

Mark W. Elliott: 'The Eclipse of the patristic tradition in the shadow of the Westminster divines.'

What happened to the authority of Antiquity in general and the Church Fathers in particular in the Reformed theological writing during the long seventeenth century? Familiarity with the early church writers was manifest in the generation of Robert Howie, the Aberdeen Doctors, Robert Boyd, James Wedderburn, who were all quick to turn to the Church Fathers. The example of Robert Leighton a generation later shows this humanism at its height: his *Praelectiones* at Edinburgh in the early 1650s show a comfortable ease and a deep respect for the ancients, pagan and Christian alike. The arrival on the scene of the Westminster Confession seems to have relegated the Fathers from view. There is some evidence that during the Westminster debates, certain positions held by the Church Fathers were viewed as unsound: these seemed to think that Christ was not *autotheos*, but derived his divinity from God the Father; they had a tendency to Pelagianism and something approaching the doctrine of Arminius; they seemed to deny the sufficient imputation of Christ's active righteousness, as Johannes Piscator had done. These issues lasted into the 1700s, as apparent during the trials of Prof. Simpson. It was not a question of 'the bible alone as the religion of Protestants' but a conviction at large, shared by Halyburton, Hadow and Boston among others, that God had introduced a new era, and that Genevan and Dutch Orthodoxy had found their most mature expression at Westminster, especially as interpreted in the light of the mid-seventeenth century divines. All this meant that the Confession alone (as received) should form the basis of Scottish biblical preaching.