relationship of theology and science. Some unwisely view science as a key to proving the Bible. Others have unknowingly adopted science as their first truth discourse. When they encounter a scientific pronouncement they cannot answer, their faith may be shattered. As for unbelievers, science is the realm of fact, religion the realm of make-believe. Pastors and teachers must understand these dominant cultural trends and help people assess them from Scripture. Failure to do so often proves disastrous.

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A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, edited by Rob Ventura. Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor Books, 2022. 568 pp. $39.99.

Nearly thirty-five years ago, Sam Waldron published a groundbreaking exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. To meet the needs of a new generation Waldron has now teamed up with twenty-two other Reformed Baptist leaders, under the general editorship of Rob Ventura, to produce a collaborative work on the Confession from a fresh perspective.

The work begins with a historical overview of the Confession by Austin Walker, retired pastor of the Maidenbower Baptist Church in the United Kingdom. Walker traces the origins of the Confession back to the Petty France Church in London, where it was likely authored by William Collins and Nehemiah Coxe in 1677. His conclusion reflects the current consensus among church historians but is a departure from the view that prevailed only a couple decades ago. At that time, it was believed the Confession had been drafted in 1677 by Baptist pastors meeting in general assembly in London. However, it has since been established that such an assembly never took place.

The book's chapter numbering corresponds to the numbering of the Baptist Confession. Each chapter also begins by quoting the corresponding chapter of the Confession, and then offers a paragraph-by-paragraph exposition of its contents. Key terms are defined, biblical references are discussed, supporting quotations from church history are often provided, contemporary teachings that diverge from the Confession are critiqued, and applications are suggested.

Because the book is a collaborative effort, the chapters differ in style, length, and quality. This can lead to some humorous juxtapositions. For example, immediately after Waldon's chapter on the nature of God—an intellectual feast with Scriptural exposition, citations of church fathers, Reformers, and Puritans, and careful deconstructions of heretical doctrines—we encounter a new chapter on the divine decrees from an author who gives us quotes like this one: "Every muscle of

every squirrel moves according to God's eternal decree" (90).

The most disappointing chapter is surely the fourth, which covers the confession's doctrine of creation. The chapter's author is zealous to defend six-day creationism as outlined in the confession, but his misunderstandings of competing viewpoints leave us with a chapter riddled with factual errors. For example, the author uses the terms "theory" and "hypothesis" interchangeably, though they are different concepts. More seriously, he uses "theistic evolution," "day-age," and "progressive creation" as synonymous terms, misrepresenting them all in the process (99). His engagements with naturalistic evolution, which includes polemical questions like, "how can dead pools of slime suddenly produce life?" also leave much to be desired.

Chapter 7, "Of God's Covenant," outlines the basics of Reformed Baptist covenant theology and clarifies how it differs from the covenant theology of paedobaptists. The author explains that Reformed Baptists disavow the notion that the "covenant of grace" is an actual, historical covenant. Rather, he explains, the term is used as a theological construct for the progressive revelation of the gospel in the Bible. A quote from Sam Renihan summarizes the argument: "Where the gospel is found, there is the covenant of grace. As the gospel was progressively made known throughout history, the covenant of grace was progressively made known throughout history. The covenant of grace should not be flattened into two administrations…. Rather, the covenant of grace should be seen through 'farther steps'" (139–40). It is a novel take on covenant theology, and one which opens Reformed Baptists up to the charge of equivocation.

If the seventh chapter highlights Reformed Baptist *discontinuity* with paedobaptist covenant theology, then the nineteenth chapter, "Of the Law of God," highlights its point of *continuity,* for this chapter argues in favor of the ongoing authority of the Ten Commandments as a rule of life for God's people. More than any other, this chapter also showcases what Mark Snoeberger has termed the "hermeneutical intrigues" of the Reformed Baptist movement. Here, author John Reuther cuts the Mosaic law into three parts (ceremonial, moral, and civil), draws hard lines between them, and then asserts different contemporary applications for each. The "ceremonial" law has been completely abrogated, he says, meaning that the church should not seek to apply any of it today. However, the "moral" law, summarily contained in the Ten Commandments, is *completely* in effect today so that it should be comprehensively applied by the church. Regarding the third part, the "civil" law, Reuther tells us that it is not *technically* in effect today but does contain "principles of general equity which remain as moral principles that apply to believers" in the church (362).

To support this view of the old covenant law, Reformed Baptists must equivocate on the meanings of "Israel," "church," and "law" (see 361–370). But even then, consistent application proves elusive. In Chapter 22, for example, Sam Waldron explains that Reformed Baptists do not worship on the seventh day because the "seventh-day Sabbath

ordinance…is abolished." Only "the Sabbath principle" continues in the New Testament church, he says (401–2). So which is it? Is the moral law in effect today, or does it only provide principles for the church? Shall we cut the Ten Commandments into "perpetual" and "abrogated" portions now too? On what grounds?

How much better the dispensational hermeneutic, which requires no such intrigues. Dispensationalism recognizes that (1) the old covenant law was an indivisible unity; (2) that it was given exclusively to Israel at Sinai when it was constituted as a nation-state; and (3) that it was utterly fulfilled and laid aside by Christ so that it is no longer our rule of life. Does this leave the church without a law? Of course not, for in this age we are all bound by a new law—the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:20–21).

In summary, this new volume on the 1689 confession is a generally helpful guide for understanding the origin, history, and teachings of the Reformed Baptist movement. Though not intended by the authors, it also highlights the internal contradictions inherent in the Reformed Baptist system. In their efforts to uphold credobaptism and regenerate church membership while simultaneously holding a form of covenant theology, Reformed Baptists have opened themselves up to the charge of equivocation and have been forced into hermeneutical contortions that most would find uncomfortable. This probably explains why the Reformed Baptist movement is perpetually hemorrhaging members to paedobaptist denominations on the one side and to dispensational Baptist ranks on the other. Most people simply cannot live with the cognitive dissonance.

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Let Men Be Free: Baptist Politics in the Early United States (1776–1835), by Obbie Tyler Todd. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022. 235 pp. $35.00

Let Men Be Free is the first comprehensive treatment of Baptist politics in early America. It comes in eight chapters and is organized both chronologically and thematically—an arrangement made necessary by the tremendous variety of issues, perspectives, and organizations in Baptist life in the early republic.

As a work of scholarship, this book is truly stunning. Todd has consulted hundreds of primary sources including letters, tracts, sermons, books, minutes from association meetings, and personal diaries. He includes voices from virtually every member of the Baptist fraternity, including Black, Native American, Regular, Separate, and Free-Will Baptists. As the book unfolds, Todd also manages to weave doctrinal debates and biographical sketches together into a seamless narrative that renders the work both informative and compelling. While highlighting