Robert Lowry Calhoun as Historian of Doctrine

by

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with an appendix on
"Theology at Yale Divinity School"

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ROBERT LOWRY CALHOUN AS HISTORIAN OF DOCTRINE

It would be hard to think of a better topic for a YDS alumni group than Robert Lowry Calhoun as historian of doctrine. All of us who remember him will be delighted, and those who do not, will be introduced to one of the great teachers of this century. Praise no less than gratitude are owing to the Library for this Lectureship.

I have only one reservation: a lecturer other than myself would have been desirable. I shall focus on a posthumous volume of Calhoun's work on the history of doctrine which is now ready for publication, but which deals with periods on which others are far more expert than I. As the surviving member of the editorial team which started this project, however, it is up to me to introduce it.

I shall do so under three headings: first, Calhoun's reputation during his lifetime; second, the story of the preparation of the book; and third, his contribution to scholarship.

I

In reference to reputation, much of what I shall say is familiar to the older generation, but not to the younger one. Calhoun taught ministerial, doctoral, and college students at Yale for over four decades until he retired in 1965. Death came in 1983 when he was 86 years old. Reports of his preternatural brilliance began penetrating the hinterland from the late nineteen twenties on; Professor Oscar Winfield, a Yale Ph.D. from whom I had a freshman philosophy course at Gustavus Adolphus College the year before Pearl Harbor, was one of the bearers of these reports.
It was in the forties and fifties, however, that Calhoun's reputation reached its heights. He was then customarily linked with H. Richard Niebuhr and Roland Bainton as one of the three giants who contributed most to making this Divinity School the major center of university theological studies in North America. (Union Seminary in New York was generally regarded as its only real rival, but Union was not an integral part of a university.)

Unlike Niebuhr and Bainton -- not to mention others such as Kenneth Scott Latourette -- Calhoun's reputation was independent of his publications (which were meager in quantity, though high in quality, and not directly related to the history of doctrine). It was his teaching, and especially his lecturing, which made him a legendary figure to what must have been thousands of students over the years. The Yale College part of his reputation is rarely mentioned, so let me begin with that.

He biennially gave a year-long course in the history of philosophy which regularly attracted a hundred or more undergraduates and was said to be one of the most popular courses in the College. It, together with other Calhoun philosophy courses, especially his Plato seminar, is given credit by some who lived through those days for the revival of philosophy at Yale which began in the thirties. Yet the history survey was the one most famous for its difficulty. Calhoun called it an "advanced" introductory survey, and in addition to the undergraduates, Ph.D. students who sat for a doctoral exam in the field automatically took it even when they had had what was elsewhere considered good undergraduate preparation. One of these, Virginia Corwin, who did her dissertation under Calhoun, was head of the religion department at Smith until her retirement, and
hired my wife, Violette, for her first college teaching job, tells of the time the undergraduate final was exactly the same as the Ph.D. qualifying examination. The undergraduates, to be sure, were graded more leniently, but still only the brightest and best survived, as I know from being a teaching assistant for Calhoun in that same course a decade or two later. In retrospect, I find myself dumbfounded that he was able to attract so many undergraduates into what for many was a murderously difficult course.

The impression Calhoun made on many of us did not fade as we grew older. Like others who have had a chance to sample great teaching throughout the world, I think of him as the greatest lecturer I have either heard or heard of. He was simultaneously both enthralling and intellectually demanding, not only occasionally but for three hours a week in year-long courses which went for a full thirty weeks. It was possible, furthermore, to sit in on the same course year after year without being bored. There was always enough variation to keep things interesting. Albert Outler, who studied and taught here before his long and distinguished career at Perkins Divinity School of SMU, sat through the History of Doctrine twice while he was a graduate student and once after joining the YDS faculty. Calhoun lectured rapidly and without visible notes yet in such a way that one thought of him as thinking through every sentence and paragraph as he spoke; but when transcribed word for word, those sentences and paragraphs read as if they had been carefully polished for publication. Let me cite Virginia Corwin once again.

No student who has become a teacher can remember [Calhoun's lectures] without a stab of envy . . . The thought of someone gone
centuries ago -- St. Augustine, for example, or Origen -- takes shape before the mind, every essential detail in place . . . but the line and structure of the whole dominate, and the part is held in true proportion.

. . .

This extraordinary effect of clarity is not achieved by sacrificing a [thinker] or his conceptions to a scheme of one's own . . . Students know that they are watching a master teacher who is also an austerely honest historian, testing the theses of other scholars by reading the sources in their original language, by controlling the less well-known writings and personal letters, and making his independent report. He protests that he knows but little of the domain he traverses, but the listener is not deceived . . . The response can only be one of keen pleasure.

It was not only his lectures, however, which made him a great teacher. "An ill-defined question thrust into a lecture is treated with kindness beyond its deserts, rephrased and presented at its best before it is answered respectfully." Or, to quote a complaint from Roland Bainton:

[Calhoun] is equally self giving to all inquirers. He will do anything for some one in front of him, though he finds it hard to work for the general public or posterity. A student, after a class ending at ten o'clock, would come with a question. Bob would discuss it with him


2Ibid
until noon, take him to lunch and bring him back for further elucidation into the middle of the afternoon. Some of us have wished that he might do for the masses what he does for the man, but if Bob thinks about it he would probably answer that he leaves it to the man to minister to the masses. [He] teaches our generation largely through those whom he has taught.\(^3\)

Indeed, there is probably no one of his generation in North America who was more a teacher of teachers in theology, and he influenced a good many philosophers also.

Yet Calhoun's influence, though great, was and remains largely anonymous. Even those of us who are most heavily indebted to him rarely have occasion or opportunity to acknowledge our debts. We aren't asked to lecture on him -- I had to propose him as a topic for this lecture -- and when we try to document our borrowings we are baffled. In part this is because of the difficulty of footnoting oral communications, but Calhoun also had the disconcerting habit of citing a half-dozen or so sources for every idea we thought was original with him. Perhaps he had too good a memory, and that is why he published so little; he could always think of someone who had anticipated him. Most scholarly books, he would tell us, are redundant because, in their search for originality, they ignore or forget so much of what is already known that they lose perspective and balance. Not surprisingly, he thought of his main job as that of transmitting the heritage and of instilling a proper sense of what constitutes responsible scholarship. Such a legacy, however, although of central importance to the educational process, is bound to be largely anonymous; it resists public display.

\(^3\)Tribute to Robert Calhoun," Yale University Divinity News, 62/4 (1965) P.
Another now largely forgotten dimension of Calhoun's influence was national and international. He was active in the Federal, and its successor the National, Council of Churches as well as in the World Council as a theological consultant, a giver of addresses, and a major drafter of major reports. Some say he was better able than any other theologian to explain the Americans to the Europeans and vice versa. Even Karl Barth, whom he respected but did not at all agree with, is reported to have been impressed by his knowledge and use of patristic and Reformation sources -- not to mention such moderns as Harnack and Schleiermacher (who was the one modern figure on whom he regularly gave seminars). I, like others who studied under him, was only vaguely aware of his extramural fame at the time it was at its height in the forties and fifties, and I have done little to investigate it since. I have not inquired about the archives here at Yale or the files of the organizations which made use of his services. All I know is that I keep on meeting people both here and abroad, though naturally fewer as the years progress, who have never read a word of Calhoun's but for whom he is a legendary figure.

II

It takes more than oral tradition, however, to justify a posthumous publication. There must be written remains, and it is to these that I now turn in telling the story of the volume which has already been mentioned.

During the 1947-48 academic year, a group of students recorded and transcribed Mr. Calhoun's lectures in the history of doctrine. The result was a five-to-six hundred page, single
spaced manuscript which he corrected for scribal errors and approved for "private use". Many hundreds and perhaps thousands of copies of this transcript were made over the years; and in the early fifties, Calhoun signed a contract and received an advance from Harper & Row to prepare them for publication. He worked sporadically at this both before and after his retirement, but he was a perfectionist. He would expand ten pages into forty, realize this was far too long, and then, instead of compressing, return to ground zero and re-read all the sources in the original languages in an effort to find another approach which would be more compendious.

His failures wore on him. He was a Congregationalist of Presbyterian stock from Minnesota, where his father, one-time mayor of St. Cloud, was a struggling lawyer notable for pro bono work, and he had a conscience for which a signed contract was an unbreakable bond. Finally, a year or so before his death, Hans Frei, who also is now departed, proposed that he and I take over the project. Mr. Calhoun consented, and no longer weighed down by the responsibility of deciding what was publishable and what was not, proceeded to make great progress in his last months with the help of a graduate student, David Dawson, who is now himself a scholar of distinction.

His perfectionism, however, was undiminished although no longer paralyzing. He kept going back to the original sources whenever he had any doubts; and that, because of a bad back, meant reading while lying flat with his head propped up and a light shining down on the book he would hold on his chest. His wife, Ella, who was a medical doctor, told Hans Frei that when she checked on him one morning a few days before his death, she discovered that he was still asleep with the light on and a heavy volume of the Patrologia Latina edition of Tertullian's writings lying
on his chest where it had obviously rested the entire night. She thought his 86 year-old body had
not been able to stand the work of those last months. But it was worth it even if it killed him, she
said; it had been the happiest year since his retirement.

Frei and I promised Mr. and Mrs. Calhoun that we would complete the task, but it went
slowly after Calhoun's death. Then Mrs. Calhoun died, and Hans died in 1988, and my own
academic and departmental responsibilities increased. The work proceeded, however, in
accordance with the guidelines we worked out with Calhoun in his final year. The 1948 transcript
(which is complete and had been checked by Calhoun) has been collated with three other types of
material. The first type consists of fragmentary and uncorrected student transcripts of post-48
lectures. Then, in the second place, there are those post-'48 fragments which were reworked by
Calhoun into possible replacements of sections of the '48 transcript. Third, there are other possible
replacements which he worked up de novo. I speak of "possible replacements" because Calhoun
had usually not made up his mind about whether or how to use them.

The basic work of collating, a fair amount of footnoting of Calhoun's sources, and the job
of entering two to three thousand pages of double-spaced text into the Yale mainframe computer
was done by graduate students, of whom I should especially mention Joseph Mangina, now
teaching at Wycliffe College of the University of Toronto. They were paid with money from
various sources and supplied by Yale with some infra structural support beginning under Leander
Keck's deanship and continuing until recently in the form of office space which greatly facilitated
the work. I should also mention the help given by the Department of Religious Studies, especially
when Gene Outka was chair; and from beginning to end it was the University libraries, especially the Divinity School one, which have been indispensable for checking the multitudinous references involved in a project such as this.

Yet despite this help, progress was slow in large part because the editors didn't find enough time for fund-raising and administration. It took twelve years after the beginning of the project, eleven years after the death of Mr. Calhoun, and six years after the death of Mr. Frei to complete the job of collating, preliminary footnoting, and entering the material into the computer. Since then it has been up to me to decide what should be left out and what should be retained in the final draft, and how to piece the various sources together. It wasn't until 1996 that I began making real progress on this task, and the draft of a first volume was not finished until last June. Others have seen that draft, and one of them (far more knowledgeable about the subject matter of the present volume than I am and, in the absence of Yale connections, motivated by nothing except sheer generosity) was particularly intensive and helpful in his critique. I did some further work on the basis of the comments I had received, and began looking for the publisher who would be interested in giving this volume the widest possible circulation. This search is not yet complete, but is making progress.

In reference to the principles guiding the final editorial work, we have naturally tried to do what Mr. Calhoun would have done. When confronted by alternative versions of the same material, we (or, in recent years, I) have chosen the version which best combines readability and scholarship and which also, whenever possible, was not part of the '48 transcript. There is, it seems clear, no
point in duplicating material already widely circulated in private copies. When the '48 versions are
the best available, however, we have naturally used them, and they constitute at least a third of the
chapters in the first volume. Whatever the version, we have sought to keep, not only Calhoun's
thoughts but his words, and where this is impossible, brackets have generally been inserted. With
rare exceptions, the only unbracketed changes are corrections of factual errors or of verbal
infelicities. For example, Calhoun's insistently generic use of male-gender language, especially in
the earlier lectures, is replaced, when the referents are human beings rather than God, by inclusive
language to the extent this can be done without syntactical or grammatical clumsiness. Interpretive
material clearly outdated or discredited by recent scholarly developments has not been replaced or
rewritten, but has either been retained with a footnote indicating what would now be regarded as
erroneous, or has been omitted where this can be done without substantial loss of coverage. There
has, in other words, been no attempt to speculate about how Mr. Calhoun might have revised his
work were he now alive, but the effort has rather been simply to present whatever he would have
thought of as reasonably accurate -- or, as he would have put it, "not wholly inaccurate" -- during
that last year of his work on the project. To the extent the editors have succeeded, there is nothing
here Calhoun would have been unwilling to have published under his name. In the present draft, I
have bracketed the occasional insertions of transitional or other material, have kept editorial
comments to a minimum, and have confined them to footnotes. Thus the manuscript has a single
author, Mr. Calhoun; all the substance and almost all the words are his. As he is no longer with us
to make decisions about changes, major alterations are not feasible.
Whether a second volume should be produced seems doubtful. There are some very good sections in the later material, but Calhoun did not rework any of it, and there are portions which by the end of his life he considered unpublishable. My impression is that he no longer thought of his treatments, for example, of Luther and of late medieval thought as useful even for introductory purposes; but, on the other hand, he continued to think of his lectures on Calvin, Zwingli, Westminster, and Schleiermacher as basically sound. Even the historically poor sections, however, are historiographically interesting, and if the demand for the first volume becomes great, that might justify a second volume. The preliminary work has already been done; the collating, partial footnoting, and entering of the manuscript into the computer has been completed, and what remains is the more manageable job of deciding what parts to publish and how to weave them into a unified whole. Someone else, however, would have to do the work. I am ready to hand on the torch to others, and that would be true even if I were to change my mind and come to think that a second volume is desirable.

In any case, what has so far been accomplished is a substantial and self-contained whole. It consists of a volume of 665 pages, which covers that half of Calhoun's History of Christian Doctrine on which he had done the most work. It extends from the New Testament to end of the patristic period, or, if you prefer, from Jesus Christ to the beginning of the middle ages. The last Western figure to be treated is the 7th c. Pope, Gregory the Great, while in the East, it is the 8th c. John of Damascus. In Calhoun's version of history, all later developments of Christian doctrine depend positively or negatively on these 700 years; and the question to which we now turn is
whether his account should be published a half century or more after it was first conceived.

III

I shall start with the historiographical rather than the historical case for publishing because it is the easiest though not most compelling one to make. An historically worthless account of the first seven centuries could be historiographically invaluable because of what it tells us of the discipline -- the study, teaching and learning -- of the history of doctrine fifty years ago. What was it, one might ask, which made Calhoun's erudite and difficult year-long lecture course attractive to the elite ministerial students of what were then the dominant denominations at what was widely regarded as the foremost divinity school in the country? Some of us who lived through those years may think the answer is in large part obvious, but a century from now, intellectual historians may well be baffled. One could argue that the lectures should be published for their benefit even if not for ours.

Some of the explanation for Calhoun's appeal has already been quoted from Virginia Corwin. She emphasized the combined aesthetic and intellectual awe and delight which came from hearing a great scholar and great lecturer put on an ever changing but cumulative series of masterful performances day after day and week after week, but those qualities would be attractive in our day also, and something more is needed to explain the special impression he made on students in the midcentury. Perhaps it will help if I tell the story of one undergraduate in the history of philosophy course for which I was Calhoun's TA in the late forties.
He was a philosophy major, a professed atheist, and came from a semi-observant Jewish family. Calhoun was, he thought, the most brilliant human being he had ever encountered. More than that: his intellectual breadth, balance, and objectivity seemed to this student stunning. He did a more persuasive job of giving a synoptic overview of the thought of Plato and Aristotle, of Spinoza and Kant, not to mention other great philosophers, than they could possibly have done for themselves; and he did this, not by bowdlerizing and not by translating into modern conceptualities, but in terms which they themselves would have recognized as fair to what they were seeking to say. M., as I shall call this student, found himself first a Platonist, then an Aristotelian, later a Spinozist, and finally a Kantian. (He never became a Hegelian, for although the course dealt with Hegel, there were limits to Calhoun's sympathies.) At the end of the year, M. was left with one great question: what did Calhoun himself believe? As a Congregationalist minister, this great professor was presumably a theist of some sort, but what kind and for what reasons? M. decided that the way to find out was to enroll at the Divinity School, which he proceeded to do for a year after he got his B.A. It was an enjoyable year, he later told me, not least because doors were never unexpectedly slammed in his face, as had happened frequently while he was in the College. And Calhoun the believer was in evidence in the chapel talks he gave from time to time, as did all the YDS faculty. Most significantly for M., the Divinity School helped reconnect him with his Jewish roots. He went on to get a Ph.D. and taught until his retirement at a major university, but throughout his life Calhoun has remained an enigma. He was baffled by Calhoun's ability to engage his students in a personally meaningful search for the truth and yet be so objective that no hint of his theistic and
Christian commitments appeared in his philosophy course. Or, at the Divinity School, how did he manage to be so even-handed as to be acceptable to everyone from Unitarians to Eastern Orthodox including, perhaps most remarkably, the Protestant liberals who thought of him as one of their own despite his for them puzzling admiration for the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds?

Part of the answer to this question is that Calhoun was so good an expositor that he didn't need to be a controversialist; he didn't need to intrude his own opinions or convictions in order to fascinate. Yet it must be added, I suspect, that impartiality and objectivity were more highly regarded in those days than in ours. The hermeneutics of suspicion had not yet received a name; and while two world wars and the irrationalisms of Nazism and Communism had already fatally undermined the Enlightenment confidence in pure rationality, there was still a widespread belief that objectivity could be asymptotically approached, and that those like Calhoun who seemed to come closest to seeing things clearly and seeing them whole, who were both comprehensive and balanced, were more reliable guides in the search for the truth than the ideologically biased advocates on the right or on the left. Yet Calhoun did not produce disciples. Perhaps one could say that students never found out enough about what he believed or why he believed it to become his followers. Yet whatever their own convictions, whether staunchly secular or deeply religious, they tended to develop, as I earlier said, a Calhounian sense of intellectual responsibility, a belief that scholars are obligated to be respectful, fair and, indeed, charitable in their understanding of others.

Yet in combination with his subject matter, Calhoun's influence on attitudes did have consequences for theological orientation. Thirty-three years ago, Robert Cushman, who was then
Dean of Duke Divinity School, penned some lines which are in effect, though not in form, a personal confession of what happened to him when he was a student at YDS.

"Professor Calhoun's distinctive contribution," he writes, "was to explore pre-modern deposits of philosophical and Christian wisdom" at a time when American theological studies in the mainline denominations and in the universities, not least at Yale, were "heavily weighted on the side of the sciences of religion and post-Kantian thought." No other single individual, Cushman implies, did more to open a way in the thirties "for sympathetic rediscovery of classical Christian positions both Catholic and Protestant." He thereby "mightily helped doctrinally illiterate children of liberal American Christianity in the thirties and forties to recover a critical comprehension of the well-nigh unsearchable riches of inherited Christian wisdom." Calhoun "not only prepared the ground" for informed encounter with the neo-orthodox theology which "liberal American religious thought was ill-prepared to receive," but also equipped American theologians (including Cushman) "to enter into responsible discussion with their counterparts in the world ecumenical movement", and thus fulfill "the role Providence [has assigned] as their theological and ecclesiastical vocation at mid-twentieth century and, seemingly, for the foreseeable future."

The foreseeable future quickly arrives and then vanishes. After thirty-three years, Cushman seems quaintly anachronistic in assuming that ecumenism of the ressourcement ("back-to-the-sources") variety is theologically and ecclesiastically central, and that Calhoun's role in

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preparing his students for this centrality was providentially arranged; but as I happen to have been one of those so prepared, it would be ungrateful of me not to acknowledge the debt a good many of us owe to Calhoun for having given us a sympathetic yet non-partisan grounding in the Christian doctrinal traditions as a whole. Nothing like it was available anywhere else in North America. Without this comprehensive grounding, Yalies such as Albert Outler, my wife Violette Lindbeck, and myself would have found our time at the Second Vatican Council much more bewildering and much less fruitful than it was. Historians who want to know the theological background for North American Protestant ecumenism during those heady days would benefit by consulting, among other things, Calhoun's History of Doctrine when and if it appears in print.

Now let us turn to the historical as distinct from the historiographical case for publishing. Is this book valuable, not only because of the light it sheds on the time when it was written, but also because of what it tells us about the past which is its object of study? There are here three possibilities. First, if the book is historically unreliable, it should not be published. Second, if it is reliable in what it includes but inadequate because of what it leaves out, then it may be publishable but not worth publishing. In the third place, however, it not only can but should be published to the extent it makes a currently distinctive and helpful contribution to the understanding of early Christian doctrinal development.

On the first point, I shall simply assert rather than argue: the Calhoun volume is basically reliable in what it says; the few factual points at which it is contradicted by the present-day scholarly consensus are noted in footnotes and do not mar the larger picture. Even on Gnosticism,
Calhoun read extensively in the new Greek (though not the Coptic) materials which became available after his retirement and thus was able to correct misrepresentations, dating back in some cases to Irenaeus, which were unchallenged in the mid-century and therefore also present in the '48 transcript of his lectures.

At the very end of his life, Calhoun began expressing doubts regarding traditional ways of picturing the relation of orthodoxy to heresy in general, and not simply to Gnosticism. Instead of the heresies being off-shoots of an orthodox mainstream going back, let us say, to Pentecost, one can think of a relatively unified mainstream gradually coalescing in the course of the second century out of an initial multiplicity of often competing groups claiming to be, not only Christian but also, in some cases, "apostolic" and "catholic." This developing mainstream is what scholars now generally call the "Great Church," and it grew in the course of the third century to embrace the vast majority of Christians. Naturally it defined orthodoxy for subsequent generations. It viewed its understanding of the faith as in continuity with that of the apostles and treated those who disagreed (that is heretics) as innovators who had distorted the faith once for all delivered to the saints. These seeming innovators, however, are often, it seems, survivors or conservers, marginalized heirs of understandings of Christianity no less ancient than those to which the majority appealed. If so, doctrinal development is a matter of constructing orthodoxy rather than of articulating (as Catholics since Newman have held) or distorting (as liberal Protestants such as Harnack have maintained) the original deposit or experience of faith.

Calhoun was chary of talking in terms of either articulation or distortion, either organic
growth or degeneration, and consequently his account is rather easily reconcilable with the
"constructionist" picture which he seemed increasingly to entertain in his last year. He had, in any
case, no inclination to adopt the anti-Roman (yet ironically romanocentric) explanations of a Walter
Bauer for the construction and triumph of the Great Church, nor is it likely that he would have been
impressed by any of the other *cui bono* theories inspired by various forms of the hermeneutics of
suspicion which have become increasingly popular since his death. The communities which
developed into the "orthodox" Great Church had no political, cultural, social, or economic
advantages; indeed, they seem to have been the most persecuted of the professedly Christian
groups. Their victory can be plausibly -- perhaps most plausibly -- explained as a function of their
success in constructing unity-and-community-constituting polities, canonical scriptures, liturgies,
and rules of faith. Such a view would not require Calhoun to change the fundamental story line of
doctrinal development of which we shall shortly speak. He might have wanted to alter some of the
details, but it would be sheer speculation as to what those alterations might be.

There are also other respects in which Calhoun would no doubt now consider his account
inadequate. These faults, however, are of omission rather than commission. Let me list some of
the omissions noted by others or, in some cases, by myself. There are, for example, only passing
references to Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor although these Eastern theologians are
now widely regarded as comparable to St. Augustine in theological stature. Moreover, Calhoun
shortchanged aspects of Trinitarian doctrine, especially pneumatology, and he apparently never read
treatises, such as Gregory the Great's *Moralia*, which a professional patrologist (which Calhoun

18
was not) would be expected to have perused. More seriously, he neglected patristic exegesis even though there were authors, such as de Lubac and Danielou, who were already in the mid-century beginning to mine its riches. Finally, social, cultural, and liturgical studies related to doctrinal developments were relatively undeveloped and our present concerns regarding patristic attitudes to women and to Judaism had not yet awakened. It is this failure to deal with topics which were unnoticed fifty years ago but are now at the center of research which is the main reason for asking whether Calhoun's manuscript, although publishable, is worth publishing. It can be plausibly maintained that it does not make what would at present be regarded as distinctive and/or significant contributions to the advancement of historical understanding.

The counter-argument is that current views of what is historically valuable are themselves deficient. They often emphasize understanding doctrine in terms of external (or "etic") theories (which in our day are generally hermeneutical but no less alien to the self-understanding of the participants in the doctrinal developments than the progressive or evolutionary schemes which prevailed in the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth centuries). These theories often do not even try to make sense from the inside (that is "emically") of the ideas which were of central importance from the participants' perspective. This, however, as I have tried to show, is Calhoun's forte. Much of this volume is better than any other book of which I know in presenting a readable and at the same time reliable running narrative of the conceptualities employed by the shapers of Christian doctrine in the first seven hundred years. This does not mean that it competes with Turner or the first volume of Pelikan, which are in their particular ways the best recent surveys we have,
but these authors deal with doctrines one by one (which was also true of Harnack). Calhoun, in contrast, provides us with a comprehensive overview of the entire thought of each major author he treats, viz., Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Augustine, Gregory the Great, and John of Damascus, and then integrates these accounts into a continuous story of doctrinal development. This is what enables readers to think that they are getting an insider's view. Good full-scale studies of individual authors can of course draw us into their doctrinal worlds far better than can rapid sketches, but among historically reliable surveys of comparably extended scope, Calhoun's is arguably the best at drawing theologically and ideologically diverse readers into the on-going tale.

What then is the over-all story-line, the basic theological and historical plot, of this book? The plot is in part traditional; it centers, as any treatment of doctrine in this period must, on the articulation of the classic Trinitarian and christological creeds. Three considerations, at first unarticulated, controlled that development. First, Jesus Christ is genuinely human; second, salvation is through him; and third, "God alone and no created being, even the highest of creatures, can save from sin and death." The logic whereby the interaction of these three principles taken together produced Nicea and Chalcedon is laid out by Calhoun with exemplary clarity, but at the same time with attentiveness to the historical complexities and contingencies which made the outcome anything but a foregone conclusion. It was this ability to give order to a confusing picture without sacrificing either interest or detail which makes him persuasive; and it is this persuasiveness combined with the centrality of God in Christ for the Christian present no less than the past which gives his work its enduring value for those who want to understand the development
of the mainstream doctrinal heritage common to Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and
Reformation Protestantism.

FINIS
APPENDIX

"Theology at Yale"
Text from an exhibit prepared by Martha L. Smalley
to accompany the 1998 Day Associates Lecture


The roots of theology at Yale
[excerpted from Bruce Kuklick’s work Churchmen and Philosophers]

...The establishment of the Yale department of theology in 1822, later to become the Yale Divinity School, was the most significant event in the history of Trinitarian theological ideas in the United States from 1780 to 1840....

...After its founding, the School deeply influenced professional Congregational debate, and Yale produced the most innovative and ingenious systematic theology in the nineteenth century, Nathaniel William Taylor’s New Haven Theology. Not only did Taylor’s work itself define discourse in the philosophy of religion, but he also taught and influenced Horace Bushnell, whose work was instrumental in overthrowing the New England Theology in the 1880s....

New England Theology: “A movement within 18th- and early 19th-century American Calvinism that brought together elements of Puritanism with other concerns such as the freedom of the will and divine justice.”
from the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms

New Haven Theology: “A theological movement originating at Yale University through Timothy Dwight and Nathaniel W. Taylor that opposed the current Calvinism, encouraged revivalism, and sought social reforms.”
from the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms
Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)
Calvinist thought in colonial America found its fullest expression in the writings of Jonathan Edwards. In his own time Edwards was recognized in the colonies and the Old World as an important figure.

When Edwards died, he left a corpus of writing that attracted the labors of gifted Congregational (and Presbyterian) thinkers for the next century and a quarter. The interpretation of this writing and the accretions to it comprise the New England Theology. Its adherents adapted Edwards's teachings to a changing society and intellectual climate, and they also resolved problems they believed he had handled incompletely or less than adequately.... The New England Theology forms a chapter in the history of Protestant theology and represents the most sustained intellectual tradition in the United States.

The New Divinity, best exemplified by Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790), Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), and Nathaniel Emmons (1745-1840), was the first stage of the New England Theology. This stage was succeeded by the work of Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858) and his colleagues at Yale...
Timothy Dwight (1752-1817)
An individual of magnetism and authority and one of America's early men of letters, Dwight wrote long patriotic poems and an extended narrative, Travels; In New England and New York ....Dwight embodied Edwardsean theology at Yale.

Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858)
Nathaniel William Taylor was a favored protégé of Dwight's in the class of 1806. Taylor had been Dwight's amanuensis - the president had bad eyes - and replaced Moses Stuart at the Center Church in 1811 after Stuart went to Andover....

Taylor was recognized as a gifted thinker even as a young man. He synthesized personal piety and impressive reasoning, and the amalgam often proved irresistible. When Yale formed the theological department in 1822, its authorities named him professor of theology....

The keystone of Taylor's work was his notion of God's moral government. God created a theocratic polity peopled by moral agents. ...Being a moral agent meant having free will. If human beings were genuinely to participate in God's kingdom, they must freely choose to worship or not to worship him.... For Taylor, people had the ability to act contrary to the way they had acted, be their circumstances and their character the same. ....God's moral polity was properly characterized by the "liberty of indifference," his governance circumscribed by the "self-
determining” aspects of the governed.

Taylor said that man had a tendency to act rightly. He knew happiness depended on moral conduct. But man’s clouded understanding misconstrued the inducements, and he acted against this tendency. In acting on “the greatest apparent good,” he acted against his greatest good, allowing selfish desires to predominate. When moral beings acted wrongly, as they ever did, they acted against their virtuous tendency. And only divine grace could get them to conform to this tendency.

Commentators have argued that Taylorism was a last-ditch Congregational response to a changing social climate. Advocating its peculiar sort of freedom, New Haven sacrificed sterner orthodox doctrines in a final effort to win converts in a culture moving away from traditional religion. Taylor’s concentration on God’s moral government confirmed Dwight’s emphasis on benevolent moralism and reform societies. In Jacksonian America, which often degenerated into lawlessness and mob rule, Taylorism was an appropriate elite response. Conventional religion, the argument goes, was defended at the cost of theological purity, by stressing that everyone had to be voluntarily dutiful under God’s government.

Taylor retired in 1857. His original work was done in the thirties, and by the middle of the century he and his colleagues said little that was new. His death in 1858 formally ended an era, and with him New Haven theology also died. In the last ten years of Taylor’s tenure, Yale lost students while Princeton and Andover did not. Immediately after the Civil War the divinity school verged on closing. Although it later revived, theology was tangential to its renewal, and the systematic philosophy of religion never again played the role it had under Taylor.
Horace Bushnell (1802-1876)
As a young man in the 1820s and 1830s Bushnell vacillated among law, journalism, and the ministry before entering the Yale seminary, where he studied with Taylor and received his degree in 1833 at the age of 31. He then became the pastor of the North Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut, earning a reputation for oratorical eloquence and effective, if controversial, ministerial leadership...
Whereas the impact of his mentor Taylor was increasingly restricted to students of theology, Bushnell became a civic father who used his Hartford pulpit to discuss the issues of a growing commercial town.

Lyman Beecher (1775-1863)
Beecher [was] the outstanding revivalist produced by Congregational Calvinism during the Second Great Awakening. A likable, successful, and influential clergyman, Beecher led the attempts at denominational unification, moral reform, and missionary activities begun earlier by Dwight... Beecher shone in the ecumenical period. Born in New Haven and a graduate of Yale in 1797, he lived with Dwight as a student....

A confidant and close friend of Taylor, Beecher went to Cincinnati in 1832 to preside over the new Lane Theological Seminary, designed to train the learned ministry for the west... Interested neither doctrinal nor ecclesiastical niceties, he promoted evangelical Protestant piety. Taylor's ideas, he thought, would do the job, but Beecher eschewed controversy.
Samuel Harris (1814-1899)
[from Bainton’s *Yale and the Ministry*]
In theology Harris was not a path breaker. His task was to teach the fundamentals, not to be startling. From Taylor he derived his faith in the moral government of the universe. From Bushnell he appropriated the blending of the natural and the supernatural. With Wordsworth he saw God immanent in nature. Like his great predecessors he combined the diverse strands in modern Christianity....

His greatest distinction lies in the extension of Noah Porter’s treatment of the problem of knowledge to the sphere of religion. One has the feeling that with Harris moralism was a deep ingredient in his conviction as to the possibility of knowledge. If there is no possibility of knowing, there can be no morality because morality depends on choice, and choice requires the knowledge of alternatives....

George Barker Stevens (1854-1906)
[from Bainton’s *Yale and the Ministry*]
After Harris systematic theology at Yale was not systematic until the coming of Douglas Macintosh. The immediate successor of Harris, George B. Stevens, had been transferred from the field of New Testament, and although he wrote some books on theology proper, he never ceased to deal with what was essentially Biblical theology, despite the institution of a new chair devoted to that particular field and manned by Frank C. Porter.
Douglas Clyde Macintosh (1877-1948)  
[from Bainton's *Yale and the Ministry*]  
Like Jonathan Edwards and the whole New England tradition [Macintosh] was concerned that religion should be consonant with and supported by philosophy and natural science. And he was fully abreast of that radical Biblical criticism in which the humanist science of historiography had issued. But research implies uncertainty. If all were known there would be no research. Religion, however, can brook no uncertainty - not on the points which vitally matter. Therefore, religion must be independent of historical research. Even more unequivocally than Porter, Macintosh maintained that Biblical scholars must be absolutely unimpeded, even should they come out with a demonstration that Jesus had never lived at all. The Christian, however, cannot hold his faith in abeyance while the historians are settling such questions. Faith, therefore, must be emancipated from history...
H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962)  
[from the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought]  
Influenced by E. Troeltsch and M. Weber, [Niebuhr] analysed Christian denominations as sociological groupings, arguing that doctrinal differences were both a product of and instrumental in shaping social conditions..... Although he stressed the importance of historical revelation, and saw the Christian revelation as offering access to the absolute, he did not regard Christian understanding as absolute, and therefore saw room for other religious approaches to God.... His major contribution was the attempt to integrate schematically Christian belief and issues relating to the modern world - social, political, ethical, and religious....

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The new Yale Theology  
[From “Postliberal Theology” by William C. Placher, in The Modern Theologians, : an Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, ed. by David F. Ford.]

... George Lindbeck’s The Nature of Doctrine, published in 1984, brought the work of a number of theologians who share at least a ‘family resemblance’ into focus as a new theological option. The last chapter of the book was entitled ‘Toward a Postliberal Theology’, and within a year or two of its publication references to ‘postliberal theology’ regularly appeared.....

...Nearly all the postliberal theologians have had some connection with Yale (many of the movement’s roots lie in the work of Yale theologian H. Richard Niebuhr)....

.... In the tradition of scholars like Mircea Eliade of the University of Chicago, many religious studies departments in the United States teach ‘religion’... as a universal phenomenon whose themes and symbols manifest the experience of the sacred in different but related ways in
different cultures. Christian theology then takes its place as one set of answers to those universal human questions.

... At Yale the pattern has been different, with an emphasis on the study of particular religious traditions, each in its own historical and cultural context.

... By the late 1970s new styles in biblical studies had emerged at Yale....

... The writers mentioned so far [William Christian, Wayne Meeks, Brevard Childs, David Kelsey] might not agree with each other on many issues or want to sign on as 'postliberal theologians', but they have helped shape a milieu where people studied religious traditions as communal practices more than as the expressions of individual experience, and studied religious texts as they have functioned in their communities more than as historical sources or symbols of universal myths. Hans Frei had been thinking about theology in related terms for many years, and Lindbeck gave such an approach a name: 'postliberal theology'....

... To attempt a brief statement of basic concerns: postliberal theology attends to the biblical narratives as narratives rather than simply as historical sources or as symbolic expressions of truths which could be expressed non-narratively. But unlike some other theologians interested in narrative, postliberals do not let the stories of our lives set the primary context for theology. They insist that the biblical narratives provide the framework within which Christians understand the world. Christian theology describes how the world looks as seen from that standpoint; it does not claim to argue from some 'neutral' or 'objective' positions and indeed denies the possibility of such a position. It pursues apologetics, therefore, only on an ad hoc basis, looking for common ground with a given conversation partner but not assuming some universally acceptable standard of rationality.

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The named professorships:

Dwight Professorship of Theology and Philosophy of Religion

Established in 1822 as the Dwight Professorship of Didactic Theology, and named in honor of President Dwight. The subject-title was changed to Systematic Theology in 1871 and to the above title in 1933.

1822-1858 Nathaniel William Taylor
1871-1895 Samuel Harris
1895-1906 George Barker Stevens
1916-1942 Douglas Clyde Macintosh
Dwight Professorship of Philosophy and Christian Ethics
1948-1951 Albert Cook Outler
1952-1954 H. Richard Niebuhr
1981- Gene Outka

Pitkin Professorship of Historical Theology
Established in 1942 by gift from John Aaron Hoober in memory of Horace Tracy Pitkin.
1942-1963 Robert Lowry Calhoun
1981-1993 George A. Lindbeck
1998- Marilyn McCord Adams

Sterling Professor of Historical Theology
1963-1965 Robert Lowry Calhoun

Noah Porter Professorship of Philosophical Theology
Established in 1919 by Martha Day Porter as a memorial to her father, Noah Porter, President of Yale from 1871 to 1886.
1953-1972 Julian Norris Hartt
1980-1987 Paul L. Holmer
1992- Nicholas Wolterstorff

Luther A. Weigle Professor of Theology
1994- David Kelsey