

BOOK REVIEW

of

W. Gary Crampton,

By Scripture Alone: The Sufficiency of Scripture,
The Trinity Foundation, 2002.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is presented by Larry D. Paarmann.

W. Gary Crampton, ordained in the PCA, holds two doctorates, one in theology from Whitefield Theological Seminary, and one in philosophy from the Central School of Religion in Surrey, England. In addition to *By Scripture Alone*, Dr. Crampton has also authored *What Calvin Says: An Introduction to the Theology of John Calvin*, *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark*, and *A Study Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Dr. Crampton has a very high view of Scripture, as clearly displayed in his earlier work *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark*. That high view is even more clearly displayed in *By Scripture Alone*. In the Forward to the book, Robert L. Reymond, former Dean of Faculty at Knox Theological Seminary, and faculty member at Covenant Theological Seminar for more than 20 years prior to that, says “No doctrine is of greater importance today, given the sad state of affairs within professing Christendom, than the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.”

The book under review is 245 pages long, and is divided into two parts. Part 1 is titled *The Westminster Assembly’s Doctrine of Holy Scripture*, and Part 2 is titled *Sola Scriptura versus Sola Ekklesia*. As explained in the Introduction, Part 2 is a response to a recent book: Robert A. Sungenis, et al., *Not By Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura*, Queenship Pub. Co., 1998. This book by Sungenis et al. is something of a champion for the Catholic position. See, for example, the numerous references to it in Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, Canon Press, 2001. It is also referred to very frequently on the internet: for example, see the numerous comments on the book at Amazon.com, and references to it by detractors of evangelical books on sola Scriptura. Although Crampton does not explicitly say so, no doubt the title of the book under review is in direct response to the book by Sungenis, et al.

In the Introduction, referring to the Westminster Standards, Crampton quotes B.B. Warfield: they are “the final crystallization of the elements of evangelical religion, after the conflicts of sixteen hundred years. . . . They are the richest and most precise and best guarded statement ever penned of all that enters into evangelical religion and all that must be safeguarded if evangelical religion is to persist in the world.” Therefore, Crampton takes the Westminster Standards as his starting point, and explains that the first chapter of the Confession, which is on Scripture, is the “continental divide” between Christianity and all other types of thought. So that’s what he does in Part 1: give a commentary on what the Confession has to say about Scripture. He covers The Necessity of Scripture, The Identity of Scripture, The Authority of Scripture, The Sufficiency of Scripture, The Clarity of Scripture, The Transmission and Preservation of Scripture, The Interpretation of Scripture, and The Finality of Scripture. All of this, in summary form, is in the Confession. Crampton concludes Part 1 by saying, in reference to the inerrancy of Scripture, “It is simply beyond reasonable doubt that the view of Scripture taught by the Westminster Assembly is the view that has been adhered to by the Christian church through the centuries.”

In Part 2 Crampton responds to the above-mentioned book by Sungenis, et al., which basically takes the position that the Church, by which they mean the Catholic Church, is the ultimate authority, and they challenge the Protestant position of sola Scriptura, which takes the position that the Bible, the Word of God written, is the ultimate authority. The authors of Sungenis, et al. charge that sola Scriptura leads to anarchy, inasmuch as no central church authority can then be appealed to. They also charge that sola Scriptura is based on fallacies: fallacies in Biblical interpretation, the fallacy of putting the Church against Scripture, the fallacy that all tradition is bad, and the fallacy that Scripture interprets itself. They also charge that sola Scriptura is not Biblical. They also charge that we cannot independently determine what is Scripture, but the Church must so inform us. They also charge that there are philosophical and practical problems with sola Scriptura. Crampton very ably responds to all these charges. The issues today are the same as they were in the sixteenth century. Nothing has changed on this front. And as Crampton says, “Rome has no intention of changing its views in matters such as these.” “The clarion call of the Protestant churches was *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”), *sola gratia* (“grace alone”), and *sola fide* (“faith alone”), declaring them to be matters of eternal consequence.” They still are! “Protestantism embraced all three; Rome rejected all three.” Our ultimate authority is what God has revealed!