



John Murray (1898-1975)

John Murray was born in the Scottish Highlands, yet he spent almost all his working life in the United States. He came from the parish of Creich, which is just divided from the north-east of Ross-shire by the River Shin. His family was noted for its Christian beliefs and practices, and he was nourished by the preaching in the Free Presbyterian Church which they attended. Like many other men from Sutherland, he served in the First World War, and was wounded in France, losing an eye in one of the final battles. All his future study and work was done with one eye.

He had come to personal faith sometime before he entered the University of Glasgow, and he followed an Arts course, graduating MA in 1923. Ministers in the Free Presbyterian Church seem to have encouraged him to proceed to study at Princeton Theological Seminary in the USA (1924-27), especially after they had seen the quality of his work during tutorial theological study he undertook within his own church. It had no college, but some of its tutors, especially Donald Beaton of Wick, were very competent.

Princeton Theological Seminary had developed a reputation for its adherence to orthodox Reformed theology, though Benjamin Warfield had died a few years prior to John Murray's enrolment there. However, J. Gresham Machen, Geerhardus Vos, and Robert Dick Wilson were teaching, and Murray was brought into contact with fellow students like Ned Stonehouse, Paul Woolley, Cornelius Van Til, and W. J. Grier. He completed an M.Th. degree in Systematic Theology, before accepting a scholarship to go to the University of Edinburgh for further post-graduate studies.

Princeton Seminary was going through a period of change in the late 1920s, and the threat of liberal teaching was so great that Gresham Machen led a break from it in 1929, and was instrumental in the formation of Westminster

Theological Seminary. It was situated in central Philadelphia for some years, but since then near Glenside, Pennsylvania. John Murray did not teach at Westminster in its first year of existence, because he had accepted an invitation from Professor Caspar Wistar Hodge to teach for a year in the Department of Systematic Theology at Princeton. Though his sympathy was entirely with Westminster, Murray fulfilled his pledge to Hodge, but immediately the year was over, he transferred to Westminster. He joined several of those who had been fellow-students at Princeton, as well as Professor R. B. Kuiper from Grand Rapids, and later younger scholars such as E. J. Young, E. P. Clowney, and Jay Adams were part of a very strong team that was characterised by its commitment to the Scripture and Reformed theology.

For the first few years he taught as an instructor, but in 1937 he was ordained to the ministry in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church which had come into existence out of the theological turmoil in the Presbyterian Church of America and Princeton Seminary. He was also appointed as Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster, a position he held until his retirement in 1966, when he returned to Scotland for the final years of his life.

Professor Murray was deeply influenced by his professors at Princeton, especially Geerhardus Vos. His prime interest was the relationship of exegesis and biblical theology to the development of Systematic Theology. As an exegete, his skill was seen in many of his writings, but especially in his two-volume commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. He also published books and articles on historical theology and ethics, as well as popular articles in magazines such as *The Presbyterian Guardian*.

While many students were deeply influenced by John Murray, his books have reached an even wider audience. One book that has confirmed many in the Reformed understanding of the application of God's saving work in Christ is *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Dr Peter Jensen of Sydney is but one who found this book so formative of their theology. He stated: 'John Murray's little book ... has meant so much to me. It has formed part of who I am'.

Family life did not come until he retired from Westminster and married a long-time friend, Dr Valerie Knowlton. They settled on his family's property near Bonar Bridge in Scotland, and two children, Logan and Margaret, were born to them. Margaret died at five years of age from the effects of asthma, and Valerie and Logan returned to the USA after Professor Murray's death, Valerie dying in 2014. Her son Logan, a specialist paediatrician, and daughter-in-law Mary MacDonald-Murray, are both active in the life of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In Maine, ME.

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