The Contentious Triangle
Habent sua fata libelli

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The Contentious Triangle

CHURCH, STATE, AND UNIVERSITY

A Festschrift in Honor of
Professor George Huntston Williams

Edited by
RODNEY L. PETERSEN &
CALVIN AUGUSTINE PATER

Volume LI
Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies
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FOREWORD

This volume tells a story that is larger than any foreword could hope to portend. It is, of course, about George Huntston Williams. But it is also about a vision of faith in time. As such it reflects both a statement about one who has helped to shape the discipline of church history, yet also stands in some measure as a constructive critic of that guild that he has helped to form.

Standing on the threshold of the twenty-first century language such as a vision of faith in time sounds reminiscent of a kind of grand scheme, the kind of thing that historians seek to avoid. Yet in George Williams one finds a scholar committed to the particular, the limited and defined, to microhistory in the best sense of the term, but also one who confronts us with the full order of antinomies in the history of peoples he finds to be “the People of Two Covenants,” a people whose Continuities and Discontinuities form the contours of the Christian story. This bounding breadth is something of what Jaroslav Pelikan means when, in the opening article of this Festschrift, he writes of the “‘Hundred-handed, Argus-eyed’... Scholarship of George H. Williams” Pelikan’s article opens up a section on “History and the Historian,” which takes us to the larger bio-bibliographical reflections of Timothy George and on to the work of Peter J. Gomes. “Thomas Hollis of London: Piety, Philanthropy, and Harvard at Two Hundred Seventy-Five Years,” benefactor of the first endowed professorship in what would become the United States, held for many years by George Williams. Hollis, together with his later endowment of a chair in Mathematics, would symbolize in these gifts the Puritan conception of God’s double revelation in Scripture (history) and in Nature, especially apt in Williams’ tenure.

All of the voices of this “covenantal” history, cacophonous and concordant, have crowded into the life of George Huntston Williams. The pace of that life is a supernumerary affair. It has nimbly moved in Erasmian quest east to the academic and ecclesiastical centers of Europe, and west to the newer horizons, for

1These remarks were first developed at the time of Williams’ eightieth birthday and presented to him as the foreword to Rodney Petersen and Margaret Studier, George Huntston Williams: Biographical Statement and Bibliography for the Period 1940-1994 (Newton: Boston Theological Institute, 1994).

2See the sketch of Williams’ life in Biographical Statement, pp. 7–21. Several of the articles in this volume add to this biographical history.
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him and the movement he seeks to understand and about which he writes, to Japan and China on the adventual threshold of a new history. It is a life of constant accretion, never deletion, whether friend or foe each is valued like the footnotes and reflective insight that make his volumes grow. As Metropolitan Demetrios Trakatellis writes of “Justin Martyr,” so Williams is also “A Man of Dialog,” meaning the full engagement of parties with one another. As Everett Ferguson writes of the early church, so it might be said of Williams’ prevailing philosophy in such interaction, “Love of Enemies and Nonretaliation....” Appropriately, Nicholas Constan, writing of “Word and Image in Byzantine Iconoclasm: The Biblical Exegesis of Photius of Constantinople,” might as aptly be describing George Williams as Photius of Constantinople when Constan writes of Photius as bibliophile-librarian and committed theologian. In taking up the theme, “The Law of the Church in the Central Middle Ages: Its Creation, Collection, and Interpretation,” Roger Reynolds and, then, Heiko Oberman, in “Hus and Luther, Prophets of a Radical Reformation,” work with themes that shape Williams’ conception of society as symbolic of a larger ontological reality, a concept to be developed in a later article by Danièle Letoche. These articles constitute a second section in this volume, on “The Ancient and Medieval Church”; they provide a platform for Williams’ work and historical perspective in later eras of church history. Williams is a Congregationalist in practice and in polity, then also a Unitarian, but a minister in the United Church of Christ and Trinitarian, the first in the latter and the latter in the former. Only his history can explain this, and perhaps the multiconfessional and humanist sixteenth-century Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania. For this and reasons of historical scholarship, it is appropriate that Lech Szczucki begins a third section on “Reform, Renewal, and Religious Ferment in Early Modern Europe,” with an acknowledgment of “George H. Williams’ Studies on the Radical Reformation in Central Europe.” Equally appropriate is the article by Calvin Pater, which acknowledges the creative perspective that Williams brought to the sixteenth century in “And the Waters Withdraw; The Recovery of Atlantis: George H. Williams and the Radical Reformation.” This article is followed by several others that illustrate the kind of microhistory so characteristic of the detail with which Williams works: Werner Packull’s piece, “Early Contacts between Anabaptists in Hesse and Moravia”; the article by Paul Grimley Kuntz, “The Moral Code of a Radical Reformer: Paracelsus and the Ten Commandments”; one by Nelson Minnich, “wie in dem Basilischen Concilio den Behemen gescheen?” The Status of the Protestants at the Council of Trent”; and Keith Sprunger, “The Meeting of Dutch Anabaptists and English Brownists: Reported by P. J. Twisck.” The final two articles in this section reflect Williams’ own concern for an engaged sense of church history, those by Harold O. J. Brown, “From Poland to Park Street: A Congregational Reformer’s Long Shadow,” and John Witte, Jr., “Anglican Marriage in the Making: Becon, Bullinger, and Bucer.”
Foreword

Throughout these articles there runs the ambiguity of those who look for “the city not made with human hands” but which reflects all-too-humanly the hands of those who lay together the brick and mortar of its habitations and its walls. This is the history of the covenant people, *mutatis mutandis*: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). Williams’ own biography picks up these pieces, not only in his nuclear and extended family, but also in his contact with people of the covenant, *am ha’aretz*, the Amish farmers of his childhood and the distant voices of industrial America, Cleveland, Eugene Debs, and the “L” from Chicago’s mercantile center and museum-garlanded Loop to Austin and Oak Park on that city’s fiery Western horizon. All these are shards of a larger story.

In picking up these pieces, Williams has never been a mere collector. His interest in languages, peoples, and their histories almost carries him into a world analogous to biological classification and zoological differentiation. Here he discovered the religious perturbations that would be of such interest throughout his life: at first in structures mediated by Paul Tillich, *Priest, Prophet and Proletariat*, then in the world of compounding National Socialism and the diminishing sanctity of life in Europe prior to the outbreak of World War II. Neoorthodoxy gave this decrescence a name. It was an old name known to pilgrims past that would shape Williams’ understanding of the People of the Covenant. Whether pre- or infralapsarian, Williams looked for anointing grace among these peoples, even in the regal *Norman Anonymous*, and found propitiation through expiation. His struggle to understand the People of the Covenant brought him back to this country to finish his studies and then on to teach at Pacific School of Religion, Starr King, and then east to Harvard University and Divinity School.

He would write about the history of this people as his friend of years, Sterling Professor Jaroslav Pelikan, would write of their theology; however, Williams fell into the sixteenth-century slough and, like the greater Latin Church, found himself mired in its *disputationes*, sociological and theological. With the ardor of Ernst Troeltsch, he called its most confusing lines *The Radical Reformation* and set out to put them straight. They, too, were part of the covenant people and—perhaps more profoundly—shorn of kingly anointing he found that they bore a prophetic mantle.

Williams did not so much get caught up in the sixteenth century as help to mark out the modern period by the strength of his typological division of early modern Europe. Danièle Letocha catches the currency of this in her article, “A Determined Generalist: Professor George H. Williams as Philosopher,” which draws us into the fourth section of this volume on “Church History in the Modern Era.” Letocha identifies the larger trajectories of Williams’ work and his interest taken, in part, from Ernst Kantorowicz in the symbolic nature of society as developed in its academic, religious, and legal structures. In different ways, the balance of articles in this section deals with aspects of the body social from this perspective. Such is the case with Harold Berman in “The Religious Dimensions

In the half century that Williams has worked at Harvard as professor, acting dean, and in numerous other capacities, the Protestant world—defined and channeled by the sixteenth century—has changed markedly. Roman Catholicism has taken on the new hues of Vatican II and a variety of liberation theologies. Documented by Williams in observations extending from that Council to the present, Williams’ biography of the current pope, *The Mind of John Paul II*, sets out the implications of many of these changes in contemporary fashion. So, too, the world of Orthodoxy, long frozen by historical circumstances, is experiencing its new though unpredictable spring. Williams was drawn to and into this world by Odessan Father Georges Florovsky, another shard of the larger history to which George Bebis takes us, the deeper sense of life, an “ecumenism in time”—ideas that had caught Williams’ eye once on LeBreton’s shelf long ago in France. Whether pinnacled in solitary labor in Widener Study K or as a transitional public divine, caught up under President Pusey in a new *translatio studii*, Williams’ work has brought Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox thought together in his efforts to understand, if in a mirror dimly, the history of the People of the Covenant. From Cotton Mather and *Magnalia Christi Americana* to the *Polish Brethren* and *Stanislaw Lubieniecki*—all are found in this *Wilderness and Paradise* of Williams’ work. But such “Divinings” continue and include that older People of the Covenant as well as peoples new to its story, visions of faith through history, not only in temporal but also in spatial ecumenism whose annals are written in the antinomies of time. So it is important to conclude this volume with a tribute to Williams’ ecumenical efforts as with the article by Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, “The Encyclical *Ut unum sint*: At a Crossroads in the Ecumenical Movement”; and also to let Professor George Williams have the final word in an article from a transcript, edited by James D. Smith, “In Defense of Church History: A Minister with Historical Perspective.”

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2This is the manuscript title. The full manuscript is in the Boston Theological Institute archives. An edited version is forthcoming from William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Foreword

This Festschrift, like the body of scholarly and church writings that George Williams passes on as his heritage, is in debt to many. A word of thanks goes first to Margaret Studer, faithful friend and aide to Professor George Williams in many ways. Not only were her suggestions useful in the preparation of this volume, but her work made possible the celebration of the eightieth birthday of Professor Williams in 1994. Acknowledgment in the preparation of this Festschrift extends to others who have helped to prepare the individual manuscripts for publication: Adam Kissel, Amelia Smith, and Ina Pufahl; and to be singled out for his unstinting and persevering work in this respect is Forrest Clingerman, office operations manager of the Boston Theological Institute.

Thanks goes to Yale University’s Sterling Professor Jaroslav Pelikan, who gave the keynote address at that celebration for Williams and who has meant so much to him as a friend and colleague through the years. Another to be singled out is Heiko Oberman, Williams’ colleague from 1958 to 1966, whose valuable suggestion for a title of this volume caught the essence of a leitmotif extending through Williams’ scholarly career, only now coming into its fullness with Divinings. Finally, a word of thanks goes to the authors noted above. I am especially grateful that each section of this volume could be written by a person representing a different communion and country, Jaroslav Pelikan, Metropolitan Demetrios Traktellis, Lech Szczucki, Danièle Letocha, and Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy. Like every article, but in a particular way in the case of these five, each represents a different horizon in the work of George Williams.

Finally, a word of thanks must be extended to Robert Schnucker and to Paula Presley of Thomas Jefferson University Press. This volume has been intentionally delayed so as to permit Professor Williams time to complete “Divinings” and in order to be as inclusive as possible of the many different eddies that flow into the broad stream of Williams’ scholarship. Their encouragement and patience has also made this volume possible. In the years since the completion of the last Festschrift in Williams’ honor, edited by F. Forrester Church and Timothy George, with the assistance of James D. Smith, Williams has completed three major books (one the extensively revised The Radical Reformation, third edition) and a host of articles. Lastly, encouragement not only comes through all of the means implied above; it is also related to those who assist with the practical matters of making publication possible. I wish to add a final note of thanks in this regard to friend and minister Rev. Dr. Rhys Williams and to the congregation of the First and Second Church Boston, to friend and minister Allen Happe of First

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