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# **George Smeaton (1814-1889) and his *Novum Organum*:**

Biblical Theology and Reformed Orthodoxy.

By Andrew Gideon Howard Longwe



**EDINBURGH**  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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For Jesus, who wrote my name in His book! Soli Deo Gloria!

## Abstract

This thesis seeks to retrieve the invaluable and erudite contribution made by Professor George Smeaton (1814-1889) in his much-overlooked *magnum opus*, *The Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by Christ Himself* (1868).<sup>1</sup> In previous assessments of Smeaton's theology, it has been claimed that it was a 'ground-breaking work' and a '*novum organum* of theology' because of the new method he applied to the study of the atonement.

This thesis wants to ask the following questions: what was Smeaton's new method? Was it a '*novum organum* of theology'? Was it a 'ground-breaking' contribution to the study of the atonement in Scotland? Did his application of this new method to the study of the atonement contradict or cohere with his classical Reformed orthodoxy?

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one presents a biographical sketch of Smeaton's life; highlighting the various aspects which led him to become a Reformed orthodox biblical scholar. Chapter two presents an overview of the relevant developments which took place within Smeaton's ecclesiastical and theological milieu; highlighting the various factors which shaped his interest in the atonement and Biblical studies. It also gives an overview of the leading theological methods applied to the doctrine of the atonement in Scotland prior to 1868. The evidence will enable us to establish whether or not his method was ground-breaking. Chapter three examines Smeaton's Biblical theological method and how he applied it to his study of *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*. Chapter four examines

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<sup>1</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by Christ Himself; or, The Sayings of Jesus on the Atonement Exegetically Expounded and Classified*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868).



his key theological postulates which ultimately shaped and informed his Biblical theological study of the atonement. The evidence will enable us to establish whether or not his application of the method contradicts or coheres with Reformed orthodoxy. The final chapter will summarise the various conclusions which have arisen from our discussion. In short it will argue that in Scotland Smeaton pioneered a '*novum organum* of theology' by applying the Biblical theological method to the study of the atonement. Although it was both a bold and ironic innovation in his context; his application of this new method cohered with his loyalty to the classical Reformed orthodox tradition.

# Introduction

## The Principal Concern

This thesis aims to further contribute to the study of nineteenth century atonement theology by looking at the pioneering contribution of George Smeaton (1814-1889). In particular, this study will re-examine his *magnum opus*, *The Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by Christ Himself* (1868).

Several writers have suggested this was a ground-breaking and innovative contribution to Scottish Reformed theology. For example, in an early review of Smeaton's work published for the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine* (1869), the reviewer claimed that Smeaton had the distinguished honour of inaugurating a new method of investigation to the atonement.<sup>2</sup> This assertion was reiterated two years later in the *British Quarterly Review* (1870):

Professor Smeaton may claim the honour of having inaugurated, at any rate in Scotland, a *novum organum* of theology. . . His book is a great and noble work – a credit to British biblical scholarship, and a great service to doctrinal theology.<sup>3</sup>

Students of Smeaton's work in more recent times have made similar claims. For instance, in the twentieth century, Malcolm Kinnear praised Smeaton's work in *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement c1845-1920* when he stated,

It ought not to be overlooked that Smeaton's two books were the first comprehensive, scholarly exegetical analysis of the New Testament teaching on the atonement from a

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, Review of George Smeaton's *The Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by Christ Himself*, in *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol 1, (1869): 112-116.

<sup>3</sup> Anonymous, Review of George Smeaton, *Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by the Apostles*, in *The British Quarterly Review*, Vol 53-54, (1871): 133-134.

British author in this period, and in thoroughness and detail his work has not been paralleled since in the English language.<sup>4</sup>

Kinnear also argued that Smeaton's emphasis anticipated the character of the works which were published in the years succeeding him.<sup>5</sup> In the twenty-first century John Keddie, in his popular biography of Smeaton claimed:

Smeaton's work was ground-breaking. It is to be seriously doubted that the magnitude of his achievement in these volumes on the atonement, *and especially in the first*, was really appreciated in his own day.<sup>6</sup>

Against this background, Smeaton's application of a new method to the doctrine of the atonement in Scottish theology merits a re-examination. This thesis wants to ask the following questions: What was his new theological method? Was it 'a *novum organum* of theology'? Was it a 'ground-breaking' contribution to the study of the atonement in Scotland?

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<sup>4</sup> Malcolm A. Kinnear, "Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement c. 1845-1920," (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1995), 179.

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 131.

<sup>6</sup> John Keddie, *George Smeaton: Learned theologian and Biblical Scholar*, (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007), 140. Emphasis mine.

## Methodology and Historiography

This study seeks to place Smeaton in his historical and theological context within nineteenth-century Scottish Reformed theology. Conflicting interpretations of theologians in this tradition exist – Smeaton’s theological identity and contribution is no exception.<sup>7</sup> One reason for this is the conflicting taxonomy of nineteenth-century Reformed theology. This is nowhere clearer than in the contrast between the two classic primers on theology, John Macleod’s *Scottish Theology: in its relation to Church History*,<sup>8</sup> and Thomas F. Torrance’s *Scottish Theology: John Knox to John McLeod Campbell*.<sup>9</sup>

Torrance’s primer contends that traditional Westminster Calvinism represents a distortion and betrayal of John Calvin’s theology - in particular his doctrine of God and the atonement. In his book, Torrance does not hide his opposition to traditional Westminster Calvinism and its Scottish proponents, using scornful epithets such as ‘hard-line Calvinist’ to describe them. As a result, Scottish Reformed theologians such as Donald Macleod have highlighted the defective nature of Torrance’s work, and further afield academic studies have been influenced by the work of Richard Muller and others who have dismantled the ‘Calvin against the Calvinists’ revisionism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, Malcolm Kinnear in his thesis argues that Smeaton was attempting to modify Calvinism, whilst Shillaker in his thesis argues that Smeaton was stood firmly in his classical Calvinistic heritage.

<sup>8</sup> John Macleod, *Scottish Theology: in its relation to Church History*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1943, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: John Knox to John McLeod Campbell*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Donald Macleod, “Dr T.F. Torrance and Scottish Theology: A Review Article”, in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 72:1 (2000): 57-72. Richard Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

John Macleod's *Scottish Theology* is markedly different from Torrance's work. For him, traditional Westminster Calvinism is not a betrayal of John Calvin, but a faithful expression of his thought. Macleod recognises the significant developments and contributions of nineteenth century classical Scottish Calvinists. For instance, Macleod asserted that Professor Smeaton's work as a theologian still awaited a worthy appraisal.<sup>11</sup> Following his call, four works have taken up the task.<sup>12</sup> Homer Goddard in 1954 wrote on *The Contribution of George Smeaton (1814-89) to Theological Thought*. Norman Madsen in 1974 wrote on Smeaton's *Atonement and Pneumatology: A Study in the Theology of George Smeaton*; Robert Shillaker in 2002 wrote on, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton 1814-89* and finally Malcolm Kinnear included Smeaton in his 1995 study entitled *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement c. 1845-1920*.

Torrance's *Scottish Theology* makes no mention of Smeaton or his contribution to Scottish theology. Instead, he devotes 'almost one tenth of a work covering four centuries' to assessing the theological thought and contribution of John McLeod Campbell.<sup>13</sup> Torrance's work displays a kind of fixation on Campbell. He regards Campbell as 'one of the profoundest theologians in the history of Scottish theology since the Reformation of the Church of

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<sup>11</sup> John Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 289. The contents of this book were originally delivered as lectures in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, in 1939.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm A. Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement c. 1845-1920*, (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1995), Norman P. Madsen, "Atonement and Pneumatology: A Study in the Theology of George Smeaton," (PhD Diss., University St Andrews, 1974), Homer L. Goddard, "The Contribution of George Smeaton to Theological Thought," (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1953), and Robert M. Shillaker, "The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814–89)", (PhD Diss., Open University, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine?" In *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, eds. David Gibson; Jonathan Gibson, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 612.

Scotland'.<sup>14</sup> He even posits that Campbell 'unquestionably held firmly to "the Catholic and Reformed" doctrine of the atonement.' This is a strange claim since Campbell was unanimously deposed from the Church of Scotland in 1831 following a heresy trial for his heterodox views on the atonement.<sup>15</sup> He also stated that his doctrine of the atonement contradicted the Westminster Confession of Faith: 'The Assembly was right: our doctrine and the Confession are incompatible.'<sup>16</sup>

According to Sinclair Ferguson, 'interest in and discussion of McLeod Campbell's views underwent something of a revival in the second half of the twentieth century.'<sup>17</sup> Ferguson claims that this happened in Scotland and beyond 'largely through the influence of the brothers T. F. Torrance and J. B. Torrance'.<sup>18</sup> Ferguson contends that their published writings 'constitute a sustained support for Campbell's theology and share his deep antipathy to "Federal Calvinism."<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, since the publication of Torrance's primer on Scottish theology in 1996, numerous studies have been carried out on Campbell's theological thought.

<sup>20</sup> One of the most recent works to look at Campbell's theological thought does so in relation

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 287.

<sup>15</sup> Ironically, Torrance's own theological teacher and mentor, H. R. Mackintosh wrote regarding Campbell's atonement theory of vicarious repentance that the New Testament contains not even a faint allusion of it. H.R. Mackintosh, *Some Aspects of Christian Belief*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 88-89.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Erskine, *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, edited by William Hanna, (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1884), 106.

<sup>17</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 128.

<sup>18</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine"?, 611-612.

<sup>19</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine"?, 611-612.

<sup>20</sup> James C. Goodloe, *John McLeod Campbell: The Extent and Nature of the Atonement*, (SRTTH, New Series no. 3; Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1997); Peter K. Stevenson, *God in Our Nature: The*

to Torrance's theological thought: Andrew Purves' *Exploring Christology & Atonement: Conversations with John McLeod Campbell, H. R. Mackintosh, and T. F. Torrance*.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the aforementioned evidence reveals that Torrance and Macleod's conflicting interpretations of Scottish theology have influenced previous Scottish historical theological studies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, comparatively speaking, Smeaton has not received anywhere near as much attention as Campbell. Sadly, Smeaton has been greatly overlooked in the development of doctrinal history of the atonement.<sup>22</sup> For instance, one can search the index pages of various primers on atonement theology almost in vain for even a single reference to Smeaton.

Torrance's omission of Smeaton in his *Scottish Theology* is disappointing for a number of reasons. (1) Campbell and Smeaton were contemporaries of each other. (2) They both published works on the atonement. (3) Smeaton interacted at length with Campbell's work on the atonement in an article for *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* and he reviewed

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*Incarnational Theology of John McLeod Campbell* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004); Peter K. Stevenson, "The Person and Work of Christ in the Preaching and Theology of John McLeod Campbell", (PhD diss., University of London, 2001); Gael Turnbull, *John McLeod Campbell: His Life, Times and Contemporaries*, (Edinburgh: Gael Turnbull, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Purves entitled, *Exploring Christology & Atonement: Conversations with John McLeod Campbell, H. R. Mackintosh, and T. F. Torrance*.<sup>21</sup> (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> For instance, See Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007). This work contains no mention of Smeaton – or indeed any nineteenth-century Scottish conservative atonement theologians - in their historical review of the doctrine of penal substitution. Indeed, one can search the index pages of various works on atonement theology almost in vain for even a single reference to Smeaton.

Campbell's theory of the atonement in *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*.<sup>23</sup> (4) Smeaton unquestionably upheld firmly the 'Catholic and Reformed' view of the atonement.<sup>24</sup> (5) Smeaton, like Campbell, could be described as an 'innovator' – since he pioneered a new method to the study of the atonement. (6) Smeaton's new theological method was developed in order to rebut the theological method employed by Campbell, namely, the method of Christian consciousness.

This thesis hopes to play a small part in redressing the imbalance within Scottish historical theological studies by re-examining one of the most noteworthy aspects of Smeaton's contribution to Scottish theology, namely, his application of an innovative method to study of the atonement.

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<sup>23</sup> George Smeaton, "False theories of the atonement – M'Leod Campbell and Baldwin Brown", in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 10, (1861): 532-553. Although, Torrance may well have had Smeaton in mind when he wrote: 'The usual criticisms of McLeod Campbell over the question of 'penal substitution' in his own times and since appear rather shallow...' Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 310. This comment only further illustrates Torrance's personal scorn of Federal Calvinists. George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 493-494.

<sup>24</sup> 'Smeaton represents the orthodox Church doctrine of the first eighteen centuries...' Homer L. Goddard, *The Contribution of George Smeaton to Theological Thought*, 137. Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 179.



## Literature Review

Smeaton published only a handful of works during his career, of which the most important were *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement* and *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. These writings are Biblical and dogmatic in character. They are marked by careful exegesis, wide-ranging scholarship, and an impressive understanding of the key historical doctrinal developments.

His lesser works include a *Memoir of Alexander Thomson of Banchory*, *National Christianity and Scriptural Union* and *The Scottish Theory of Ecclesiastical Establishments*. In addition, he frequently contributed to journals and periodicals, and was the editor of *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* between 1861 to 1863. A number of his printed lectures and sermons from his time at Aberdeen Free Church College are still in existence.<sup>25</sup>

A number of short endorsements and prefaces also give a further indication of the sort of topics he was interested in and supported. In 1859, he wrote *The Improvement of a Revival Time*, and in 1860 an introductory paper to *The Beauties of the Rev. Ralph Erskine on the Suitableness of Erskine's writings to a period of religious revivals*. He was clearly concerned with preaching and pastoral issues, writing prefaces for *Outlines of Discourses* by Rev. James Stewart (1860) and *Means and Method to be Adopted for a Successful Ministry* (1861) by the same author. He wrote a preface for Henry Darling's *The Closer Walk* (1862) and for *Memorials of the Late Miss Agnes Aitken* (1882). Other prefaces highlight that he was interested in topics such as exclusive psalmody, the Sabbath, and the inspiration of Scripture. For example, he wrote prefaces to John M'Ewan's work on *Exclusive Psalmody* (1883), for the continental writer

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<sup>25</sup> His lectures can be accessed in New College Special Collections. His sermons have appeared in different denominational magazines or journals.

Johannes Gossner's *The Lord's Day* (1860) and for Thomas Chalmers's pamphlet on *Inspiration of Scripture*.

As already highlighted, four doctoral theses have been undertaken on Smeaton. Goddard's thesis is the most comprehensive study of Smeaton's theology. He looked at the four main areas in which Smeaton contributed to theological thought of his day: Inspiration, the Atonement, Church and State, and the Holy Spirit. Throughout the thesis, Goddard evaluates Smeaton's theology in light of twentieth century neo-orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, Goddard argues that

The most damaging criticism of Smeaton is that he seldom presents a fresh theological concept or viewpoint. He therefore stirred up little antagonism, being considered by many to be one of the last of the old school with "the old... point of view." Smeaton's main purpose was to conserve and defend established doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, he recognises that Smeaton's most outstanding contribution was given in his first volume work:

Smeaton's outstanding contribution to theological thought is his first volume on the atonement comprising the sayings of Jesus on this crucial doctrine... [his] *approach to the atonement was new*...The breadth of his atonement teaching is most comprehensive. He reveals the gospel records of Christ's instruction as the source of apostolic teaching. The unity of Christ and His apostles in their concept and teaching

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<sup>26</sup> For instance, speaking about Smeaton's view of the atonement and the incarnation Goddard argues '...where Smeaton and Brunner agree in both saying that the incarnation and the Cross are inseparable is the best place to leave it.' Homer L. Goddard, *The Contribution of George Smeaton to Theological Thought*, 101.

<sup>27</sup> Homer L. Goddard, *The Contribution of George Smeaton to Theological Thought*, 181-2.

of the atonement is thoroughly established...The complete two-volume work remains a source book of eminent worth on the atonement.<sup>28</sup>

Madsen's study looks at the relation between Smeaton's pneumatology and atonement theology. He also chooses to evaluate Smeaton's theology in light of modern neo-orthodox theologians like Barth and Brunner.<sup>29</sup> For example, he contends that 'Smeaton's theology tends to be impersonal, especially when seen in the light of Brunner's theology.'<sup>30</sup> Madsen's primary conclusion in his thesis is that 'Smeaton's understanding of atonement and pneumatology, seen in the light of traditional and contemporary theologians, offers a positive attempt to fully realise the true role of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology.'<sup>31</sup>

Significantly, Madsen's thesis examines Smeaton's theological method in detail.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, however, nowhere does he highlight the fact that it was new method, nor does he mention it as a significant aspect of his contribution to Scottish atonement studies.

Kinnear's work is the most focussed on Smeaton's atonement theology. Kinnear argues that the previous doctoral studies reveal Smeaton's 'theological affinity' to the leading exponents of seventeenth century Calvinism such as Francis Turretin, Herman Witsius and John Owen. But Kinnear's assessment of Smeaton's atonement theology attempts to demonstrate the ways Smeaton sought to modify classical Calvinistic theology. He states:

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<sup>28</sup> Homer L. Goddard, *The Contribution of George Smeaton to Theological Thought*, 183-4. Emphasis mine.

<sup>29</sup> 'Accordingly, both Barth and Brunner reject Smeaton's argument for the necessity of the atonement based upon the juridical aspect of God's nature.' Norman P. Madsen, *Atonement and Pneumatology*, 213-4.

<sup>30</sup> Norman P. Madsen, *Atonement and Pneumatology*, 245-246.

<sup>31</sup> Norman P. Madsen, *Atonement and Pneumatology*, 251.

<sup>32</sup> See chapter 1 of Madsen's thesis and the section entitled 'The Hermeneutics of Smeaton'. Norman P. Madsen, *Atonement and Pneumatology*, 7-70.

...despite his firm adherence to Calvinism, Smeaton in fact moved toward a modification of traditional theology along lines that were prevalent in his day. Smeaton seemed concerned to demonstrate that other theological themes dear to the heart of contemporary thinkers could in fact be accommodated within the classic theory.<sup>33</sup>

It is true that Smeaton highlighted theological themes from his contemporary theologians, which had oftentimes been neglected by classical Scottish Reformed theologians in the nineteenth century. However, it would be a misrepresentation and an exaggeration to suggest that Smeaton ‘modified’ classical Calvinism in any fundamental way.

In some places, Kinnear wrongly interprets Smeaton’s atonement theology. In one place, he claims that Campbell’s theory of Christ confessing the sins of the world can be found in Smeaton’s writings.<sup>34</sup> Failing to acknowledge that Smeaton explicitly rejected Campbell’s theory of Christ confessing sin. Since Smeaton described Campbell’s theory as an ‘extravagant and strangely constituted theory’, which has ‘no warrant or foundation in Scripture’.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Kinnear’s claim that Smeaton modified traditional theology is overstated. However, as previously highlighted, Kinnear’s thesis does acknowledge Smeaton’s noteworthy and pioneering contribution to Scottish atonement theology.<sup>36</sup>

Lastly, Robert Shillaker’s thesis addresses the relationship between Smeaton’s federal theology and pneumatology. His work displays the most sympathetic reading of Smeaton. His thesis

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<sup>33</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 126. Kinnear contends, ‘it was not solely the opponents of Calvinism who recognised this idea.’ Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 168.

<sup>35</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, 424.

<sup>36</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 179.

argues that ‘Smeaton provides a coherent theory, which does not contradict the tradition of Reformed theology in which he stands.’<sup>37</sup> In short, his thesis highlights four ways in which Smeaton distinctively develops a ‘more thoroughly federal pneumatology’.<sup>38</sup> Regarding Smeaton’s novel theological method, Shillaker acknowledges Kinnear’s assessment of Smeaton’s contribution. But nowhere does he give his own analysis or comment.<sup>39</sup>

The lack of analysis on Smeaton’s novel method and its contribution to Scottish Biblical scholarship demonstrates that more attention to his method is required. Furthermore, the different (even contradictory) assessments of Smeaton’s theology highlight that more attention is required to appreciate his relationship with classical Reformed orthodoxy.

This thesis hopes to shed light on these issues. Thus, this thesis will seek to answer the following questions: what was Smeaton’s new method? Was it a ‘*novum organum* of theology’? Was it a ‘ground-breaking’ contribution to the study of the atonement in Scotland? And, did his application of his new method to the study of the atonement contradict or cohere with his classical Reformed orthodoxy?

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<sup>37</sup> Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814–89)*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> According to Shillaker the four ways in which Smeaton distinctively develops a ‘more thoroughly federal pneumatology’ are: (1) the Holy Spirit indwelt Adam at his creation, only to deprive Adam of his fellowship at the fall, (2) the Spirit is the executive of the communication between the two natures of the incarnate Christ, (3) Christ is able to experience the life of the true Spirit-filled person, and (4) the closeness between the Spirit’s work and Christ’s mission. Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814–89)*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814–89)*, 13.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

It is necessary to define three concepts which will be discussed in this thesis:

(1) *novum organum* (2) classical Reformed orthodoxy, and (3) Biblical theology

### **Definition of *Novum Organum***

'*Novum Organum*' when translated from Latin to English means 'new method' or 'new instrument'. Thus, when the aforementioned reviewer stated that Smeaton 'may claim the honour of having inaugurated a *Novum Organum* of theology...', he was suggesting that Smeaton had developed a 'new method' for doing theology. It was fitting for the reviewer to use this Latin phrase. Because in 1620, Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626) published his *magnum opus* called *Novum Organum* which presented a new scientific and philosophical method of inquiry, namely, the inductive method. According to Bacon, the inductive method – as opposed to the deductive method of reasoning - was the proper method for interpreting nature. In *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, Smeaton utilised the inductive method in his application of his new theological method to the study of the atonement. Smeaton believed the inductive approach was the proper method for interpreting the contents of the Bible.

## Definition of Classical Reformed Orthodoxy

The term ‘Reformed’ refers to those who belong to the Protestant theological tradition which was developed in the Reformation and the post-Reformation eras. It is commonplace in both contemporary and academic theological literature to find the term Reformed being used synonymously with the terms such as Calvinist or Calvinism.<sup>40</sup>

In popular contemporary literature, the ‘five *solas*’ of the Reformation (*sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *solus Deo Gloria*) are often used to provide a definition of Reformed theology. However, they provide too capacious a definition of Reformed theology because these five watchwords of the Reformation could also be applied to the Lutheran theological tradition.<sup>41</sup> Strictly speaking, Reformed theology stands in contradistinction to Lutheran theology.<sup>42</sup>

The ‘five points of Calvinism’ are also used to provide a definition for Reformed theology. However, they provide too narrow a definition; since the five points of Calvinism emerged during a specific theological disagreement between Reformed theology and Arminianism in the seventeenth century at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619).<sup>43</sup> Thus, neither succeed in providing

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<sup>40</sup> In this thesis Reformed is the preferred term. Because it is more precise and more inclusive. Calvinism, named after John Calvin (1509-1564), is partly misleading because he did not found the Reformed movement, nor do Calvin’s theological beliefs define every aspect of the Reformed theological tradition.

<sup>41</sup> Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson, “Introduction”, in Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson ed., in *The Cambridge Companion of Reformed Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 13.

<sup>42</sup> Even though the Reformed and Lutheran theological traditions stand in agreement upon the five *solas*; there are significant areas of theological disagreement such as the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Nimmo and David Fergusson, *Introduction*, 13.

a comprehensive definition of the Reformed theology. David Fergusson and Paul Nimmo are thus right to state: ‘Reformed theology is not one that is amenable to easy or quick definition.’<sup>44</sup>

The best place for a definition of classical Reformed theology remains the various Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historically speaking, Reformed beliefs were set down in the various confessions of the Reformed churches throughout Europe.<sup>45</sup> No single Reformed confession has ever commanded universal assent throughout the various Reformed denominations. However, Michael Allen highlights:

While they [Reformed confessions] were plentiful in number and diverse in expression, they both then and still now represent a largely cohesive vision of Catholic orthodoxy that is Reformed according to certain Scriptural principles regarding God and his relations to his creation.<sup>46</sup>

The major Reformed confessions stand in large agreement on a broad range of theological beliefs such as the doctrines of Scripture, God, Christology, the Sacraments, and the Christian life.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the various Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Nimmo and David Fergusson, *Introduction*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, there are the Scottish-English Confessions: Scots Confession (1560) the Thirty-Nine Articles (1563), and the Westminster Standards (1646-7). The Dutch-German Confessions: the Belgic Confession (1561) the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the Canons of Dort (1618-19). The Swiss Confession: the First and Second Helvetic Confession (1536; 1566) and the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675).

<sup>46</sup> Michael Allen, “Confessions”, in Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson ed., *The Cambridge Companion of Reformed Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 13.

<sup>47</sup> For further study on the topic of theological agreement within the various confessions see *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, eds. Sinclair Ferguson and Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).



provide the various Reformed ecclesiastical bodies with ‘orthodox views’ of Christian dogma.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, it ought to be noted, that Reformed confessions were never intended to possess infallible status within the Reformed churches. Only the Bible is regarded as *norma normans* ‘the rule that rules’, whereas a confessional statement is regarded as a *norma normata* ‘a rule that is ruled’. In fact, many of the Reformed confessions openly acknowledge their own fallibility and state their openness to be corrected in light of Scripture.

This thesis is concerned with a Scottish Reformed theologian who subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646-7). According to Sinclair Ferguson, the Westminster Confession of Faith is ‘an outstanding expression of classical Reformed theology framed for the needs of the people of God.’<sup>49</sup> In thirty-three chapters it judiciously and pastorally presents the whole range of Christian doctrine from the Bible. For around two hundred years the Westminster Confession was considered by many as ‘the unalterable rule and symbol of theological orthodoxy’ in Scotland.<sup>50</sup> Thus, when we speak of Smeaton as a Reformed orthodox theologian in this thesis, we are implying that he upheld and defended the key tenets of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

In some other places within academic theological literature, the term ‘Reformed Orthodoxy’ is used in a narrower sense than we have outlined above. For instance, Richard Muller speaks of Reformed Orthodoxy as follows:

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<sup>48</sup> Orthodoxy comes from a Greek word. *Orthos* means right and *doxa* means belief.

<sup>49</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, “Historical Introduction to the Reformed Confessions”, in Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson ed., *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), xii.

<sup>50</sup> Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinistic Orthodoxy: Drifting from the truth in Confessional Scottish Churches*, (Fearn, Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 43.

Reformed Orthodoxy, indicates ... the era, ca. 1565-1700 or 1720, during which Reformed theologians made their greatest effort in the definition and defence of that confessional teaching.<sup>51</sup>

Since George Smeaton did not live in the aforementioned era, he cannot be considered as a Reformed Orthodox theologian (in the narrow sense of term). But because he maintained and upheld the Reformed Orthodoxy of the Westminster Confession of Faith, it is legitimate to apply the label 'Reformed orthodox' to Smeaton (in the broad sense of the term).<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Smeaton viewed his entire theological agenda in his nineteenth century context as defending and upholding the classical Reformed orthodox beliefs of the Reformation and post-Reformation era. However, he sought to recast Reformed orthodox beliefs with a method and in a manner, which was relevant and appropriate to his context.

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<sup>51</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition*, Inaugural Address, September 7 1995, Calvin Seminary Chapel, (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1995), 26.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Helm lists George Smeaton as one of the leading proponents of classical Reformed theology in nineteenth century. Helm defines the classical Reformed theology as follows '...a theology that endeavours to express and be faithful to Scripture while standing in the tradition of the ecumenical creeds, confessions of faith of the early generation of the Reformers and subsequent Reformed Orthodoxy. It professes that faith through successive cultures, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism, and so on. Its articulation has two aspects: the development of its intentions to be consistent with and faithful to the scriptures and the creeds, and to express the nature of our knowledge of God and of ourselves that Scripture convey.' Paul Helm, *Faith, Form and Fashion: Classical Reformed Theology and Its Postmodern Critics*, (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 1. In this thesis, Reformed orthodoxy will be used interchangeably with the term 'classical Reformed theology'.

## **A Brief Outline of the Doctrine of the Atonement in the Classical Reformed Orthodox Theological Tradition**

Since this thesis is concerned with Smeaton's theological method to the study of the atonement, a brief outline of the Reformed understanding of the atonement will be given (the understanding of the atonement as given in the Westminster Confession of Faith).

### *Federal Theology and the Atonement*

In the Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrine of atonement is explained within the context of God's covenantal relations with Adam and Christ - the two covenant heads of humankind. Furthermore, it is explained within the framework of the 'covenant of works' and the 'covenant of grace'.

#### *The Covenant of Works:*

In the Garden of Eden, God entered into a covenant of works with Adam. In this covenant, life was promised to Adam - and in him to his posterity - upon the condition of perfect and personal obedience. However, because of Adam's disobedience in the garden: 1) the guilt of sin, 2) a fallen nature, and 3) the reality of death was imputed to Adam and all mankind. As a result, all of humanity were made incapable of obtaining life by the covenant of works.

#### *The Covenant of Grace:*

So, God made a second covenant, namely, the covenant of grace. In this covenant, God offered life and salvation to sinners. This covenant was administered differently in the Old and New Testament times. However, the essence of this covenant was the same throughout both Testaments. In both eras, God saves his elect people by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and to the glory of God alone.

More specifically, in the covenant of grace, God saves his elect on the basis of the obedience and satisfaction of the second Adam. The second Adam during his life on earth was made under the law and obeyed it in its entirety. Thus, fulfilling the laws demands. The second Adam also discharged the debt of his elect people by fully satisfying the justice of the Father through his penal and substitutionary sacrifice upon the cross. Thus, purchasing reconciliation and everlasting life for His people.

### **Summary**

In summary, this classical Reformed orthodox understanding of the work of Christ, as taught by the Westminster Confession of Faith, is also known as penal substitutionary and limited atonement. Smeaton applied his new method to the Bible in order to elucidate this key tenet of classical Reformed orthodoxy.

## Definition of Biblical Theology

Biblical theology, like Reformed theology, is not amenable to easy definition. It is an elastic term with a complex history.<sup>53</sup> Many modern definitions of Biblical theology (given by scholars living in the twentieth century or twenty first century) are more advanced and nuanced than the understanding of Biblical theology in the nineteenth century.<sup>54</sup> In light of this fact, the definition of Biblical theology presented below is taken from two of Smeaton's contemporaries.

In 1869, the reviewer of Smeaton's work in the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine* defined Biblical theology as follows:

God disclosed His mind and will to the Church, in a long and gradual process, "at sundry times and in diverse manners," through a long succession of centuries, and by the ministry of a long succession of prophets and apostles. Finding this to have been

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<sup>53</sup> It is an 'elastic term' because it has various meanings and usages in Protestant theological literature. See for example Sinclair Ferguson's article 'What is Biblical Theology?' in *Some Pastors and Teachers*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 417-448. It has a 'complex history' because scholars cannot agree on the issue of when Biblical theology came into existence. Scholars like Don Carson and Sinclair Ferguson acknowledge that Biblical theology has a rich pedigree in the Christian Church. Carson states: 'It would be the height of arrogance to argue that before the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century the church knew nothing of biblical theology.' Don Carson, *Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective* in *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 5 (1995) 17-41. Whilst other historians have suggested that Biblical theology is a modern innovation, approximately two hundred years old. See C H. H. Scobbie, "History of Biblical Theology" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 11-20.

<sup>54</sup> Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A comparison of Theory and Practice*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

the case, biblical theology endeavours to follow in the steps of the Divine Wisdom. It traces the gradual disclosure of the truth, and attempts to ascertain the amount and tenor of the doctrine set forth in the several portions of the Divine Word. The method is capable of abuse, like everything else, but its value must be acknowledged by everyone who has looked into the matter with any care.<sup>55</sup>

Peter Lorimer in an article written in 1849 entitled *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology* gave a more detailed definition of Biblical theology.<sup>56</sup> According to Lorimer, Biblical theology reproduces the logical spirit of the Bible. Meaning:

It gathers together all its materials of Divine truth, by a rigid and impartial and large induction of Scripture-phenomena, before it presumes to combine them into a compacted system; and even in this effort of systematic combination, it is the mutual relations and bearings of Truth, which have been observed in the Scriptures themselves, and not any relations or bearings which are merely imagined or conjectured by the theologian, which determine the organic order and connexion in which the materials are arranged. 'What is written in the law— what readest thou? that was both the logic and the humility of the Apostles and Prophets, and such also is the characteristic logic and humility of the Biblical Theology.'<sup>57</sup>

Biblical theology also reproduces the historical spirit of the Bible. Meaning:

[The Bible]... was not communicated all at once, and once for all, in a ready-made system or corpus of doctrine, but it was unfolded gradually at successive periods of time, and by means of a long series of historical personages; by the Patriarchs, by the

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<sup>55</sup> Anonymous, *Review*, 112-116.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Lorimer, "The Characteristics of Biblical Theology", in *The Biblical Review*, Vol 6, (1849): 373.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 376.

Prophets, by the Baptist, by the Saviour himself, by his Evangelists and Apostles; in a word, 'at sundry times and in divers manners'... Biblical Theology reproduces the historical spirit of the Bible itself; and not only exhibits Divine doctrine in its ultimate form, but in every other which it had ever before assumed, and in connexion with every historical circumstance with which the Scriptures themselves record it to have been associated.<sup>58</sup>

He also asserted 'Perhaps the best, most comprehensive, and most descriptive definition of Biblical theology would be, *'that theology which reproduces the Bible's own teaching in the Bible's own spirit.'*<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, with regards to the origins of Biblical theology, as a distinct academic discipline from Systematic Theology, Lorimer contended that it was a relatively recent development in his context. He credited the German scholars as cultivating it as a distinct science.

Our German friends have been cultivating it as a distinct branch of study — for better or worse, in the right spirit or the wrong, — for upwards of a hundred years; their theological literature is rich with treatises upon it.... But in our own country it can scarcely be said to be known as a distinct branch of Systematic Theology. We are persuaded, however, that its introduction among us would be attended with some signal advantages to the students of theology and the future ministers of our churches, provided its true characteristics were at all correctly apprehended and adequately realized.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 376.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 374.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 373.

Indeed, the name most associated with the emergence of academic Biblical theology as a distinct academic discipline in Germany is Johann Philipp Gabler (1753-1826). He was a moderate rationalist theologian who on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1787 gave his inaugural lecture at the University of Altdorf. It was entitled *The Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each*. According to John Sandys-Wunsch ‘In most summaries of the history of Biblical theology, Gabler's inaugural address is seen as an important turning-point, but rightly or wrongly it was not so seen by his contemporaries.’<sup>61</sup>

In Gabler’s mind, Biblical theology was a purely historical exercise intended to discover the religion and theology of the past, whereas dogmatic theology was a normative discipline.

Gabler laid out this vision for academic Biblical theology:

...we must carefully collect and classify each of the ideas of each patriarch – Moses, David, and Solomon, and of each prophet with special attention to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi, and the rest; and for many reasons we ought to include the apocryphal books for this same purposes; also we should include the ideas from the epoch of the New Testament, those of Jesus, Paul, Peter John and James. Above all, this process is completed in two ways: the one is in the legitimate interpretation of passages pertinent to this procedure; the other is in the careful comparison of the ideas of all the sacred authors among themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Gabler hoped that through scholarly exegetical techniques, theologians would unearth the universal and timeless religion of the Bible and this would lead to a new unity amongst Christians. Gabler’s understanding was significantly shaped by the principles of Enlightenment

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<sup>61</sup>J. Sandys-Wunsch and L. Eldredge, *J. P. Gabler and the Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary and Discussion of His Originality*, SJT 33 (1980): 133-58.

<sup>62</sup> J. Sandys-Wunsch and L. Eldredge, *J. P. Gabler*, 133-58.



rationalism and a moderate anti-supernaturalism.<sup>63</sup> In evaluating Gabler's understanding of Biblical theology, J. V. Fesko has stated:

In one sense, Gabler stood in continuity with historic Reformation exegetical principles, namely the need to interpret the Scriptures within their grammatico-historical contexts as well as to be vigilant against theological eisegesis. On the other hand, given his understanding of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and his commitment to Enlightenment rationalism, Gabler's understanding of biblical theology is significantly different than other manifestations throughout church history.<sup>64</sup>

Interestingly, Gabler did not write a Biblical theology himself. He did, however, praise another German Biblical scholar for his major contribution to Biblical theological studies: G. T. Zachariae (1729–77). Between 1771 and 1775, Zachariae published a four-volume work called *Biblische Theologie*. According to Alfred Cave, Zachariae's work marked an epoch in the science of Biblical theology.<sup>65</sup>

Although Zachariae separated Biblical theology from dogmatic theology, his work ultimately sought to establish dogmatic theology on a Scriptural basis. J. Sandys-Wunsch asserted:

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<sup>63</sup> J. V. Fesko, *On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology*, in, *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in the service of the church: Essays in honour of Richard B Gaffin, Jr.*, Edited by Lane G. Tipton and Jeffery C. Waddington, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing 2018) 447-8.

<sup>64</sup> J. V. Fesko, *On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology*, 448. As Eugene H. Merrill states in an ironic way the very approach which was used to 'open up the riches of God's revelation in previously unimaginable ways came as a by-product of a rational skepticism' and 'included in its agenda a discounting of traditional (dogmatic) theological method. Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006) 6-7.

<sup>65</sup> Alfred Cave, *An Introduction to Theology: its principles, its branches, its results, and its literature*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), 408.

His work moved biblical theology in an autonomous direction through a conviction that if one temporarily lays aside church dogma and carefully studies the Bible's teachings, one will find or derive much the same theology as that which is already espoused by the church.<sup>66</sup>

According to Gerald Bray, the belief that Biblical theology was the foundation from which Systematic theology may then properly be construed, 'marked an important reversal of roles, since for a long time dogmatics had been used as a means of controlling and censoring the work of Biblical scholars.'<sup>67</sup>

In this thesis, our understanding of Biblical theology will reflect the definitions given by Smeaton's contemporaries. Furthermore, in terms of the history of academic Biblical theology, the reader ought to keep in mind that it was a relatively young discipline in the minds of Smeaton's contemporaries.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> J. Sandys-Wunsch and L. Eldredge, *J. P. Gabler*, 133-58.

<sup>67</sup> Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation Past and Present*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1996), 248.

<sup>68</sup> For further a more in-depth definition and background to the development of academic biblical theology see: Alfred Cave, *An Introduction to Theology: its principles, its branches, its results, and its literature*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), 405-421.

## Chapter Outline

In chapter one, a biographical sketch of Smeaton's life will be given, highlighting the various aspects which moulded, shaped, and led him to become a Reformed orthodox biblical scholar.

In chapter two, an overview of the pertinent developments which took place within the Scottish church and theology in the nineteenth century will be given. This will be followed by an assessment of the major developments which took place within atonement theology in Scotland. Finally, an assessment of the leading theological methods applied to the doctrine of the atonement prior to Smeaton's new method in 1868 will be presented.

In chapter three, we will define and analyse Smeaton's Biblical theological method. We will also look at (1) what specifically led him to adopt the Biblical theological method and (2) how he applied it in his work *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*.

In chapter four, we will seek to establish whether or not Smeaton's application of the Biblical theological method contradicted or cohered with his classical Reformed orthodox. We will do this by examining his key theological postulates, which ultimately shaped and informed his Biblical theological study of the atonement.

In the final chapter, we will summarise the various conclusions which have arisen from our discussion. Answering the questions: Was it a '*novum organum* of theology'? Was it a 'ground-breaking' contribution to the study of the atonement in Scotland? Did his application of this new method to the study of the atonement contradict or cohere with his classical Reformed orthodoxy? Did Smeaton's Biblical theological method to the atonement contribute anything to the development of future atonement literature in Scotland?

# Chapter One: The Making of a Pioneering Reformed Orthodox Biblical Scholar

## Early Years

George Smeaton was born on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1814 to George and Janet Smeaton of Coldside Farm in Berwickshire in the Scottish borders. Whilst Smeaton was still young, he professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>69</sup> In 1829, aged fifteen, he moved to Edinburgh to begin his academic studies and training for ministry in the Church of Scotland.<sup>70</sup> Both faith and academic studies laid the foundation and set the direction for his future ministry and theological labours.

## Student Years

He spent four years in the faculty of Arts, followed by four years in the Divinity Hall. In the Arts faculty he took classes in Latin, Greek, Logic, Moral and Natural Philosophy. In the Divinity Hall, he took classes in Systematic Theology, Hebrew and Oriental Languages, and Ecclesiastical History.<sup>71</sup> There is every suggestion that Smeaton flourished as a student over eight sessions at the University of Edinburgh. For example, in 1869, when he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Edinburgh Dr Thomas Crawford asserted: ‘when prosecuting his studies at this university [he] obtained, in almost every department of learning, the highest academic distinctions’.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, in his final year in the Divinity Hall, Thomas

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Smith and Robert Gordon, *In Memoriam*, Sermons Preached in Buccleuch Free Church, Sabbath, 21 April 1889, on the Death of the Rev. George Smeaton, D. D., (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1889), n.p.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Smith, *In Memoriam*, n.p.

<sup>71</sup> The chair of Divinity was occupied by Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), the chair of Ecclesiastical History was occupied by David Welsh (1793-1845), and the chair of Hebrew and Oriental Languages was occupied by Alexander Brunton (1722-1854).

<sup>72</sup> *The Scotsman*, Thursday, 22 April 1869.

Chalmers awarded him with a gift of £100 for being the ‘best student of the year’ – further evidencing that he was a standout student.<sup>73</sup>

Whilst at University, it appears that Smeaton had real abilities in the area of Biblical languages: Greek<sup>74</sup> and Hebrew<sup>75</sup>. For instance, according to Alexander Ewing, Chalmers regarded Smeaton was one of the ablest Greek scholars of his day.<sup>76</sup> As a result, Chalmers encouraged

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<sup>73</sup> His son informs us that he used the money to buy himself a complete edition of Migne’s Patristic Library in seventy folio volumes, a first edition of Calvin’s Opera, a fine copy of Poli Synopsis, the famous folio Erasmus in five volumes and other works. This is evidence of Smeaton’s massive theological, historical, and linguistic appetite at a young age. William Knight, *Some Nineteenth-Century Scotsmen; Being Personal Recollections*, (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1903), 108. The value of £100 in today’s money would be £8,558.00. By the time of his death, his family donated his enormous and wide-ranging library, with over 15,000 volumes to the New College Library.

<sup>74</sup> In Smeaton’s biographical entry in the *Fasti*, it notes that during his days at University he read through a large folio Greek lexicon in order to commit every word to memory. H. Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae: The Succession of ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*, vol 5, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1925), 154. The Rev. Thomas Smith asked him whether this was true in later life, Smith said ‘Smeaton answered with a smile, “Well there was some truth in it. I suppose you did foolish things yourself in those days.”’ Thomas Smith, *In Memoriam*, n.p.

<sup>75</sup> The Rev. John Edmonston of Ashkirk in the Borders nominated Smeaton for the Chair of New Testament he spoke of the calibre of candidate worthy of the position: ‘He must...not only... know Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac and several other languages with whose barbaric names he would not disturb the ears of the Assembly, but he ought to be acquainted with Hebrew Scriptures, and familiar with the Septuagint version... in order to supply the science of exegesis to the New Testament... As for the Greek New Testament itself, he ought to be able to take it in his hand and read it off fluently in English. He must be able, not at second-hand but for himself, to make use of the Syriac, and other ancient versions, for determining many nice points as to the trusted reading of the original text, and in many cases, also the true rendering.’ *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 26 May 1857, 88-89.

<sup>76</sup> Alexander Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, vol 1, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1904), 46-59

Smeaton and some of his most talented peers in the Divinity Hall to form ‘The Exegetical Society’.

The society was for the stated purpose of the ‘critical study of sacred Scripture’.<sup>77</sup> Chalmers wanted ‘none but the very elite of the Hall for taste and skill in the languages’ to be part of the society.<sup>78</sup> The Society met early on Saturday mornings (at 6.30 a.m.), ‘at which time members presented papers and interacted on their interpretations. The meetings served to sharpen the participants theological and Biblical insight.’<sup>79</sup> Significantly, Smeaton’s participation in the Exegetical Society highlights his early interest in the discipline of Biblical exegesis. This is a noteworthy development because this formed the basis of his future theological method.

Incidentally, in the society were other gifted young men such as Robert Murray M’Cheyne, Andrew Bonar, and Horatius Bonar. However, according to John Macleod, Smeaton was ‘the most eminent scholar of the set of young men who with M’Cheyne and the Bonars sat at the feet of Chalmers.’<sup>80</sup>

In the lectures Chalmers delivered to his students at the Divinity Hall, he regularly challenged them to engage in the study of Scripture Criticism:<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> David Victor Yeaworth, *Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843): A Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Scottish Evangelical*. (PhD diss., the University of Edinburgh, 1957), 71.

<sup>78</sup> David Victor Yeaworth, *Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843): A Study of an Early Nineteenth Century Scottish Evangelical*, (PhD diss., the University of Edinburgh, 1957), 71.

<sup>79</sup> Jordan Mark Stone, *A Communion of Love: the animating principle behind the Christocentric spirituality of Robert Murray M’Cheyne*, (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) 2018, 26.

<sup>80</sup> John Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 287.

<sup>81</sup> According to Thomas Chalmers the two main objects of Scripture criticism: 1) the integrity of the text, and 2) the interpretation of it. In other words, ‘The first question is, “What did the authors of Scripture really write?”’ The second, “What is the sense or meaning of it?”’ Chalmers’ understanding of Scripture is worth noting, he

Scripture criticism is that in which the learning of our Church is most deficient; and there are few things in which I would more sincerely rejoice than in seeing that deficiency repaired...I hold it to have been inadequately cultivated in Scotland.<sup>82</sup>

He went on,

The truth is, that we are behind our neighbours in the South, and still more behind the Biblicists in Germany, not in all the branches certainly, but in the philological branch of Scripture criticism ... The walk of Scripture criticism is that which at present is most unoccupied. Should I know but one instance of a powerful affinity for this study, and an intense prosecution thereof, I would do my uttermost to foster and patronize it feeling as I do of this class-room that one of its proudest literary honours would be that there had issued from its walls some future Griesbach of Scotland.<sup>83</sup>

The lack of direct evidence means we can only deduce from these statements that Smeaton developed his interest in Scripture criticism from sitting under Chalmers. Although, it may also be the case that Smeaton was inspired by others to take up the task of Scripture criticism; and Chalmers' dictums just intensified an interest that Smeaton potentially already possessed.

In Chalmers' divinity lectures, he also urged the students to engage the writings of the critics, fathers, and theologians. He said,

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believed in plenary verbal inspiration. Therefore, the task of the Scripture critic did not have a genuinely 'critical' function. In Chalmers' mind, the primary task was to classify the contents of Scripture with the aim of discovering the import and meaning.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, Vol 2, (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1852), 279.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, 267-275. The reference is to the rationalist biblical scholar, Johann J. Griesbach (174-1812).

...pass from the study of the classics to the study of the original Scriptures, and to the perusal of those critics, and fathers, and theologians, who have delivered themselves in one or other of the dead languages, you will leave far behind you those of us whose boyhood has been cast on that period when classical learning in Scotland was at its lowest ebb.<sup>84</sup>

This vision is reflected in all of Smeaton's scholarly writings. Since throughout them he quoted extensively from the early church fathers through to contemporary nineteenth century German scholars. As we will see in chapter 3, Smeaton's wide-ranging knowledge of Biblical and theological scholarship also helped him develop his pioneering method to the doctrine of the atonement.

It is worth noting that as a student, Smeaton was nurtured in the classical Reformed theological tradition.<sup>85</sup> There is some evidence to suggest he embraced this theological tradition at the feet of Chalmers. For example, in 1879, Smeaton republished Chalmers' lecture *On the Inspiration of the Old and New Testaments* and stated in the introductory note: 'As many of Dr Chalmers' pupils regard his masterly chapter on Inspiration as peculiarly suited to the present time... Many still living will recall the indelible impression which it made when they first heard it from his lips...'<sup>86</sup> Smeaton's appreciation of Chalmers' lecture on the subject of inspiration, a key tenet of classical Reformed orthodoxy, is noteworthy because this tenet had important

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, 267-275.

<sup>85</sup> For instance, Chalmers' *Institutes of Theology* reveal that he taught his students the key doctrines of the classical Reformed theological tradition.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *On Inspiration of the Old and New Testaments: a chapter from Thomas Chalmers*, (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1879), 1.



implications for both his understanding of the doctrine of the atonement<sup>87</sup> and his theological method.<sup>88</sup>

Smeaton also stated in the preface: ‘The disquisition, considered as part of the author’s evidences of Christianity, bears the stamp of that *inductive method* with which his mind was fully imbued... it is worthy of the man, whom I have always venerated as by far the foremost Christian philosopher ... of the century.’ This remark is significant because Smeaton employed the inductive method as part of his pioneering theological method. Indeed, he may well have appropriated the inductive method as a result of Chalmers’ influence.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> A. A. Hodge stated: ‘The two great doctrines just at present most generally brought into question, and which have suffered most at the hands of Rationalistic criticism, are those concerning the nature and extent of Biblical Inspiration, and the nature of the redemptive work of Christ. These naturally stand or fall together. For if the inspiration of the Scriptures is plenary, then the Church doctrine as to the nature of Redemption remains impregnable. But if the authority of the Scriptures may be abated, the way is open, of course, in due proportion, to theories of Redemption adjusted to the “finer feelings,” the “moral intuitions,” and the administrative experiences of mankind.’ Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1867), 16.

<sup>88</sup> Homer Goddard stated: ‘Smeaton’s attitude toward the doctrine of inspiration is central to all of his teaching. His view of revelation and inspiration is the basis for his Biblico-exegetical method...’ Homer L. Goddard, *The Contribution of George Smeaton to Theological Thought*, 19. Thomas Chalmers, *On Inspiration of the Old and New Testaments*, 1-2. Emphasis mine.

<sup>89</sup> This fact was hinted at by Peter Lorimer: ‘Both Professor Smeaton’s book on the Atonement, and Dr Crawford’s, are works in which Chalmers would have recognised with joy his own most cherished principles, in the department of what he happily called “the Logic of Theology.”’ Peter Lorimer, *Review*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 20, (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1871), 593.

Evidently, it was Smeaton's impressive academic abilities (especially in the area of Biblical languages and exegesis), which equipped him to make an important contribution to the study of the atonement in the field of Biblical scholarship.

### **Pastoral Ministry**

The Presbytery of Edinburgh licensed Smeaton for ministry in the Church of Scotland in March of 1838. His first appointment was as a missionary, or probationary assistant, in North Leith under the care of Rev. James Buchanan (1804-1870). The following year, in March of 1839, the Presbytery of Edinburgh ordained and inducted Smeaton to the new *quoad sacra* charge of Morningside. After only eighteen months of ministry in Morningside, he was presented to Falkland Parish Church, Fife.<sup>90</sup> Significantly, during his time in Falkland, approaches were made to Smeaton from vacant chairs in the theological faculties of both Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. This is an indicator that he was a promising theologian at a very early stage in his ministry. In the end, he turned down both these offers because of the events looming in the church courts surrounding the issue of patronage.<sup>91</sup> And on the 18th May 1843, Smeaton cast his lot in with the four hundred and seventy ministers who withdrew from the Church of Scotland to establish the Free Church of Scotland.

Within the Free Church, Smeaton's leadership and pastoral gifts were instantly recognised by the wider church. For instance, in 1843, the wider church prevailed upon him to leave Falkland and become the minister of the newly established Free Church congregation in Auchterarder.

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<sup>90</sup> John Keddie, *George Smeaton*, 33.

<sup>91</sup> He wrote the following to one of the requests: 'While profoundly sensible of high honour thus paid me, I trust I shall not be thoughtful if I say that I could accept nothing, until the present anxious crisis in the Church has passed.' William Knight, *Some Nineteenth Century Scotsmen*, 108-9.

Furthermore, his academic abilities were also recognised by the wider church.<sup>92</sup> Since when the first General Assembly of the Free Church met, it appointed him as a member of the committee on education. As a result, he was strategically placed to assist in the formation and oversight of the theological and intellectual odyssey of the new denomination.

Remarkably though, Smeaton's involvement in a demanding parish ministry, coupled with wider denominational responsibilities, did not hinder him from keeping abreast with theological and philosophical developments taking place on the Continent. In Auchterarder, Smeaton displayed to the wider church that he was a very gifted pastor-scholar. For instance, he even taught himself both German and Dutch in order to read the leading scholarly works of theology and philosophy published on the continent.<sup>93</sup> According to Alexander Ewing '...as early as 1845 he was one of the pioneers in directing attention to German and Dutch theology...'<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> The town of Auchterarder had suffered from various controversies and divisions between 1833 and 1843 and needed a wise, strong, and servant hearted minister to shepherd them. According to Rev John G. Cunningham, 'he obeyed what was virtually the desire of the whole Church and went in the summer of 1843 to Auchterarder.' Rev. John G. Cunningham, *The Free Church of Scotland Monthly*, 2 September 1889, 279.

<sup>93</sup> This desire to learn from continental theologians may well have been cultivated by Thomas Chalmers. Since Chalmers in one of his divinity lectures stated: 'It is for those who are smitten with a taste for the systems of the Continent, and I have no wish to discourage it, nay, should rejoice if some two or three were to sound them to their very depths, for then I am sure they could all the better expose the illegitimacy of their adverse applications to the Christian faith' *Posthumous Works of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D.D., LL.D.*, Edited by the Rev William Hanna, LL.D., Vol IX. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1850), 553.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, 46-59. There is evidence which displays Smeaton visited Germany in 1845. James Craig, *The Gospel on the Continent: incidents in the life of James Craig, M.A., D.D., Ph.D.*, edited by his daughter (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), 102.

Smeaton's son, Oliphant throws further light on his father's private scholarly studies in the manse at Auchterarder:

From 1843 to 1852 he remained in Auchterarder discharging assiduously the duties of the Free Church minister of the place, and prosecuting at the same time his own private studies. At a time when German theology and philosophy were almost unknown among theological students, he was already familiarly acquainted with all the most minute developments of philosophy from Wolf and Crusius to Fichte, Jacobi, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Lotze and of the theology from Bahrtdt and Schleiermacher to Daub, Neander, Tholuck, Baur, Strauss, Bleek, Steir, and others.<sup>95</sup>

In the 1840s, there were very few Scottish theologians as conversant with continental thought as Smeaton.

Evidently, his exceptional gifting in the area of linguistics combined his voracious appetite for scholarly knowledge clearly helped him develop as a pastor-scholar. Moreover, his willingness to learn from academic theologians and philosophers on the continent (even those who held radically different viewpoints) reveals one of his key characteristics: humility.

### **Professorial Career**

In 1853, Smeaton's standout gifts as a pastor-scholar were once again recognised by the General Assembly of the Free Church. This time the General Assembly called him to teach part-time as the junior professor of Systematic Theology - under Patrick Fairbairn (1805-1874) - at the newly created Aberdeen Free Church College. Initially, he took up his responsibilities,

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<sup>95</sup> William Knight, *Some Nineteenth-Century Scotsmen*, 108.

while remaining in his charge at Auchterarder. Clearly, it was his intimate knowledge of the Biblical languages and wide-ranging theological learning which qualified him for this teaching position.

In 1854, Smeaton was appointed to the full-time position of professor of New Testament Exegesis in Aberdeen Free Church College by the General Assembly. In a nomination speech at the Assembly of 1854, Robert Candlish stated this in support of Smeaton:

It is also well known that he [Smeaton] is one of those who, in the retirement of his country manse, has been not only keeping up those literary attainments which he acquired at college, but has been steadily and enthusiastically pursuing his studies, till, I believe, it may be said of him at this hour, that he is one of the most accomplished and best theologians we have.<sup>96</sup>

Incidentally, it ought to be noted that New Testament Exegesis was a relatively new discipline within the Scottish academic setting. Thus, his appointment to this chair made him an early pioneer in this field of study in Scotland.

In Aberdeen Free Church College, Smeaton gave at least two introductory lectures to the students there. His first lecture was given in 1853 entitled the *Necessary Harmony Between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*.<sup>97</sup> The content of this lecture exhibits Smeaton's convictions regarding the nature of the theologian and his task. He argued that one's faith and piety was

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<sup>96</sup> *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland 25 May 1854.*

<sup>97</sup> *Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life: being introductory lecture, delivered on the 9th November 1853 to the Free Church students attending the Divinity Hall at Aberdeen' (Aberdeen: A Brown; Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1853).*

key to the formation of one's theology. The second lecture was entitled *Basis of Christian Doctrine in Divine Fact: with particular reference to the modern realistic development of theology*.<sup>98</sup> The content of this lecture displays a wide-ranging knowledge of the developments in modern theology.

After four years in Aberdeen, the Free Church General Assembly of 1857 nominated Smeaton as the candidate to replace Professor Alexander Black in the chair of New Testament and Exegetical Theology in New College, Edinburgh. Smeaton accepted the call and transferred to New College in that same year. This appointment was his last and he occupied this chair for the next three-two years - until his death in 1889.

At that time, New College was the largest English-speaking Reformed theological seminary in Europe. Thus, Smeaton's appointment placed him at the vanguard of classical Reformed academic theology in Scotland and arguably in Europe. He was among men of the first rank in Scottish Presbyterianism such as Professors William Cunningham (1805-1861), James Bannerman (1807-1868), James Buchanan (1804- 1870), and John 'Rabbi' Duncan (1796-1870).

A number of Smeaton's colleagues and contemporaries held him in high esteem. For example, his close colleague and friend Professor James MacGregor said that Smeaton had 'the best-constituted theological intellect in Christendom'.<sup>99</sup> Marcus Dods his former student and successor said in his introductory lecture to New College:

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<sup>98</sup> George Smeaton, *Basis of Christian Doctrine in Divine Fact: with particular reference to the modern realistic development of theology*, (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1854).

<sup>99</sup> Ian Hamilton, *George Smeaton*, in Nigel M. de S. Cameron ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 779.

Not only had he the ordinary acquirements of a teacher of exegesis, exact scholarship, and acquaintance with modern criticism, but he had a quite exceptional theological learning. I don't know if any man is left among us who is so much at home as he was in Patristic and mediaeval writers.<sup>100</sup>

### **Published Writings**

Most of Smeaton's published writings can be found in leading theological journals of his day. According to his son, he was a substantial contributor to the *Eclectic, Retrospective, Foreign Quarterly*, and *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review (BFER)* of which he later became editor. According to Oliphant Smeaton, 'his articles were distinguished by vigour of thought and wide range of scholarship.' From 1853-1863 his contributions to the *BFER* reveal that his main interests were in studying the doctrine of the atonement, and theologians and the theological systems of German mediating school and British Broad school. For instance, his known articles include: *Augustus Neander – his influence, system and various writings* (1853); *Old orthodoxy, new divinity and Unitarianism* (1858); *The theory of the incarnation without a fall* (1861); *Oxford Essayists* (1861); *False theories of the atonement – McLeod Campbell and Baldwin Brown* (1861).

It was in his mature years as a Professor of New Testament at New College that Smeaton published his major works of theology and literature. In 1868, and 1870 he published his two volumes on the atonement, *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by Christ Himself* (1868) and its sequel, *The Doctrine of the Atonement according to the Apostles* (1870).<sup>101</sup> He also

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<sup>100</sup> Marcus Dods, *Recent Progress in Theology. Inaugural Lecture, New College, Edinburgh, November 6th, 1889*, (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1889), 5.

<sup>101</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by Christ Himself*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1868; second edition, 1871). George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by the Apostles*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870; second edition, 1871).

published the biography of his friend, *Memoir of Alexander Thomson of Banchory*.<sup>102</sup> In 1882, he delivered the *Cunningham Lectures*; later published under the title *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*.<sup>103</sup> Smeaton's writings reveal that he was interested in key tenets of classical Reformed orthodoxy, namely, the atonement and the Holy Spirit. His works earned him the reputation as an erudite Reformed Biblical and historical theologian.

### **Honorary Doctorate**

As a professor at New College, Smeaton's stature and contribution to Scottish Reformed theology was recognised by the award of an honorary doctorate from the University of Edinburgh in 1869. Incidentally this came in the year following his pioneering contribution to the atonement. At the ceremony Thomas J. Crawford (1812-1875) professor of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh said,

I have the great satisfaction of now presenting to your Lordship the Rev. George Smeaton [applause], Professor of Exegetical Theology in the Free Church College, Edinburgh, ... who has for many years discharged with much efficiency the duties of that honourable and arduous office which he now holds; and who, by his numerous theological writings, especially his admirable treatise on the atonement, has greatly contributed to the interest of Christian truth, and established a claim which cannot be gainsaid to the honorary degree of doctor of divinity [Applause].<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> George Smeaton, *Memoir of Alexander Thomson of Banchory*, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1869).

<sup>103</sup> *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1882).

<sup>104</sup> *The Scotsman*, Thursday, 22 April 1869.



## Student's Perspective

A well-rounded picture of Smeaton is complimented with insights from his former students.

The Rev. John George Cunningham said

We well remember the zeal and hope with which the students of our day welcomed the new professor, and entered eagerly under his able guidance on the exegesis of the New Testament, a department of theological research on which had then only begun to be valued and cultivated as deserved. For our own part we found in the work of the class and in the sympathetic fellowship of the professor an intellectual impulse and a spiritual impression of the most helpful and useful kind. <sup>105</sup>

In the biography of the Rev. Donald John Martin, Norman C. Macfarlane highlights both Smeaton's deep piety, theological sensitivity, and unswerving orthodoxy. He writes,

Dr George Smeaton was a scholarly devout soul, whose earnest prayers in the class brought the heavens near. He knew his subject, New Testament exegesis, thoroughly. His students would have prized the slightest suggestion of heresy such as they found in his successor [Marcus Dods]. But Dr Smeaton held on like a full moon slicing its way through the clouds. His lectures were like golden paths which his students found richly monotonous... <sup>106</sup>

However, in contrast, an unsympathetic conservative student Alexander Ross stated that he did not care for Smeaton's New Testament courses because Smeaton drew heavily upon suspect

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<sup>105</sup> John Cunningham, *The Free Church of Scotland Monthly*, 2 September 1889, 279.

<sup>106</sup> Norman C. Macfarlane, *Rev. Donald John Martin: preacher, soul winner, social reformer*. (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1914.), 34-35.

tomes of German critical scholarship.<sup>107</sup> Taken together, all these comments suggest that Smeaton was a godly, orthodox, and highly gifted professor. Interestingly, as we will see in chapter 3, it was Smeaton's keen interest in modern German Biblical scholarship which partly inspired him to pioneer a new theological method.

## **Death**

In his seventy-fifth year, after thirty years of teaching in New College, Smeaton died of angina pectoris. In an appreciation adopted by the 1889 General Assembly of the Free Church, he was described as,

A man of massive intellect and unwearied diligence of profound erudition and exact scholarship, he consecrated his talents, his time, and the wealth of his learning to the service of God, and the interpretation of his Holy Word.<sup>108</sup>

Thomas Smith noted at his funeral,

For the work of professorship he was qualified by a laboriously disciplined mind, stored with most extensive erudition. I do not know that in this country if there is, or ever has been, a man more accurately conversant with all the great theological schools, the Patristic, the Medieval, the Reformation, the Puritan, the Dutch, and the Modern German. It was said to me the other day by one well qualified to judge, that the erudition of the late Dr. Cunningham might be more minute in the third of these schools, but was far inferior to Dr Smeaton's with regard to the others.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Disruption to Diversity Edinburgh Divinity: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell 1846-1996*, Edited by David F. Wright and Gary Badock, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 47.

<sup>108</sup> *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 4 June 1889, 46-7.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Smith, *In Memoriam*. n.p.

## **Summary**

This biographical introduction has highlighted the various aspects which moulded, shaped and prepared Smeaton to become a pioneering Reformed orthodox Biblical scholar in mid-nineteenth century Scotland. Based upon all the aforementioned evidence, Smeaton was qualified and well-placed to make a creative academic contribution to Scottish biblical scholarship.

In the next chapter, an overview of the pertinent developments in Scottish Reformed theology during Smeaton's lifetime will be given. It will highlight (1) the vast changes which took place in his ecclesiastical and theological setting, (2), the major developments which took place within Scottish atonement theology, and (3) it will present the leading theological methods which were applied to the atonement before Smeaton made his pioneering contribution in 1868.

# Chapter Two: The Ecclesiastical, Theological, and Methodological Context of a Pioneering Reformed Orthodox Biblical Scholar

George Smeaton's lifespan (1814-1889) coincided with an epoch in which every sector of life felt the influence of revolutionary change. Thomas Carlyle in his 1866 inaugural address as rector of the University of Edinburgh stated, 'Look wherever you will, revolution has come upon us.'<sup>110</sup> In 1889, Marcus Dods in his opening lecture as Professor of New Testament at New College, echoed Carlyle's remark:

It might be difficult to lay one's finger on any half-century in the world's history during which changes so rapid, so profound, so fruitful and so permanent have taken place as those which the past generation has seen ... Every department of human thought and activity has felt the touch of the new influences.<sup>111</sup>

Significantly, there was extensive ecclesiastical and theological upheaval in this era. For instance, in the 1830s and 40s the Church of Scotland felt the impact of politics and the civil law meddling in their decisions; the result was the major schism known as the Disruption of 1843, in which the Free Church of Scotland was born.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Inaugural Address at Edinburgh University, April 2nd 1866, by Thomas Carlyle, on Being Installed as Rector of the University there* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1866), 41-42.

<sup>111</sup> Marcus Dods, *Recent Progress in Theology. Inaugural Lecture, New College, Edinburgh, November 6th, 1889* (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1889), 6.

<sup>112</sup> Stewart Brown has asserted that 'The Disruption of 1843 was probably the most important event in the history of the nineteenth-century Scotland and a major episode in the history of the modern Western Church.' Stewart Brown, *Disruption to Diversity Edinburgh Divinity*, 30.

The bold vision of this new denomination gave rise to countless new churches in Scotland; a nationwide school system; and a handful of theological and training colleges. The Free Church led the way in significant improvements to the quality of Scottish theological education in the mid-nineteenth century especially in the field of Biblical scholarship.

Nevertheless, the winds of revolutionary change blew upon eternal matters and the resultant effect was a dramatic change in the character of Scottish theology. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, classical Reformed orthodoxy was the order of the day in Scotland. But by the end of the century, wholehearted allegiance to the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Westminster Confession diminished in the Scottish church – especially views on the inspiration of Scripture and the doctrine of limited atonement.

There are various reasons which account for these changes in Scottish theology. For instance, over the century, Scottish theology converged with the intellectual movements of philosophy and science. Both these disciplines played a role in re-moulding theological thought and expression. Simultaneously, there was the growing influence of German ‘mediating’ Biblical and theological scholarship upon Scottish theological thought. The continental influence led some Scottish theologians to embrace the Historical Critical method. There was also a revival of Broad School theology in the second half of the century which introduced free inquiry into the study of the Bible and undermined allegiance to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Our concern in the section below is to look at how these developments inspired Smeaton to apply a new theological method to the doctrine of the atonement.

# **An Overview of the Major Developments within the Scottish Church and Theology in the Nineteenth Century**

## **The Prevailing Theological Mood in Early Nineteenth Century Scotland**

Between 1800s and 1820s, the period in which Smeaton was born and raised, the evidence suggests that the prevailing theological mood within Scottish Presbyterianism was that of classical Reformed orthodoxy. With the exception of the ‘Burgher’ Seceders, the majority of Presbyterian ministers and office bearers were required to wholeheartedly subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith as their subordinate standard.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, according to A. C. Cheyne, the excesses of the French Revolution and the impact of the Evangelical revivals which followed it, led to an ‘ardent traditionalism’ and ‘devotion to the Westminster standards’.<sup>114</sup>

In the opening decades of the nineteenth century, one of most influential Scottish Presbyterian theologians was George Hill (1750-1819). He was the leader of the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland and the Principal of St Mary’s College of the University of St Andrews. Hill’s *Lectures on Divinity* (1821) were hugely influential in the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, by 1854, they had reached a sixth edition.

Thomas F. Torrance has claimed in the history of Scottish theology they enable ‘us to grasp something of the theological mind of the Kirk in the early decades of the nineteenth

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<sup>113</sup> A. C. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 23.

<sup>114</sup> A. C. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History*, 23,

century'.<sup>115</sup> According to Torrance, the contents of Hill's lectures reveal 'an evangelical Moderate adhering closely to the Westminster standards.'<sup>116</sup>

Thomas Chalmers another influential churchman in the first half of the nineteenth century used Hill's *Lectures* as one of his textbooks whilst teaching Divinity in the University of Edinburgh and New College - from 1828 and until his death in 1847. Thus, Smeaton as a student of Chalmers, was raised and reared in the classical Reformed orthodox tradition.

### **The Early Challengers of Classical Reformed Orthodoxy**

Whilst classical Reformed orthodoxy was the order of the day in Scotland, a trio of disgruntled Scottish theologians namely John McLeod Campbell, Thomas Erskine (1788 - 1870), and Edward Irving (1792 – 1834). Informed by the principles of cultural and philosophical Romanticism (individualism, feelings, and experience) these men approached the interpretation of the Scripture on the basis that human conscience and moral judgement. They believed them to be reliable sources for discerning Biblical and theological truth. This theological method became known as Christian consciousness.

The distinguishing feature of Christian consciousness was the 'the appeal to religious experience and to the ethical significance of dogma ... rather than to the historical forms in which that truth had been handed down from the past.'<sup>117</sup> This development is noteworthy because Smeaton's new method was primarily developed to oppose and withstand the

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<sup>115</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 258

<sup>116</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 258

<sup>117</sup> Vernon F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century 1800-1860*, (London: Longmans, Green, & Co 1913), 356.

theological results of the method of Christian consciousness. By the late 1860s, it had become the standard method employed by Protestant theologians.<sup>118</sup>

According to John Tulloch, it was Erskine, the ‘apostle of Christian consciousness’ in Scotland, who led the way ‘in the great reaction against mere formal orthodoxy’.<sup>119</sup> His writings reveal that he strongly rejected the judicial element of Reformed theology - believing it to be inconsistent with the filial character of God.<sup>120</sup> Instead, he placed greater emphasis on the Fatherhood and the love of God.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, on the basis of the universal Fatherhood of God and the supremacy of the love of God, disgruntled Scottish theologians, like Erskine, rejected the classical Reformed orthodox doctrine of limited atonement.

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<sup>118</sup> Hugh Martin, *Review*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, vol 18, (1869) 650-652.

<sup>119</sup> Tulloch also claimed that Erskine’s advocacy of Christian Consciousness happened ‘without any indebtedness either to Schleiermacher or Coleridge’ John Tulloch, *Movement of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 138.

<sup>120</sup> Tulloch claimed that *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel* (1828) and *The Brazen Serpent* (1831) were evidence of Erskine’s ‘desire to translate the gospel out of the formal conceptions in which it had become systematised in the doctrines of the Westminster Assembly, into experience and life.

<sup>121</sup> According to Tim Trumper, ‘Romanticism’s rejection of a more juridical presentation of God and the gospel, together with a fresh concentration on the Fatherhood of God, based on a rejection of Puritan Scholasticism (particularly with its emphasis on election and reprobation), was perhaps more responsible than any other single factor for setting in motion the anti-Calvinistic backlash that finally broke out in Scotland in the 1820s and 1830s.’ Tim Trumper, “An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition”, (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 2001), 292.



Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the early efforts of these disgruntled theologians was not a decisive moment for the erosion of classical Reformed orthodoxy in Scotland.<sup>122</sup> Both Campbell and Irving were unanimously deposed from ministry in the Church of Scotland in 1831 - confirming the prevailing orthodox theological mood in Scotland at the time.

Moreover, in the 1830s the writings and innovative theological views of the early challengers of classical Reformed orthodoxy were rebutted.<sup>123</sup> It is for this reason that Donald Macleod has described the era of the 1830s and 40s as a 'Golden Age' for Scottish Reformed theology. Because many developments which took place at this time saw the classical Reformed orthodox movement flourish in Scotland.<sup>124</sup>

### **Revival in the Divinity Hall of Edinburgh**

The 1830s and 40s was a lively time for the Divinity Halls of Scotland. It was in this era that many of the best and brightest young men were crowded into the Divinity Halls. The Divinity Hall of the University of Edinburgh was especially popular because of the presence of Thomas Chalmers. One writer asserted:

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<sup>122</sup> Donald Macleod, *Reformed Theology in Scotland* in *Theology in Scotland*, 17, (2), 2011, 5-31. Cited 10 Jan 2018. Online: <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/article/view/76>.

<sup>123</sup> In 1830, Ralph Wardlaw (1779-1853) published an essay on *The Extent of the Atonement*. In 1831, Daniel Dewar (1787-1867), minister of the Tron Church in Glasgow, published *The Nature, Reality, and Efficacy of the Atonement*. In 1834, William Symington (1795-1862), the leading Reformed Presbyterian minister and theologian published *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ*.

<sup>124</sup> Donald Macleod, *Reformed Theology in Scotland* in *Theology in Scotland*, 17, (2), 2011, 5-31. Cited 10 Jan 2018. Online: <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/article/view/76>.

While Dr. Chalmers was one of the professors, the Theological Hall in the Edinburgh University was full of evangelical life, and the scene of many intellectual triumphs...Chalmers was the great luminary, and the chief propelling power of a new spiritual movement. Round this most ardent advocate of evangelical doctrine and brilliant expositor of Christian philosophy were gathered great numbers of the noblest youth in Scotland, studying for Presbyterian ministry. With these were mingled many students from Ireland, England, and distant parts of the world, not all of them connected with Presbyterian churches.<sup>125</sup>

Consequently, many of his students became household names in Victorian Scotland; known for their powerful preaching, commitment to classical Reformed theology, and their burden for spiritual revival.

### **The Call for a Chair of Biblical Criticism in the Theological Hall**

In the midst of this ‘Golden Age’, Chalmers sought to raise the standards of Scottish theological education. Speaking to the Royal Commissioners, set up for the visitation of Universities and Colleges of Scotland between 31<sup>st</sup> August 1826 to the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1830s. Chalmers lamented the state of Biblical scholarship in Scotland. He made a passionate plea to see a chair of Biblical Criticism introduced into the Scottish Universities and Colleges. As highlighted in the previous

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<sup>125</sup> James Dodds, *Reminiscences of Dr. Chalmers*, in *The Leisure Hour Magazine*, (London: Paternoster Row, 1872), 347-349. This article is very informative about life as a student at Theological Hall during Chalmers’ time.

chapter, he was very keen that the next generation adopt a more Biblical and exegetical approach to formulating doctrine.<sup>126</sup>

However, his dream did not materialise within the Scottish Universities until after 1846. By which time Chalmers had resigned from the University of Edinburgh, and had become principal of New College. Chalmers' dream became a reality when Alexander Black was appointed professor of Exegetical Theology of New College in 1843.

Incidentally, Smeaton was only the second person to occupy the chair of Exegetical Theology at New College - he was appointed in 1857 following Professor Black. However, he was the first to occupy the chair of New Testament and Exegetical Theology in Aberdeen Free Church College - he was appointed in 1854. Thus, setting him apart as pioneer in this new and under-cultivated academic discipline in Scotland.

### **Reforming the Bachelor of Divinity**

From 1835 to 1837, Chalmers and his colleagues in the Divinity Hall of Edinburgh were successful in carrying out a number of reforms to the Bachelor of Divinity course. For instance, their reforms meant that the degree they awarded was based upon examinations which made it

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<sup>126</sup> One campaigner wrote 'We should have the Bible itself studied regularly and constantly in our theological classes. We cannot advocate the propriety of a Scripture education for the whole community, without being struck with the glaring inconsistency of classes for Divinity, where the Bible never once enters as a text book, except in as far as it furnishes the student with texts for his trial exercises.' W. M. Gunn, *Hints On the Study of Biblical Criticism in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Thomas Clark, 1838) 20. David Alan Currie, "The Growth of Evangelicalism in the Church of Scotland 1793-1843", (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 1991), 70.

credible to the student and the University which conferred it.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore their reforms made the course an ‘an instrument for awakening and strengthening in their pupils a desire for professional study’.<sup>128</sup> Significantly, these improvements happened during Smeaton’s time at the Divinity Hall. Meaning, he was among the first generation of Divinity students to undergo credible academic examinations in the nineteenth century Scotland. Thus, standing him in good stead for his future as a professional Scottish Biblical scholar.

### **Evangelical Revivals and The Formation of the Free Church**

In the late 1830s and the early 1840s, a number of evangelical revivals swept across Scotland. For instance, in July of 1839 revival broke out in Kilsyth under the ministry of William Chalmers Burns (1815 – 1868). The revival then spread to places like Perth and Dundee. In the 1840s, further revivals occurred in places such as Aberdeen, Ross-shire, and in several parts of Perthshire. These revivals helped to deepen commitment to the cause of Reformed Evangelicalism in Scotland. In fact, according to Smeaton, they ultimately culminated in the formation of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Graeme Auld, *Hebrew and Old Testament*, in *Disruption to Diversity Edinburgh Divinity: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell 1846-1996*, Edited by David F. Wright and Gary Badock, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 47.

<sup>128</sup> Graeme Auld, *Hebrew and Old Testament*, 47.

<sup>129</sup> Smeaton said regarding the Disruption, ‘The whole movement sprang from a revival of religion - to say nothing more in detail of that remarkable outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which, like a Pentecostal effusion, visited Kilsyth, Dundee, Perth, Strath-Tay, [and] Aberdeen.’ George Smeaton, *Memoir of Alexander Thomson of Banchory*, Edinburgh, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1869), 290.

The formation of the Free Church of Scotland was one of the most promising signs for the furtherance and defence of classical Reformed orthodoxy in Scotland. For instance, the Free Church's leadership was passionately committed to the key tenets of the Confession along with most of her ministers and students. The Free Church's flagship seminary, New College, in Edinburgh – as previously highlighted – led the way in bringing major improvements to Scottish theological education. Stewart Brown claims that under the leadership of Chalmers and Cunningham, New College took its place at the centre of international Reformed Evangelicalism. He wrote,

...between 1843 and 1861, New College developed the distinctive features – a well-defined curriculum centred on five core departments, an emphasis on biblical languages and literature, and a strong social commitment – that would characterise it for the next century and a half. It began to develop an international reputation as a centre of Reformed scholarship, forming a vital link between Reformed communions on the European continent and in North America.<sup>130</sup>

Furthermore, Brown informs us that in 1845-6

... Chalmers became absorbed by what he perceived as growing infidelity in the continental universities, and the need for Scottish Christians to prepare themselves for the onslaught of dangerous new theological and philosophical... For Chalmers, New College was ... called upon to lead the defence of the Reformed faith against the forces of modern biblical and historical scholarship and transcendental philosophy.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Stewart Brown, *Disruption to Diversity*, 30.

<sup>131</sup> Stewart Brown, *Disruption to Diversity*, 36.

This latter comment reveals that the central concerns of the intellectual odyssey of the Free Church in the mid-nineteenth century were: (1) the growing influence of modern German theological thought and (2) the desire for Scottish theologians to be rigorously educated in order to contribute robust works, especially of a Biblical nature, in the defence of Reformed scholarship.<sup>132</sup> Significantly, as we will see in chapter three, it was these major concerns which inspired Smeaton's atonement writings.

### **Biblical Scholarship and The Free Church**

From 1843 onwards, according to Joseph C. Holbrook, the leading Free Church theologians (Patrick Fairbairn, William Cunningham, George Smeaton, James Buchanan and others) 'produced a quantity and quality of Reformed literature, that has never been duplicated in such a short space of time in one country.'<sup>133</sup> Their works did much to improve academic Biblical and theological scholarship in Scotland and beyond.<sup>134</sup> For instance, in 1845, Fairbairn became internationally renowned as a Reformed theologian for publishing his classic work on the *Typology of Scripture* – by 1870 it had reached a 5<sup>th</sup> edition.

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<sup>132</sup> Chalmers also believed that what was needed was in Scotland '...a careful and methodical study of the bible, which had been lacking in the Scottish theological halls prior to the Disruption.' Stewart Brown, *Disruption to Diversity*, 46.

<sup>133</sup> Joseph C. Holbrook, "A Review Article: Fairbairn's Typology", in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 15/2 (May 1953), 187.

<sup>134</sup> *The Typology of Scripture, viewed in Connection with the Whole Series of the Divine Dispensations*. 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1845, 1870). In addition, his other works from this time include commentaries on Jonah and Ezekiel, a work on the interpretation of prophecy, and a work on biblical hermeneutics.

In 1845, the now Free-Church influenced T. and T. Clark released a series called the *Foreign Theological Library* containing English translations of a considerable number of German works of Biblical scholarship. It included works by Wilhelm Steiger, Ernst Hengstenberg, Franz Delitzsch, and Hermann Olshausen. Most of the works published were translations from German to English and some of the translations were carried out by the leading Free Church scholars.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, from the 1850s onwards, the average Scottish Presbyterian student or minister could line the shelves of his library with Biblical dictionaries, encyclopaedias, textbooks on systematic theology, hermeneutics, typology, and commentaries on the individual books of the Bible. This was all as a result of the growing contribution of Scottish professional biblical and theological scholars.

### **The Rise and Influence of German Theological Thought in Scotland**

It ought to be noted that the steady stream of Biblical and theological works from the continent into Scotland presented both a *challenge* and an *opportunity* to the early Scottish professional Biblical scholars. For instance, on the one hand, many of the continental thinkers were proponents of the Historical Critical method. Meaning, they did not uphold the classical Reformed orthodox tenet of verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. However, on the other hand, their Biblical and theological works were marked by superior exegetical learning and

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<sup>135</sup> For instance, in 1846, Fairbairn and Rev John Thompson translated Ernst's Hengstenberg's work on the Psalms. In 1850, Fairbairn also translated Friedrich Gustav's Lisco *The Parables of Jesus Explained and Illustrated*. In 1851-2, he translated Ernst Hengstenberg's two-volume commentary on *The Revelation*.

research. In the end, Free Church scholars were keen to respond to their errors. But at the same time wanted to learn from their superior exegetical learning.

In a series of lectures which were delivered in 1850, at the opening of New College on the Mound, a number of the Free Church professors spoke of how German Historical Critical thought posed a real threat and challenge to Scottish theological thought. There was real concern that the continental theologian's new methods were beginning to undermine the doctrine of inspiration.<sup>136</sup> Interestingly, a cursory reading of Smeaton's introductory lectures at Aberdeen Free Church college in 1853 and 1854 reveals that he shared similar concerns.<sup>137</sup>

Conversely, there is also evidence to indicate that German theological thought was appreciated by the leading Free Church scholars. This can be seen in the pages of *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* - a theological journal founded by Free Churchmen. In fact, it was Smeaton, a key contributor to the journal, who led the way in drawing attention to German theological thought.

For instance, in 1853, he introduced to the pages of *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, the subsection called the *Foreign Theological Review*. Explaining the purpose of the *Foreign Theological Review*, Smeaton informed his readers that the *main* intention was to reproduce in the pages of this British journal, German theological articles which were 'evangelical in tone and Calvinistic in doctrine.'<sup>138</sup> He admitted that some of the German

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<sup>136</sup> *Inauguration of the New College of the Free Church, Edinburgh: With Introductory Lectures on Theology, Philosophy, and Natural Science*, (London & Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1851) 125-6.

<sup>137</sup> See George Smeaton, *The Basis of Christian Doctrine in Divine Fact*, n.p. and George Smeaton, *Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*.

<sup>138</sup> George Smeaton, *Foreign Theological Review*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 2 (1853), 246-247.



evangelical theological journals often contained very mixed theology. But at the same time, they had many points of distinction and superiority, especially, in exegetical learning and research.<sup>139</sup> On these merits, he recognised they were set to exercise real influence over British and American theological thought. Therefore, their contributions could not be ignored.

Smeaton believed strongly that British and American theologians needed to acquaint themselves with their writings in order to distinguish and separate the positive and negative contributions of German thought to modern Biblical scholarship.<sup>140</sup> He also believed that interaction with their writings was necessary based on a Biblical conviction: ‘no one church can say of any other church on which the living Spirit of God breathes, “I have no need of thee.”’<sup>141</sup> Even though, Smeaton did not share many of the theological presuppositions of the continental theologians, he did admire various aspects of their exegetical learning and their theological emphases - such as their emphasis on Christology and union with Christ.<sup>142</sup>

One of Smeaton’s earliest articles published in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* looked at *Augustus Neander (1789-1850) – his influence, system, and various writings* (1853). Neander was a leading German mediating theologian.<sup>143</sup> In the article Smeaton

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<sup>139</sup> George Smeaton, *Foreign Theological Review*, 701-739.

<sup>140</sup> George Smeaton, *Foreign Theological Review*, 701-739.

<sup>141</sup> George Smeaton, *Foreign Theological Review*, 701-739.

<sup>142</sup> George Smeaton, *Foreign Theological Review*, 701-739.

<sup>143</sup> Mediating theologians sought to ‘mediate’ between the ‘subjective or speculative intellectual tendencies’ and ‘orthodoxy.’ Joshua Bennett, *God and Progress: Religion & History in British Intellectual Culture, 1845-1914*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28. According to Annette G. Aubert, the mediating approach ‘emphasized Schleiermacher’s synthesis of the “life and feeling of religion” (*Lebens und Gefühlsreligiosität*)

reveals his attitude towards both Neander and Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). In his mind, these two men were the founders of the mediating school of theology.<sup>144</sup> He said: ‘These men are universally regarded as the two great leaders of opinion in modern Germany. Their influence on their country forms an epoch in its religious history.’<sup>145</sup>

Interestingly, Smeaton had both positive and negative things to say about Schleiermacher and Neander. Regarding Schleiermacher’s contribution to theology he wrote:

In a word, he laboured to secure for theology an independent footing where neither philosophy nor criticism could assail her. That there is a truth in this position, no Christian man will hesitate to acknowledge. That it is a vital and central principle...is undoubted.<sup>146</sup>

However, he also stated:

But that Christian consciousness is the only source of spiritual knowledge, is a principle one-sided, defective, and perilous. We cannot, without the risk of evils from which the imagination shrinks put inward subjective experience in the place of Scripture, or the spirit within in place of the Word without... Schleiermacher shrunk from no consequences to which his principle led him. Nothing was accounted doctrine which did not flow by an easy and legitimate deduction from the Christian consciousness.<sup>147</sup>

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with the “historical-critical method.”” For a more in-depth definition see Annette G. Aubert *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 71-73.

<sup>144</sup> George Smeaton, *August Neander*, 701-739.

<sup>145</sup> George Smeaton, *August Neander*, 701-739.

<sup>146</sup> George Smeaton, *August Neander*, 701-739.

<sup>147</sup> George Smeaton, *August Neander*, 701-739.

With regards to Neander's contribution to German theological thought, he wrote,

Of all the writers in this century distinguished by a realistic turn of mind, who can see no doctrine apart from the Redeemer's person, and who seems impatient till he puts all the doctrines in a massive, concrete, personal form, Neander is by far the most remarkable. His views of doctrine are often defective, and sometime lax. But the centripetal force by which he is carried in this realistic manner to the personal Redeemer furnishes a strong corrective. Christ is for him the organism of all truth, the scattered rays of which are thus found, as it were, concentrated in a focus. Truth is thus seen in a substantial realistic way. This, then, is the course of thought which Theology has taken in the present day.<sup>148</sup>

He added,

In Neander's case the principle [Christian consciousness] was comparatively safe, because it was the Christian consciousness of a holy man. If nothing were uttered but the Christian consciousness of converted men, subjectivity might, within proper bounds, be useful in many respects: it would have much in common with the views of Principal Edwards in his *Treatise on the Affections*: it would be much akin to the subjective spirituality of the Puritan theology.<sup>149</sup>

Smeaton's contrasting views of Schleiermacher and Neander are noteworthy. They reveal that he was able to discern the strengths and the weaknesses of theologians whom he greatly differed from, theologically speaking.

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<sup>148</sup> George Smeaton, *August Neander*, 701-739.

<sup>149</sup> George Smeaton, *August Neander*, 701-739.

Even though, a major aspect of the theological agenda of Scottish Reformed theologians in the mid-nineteenth century was to defend Reformed orthodoxy against German ‘infidel’ views; many of them, like Smeaton, were keen to learn from German theologians. This is a noteworthy development because it was this catholic outlook which enabled Smeaton to make a bold and ironic innovation.

### **The Rise and Influence of Broad School Theology in Scotland**

At the same time that German mediating theology was influencing Scottish Reformed theologians, British ‘Broad School’ theology enjoyed a revival and began to influence Scottish Reformed thought as well. Similar to mediating theology, Broad School theologians sought to mediate between subjective tendencies and doctrinal orthodoxy. In the mid-nineteenth century, the leading Broad School proponents in Scotland were John McLeod Campbell and John Tulloch (1823-1886). In England, F. D. Maurice (1805-1872), F W. Robertson (1816-1853), and Baldwin Brown (1820–1884) were among the leading proponents of Broad School theology.

In 1853, the English Broad School theologian, F. D. Maurice published his *Theological Essays*, in which he attacked key tenets of classical orthodoxy.<sup>150</sup> This publication led to his dismissal as a professor in Kings College. It also provoked a response from Free Church minister and theologian Robert Candlish, who published *Examination of Maurice’s*

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<sup>150</sup> Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays*, (Cambridge: Macmillan & co, 1853).

*Theological Essay* in the following year.<sup>151</sup> In this work Candlish addressed the kernel of the controversy, namely, the juridical aspect of Reformed theology.

However, more Broad School writings followed. The sermons of F. W. Robertson were published in 1856.<sup>152</sup> In 1859, the English Congregationalist James Baldwin Brown published *The Divine Life in Man*,<sup>153</sup> and in 1860 *The Doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood in Relation to the Atonement*.<sup>154</sup>

In Scotland, in 1856, John McLeod Campbell published his magnum opus, *The Nature of the Atonement*.<sup>155</sup> In it, Campbell denied federal theology, penal suffering, and imputation - all key tenets within the classical Reformed orthodox understanding of the atonement. Instead, he promoted a universal understanding of the atonement founded not on any context of the law or justice, but on God's fatherly love. In 1862, Professor John Caird (1820-1898), honoured Campbell with an honorary doctorate. He commented in his address to Campbell that the heretic had converted the Church of Scotland. This comment reveals that Broad School theological thought had now taken hold in the Church of Scotland.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Robert S. Candlish, *Examination of Maurice's Theological Essay*, (London: James Nisbet and co: 1854).

<sup>152</sup> F. W. Robertson, *Sermons Preached at the Trinity Chapel, Brighton*, (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1856).

<sup>153</sup> James Baldwin Brown, *The Divine Live in Man*, (London, Ward and Co., 1859).

<sup>154</sup> *The Doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood in Relation to the Atonement*, (London: Ward and Co., 1860).

<sup>155</sup> John McLeod Campbell *The Nature of the Atonement: And its relation to remission of sins and eternal life*. (Cambridge: Macmillan and co., 1856).

<sup>156</sup> Andrew Purves, *Erskine of Linlathen, Irving, and McLeod Campbell*, in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott eds., *The History of Scottish Theology: The Early Enlightenment and Late Victorian Era*, Vol II, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 240.

In the pages of *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Smeaton published an article critiquing the atonement theology of Campbell and Brown: *False theories of the atonement – McLeod Campbell and Baldwin Brown* (1861). In 1860, Hugh Martin published a pamphlet attacking Broad School theology: *Broad Church Theology and Professor Blackie’s Eulogy on Robertson of Brighton*.<sup>157</sup> In 1864, Candlish delivered the inaugural *Cunningham Lectures on The Fatherhood of God*.<sup>158</sup> Again, his aim was to silence the Broad School’s theological deviations. Ironically, Candlish’s *Cunningham Lectures* provoked a response from his fellow classical Reformed orthodox theologian Thomas Crawford of the Church of Scotland, who published *The Fatherhood of God considered in its General and Special Aspects and Particularly in Relation to the Atonement* in 1866.<sup>159</sup> Here now was an interesting development in Scottish theological controversy: classical Reformed orthodox theologians fighting among themselves.<sup>160</sup>

When Tulloch was professor of Divinity at the University of St Andrews, he was arguably the leading academic Broad School theologian in Scotland. Indeed, Cheyne claims he had the greatest responsibility for the transformation brought about in the Scottish religious scene in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>161</sup> For instance, in 1854, Tulloch in his inaugural lecture entitled *Theology Trends of the Age* asserted that it was time for free inquiry into the

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<sup>157</sup> Hugh Martin, *Broad Church Theology and Professor Blackie’s Eulogy on Robertson of Brighton*. (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1860).

<sup>158</sup> Robert Smith Candlish, *The Fatherhood of God*, (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1864).

<sup>159</sup> Thomas Crawford, *The Fatherhood of God considered in its General and Special Aspects and Particularly in Relation to the Atonement*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons., 1866).

<sup>160</sup> For further discussion on this controversy see Tim Trumper, “An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition”, (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 2001), 337-397.

<sup>161</sup> A. A. Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 140.

Bible. According to Ian Hamilton, Tulloch's approach 'short circuited the Church's doctrinal Standards as effective, or even desirable, formulations of the Christian faith.'<sup>162</sup> In 1866, Tulloch contended that 'it is well-nigh impossible that the old relation of our Church, to the Westminster Confession can continue.'<sup>163</sup> In his writings, he expressed his appreciation for the early challengers of Scottish Reformed orthodoxy - Thomas Erskine, John McLeod Campbell and Edward Irving. He also was appreciative of Samuel Coleridge, claiming that Coleridge 'made Christian doctrine alive to the Reason as well as the Conscience – tenable as a philosophy as well as an evangel.'<sup>164</sup>

As the second half of the nineteenth century progressed, the evidence reveals that many within Scottish Presbyterianism were moving away from a firm commitment the theological tenets of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Significantly, it was into this context and as a result of Smeaton's thorough engagement with both Mediating theology and British Broad School theology that he developed his new theological method. He applied it to the study of the atonement because he sought to turn people's minds away from 'unprofitable speculation' in the study of atonement theology.<sup>165</sup>

### **The Rise and Influence of Historical-Criticism in Scotland<sup>166</sup>**

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<sup>162</sup> Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinistic Orthodoxy*, 123.

<sup>163</sup> Anonymous, *Critical Notices, The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Volume 15, (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1866), 214.

<sup>164</sup> John Tulloch, *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century* (Victorian Library re-issue, 1971), 19.

<sup>165</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, xi.

<sup>166</sup> Higher criticism, also known as Historical-Critical Method, is a method of examining the Bible in which the critic attempts to discover what was 'originally' meant by the various biblical authors, in the cultural and

In the 1860s, a number of British theologians began adopting German historical-critical methods to the Bible. For instance, in 1860, the Oxford Essayists' published *Essays and Reviews* which was a collection of seven essays on Christianity. It covered such topics as the evidences of Christianity, religious thought in England, the cosmology of Genesis and the German historical-critical method of the Tubingen School. According to Smeaton in an article in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* in 1861

These *Essays and Reviews* have done more than any book ... to startle and alarm the Christian public, at least within the pale of the Church of England.<sup>167</sup>

He added,

They bring before us the destructive theology of Germany, and the Hegelian philosophy on which the former rests. They are not a mere resemblance, but a reproduction of Baur and Strauss, as far at least as England was thought capable of receiving their conclusions. Every essay in the volume is more or less tainted with the school of Tubingen...<sup>168</sup>

However, it was at the same time that the methods of Historical-Criticism began to be adopted in Scotland. Ironically, it was scholars within the Free Church of Scotland – the

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historical setting. In contrast to (lower) criticism, historical (higher) criticism utilises the methods of secular historical research. One of the key presuppositions of those who employ this method is the Bible can be studied and researched like other human writings, and one major result of the investigations are classical Reformed orthodox beliefs are called into question – not least the supernatural inspiration of Scripture. When this method is employed dates and events, people and places are examined and scrutinized.

<sup>167</sup> George Smeaton, *Oxford Essayists – their Relation to Christianity and to Strauss and Baur, The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 10, (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1861), 407.

<sup>168</sup> George Smeaton, *Oxford Essayists*, 408.



bastion of classical Reformed orthodoxy – that began voicing their support for German Historical-Criticism.

For instance, the evidence suggests that it was A. B. Davidson, an Old Testament professor at New College, who started teaching his students the methods of Historical-Criticism. For instance, according to Kenneth Ross, Davidson ‘was an overwhelmingly effective teacher, initiating an entire generation of FC students into the novelties of the critical method.’<sup>169</sup>

George Adam Smith described him as the ‘the real author of the greatest theological change that had come over Scotland for centuries.’<sup>170</sup> When John ‘Rabbi’ Duncan discerned that his junior colleague A. B. Davidson was shifting his position, John Macleod informs us that he ‘called in the help of Smeaton to do what he could do to reclaim him.’<sup>171</sup> This reveals that Smeaton was evidently a man who cared deeply about upholding classical Reformed orthodoxy against Historical-Critical developments.

However, according to Kenneth Ross, it was William Robertson Smith’s celebrated case that *publicly* marked the entry of Historical-Criticism into the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>172</sup> Smith was a student of both Smeaton and Davidson. During his time at New College, he took a keen interest in German theology. In 1867 and 1869 he travelled to Germany and sat under some of the leading proponents of Historical-Criticism such as Albrecht Ritschl and Herman Lotze.

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<sup>169</sup>Nick R. Needham, *Andrew Bruce Davidson*, in Nigel M. de S. Cameron ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 235.

<sup>170</sup> George Adam Smith, *Professor A.B. Davidson* in *The Union Magazine*, March 1902.

<sup>171</sup> John Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 288.

<sup>172</sup> Kenneth R. Ross, *Church and Creed in Scotland: The Free Church Case 1900-04 and its Origins*, (Edinburgh, Rutherford House, 1988), 157.

When Smith completed his studies at New College in 1870, he was appointed Professor of Hebrew in Aberdeen Free Church College. Nigel Cameron states that ‘...his [Smith’s] conversion to the “advanced” critical conclusions of German OT scholarship did not take place until sometime after his arrival in Aberdeen.’<sup>173</sup> Indeed, his articles in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* were the hard evidence that German Historical-Critical thinking had taken root in a published work of a Scottish theologian. In 1881, Smith was deposed from his chair over his views on the inspiration of the Bible. Revealing that the classical orthodox movement in the Free Church still had strength to hold the tide. In 1879, in the midst of Smith’s heresy trial, Smeaton republished Chalmers’ lecture on the doctrine of inspiration.

However, the victory for the conservatives was short lived. When Smeaton passed away in 1889, Marcus Dods was appointed as his successor. According to Ian Hamilton,

The election in 1889, of Marcus Dods to the New Testament Chair of New College seemed to many the final demise of the traditionally held confessional teaching on inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>174</sup>

## Summary

In short, Smeaton lived through a lively time in Scottish church and theological history. Reared in the classical Reformed orthodox theological tradition, Smeaton witnessed the slow but steady theological downgrade which introduced a broader spectrum of beliefs and methods to Scottish theology. However, it was his awareness and intimate knowledge of these developments which inspired him to make a thoughtful, fresh, and timely contribution to Scottish Biblical scholarship. As we will see in the next chapter, the key aspect of his

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<sup>173</sup> Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *William Robertson Smith*, in Nigel M. de S. Cameron ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 782.

<sup>174</sup> Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinistic Orthodoxy*, 174.

contribution was applying a method which both upheld the doctrine of inspiration and opposed the results of Christian consciousness. Thus, on the one hand, his new method had to be biblical in nature; and on the other hand, it had to produce objective results.

## **Overview of the Major Developments Connected with the**

### **Doctrine of the Atonement**

Simultaneous, to the aforementioned developments, the doctrine of the atonement found itself at the forefront of discussions and controversies in the various Reformed denominations of Scotland. It was, of course, a pivotal tenet of Reformed orthodoxy. Below we will briefly highlight some of the major atonement discussions and controversies which took place during Smeaton's lifetime and how they inspired him to apply a new method to the study of atonement.

#### **The Church of Scotland and The Row Heresy**

As already mentioned, in 1830-1831, John McLeod Campbell, minister of Row Parish Church in Dumbartonshire, was libelled for heresy in the Presbytery of Dumbarton. He was found guilty of preaching a universal atonement and pardon through the death of Jesus, and teaching that the doctrine of assurance was of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation. The General Assembly voted 116 to 6 to depose him from the ministry of the Church of Scotland.<sup>175</sup>

From 1830 there was a flurry of publications defending the classical Reformed understanding of the atonement. A number of them were written in direct response to Campbell's heterodox

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<sup>175</sup> Thomas Erskine, *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, edited by William Hanna, (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1884), 106.

doctrine. The leading publications include: Andrew Thomson's *The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted, in a Series of Sermons* (1830); Daniel Dewar's *The Nature, Reality, and Efficacy of the Atonement* (1831); William Symington's *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ* (1834). There were also some smaller works published at this time.<sup>176</sup> Evidently, the strong reaction among conservative theologians highlighted the importance of the doctrine of the atonement to classical Reformed orthodoxy. It was within this lively theological environment that a young George Smeaton was just beginning his theological studies at the University of Edinburgh.

### **The United Secession Church and The Atonement Controversy (1841-1845)**

Whilst Smeaton was a young Church of Scotland minister in Falkland, the United Secession Church had a controversy on the atonement – the ‘Atonement Controversy’ (1841-45). It started when Dr Andrew Marshall (1802–54) of Kirkintilloch charged two Professors, Dr John Brown (1784–1858) and Dr Robert Balmer (1787–1844) with teaching an understanding of the extent of the atonement that was incompatible with the Confession of the church. The immediate outcome of this controversy was the suspension of Rev. James Morrison in 1841. While there were eight charges against him, the main one was that he taught ‘election comes in the order of nature after the atonement.’<sup>177</sup> He also believed that Christ died for all indiscriminately, and that election refers to the application of Christ's

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<sup>176</sup> Robert Burns, *The Gairloch heresy tried: In a letter to the Rev. John M. Campbell, of Row; and a sermon preached at Helensburgh and at Port-Glasgow*, (Paisley: Gardner, 1830). John Smyth, *A Treatise on the Forgiveness of Sins, as the privilege of the Redeemed in Opposition to the Doctrine of Universal Pardon*, (Glasgow: Thomas Ogilvie, 1830).

<sup>177</sup> Ian Hamilton, *Atonement Controversy*, in Nigel M. de S. Cameron ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 41-44.

atonement and not its provision.<sup>178</sup> Brown attempted to defend Morison. But to no avail. He was suspended from ministry in the United Secession Church.

Over the next few years the United Secession Church's 'Atonement Controversy' led to various publications on the subject. In 1841, John Brown published *Notes Chiefly Historical on the Question Respecting the Extent of the Reference of the Death of Christ*. In 1842 Marshall published *The Death of Christ the Redemption of his People* and in 1844, *The Catholic Doctrine of Redemption vindicated; or Modern Views of the Atonement, particularly those of Dr. Wardlaw, examined and refuted*. Balmer republished an essay by Edward Polhill (1622-1694), *Essay on the Extent of the Death of Christ* (1842) and wrote the recommendatory preface. According to Ian Hamilton these publications 'crystallized the Controversy and polarized opinion in the Church.'<sup>179</sup>

The controversy within the United Secession Church also inspired theologians from out with the denomination to address the issue. For instance, in 1846, William Cunningham (Free Church) William Symington (Reformed Presbyterian), Robert Candlish (Free Church) and Thomas M'Crie (Secession Church) endorsed the Scottish edition of Charles Hodge's (1797–1878) *The Orthodox Doctrine regarding the Extent of the Atonement*. This work was re-published in order to persuade Scottish Christians of the merits of the classical Reformed orthodox viewpoint on the atonement. Significantly, Smeaton also commended Hodge's work on the atonement.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ian Hamilton, *Atonement Controversy*, 41-44.

<sup>179</sup> Ian Hamilton, *Atonement Controversy*, 41-44.

<sup>180</sup> George Smeaton, *False theories of the atonement – M'Leod Campbell and Baldwin Brown*, *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 10, (London: James Nisbet & Co, 1861), 545.

### *Broad School Theology and the Atonement*

The revival of Broad School theology, in the second half of the nineteenth century, saw numerous works on the atonement appear. The two leading Broad School works were written by Baldwin Brown and John McLeod Campbell. In 1861 Robert Candlish, published *The Atonement: Its Reality, Completeness, and Extent*.<sup>181</sup> It was published to silence the Broad School views on the atonement. The same year it met with a reply from James Morison, the deposed minister of the United Secession Church, entitled a *Vindication of the Universality of the Atonement*.<sup>182</sup> This was a lively time of theological discussion between classical Reformed orthodox theologians and Broad School theologians.

### **The Free Church and The Union Controversy (1863-1873)**

Between 1863 and 1873 the Free Church experienced what was called the ‘Union Controversy’ – a debate over the question of an ecclesiastical union with the United Presbyterian Church. Those within the Free Church who were opposed to the union did so mainly on the grounds of the original constitution of the Free Church.<sup>183</sup> However, they also rejected the union because they perceived an erosion of classical Reformed orthodoxy within the United Presbyterian Church in relation to their views on the extent of the atonement.<sup>184</sup> Smeaton was one of the leaders within the Constitutionalist Party – along with James Begg,

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<sup>181</sup> Robert Smith Candlish, *The Atonement: Its Reality, Completeness, and Extent*, (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1861).

<sup>182</sup> James Morison, *Vindication of the Universality of the Atonement*, (Glasgow: Wallace & Co., 1861).

<sup>183</sup> Kenneth Ross, *Constitutionalists*, 208.

<sup>184</sup> Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy*, 85.

John Kennedy, and Hugh Martin – who sought to oppose the union on the grounds of their heterodox views on the extent of the atonement.<sup>185</sup>

In 1870, Smeaton's close friend Hugh Martin published *The Atonement: in its relations to covenant, priesthood and the intercession of our Lord*. Most of the contents of Martin's book started as articles originally written for the *Watchword* magazine (an anti-union Free Church magazine). James MacGregor (1829-1894)<sup>186</sup> also addressed the orthodox understanding of the atonement uncompromisingly when he published *The Question of Principle Now Raised in the Free Church Specially Regarding the Atonement*. He argued that the United Presbyterian's toleration of Amyraldism was the central reason why the question of union was out of bounds. In the Free Church General Assembly of 1873, Smeaton made a rare appearance and remarked in a speech that there was a yawning and impassable gulf between the two churches:

I am ready to prove at any one moment that the United Presbyterian Church... not merely allows, but adopts the doctrine of universal atonement, irrespective of any distinction between elect and non-elect...I never will consent to legalize this error in the church...<sup>187</sup>

Smeaton's twin volumes on the atonement were published near the end of the Union Controversy. Although they were written primarily to be a fresh academic contribution to the

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<sup>185</sup> This group also included James Buchanan, John Duncan, James Gibson, James MacGregor, Andrew and Horatius Bonar, Alexander Moody Stewart, Julius Wood and William Nixon. John R. Fleming, *A History of the Church in Scotland, 1843–1874*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1927), 180.

<sup>186</sup> James MacGregor, *The Question of Principle Now Raised in the Free Church Specially Regarding the Atonement* (Edinburgh: John Maclaren, 1870).

<sup>187</sup> *Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 28 May 1873. 154-157.

subject, the prominence given to it as a result of the Union Controversy may well have strengthened and intensified his desire to publish a work on the atonement. Incidentally, Smeaton's first volume on the atonement was lauded in the *Watchword* in 1868 by Hugh Martin who said 'it meets with our almost unqualified approbation'.<sup>188</sup>

### **German Academic Biblical Scholars and The Atonement**

In the mid to late 1860s, the leading academic Biblical scholars in Europe were publishing Biblical and academic works on the doctrine of the atonement. According to Malcolm Kinnear, interest in the atonement by professional Biblical scholars came as a result of their belief that the evidence obtained through the science of Biblical exegesis would provide the best answers to questions on the atonement.<sup>189</sup>

The writers involved reflect various shades of theological opinion and they represent different ecclesiastical backgrounds. Their arguments started from different places: some found Calvinism morally abhorrent, while others were happy to be identified with Calvinism. They were, however, united by their belief that the nature of the atonement could be made clear by a study of the biblical evidence. The central issue to be decided was whether the penal substitutionary theory was an adequate statement of the biblical teaching. The exegesis of key verses was crucial to the debate.<sup>190</sup>

Continental Biblical scholars such as Johannes Christian Konrad von Hofmann published *The Scriptural Proof* (1852-1856); and *Schutzschriften* (1856-1859). Gottfried Thomasius (1802–

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<sup>188</sup> Hugh Martin, 'The Atonement,' *The Watchword* 3 (1868–69), 226-233. The fact that Union was prevented from happening, indicates that Smeaton and his colleagues prevailed for the time being. But in 1900 the Free Church did unite with the United Presbyterian Church.

<sup>189</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 6.

<sup>190</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 6.



1875) published *Christ's Person and Work* in 1862. Wolfgang Friedrich Gess (1819-1891) published *Christ's Person and Work after Christ's Testimony and the Testimonies of the Apostles* in 1870. All of these works tackled the atonement from a Biblical-Exegetical basis.

Significantly, Smeaton's *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* (1868) was the first Scottish academic and Biblical work on the atonement. Malcolm Kinnear asserted, 'Smeaton was the first of the professional Biblical scholars to take up the issue of the atonement, and his exegetical focus anticipated the character of later discussions.'<sup>191</sup>

Smeaton's reason for addressing the atonement was because he lived in a day in which there were various conflicting viewpoints on the doctrine. Thus, he saw it as his task, as an academic biblical scholar, to defend and uphold the classical Reformed orthodox viewpoint in Scotland. Moreover, as we will see in the next chapter, it was the aforementioned continental divines' contribution's which largely inspired the character and shape of Smeaton's work.

## **Overview of the Various Methods applied to the Study of the Atonement prior to 1868**

In order to discern whether Smeaton's new method was ground-breaking, it is necessary to highlight the leading methods applied to the doctrine of the atonement before 1868 – the year Smeaton published his first volume work, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*.

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<sup>191</sup> For instance, in 1871, Thomas Crawford published his biblical and academic atonement work, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement*. Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 131

### **The Homiletical Method – Andrew Thomson (1779–1831)**

During the ‘Row Hersey’ Andrew Thomson preached a series of twelve sermons in St George’s church, Edinburgh. They were published under the title: *The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted, in a Series of Sermons*. Thomson’s main aim was to defend the classical Reformed orthodox view of limited atonement against the theory of universal pardon – which was being propagated by Thomas Erskine and John McLeod Campbell.<sup>192</sup>

The twelve sermons of Thomson are biblical and doctrinal in character. In the first four sermons, he expounds verses 7 and 8 of Psalm 130 and he focuses upon the doctrinal truth that these verses present.<sup>193</sup> Then, in sermons five to twelve, he presents the orthodox view of doctrine of the atonement by examining multiple verses and passages. He focuses particular attention on the Scriptures used by Erskine and Campbell to support their theory of universal pardon.

In all twelve sermons, it is clear that Thomson wanted his congregation to understand how he arrived at his orthodox views of the atonement, namely, by submitting to the authority and the plain teaching of Scripture. Conversely, he taught his congregation that those who held to unorthodox views of the atonement had arrived at their conclusions because of their subjective approach to the Scriptures. In Thomson’s mind, they approached the Scriptures

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<sup>192</sup> Andrew Thomson, *The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted, in a Series of Sermons*, (Edinburgh: William Whyte & Co, 1830).

<sup>193</sup> For instance, in sermon one he expounds on an attribute of God: mercy. In sermon two he expounds upon the doctrinal meaning of ‘plenteous redemption’. In sermon three, he expounds upon the doctrinal meaning ‘Lord will redeem Israel all her iniquities’. Andrew Thomson, *The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted, in a Series of Sermons*, 1-60.

whilst holding to novel ideas developed as a result of their own subjective feelings. In other words, they employed the method of Christian consciousness.<sup>194</sup>

Thomson's two key principles of Biblical interpretation can be summarised as follows: (1) the right mode of Scripture interpretation involves understanding the true import and plain meaning of the words and passages; and (2) the wrong mode of Scripture interpretation involves forming your own theory first, and then coming to the Bible in order to find proof for what you have determined to be the truth. Thomson's sermons reveal that he was gifted in the area of logic. Indeed, throughout his sermons he delights in exposing the inconsistencies and the fallacies contained in his opponent's dogmatic arguments.

The twelve sermons vary in style and length. But at the beginning of each sermon, Thomson lays out the main proposition. Then he commences with a brief introduction. The main body of each sermon is a rigorous doctrinal discourse. Some sermons defend the orthodox understanding; other sermons refute the heterodox understanding of the atonement. Most of his sermons contain some practical application and often by way of concluding remarks. In short, Thomson's sermons on the atonement were biblical, doctrinal and polemical discourses.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Andrew Thomson, *The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted, in a Series of Sermons*, 284-5.

<sup>195</sup> See Thomson's other published sermons: *Sermons on Infidelity* (1821) were written to challenge Deism and Atheism; and *Sermons on Various Subjects* (1829) contain discourses that challenge modern notions of assurance and Edward Irving's erroneous views of the human nature of Christ. His *Sermons on Hearing The Word Preached* (1825) also illustrate the nature of polemical preaching.

## The Dogmatic Method - Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)

Chalmers' *Institutes of Theology* are a work of systematic theology.<sup>196</sup> Some have argued that the doctrine of the atonement is the central subject of his *Institutes*.<sup>197</sup> The *Institutes* are divided into two major sections: 1) 'Prolegomena' and 2) 'Subject-Matter of Christianity'. Section one is subdivided into three sections: *General and Introductory* (three chapters), *Natural Theology* (three chapters), and *Evidences of Christianity* (ten chapters). Section two is also further subdivided into four sections: *On the disease for which the Gospel remedy is provided* (eight chapters), *On the nature of the Gospel remedy* (thirteen chapters), *On the extent of the Gospel remedy* (seven chapters), and *Supplementary Lectures* (six chapters).

Intriguingly, the *Institutes* do not follow the standard arrangement of Reformed systematic theologies. Instead of commencing with a study of the doctrine of God (following the practice of John Calvin, Francis Turretin, and Charles Hodge), Chalmers commences his

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<sup>196</sup> Historically speaking, the dogmatic approach to theology, commences 'with a view of the Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion', followed by 'showing the Scriptural foundation of each doctrine in succession', then, 'pointing out the harmony of each with reason and with man's natural knowledge', then 'exhibiting the mutual connexion and dependence of the whole series of dogmas' and finally 'polemically defending them against other doctrines held to be unscriptural and erroneous.' Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 372.

<sup>197</sup> Daniel F. Rice, *An Attempt at Systematic Reconstruction in the Theology of Thomas Chalmers*, Church History, vol. 48, no. 2, June 1979, 174-188. However, Mark Elliot, more accurately, suggests that the focus in the *Institutes* is actually on 'the move from the cross as objective satisfaction to the imputation of Christ's whole righteousness to all the believer's life.' Mark W. Elliot, *Natural and Revealed Theology in Hill and Chalmers*, in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott eds., *The History of Scottish Theology: The Early Enlightenment and Late Victorian Era*, Vol II, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 179. Either way, these two opinions suggest that both the accomplishment and the application of the atonement have a central place in Chalmers' dogmatic theology.

*Institutes* addressing the subject of man's depravity and he concludes the *Institutes* looking at the doctrine of God. 'The doctrine of man's moral character ought to have the first place... and the doctrine of God's mysterious constitution the last place in the argumentation of our science.'<sup>198</sup> Donald Macleod informs us that Chalmers' re-ordering reflects Hill's arrangement in his *Lectures of Divinity*.<sup>199</sup> Macleod claims that this novel arrangement also reflects Chalmers' lifelong commitment 'to the practical importance of the doctrine of total depravity.'<sup>200</sup>

However, there appears to be another determinative factor for his arrangement, namely, his preferred method of investigation. Chalmers utilised the inductive method in his study of the Scriptures. According to Daniel Rice, 'Awed by the accomplishments of the inductive method in science, Chalmers anticipated a remarkable degree of success by simply appropriating that methodology for theology.'<sup>201</sup> Chalmers believed the inductive method served 'as a procedural safeguard against a false starting-point in theology eliminating speculative philosophy as the determining factor in shaping Christian theology.'<sup>202</sup> One anonymous reviewer wrote,

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<sup>198</sup> *Posthumous Works of the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D.D., LL.D.*, Edited by the Rev William Hanna, LL.D., Vol VII. (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1849), xvii.

<sup>199</sup> Donald Macleod, *Systematic Theology*, in Nigel M. de S. Cameron ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 811.

<sup>200</sup> Michael Brautigam has written, 'As regards to theology, Chalmers has often been characterized as more of a practical than a systematic theologian.' Donald Macleod, *Systematic Theology*, 811.

<sup>201</sup> Daniel F. Rice, *An Attempt at Systematic Reconstruction in the Theology of Thomas Chalmers*, 174-188.

<sup>202</sup> Daniel F. Rice, *An Attempt at Systematic Reconstruction in the Theology of Thomas Chalmers*, 174-188.

[Chalmers] ...began his labors with those practical truths, which lie upon the surface of revelation, and come into immediate contact with the hearts of men, and for this his success and experience as a preacher gave him peculiar fitness. Fixing thus the meaning of the plain doctrines, and the current language of Scripture, he worked his way inward, by rigid analysis and keen penetration, to those interior principles and harmonizing unities which can be ascertained only by a clear apprehension and induction of the facts in which they manifest themselves.<sup>203</sup>

Recognition of Chalmers' inductive method is important because this method of investigation exercised a significant influence over the next generation of classical Reformed theologians in Scotland. According to Bräutigam, Chalmers' Scripture-based approach 'set the standard for subsequent FC theology ... and it proved influential for other Disruption 'fathers', especially for Cunningham and Smeaton.<sup>204</sup>

Chalmers may have given the *Institutes* a novel arrangement and led the way in the novel application of the inductive method, but it needs to be highlighted that he had no intention of introducing any novel doctrinal content. The *Institutes* unpack the key tenets of classical Reformed orthodoxy. Thus, Michael Bräutigam is right when he claims that Chalmers

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<sup>203</sup> Anonymous, *Chalmers on the Inductive Method in Theology, and the Nature of Christian Doctrine*, The New Englander, Volume 8, (New Haven: John B. Carrington, 1850), 207.

<sup>204</sup> Michael Bräutigam, *Free Church Theology 1843-1900*, in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott eds., *The History of Scottish Theology: The Early Enlightenment and Late Victorian Era*, Vol II, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 245.

combined in an ‘original manner’ loyalty to the tenets of classical Reformed orthodoxy with a creative openness to the intellectual movements of science and philosophy.<sup>205</sup>

### **The Doctrine of Atonement in Chalmers’ *Institutes of Theology***

In volume II of the *Institutes*, Chalmers commences his examination of the atonement by highlighting the need to address it from a Scriptural viewpoint. Chalmers asserted:

...To restrain inquiry within its proper boundaries, and give a right direction to it, would require a *novum organum* for our science, wherein to fix and define what may be termed the logic of theology, to limit and lay on its own rightful foundation the philosophy of the Christian argument. I have often affirmed in your hearing, that in no science and no subject of human contemplation, has the spirit of hypothesis dared more presumptuously, or wantoned more licentiously, than in our own.<sup>206</sup>

Significantly, it appears that Chalmers in his *Institutes* called for a new method to be found for the discipline of theology. Moreover, this comment indicates that Smeaton’s initial interest in finding and applying a new method – one that was biblical and inductive - may well have been inspired (once again) from the instruction of his beloved professor, Dr Chalmers.

The reason Chalmers laid emphasis upon the need for a biblical and inductive method to be employed in the study of the atonement was because of his conviction that the Scriptures

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<sup>205</sup> Michael Bräutigam, *Free Church Theology 1843-1900*, 244-245.

<sup>206</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, vol 2, 4.

alone reveal the meaning of the atonement.<sup>207</sup> Thus, for Chalmers, the task of Scripture criticism was a prerequisite for developing a dogmatic understanding of the atonement.<sup>208</sup> Conversely, he also believed that systematic theology gave ‘both energy and guidance to the investigation of Scripture criticism.’<sup>209</sup> As we will see in chapter four when we look at Smeaton’s theological postulates, Smeaton also shared this conviction.

Following Chalmers’ inductive study of the Scriptural evidence for the atonement, his work proceeds to build up a system of atonement theology. It is here that Chalmers informs his students how the atonement ought to be understood: (1) with respect to God’s character and (2) with respect to the believer. Finally, Chalmers considers the atonement from a practical viewpoint, namely, how to ‘preach Christ and him crucified.’ According to Donald Macleod, the reason for Chalmers’ practical application was in order to give his students ‘exactly what Hill could not give them: practical guidance and evangelical enthusiasm.’<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Chalmers contended, ‘The doctrine of man’s disease, or the depravity of his nature, can be educed partly from Scripture and partly from observation; the doctrine of God’s remedy for the disease, of the atonement rendered by His Son Jesus Christ, is educible from Scripture alone. Scripture criticism, therefore, ... [is] the means for the ascertainment of doctrine’. Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, vol 2, 15.

<sup>208</sup> The scripture critic is in Christianity what the experimentalist or observer is in science; and the systematic theologian is in Christianity what the philosopher is in science... There are first, the individual sayings of Scripture, which like the individual phenomena of nature, may be regarded as the facts of our science. There is, secondly, the comparison and classification of these sayings, which, just as a natural philosophy is grounded on the resemblance of individuals, gives rise to a systematic divinity, whose office it is to expound and establish the principles of our science...’ Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, vol 2, 15.

<sup>209</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, vol 1, 344. Also, see Enright for a discussion on Chalmers understanding of the relationship between systematic theology and scripture criticism. W.G. Enright, *Preaching and Theology in Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*, 234-239.

<sup>210</sup> Donald Macleod, *Systematic Theology*, 811.



Significantly, Peter Lorimer's aforementioned article *The Characteristics of Biblical theology* was written as a review of Dr. Chalmers' *Institutes of Theology*. He wrote

Our reason for connecting Dr. Chalmers's 'Institutes of Theology' with these remarks on the characteristics and advantages of Biblical Theology, is, that we regard that work as being substantially a contribution to this department of Dogmatic Divinity. There is little of the scholastic element in it, but the Biblical element is fully developed.<sup>211</sup>

Lorimer qualifies this statement by admitting,

The historical element of the Bible's teaching is the only characteristic that is wanting to make the reproduction complete; nor is this omission to be imputed as a fault, as it was no part of the author's intention to produce a work of Biblical Theology, in the restricted sense of the term.<sup>212</sup>

These remarks reveal that Chalmers' *Institutes of Theology* strictly speaking, a work of Dogmatic Divinity, anticipated the science of Biblical theology emerging in Scotland.

Nevertheless, they opened up the way for a Scottish theologian to establish the science of Biblical theology (as distinct from dogmatic divinity) in Scotland.

### **The Historical Theological Method – William Cunningham (1805-1861)**

Professor William Cunningham applied the historical theological approach to the atonement in his magnum opus, *Historical Theology* published in two volumes (1862). His chapters on the atonement in *Historical Theology* (volume II) cover a total of 133 pages.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 383.

<sup>212</sup> Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 383.

<sup>213</sup> William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review of The Principal Doctrinal Discussions In the Christian Church Since The Apostolic Age*, Vol II, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1862;1960), 237-370.

In them, he examines the atonement dogmatically - outlining the Necessity, Nature, and Extent of the atonement. He examines the atonement from a polemical viewpoint - answering the main objections to the orthodox view of the atonement. He also examines the Scriptural evidence for the atonement and he looks at the views of the main theological systems (Socinianism, Arminianism, and Calvinism) on the subject of the atonement.

Michael Honeycutt summarises Cunningham's method as follows: 'Cunningham used the major controversies of the Church, which he viewed as commentaries on the Word of God, as springboards from which to explore the main themes in Christian dogmatics.'<sup>214</sup> Honeycutt, in his analysis of the effectiveness of Cunningham's historical methodology suggests that it

... would have benefited from a closer consideration of the genetic development of doctrines in history. Without this aspect of study, his conclusions could at times be somewhat naive, not recognizing the personal and cultural biases affecting even the most deliberate theologians in the history of the Church. Unwilling to wrestle with the subjectivity inherent within the discipline of historical theology, Cunningham, did not always succeed in answering the question, "What is true?" There were occasions on which he merely propagated the theology of the men he admired or of the system he held.<sup>215</sup>

In contrast, Donald Macleod contends that Cunningham's historical theological lectures provide a superb training in theological method. Cunningham, says Macleod, 'states the issue, summarizes the views of the various parties, indicates the evidence for the orthodox

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<sup>214</sup> Michael W. Honeycutt, *William Cunningham: His Life, Thought and Controversies*, unpublished PhD thesis, 2002, New College Library, Edinburgh, 321.

<sup>215</sup> Michael W. Honeycutt, *William Cunningham: His Life, Thought and Controversies*, (PhD thesis, 2002, University of Edinburgh), 320.

position and finally deals with the objections.<sup>216</sup> Macleod concludes his assessment by suggesting that Cunningham's lectures are 'in effect a work of systematic theology.'<sup>217</sup>

According to Robert Rainy, Cunningham's work was a 'peculiar treatment of Historical Theology'.<sup>218</sup> In fact, Rainy claimed that Cunningham's lectures were 'different from that adopted, as far as I know, in any work that exists.'<sup>219</sup> Incidentally, this comment reveals that Smeaton was not the only leading Free Church theologian interested in employing a new method to the study of theology.

### **Christian Consciousness - John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872)**

In 1856, Campbell published his *Nature of the Atonement*. The work is hard to define in terms of theological method. For example, Tim Trumper states

What is obvious is that Campbell was an eclectic theologian in his use of Scripture and historical theology. He did not seek to expound the thought of others so much as to

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<sup>216</sup> Donald Macleod, *William Cunningham*, in Nigel M. de S. Cameron ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, 229.

<sup>217</sup> Donald Macleod, *William Cunningham*, 229.

<sup>218</sup> James Mackenzie and Robert Rainy, *The Life of William Cunningham*, (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1871), 230.

<sup>219</sup> Robert Rainy, *William Cunningham*, 230. According to Rainy, there were three distinct approaches to historical theology. The first approach looked at: 'What was believed and maintained during given periods of the Church's history?'<sup>219</sup> The second approach attempted to illustrate 'the genetic development of doctrines in history.'<sup>219</sup> The third approach, according to Rainy, 'refuses to be contented with the bare reporting of the first method; but it also refuses to linger, like the second, over speculations as to causes and consequences.' Rainy stated 'It presses on at once to the practical and ultimate question in which the theologian is interested, viz., What is true?'

extract suggestions from them for the construction of a theological schema that harmonised with his own personal Christian consciousness.<sup>220</sup>

In other words, Campbell used the Bible and the theological views of theologians in the past not as the basis of his view; but for illustration of what he had determined to be the case. Sinclair Ferguson has written,

Campbell's critique of definite atonement is self-confessedly not exegetical (although he held that it was exegetically sustainable). It seeks to be logical and theological. But the argumentation rarely proceeds on the basis of careful or substantial exegesis, and theological *a priori* appears to trump handling texts in context.<sup>221</sup>

As we will see in the next chapter, Smeaton's method in contrast to Campbell's method was self-confessedly exegetical in order to avoid *a priori* handling of the Biblical texts.

According to J. H. Leckie, Campbell avoided applying the exegetical method because he feared its consequences: 'Campbell did not follow the habit of his day of building his argument upon a series of proof texts. His reason for avoiding that method was his prevision that the development of Biblical criticism would render every theory unsound'.<sup>222</sup> John Tulloch, who shared a great deal of affinity in terms of theological thought with Campbell, stated that for all his 'personal humility and insight into the perplexities of the religious mind' he was 'essentially

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<sup>220</sup> Tim Trumper, *An Historical Study of the Doctrine of Adoption in the Calvinistic Tradition*, (PhD Diss., University of Edinburgh, 2001), 319.

<sup>221</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, "Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine"?", 614.

<sup>222</sup> J. H. Leckie, "Books that have Influenced Our Epoch: John M'Leod Campbell's 'The Nature of the Atonement'," *The Expository Times*, Vol 5, February 1929: 199.

dogmatic' in his turn of thought.<sup>223</sup> 'He did not, in short, rise above the dogmatic temper of the time.'<sup>224</sup>

According to Leckie, Campbell's work on the atonement was of all the great theological works 'perhaps, the least academic'.<sup>225</sup> In stark contrast, as we will see in the next chapter, Smeaton's work was arguably one of the most academic of works written on the atonement in the nineteenth century by a Scottish theologian.

### **Summary**

In summary, prior to Smeaton's application of a new theological method to the study of the atonement, only the homiletical, the dogmatic, the historical, and the method of Christian consciousness had been applied in Scotland. What had not been applied to the atonement was the Biblical theological method.

In the next chapter, we will define and analyse Smeaton's Biblical theological method. We will look at (1) what specifically led him to adopt the Biblical theological method and (2) how he applied it in his work *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*.

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<sup>223</sup> John Tulloch, *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1885), 154.

<sup>224</sup> John Tulloch, *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth Century*, 154.

<sup>225</sup> J. H. Leckie "John McLeod Campbell - The Development of his Thought (II)", *The Expositor*, Eighth Series, XXI, February 1921, 117

# Chapter Three: George Smeaton - The Biblical Theologian

## A New Method to the Study of the Atonement

In the previous chapter, our assessment of Smeaton's methodological context revealed the various methods which were applied to the study of the atonement in Scotland prior to 1868 such as homiletical, historical, dogmatic, and the method of Christian consciousness. However, the evidence suggests that no one had applied the academic Biblical theological method to the study of the atonement.

In 1869, in a review of Smeaton's *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* published in the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, the reviewer highlighted:

The book has many claims to the serious attention of all earnest students of theology. For one thing, it strikes out a new path in the investigation of the cardinal doctrine of the Christian system, — a new path in an old and well-trodden field.<sup>226</sup>

He expanded:

There are three principal methods in which the doctrines of the Christian faith may be investigated and discussed. These may be styled respectively, the dogmatic, the historical, and the exegetical or biblical methods.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Anonymous, Review of George Smeaton, "The Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by Christ Himself", in *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, (1869): 112-116.

<sup>227</sup> Anonymous, *Review*, in *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, 112-116.

The reviewer noted that the ‘dogmatic method’ and the ‘historical method’ had already been applied by several writers to atonement writings in Scotland. Thus, confirming the conclusions we arrived at in the previous chapter. Significantly, the reviewer stated regarding Smeaton’s application of the Biblical theological method to the study of the atonement in 1868:

Professor Smeaton has the distinguished merit of having led the way in the application of this method [Biblical theological] to the elucidation of the central article of Divine revelation.<sup>228</sup>

Below we will give an overview of Smeaton’s Biblical theological method to the exposition of the doctrine of the atonement. We will look at what inspired him to apply this method and we will analyse his application of it in *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*.

## **An Overview of George Smeaton’s Application of the Biblical Theological Approach to the Study of the New Testament’s Doctrine of the Atonement**

### **Brief Definition of the Academic Biblical Theological Method**

As highlighted in the introduction, the Biblical theological method seeks to unfold the teaching of Scripture as a whole, or parts of it – e.g. theology of Moses, theology of Jesus, and the theology of the Apostles. It appreciates the different tenor and degree of revelation in each of the various Scriptural epochs. It seeks to ascertain the Bible’s holistic understanding

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<sup>228</sup> Anonymous, *Review*, in *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine*, 112-116.

of a doctrine by applying the inductive method of exegesis to the diversity of the Biblical material. When dealing with a single doctrine, it typically adopts a chronological approach and traces the doctrine through the history of progressive revelation. In other words, it pursues a historical line development.

### **Smeaton's Application of the Academic Biblical Theological Method**

To understand Smeaton's Biblical theological method two elements are key: (1) his epistemological presumptions and (2) his biblical theological hermeneutics.

#### **Smeaton's Epistemological Presuppositions**

(1) Smeaton's foundational epistemological principle was Augustine's *crede ut intelligas* ('believe so that you may understand') later emphasised in Anselm's motto ('faith seeking understanding'). Indeed, in a lecture delivered to divinity students at the Aberdeen Free Church College in 1853, entitled *Necessary Harmony Between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*, he contended that 'the great principle to be carried out in all systematic theology is *crede ut intelligas*.<sup>229</sup> For Smeaton, faith was a prerequisite for understanding divine revelation. Thus, he defined faith as follows:

[faith] ... properly means TRUST on a personal Saviour...the object of faith is not Christ's doctrine, nor his historic life as a mere pattern, but his glorified person, with whom the closest relation is formed by an act which is simply receptive, and raising the mind above the seen and temporal.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> *Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*, 26.

<sup>230</sup> George Smeaton, *Faith*, in *The Imperial Bible Dictionary*. Ed. Patrick Fairbairn, (London: Blackie & Son, 1886 [1864-1866]), 274-76.



Such faith is essential for a true understanding of divine matters:

The principle indeed that faith precedes a true understanding of all divine things; or in other words, that a man must have a new sense before he can apprehend divine things, is a postulate in theology.<sup>231</sup>

For Smeaton, any individual seeking to understand divine revelation must first be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Regeneration is a prerequisite to gaining a new sense of appreciation for divine revelation:

...the science of theology presupposes the new sense, presupposes regeneration, presupposes faith, without which it is not understood, and cannot be understood.<sup>232</sup>

Following Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14, he held that the natural man cannot understand spiritual things.<sup>233</sup> Accordingly, the Holy Spirit is crucial to a believer's faith, spiritual life, and theological activity.

Smeaton also believed (on the basis of Ephesians 1:18) that prayer is a *sine qua non* in theological activity. He urged divinity students 'cultivate a spirit of prayer, in reference to all your studies, and to all your exercises...' <sup>234</sup> Elsewhere, he wrote, 'the more the Church asks for the Spirit and waits for His communication, the more she receives.'<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*. 26.

<sup>232</sup> *Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*. 26.

<sup>233</sup> 'The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.' (NIV) cf. George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 67.

<sup>234</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 289.

<sup>235</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 289.

Thus, spirituality is key to the formation of theology:

If there is one principle more important in my eyes than any other, or one which I am more peculiarly anxious to place, or to see placed, as a moving spring in the minds of the rising ministry, it is just the highest cultivation of spiritual life, in combination with the highest appreciation of orthodox doctrine. And these principles must be lived before they can be taught.<sup>236</sup>

He went on,

Theology is not all doctrine. Man's nature is not all intellect, He is heart as well as head; and, while we plead for orthodoxy with all earnestness, we mean living orthodoxy, or truth embosomed in the spiritual life.<sup>237</sup>

(2) A second key epistemological principle was that every theologian has a finite mind. Thus, a theologian must conserve 'mystery' in theological investigation: 'all true theologians, who have trained their minds in the right school, whether in expounding positive truth or in combating erroneous views, have uniformly accepted it as the highest function simply to conserve the mystery.'<sup>238</sup> With Calvin, he held that where the scriptures stop teaching, the theologian stops learning. Since the finite mind is limited in its understanding the priority of all students of the Bible is to yield to its truth.

In summary, Smeaton's epistemological presuppositions demonstrate that he stood in continuity with the leading Patristic, Medieval, and Reformed theologians. As an academic theologian, he had no interest in making intellectual contributions which were novel or

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<sup>236</sup> George Smeaton, *Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*, 16.

<sup>237</sup> George Smeaton, *Necessary Harmony between Doctrine and Spiritual Life*, 22.

<sup>238</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 226.

merely academic. Rather, he made it his priority to serve the church's spiritual life and for this task possessing a lively spiritual life was essential. In addition, his main contributions were developed on the shoulders of theological giants in previous centuries. He saw himself building upon, and reviving where necessary, emphases which had been asserted in the past; but which were ignored or lacking prominence in his own day.

### **Smeaton's Biblical Hermeneutics**

Although a pioneer in the field of New Testament and Exegetical Theology Smeaton never wrote a work on his hermeneutical method.<sup>239</sup> But they can be deduced from his writings.

*Sola Scriptura.* Fundamental to Smeaton's hermeneutic was his understanding of the Bible as divine revelation. In keeping with the Reformed tradition, he affirmed the principle of *sola scriptura* as basic to all theological activity. Indeed, as Madsen put it '...for Smeaton, Biblical revelation is the veritable basis of Biblical theology.'<sup>240</sup> More precisely, the character of Scripture is determined by its inspiration:

The peculiar properties of the sacred Scriptures such as their SUFFICIENCY, PERSPICUITY, CERTAINTY, PERFECTION, and DIVINE AUTHORITY, are all derived from the fact that they were given by the inspiration of God (2 Tim. iii. 16)<sup>241</sup>

*Inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.* Following Calvin, Smeaton also affirmed the importance of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit:

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<sup>239</sup> Smeaton's first professorial colleague Patrick Fairbairn wrote a standard work on the Scottish reformed hermeneutical method *Hermeneutical Manual of the New Testament Scriptures*. Smeaton's exegetical method displays a harmony with this work.

<sup>240</sup> Norman P. Madsen, *Atonement and Pneumatology*, 49.

<sup>241</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 171.

This principle, that the Holy Scriptures can be understood only by the aid of the Spirit, is strongly expressed in all the Protestant confessions...The Scriptures, containing a revelation by the Holy Spirit, can be understood only by the aid of the same Spirit who is the author of the Book....<sup>242</sup>

He believed the interpreter of Scripture must ideally have experienced the same conversion of mind and heart as the biblical author.

*Brevity.* In a rather striking similarity to Calvin, Smeaton also upheld the principle of brevity in theological labours: 'our object is brevity and condensation, as far as may be consistent with perspicuity...'<sup>243</sup>

*The plain meaning of the text or Scripture.* One of Smeaton's favourite words is 'plain': 'The plain meaning of this clause...'<sup>244</sup> or 'There seems no ground to doubt that Jesus earned His bread by the sweat of His brow, *whether we look at the plain words used by the evangelist..*'<sup>245</sup> But again, like Calvin, he believed that in cases when the context demanded, the interpreter must go beyond a flat interpretation. For example,

John next adds that the Lord spoke of the Spirit, who was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (ver. 39). The language literally is, "for the Holy Ghost was not yet." This of course does not mean that there was no personal Holy Ghost before

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<sup>242</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 226.

<sup>243</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 75.

<sup>244</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 49.

<sup>245</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 138.

Christ's ascension, but that He was not yet dispensed, as He was afterwards given, to the Church.<sup>246</sup>

*Grammatical Historical method.* Smeaton was also committed to the primacy of studying the Bible in its original languages in order to determine the meaning and import of a verse:

The object steadily kept in view has been to determine what saith the Scripture — according to rigid principles of grammatico-historical interpretation — without dislocating or wresting, so far as I am aware, a single expression from its true significance, and thus to run up the matter to authority.<sup>247</sup>

With this principle in mind, he also understood that the interpreter's task was to explain the words of Scripture and to refrain from putting a sense on biblical words different from that which properly belongs to them:

My task in this work has been simply to determine, by strict exegetical investigation, the import of Christ's words, and to reproduce His thoughts by the exact interpretation of language. I have no other desire than to ascertain what He did, and to abide by it.<sup>248</sup>

He also cared deeply about interpreting Scripture from its original languages. Both his works on the atonement include an appendix entitled: *Index to Greek Words Elucidated*.<sup>249</sup> Indeed, he emphasised that it would be the results of exegesis that he presented, not the philological process.

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<sup>246</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 346.

<sup>247</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface.

<sup>248</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface.

<sup>249</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 502.

*Authorial Intent.* The principle of authorial intent was fundamental to his Biblical investigation.

I shall try to evolve what the Scriptures say; and for that end transplant myself into the circumstances in which the writers of the different ages were placed. To penetrate, as far as possible, into the teaching of inspired prophets before the coming of Christ, and of inspired apostles subsequent to His resurrection, it will be necessary to bring out, in a condensed outline, their scope and harmony.<sup>250</sup>

As previously highlighted, even the titles of his works reveal that his primary aim was to ascertain Christ's and the Apostles' consciousness on the issue of the atonement.

When we reflect that all His statements are the expression of His [Christ's] own consciousness, the Christian entering into their meaning will say, as the Christian astronomer did when he discovered certain laws of the solar system: "My God, I think my thoughts with Thee" This cannot be a trifling matter in theology.<sup>251</sup>

Thus, his ultimate goal was not merely to understand the human author, but the divine intention in the text.

*Analogy of Faith.* Smeaton was also committed to the historic principle of *analogia fidei*: 'But we must collect whatever is really taught, comparing text with text, and the less obvious testimonies with the more easy and perspicuous, if we would think the thoughts of God.'<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 7.

<sup>251</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 17.

<sup>252</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 18.

*Christological Typology.* The Christological typological method was also employed throughout his writings. Jesus' Messianic function was nourished and sustained by the Old Testament types.<sup>253</sup>

We find express allusion by Him to the typical character of the manna (John vi 32), to the brazen serpent (iii. 14), and to the history of Jonah (Matt, xii 40); clear proofs that He found Himself in the Old Testament.<sup>254</sup>

*Continuity of the Old and New Testament.* Smeaton also maintained the unity of the Old and New Testaments: 'So close in every point of view is the connection, rightly apprehended, of the old and new economy, that the one is incomplete without the other.'<sup>255</sup> But here he went a step further than Calvin and followed the seventeenth century Reformed fathers in emphasising covenant as a distinguishing mark of atonement theology.

*Exegesis.* A further dominant principle for Smeaton is the priority of exegesis.

My task in this work has been simply to determine, by strict exegetical investigation, the import of Christ's words, and to reproduce His thoughts by the exact interpretation of language.<sup>256</sup>

*Exegesis and Dogmatics.* In an article in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* he wrote:

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<sup>253</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 79.

<sup>254</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 80.

<sup>255</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 128.

<sup>256</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface.

The task of reproducing apostolic doctrine, and of putting it together in its organic connections, is daily becoming a more urgent duty. And the part assigned to exegetical theology is to recall, as far as may be, not only single phases, but the general outline of those fresh times when apostles, as the chosen organs of Christ's revelation, exhibited in the church the riches of divine grace, as it was discerned by them in the company of the Incarnate Word, and after His ascension.<sup>257</sup>

Hugh Martin – who himself lamented the demise of a covenantal, biblical theological perspective on the atonement<sup>258</sup> - wrote in a review of Smeaton's first volume:

It does not build a system; it gives us materials to build with. By rare insight into trains of thought; by minutely accurate exegesis; by severely legitimate method, always amenable to rule, and always guarding against the capricious and the arbitrary, never straining to deduce or support a foregone conclusion; by taking out of the text what is in it, never tempted to take more, - this very able theologian has presented us with an amount of truth on the doctrine of the Atonement, directly from the lips of the Great Deliverer himself, which has positively startled us by its amount, and delighted us by its consistency and its completeness.<sup>259</sup>

To this extent Smeaton's biblical hermeneutical principles stood in continuity with the early Christian tradition developed in light of the Reformed tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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<sup>257</sup> George Smeaton, *Pauline Doctrine of Righteousness* in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, vol 11, (1862), 192.

<sup>258</sup> See Hugh Martin, *Atonement*, 12.

<sup>259</sup> Hugh Martin, *Review*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, vol 18 (1869), 650-652.



Smeaton's academic Biblical theological approach can only be fully appreciated when his two volumes are viewed together. In the first volume Smeaton stated:

The present volume [Christ's doctrine of the atonement] is intended to be the first portion of a larger whole, which if completed, will exhibit the entire New Testament teaching on the subject of the atonement.<sup>260</sup>

In his second volume, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, he wrote,

This volume ... is the sequel of the volume which appeared in 1868 on the sayings of Jesus in reference to the atonement, and completes my undertaking; the object of which was to exhibit the entire New Testament teaching on the nature and fruits of Christ's death. I started with the conviction that we cannot attain a full view of the New Testament doctrine on the subject, except in a *biblico-historical* way...The work is rather biblical than formally dogmatic ...<sup>261</sup>

He added:

I hold that we can think the very thoughts of Christ and His apostles. The design of this work is mainly to demonstrate, in the only way in which this is to be done, the pure biblical doctrine of the atonement.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, vii.

<sup>261</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, v.

<sup>262</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, v. Emphasis mine.

Thus, in his own words, his twin works were designed to be a comprehensive Biblical theological examination of the New Testament's doctrine of the atonement. Significantly, Smeaton viewed his twins work as making an important contribution to atonement studies because no one had yet carried out an exhaustive academic Biblical theological study of Christ's sayings or an exhaustive academic Biblical theological study of the apostles' sayings on the atonement. For instance, in Smeaton's first volume, he stated:

In no quarter has the importance of Christ's own teaching on this article been sufficiently recognised, nor its fullness, nor its extent, nor its formative character as regards apostolic development....<sup>263</sup>

In his second volume, he stated:

No one has hitherto traversed the whole field this way, though numerous specimen-texts are discussed in dogmatic compends, polemical treatises, biblical dogmatics, outlines of Pauline, Petrine and Johannine theology...<sup>264</sup>

In other words, Smeaton believed that, separately, his two works were novel in what they set out to accomplish. Furthermore, he recognised that as a result of applying the Biblical theological method to the entirety of the New Testament's teaching on the atonement, his work would demonstrate and establish the unity that exists between the theology of Jesus and the apostles.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, ix.

<sup>264</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, viii.

<sup>265</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, 8.

This was an important aspect of his contribution to nineteenth century Scottish atonement theology. Because in his own day there were a number of theologians who espoused the theory that Jesus and the apostles' teaching on the atonement contradicted each other. They also claimed that 'to restore Christianity to its original simplicity, nothing is more indispensably necessary than to abide exclusively by the sayings of Jesus.'<sup>266</sup>

However, Smeaton discerned that these theologians had misapprehend the apostles' relation to the Lord's teaching on the atonement. He wrote, 'they assume that the truth has undergone a certain transmutation in the apostles' hands.'<sup>267</sup> However, as his exhaustive Biblical theological study aimed to establish, the teaching of Jesus and his apostles on the subject of the atonement was both consistent and harmonious. Thus, the claims that they contradicted each other were deeply erroneous.

### **Smeaton's Biblical Theological Method Applied in Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement**

Smeaton deemed his study of Christ's doctrine of the atonement as an important preliminary to an exegetical study of the apostles' doctrine of the atonement. For a couple of reasons. (1) He wrote, 'nowhere has any attempt been made to arrange and classify our Lord's sayings on the subject.'<sup>268</sup> (2) He recognised that when the sayings of Christ are arranged and classified, they supply an outline of the apostolic doctrine of the atonement.<sup>269</sup> Smeaton lamented the fact that many atonement writers in his own day failed to recognise that a rounded and

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<sup>266</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, 8.

<sup>267</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, 8.

<sup>268</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, ix.

<sup>269</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, vii.

concrete development of the doctrine in all its elements can be found in Christ's sayings.<sup>270</sup>

He stated,

In no quarter has the importance of Christ's own teaching on this article been sufficiently recognised, nor its fullness, nor its extent, nor its formative character as regards apostolic development....<sup>271</sup>

He added:

...certain aspects of the atonement, and especially those which relate to its divine side, or exhibit it as redounding to the glory of God, are with more simplicity and comprehensiveness portrayed by the Lord Himself than by any other speaker in any other portion of Scripture.<sup>272</sup>

It is evident from these comments that Smeaton viewed his Biblical theological approach to Christ's sayings on the atonement as making a hugely significant contribution to Scottish atonement theology in mid-nineteenth century Scotland. Unfortunately, as John Keddie has highlighted 'it is to be seriously doubted that the magnitude of his achievement in these volumes on the atonement, *and especially in the first*, was really appreciated in his own day.'<sup>273</sup>

### **The Main Aims of Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement**

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<sup>270</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface.

<sup>271</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, ix.

<sup>272</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1.

<sup>273</sup> John Keddie, *George Smeaton* 140. Emphasis mine.

The main aims of his first volume were given in its subtitle: *The Sayings of Jesus on the Atonement Exegetically Expounded and Classified*. He states

The scope we aim at in the following disquisition, is to gather out of the sayings of Christ the testimony which He bears to His own atonement in its necessity, nature, and effect.<sup>274</sup>

In other words, Smeaton's sole objective was to present Christ's own understanding of the doctrine of the atonement by (1) exegetically examining the meaning of his sayings in the four Gospels and (2) classifying them under doctrinal heads.

### **Exegetical Examination of Christ's Sayings**

For Smeaton, exegetically examining Christ's sayings meant engaging the material of the four Gospels with the 'rigid principles of grammatico-historical interpretation'.<sup>275</sup> Since Biblical revelation was the sole authority for evolving one's doctrinal understanding; strict exegesis of biblical revelation was the true method to study, interpret, and understand it.

My task in this work has been simply to determine, by strict exegetical investigation, the import of Christ's words, and to reproduce His thoughts by the exact interpretation of language ... to go to the Scriptures, not for the starting point of thought alone, but for the substance of thought as well, or for the rounded and concrete development of

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<sup>274</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 2.

<sup>275</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, v.

the doctrine in all its elements: and these will be found in Christ's sayings, if we but patiently investigate them.<sup>276</sup>

Unlike the Rationalist and Mediating theologians of his day, Smeaton viewed Biblical revelation as fully authoritative. This meant that the interpretation of the Biblical language and the importance of grammatical construction were key to forming any objective doctrinal presentation.

### **Classification of Christ's Sayings**

By *classifying* Christ's sayings Smeaton meant taking the Biblical material produced by the Biblical theological approach, and organising it under various doctrinal heads in order to present Christ's doctrine in all its constituent elements. Generally speaking, he used the doctrinal heads of necessity, nature, and effect; but in some places he also liked to speak of the scope, nature, and fruits of the atonement.<sup>277</sup> As already highlighted, this work of classification was both *essential* and *fundamental* because: (1) it had not yet been done by another New Testament scholar, and (2) it laid a much-needed foundation for understanding the apostolic teaching on the atonement.

### **Secondary Aim of Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement**

Although the main aim of his first volume was to present Christ's own understanding of the doctrine of the atonement by expounding the meaning of his sayings in the four Gospels by (1) exegetically examining these sayings, and (2) classifying them under doctrinal heads.

There was another aim that presented itself to his mind:

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<sup>276</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, viii.

<sup>277</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1-2.

While the main purpose, from the nature of the investigation, was to define and fix the true idea of the atonement as surveyed from Christ's own view-point, a second and less direct object, though not without its importance in the present discussions on the person and life of Christ, came to be frequently to the mind: *the objective significance of His whole earthly life was presented to my mind in a manner in which modern biographies never touch.*<sup>278</sup>

Here Smeaton alluded to the nineteenth century 'lives of Jesus'. He was aware that he was addressing a subject that many of these works failed to address: *namely, the objective significance of the earthly life of Jesus in its relation to his atoning work.* Thus, a new and secondary aim emerged for his study: to appreciate the objective significance of Christ's life. He wrote,

The more fully we enter into Christ's truly human experience, and trace His chequered course of joy and of sorrow, the livelier will be our apprehension of His curse-bearing life, and of His penal death.<sup>279</sup>

This second and less direct aim of the first volume was a significant aspect of his contribution to Scottish atonement theology. Indeed, Hugh Martin was especially appreciative of Smeaton's emphasis. He wrote 'His [Christ's] consciousness is a sin-bearer's consciousness during all the days of His flesh—as Dr. George Smeaton, than whom no greater authority on

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<sup>278</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, viii-ix.

<sup>279</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 19.

this theme exists, has done admirable service by so copiously and variously demonstrating.<sup>280</sup>

### **Some Additional Aims**

#### ***To Rebut German Mediating Theology and its Method of Christian Consciousness***

It is evident from various statements made in his first volume that Smeaton was particularly concerned to rebut the influence of Continental theologians in his work.

In these pages I have examined, according to the rules of exact interpretation, what Jesus taught on the subject of the atonement ... This seems to be urgently demanded in our times. The necessity of correctly ascertaining, by the only means within our reach, what the Lord actually taught on this point, cannot be overstated, when we direct any measure of attention to modern thought, and to the conflicting views, often as ill-digested by their propounders as perplexing to the minds of others, which are at present given forth on the nature, design, and effect of the Lord's death. The one-sided views on this great theme, held not by scoffers at vital religion, but by earnest men, actually though not willingly deviating from biblical truth, are not to be corrected by any human authority, nor even by an appeal to the Church's past, which yet, as the voice of our mother, is entitled to some amount of deference. They can be effectually confronted and silenced only by the explicit testimony of the Church's Lord.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Hugh Martin, *Atonement*, 200.

<sup>281</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, vii



It ought to be noted that Smeaton regarded the leading German and Dutch Mediating theologians of his day as ‘earnest men’ and not ‘scoffers of vital religion’. They were not ‘willingly deviating from biblical truth’. His main bone of contention was,

...with all their acknowledged learning and ability, they have too much forgotten the simple function of the interpreter and deposited their own unsatisfactory opinions or the spirit of the age in the texts which they professed to expound.<sup>282</sup>

From his perspective, they were to be confronted by the Lord’s testimony alone, since ‘...every true disciple has this distinctive feature about him, that he hears the voice of Christ, but a stranger’s voice he will not follow.’<sup>283</sup>

Another major defect of the Mediating theologians, in Smeaton’s view, was the role ‘Christian Consciousness’ played in their method. It had become a standard nineteenth century hermeneutic to the Bible – as we saw in the writings of McLeod Campbell and Erskine. In sharp contrast he held that atonement theology was to be understood by appealing *only* to the Scriptures as the sole authority.

It is not, then, to the Christian consciousness that I appeal with some modern teachers ... but to the sayings of the Great Teacher, and of His commissioned servants, employed as His organs of revelation to the Church of all time.<sup>284</sup>

Indeed, the very title of the first volume - *The Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by Christ Himself* – was itself a response to Mediating theology’s Christian consciousness – as

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<sup>282</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, x.

<sup>283</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, vii.

<sup>284</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, viii. Hugh Martin, *Review*, 650-652.

his title reveals that he was concerned with Christ's consciousness and not, ultimately, with the Christian's consciousness.

For Smeaton his main problem with the German Mediating theologians was that their methods ultimately exalted the inner life at the expense of objectively true doctrine. They asserted the authority of the Spirit *within*, rather than the authority of the word from *without* to which the Spirit bore his inner witness. Their methods were not concerned with Biblical definition or doctrinal precision. Thus, for Smeaton, the Mediating tendency was averse to clearly-defined views of doctrine or of Scripture truth.

The work here [*The Apostle's Doctrine of the Atonement*] presented to the public was suggested by this new phenomenon especially by the somewhat bold attempt which it has made to vindicate its claims by an exegetical appeal to Scripture. I refer to attempts in this direction by Menken, Stier, Klaiber, and above all by Hofmann of Erlangen, who, in the use of a peculiar exegesis, have arrived at results diametrically opposed to the views at which the entire Christian church in the east and west arrived, during eighteen centuries of her history. Schleiermacher, the great champion and bulwark of this tendency, from reasons which may be easily inferred, did not attempt to base these views on exegetical investigation, but on Christian consciousness. This phenomenon of a Christianity without an atonement, professedly based on an exegetical foundation, seemed to call for such a work as the present; and in the course of it I have thoroughly investigated the teaching of the Lord and His apostles.<sup>285</sup>

His words here clearly applied to both volumes on the atonement.

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<sup>285</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, vii.

Smeaton was persuaded that the Mediating school's atonement works demanded a rebuttal.

Within recent memory ... a new phenomenon has presented itself to the attention of Christendom – a sort of spiritual religion or mystic piety, whose watchword is, spiritual life, divine love, and moral redemption, by a great teacher and ideal man, and absolute forgiveness, as contrasted with everything forensic.<sup>286</sup>

He recognised that

At present, when the judicial or forensic aspects of theology are widely impugned, deep importance attaches to the inquiry, whether a satisfaction to divine justice was imperatively necessary.

Revealing that what he believed was lacking, *inter alia*, was the federal theology as a necessary framework for understanding the atonement. As we will see in the next chapter, a key aspect of Smeaton's Biblical theological method was recognising Scriptural covenantal framework - in particular, the Adam-Christ parallel. In Smeaton's mind Federal theology was fundamental to a proper understanding the Bible's teaching on the atonement.

### ***To Rebut the False Atonement Theories of His Era***

It is evident throughout *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* that another aim that he had in mind was to rebut the various false atonement theories of his day. Smeaton recognised that some were alleging that Christ was a victim to his holy and ardent zeal.<sup>287</sup> Others recognised his death as a historical event, but they understood it to be only a confirmation of the

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<sup>286</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement* vii.

<sup>287</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 18.

declaration of absolute forgiveness of which he had been a preacher.<sup>288</sup> Others placed great weight on the person of Christ and his Incarnation, but made light of the cross in comparison.

In Smeaton's mind, these false atonement theories taught 'insipid half-truths' - which gave the impression that they were 'seemingly right'. However, a Biblical theological examination of the New Testament's contents would prove them to be 'essentially wrong'.<sup>289</sup> In one place he wrote,

They view Jesus as a mere preacher or herald of salvation, but not as a veritable Saviour in the full sense of the term. They will go farther than this, and will extol Him as the Prince of Life, and as its Dispenser, but it is life unconnected with the price paid, or the ransom offered. And the prominence given to Christ's example, or to the pattern of His life, is never free from a certain influence that operates like a snare.<sup>290</sup>

Regarding this polemical aim in his work, it is noteworthy that most of his rebuttals of false atonement theories were directed against those prevalent in Germany and in the Mediating school.<sup>291</sup> Comparatively, Smeaton gave little attention to the leading atonement errors in Scottish theology. He did briefly engage with Edward Irving (1792-1834) and John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872); but this was incidental in comparison to his engagement with continental thought.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 18.

<sup>289</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 18.

<sup>290</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 18.

<sup>291</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, xii.

<sup>292</sup> Smeaton responded to Edward Irving's false claim that Jesus became the sin-bearer by any necessity of nature in virtue of taking the flesh. According to Smeaton Irving thought that Jesus assumed sin simply in virtue of taking humanity; as if sin and humanity were one and the same. Smeaton highlights J. Macleod Campbell's

In summary, rebutting German Mediating theology, the method of Christian consciousness, and the false atonement theories of his day were evidently areas he saw himself making a key contribution to nineteenth century atonement theology.

### **Contemporary Inspiration for Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement**

Moreover, it was highlighted in the introduction that academic Biblical theology - as a distinct science from Systematic theology - was scarcely known about in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century. However, according to Lorimer academic Biblical theology was cultivated, with much success and vigour by German scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is hardly surprising, then, that Smeaton found his main inspiration in their writings.

In *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* there is ample evidence suggesting that Smeaton drew his primary inspiration for his own Biblical theological work on atonement from the works of the leading continental Biblical theologians.<sup>293</sup> For instance, in his preface, he reviews numerous atonements works written by continental Biblical theologians.

The majority of the works he consulted dealt with 'the theology of Jesus' in the four Gospels, in relation to the atonement. They included authors such as: Carl Christian Flatt (1772-1843);

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theory of the death of Christ as a confession of sin. He also highlighted how Campbell confused and confounded the divine perfections, instead of exhibiting their harmony in the scheme of human redemption. Campbell also put forward a moral and spiritual atonement as opposed to a judicial and forensic atonement. George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 123; 434.

<sup>293</sup> Todd Statham has stated German biblical scholars provided Scottish biblical scholars with useful resources for learning how to recast and renew the study of Christian doctrine. Todd Regan Statham, "Dogma and History in Victorian Scotland", (PhD., Montreal, Quebec, 2011), 8.

Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849); Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm (1807-1891); H. Huyser (Unknown); Petrus Hofstede de Groot (1802 -1886). Many of these, he viewed as misguided and as deviating from a historic orthodox understanding of the doctrine.

Yet, two writers Smeaton viewed with a greater sympathy were Johann von Hofmann (1810-1877) and Albrecht Ritschl (1822 – 1889). He described von Hofmann as a ‘keen dialectician and an accomplished exegete’, and added, ‘... he [von Hofmann] expounds in the same tendency with the writers just named, though with far more of the evangelical spirit.’<sup>294</sup>

However he also discerned the weakness of these men in their approach to Scripture:

With all their acknowledged learning and ability, they [Hofmann and Ritschl] have too much forgotten the simple function of the interpreter, and deposited their own unsatisfactory opinions or the spirit of the age in the texts which they professed to expound.<sup>295</sup>

Smeaton also listed a number of theologically conservative academic Biblical theologians on the Continent whose works he regarded to be of real usefulness in his preparation. ‘But there are those who have discussed the Lord’s sayings in a general outline of the Scripture testimony to the atonement, in a better spirit, and with more success.’<sup>296</sup> In this regard, he highlighted the contributions of C. F. Schmid (1794 – 1852) Wolfgang Friedrich Gess (1819-

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<sup>294</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface.

<sup>295</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface. The ‘spirit of the age’ refers to the rationalistic atmosphere which was pervasive in the nineteenth century. The rationalist atmosphere had led many Biblical scholars to question the inspiration of the Scriptures, and place a greater emphasis on the autonomy of human mind when seeking to understand doctrine.

<sup>296</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement* X.

1891), H. E. Vinke (1794-1862), and Bartus van Willes (unknown). The latter two writers were from Holland, and it seems that Smeaton's appropriation of their works was a novel contribution for a British work of theology.

Mr. Smeaton has read and digested the latest literature of the foreign; in particular, we are glad to see that he has paid a due tribute to the theologians of Holland, who, whether as assailants or as advocates of the truth, are at present in the van of conflict. German and French writers are familiar enough; it is something new to see the Dutch critics and expositors at home in English pages.<sup>297</sup>

Nevertheless, Smeaton's Biblical theological approach most reflects that employed in C. F. Schmid's *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (1853). Indeed, Smeaton acknowledged his indebtedness to Schmid's work at the outset of *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*.<sup>298</sup> In Schmid's volume he looked at the life and doctrine of Jesus, and the life and doctrine of the apostles.<sup>299</sup> According to Smeaton, Schmid treated the sayings of Jesus and gave an outline of the Scripture testimony of the atonement in a 'brief but felicitous way'.<sup>300</sup>

It also appears that Smeaton utilised and fine-tuned his understanding in light of some other contributions made by continental Biblical theologians such as J. C. F. Steudel (1779-1837),

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<sup>297</sup> Anonymous, *Review*, in *London Quarterly Review*, 1869, Vol 31, 243. Kinnear also wrote '... he [Smeaton] had a good knowledge of Dutch and German Biblical criticism, and his use of this is an interesting aspect of his contribution.' Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 127.

<sup>298</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface.

<sup>299</sup> Smeaton noted his regret that Schmid's *Biblical Theology* had been published as a posthumous work.

<sup>300</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, preface.

and Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802-1869).<sup>301</sup> For instance, Steudel, like Smeaton, dealt with the biblical material historically (as a developing revelation) and then systematically, (organising the biblical data into categories).<sup>302</sup>

Whilst Smeaton's Biblical theological approach to the atonement studies in Scotland clearly broke new ground, his method had already been applied by numerous continental thinkers to the atonement before him. This fact was recognised by those who reviewed his work:

We welcome this work as an effort in a department of theology which is hardly yet distinctly recognised in this country, though it has been for some time cultivated with much vigour and success in the continental schools. . . . The author's undertaking is a very lofty and bold one, and, looking at the work as a whole, it appears to us on many accounts seasonable and fitted to do good. *The Presbyterian*.<sup>303</sup>

John Caird in an article entitled *Recent Dogmatic Thought in Scotland* in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* (1891) questioned, the degree to which, the Scottish writers spoke of the originality of the modern Germans as Biblical theologians. '... the alleged originality of

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<sup>301</sup> As editor of *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Smeaton regularly published articles written by both Steudel and Hengstenberg Cf. Ernst Hengstenberg, *On the Sacrifices of Holy Scripture*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, vol 10 (1862), 777-790. Johann Steudel, *The infallible inspiration of the apostles* in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, vol 10, (1862), 791-880.

<sup>302</sup> J C Steudel, *Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, (Berlin: 1840). In his first volume, Smeaton chose not to proceed chronologically through the contents of the Gospels but to present the doctrine of the atonement - as revealed in the four gospels - in thematic fashion. The work is divided up into sections: *The constituent elements of the atonement; the effects of Christ's death; the relation of the atonement to other interests in the universe; the actual efficacy of the atonement and the application of the atonement*.

<sup>303</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*, Cited 15 March 2019. Online: [https://archive.org/stream/doctrineatoneme01smeagoog/doctrineatoneme01smeagoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/doctrineatoneme01smeagoog/doctrineatoneme01smeagoog_djvu.txt) dust cover.



the modern Germans as Biblical theologians, here and elsewhere, is overstated.<sup>304</sup> However, he did concede what is modern ‘is the tracing of different types of doctrine, and the confirming of Scripture testimony at any point by their agreement.’<sup>305</sup>

### **Modifying the Form of Classical Reformed Orthodox Theology**

Even though, he was inspired to a great extent by non-Reformed orthodox theologians, it appears that Smeaton saw his first volume work making an important contribution to Reformed theological studies of the atonement – especially in the area of theological method.

Instead of commencing, according to the common custom, by fixing a centre and drawing a circumference, we wish to proceed historically. We shall not select a view-point, and then adduce a number of proof texts merely to confirm it; and we do so for a special reason. It has always seemed to be a point of weakness in treatises on this subject, that the truth has been so much argued on abstract grounds, and deduced so largely from the first principles of the divine government. The importance of these must be acknowledged, as they rationalize the doctrine, and establish it in the convictions of the human mind, when the fact is once admitted; but they have their proper force and cogency, only when the truth of the doctrine is based and accepted on a ground that is strictly historical.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>304</sup>John Cairns, “Recent Dogmatic Thought in Scotland”, in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, II (1891): 193-215.

<sup>305</sup> John Cairns, “Recent Dogmatic Thought in Scotland”, in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, II (1891): 193-215.

<sup>306</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1.

It is clear from this comment, Smeaton believed that a certain modification had to be made with regards the form (but not the substance) of classical Reformed orthodoxy. This point was further brought out in a lecture he gave to his Divinity students in Aberdeen:

The theology of the Reformation period and of the Puritan age is the wine of which I for one continue to say, in full view of all the Theology more recently produced “the old is better”. But the purpose of these remarks has been to show that the form must change, and that the Living One who glorified the past, is no less to be seen walking in the present. We are not mere resurrectionists of the old, but scribes instructed into the kingdom of heaven, bringing forth things NEW AND OLD. And the Church, depending on that Living one whose presence and life have glorified all centuries, expects that as He interpose before, so he will interpose again as emergencies arise like that which dates from the attacks of the modern infidelity, to usher in creative epochs, to make all things news, and to guide us to the promise future. Onward to that bright future the Living One is conducting his church. And this should be habitually felt by every scribe intrusted to bring froth things new and old.<sup>307</sup>

These words are critical if we are to have an understanding of why Smeaton employed the Biblical theological method. Smeaton was not a conservative in theology for its own sake. Hugh Martin recognised this element in his work:

There are a great number of earnest minds at present to whom systematic theology presents the aspects of a dry, frigid, starched, and mummy-like object of contemplation; and hence a true, if formal, dogmatic has not the same probability of commending itself to them, as a false and arbitrary scheme of thought, provided it

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<sup>307</sup> George Smeaton, *The Basis of Christian Doctrine in Divine Fact*. n.p.

have an aspect of freshness and liveliness about it, which they think Puritanical orthodoxy incapable of assuming. Now this volume seems to meet the case of such, provided only they are earnest and honest. It is Biblical and exegetical. It appeals directly to Scripture, and it confines the discussion to a department of Scripture which those who dislike cut and dry systems of doctrine are peculiarly fond of.<sup>308</sup>

Smeaton therefore aimed at a fresh and positive construction of Biblical revelation on the atonement: ‘...we wish to bring out *positive truth* or edifying doctrine much more than merely polemical discussion...’<sup>309</sup> Of the second volume he wrote, ‘The work is rather biblical than formal or polemical and intended to embody *positive truth* according to the setting in which the doctrine is placed in the apostolic documents.’<sup>310</sup>

## Summary

We have now considered Smeaton’s contribution from the perspective of his Biblical theological methodology. Interestingly as a result of our study a couple of questions arise: did Smeaton’s attempt to modify the form of classical Reformed orthodoxy and his inspiration from the works of many German and Dutch Mediating biblical scholars undermine or even contradict his Reformed orthodoxy? To answer this question, we will turn to examine Smeaton’s theological postulates connected to his Biblical theological study of the atonement. Smeaton’s theological postulates were certain key and connected doctrines which he deemed as essential for arriving at a full and rich biblical understanding of the atonement.

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<sup>308</sup> Hugh Martin, *Review*, 650.

<sup>309</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, 19. Emphasis mine.

<sup>310</sup> George Smeaton, *The Apostles’ Doctrine of the Atonement*, V. Emphasis mine.

Thus, at the outset of his work, he flagged them up and he justified them on biblical-theological grounds.

# Chapter Four: The Atonement Theologian

## Smeaton's Postulates to the Atonement

Like Chalmers before him, Smeaton recognised that theological postulates – that is doctrines from systematic theology - give both energy and guidance to the task of Biblical investigation. Thus, at the outset of his work, he laid out eight postulates – eight doctrines – which he believed to be organically connected to his investigation of the atonement. He believed that keeping these doctrines connected to his investigation of the atonement was essential for arriving at a full and rich biblical understanding of the atonement.

### **Postulate One: The Atonement is a Divine Provision to put away Sin and all its Consequences.**

For Smeaton, the fact that the atonement was a divine provision of God to address the reality and consequences of the Fall was a key postulate.

For Smeaton, this meant recognising: (1) God is the Moral Governor of the Universe and the Authoritative Lawgiver, and (2) all humanity -because of the Fall - stand guilty before God and in desperate need of rescue. Smeaton wrote ‘with a vivid sense of the relation in which men stand to the moral Governor, the Biblical doctrine evolves those truths that stand connected with the authority of law and the guilt of disobedience.’<sup>311</sup>

He also wrote ‘The Humiliation of the incarnate Son was primarily planned in connection with a remedial scheme, and is therefore a provision in the Divine counsels by occasion of

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<sup>311</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 20.

sin.<sup>312</sup> One of his reasons for underscoring this postulate was because in the modern theology of Germany (and the emerging theology of Britain) there was growing acceptance of the theory that the Incarnation would have taken place if no sin had entered the universe. Also, he stressed this postulate because many Christians within his day - as a result of modern subjective influences and theories - had begun to merely regard God as a 'fountain of influences'. Thus, many had lost sight of their relation and responsibility to God as the Moral Governor of the Universe.

In connection with this postulate he stated that (1) the consequences of the Fall were far-reaching and manifold. For instance in the Fall man forfeited his original standing relation before God; sin led to the deterioration of man's nature; sin brought the entrance of death, temporal, spiritual, and eternal; sin caused the departure of the Holy Spirit from man's being which was created to be His temple<sup>313</sup>; sin led to the tyrannical rule of Satan in the world; sin forced a chasm between man and heavenly creatures; and much more. But 'whatever is restored by Christ was forfeited by sin.' Here he aligned with Calvin.

Secondly, he laid out the biblical definition of sin. Sin is 'the violation of the law which mankind were under obligation to fulfil.'<sup>314</sup> Sin is either an act of omission (a duty required) or of commission (an act which the tenor of the law has forbidden).<sup>315</sup> He highlighted Jesus'

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<sup>312</sup>George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 20.

<sup>313</sup> Smeaton's belief that primeval man was a temple for the Holy Spirit and his departure at the Fall was largely unique to him in nineteenth century Scottish atonement thought.

<sup>314</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 21.

<sup>315</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 21.

view: sin is: darkness (John viii. 12), trespass (Mark xi. 25), debt (Matt, vi 12), and lie (John viii 44).<sup>316</sup>

Smeaton stated that these aforementioned facts had to be kept in view at every point of his exegetical inquiry.

### **Postulate Two: The Necessity of the Atonement**

The fact that Christ believed in the necessity of his own death was a key postulate to his atonement theology. For Smeaton, Christ's sayings revealed that he believed in the necessity of his own death. Smeaton discerned that most of Christ's sayings reveal that he viewed the necessity of his death in relation to it being foretold in the Old Testament. He asks however: 'was there any deeper reason assigned by Him?' Yes, indeed. For Jesus alluded, both directly and indirectly,

to a deep inner necessity for His atoning work...for God would not subject His Son to such agonies if sin could have been remitted without satisfaction... The facts are too momentous and solemn, and too closely connected with all the attributes of God and all the persons of the Trinity...<sup>317</sup>

God's divine rights – which are inalienable - and his justice in particular necessitated the atonement. 'The Author of the atonement ... alone fully knew what were His own claims as the moral Governor of the universe.'<sup>318</sup> Because Smeaton proceeded exegetically, he recognised that this was an *a posteriori* argument. However, he believed that this deduction

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<sup>316</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 21.

<sup>317</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 23.

<sup>318</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 20.

could be demonstrated since implicit in Christ's sayings to his first century hearers was his assumption that they were already familiar with the necessity of atonement.

The whole Old Testament was thus calculated to bring into prominence the necessity of an atonement, and to sharpen the conviction that sin required a higher sacrifice; and the sacrifice, presupposing the sinful deed, showed the inviolability of the law and covenant.<sup>319</sup>

Thus, he did not need to make the case to them. For Smeaton, a right understanding of man also demonstrated the necessity of the atonement. He wrote,

...a correct conception of the doctrine of man, also shows the necessity of the atonement... the atonement is in reality nothing else than the taking up of man's obligations at the point where the primeval man failed, with, of course, the additional element which his fall had entailed — the awful fact of sin. We may well affirm, then, that a correct anthropology, as well as a due conception of the attributes and rights of a personal God, is indispensable to a correct notion of the necessity of the atonement.<sup>320</sup>

God must always be considered in his relation, not only to the consequences of sin, but to sin itself. Sin has denied God of his rights; these must be restored. Therein lies one aspect of the necessity of the atonement.

In this connection Smeaton drew attention to two sayings of Christ in relation to the necessity of the atonement. John 3:14 *So MUST the Son of Man be lifted up* and Matthew 24:42 *if it be possible let this cup pass from ME.*

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<sup>319</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 24.

<sup>320</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 28.



In this connection the necessity of the atonement stemmed from the fact that God has to satisfy his own divine justice.<sup>321</sup> He wrote,

But of all who have handled this theme, no writer has more powerfully vindicated divine justice in the matter of the atonement than Anselm, in his celebrated treatise, entitled *Cur Deus Homo*, written in 1098 during his exile from England, and intended to meet speculative objections in his day, not unlike those of our age.<sup>322</sup>

### **Postulate Three: The Incarnation as a Means to an End.**

For Smeaton the Lord's incarnation 'as a means to an end' is another important postulate of his theology. Smeaton was convinced that the Bible set forth the incarnation as 'a means for the accomplishment of a great result: not as in itself an end'.<sup>323</sup> According to Smeaton, the incarnation was 'the foundation of the whole work of atonement', not the end in itself (John 6:39; Matthew 18:11; Mark 10:45):<sup>324</sup>

The Incarnation of the Eternal Son ... fills up the chasm and paves the way to the rectification of man's relation. But it is equally necessary to meet the wants and cravings of the human spirit, which ever and anon exclaims: What would become of me if my Maker were not my Redeemer? (Is. liv. 5).<sup>325</sup>

Again, Smeaton reasons over against the continental divines of his day who argued that the,

Incarnation would have taken place though no sin had entered to disturb the harmony of the universe. On the contrary, that view seems to me to go far to vitiate every

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<sup>321</sup> In this respect, Smeaton is confessedly Anselmian.

<sup>322</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 421.

<sup>323</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 39.

<sup>324</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 39.

<sup>325</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 39-40.

department of truth, because it deduces the Incarnation from the idea of humanity and not from the exercise of free and sovereign love.<sup>326</sup>

In addition, he recognised that the continental divines saw the incarnation as a completion, not as a restoration of creation. This he held, might suit Schleiermacher but it does not accord with Scripture.<sup>327</sup>

Based upon Christ's words, Smeaton sought to demonstrate that the incarnation was conditioned by sin and absolutely necessary for man's redemption. He wrote,

The expiation of sin, the meritorious obedience to be rendered to the law, the vindication of Divine justice, are the objects contemplated by the stupendous fact of the Incarnation, the Incarnation and the cross being inseparable. The words of Scripture announce an Incarnation of redeeming love: not of natural process.<sup>328</sup>

Again, '...we view the Incarnation as ushered in to be a means to an end.'<sup>329</sup>

#### **Postulate Four: The Love of God in Harmony with Justice as the Only Channel of Life**

Understanding God's attributes of the love and justice were a key postulate of Smeaton's atonement theology. He wrote, '... a due conception of the attributes and rights of a personal God, is indispensable to a correct notion of the necessity of the atonement.'<sup>330</sup> In another place, 'What moved Him [God] to this [atonement]? and the answer is, His own attributes or perfections.'<sup>331</sup> The attributes of love and holiness are particularly important.

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<sup>326</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 40.

<sup>327</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 41.

<sup>328</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 38.

<sup>329</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 42.

<sup>330</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 29.

<sup>331</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 167.

The atonement emanated from the love of God. It is God's communicative principle (*das selbst-mittheilende*). He wrote,

Love, then, may be fitly regarded as the communicative principle of the divine nature, or as the diffusive source of blessing; and it receives different names, according to the modification of the relation in which His creatures stand to Him, or the varied course of action He pursues toward them.<sup>332</sup>

Smeaton acquired this language from Isaac Dorner (1809 –1884) and Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus (1796 –1862). 'They maintain that there is in God ... a self-communicating element'.<sup>333</sup> However, he was also quick to point out that their definition was essentially the same definition as the Reformed scholastic understanding of *communicativum sui*. The use of this language therefore was not a novel idea, but consistent with historic Reformed belief. This point is an important correction to Kinnear's contention that Smeaton here attempted to modify Calvinistic thought – albeit Smeaton received criticism from a contemporary sympathetic reviewer for adopting this language.<sup>334</sup>

He asserted, 'The atonement emanated from sovereign grace, and was an expression of the boundless and incomprehensible love of God's heart to sinful men...' <sup>335</sup> Divine love must be viewed as the source of the atonement. In an important paragraph he writes:

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<sup>332</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 46.

<sup>333</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 435.

<sup>334</sup> Anonymous, *Review*, *The Presbyterian*, No. 1, May 1, 1868, 10. [Cited 14 February 2019] Online:

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=s3EOAAAAQAAJ&pg=RA2-PA10&dq=presbyterian+review+smeaton+1868&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwib48Tf9pbhAhXHXRUHbaOA-0Q6AEIODAD#v=onepage&q=presbyterian%20review%20smeaton%201868&f=false>

<sup>335</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 60.

These words of Christ [John 3:16] plainly show that the biblical doctrine on this point is not duly exhibited, unless love receives a special prominence; and that it would be a misrepresentation against which the biblical divine must protest, if, under the influence of any theory or dogmatic prejudice, love is not allowed to come to its rights. If even justice were made paramount, the balance of truth would be destroyed.

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The reason that love is worthy of special prominence, is because it is given prominence by the biblical writers.<sup>337</sup>

However, Smeaton also recognised that love can only be fully appreciated when it stands connected to God's justice. He asserted,

While the death of Christ, as a costly declaration of divine love, removes the slavish fear and distrust which prompt men to flee from God, it does this only as it meets a necessity on God's part, and provides a vicarious sacrifice for sin. The text exhibits the harmony of justice and love — the demand of justice, and the provision of love...<sup>338</sup>

Love, then, can be understood only in its connection with the justice of God. Moreover, without an understanding of justice, there can be no real conception of love – in Smeaton's theology.

### *Justice of God*

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<sup>336</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 45.

<sup>337</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 47.

<sup>338</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 47.

Following Smeaton's logic, if love is God's communicative principle, then divine justice is the self-asserting activity of the divine nature God (or the conservating principle) whereby He maintains the inalienable rights of the Godhead.<sup>339</sup> Again this language is taken from Dorner and Chalybäus. And again, their definition of justice, in Smeaton's mind, was the same as that implied by the scholastic distinction of *conservativum sui*. God's own eternal nature required a satisfaction for sin. He can no more not punish sin than he can lie. It is how he is. For Smeaton, God's moral perfections demand satisfaction because he loves and delights in his own perfections – among which there is perfect harmony.<sup>340</sup> In his atonement theology, therefore, the demand of justice was met by the provision of love. This belief placed him in conflict with the various theological schools (such as the Mediating School and Broad School) who were rejecting the judicial aspects of God and placing greater emphasis on the familial aspects of his nature such as the divine Fatherhood. Justice was thus subsumed into love or the love of God was redefined altogether based on a theologian's subjective understanding and sensibilities. Naturally, this also led to new theories of the atonement being propagated. As Kinnear notes,

The debate about the atonement [in the mid-nineteenth century] was conducted in the context of a reaction against Calvinist orthodoxy, which seemed harsh and contrary to the love of God. There was a strong, moral opposition to the idea that God was satisfied by vicarious punishment.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 46.

<sup>340</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 46.

<sup>341</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 27.

Yet Smeaton's emphasis on love was by no means unique among Scottish Reformed writers. Both Martin and Crawford made love central in their presentation of the atonement.<sup>342</sup> For, as Smeaton put it: 'Thus the Cross displayed the love of God in providing the substitute, and was the highest manifestation of its reality and greatness.'<sup>343</sup>

### *Fatherhood of God*

In connection with Smeaton's view on the love and justice of God, his views on the Fatherhood of God are worth noting:

Far be it from our thoughts to ignore the Fatherhood of God and the tender relation formed by grace between Him and His children; but when men come into this relationship, which henceforth exempts them from everything properly penal, that is the privilege of saints, not of natural men. It is a gift of grace, not a right of nature nor a universal boon; for all are by nature the children of wrath (Eph. ii 3). It cannot be affirmed that it belongs indiscriminately to all men, unless we obliterate the distinction between converted and unconverted men. But God's Fatherhood does not exclude His relation as a lawgiver and a judge. We rather affirm, — without entering into a new question foreign to our undertaking, — that the former rests upon the latter.<sup>344</sup>

As Robert Shillaker has pointed out, Smeaton's 'thinking on this subject was done against the backdrop of the polemical debate between Robert Candlish and Thomas Crawford.'<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Thomas J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture respecting the Atonement*, 151-153. Hugh Martin, *The Atonement*, 190-191.

<sup>343</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 48.

<sup>344</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 32.

<sup>345</sup> Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814-89)*, 172-176.

Interestingly, Shillaker also shows that Smeaton's viewpoint diverges from both these men in some respects.<sup>346</sup>

### **Postulate Five: The Unique Position of Jesus.**

For Smeaton, recognising the terms that Jesus applied to himself was also essential for understanding the atonement. In particular, the relation Christ holds to God and man.<sup>347</sup>

Smeaton noted that the terms most commonly used in the various doctrinal discussions of the atonement were drawn from Bible phraseology such as: Surety, Mediator, High Priest, and Advocate. However, these terms are not found in the Lord's own words descriptive of Himself.

This led Smeaton to highlight the fact that Jesus used phrases and titles which revealed that He was conscious of a quite unique relation to the world. He wrote:

...that He stood between God and man; that He was not an individual unit of the race, as all the negative theology represents him; but acting in a representative capacity for it. He assumes a position that no one but Himself could dare occupy. Thus, when He calls Himself the Way, in the saying "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John xiv. 6), He means that He is the exclusive Way; not only paving the way for others, but constituting, in His own person and work, the only way by which any could have access to God. That this is the meaning is evident from the subjoined words, "No man cometh unto the Father by Me."

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<sup>346</sup> Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814–89)*, 172-176.

<sup>347</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 51.

For example, Smeaton highlights the various instances where Jesus linked Himself to the lost and condemned, as their Physician and Deliverer (Matt. ix. 12; Luke 19:10) After reviewing Jesus' use of terms and titles, Smeaton concludes:

He showed, in a word, by many titles and expressions, that He stood in the position of a Mediator between God and man, and that if men did not believe in Him they should perish in their sins (John viii 24). But He abstains, for obvious reasons, from appropriating the title most of all familiar to the Jews, — that of Messiah.<sup>348</sup>

### **Postulate Six: Sayings of Jesus Referring to a Sending by the Father**

For Smeaton another key postulate of his atonement theology was recognising that throughout Jesus' ministry, he was constantly referring to the fact that he was sent by the Father. For instance, he highlighted various passages which evidence this: John 3:17, 6:38;57 7:28;33 8:29 10:36 and Matthew 10:40.<sup>349</sup> According to Smeaton:

... the Lord uniformly intimates that He did not assume or arrogate to Himself the dignity or office of being the Redeemer of sinful men, but that He was appointed to it, or ordained by God to it.<sup>350</sup>

### **Postulate Seven: Sayings of Christ which assume that He is the Second Adam**

For Smeaton, covenant lay at the centre of his biblical theological examination of the atonement, and within that context in particular, the Adam-Christ parallel. According to Smeaton, Reformed federal theology was '... only meant to ground and establish the

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<sup>348</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 55.

<sup>349</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 51-62.

<sup>350</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 62.



undoubtedly scriptural doctrine of the two Adams (Rom. v. 12-20; 1 Cor. xv. 47).<sup>351</sup> He added,

No one can doubt, who examines the federal theology, that the design of those who brought that scheme of thought into general reception in the Reformed Church for two centuries, was principally to ground, and to put on a sure basis, the idea of the two Adams; that is, to show that there were, in reality, only two men in history, and only two great facts on which the fortunes of the race hinged...<sup>352</sup>

Smeaton's doctrine of the atonement cannot be understood without this concept:

The doctrine of the atonement cannot be understood at all, except on the principle that the same constitution is laid at the basis of that economy by which we are saved, as lay at the basis of that economy by which we fell. That constitution was to the effect that one man was regarded as the race, and that the race is still the one...<sup>353</sup>

Nevertheless, Smeaton tended to avoid the classical seventeenth century federal theological terminology. This sensitivity appears to be partly due to what he viewed as the excesses and artificial construction of federal theologians who followed in the footsteps of Cocceius, Witsius, and Owen etc. He thus proffered these judicious comments:

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<sup>351</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 439.

<sup>352</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 439. He also listed theologians in the history of the Reformed Church who espoused the Adam-Christ parallel: Johannes Cloppenburg (1592 - 1652), David Dickson (c.1583–1663), Johann Cocceius, Herman Witsius, William Strong (birth unknown – 1654), and John Owen.

<sup>353</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 64.

It became a magnificent scheme of theological thought in the hands of these men, and of others who took it up with ardour. That foreign thoughts afterwards came to be introduced into it, and that it became complicated by many additional elements, brought in to give it completeness, but which only lent it an air of human ingenuity and artificial construction, cannot be denied...Against this whole scheme of thought, a reaction set in a century ago. Nor can this be wondered at, when we remember that it was overdone, and that the reaction was only the effort of the human mind to regain its equilibrium — as is always the case when anything is carried too far. It was overdone, and now it is far too much neglected. But it is by no means to be repudiated, or put among the mere antiquities of Christian effort. This, or something like it, whether we adopt the federal nomenclature or not, must occur to every one who will follow out the revealed thoughts uttered by Christ Himself to their legitimate consequences.<sup>354</sup>

He believed in what was in view in the federal theology of a covenant of works, covenant of grace, and covenant of redemption.

#### *Covenant of Redemption*

Smeaton believed that the Lord's sayings - in New Testament passages such as Matthew 10:40; John 6:38, 57; John 7:28,33; John 8:29; and John 10:36 - presupposed a covenant or an agreement within the Trinity for the salvation of elect people (the so-called *pactum salutis*):

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<sup>354</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 439.

If we put together a few of the expressions used by Christ upon this topic, we shall find that He, first of all, leads us, by means of this phraseology, to the counsel of peace, or compact between the Father and the Son for man's redemption.<sup>355</sup>

In classical Scottish federal theological terminology, this counsel of peace was also known as the covenant of redemption, and Smeaton also believed in it.<sup>356</sup>

### *Covenant of Grace*

Smeaton discerned in the biblical story what is commonly known as the 'covenant of grace':

This covenant ... exhibiting the whole economy as springing from the Father's gracious will, and as a scheme of grace, and nothing but grace, *combines in a vivid way all the doctrines of special saving grace*. It is peculiarly valuable as affording a bird's-eye view of the whole economy from its commencement to its final consummation. It is the unrolling of the map of God's procedure; and in putting together plan and execution, fact and theory, as we shall proceed to do, we obtain a juster view of the grace which projected the whole.<sup>357</sup>

Smeaton held this perspective was important for the way it emphasised the humanity of Christ in relation to his work.<sup>358</sup> Such an emphasis was not unique to Smeaton. It was prevalent among Scottish Reformed theologians in the mid-nineteenth century. For example, Martin and Crawford, also taught that the atonement should be understood in its relation to

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<sup>355</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 56-57.

<sup>356</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 66.

<sup>357</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 68.

<sup>358</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 68.

the covenant of grace.<sup>359</sup> For all three of these theologians Christ's sin-bearing, law keeping, and obedience all had their source in it.

### *Covenant of Works*

Smeaton's federal headship presupposed his belief in a covenant of works. This was a key principle underlying his understanding of the atonement theology.

That covenant rested on this basis, that as God at first had created man under a representative constitution, or under a system which was that of one for many, so the surety must come on a footing precisely similar, nay, enter into the very provisions of that first arrangement (Rom. v. 10). Thus Christ and His people stand in the eye of law as one single person. There were, properly speaking, but two persons in the world — Adam and Christ, — in whom the whole seed, belonging severally to these two, must be considered as contained. On the principle just laid down, that Christ and His seed are viewed as one person, it is plain that the salvation of His people was virtually to be wrought out in the obedience and death of the Son of God. The covenant rested on this basis, that the Son of God, condescending to be Son of man, should enter into our covenant of works, and that all who were given to Him should enter into the federal reward. That this may be rendered more clear, it will be necessary to sketch with all possible succinctness the various conditions prescribed to Him.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Donald Macleod, "Covenant Theology", Online: <https://donaldmacleod.org.uk/dm/covenant-theology/> Cited 4 June 2017. According to Donald Macleod, '...possibly the most enthusiastic nineteenth-century devotee of covenant theology was Hugh Martin'. Thomas J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture respecting the Atonement*, 83-88; 141-145.

<sup>360</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 62.

Again, he writes,

.... Adam was a public person, — the representative of all his family, according to the constitution given to the human race, as contradistinguished from that of other orders of being, — so Christ, the Restorer, stands in the same position to His family or seed. The world could be redeemed on no other principle than that on which it was at first constituted. Augustin's expression, *ille unus homo nos omnes fuimus*, [we all were that one man] as applied to the first man, is perhaps the very best formula ever given; and the same formula may be applied with equal warrant to the second man, the Lord from heaven. As applied to the atonement, this principle of a covenant, or a conjunction between Christ and His seed, is simple and easily apprehended. The conditions being fulfilled by the second man, His people enter into the reward.<sup>361</sup>

Again:

He [Jesus] must be put under the law, and under that law as broken. Some would make it appear that He was not necessarily made under the law in the proper sense. But if it was to be a true obedience on His side, and a true substitution or vicarious action for others, He must stand under our covenant — that is, be made under the law of works, both as to precept and penalty.<sup>362</sup>

Nevertheless, instead of utilising the term ‘covenant of works’, more often than not Smeaton preferred to talk about Christ being under the ‘law’ and the ‘law of works’.

According to Smeaton, Adam in his pre-fallen state: (1) bore the image of the triune God, (2) was filled with the Spirit of Life, and so (3) man and God existed in the closest of relations.

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<sup>361</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 440-1.

<sup>362</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 67.

These facts were important postulates to his theological investigation of the atonement.<sup>363</sup> It should be noted that affirmations *one* and *three* were widely acknowledged in Reformed thought. However, affirmation two - the view that Holy Spirit indwelt Adam prior to the Fall – was not as widely held. Thus, it is here that we discover one of Smeaton’s noteworthy beliefs.<sup>364</sup>

Key to his understanding of what the Second Adam came to restore as a result of his atonement was the Holy Spirit. But he grounded this view of Adam being indwelt by the Spirit before the Fall. He pointed to the words of Genesis 2:7: ‘When God breathed into man the breath of LIFE (or LIVES, for it is plural), we must understand life in the Holy Spirit as well as animal and intellectual life.’ He also quotes John Owen at this point:

Dr Owen has well remarked that God, having manifested by other parts of creation His existence, nature, and perfections, designed in the creation of man to manifest Himself in a trinity of persons; a remark setting forth a momentous truth only too little pondered.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 10; 16.

<sup>364</sup> Robert Shillaker affirms this, ‘It is in this area, of the personal relationship between God and humanity at creation, that Smeaton's theology contains one of its more distinctive nuances.’ Cf. Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814-1889)*, 53.

<sup>365</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 11. Cf. *The works of John Owen*, vol 3, 102. Owen stated, ‘... Adam may be said to have had the Spirit of God in his innocency. He had him in these peculiar effects of his power and goodness; and he had him according to the tenor of that covenant whereby it was possible that he should utterly lose him, as accordingly it came to pass. He had him not b especial inhabitation, for the whole world was then the temple of God.’

According to Smeaton, this belief was not new. It was present in Patristic and Puritan theology; although Calvin and others after him chose not to adopt it - interpreting Genesis 2:7 to refer to physical life.<sup>366</sup> But, according to Smeaton 'The Patristic writers, Athanasius, Basil, Ambrose, and Cyril, refer the words [Gen 2:7] to the occasion when God communicated the Spirit, the breath of the Almighty, the giver of the Higher as well as of the lower form of life.'<sup>367</sup> Adding, 'This is a point that has never been taken up in earnest by any divine of note, with the single exception of Howe, whose Living Temple proceeds upon it as a postulate.'<sup>368</sup>

Smeaton did not embrace this belief as an attempt to introduce into theology a novel idea, but rather was resuscitating a view lost sight of by Reformed theologians in order to develop his understanding of atonement theology.<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 10.

<sup>367</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 10-11.

<sup>368</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 14. Smeaton believed that the reason this postulate had been overlooked in church history was because a theological treatise, which had long passed under the name of 'Augustin', denied this belief. He stated, 'The great influence of Augustine's name, thus supposed to have pronounced a different judgement, seems mainly to have had the effect of repressing due inquiry, and of blunting statements which might otherwise have been at once clearer, ampler, and less reserved in the direction to which I have referred.'

<sup>369</sup> Robert Shillaker highlights examples and instance where William Cunningham, Charles Salmond, and Octavious Winslow mention that the Holy Spirit was in Adam pre-Fall. *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814-1889)*, 139-146.

Smeaton believed that this postulate was rooted in both exegetical evidence and by the analogy of the federal headship parallel between Christ and Adam.<sup>370</sup>

The arguments from analogy which go to prove that Adam had the Spirit are conclusive. The doctrine that man was originally, though mutably, replenished with the Spirit, may be termed the deep fundamental thought of the Scripture-doctrine of man.... It is clear that, unless the first man possessed the Spirit, the last man, the Healer or Restorer of the forfeited inheritance would not have been the medium of giving the Spirit, who was withdrawn on account of sin, and who could be restored only on account of the everlasting righteousness which Christ brought in (Romans viii. 10).<sup>371</sup>

Elsewhere he wrote,

Adam had the Spirit in the state of integrity, not only for himself, but for his seed; and he walked after the Spirit as long as he stood in his integrity. From the narration of creation, brief but suggestive, which is given in Genesis, the great thought is derived that, according to the constitution which God was pleased to give the first man among the creatures of His hand, not only was a federal unity assigned to him as the head of the race, but a relation to the whole Trinity which comes to light in his being made in the image of God.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> As did, John Howe (1630-1705) and George Bull (1634-1719). For Smeaton was not trying to be innovative in holding this viewpoint, but trying to recover something which had been long overlooked. Both Johann Cocceius and Herman Witsius held this view in a seed form. However, it was not at the forefront of their scheme of salvation.

<sup>371</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 15.

<sup>372</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 11.



Thus, he concluded,

On exegetical grounds as well as on ground of analogy, we must hold that man as he was formed not only corresponded to His ideas as a Son within the sphere of creaturehood, but was the temple of the Holy Ghost. This is a view so essential to all right conceptions of our primeval relationship, that without it no sound anthropology can be maintained. The deep ground-thought presupposed by Christianity is, that Adam had the divine image and life from the Spirit of Life. It follows, accordingly, that the elements were already deposited in him by which he was in a position to reach the full perfection of his being, as he was. He needed only to have further developed that which was already in him, and to abide the probation which he was place.<sup>373</sup>

Therefore, in Smeaton's theology, 'creation has been ruined by a fall and is being redeemed by God, in which the redemptive situation both recovers and, in some way, exceeds the original creation.'<sup>374</sup> The reason the redemptive situation exceeds the original creation, is because the individual as a result of Christ's atonement receives the Holy Spirit and is given new life in the Son.

To argue this point, Smeaton shrewdly appropriated an axiom used by both Augustine and Calvin that what was restored by the Second Adam in the atonement, was what had been lost by the First Adam in the fall.<sup>375</sup> He wrote:

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<sup>373</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 12.

<sup>374</sup> Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814-1889)*, 1.

<sup>375</sup> 'For, according to a canon, of easy and universal application, constantly applied by Augustin and Calvin in their interpretation of the divine word, whatever is freely provided and bestowed by God, is a something of

Under the effects of sin we may classify a vast number of bitter evils, such as the forfeiture of our right relation or standing before God; the deterioration of our nature and the entrance of death, temporal, spiritual, and eternal; the departure of the Holy Spirit from the human heart, formed to be His temple; the tyranny of Satan; the gulf formed between men and all holy intelligences, and the like. In a word, whatever is restored by Christ was forfeited by sin.<sup>376</sup>

He added,

... there is such a correspondence or similarity in an opposite direction between the effects of sin and the effects of the atonement that the comparison of the two serves to throw light on both.<sup>377</sup>

Furthermore, central to this analogical argument was Smeaton's understanding of the Holy Spirit and his relationship with Christ. For Smeaton, Christ's flesh was prepared by the Holy Spirit, Christ was indwelt by the Holy Spirit in his earthly ministry, and Christ's atonement procured the gift of the Holy Spirit for his elect people.<sup>378</sup> It is only after the work of the atonement is complete that the Spirit is given.<sup>379</sup> The whole subject merits a special study on its own in Smeaton's view.<sup>380</sup>

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which man is destitute...' Interestingly, as highlighted above, Calvin did not teach that Adam was indwelt by the Spirit.

<sup>376</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 11-12.

<sup>377</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 12.

<sup>378</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 342.

<sup>379</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 343.

<sup>380</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 344 and 350.

For Smeaton, the atoning work of Christ secured the Spirit for Christ's elect. Moreover, the Spirit's return to the elect put mankind back in a close relation to God – according to Smeaton it is a better standing than the first Adam.<sup>381</sup> For Christ's procurement of the Holy Spirit by his atonement has brought about a whole new relationship.

A provision was to be made that Divine love might have free course to mankind, and that sinners might again become the habitation of their Maker... to place man, once estranged, in such a sphere that in harmony with the Divine claims and the honour of the law, he shall bask anew in the beams of Divine love, realizing nearer intercourse and more absolute dependence than if he had never fallen — was an end worthy of the Incarnation. The Christian redemption is thus a remedial economy, not a natural process to carry on creation to its completion. Every want was to be met, and a more glorious vessel formed with larger capacities of happiness. The remedial scheme contemplated for man a position of greater nearness than if the Fall had never been (John xvii 20-23). The doctrine of the Divine image, the deep ground-thought of Christianity, is so fully exhibited that the descriptions of Genesis and Revelation seem to touch each other. By the Incarnation the lost image and dominion are restored.<sup>382</sup>

Thus, by way of summary, Smeaton writes:

[The]...testimony of the Lord emphatically declares that the supply of life, far from being an absolute or an unpurchased gift, was possible only by means of His atonement; that it was secured by a work of obedience; and that it is forfeited no more. Not only the primeval life which was enjoyed in fellowship with God is restored, but the primeval life which awaited man after a period of probation, and

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<sup>381</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1.

<sup>382</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 42.

which would have been conferred had he continued in his first estate, is procured and conferred by the atonement of the incarnate Son in the room of sinners. In securing this result, the Prince of Life encountered death, and rendered an equivalent for the guilt of mankind; for the dominion of death could give place to a reign of life in no other way.<sup>383</sup>

His exegesis of three passages in John's Gospel (7:38-39; 14:16; 16:7) leads him to this conclusion:

Such is the connection between the gift of the Spirit and the mediation of Christ. They must be apprehended together; and the isolation of the Spirit's work from the cross and crown of the Redeemer is always of doubtful tendency, and calculated to divest the theology, to which it gives a tone, of its evangelical liberty. It speedily engenders a legal element; and hence, according to this view of the connection between Christ and the Spirit, it is necessary to fix a steady gaze on Christ's cross, as the Lord our righteousness. The living personal Saviour, the true foundation of life to humanity, gives the Spirit, thus won or procured by His death.<sup>384</sup>

Smeaton believed that a lack of appreciation for the connection between the Holy Spirit and the atonement meant that one would depreciate what was achieved by Christ's death and ascension. In this emphasis he is to be distinguished from both Martin and Crawford, neither of whom mentioned the Holy Spirit indwelling Adam. Here then was a fresh contribution to Scottish atonement theology.

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<sup>383</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 278.

<sup>384</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 350.

But while Smeaton sought to bring this to the fore in his salvation scheme, neither his exegetically grounded belief nor his use of analogy took root in Scottish Reformed thought, or have much of a bearing on subsequent theological writing. As Shillaker concluded, Smeaton's unique attempt to bring Howe's scheme to the fore in Reformed theology was probably dwarfed by the larger theological shifts that were beginning to transform the face of the Free Church and Scottish theology.<sup>385</sup>

### **Postulate Eight: The Influence of Christ's Deity**

Smeaton's final postulate is arguably his most important: 'the connection between the doctrine of the atonement and that of Christ's deity'.<sup>386</sup>

So close is the connection between the doctrine of the atonement and that of Christ's deity, that they are always found, as history shows, to be either received together or denied together. The one is necessary to the other; and hence the true Church has always in every age confessed to both. The Lord connects the two as the two "heavenly things," on which He lays the greatest stress in His interview with Nicodemus (John iii 13, 14).<sup>387</sup>

For Smeaton the deity of Christ can be conclusively proved from the Gospels.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> According to Shillaker, only two modern Reformed writers have taught this view of the Spirit indwelling Adam – D. B. Garlington and Meredith Kline. Kline himself makes no reference to Smeaton as his work is totally concerned with the Biblical images and not systematic or historical factors. 158.

<sup>386</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 69.

<sup>387</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 69.

<sup>388</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 71.

Following the Patristic, Reformed, and Puritan traditions Smeaton's Christology was thoroughly orthodox. In the main, it reflects the classical Chalcedonian formulation (451). For instance, he affirms his belief in the hypostatic union, that is to say, that Christ had two natures - human and divine – and they were conjoined in one person.<sup>389</sup>

Moreover, Christ's nature was impeccable – that is, without sin, unable to sin, and it was also free from the consequences of sin, such as disease and death.<sup>390</sup> Smeaton held to the necessity of Christ's deity to give adequate efficacy to his atonement:

It is the person of Christ, or Himself as a divine person, in the performance of a work given Him to do — and not His teaching, merely, or the republication of lost truth — that constitutes the ransom. But one equal to the task of bringing a satisfaction or atonement for millions must needs possess a divine dignity. A mere man could as little redeem the world as he could create the world: the Restorer of man must be the Maker of man.<sup>391</sup>

He also stressed the harmony of the deity and humanity in their union in the one person of Christ.

If we examine the history of Christ's life, as written by inspired men, we find that the two sides of His person are in a quite peculiar way brought out together; and that the scenes which represent Him in His deep abasement always contain, if we only look for them, discoveries or out-bearings of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily. The whole person, as divine and human, is in some way brought out, a peculiarity of the

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<sup>389</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 73.

<sup>390</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 125.

<sup>391</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 69.

biblical narrative, which is wholly lost in human biographies of Christ. They cannot approach it.<sup>392</sup>

Only the orthodox Christology can ground a consistent doctrine of the atonement.

The Arian scheme destroys all proper conceptions of His satisfaction. If Jesus were not a divine person and infinitely exalted above all law, He could not act for others.<sup>393</sup>

The Sabellian view

...goes no further than a humanitarian theory of Christ's person. Such a person would have nothing to spare, no superabundance of merit beyond what was absolutely necessary for his own wants. By the supposition of being merely inhabited by God, He is but a creature necessarily subject to the law, and precluded by the nature of the case from acting vicariously. He could not put Himself under the divine law for others. The utmost that could be done would only be His duty. Whatever a creature has or is capable of rendering. He owes already to His maker.”

And in the Nestorian view, which divides the two natures, Smeaton contends, ‘the foundation of our redemption is overthrown at once by any separation of the natures’<sup>394</sup> Essential for a proper Christology and atonement theology is the understanding:

The works of Jesus, accordingly, are the works of the person...this guiding principle must be carried with us into the interpretation of all His language. If we ascribe, then, to the person what belongs to either nature, as we may and must, more value attaches

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<sup>392</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 71.

<sup>393</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 71.

<sup>394</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 73.

to the obedience and suffering of the Son of God than to the sinless service of all creation.<sup>395</sup>

Smeaton sees three consequences derived from the influence of Christ's Incarnation - either directly taught or easily deducible from his words.

1. The first effect of his Incarnation: Jesus had power over his own life (John x:8). 'No one can be the master of human nature who is not supreme God, producing and upholding it by his own power.'<sup>396</sup>
2. The second effect of his Incarnation: the infinite value or merit attached to his atonement (John iii.16). Only the God-man was able to make atonement for infinitely great sin. 'This involves the collision of infinitudes – infinite wrath for a world's guilt met by infinite endurance; the curse exhausted in order to be changed into a blessing,- things of such a nature that nothing short of omnipotence could be put into the scale against them.'<sup>397</sup>
3. The third effect of his Incarnation: the party bought must, by the necessary law of purchase, belong to him who redeems them (John x:2). 'But man cannot be lord of man. To this proprietary right to His own sheep our Lord refers when he calls them his sheep (John x:3): he proceeds to argue on the ground of His

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<sup>395</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 73.

<sup>396</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 76.

<sup>397</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 77-78.



omnipotence and His Father's dominion, that none shall pluck them out of His hand'.<sup>398</sup>

It is these facts which ground his ability to save all of his people.<sup>399</sup>

Thus the Son of God was by the Incarnation in the position of sinners for the endurance of the punishment; the dignity of His person supplying what was wanting in the continuance of sufferings limited to thirty-three years, — Christ being no ordinary man, but the Son of God.<sup>400</sup>

Throughout Smeaton's work, there is a final postulate assumed.

### **Postulate Nine: The Trinity**

His atonement theology was fundamentally rooted in his doctrine of God. Throughout, his exposition of the atonement, the Trinity occupies a central place. He summarised his beliefs in Trinity the following five propositions:

1. That there is one God or divine essence.
2. That the same numerical divine essence is common to three truly divine Persons, who are designated Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
3. That between these three divine Persons there obtains a natural order of subsistence and operation: that the first Person hath life in Himself (John v. 26); and that the second and third Persons subsist and act from the first.
4. That this order of the divine Persons belongs to the divine essence prior to, and irrespective of, the covenant of grace.

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<sup>398</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 78.

<sup>399</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 78.

<sup>400</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 78.

5. That this natural order of subsistence and action is the ground and reason of the several names, Father, Son, and Spirit; the Son being begotten of the Father, and the Spirit by spiration proceeding from both.<sup>401</sup>

Smeaton summarised his understanding of the economic work of the Trinity in this way:

- (1) the Father is the source *from which* every operation emanates
- (2) the Son is the medium *through which* it is performed,
- (3) the Holy Ghost is the *executive by which* it is carried into effect.<sup>402</sup>

Additionally, he believed that the Trinity should be understood from a practical viewpoint.

He wrote,

...a belief of this great truth is absolutely essential to the Christian man and to the Christian Church. Without it, Christianity would at once collapse. As this doctrine is believed on the one hand, or challenged on the other, Christian life is found to be affected at its roots and over all its extent. Every doctrine is run up to it; every privilege and duty hang on it.<sup>403</sup>

It is 'the very essence of Christianity essence and compendium of Christianity itself.'<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 3-4.

<sup>402</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 4

<sup>403</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 5.

<sup>404</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 4.

Alongside, the Fathers, and the Reformers, Smeaton contended that the Trinity is the loftiest subject of contemplation for any human being. It brings the Christian peace, rather than perplexity.

It [the Trinity] not only presents a lofty subject of contemplation to the intellect, but furnishes a repose and peace which satisfies the heart and conscience. *To explain this mystery is not our province.* All true theologians, who have trained their minds in the right school, whether in expounding positive truth or in combating erroneous views, have uniformly accepted it as their highest function simply TO CONSERVE THE MYSTERY, and to leave it where they found it, in its inscrutable sublimity, or, as the poet expresses it, “dark though excessive bright.” Leibnitz happily said, If we could bring it within the terms of any humanly constructed definition, it would be a mystery no longer. The zeal and erudition of the Fathers, accordingly, were mainly employed to retain and preserve the mystery.<sup>405</sup>

Furthermore, the Trinity is incomprehensible - that is, beyond creaturely comprehension. But this should lead to worship:

The enlightened Christian in this field neither expects nor wishes to find that which will not baffle his comprehension by its vastness, nor dazzle him by its splendour. Nay, the appeal to the ADORING WONDER of the finite mind becomes more powerful when its limited capacity fails to comprehend the theme in all its magnitude. We cease to comprehend and begin to adore. The Christian Church, feeling that she has to believe what God has condescended to declare, is alive to the fact that there is no loyalty greater than the loyalty of the intellect; and she calls for the submission of

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<sup>405</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 4.

the finite reason. Hence every one feels the force of these beautiful words of Gregory Nazianzen in reference to the Trinity... “I cannot think of the ONE but I am immediately surrounded with the splendour of the THREE; nor can I clearly discover the three, but I am suddenly carried back to the One.”<sup>406</sup>

Here we see Smeaton’s epistemological conviction that divine revelation takes priority over man’s intellect and mental ability. He concluded that,

... the doctrine of the tri-personal God, or the threefold personality in unity, as the most fundamental, vital, and practical of doctrines; that it forms the ultimate ground of every truth; that it is absolutely intertwined with the essential provisions of the gospel; and that the plan of salvation cannot be left standing entire, if this great doctrine, the keystone of the arch, is either loosened or displaced... Without this doctrine, the Creed would have no coherence, nor her members have any solid peace.<sup>407</sup>

## Summary

In summary, in this chapter, we have highlighted Smeaton’s sources of knowledge and his nine systematic postulates which informed his Biblical study of the atonement. It is important to highlight that Smeaton did not assume or conceal his Reformed theological presuppositions, rather he self-consciously employed them and sought to justify them biblically and theologically. The reason this is noteworthy is because Smeaton acted self-consciously as a *Reformed* Biblical theologian.

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<sup>406</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 4-5.

<sup>407</sup> George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 5.

We also discovered one of his distinctive beliefs, namely, that Adam was indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Reasoning from the Augustinian-Calvinistic axiom, he brought this element to the fore of his salvation scheme. However, he did not view this aspect as a novel innovation to Reformed atonement theology, but an emphasis that had been lost sight of in the Reformed tradition and needed to be recovered. To that extent, what we have learnt is that Smeaton coupled his Biblical theological methodology with his self-conscious commitment to historic orthodoxy - which, it should be said, Smeaton held represented the teaching of Scripture.

We must now summarise the various conclusions which have arisen from our discussion.

## Chapter Five: Novum Organum

### 1. Was *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* a 'Novum Organum of Theology'?

At the outset of this thesis we highlighted the claims of several writers who suggested Smeaton's *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* was a 'ground-breaking' contribution to Scottish Reformed theology, or indeed, a *novum organum* of theology.<sup>408</sup> The question we must now answer is: does the evidence presented in this thesis substantiate these claims?

In chapter one, our biographical introduction of Smeaton, we observed that he was both an erudite and godly classical Reformed Scottish theologian. His rigorous education at the University of Edinburgh - in particular under the tutelage of Thomas Chalmers - prepared him for a bright future as a professional theologian in the classical Reformed orthodox tradition. Moreover, his outstanding linguistic abilities in Greek and Hebrew, equipped him for a notable career as a Biblical scholar. In addition, his knowledge of the German and Dutch languages enabled him to become a forerunner in Scotland in directing attention to the latest developments in German and Dutch theology and philosophy.<sup>409</sup> Finally, his appointments to the chair of New Testament and Exegetical Theology - first in Aberdeen Free Church College in 1854 and then to New College, Edinburgh in 1857 – meant he became an early pioneer in a relatively new field of study in Scotland. Thus, all of the

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<sup>408</sup> Anonymous. Review of George Smeaton, *Doctrine of the Atonement, As Taught by the Apostles*, The British Quarterly Review. Volumes 53-54. 1871. July and October. (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 133-134. John Keddie, *George Smeaton: Learned theologian and Biblical Scholar*, (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007), 140.

<sup>409</sup> Alexander Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*, 46-59. There is evidence which displays Smeaton visited Germany in 1845. James Craig, *The Gospel on the Continent: incidents in the life of James Craig, M.A., D.D., Ph.D.*, edited by his daughter (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), 102.

aforementioned evidence suggests that Smeaton was both qualified and well-placed to make a creative academic contribution to Scottish Biblical scholarship.

In chapter two, we looked at Smeaton's ecclesiastical, theological, and methodological context. Significantly, we highlighted the leading theological methods which were applied to study of the doctrine of the atonement in Scotland prior to 1868, namely, the homiletical method, dogmatic method, historical method, and the method of Christian consciousness. Evidencing that Smeaton's application of the Biblical theological method to study of the atonement in 1868 was ground-breaking, and indeed, a *novum organum* (new method) of theology in Scotland.

However, in chapter two, we also noted that Thomas Chalmers in his Divinity lectures delivered to his students at both the University of Edinburgh (1827-1843) and New College (1843-1847), posthumously published as *Institutes of Theology*, called for a *novum organum* of theology. In fact, in his Divinity lectures, Chalmers contended that Scottish Reformed theologians ought to (1) adopt a more Scriptural approach to the study of doctrine and (2) utilise the inductive method in the task of Biblical investigation. In this connection, we highlighted Michael Bräutigam's assertion that Chalmers' Scripture-based inductive method 'set the standard for subsequent FC theology ... and it proved influential for other Disruption 'fathers', especially for Cunningham and Smeaton.'<sup>410</sup>

Furthermore, we highlighted two claims made by Peter Lorimer. (1) He asserted that Chalmers would have recognised with joy his own most cherished principles, in the

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<sup>410</sup> Michael Bräutigam, *Free Church Theology 1843-1900*, in David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott eds., *The History of Scottish Theology: The Early Enlightenment and Late Victorian Era*, Vol II, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 245.

department of the ‘Logic of Theology’, in Smeaton’s *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*.<sup>411</sup>

(2) He claimed that Chalmers’ *Institutes of Theology*, although a work of dogmatic divinity, anticipated the science of Biblical theology.<sup>412</sup> Therefore, it could be argued that Chalmers’ theological lectures prepared the way for a Scottish Reformed theologian to apply the academic Biblical theological method.

In chapter three, we gave an overview of Smeaton’s Biblical theological method to the exposition of the doctrine of the atonement. We noted how Smeaton’s Biblical theological method sought to ascertain the New Testament’s doctrine of the atonement by looking specifically at the theology of Jesus and the theology of the Apostles. In examining Smeaton’s epistemological presuppositions and Biblical hermeneutics, we established that he acted self-consciously as a *Reformed* Biblical theologian.

In this chapter, we also looked at what Smeaton said in *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement* regarding what inspired him to apply the Biblical theological method. (1) Smeaton stated that he was inspired by the fact that no one else had attempted to arrange and classify Christ’s sayings on the atonement, and (2) because no one else had attempted to produce an outline of the apostolic doctrine of the atonement from Christ’s sayings.<sup>413</sup> Further demonstrating that Smeaton saw his first volume work making a fresh contribution to Scottish atonement theology in mid-nineteenth century.

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<sup>411</sup> Peter Lorimer, *Review*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 20, (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1871), 593

<sup>412</sup> Lorimer recognised that Chalmers’ *Institutes of Theology* were eminently Biblical, both in their matter and spirit. But he also conceded that, strictly speaking, they were not a work in the department of Biblical theology. Peter Lorimer, *The Characteristics of Biblical Theology*, 383.

<sup>413</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, ix.



Furthermore, we highlighted how Smeaton, ironically, drew inspiration for applying the Biblical theological method from German and Dutch Mediating scholars.<sup>414</sup> Indeed, one reviewer said:

... it is something quite new, or all but quite new, to see a Scottish theologian clothed, though he be in full armour of proof, as a master of systematic divinity, doffing that armour for the nonce, and descending into the same arena of “grammatico-historical” exegesis, with the continental divines of the new school.<sup>415</sup>

Affirming that Smeaton’s application of the Biblical theological method in Scotland was innovative.

However, the reason Smeaton adopted the method from the German Mediating theologians was because he perceived that a method was to a large extent a neutral tool; its application and function depends upon other factors – such as one’s epistemological presuppositions and Biblical hermeneutics. In Smeaton’s mind, the Biblical theological method was by no means inherently defective simply because it was utilised by German Mediating theologians. Rather, in Smeaton’s mind, *abusus non tollit usus*: the wrong use of the method did not negate its right use. Smeaton recognised that, in safe hands, the Biblical theological method could be effectively appropriated in the defence and advancement of orthodoxy. In addition, Smeaton recognised that his innovation, in Scottish theology, was a safe one. As one reviewer justly

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<sup>414</sup> Smeaton’s application of this method was not the first time that a Scottish Reformed theologian appropriated tools plied outside of orthodoxy. For instance, Thomas Chalmers in the first half of the nineteenth century made use of Scottish Common-Sense Realism and the Baconian inductive method.

<sup>415</sup> Peter Lorimer, *Review*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 20, (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1871), 192.

commented: ‘It is, in truth, a very safe kind of innovation, which consists in going back to what is old, to what is oldest of all, the *ipsissima verba* of the Lord and his apostles.’<sup>416</sup>

In chapter four, we looked at Smeaton’s nine theological postulates. These were the doctrines which he believed to be organically connected to his Biblical theological investigation of the doctrine atonement. For example, we discovered that the federal headship construct (First and Second Adam) was fundamental to his understanding of Scripture’s teaching on salvation. Indeed, in Smeaton’s mind it was the undergirding principle of his redemptive historical hermeneutic.

Moreover, Smeaton’s nine theological postulates reveal that Smeaton acted self-consciously as a Reformed Biblical theologian. Unlike his continental contemporaries, he did not assume them or even try to conceal them, rather he self-consciously employed them and sought to justify them Biblically and theologically. Interestingly, Smeaton perceived that the continental Mediating practitioners employed the Biblical theological method believing that their method was ‘scientific’ and therefore ‘objective’. However, Smeaton recognised that, in reality, the continental Mediating theologians failed to recognise that there is no such thing as presuppositionless Biblical theology. Indeed, he detected that concealed in their Biblical hermeneutical principles were a number of influential presuppositions. For instance, Smeaton discerned that their application of the Biblical theological method was built upon their foundational hermeneutic of Christian consciousness as the judge of truth.

Moreover, Smeaton rightly recognised that Christian consciousness elevated human reason over the authority of the Scriptures; whereas Reformed orthodoxy deemed human reason to be subordinate to the Scriptures. In this context, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement* was a

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<sup>416</sup> Peter Lorimer, *Review*, in *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, Vol 20, (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1871), 192.

shrewd rebuttal, placing Scripture above reason, and bringing the reader into contact with Christ's own mind. Thus, it was in this area of Reformed presuppositions and postulates that Smeaton stood out from most of his contemporaries and successors – with a few exceptions.

## **2. Did Smeaton's Application of the Biblical Theological Method Contradict or Cohere with his Classical Reformed Orthodoxy?**

The evidence in this thesis proves that it cohered with his classical Reformed orthodoxy. This is because his application of the Biblical theological method was related to the following key principles:

### **(i) Reformed spirituality**

Smeaton emphasised spirituality as essential to his theological activity. In fact, it was one of the key boundaries within which he acted as a Biblical theologian. The Biblical theological method was not an end in itself. Its purpose was to bring the minds of his readers into immediate contact with the mind of the Lord. For Smeaton, knowing the mind of the Lord was the very essence of theological investigation.

In keeping with classical Reformed orthodoxy, he also regarded the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit as both the key to his producing his work and to the readers of his work: 'every true disciple has this distinctive feature about him, that he hears the voice of Christ, but a stranger's voice will he not follow'.<sup>417</sup> For Smeaton the Scriptures were the rule and guide of faith and the Holy Spirit their true interpreter – these were all essential to true theological investigation.

### **(ii) Reformed Biblical scholar**

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<sup>417</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, vii.

Although Smeaton was a true scholar, he did not ultimately implement the method for academic distinction, nor to introduce German presuppositions to Scottish thought. On the contrary, he applied the method to expound and elucidate the truth of the atonement in divine revelation, in a way that was thoroughly consistent with Reformed orthodoxy and its key presuppositions. From his Reformed perspective, Smeaton perceived the ultimate flaw in the application of the Biblical theological method by many of his contemporary continental practitioners was: they acknowledged revelation *in divine fact*, but rejected divine revelation *in word*. Thus, for them, the facts were open to interpretation. By contrast, for Smeaton (and in keeping with classical Reformed hermeneutic) the facts came with their own interpretation in the word.

Furthermore, his work addressed the confusing and perplexing heterodox views that were being espoused on the continent, such as the overemphasis on the incarnation as opposed to the cross. For Smeaton, these could only be overcome by beginning with the classical Reformed presuppositional approach. That is to say, Christian consciousness must always be subordinate to Christ's consciousness - as found in Christ's sayings about the atonement recorded in the four Gospels. Thus, for Smeaton, the Bible alone was the ultimate source for developing one's doctrine of the atonement.

### **(iii) Evangelical outlook**

Furthermore, if Smeaton's contribution is to be properly appreciated, it needs to be recognised that in his mind the death of Christ was the central truth of Christianity and the great theme of the Bible. Indeed, the reason he regarded the atonement as the key doctrine of

Christianity was because of what it achieved: it restored mankind into a close standing with God which exceeded his pre-Fall position.<sup>418</sup>

In addition, as the final chapters of his work make clear, Smeaton viewed the exercise of Christian academic theology as inseparable from Christian evangelism and discipleship.<sup>419</sup> His underlying conviction was that the study of the Bible, in particular the truth of the Gospel, was vital not just for orthodox belief but for any genuine and life-transforming relationship to God.

#### **(iv) Ecclesiastical defence**

In view of this previous fact, Smeaton stated at the outset of his work that he felt it was ‘urgently demanded’ and therefore sent it forth ‘with the prayer that the Great Teacher may use it to turn men’s minds away from unprofitable speculation, to listen to his voice.’<sup>420</sup> This prayer stemmed from the fact that he was cognizant that many of his successors in his own country had already been, and would in the future be tempted to abandon classical Reformed and Biblical viewpoints in exchange for harmful theological speculations. Following Chalmers and Cunningham, Smeaton saw his primary duty as a Free Church professor was to instruct the next generations of Christian ministers and theologians in the defence of Biblical orthodoxy – especially in the face of the growing influence of German infidelity. It was for this reason, as he comments in his preface, that he wrote the work for ‘the educated English

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<sup>418</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1.

<sup>419</sup> The last three chapters of *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement* deal with matters of evangelism and discipleship: Chapter VI: The Actual Efficacy of the Atonement, Chapter VII: The Application of the Atonement, and Chapter VIII: The Endless Happiness or Woe of Mankind Decided by the Reception or Rejection of the Atonement.

<sup>420</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, xi.

reader'.<sup>421</sup> However, Smeaton's aim was clearly not realised in the Free Church. For within a few years there was a marked transformation in the theological views of many Free Church theologians and ministers.<sup>422</sup> Thus, Kinnear was right when he asserted: 'Smeaton ultimately failed to convince the wider scholarly world that their interests were best served by adhering to Calvinist orthodoxy.'<sup>423</sup>

Moreover, because Smeaton sought to uphold the classical Reformed doctrine from the Bible, almost predictably, he was accused by reviewers of bringing the system of the Westminster Confession of Faith into his work:

Professor Smeaton has, however, brought to them as much as he has found. Almost all the scholastic ideas of subsequent ages are gathered around them, and the entire system of the Westminster Assembly's standards is found in them. The process would have been much more interesting, and the result much more satisfactory, had these sayings of our Lord been dealt with either in chronological or in doctrinal sequence, with a rigid exclusion of all the ideas of subsequent dogmatic theology; as it is, Professor Smeaton simply traverses the old dogmatic round, heavily weighted with the Assembly's confession of faith. In that confession there is much precious truth;

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<sup>421</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, viii.

<sup>422</sup> Shillaker stated 'It would appear that Smeaton was not confident that the Reformed orthodoxy would prevail in the short term, as Thomas Smith comments: 'With respect to the conduct of the controversy, Dr. Smeaton was disposed to take what some of his friends deemed a pessimist view; but on the ultimate issue he had no doubt. This line of thought cannot be taken too far, and it might be better to understand Smeaton as being aware of a battle in which Reformed theology was being assailed with some effect.' Robert Shillaker, *The Federal Pneumatology of George Smeaton (1814-1889)*, 22.

<sup>423</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 126.

but there are some things that we do not think to be truth, from which modern theology is happily disencumbering itself.<sup>424</sup>

This criticism misses something that Smeaton evidently perceived and which recent academic research into Protestant Scholasticism has documented.<sup>425</sup> Although writing two centuries before the advent of academic Biblical theology, many of the seventeenth century divines were themselves Biblical theologians. Sadly, they have suffered from the historically inaccurate caricature that they were merely proof-texters in their theological formulation.<sup>426</sup> Ultimately this fact is not reflected by a casual reading of the Confession. However, a further reading of the writings of the men who produced the Confession reveals that they arrived at their doctrinal conclusions, based upon Biblical theological grounds. This fact Smeaton certainly appreciated.

However, at the same time, he recognised that the academic Biblical theological method of the nineteenth century was refined by a greater cognizance of how divine revelation, from which orthodoxy emerges, actually *works*. Thus, one could argue that Smeaton's aim was not

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<sup>424</sup> Anonymous, *Review*, in *The British Quarterly Review*, Vol 48, July-October, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1868) 580.

<sup>425</sup> The Richard Muller school of thought, in the last few decades, has shown that the Westminster Divines were not mere proof texters but developed their theology on biblical-theological ground. Muller and others have contributed much to study of the methodology, development, and history of Reformed Orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their historical reading has altered and enriched our understanding of Reformed Orthodoxy. See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>426</sup> Interestingly, the divines rejected the idea of adding proof texts to the Confession because they believed it would diminish the reality of their Biblical theological conclusions. However, the Parliament required them to add them.

to relay the foundation, but to furnish and illuminate the hallways and rooms of Biblical revelation. Indeed, it could be argued that Smeaton was retrieving and recasting the classical Reformed Biblical theological foundation with regards to the atonement, and on such a premise Smeaton arguably pioneered something that was hugely impressive.

Moreover, the aforementioned evidence, also challenges Malcolm Kinnear's assessment that Smeaton was attempting to modify Calvinistic belief.<sup>427</sup> Smeaton was by no means seeking to undo or introduce novel ideas to classical Calvinistic theology. If anything, he was reviving and recovering classical Reformed belief - in a way that was both consistent with his tradition and relevant to the nineteenth century context.

### **3. Did Smeaton's Application of the Biblical Theological Method Contribute to the Development of Future Atonement Literature in Scotland?**

Remarkably, the answer must be 'Yes' and 'No'. 'No' because we struggle to find evidence of any significant influence or impact of Smeaton's contribution on atonement works written by his contemporaries and successors in Scotland. But 'Yes' because a small handful of Biblical theological works on the atonement appeared soon after his two-volume works. The main ones include: Thomas Crawford, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement* (1871), James Denney, *Jesus and the Gospels* (1909), and *The Death of Christ: Its Place and Interpretation in the New Testament* (1911).

Interestingly, however, the Biblical theological method was applied more broadly to other doctrines in the years after the publication of *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* and *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement*. For instance, Smeaton himself applied the Biblical-theological method in his *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (1882). So too did Patrick Fairbairn in his *The Typology of Scripture, viewed in connection with the whole series of the Divine*

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<sup>427</sup> Malcolm Kinnear, *Scottish New Testament Scholarship and the Atonement*, 126.



*Dispensations* (1876). A number of other Scottish theologians applied the Biblical theological method in their works: Paton James Gloag, *The Messianic Prophecies* (1879), Thomas Whitelaw, *How is the divinity of Jesus depicted in the Gospels and Epistles?* (1883), James S. Candlish, *The Kingdom of God: Biblically and Historically Considered* (1884), Douglas David Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church: Historically and Exegetically Considered* (1887), Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Kingdom of God* (1889), William Lindsay Alexander, *System of Biblical Theology* (1888) and Archibald Scott, *Sacrifice: Its Prophecy and Fulfilment* (1894).<sup>428</sup>

However, the majority of Smeaton's successors did not adhere to all of his classical Reformed orthodox distinctives. Most of them embraced the negative critical aspects of the modern continental schools. Indeed, Smeaton's successor in the chair of New Testament, Marcus Dods, inaugurated a new era in New College. He was a 'believing critic'; meaning he sought to maintain a sincere faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, whilst at the same time upholding the critical presuppositions of the continental thinkers (e.g. the denial of plenary verbal inspiration). This became the prevailing theological position among many of the leading Free Church theologians in the late nineteenth century.

The question has often been asked before: How could a church that prided itself on being the strictest evangelical body in Christendom produce an A. B. Davidson, a William Robertson Smith and a George Adam Smith? It is a question without an easy answer. Richard Riesen has contended that the seeds of liberalism were in the Free Church Fathers themselves.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> See Alfred Cave, *An introduction to theology: its principles, its branches, its results, and its literature*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), 410-421.

<sup>429</sup> See Richard Riesen, *Criticism and Faith in Late Victorian Scotland: A. B. Davidson, William Robertson Smith, and George Adam Smith* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985). Nick Needham disputes this

However, this seems highly implausible. Since Smeaton, one of the youngest Free Church fathers, failed to exercise a great deal of influence over the next generation. Norman C Macfarlane wrote: Older men kept on their shelves his [Smeaton's] books on the atonement... but the younger men gave them no place.<sup>430</sup> Smeaton's atonement contribution was overlooked and discarded by the next generation of Scottish theologians. Although a number of them applied the Biblical theological method in their writings, they gave no credence to Smeaton's pioneering application of the method within Scottish Reformed tradition.

In a sense, this reality can be masked by a mutual interest in the (1) Biblical theological method and (2) in learning from German Mediating theologians. Indeed, it was virtually a *sine qua non* for a Scottish New Testament professor to be familiar with the latest works published on the continent. And many future Scottish Biblical scholars came to share Smeaton's desire to be intimately acquainted with German Biblical and theological literature. But, unlike him, they embraced the presuppositions, hermeneutic, and increasingly the theological postulates of continental literature - the very things Smeaton sought to expose and rebut.

Moreover, it is a conspicuous fact of the works written on the atonement in the last one-hundred-and-fifty-years - whether by believing critics or classical Reformed theologians in Scotland - very little attention, if any, is given to Smeaton. It is strikingly noticeable that following the widespread acclaim his works received when they were originally published, his contribution very quickly faded into obscurity. In a word, he became the forgotten Scottish Reformed Biblical theologian of the atonement. However, the Biblical theological

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theory in his book Nicholas R. Needham, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture in the Free Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1991).

<sup>430</sup> Norman C. Macfarlane, *Rev Donald John Martin*, (Edinburgh, 1914), 35.

works of James Denney and Alexander Bruce, (both of whose Reformed credentials turned out to be suspect as they increasingly adopted the presuppositions and results of negative criticism) received greater recognition and acclaim in the twentieth century in Scottish Reformed studies of the atonement.

Smeaton's strategy of adopting and pioneering the Biblical theological method to the central tenet of Scottish Reformed Orthodoxy was shrewd and imaginative. But sadly, it was little appreciated in his own era. In light of this John Keddie was therefore right to assert:

Smeaton's work was ground-breaking. It is to be seriously doubted that the magnitude of his achievement in these volumes on the atonement, *and especially in the first*, was really appreciated in his own day.<sup>431</sup>

#### **4. Was Smeaton A Forerunner to Modern Reformed Biblical Theology?**

Today Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) is widely acknowledged as the 'father of modern Reformed biblical theology'. Vos was a Dutch-American theologian who studied theology in Holland, Germany, and America. Following his studies, he had a prodigious career as a theologian. First, he taught systematic theology at the theological school of the Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His systematic lectures were later published in five volumes entitled *Reformed Dogmatics* (1910). Following his time as a systematic

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<sup>431</sup> John Keddie, *George Smeaton: Learned theologian and Biblical Scholar*, (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2007), 140. Emphasis mine.

theologian, Vos became professor of Biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>432</sup> Like Smeaton, Vos was committed to Reformed orthodoxy; and covenant as the architectonic principle of Scripture. His two works *Pauline Eschatology* (1930) and *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948) provide the evidence of why he is regarded as the father of modern Reformed Biblical theology.

Moreover, Vos and Smeaton, unlike many of their continental contemporaries, recognised that Biblical theology and systematic theology were two complementary disciplines within the organism of theology. Neither wanted the Biblical theological method to supplant systematic theology.<sup>433</sup> For instance, Martin in his review of Smeaton's work recognised this fact when he asserted: 'It [*Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*] does not build a system; it gives us materials to build with.'<sup>434</sup> Vos in similar vein stated in a lecture 'Biblical Theology is of the greatest importance and value for the study of Systematic Theology.'<sup>435</sup>

However, perhaps the area they shared a most striking similarity, was in their conceptualisation of the relationship between systematic and Biblical theology. For instance,

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<sup>432</sup> It is noteworthy that before Smeaton became a Biblical theologian, he also taught systematic theology for a short time. Smeaton's first year of teaching theology was in Aberdeen Free Church College in which he served as a junior teacher to Patrick Fairbairn in the systematic theology department.

<sup>433</sup> Smeaton's arrangement of *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* reveals that he appropriated systematic theological categories.

<sup>434</sup> Hugh Martin, *Review*, 650.

<sup>435</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline*, Inaugural address as Professor of Biblical Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary, delivered at the First Presbyterian Church, Princeton, on May 8, 1894. Cited 10 Jan 2018. Online:

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d8f2/abcab2724edbd8dbe423f836eac6008ccfe8.pdf>

Smeaton stated at the outset of *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement* his understanding of Biblical and systematic theology:

Instead of commencing, according to the common custom, by fixing a centre and drawing a circumference, we wish to proceed historically.<sup>436</sup>

Vos stated his understanding of the two disciplines in the following way:

In Biblical Theology the principle is one of historical, in Systematic its one of logical construction. *Biblical Theology draws a line of development. Systematic Theology draws a circle.*<sup>437</sup>

Vos nowhere referenced Smeaton in his writings. However, our examination of Smeaton's contribution suggests that he was a forerunner to the Vosian approach to Reformed Biblical theology.

### **Final Remarks**

Smeaton should be applauded by Scottish Reformed theologians today for the way he capably and resourcefully combined insights from modern continental Biblical scholarship with the classical Reformed tradition to expound a rich and thoroughly Biblical theological understanding of the atonement. His *novum organum* of theology deserves to be widely recognised. Indeed, his forgotten innovation provides both Biblical scholars and thinking Christians with an excellent model of investigation.

Smeaton brought together the theology of the Reformed orthodoxy with the methods of academic Biblical theology and its distinctive insights. Moreover, he did this whilst living in a milieu that was increasingly and rapidly modifying and rejecting Biblical authority. The

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<sup>436</sup> George Smeaton, *Christ's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1.

<sup>437</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), 24-25. Emphasis mine.

present author believes that in view of all of the aforementioned facts, Smeaton deserves to be recognised as a model Scottish Biblical scholar – although he would have certainly not claimed that his contribution was the final word on the topic.

In conclusion, even though Smeaton's work left no real heirs in his own context, students of Reformed theology in Scotland today should acquaint themselves with his *novum organum* of theology and ground-breaking atonement work. It would both deepen their appreciation of the death of Christ and furnish them with the relevant Biblical and theological categories by which to exposit and elucidate it. However, as Donald Macleod wisely stated:

Not that we can revive ourselves by simply reading old books. But as the Reformers drew inspiration from the Fathers, so we can draw fresh life from the great reforming doctors, Scottish as well as Continental: provided, of course, we are prepared to reassess and re-evaluate them in dialogue with others and, above all, in the light of our own formative principle, *sola scriptura*. Such a reclaimed theology, grasped with conviction and preached with passion, would enable us both to evangelise the world and to secure for Christ his rightful place in the public square.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Donald Macleod, *Reformed Theology in Scotland* in *Theology in Scotland*, 17, (2), 2011, 5-31. Cited 10 Jan 2018. Online: <https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/TIS/article/view/76>.

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