

## **Theological Conviction Statement**

Your Name: John Larson Date: July 28, 2014

### **Part One: Theological Views**

*Please state briefly your personal views on the following subjects:*

#### 1. The Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture

*“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3.16-17).*

When Paul uses the Word “theopneustos” he is talking about the origin of Scripture. God is truly the author of Scripture. “All Scripture” is the product of the breath of God. It is as if God exhaled and the product of his exhaling is the Bible. Whatever Scripture says, God says.

*“...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1.20-21).*

The Bible is “from God”. It is not the result of someone’s effort to makes sense of reality, nor is it the result of human initiative.

*“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the Word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thessalonians 2.13).*

Because of the Bible’s origin, it’s ‘from God’ character, it and it alone is our rule of faith and practice. God has spoken clearly and authoritatively and perspicuously and sufficiently in his word, to which nothing is to be added, and from which nothing is to be removed (Rev 22.18-19). *“What more can He say than to you He has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”*

#### 2. The Doctrine of the Trinity

I wholeheartedly and emphatically affirm and subscribe to the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the teaching of our *Confession* on the Trinity.

There is only one true God, and this one God exists in three distinct yet inseparable persons who are related to one another in ways that reflect the identity and role of each. The one God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God. Yet each of the persons of the Godhead is distinct in his primary function in relating to the world through creation and redemption: The Father plans, the Son executes, the Spirit applies. God the Father is the great Architect of creation, redemption and consummation, who plans, directs, and sends. The Son and Holy Spirit are willingly subordinate to him in role though they are equal in essence. God the Son obeys the Father, accomplishes redemption, and with the Father sends the Holy Spirit to apply the work he has begun. In all things he glorifies the Father. God the Holy Spirit brings to completion the work planned by the Father and begun by the Son. In all things he works to glorify the Son.

### 3. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Acts 1:10–11; 1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:50–52; Acts 24:14–15; Dan 12:2; Jn 5:28–29; 2 Thess 1:5–10

Jesus, who was taken up from his disciples into heaven, will come in the same way as they saw him go into heaven. He will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. We will not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

There will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust - the just to everlasting life in the gracious presence of God and the unjust to everlasting torment under the infinite wrath of God.

Since no man knows the day or hour of his coming - not even the Son of Man nor the angels, but the Father only, we should live our lives watchfully and soberly, always ready for his appearing (Matt 24.36 - 25.46).

### 4. The Continuation of the Sign Gifts of the Holy Spirit

I am a cessationist. I believe that the Lord Jesus, having ascended on high, has sent forth his Spirit as the Giver of diverse gifts to his people (Eph 4.1-16). The apostle Paul speaks of these things (Romans 12.4-8; 1 Corinthians 12.1-31; 14.1-40), saying that extraordinary gifts were given for the establishment of the Church in the days after Pentecost—provisional gifts which were given as modes of special revelation in the

foundational period of the Church of Jesus Christ. I believe that since the completion of God's special revelation in Scripture, the offices of prophet and apostle have become obsolete, and the extraordinary or miraculous gifts attached to those offices have also ceased. I believe that the 'ordinary' gifts remain for the edification of the church on earth until Jesus returns, and that all the Spirit's gifts are bound together by love in perfect unity.

## 5. The Five Points of Calvinism (with attention to the extent of the atonement)

I wholeheartedly affirm and embrace this formulation as a faithful expression of what the Bible says about God, humanity, sin, and salvation in Jesus Christ.

### **Total Depravity**

We are corrupt down to the root or core of our being, and this radical corruption or total depravity leaves us all in a position of utter inability to do anything good or make any contribution whatsoever to our salvation. As WCF 6.4 says, natural man is "*utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil*". Left to ourselves we are dead in sin, and wholly incapable of pleasing God. This means that grace alone must change our nature before we can ever respond to God and be saved.

### **Unconditional Election**

The decree of God is *not* contingent or conditional. God's decree is not based on his foreknowledge or foresight. God's knowledge is completely independent of human action. The Reformed theologian says, "God chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world, and this election was not based on my faith in Christ; rather, my faith in Christ is the result of God's unconditional election of me in Christ."

God has predestined some men and angels to everlasting life, and he has foreordained some to everlasting death. The difference between the elect and the reprobate is not in the people, but only the purpose of God. All people deserve judgment. In the case of the elect, God graciously chooses to save them. In the case of the reprobate, God justly passes them by and leaves them in their sin.

### **Limited Atonement**

The answer of the *Westminster Standards* is this: what Jesus has done he has done for the elect and for no others. Jesus is Mediator for a particular people: as Prophet, Priest, and King he has made a full atonement and accomplished eternal salvation for those the Father has given him. There is a unity between the decree, accomplishment, and application of redemption—it was particular at every point. Jesus, in his humiliation and his exaltation, has accomplished salvation for the elect, so that the elect, and only the elect, will be saved.

WCF 3.6; 8.5; 8.8; Jn 6.38-40; Revelation 5.9-10; Hebrews 9.12; Titus 2.14

There are some people who refer to themselves as "4 point Calvinists", but this is inconsistent because the "5 Points" are inseparably related:

- We are dead in sin and incapable of doing anything to move toward God;
- God has chosen to save some people, not because of anything in them, but only because of his grace.
- Those whom he has chosen, he has saved. He has not merely made salvation possible; he has actually accomplished salvation for them.
- Those whom God has chosen, and for whom he has accomplished salvation, he draws irresistibly to himself.
- Since this salvation is all the Lord's doing, he will bring it to a perfect completion— not one of his children will fall away, but will persevere to the end.

Jesus has not merely done his part to make salvation possible for everyone, then leave the rest up to us. If that were the case, Christ's work is just a bridge built halfway across the chasm between man and God, which is of no actual saving value for *anyone*! Thank God this is not the case! The work of Christ is efficacious to save! He has not made salvation possible; he has saved his people from their sin. This salvation was:

- Predestined in eternity past, in the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son
- Accomplished by Jesus in the fullness of time
- Applied to the elect through the power of the Holy Spirit as he unites them to Christ in their effectual calling
- Consummated in the age to come as God's elect appear with Christ in glory

What does redemption mean? It does NOT mean redeemability. Jesus has NOT merely placed us in a redeemable position (if only we will make a decision for him). Redemption means that Christ actually purchased and accomplished redemption for his people.

### **Irresistible Grace**

John 6.44 - If the Father draws me, it is impossible for me not to believe in the Son. If the Father does not draw me, it is impossible for me to believe in the Son.

WCF 10.1 and 10.2 give us a clear picture of the Reformed view of effectual calling and regeneration:

1. Only those whom God has chosen will be effectually called & regenerated.
2. He will call his people "by his Word and Spirit" – the Spirit working through the Word
3. The calling of God is *not* based on foreknowledge (Arminianism). Man is completely passive, until he is "*quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit*", at which point he is

able to answer the call and embrace Jesus Christ in the gospel. This is an absolutely sovereign, *monergistic* work of God.

This will bring about 4 things:

- My mind is enlightened to understand the things of God
- God gives me a new heart, a new nature
- My will is renewed, so that I begin to love God and want him
- I am drawn to Christ and embrace him as he is offered freely in the gospel

### **Perseverance of the Saints**

The Reformed emphasis on the Perseverance of the Saints draws attention to two complementary biblical truths:

1. God calls his people to endure or persevere to the end.
2. God, who first gives his people faith, will cause them to persevere.

“The Perseverance of the Saints” points to the fact that God will preserve his children and save them all the way to the end. This is a promise. But this is also a calling. If you are a Christian, your perseverance is guaranteed but it is *not* automatic (Matt 10.22; 24.13; Col 1.21-23). It is essential for you to know that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8.39). But those who belong to Jesus must maintain close communion with him.

Perseverance is connected to sanctification. The point is that real Christians will persevere in holiness & faithfulness to Christ all the way to the end. So there’s effort on our part here—perseverance is a calling. The basis of our perseverance is the perfect work of Christ and his perseverance with me. But take Hebrews for example: the whole letter is an exhortation to persevere, and if the Bible exhorts us to persevere it’s because we really do have to make every effort to do so! The Christian life is an endurance test (10.36) and a marathon (12.1), so we have to endure and run if we want to persevere to the end. Having said this, the call to endure and persevere is undergirded by God’s promise to keep us in the palm of his hand and never let us go.

### 6. The Doctrine of the Church (including the proper recipients of the sacraments)

The Church is the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the people of God, the covenant people of God assembled in his presence through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit. When we talk about “the church”, we should think of all the elect at all times and in all places; this is where the WCF begins. This is often called the “invisible church” – not because the church never becomes visible, but because it can’t be limited to the visible. The church, which is the body and the bride of Christ, is made up of the entire number of the elect from every age. As members of the church, believers are even united to believers who are already in heaven, as well as believers still living all around

the world. We belong to one another, and in heaven we'll enjoy that bond of fellowship existentially (Eph 1.22-23; 5.23-24; Col 1.18).

But there's more that has to be said about the church. When the Bible speaks about the church, it tends to speak of it as a visible entity on this earth in which ministry is exercised. The primary usage of the term in the NT refers to local, visible gatherings of God's people - believers and their children. In other words, the Bible doesn't talk about the church as something ethereal, but as something that finds concrete expression in cities like Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and so on.

So when you think of the local church, you should think also of the universal church; and when you think of the universal church, you should also think of the local church. One does not exist apart from the other.

Fundamentally, being a Christian is not only a vertical but also a horizontal matter. We are united to Christ, and we are united to each other; we have fellowship/communion with the Trinity, and therefore we have fellowship/communion with one another; Jesus has given us to the Father, by the Spirit, and by that same Spirit he has bound us to one another as his body. This is an incredible privilege and blessing, and also brings great responsibilities. If you are a Christian, you don't belong to yourself; you belong to God, and you belong to other Christians.

Within the visible church, professing Christians should be baptized, along with their children, since the promises of the covenant are made to us and to our children (Acts 2.39). The Lord's Supper also serves as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and is a means of grace, but is only to be administered "to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves" (LC 177).

## 7. The Role of Women in the Church (including the issue of their ordination to church office)

It is clear from Scripture that the office of elder is open only to qualified men (1 Tim 2.11-15; 3.1-7; Titus 1.5-9).

While the office of deacon is not a ruling office, my own view is that there is, nevertheless, a certain authority in the office. Male leadership in the church and the home is grounded by the apostle Paul in the pre-fall creation order ("Adam was formed first, then Eve", 1 Tim 2.13), as well as in the fact that "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2.14). There is great opportunity for women to assist the deacons in various ways, under the oversight of the elders (per BCO 9-7), and I see an almost limitless need for wise, godly women to be busy teaching and discipling and counseling other women in the church. But I am persuaded that Paul's specific instruction in 1 Timothy 2 and 3 and Titus 1, as well as his more general male/female statements in 1 Corinthians 11.1-16 and 14.33b-40, limit the offices of elders and deacons to qualified men only.

## 8. The Doctrine of Creation (including the view of the days Genesis one)

### **Controlling Principles:**

The Scriptures, and hence Genesis 1–3, are the inerrant word of God. Genesis 1–3 is a coherent account from the hand of Moses. History, not myth, is the proper category for describing these chapters; and furthermore the history is true. In these chapters we find the record of God’s creation of the heavens and the earth ex nihilo; of the special creation of Adam and Eve as actual human beings, the parents of all humanity (hence they are not the products of evolution from lower forms of life). We further find the account of an historical fall, that brought all humanity into an estate of sin and misery, and of God’s sure promise of a Redeemer. Because the Bible is the word of the Creator and Governor of all there is, it is right for us to find it speaking authoritatively to matters studied by historical and scientific research. A naturalistic worldview and true Christian faith are impossible to reconcile, and I gladly take my stand with Biblical supernaturalism.

### **The Freedom of God**

WCF 4.1 states that *“It pleased God...”* to create the world. This emphasis on the sovereign good pleasure of God is a recurrent emphasis in the WCF. God is not a distant, impersonal clockmaker who made the world in some impersonal way and then left it to tick along on its own. Behind creation lies the personal will and personal attributes of the personal God. Also, creation was the free decision of God. It was not necessary for God to create. “Creator” is not an essential property of God; God would still be God if he had not chosen to create. God is “Creator” only because it pleased him to make the world and everything in it.

### **The Glory of God**

Creation manifests the power and goodness and wisdom of God, and presents us with a constant picture of his glory. Creation should never be treated as an end in itself. To worship creation in any way is to distort the very purpose of creation, which is to point beyond itself to the Creator. At the same time, creation should never be despised or treated as an evil (as some forms of Gnosticism, e.g.), because it does put the glory of God on display for us. The proper response is worship! Psalm 104.24, 31-33

### **The Days of Creation**

As for the duration or nature of the days of Genesis 1, it continues to be my understanding that the Westminster Divines did not see the length or nature of the days of creation as an important theological issue. They may not all have held identical views, but for them it was not a matter of contention. Robert Letham pointed out in a WTJ article some time ago that the absence of scholarly discussion of this issue in the 17th century is striking.

Having said that, I have tended toward the ‘Calendar Day’ view, without the ‘mature creation’ assumptions (though God surely could have done that!). However, I am also attracted to what I understand of the Analogical Day View which says that Genesis 1

sets up an analogy between God’s work and human work. God works six days and then rests on the seventh day. Man is to imitate this pattern by his Sabbath observance (Ex 20.11). God’s works are real (historical) acts of God in time and space, and his pattern of work and rest serves as the model for our lives of working and resting. The days are chronological (unlike the Framework view), but the Bible just doesn’t leave us with the ability to measure the duration of those days.

## Part Two: Exceptions to the Standards

*Please list any and all exceptions you take to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms. When possible, format your statement as follows:*

Section of the Confession or Catechism Number	Language to which you take exception	Explanation
WCF 13.3	“the regenerate part”	This phrase is confusing at best! However, I also believe that this confusion is mitigated by the far superior language of WCF 10.1 concerning effectual calling.
WCF 21.5	“the singing of psalms”	I agree with this statement, but only if it does not forbid the singing of hymns and spiritual songs as well, which I believe also are commanded in Scripture (Col 3.15,16). I agree with our Directory of Worship when it commends the singing of psalms and hymns in worship (51.1, 3).
WCF 21.8	Christians, on the Sabbath, are to “not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are to be taken, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.”	First, I prefer the statement of LC 119 when it says that what is forbidden are “ <u>needless</u> works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments”. That seems more careful than this statement that forbids all words & thoughts about our worldly employments. Second, I do not believe that the <u>entire</u> day must be spent in private or public worship or in the duties of necessity and mercy. I believe that rest and recreation are appropriate for the Lord’s Day as well, as long as they do not cause another person to work.

LC 191	“countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate.”	If this is merely intended to say that the civil magistrate should see to it that the Christian Church is free to live and function in peace according to its convictions (as expressed in WCF 23.3), then I agree with this statement. However, if the intention of this statement is to give the civil magistrate a role in overseeing the church, then I disagree. I do not believe that this is a consistent application of the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer.
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