt not realize the hermeneutical difficulties, or is he is choosing to ignore them?]

is likewise caricatured as ignorant, or simply dishonest. [Again, a rhetorical coup perhaps, but Pratt would need to show how his own training in biblical scholarship combined with his own interpretation of our tradition would yield better results. The *ad hominem* tone he is adopting here in these last two paragraphs, however, will not help him secure a broad hearing. Moreover, Pratt needs to consider that there might be *reasons* why older notions of inerrancy are not adopted “among our own scholars.” It is not about a newer generation of

scholars, throwing traditional caution to the wind, willing to cast off the shackles of the past. It is more about younger scholars having reasons for being dissatisfied with older formulations and looking for more compelling paradigms.]

Now, to be fair, as some of our biblical scholars have moved in this direction they have rooted their arguments not so much in natural sciences. For the most part, biblical scholars don't know enough about such matters to converse along those lines. Instead, the arguments that have come to the foreground are based on the humanity of Scripture. That is to say, they are based in large part on the assumption that God accommodated himself to the beliefs and literary styles of the ancient Near East to the point that the purposes of Scripture are largely indistinguishable from the purposes of other literature of those times and places. [This is inaccurate and bordering on misrepresentation. I know of no evangelical scholar who would say that accommodation *necessarily* makes Scripture "largely indistinguishable" from ANE literature (read the previous sentence of Pratt's carefully). God does, most certainly, "accommodate" (although such a term would need careful nuancing is as not to suggest that God is in some way beholden to categories over which he has not control), and I would like to see Pratt outline an argument that takes this fact fully into account. It seems to me that Pratt is arguing on the basis of an assumed and faulty premise that the extremes in scholarship define the entire spectrum.]

Parallels are drawn between the Scriptures and examples of ancient near-eastern historiography. Comparisons are made between the Bible and historically unreliable ancient mythological texts like *Enuma Elish*, *Gilgamesh*, or *The Epic of Atrahasis*, as well as royal propaganda like the Mesha Inscription (or Moabite Stone) and the Inscriptions of Sennacherib. Once significant literary parallels are established, the conclusion is drawn that the Scriptures were not intended to make as many historical claims as our forebears once thought they were. [That is correct. Our forebears were not privy to this information, but we are, and adjustments have had to be made. Are we to understand Pratt as saying that these parallels are figments of scholarly imagination and, so, can be safely ignored by the faithful?]

Now this approach to biblical historiography touches all portions of Scripture, including the so-called historical books of the Old Testament and New Testament narratives, but much of the attention has been given to the primeval history, especially to the first chapters of Genesis. [In the interest of full disclosure, Pratt should explain *why* the primeval history has been such a focus on scholarly attention. There are *reasons* why these chapters continue to attract attention, by evangelical and non-evangelical scholars alike.]

So, I want to focus my comments on that portion of the Bible.

I still recall a very dramatic moment in my education, at Union Seminary in Virginia, when a professor chided me in front of a class for holding that Genesis 1 was historically reliable. [The professor should have pushed Pratt to explain what he means by “historically reliable.” Perhaps then Pratt’s “great victory” (see below) would have been less remarkable.]

He derided me by saying this. “Genesis 1 tells us nothing about the way God made the world.” And I remember my response. “How can you say that? Even *Alice in Wonderland* tells us something about the way God made the world.” [I must admit I don’t follow this. I assume Pratt had a legitimate point to make, but I think something is missing here. On the surface it just seems like a bit of slight of hand to catch a professor off guard.]

“Okay,” he admitted, “but all that Genesis 1 tells us is that God made everything. To go beyond that is ridiculous.”

Now, to tell you the truth, as I left the class that day, I felt like I had won a great victory. I had actually caused my professor to admit that Genesis 1 tells us that God made the world. I left class elated.

Unfortunately, in recent years I had that same conversation again with a respected scholar within our branch of the church. After hearing him claim, “Genesis 1 does not tell us anything about the way God made the world.” [I do not know who this scholar is, but it wasn’t me.] I responded, predictably, “Even *Alice in Wonderland* tells us something about this.” And the response I received was strikingly familiar. “Okay,” he admitted, “but all it tells us is that the God of Israel made everything. The mythic features of Genesis 1 make it ridiculous to go beyond that.” [Pratt needs to explain, very clearly, why the position articulated here by his evangelical brother is unacceptable.]

While I rejoiced the first time I had that conversation, frankly, I did not rejoice the second time. In my estimation, such conclusions are out of accord with our confessional heritage. [Yes, in Pratt’s estimation, and he is more than free to make the case. But are we to believe that the *Alice in Wonderland* analogy is somehow supposed to safeguard Scripture’s historical reliability? Moreover, Pratt is assuming that the point of Genesis 1 is to communicate historically reliable information. If he does not want to allow *Enuma Elish*, etc., to have any direct influence on his conclusions about Genesis 1, perhaps at least we should expect him to allow these ancient stories to “calibrate” his genre expectations of Genesis? Also, it seems that Pratt is allowing for no mythic content, or even context, for Genesis 1. If that assessment is correct, I find it incredible.]

The Confession does not reflect this kind of historical minimalism when reading the first chapters of Genesis. [That is because the confession was written (1) for a different purpose, and (2) before anyone knew anything about these close ANE analogs.]

It does not hesitate to treat a number of details presented in the primeval history as historically true. [One should not expect anything different, and the divines should, therefore, neither be chided nor praised. They lived in their own historical moment.]

Notice how much detail 4.1 includes in its reflections on Genesis 1–2. We are told that God created humanity “in the space of six days” and the creation was “very good.” Even the chronology of the passage is reflected in 4.2, where we read that God created humanity “after God had made all other creatures,” that God created man “male and female,” that he created them “after his own image.” In 6.1 Adam and Eve are called “our first parents,” and we are told that they were “seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan” and ate “the forbidden fruit.” Westminster does not bother to argue for these beliefs. They are stated as true because the Scriptures state them. [I find this statement to be nearly incomprehensible. Are we to understand Pratt as saying that statements Scripture makes are “true” (in the way Pratt assumes) simply because Scripture states them? Is there no sensitivity to potential genre differences?]

The Confession’s statements of this kind stand in sharp contrast with those that relegate the opening chapters of Genesis to the status of ancient near-eastern mythology. [That may be, but that does not settle the question either way. The Confession is not the filter through which we read Scripture. And our tradition is misused, misunderstood, and truncated when it is used to shield the church from further progress in its knowledge of Scripture.]

Even when the disclaimer is added that myth in the Bible is true myth, I have not found these same scholars willing to state plainly that they believe that Adam and Eve were our first parents, or that they were actually tempted by a talking serpent, or that they actually ate forbidden fruit and were actually driven from a garden. These teachings are relegated to pre-scientific mythological status that has relatively little bearing on what we should think actually happened.

Now, we should all admit that since the days of Westminster the number of challenges that have risen against the historical reliability of the Bible has increased dramatically. [Again, it is worth asking why this is the case. Is the world just “going liberal,” with only a remnant remaining who can see what is *really* happening, or are these real challenges that have as yet to be addressed in a fully convincing manner? If a lot of smart people disagree with Pratt, even some those within “our circles,” it might help if Pratt could at least give some acknowledgement that the issues are very difficult and diverse opinions are held.]

This is one of the reasons the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* was composed in the last century, in large part by representatives from our circles. Chicago states boldly that the Scriptures are historically reliable, but then qualifies the statement in a number of ways in the light of challenges that have

been raised since the days of Westminster. [The question is whether those “qualifications” have proved persuasive. I don’t think they have, nor do I think the CSBI should serve as our default drive on inerrancy. But more importantly, one of the points of /&/ is that we should not *have* a doctrine of Scripture whereby the human dimension, which is there by God’s own design, needs to be “qualified.”]

But following the hermeneutical orientation of Westminster, it expresses this issue first in the connection between God as the author and the Scriptures as his word, and then secondarily qualifies that basic orientation. We all know these qualifications. The Scriptures contain hyperbole, round numbers, phenomenological descriptions of nature; they are highly selective; and so on. And more than this, the Chicago Statement also admits that there are times when we simply don’t know how to reconcile what the Bible claims historically with other historical evidence. Yet, the affirmation of historical reliability is not denied or marginalized. This is not ignorance or dishonesty as some suggest these days. It is the result of a hermeneutical orientation that I believe the Scriptures themselves have. [This is a matter of opinion, and Pratt is certainly welcome to have his. It is, in my view, still somewhat evasive to have a doctrine of Scripture where so much of the Bible’s own self-witness needs to be “qualified.”]

And more to the point of our purposes here, it is an orientation that appears in our confessional heritage. [One can in no way equate the “orientation” of CSBI and “our confessional heritage.” Moreover, “our confessional heritage” is just that, a heritage. It is a trajectory that is rooted in but extends beyond the Westminster Standards. One need only peruse the biblical scholarship of Old Princeton and Westminster Seminary, not to mention the Dutch tradition, to see that the WS did not have the final word on biblical scholarship in our circles. Yet Pratt here seems to be content to equate our confessional heritage with *his* particular manner of reading the WCF. What Pratt argues for here is, to say the least, highly debatable.]

I suppose that one of the most troubling issues for me in recent discussions about these matters is the fact that the challenges against historical reliability we face today are not remarkably different from those that we have known about for nearly half a century. [Again, Pratt needs to ask himself *why* this is the case. Why is it that scholars “in our circles,” and a good many outside of those circles, have come to accept opinions on, say, Pentateuchal authorship that would have been anathema in Machen’s day? Because, over time, certain models have become more persuasive. It is not, as I said earlier, that subsequent generations of evangelical scholars have forgotten their tradition, uprooted, and left for liberal pasture. It is because they have been persuaded that different explanations are needed. Pratt offers no counter-argument, only a model that seems to suggest that movement is a rejection of tradition.]

There has been no tidal wave of archaeological data against the Scriptures that

has come to light in the last twenty years that would compel any honest scholar to change his views on the Bible. [Pratt is assuming the point that has to be proven. Many would disagree with him on this point. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of what evidence has come to light; it is a matter of constructing models of explaining the collective evidence we have had before us for much longer than simply the last twenty years.]

There has been no barrage of data of which earlier scholars of our tradition were ignorant. [Of course they weren't ignorant!! That is not the point. The point is whether their *explanation* of the data, i.e., their incorporation of the data into *existing* models is, at the end of the day, persuasive or not.]

Through the years, our denomination has been deeply influenced by scholars who knew well the data brought against the Bible, but still found the arguments based upon that data unconvincing. [And that is where the civil conversation can commence.] The evidence has not changed that much; it is the hermeneutical orientation of some of our scholars that has changed. [This is only one way of looking at this issue. Pratt must entertain the possibility that changes in current orientation may be a result of current scholars finding older orientations unhelpful.]

For instance, I recently reviewed a book in which one of our scholars wrote that Genesis 1 should not be treated as history because no human being witnessed the events of creation. [This is actually a very old argument going back to Jean Astruc and even earlier.] Now, I think we would all agree that Genesis 1 is not ordinary historical writing [This is interesting. It would help if Pratt would articulate how Genesis is not "ordinary" historiography while also being "historically reliable." This is actually a hopeful statement of Pratt's that has potential, perhaps, for moving beyond some of the impasse we are in.]

in the sense that it is based on human eyewitness reports. But to deny that Genesis chapter 1 is history because there was no eyewitness is to deny the divine origin and supernatural character of the Bible. [Pratt is equating historicity (of a certain type) with divine origin. This is fallacious reasoning.]

Genesis 1 is an eyewitness account, an account by God the all-seeing eyewitness. [O.K., but so are DTR and CHR, yet they are very different accounts of history. Pratt cannot appeal to divine origin to settle the genre question so easily.]

Our heritage has unabashedly approached historical reliability with this kind of hermeneutical commitment. The Bible is a supernatural book; it has all sorts of information that goes far beyond what human writers could have known through natural means. It is a supernaturally granted revelation; it is guarded against falsehoods [Which is defined how?]; it is supernaturally authorized. [It seems that Pratt is discounting ANE documents that put Genesis into a very different light

than he is willing to accept. Again, he is free to do so, but piling up words like “supernatural,” “revelation,” “falsehood,” etc., do nothing more than polarize what is in reality an issue that requires much more patience and nuance than we have seen.]

But the clear tendency that has grown in our circles is to approach this issue with the opposite orientation, reducing or removing the supernatural dimension of Scripture. [Pratt’s argument is becoming a bit redundant here, and I do not want to feel compelled to respond at every point. Still, let me say again, that the wedge between divine and human is of Pratt’s devising, not mine or others “in our circles.” I for one am very unhappy with any discussion, including Pratt’s, that seeks to isolate the one from the other. To do so is, ironically, to show disrespect for the very Scripture God gave us.]

Then, on the basis of these kinds of assumptions [No, not “on the basis,” of the ANE evidence, as if it is posed as some neutral standard. That is another caricature. Rather, the ANE evidence *calibrates* and *tames* faulty genre decisions—such as I see Pratt making—about Genesis, e.g., that is a book of science or a history book in the contemporary sense of the word.]

, we qualify the ways in which biblical human texts can still be true. In the case of Genesis chapter 1, it is often called myth, but true myth in the sense that it points to the God of Israel as the true Creator. In the case of other historical portions of Scripture, those portions misrepresent historical events [“Misrepresent” is a strong word and seems to stem from Pratt’s assumptions about the nature of ancient (and modern) historiography as being “brute” or “neutral.”]

for any number of reasons, but their moral and theological points are nonetheless true. Once again, I want to urge that the heart of the issue is not new or overwhelming data; it is our hermeneutical orientation, an orientation that has broken with our heritage. [The issue is a failure, after all this time, to find theological and hermeneutical paradigms that show full integrity toward the Bible as fully human and fully divine.]

I once had a student who commented on the outlook in this way. He said this to me, “It’s like the Bible is an embarrassing uncle we have to introduce to our friends. So, we tell our friends all about the flaws that he has and all the weaknesses that he has before we introduce him to them. That way they are not bothered by what they see when they do finally meet him.” [Yes, the Bible is an embarrassing uncle if we feel it needs to meet the kind of expectations Pratt is articulating here.]

And I think my friend is right. The tendency of many in our circles these days is to focus attention on the historical problems resulting from the humanity of the Bible to the point that we are no longer bothered when the Scriptures do not appear historically reliable. [No, it is not by merely focusing incessantly on the human

dimension that we somehow become euthanized to the problems, and now we all breathe a sigh of relief. It is by allowing “Scripture in context” to shape how we think about Scripture. Scripture is only an “embarrassing uncle” if we insist, as Pratt seems to be throughout this lecture, that we can have a doctrine of Scripture that exists in isolation from evidence we have. It is important to stress here that I am *not* arguing that the external evidence is “neutral” and that our doctrine of Scripture must change with every spade of dirt tossed about in an archaeological expedition. Our doctrine of Scripture is *rooted*, absolutely and unalterably, in God, the author thereof. Pratt’s error is in assuming *what kind of Scripture* this wise, loving, all-knowing God is willing to produce. I would rather not make such assumptions, even if our forebears *might have* (and I stress, *might have*, since I do not accept Pratt’s truncated version of our Reformed heritage), but rather allow the collective evidence to help me understand what we are to make of this *divinely* originated book.]

I’ll say that again: The tendency of many in our circles these days is to focus attention on the historical problems resulting from the humanity of the Bible to the point that we are no longer bothered when the Scriptures do not appear historically reliable.

[I’ll say it again: this is a misrepresentation of the issue. The “problems” are only problems because of a faulty starting point, namely, the equating of “divine origin” with a particular kind of “historical reliability” (which Pratt has not defined thus far). Moreover, these “problems” do not result from the “humanity of the Bible.” The humanity of the Bible is what *God himself* has put there. If pointing them out causes such problems for “our heritage” as Pratt defines it, it may be time to balance his “always Reformed” melody with a healthy dose of “always reforming” harmony.]

But I believe that the wisdom of our heritage teaches us that we should not diminish our expectations of Scripture to the point that historical problems no longer bother us. [Pratt is following the line of argumentation he began above. The historical issues should *never diminish* our expectations. Rather, they should help insure that our *expectations* are in line with what Scripture, by God’s wisdom, is prepared to deliver. Pratt seems unwilling to examine his presuppositions on this entire matter.]

They should bother us. They should compel us to work very hard to deal with such issues and even challenge us to hold on to the historical veracity of Scripture when there is no resolution to historical difficulties available. After all, according to our tradition, the Scriptures came from God who is truth, and they are, therefore, truth. If we ever come to the point that the historical difficulties of the Bible don’t bother us anymore, then we have changed our orientation toward the Bible. They should bother us. After all, they came from God. [The circularity of this argument is evident.]

3. The Harmony of Scripture

Now we should turn to a second way in which recent hermeneutical posturing [A somewhat derogatory, even alarmist, phrasing.] toward human origins has affected our doctrine of Scripture: the harmony of the Bible. I have in mind here the question of whether or not the Bible contradicts itself.

One of the firm conclusions of critical scholarship over the last 150 years is that the Bible represents a compilation of competing points of view. [This is slippery language. "Competing" does not mean "contradictory." Does Pratt's position allow for true theological diversity?]

As the various voices of Scripture are allowed to speak, they present viewpoints that are incompatible as far as they are concerned. These contradictory views include smaller matters like details of history, as well as larger issues like theological and political points of view. For the most part, this fragmentary approach to Scripture [Is this "fragmentary"? What does Pratt hope to accomplish by posing the very real issue of theological diversity in Scripture this way?]

has been closely tied to critical reconstructions of Israel's history and questions of how the compositional history of Scripture fits within those historical reconstructions. At times, incompatible viewpoints are attributed to various literary strata within one book of the Bible so that one part of a book of the Bible conflicts with another part of the same book. For instance, it is widely accepted in critical circles that one stratum of Noah's flood presents its duration as 40 days and nights while another stratum of Noah's flood presents it as lasting 150 days and nights. At other times whole books are seen as competing with each other, for instance, the many differences between Samuel/Kings and Chronicles. This propensity toward finding [This is another caricature. It is not so much that people are reading suspiciously, looking for disharmonies to exploit. The disharmonies are there on the pages of Scripture. The fact that they are being more openly discussed is healthy and may lead to better articulations of Scripture that what Pratt seems to be advocating.]

disharmonies in Scripture has been so strong that often the slightest logical tensions between texts are magnified to the point that they are portrayed as diametrically opposed when critical scholars handle them. [Are we to conclude that Pratt, who has worked on Chronicles, finds no "competing" points of view between CHR and DTR? How would he explain the synoptic Gospels? I may simply be missing a larger point Pratt is aiming for here, but he seems to be painting a picture I would think he himself would have trouble accepting.]

Now, is there any wonder that this is true? After all, in this view the Bible reflects the outlooks of a multitude of human writers who composed their literature over nearly 1000 years. [The Bible does reflect this fact. To deny it is to deny its human authorship, or at least to render God's use of human agents to be of no

consequence.]

What could make more sense than to expect them to reflect contradictory and competing points of view? [I, at least, do not say this in /&/I. Rather, this state of affairs reflects *diversity*. Pratt is free to deny theological diversity if he wishes.]

Frankly, if we center our attention on Scripture as a collection of human writings as critical scholars have done, this conclusion makes perfectly good sense. [No, it is God who was pleased to have his word written in various times and place, for various purposes and by various authors, and thus to reflect a clear degree of diversity. Denying that diversity is to deny what God himself has put there. God himself seems pleased to allow this state of affairs. Why is Pratt so resistant? What is he concerned about that might be lost?]

I remember once having a professor who presented the prophetic denunciations of Israel's sacrifices as an example of competing views in the Bible — a conflict between the worship regulations requiring sacrifice and the prophets' rejection of sacrifices. Of course, he had no desire to see any harmony between the prophetic witness and the worship legislation of the Pentateuch because he had so reconstructed Israel's history that there was no reason to presume that everyone in Israel owed allegiance to Mosaic legislation. At one point I suggested that perhaps the conflict was not between the prophets and faithful interpretations of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, but between the prophets and hypocrisy among the Israelites that biblical worship legislation itself condemned. His answer was predictable. "That answer is too simple. It doesn't allow all the voices of Scripture to speak." (Remember that answer, please.) [I wonder how that professor would respond to what appears to be a caricature. Pratt may disagree with the history of critical scholarship as standing against the clear teaching of the Confession, but these scholars are not fools who simply refuse to see the utterly simple harmony that is so evident to any who don't carry the critical baggage.]

Now, I have been saddened to find that very similar attitudes have taken root in our circles. Once again, I am not concerned with statements like those of B.B. Warfield who was one of the first in our tradition to acknowledge that the Scriptures contain multiple "concatenations" or "theologies." He firmly coupled this belief with the belief that there was extensive harmony [On what level? Demonstrated concretely or merely postulated theoretically?] among all of these theologies, and a harmony that could be seen in systematic theology. Instead, my concern is how much we hear these days in our own circles about the diversity of Scripture. And increasingly, our own scholars' characterization of attempts to harmonize the diversity of Scripture is the same as that of my professor: "That answer is too simple." [Yes, I certainly do think that many attempts to harmonize Scripture, as Pratt seems to be suggesting, are "too simple," and I would add either dishonest (for a biblical scholar) or perhaps at best rhetorical.]

Now, my own concentration in biblical studies for a number of years has been the book of Chronicles. If there is one place in the Bible where the diversity of Scripture is evident, it is there. Working with the differences and [sic, in] detail between Samuel/Kings and Chronicles seriously challenges anyone who believes that the Scriptures are harmonious. So, I do not consider myself simplistic in my assessment of these matters. [But is Pratt simplistic in his solution?] But at the same time, I am convinced that the unity of Scripture, the harmony and compatibility of its various parts, has been inappropriately obscured by a growing number of our biblical scholars. [What we would need to see is for Pratt to pick, say, ten areas of tension between CHR and DTR and then explain them in such a way that essential harmony is preserved, and whether such a model would be convincing to scholars who are sympathetic with Pratt's theological concerns while also being fluent in the issues involved. If he cannot do so, and recedes to the defense that Scripture is *ultimately* harmonizable regardless, even if we do not see it here, it would be incumbent upon him to present a (confessional) model of Scripture whereby God gives us books that so clearly do *not* harmonize but that really *need* to. In other words, does Pratt really think that God gave us two very distinct interpretations of Israel's history to see how clever or faithful we can be to resist their distinctives and maintain a theory of "unity" that sidelines the very Scripture we are committed to handle and submit ourselves to?]

Here again, I want to suggest that this tendency does not reflect the wisdom of Westminster. Rather, it has a different hermeneutical orientation. The position of Westminster is straightforward: the Bible is God's Word, and therefore it must be conceptually harmonious. We can see this orientation in a number of ways. In the first place, Westminster explains in 1.5 what distinguishes the Canon of Scripture from other writings as the Word of God. [Am I right in concluding that Pratt has problems with such respected Reformed OT scholars as Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman III? Further, we should be reminded here again of WCF's purpose, which is not to solve the problems of modern scholarship (of which the divines, by their historical setting, were largely ignorant), but to provide the church with a model of biblical authority so that no one would be beholden to human traditions (in that case, Rome). As I said earlier, Pratt expects too much from WCF in the current debate about the dual authorship of Scripture. And so as not to be misunderstood, let me restate it here: the external evidence, which is considerable, does not determine *whether* Scripture is of divine origin. Rather, it helps us understand the *kind* of Scripture this divine author has given the church. And, as is so often the case, God seems to have given us something that makes us a tad bit uncomfortable. That God would be so like us is something that bothered Jesus' opponents and has continued in various errors in the church throughout history. The "problems" Pratt refers to are not problems, but reminders of how great God is and how willing he is to become one of us.]

Westminster 1.5 is best known in our circles for insisting this: that "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof [of

Scripture], is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” Most of us remember from that paragraph in the confession that the testimony of the Spirit is so compelling that it is the source of “our full persuasion and assurance.”

In scholarly discussions in our circles, appeals to the testimony of the Holy Spirit have become more frequent. **[Which is good, I think. He has, in my view, too often been relegated to the task of inspiring biblical authors. A more vibrant doctrine of the HS might actually help us as we approach the many difficult issues before us.]**

This is an interesting feature of recent discussions. It is fascinating to me, however, to see how this appeal to the testimony of the Holy Spirit occurs in a context where the humanity of Scripture is emphasized. **[That is perfectly understandable and desirable if one has a properly biblical, i.e., incarnational, model of Scripture.]**

As the humanity of the Scriptures is stressed to the point that the harmony of Scripture comes into question, **[No, the humanity is stressed to the point where earlier articulations of Scripture’s harmony are called into question.]**

the testimony of the Spirit is brought in to counter the negative impact of what scholarly research says about Scripture. It serves as a personal *deus ex machina* (God as machine) — a sort of last-minute rescue of faith from the internal conflict we feel over Scripture. **[This is a disappointing, somewhat condescending, comment. I would also add that, if the HS were brought into the discussion at the outset, there would be no need to insert him at the end as “last-minute rescue of faith.”]**

It is as if our study of Scripture has raised so many problems, including disharmony, that we must have an indisputable basis for believing that it is in any sense God’s Word. And that indisputable basis is found in the testimony of the Holy Spirit, a religious ***intuition*** that is impervious to examination, impervious to disqualification — but also equally devoid of content and definition. **[Thus far, this is how I would have described Pratt’s argument.]** Do I need to say that one again? An indisputable basis is found in the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Our religious intuition that is impervious to examination (nobody can argue with you if you have the Holy Ghost telling you this is true), impervious to disqualification (what open-minded person would say that God is not telling you this?), and also, however, equally devoid of content and definition. In other words, “I feel the Holy Spirit is telling me that this is the Word of God” — but the definition of what that means is an entirely different matter. **[Pratt’s caricature impugns motives to scholars in “our circles” that I do not recognize. In fact, I would argue that Pratt’s point here is at odds with the Reformed faith. He seems to suggest that a religious *intuition* re: God’s word, based on the work of the HS, is a problem. Warfield disagrees:]**

But, we may be reminded, the church has not held with such tenacity to all the doctrines taught in the Bible. How are we to account, then, for the singular consistency of its confession of the Bible's doctrine of inspiration? The account to be given is again simple, and capable of being expressed in a single sentence. It is due to an instinctive feeling in the church, that the trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine, and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life. It is due to the church's instinct that the validity of her teaching of doctrine as the truth of God,—to the Christian's instinct that the validity of his hope in the several promises of the gospel,—rests on the trustworthiness of the Bible as a record of God's dealings and purposes with men ("The Church Doctrine of Inspiration," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* [ed. S. G. Craig; Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948], 120-21)]

But in Westminster, this is not the process. In Westminster, the testimony of the Spirit is not a religious intuition that overcomes us in spite of what we know to be true [This is an odd way of putting the issue. No one is posing that the HS has to convince us of something contrary to what we *know*. Rather, the HS convinces us to know what we ought to know.]

of the Bible. Quite the contrary, Westminster views the testimony of the Spirit in conjunction with what we learn from the study of the Bible. As 1.5 puts it, "the inward work of the Holy Spirit [is a testimony] ... by and with the Word in our hearts." The testimony of the Spirit is conjoined with the Word itself. [I have absolutely no argument with this, but it neither follows from nor is relevant to the point Pratt is making. The Spirit does not convince us of the historicity (by modern standards) of, say, Gen 1-11. The Spirit, in and through Scripture, convicts us that Scripture is our guide to faith and practice.]

And this conjunction of the Spirit's testimony with what we know to be true of Scripture becomes even clearer in the way that Westminster 1.5 lists the qualities of Scripture. As it lists them, these qualities offer evidence of the divine origin and authority of the Bible. You know how it goes. Westminster 1.5 notes "the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole ... the full discovery it makes of the ways of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God." It doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God, and then follows the word of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Notice that the results of exploring Scripture make it "abundantly evident" that the Bible is the Word of God. Our explorations do not make it necessary for the Spirit of God to rescue [Again, this is Pratt's unfortunate word based on his caricature above; no one is talking about rescuing the Bible from itself; Pratt is.]

us from what we see there. Are you catching my drift here? This is extremely important.

Now, I wish we had time to touch on each of these evidences, but for our purposes here we should note that one thing Westminster expects us to discern in Scripture that makes the authority of Scripture “abundantly evident” is “the consent of all the parts.” Put simply, this means that one way the Scriptures reveal that they are from God is that all the parts of Scripture consent with the other parts, they agree with each other, they are harmonious. Lack of harmony in the Bible would be evidence to the contrary. [It is debatable whether the “consent of all the parts” clause speaks to the issue of theological diversity of the OT. “Consent” does not mean “harmonizable” in the way Pratt assumes.]

Once again, we see the hermeneutical orientation of Westminster deeply influencing the logic of the doctrine. Here is the logic: the Bible is the Word of God, not among the human writings mentioned in 1.3. It is authoritative because it comes from God, “the author thereof,” “who is truth itself” (1.4). And this divine authorship is abundantly evident in features we find as we study the Scriptures, one of which is “the consent of all the parts” of Scripture or the harmony of Scripture (1.5). [I have absolutely no argument with this. As long as Pratt remains on the level of the Confession attesting to Scripture’s *authority* because it is a book of *divine origin*, he is on safe ground. Where his point begins to get muddled is when he assumes that this confession is poised to address the varied, complex, and legitimate issues raised in modern biblical studies. The problems don’t go away by appealing to the Confession. More importantly, the church is not helped by its ministers virtually hiding behind the Confession to be protected from these *commonly discussed issues* raised in the modern study of Scripture. To put it more plainly, the reading strategy passionately argued for here by Pratt, where tradition trumps evidence every time, expresses well my motivation for writing *I&I*. Pratt may feel his words here are a timely and needed message of correction, but I see in them more a reluctance to engage the issues head on *along with* the tradition. Toward that end, a truly timely warning is that of Richard Longenecker, who, in addressing the Second Temple evidence for the NT’s use of the OT (which Pratt gets to below) says:

It has become all too common today to hear assertions of a theological nature as to what God must have done or claims of a historical nature as to what must have been the case during the apostolic period of the Church—and to find that such statements are based principally on deductions from what has previously been accepted and/or supported by current analogies alone. The temptation is always with us to mistake hypothesis for evidence or to judge theological and historical formulations by their coherence and widespread acceptance, rather than first of all by their correspondence and exegetical data. History is replete with examples of this sorry condition and its sorry results, and hindsight permits us to recognize it in the past for what it was: a perversion of the truth. But we are ‘sons and daughters of our parents,’ composed of the same stuff and subject to the same pressures and temptations. And nowhere do we need to guard against our own inclinations and various pressures more carefully than in our understanding of the New Testament writers’ use of Scripture. Neither piety nor

speculation—both of which are excellent in their own ways when properly controlled—can substitute for careful historical and exegetical investigation. Nor can traditional views of either the right or left be allowed to stand unscrutinized in the light of recent discoveries. The Jewish roots of Christianity make it a priori likely that the exegetical procedures of the New Testament would resemble, at least to some extent, those of Judaism of the time (*Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 185-86.)

Longenecker's warning is one we should heed and is fully in keeping with our Confessional heritage, and in fact seems to be a requirement of that very heritage (WCF 1.10).]

What we see here in Westminster is a principle that applies to every communication event. Under the influence of contemporary deconstruction, it has become almost commonsensical in our day (and all of us in this room would agree with this) that it is possible to apply a hermeneutic of suspicion successfully to practically any piece of literature we choose. [Pratt here is introducing inflammatory concepts (deconstruction and hermeneutic of suspicion). These are his words and do not describe those with whom he is arguing.]

If we have certain assumptions about the author of a text, capable readers can deconstruct their texts by dismantling them into contradictory, self-defeating claims. When we suspect that writers oppose us on some important issues, with enough effort we can read their texts as riddled with internal conflict, [This works both ways: if one makes certain assumptions about how Scripture ought to behave, then, with a little effort, one can squeeze it into any mold one wishes.]

and thus dis-empower their “will to power” over us. We can all do this with any text we want. We can do it today right now with the Koran, we can do it right now with the Bible if we believe certain things about the writer of the Bible. [Pratt's Bible is actually more “Koran-like,” with its discomfort with incarnation, than he may be willing to admit.]

But contemporary hermeneutical discussions have also made us aware that at the same time, when we have alternate assumptions about writers, when we sympathize with them, when we are supportive of their views, we know how to spend our energy on finding ways to understand the coherence and harmony of their texts so that their text can have their intended impact (consider the way talk radio personalities and television pundits do this). [My point is that Scripture's “intended impact” may be different from how Pratt understands it. Also, coherence and harmony, as mentioned above, are not synonymous, and Pratt should not collapse them together. For example, I believe the synoptic passages *cohere* but I do not think they can (or are intended to) be “harmonized” in the way Pratt seems to assume they should be (i.e., because the Bible is God's word, here is how it should behave).]

Now, one thing that can be said about the Westminster Assembly is this: they knew the Bible well. [No question there, but it is beside the point.] They were not naïve about the logical tensions and apparent disharmonies of Scripture. We can say the same thing about Jesus and his apostles and thousands of biblical scholars from patristic times to the period of Westminster. Although an argument can be made that some of these witnesses did not question the historical reliability of the Bible because they were unaware of many historical problems raised by modern research, we can say with confidence that they were well aware of the fact that the diversity of Scripture presents difficulties for harmonization.

What made it possible then for Westminster (or, for that matter, Jesus and his apostles and the host of faithful scholars of historical Christianity) to affirm the harmony of Scripture? [I am not clear where Jesus affirms the harmony of Scripture, at least in the way Pratt understands it. I understand that calling upon Jesus should clinch any argument, but Pratt needs to be more careful here. Also, perhaps the divines did not define “harmony” as rigidly and modernistically as Pratt does.]

To cast it in terms of contemporary post-structuralist hermeneutics, they all had certain predispositions toward the divine author of Scripture. They were sympathetic toward him. They were supportive of him. [As am I. In fact, I am so supportive of the divine author that I am willing to submit myself to Scripture in order to allow it to set its own parameters. I am eager to allow how Scripture behaves to define how we understand such concepts as “harmony” etc., rather than imposing notions onto Scripture or church history.]

As Westminster put it, God is truth; it would be impossible for an entirely truthful God, trustworthy in every way, to contradict himself as he spoke in one place or another. [This is the very point to be demonstrated. It also depends entirely on how one understands “contradiction.” If one takes a more redemptive-historical approach to Scripture, one can understand the tensions (not contradictions) in Scripture to be reflective of the historical drama the Spirit records in Scripture. The coherence of Scripture is seen in where it is heading, which is what I mean by a Christ-centered coherence, or better, a “Christotelic” coherence: Scripture’s coherence is Christ-centered and therefore eschatological.]

In many respects, this is little more than the judgment of charity applied to God. We read his book with the expectation, even the firm conviction, that it will not present incompatible outlooks. And with this basis, this sympathetic reading, with this bias, we lead ourselves to see this issue in terms of theology proper, as a matter of our outlook on the character of God. It is much more responsible to say, “We don’t know how these elements fit together, though we believe they do,” than it is to say, “These elements of the Scripture given to us by God do not fit together.” [This is an assertion with which I strongly disagree, and Pratt needs to demonstrate, not merely state, if he wishes to persuade others not already

convinced of his position. I would add, also, that it is actually “much more responsible to say” that, if our theory keeps running up against how Scripture self-evidently behaves, it may be time to re-examine the theory, and not to hold to it tenaciously despite the evidence. Ironically, in principle Pratt’s method of argumentation is similar to the “appeal to the HS” argument he chides earlier. For Pratt, his understanding of the tradition seems to be the unassailable and unalterable starting point for any subsequent issue that may arise. This is not only contrary to reason, but it is out of accord with the healthy confessionism that I feel is modeled by many others in the PCA (and the WCF itself).]

This is not dishonesty or naiveté as some scholars are prone to say these days. It is a matter of theological conviction about the character of God and our sympathetic reading of that God. [It is a matter of a “theological conviction” but some convictions, regardless of how strongly held, are still susceptible to error and can be held for bad reasons (either naiveté or dishonesty).]

When the historical orientation of holding divine authorship as the primary frame of reference and human authorship as secondary is preserved, the authority of Scripture is “abundantly evident” in “the consent of all parts of Scripture.”

When this basic hermeneutical orientation is reversed, as has been done for some time now in our branch of the church, when human authorship takes first place and divine authorship takes second place, [It is most unfortunate if this is what Pratt has picked from *I&I* or others “in our branch from the church”; more perceptive readers have not drawn this conclusion.]

it is no wonder that the Bible is characterized as a problem for scholarly evangelicals. [It is a problem among evangelicals. Think of how many lose their faith because of trite answers they get to these real problems. Such a scenario may not be part of Pratt’s experience, but it is certainly part of mine. Also, Pratt’s phrasing here is clearly a reference to the subtitle of *I&I*. But, the entire point of the book is that the humanity of Scripture is *not* a problem.]

It is no wonder that it is treated as a book of such diversity that it is disharmonious.

When we default to the humanity of Scripture as our primary reference point, we should not be surprised at all to find that passages like Proverbs 26:4-5 (“Do not answer the fool according to his folly ... Answer the fool according to his folly”) appear to be self-contradictory — even though there has been a long history of successfully handling these verses in other ways. It should not be surprising that the differences between the legal codes of Exodus and Deuteronomy are treated as somehow disharmonious, beyond harmonization. It should not shock us that the New Testament use of the Old Testament is characterized as incompatible with the original meaning of the Old Testament. This is said to be nothing more than recognizing the truly human character of such passages. Within this frame

of reference, these and countless other portions of Scripture seem obviously contradictory. [And Pratt's way of handling these issues are, what? I should make it clear here that I in no way referred to these issues in /&/ as contradictory. In fact, I say the opposite, and, e.g., concerning Prov 26:4-5, I offer a perfectly legitimate and well-known explanation. As for how he presents the issues above, Pratt continues to set up straw men, in my opinion.]

But within the frame of reference afforded by millennia of Christian scholarship and reflected in Westminster, these differences are nothing more than opportunities for God's people to demonstrate their trust in the truthfulness and integrity of God the author of Scripture by putting forth the effort it takes to read these texts sympathetically with the goal of demonstrating their harmony to whatever degree our feeble scholarship allows us. [That's why these things are there? So we can demonstrate faith? Is this really what "millennia of Christian scholarship" have taught? This is shallow solace. Moreover, much of what is discussed in a book like /&/ are things that were *not* know before the 19th century.]

It surprises me sometimes how the term "harmonization" has become a word of disdain in our circles. Have you noticed that? In some sense, I can understand why. After all, at times the desire to harmonize has caused us to be satisfied with simplistic, inadequate outlooks on the Bible. And it has cut us off from many of the riches that Scripture offers. But rather than reject all attempts at harmonization, it is better to judge each attempt at harmonization on its own merits. This is what Westminster does. [No, that is what WCF says. It does not do it in the sense of taking specific, problematic, examples and walking readers through them. And neither does Pratt. Thus far, unless Pratt would put into writing something to the contrary, I would submit that the position he is advocating on this matter is indeed simplistic and inadequate.]

Westminster's commitment to the consent of all the parts is not simplistic in principle. [No, but to remain on the level of principle, as Pratt is doing, is simplistic.] Westminster does not flatten the Bible as if it were written one afternoon by some man sitting in his easy chair. It acknowledges the diversity of Scripture. But at the same time, Westminster shows such high regard for divine authorship that it works hard to demonstrate the underlying harmony of this diversity.

If ever there were an example of theological tension in the Bible it would have to be the differences between the Old Testament and New Testament, or more specifically between the Mosaic legislation and New Testament ethics. Westminster acknowledges these differences. For instance, in 19.3-5 the Confession explains that the abiding significance of the moral law is different from that of the ceremonial and judicial laws. There is plenty of recognition of the diversity between the testaments in Westminster. But despite this diversity, Westminster strongly asserts that harmony exists even between the Old

Testament and New Testament. You will recall how it closes its assessment of the differences between the Old and New Testament in this way in 7.6: “There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.” The covenant of grace is a theological construct that brings harmony to the most radical diversities we find in the Bible. [This is a fine example, but it is in the realm of ethics and Scripture’s broad covenantal harmony, with which I strongly agree. The example, however, is not germane to the points discussed thus far. Better would be for Pratt to pick, say, an example of the NT’s use of the OT that “appears” to be at odds with the OT context, and then allow his presupposition of what a divinely authored book ought to do to orient his explanation. Then others can chime as to whether that explanation is adequate, convincing, reasonable, etc.]

I don’t believe it is going too far to say that this commitment to harmonization reflects the mainstream of Christian theology from the earliest of times. Take for instance what the Council of Chalcedon said about the natures and person of Christ. You know how it goes:

[Christ is] truly God and truly man ... recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons.

Add to that the fuller expression of Westminster 8.2:

The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Himself man’s nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost; in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

I must tell you that whenever I read these and similar formulations in Christology, I hear voices shouting inside of my head, and they are shouting questions at me. Are there any outlooks given in Scripture that seem more obviously mutually exclusive than the ones that are listed together here in these statements? [I am confused here. “These statements” are about the nature of God/Christ, not Scripture.] That Jesus is one person with two natures, a divine nature that maintains all of the attributes of the Creator without exception, and a human nature that maintains all the limitations of sinless human creatures? Have you ever heard any harmonizations of different viewpoints in the Bible that go this far? Can you imagine an attempt to show the compatibility of different outlooks in

the Bible that stretches credulity any thinner than these do? Those voices are screaming in my head every time I think of the hypostatic union. I more than suspect that many of us hear the same voices. Yet, this harmonization, this display of the consent of all parts of Scripture, is a pillar of Christian orthodoxy. [This may be a bit of an overstatement with respect to Scripture.]

Why then has the church worked so hard to bring these teachings into harmony, [What teachings specifically?] even to the point of admitting that we cannot fathom how all these things can be true? It is because orthodox Christianity, reflected in Westminster, has approached the Scriptures with an assumption: the assumption that they come from God and would not therefore contradict themselves. When we shift our hermeneutical priorities away from the priorities of Westminster to the point that we find the Scriptures to be disharmonious, we not only find ourselves out of accord with Westminster but also out of accord with basic Christian orthodoxy. [My comments here would just be repeating what I said above, but let me add that, since Vos, the Reformed faith has articulated a model of Scripture, a redemptive-historical one, that, if Pratt accepted it, would nuance if not negate much of his argument.]

And more than this, stressing the human diversity of the Bible to this extent also robs our tradition of any possibility of having a system of doctrine that unites us. When we believe that the Scriptures are so diverse that they contradict each other, there is no longer any basis for the traditional notion of systematic theology, or for a meaningful acceptance of our ordination vow that the Westminster standards represent “the system of doctrine taught in Scripture.” [This seems more of a scare tactic to me than an argument. Let me simply say that I disagree with Pratt’s assumptions and his use of language. The task that lies before us, as contemporary Reformed Christians, is how to formulate a system of doctrine that brings into the conversation what we have come to understand about Scripture, the contexts in which it was given, etc. Pratt seems to think that to engage such a task is to deny our heritage. In my opinion, it is to be faithful to it. Moreover, what ultimately unites us, and what should be the focus of all our systems of doctrine, is the Spirit of the risen Christ and our faith in him.]

Now to counter this conclusion, some of our scholars have suggested that we shift our hopes for harmony in Scripture away from the traditional view of finding a coherent system of doctrines undergirding everything that is taught in Scripture. They have proposed that our commitment to Christ is the focal point that brings unity out of the diversity of Scripture. [Yes, I feel this is what Scripture teaches, namely Paul. It is in Christ, specifically, the crucified and risen Christ, that Scripture now coheres. Abstract systems of doctrine are extremely valuable and even unavoidable, but are only valid to the extent that they bring Scripture’s focus to Christ. What God has done in Christ and continues to do through his Spirit, that is what makes all of Scripture—even all of life—cohere.]

This focus on Christological readings of the Bible as the unifying concern of the Bible has taken many forms. In our circle, it began in full force with the understanding of New Testament eschatology and how the New Testament saw Christ as the climax of all redemptive history. As you know, this outlook derived largely from the works of Geerhardus Vos and Hermann Ridderbos, two of the most influential authors of the last century in our branch of the church. Building on their work, others argued forcefully that all Christian preaching and thus all reading of the Old Testament must be filtered through this Christocentric eschatology of the New Testament. Fair enough. I don't know how anyone could seriously doubt this basic orientation for Christian interpretations of the Bible.

But unfortunately, this stream of thought went further than the earlier advocates. [This is a telling statement and helps us understand much of the rhetorical strategy of Pratt's argument: old is right, new is wrong.]

This development was less concerned with establishing the harmony of the original meaning of Old Testament passages with New Testament Christological readings. New Testament Christological themes were discerned in the Old Testament at every turn whether or not they were tied to the original meaning of the Old Testament. In a word, Christological interpretation became increasingly *eisegetical* in our tradition.

Now as I see it, until the last decade or so, Christological eisegesis was largely based on the notion of divine authorship of Scripture. The assumption was that in his wisdom God designed the Old Testament to present all kinds of anticipations of Christ, even when these concepts were not in the view of human writers. Thus, Christian interpreters were thought to be right to find such Christological motifs in the Old Testament because God had ordained this feature of Scripture. Now frankly, I have never been convinced of this basic orientation, but my concern is not to quibble over that here. My concern has much more to do with more recent developments in this stream of thought.

In more recent years, as the Scriptures have been increasingly approached as a human book, Christocentric reading of the Old Testament has not disappeared. Rather, it has found a new validation. [Or perhaps a better way of putting it, a Christocentric reading of the OT has continued to mature.]

Rather than validating Christological eisegetical readings of the Old Testament on the basis of divine authorship [Again, Pratt is assuming some things about the nature of divine authorship, namely, that it will not be in any serious way affected by historical context.],

more recent reflections on this approach have been squarely based on the humanity of the New Testament. Just as the Old Testament has been understood in terms of its ancient Near Eastern literary context, the New Testament is now read in terms of its cultural and literary setting. [Again, is Pratt

saying we should *not* read the NT against its background? This would be a strange admission. As an OT scholar, one wonders just what role historical context plays for Pratt, practically speaking.]

And as we might expect, just as in Old Testament studies, the tendency in New Testament studies has been to draw heavily from extra-biblical parallels to determine the intent [Curious word choice. Not sure what Pratt is after here, but I would rather say that the extra-biblical “parallels” do not “determine intent” but *clarify genre expectations for contemporary readers.*] of New Testament writers.

Now, the reality is that we don’t know much about the ways Jewish writers interpreted the Scriptures in the first century. [Yes we do. We know a lot, hence the problem. I’ve seen this argument uttered elsewhere, and it just doesn’t wash. Entire doctoral programs are devoted to its study, and even then hardly scratch the surface.]

There was hardly one way it was done; methods of interpretation were about as numerous as the sects of Israel at the time. [Interestingly, these two sentences stand in stark contradiction, and may reveal Pratt’s lack of familiarity with the issues. How can Pratt, on the one hand, be so sure that we don’t know much about Second Temple writers, and then say, on the other hand, that there were numerous methods of interpretation?]

We can, however, reconstruct the practices of many of these competing sectarian groups this much. Many of them interpreted Scriptures in ways that hardly conform to what we might call in our circles grammatico-historical methods. [Absolutely true.] Instead, many first-century Jewish sects approached the Bible in a very esoteric, charismatic, intuitive, eisegetical way. [These are somewhat modern, biased, designations, but they can remain for the sake of discussion.] And this eisegesis was forcefully driven by a desire to show that their sectarian views were supported by Scripture. One only has to read a few pages of Peshier Hababbuk to have a sense of how far these sectarian readings went. And I think it is fair to say that many groups’ readings (compelled by their convictions and sectarian viewpoints that they found support for in parts of Scripture) would be considered illegitimate in Westminster’s “due use of ordinary means” sense (1.7). But these esoteric readings were held, nevertheless, by a number of groups in the first century. [So far so good.]

Now, it isn’t difficult to understand that when the humanity of the New Testament is emphasized, [Pratt throughout at best pays lip service to Scripture’s humanity, which is functional docetism, and therefore an error.]

it is only natural to look for [one does not have to look very hard, hence the problem] connections or parallels between the ways these sectarian voices handled the Bible and the ways the New Testament writers handled the Bible. On the basis of what I consider rather superficial connections, [Pratt is free to

maintain his opinion, but many scholars, Reformed or otherwise, would not characterize the connections as “superficial.”] the argument is made that New Testament writers read Christ into the Old Testament much like their contemporaries read their own views into the Old Testament. After all, New Testament writers were compelled by the inescapable conviction that Christ was the Messiah and that their sectarian views were true. So, they went about interpreting the Bible in the same ways that their contemporaries did. The only significant difference was that they were followers of Jesus and not of some other leader. [No, the difference is not that they were merely followers of Christ, as other groups followed other leaders or ideologies. The difference is that *Christ rose from the dead. THIS* is the foundational, central conviction of the church, the center of Paul’s theology, and the center around which we are to form our theologies today, including how we understand Scripture as God’s word bearing witness to his saving acts, which reach their climax in Christ.] They understood the truth that God had been revealed in Jesus and in no other, and so they found him in the Bible.

So it is that within a frame of reference where doctrinal disharmony is assumed for the Old Testament, it is said that we can now find harmony. But this is not a harmony that is founded on the “consent of all the parts” because God is the author of Scripture. [A return to a frustratingly circular argument.] And it is not a harmony that can be discerned through careful traditional exegetical work. On the contrary, it is a harmony that finds its center in intuitive, esoteric eisegesis driven by the sectarian conviction that Jesus is the Christ. [I wonder how Paul would feel about being characterized like this? Pratt seems to be suggesting that there really is no hermeneutical problem between the OT and NT. I would be interested to hear him defend that thesis, preferably in a refereed publication of some sort.]

In some respects, I think that this sort of appeal to Christocentrism as the harmonizing point of reference is similar to recent appeals to the testimony of the Holy Spirit that I have already mentioned. [And why is this such a problem for Pratt?] Just as the testimony of the Holy Spirit is often appealed to as the source of our conviction that the Bible is God’s Word despite the problems that we find in the Bible, now our conviction that Jesus is Lord is the impervious religious conviction that makes it possible to read the Bible as a unity despite the problems of disharmony that appears on every page. In fact, we are encouraged to see Christ as the central integrating feature of Scripture *despite* — not *because of* — what we find through careful study of the Bible. Rather than being the fulfillment of the system of doctrine taught in antecedent portions of the bible, our commitment to Jesus is seen as the *Deus ex machina* for a Bible that is characteristically disharmonious. [This will only be persuasive when Pratt applies his understanding of how Scripture should work to explaining how it actually does.]

Now of course, I don't know a Christian who would deny that in some sense [I am willing to try to articulate what this "sense" might be. It is not enough to give lip service to it.]

our commitment to Christ is a unifying force in our reading of the Bible. But at the same time, when Christ is proposed as a substitute for a systemic unity, [It is not so much Christ who *substitutes* a systematic unity, it is a question of what manner of "systematic unity" we have a right to expect from Scripture. The unity/coherence is actually a redemptive-historical one with Christ as the climax.] a conceptual unity that reaches to the details of every aspect of Scripture, one is left wondering how Christ can rescue [Again, this is Pratt's word.] the Bible. When the teaching of one stratum of Scripture cannot even in principle be harmonized with another, when one stage of revelation is not compatible with another, when so few items in Scripture are harmonious, then even our commitment to Jesus becomes nebulous — so nebulous that he is subject to diverse voices and can offer no substantial unity for the Bible. [If Christ is the subject of these diverse voices, then he *is* the locus of "substantial unity." The question to ask Pratt is whether *he* is willing to do the "hard exegetical work" (as he mentions earlier) to maintain the centrality of Christ, despite challenges, in every square inch of his Christian life, including his doctrine and interpretation of Scripture. This may not provide the kind of unity Pratt is arguing for, but it does offer a much deeper and ultimately more satisfying coherence. Perhaps what we are seeing here is the on-going debate over the relationship between systematic theology and biblical theology. That is a good debate that will not, and should not, recede into the background. But I have been too influenced by my theological training (i.e., Vos and Ridderbos as mediated through Gaffin) to yield the ground Pratt seems to require.]

Once again, I believe that all of this confusion is the opposite of what Westminster does. Westminster offers us a path of wisdom. The Scriptures are harmonious (and they even find their harmony in many ways in Christ) [O.K., but I thought earlier Pratt wasn't too keen on this idea.] because they have come to us from God, the author thereof. Every detail of Scripture fits with every other detail, [Every detail?] and this belief leads faithful readers to the conclusion that Christ is the fulfillment of every hope the people of God expressed in every book, in every Scripture, at every point. This is why Westminster warns against understanding the full sense of any Scripture as a polyphony. Rather, everything the Scriptures teach, when rightly understood, is unified and harmonious. [Again, in what sense?] As Westminster 1.9 puts it, the "full sense of any Scripture ... is not manifold, but one." [The meaning of this sentence is not as obvious as Pratt would have us believe.]

To sum up what I have said, I believe that our confessing community would be wise to look to Westminster for guidance [I think Pratt is arguing for more than mere "guidance"] in contemporary hermeneutical discussions. I would by no means suggest that the Confession gives us everything we need to know; nor

does it supply us with a complete guide to biblical interpretation. Yet, its orientation toward the primacy of divine authorship, and the implications it draws for issues like historical reliability and the harmony of Scripture, give us a path of wisdom. If we vary from this path, we are sure to find ourselves varying from some of the most essential doctrines of our faith. [The slippery slope argument, which has been sublimated until here at the end.]

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