

Is it Me?
Or
The Cat Let Out of the Bag

With such a main title, I am, of course, leaving myself wide open to the obvious answer: ‘Yes’.

Let’s see. Let’s see what you think.

Here are two paragraphs written about Princeton Theological Seminary, which was founded in 1812.

Here is the first:

The name of the seminary is known in all the world. Its chief distinction is its biblical teaching. The ground of its faith is the Bible. Its only question is: ‘What has God said?’ Its only proof is God’s word. Its professors have never reached the point of thinking that they knew more than the Bible. This seminary has always taught that there are but two questions to be considered: (1) Is this the word of God? And (2) What does it mean? This ascertained, there is nothing left but to believe and adore.

Here is the second, setting out the first of ‘three significant elements in the [seminary’s] tradition’:

It was a confessional tradition. They were committed to the classic Confessions of the Reformed Churches, particularly the Westminster standards. They were doctrinal maximalists [that is, they allowed no compromise in their views]. To say the tradition was confessional is to say that it was theological, involving a view of life founded on the decree of God, and the covenant purpose of God to justify, sanctify and glorify sinners by Jesus Christ. As A.A.Hodge put it, the characteristic of Princeton theology was ‘close and persistent adherence to the type of Calvinism taught in the Westminster standards as these are interpreted in the light of the classical literature of the Swiss, Dutch and English Puritan theologians, who wrote after the date of the Synod of Dort, especially Francis Turretin of Geneva and John Owen of

England'. [John Gresham] Machen, at a later date, wrote of the fact that though he had given his life to the study of the New Testament he regarded this as ancillary [that is, additional, subsidiary, secondary, supplementary] to systematic theology. Princeton scholars were not just able technicians; they served, in their work, the knowledge of God.

So I ask again: Is it me? The first paragraph tells me that the basis, the only basis, for the seminary was Scripture. *That*, for the seminary, was 'the only question'. The second paragraph tells me that theology, Calvinistic theology, Westminster Assembly theology was primary. One of its leading professors actually stated that for him the study of Scripture (and that, only the New Testament) came second to systematic theology.

So which is it? How can both be true? They can't. Consequently how can the current (July 2018, pp16-22) *Banner of Truth* contain the 1971 article 'The Princeton Men' by Paul Helm, which opens with the first paragraph above, and which has the second paragraph as the first main paragraph after the introduction? How is this possible?

I am well aware of the usual escape clauses which will be trotted out. But it will not wash. Indeed, as my title goes on to say, the cat really is let out of the bag.

The point is, when it comes to addressing vital contemporary questions like the new covenant, the believer and the law, the way to bring sinners to Christ, assurance, and so on, too many fall back on a Confession, and let the theological system contained in that Confession trump all. If only – if only – the Reformed would not only repeat, but act in accordance with, the first paragraph of that article! Let Scripture speak! Let Scripture speak unfettered by man-made Confessions! Let us take seriously such passages as Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:6; Isaiah 8:20; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; Revelation 22:18-19. And act upon them.