

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Troubler of Israel: Report on Republication by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Assessing the Teaching of Professor Meredith G. Kline by Mark W. Karlberg

The republication report opens by stating the mandate given to the committee of five members: “The 81st General Assembly, in response to an overture from the Presbytery of the Northwest, elected a study committee ‘to examine and give its advice as to whether and in what particular senses the concept of the Mosaic Covenant as a republication of the Adamic Covenant is consistent with the doctrinal system taught in the confessional standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.’” In view of the mandate the committee chose to focus on the teachings of Meredith G. Kline as the means of examining and advising the church on theological issues dividing its membership asunder. The committee notes: “On the one hand it may seem that the mandate of the committee is merely one of confessional exegesis. It certainly involves this, and your committee has taken pains to work with and comment upon every area of the standards that is relevant to the mandate. On the other hand, the committee has also worked on numerous passages of Scripture, especially since the very confession we were tasked to study states quite clearly that ‘in all controversies of religion, the church is finally to appeal unto them [i.e., the Scriptures]’ (WCF 1.8).”¹

Though acknowledging that Scripture, not the *Westminster Standards*, has the last word in theological disputes, *in point of fact the report reverses the priority, giving first place to the confessional teaching*. The second grievous error in the thinking of the committee is the false supposition that Kline’s formulation of covenant theology has been the impetus and the cause of the long-standing division in the church and seminary (notably, Westminster East and West). Here again, we find an attempt at rewriting the history of the dispute, shifting the center of attention away from the true cause—the teaching of Norman Shepherd, former systematics professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

Background to the Study

The modern-day controversy regarding the interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant (the so-called doctrine of “Republication”) has been simmering for over forty years. More exactly, it began in the late 1960s in the womb of Westminster Seminary and the OPC in the thinking of Shepherd’s predecessor, systematist John Murray. (Shepherd was chosen by Murray to fill his position on the seminary faculty

¹ Northwest Theological Seminary stoked the controversy, only to close its doors in 2016, having failed to garner financial support. The demise of the seminary is in large part due to its

aggressive promotion of the Shepherd-Gaffin theology. [The report as provided on the OPC website provides no pagination, a major oversight.]

upon retirement. Prior to Murray's death Shepherd claims to have received Murray's approval of his new thinking on the doctrine of the covenants and justification—approval was sought on Murray's death-bed upon a visit to Scotland.)

Traditional, mainstream Reformed theology has taught—from the time of the Protestant Reformation down to the present day—that the Mosaic Covenant is an administration of the single, ongoing “Covenant of Grace” spanning the entire period of redemptive history (from the Fall to the Consummation). *Peculiar to the Mosaic economy, however, is the operation of the works-inheritance-principle in a very restricted sphere or manner.* A number of explanations have been provided within historic Reformed theology concerning this unique covenantal arrangement in the period extending from Moses to Christ, what is the old economy of redemption. Dissatisfied with this element in Reformed doctrine Murray set out to “recast” the doctrine of the covenants, at the very time that Barthianism was on the ascendency in most Reformed circles in Europe and elsewhere. Murray clearly was not a Barthian, but his novel teaching did imbibe some of the new thinking that was quickly gaining ground. And so it was Murray who opened the door at Westminster to the radical deviation in covenant theology struck by Shepherd and his staunchest supporter, Richard Gaffin, Jr., co-author, if not father of the New Theology.

From the broader vantage point of the history of scholastic Reformed orthodoxy, Murray's view gave expression to the theology of English Puritanism, notably, the view that came to dominate in the time after the framing of the *Westminster Standards*. From that point onwards, there were two distinct interpretations of the Mosaic Covenant within international Calvinism, one which acknowledged the works-inheritance principle *as an administrative principle operative within the Mosaic covenant of grace*, the other denying any such covenantal

operation (both sides did recognize the principle of natural law binding upon all God's image-bearers, human and angelic, requiring perfect obedience). The “Puritan” view maintained that the Mosaic Covenant was exclusively a covenant of grace (like the new covenant established by Christ), a covenant lacking the “merit” (or “works”) principle as a component of the administration of God's covenant with his elect people. Crucial here, additionally, is recognition of the requisite theological distinction between decretive election to salvation (applicable to all those for whom Christ died) and national, theocratic election (the election of ancient Israel under Moses as covenant-mediator).²

Shepherd's dismissal from the faculty of Westminster did not bring closure to the raging dispute. The legacy left by Shepherd, aggressively nurtured by Gaffin who remained on the seminary faculty, became ever more deeply entrenched, despite all efforts to eradicate heterodox teaching from the seminary and the church. In 2004 the 71st General Assembly of the OPC adopted its brief “Statement on Justification,” in an effort to address the unresolved debate concerning the foundational doctrine of justification by faith apart from the good works of the believer (faith alone as the “instrument” of justification). The Statement concluded by announcing the erection of a study committee comprising seven members “to critique the teachings of the New Perspective on Paul, Federal Vision, and other like teachings concerning the doctrine of justification and other related doctrines, as they are related to the Word of God and our subordinate standards, with a view to giving a clear statement to the presbyteries, sessions and seminaries, and report back to the 72nd GA” (*emphasis mine*). The major study report on justification was presented and received by the 73rd General Assembly in 2006; it

² The Puritan-Murray view insists that the Mosaic Covenant, like the new covenant, is a covenant of grace (having no works-inheritance principle in its administration). It therefore follows that the principle enunciated in *Leviticus* 18:5 (“do this and live”) is, in proper covenantal context, at one with the grace-inheritance principle. And looking to the prelapsarian covenant, it is likewise argued that there is no works-inheritance principle, if by that we mean that Adam would earn reward and blessing

from God for faithful covenant-keeping (i.e., human “merit”). The ground of inheritance, in this view, is (non-soteric) grace, but grace nevertheless (not “works”). Consistently applied, the result of this thinking dissolves the crucial antithesis between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, in terms of the principle of inheritance (reward). Clearly, this is not the intent of the framers of the *Westminster Standards*, despite confusion in theological formulation.

was reprinted and posted on the denomination's website in 2007.³

A decade later, the study report entitled "Report of the Committee to Study Republication" was presented and received at the 83rd General Assembly in 2016. Curiously, the OPC did not move in any official capacity to take up this highly divisive topic among its constituency long before now, waiting instead for the passing of Professor Meredith G. Kline, who had challenged the views of Murray and Shepherd on the doctrine of the covenants as early as the 1960s. (Given his importance in the life of the seminary and the denomination, criticism of Murray has been difficult for many to hear, let alone accept.⁴) Kline held tenaciously to the view of classic Reformed theology; regrettably, his position found

little sympathy and support among some faculty colleagues in Philadelphia, those who had exercised the greatest influence on the direction of the seminary and the OPC. The decision finally to form a denominational study committee came after several years of debate and petition to General Assembly.⁵

The 83rd General Assembly ended one day earlier than had been scheduled, and the presentation of the committee report was reserved until the final afternoon of the Assembly, one of the last items to be addressed. Doubtless, it was determined to withhold discussion of the study report on so volatile a subject in order not to distract the Assembly from the other business that was scheduled. (The report was not publicly made available until September 2, 2016, when it was posted on the denominational website.)

³ The "Report on Justification" provides scant attention to Shepherd's radical (and highly influential) teaching. The report is marred by inadequate discussion of the importance of the doctrine of the Covenant of Works and the law/grace antithesis—the matter of the propriety of the term "grace" applied to the prelasarian covenant pales in comparison. It was reported to me that David VanDrunen and Gaffin, as members of the OPC committee to study justification, were at odds regarding the writing of the report. VanDrunen, who chaired the committee, happily did secure the upper hand. But then again, Gaffin knew that all General Assembly study reports are not binding documents, but rather "food for further thought," *i.e.*, guides to ongoing study within the denomination. See my critique of this report in *Federalism and the Westminster Tradition: Reformed Orthodoxy at the Crossroads* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 48-50.

It bears repeating: Though Gaffin served as one of the members of the study committee on justification, it would be a great mistake if one were to infer from this circumstance that Gaffin himself agreed with those aspects of the discussion that impinged upon the views of Shepherd (which, in all essential features, is the same as that held by Gaffin). Three factors must be taken into account: (1) as noted above, the General Assembly reports "do not have the force of constitutional documents, namely, our Confession of Faith and Catechisms and Book of Church Order," and therefore are not binding (Gaffin recognizes that the committee report on justification bears the input of the several members, and all do not necessarily agree *in toto*); (2) despite *private* conversations individuals have had with Gaffin, any comments he has made distancing himself from Shepherd are to be questioned (Gaffin has never made a *public* statement denouncing any of Shepherd's heterodox views—he has never recanted heretical teaching); and (3) Gaffin's active involvement in supporting Shepherd throughout the seminary controversy, leading up to Shepherd's dismissal from the faculty, and his own writings bear witness to the fact Gaffin is the co-author, if not father, of Westminster's deviant teaching on justification and the covenants.

⁴ Cornelis P. Venema in "The Mosaic Covenant: A 'Republication' of the Covenant of Works? A Review Article: *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*" (*MAJT* 21 [2010] 35-101) complains: "[T. David] Gordon's attack upon John Murray in his chapter seems to exceed the bounds of propriety for an academic essay in biblical theology. For example, he asserts that Murray not only could not have made any sense of Paul's argument in Galatians, but also that whatever he would have written would be 'obfuscatory in the highest degree' (253). And, as if that were not enough, he adds, 'I like to think that he [i.e. Murray] was aware that he was entirely flummoxed by Paul's reasoning, and that he therefore determined not to write anything about the matter until he could make some sense of it.' In actual fact, Murray does address the matter directly in his commentary on the book of Romans, which includes an appendix on Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5, that we will consider in what follows. Furthermore, Gordon neglects to note that Murray addresses the interpretation of Galatians 3 in his *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955 [44–45]), and that his lectures on Galatians at Westminster Theological Seminary are available to the public (see <http://sites.google.com/site/themosaiccovenant/john-murray>)" (78, note 58). Kline held the conviction that Murray's misconstrual and recasting of Reformed covenant theology was blatantly wrong and inexcusable on his part as Westminster's systematician. "He should have known better," Kline correctly reasoned.

⁵ Perhaps the OPC will yet produce a history of the Shepherd controversy—including, notably, Gaffin's role and ardent defense of Shepherd from the mid-1970s onwards. Such a history must critique Gaffin's own unorthodox teaching on justification and the covenants which has persisted ever since the days of Shepherd's dismissal from Westminster Seminary in 1982. Perhaps after Gaffin passes from this earthly scene this will finally come to fruition—but do not count on it!

It was reiterated at the 2016 Assembly that, as in all cases, “General Assembly papers are thoughtful and weighty treatises on important matters but do not have the force of constitutional documents, namely, our Confession of Faith and Catechisms and Book of Church Order” (citation taken from the OPC website and reiterated at the opening of the report on republication). How this study will be received across the denomination and within the broader Reformed community remains to be seen.⁶

To be sure, much interest in this church study has been generated over the years. John Edward Knox, a member of the OPC, writes: “The doctrine of republication was the focal point of one of the reports given at this year’s GA, and many people are looking to this report to bring some peace in the Reformed world. Whether or not it will settle things down, history will determine.”⁷ Likewise, Matthew W. Kingsbury, pastor of Park Hill OPC in Denver, comments: “The most eagerly anticipated item on the docket of the 83rd General Assembly of the OPC was

the report of a special committee to study republication.”⁸

Summary of the Principal Argument(s) in the Report

There are three parts to the study: (1) a summary of the covenant theology as set forth in the *Westminster Standards*; (2) a consideration of the several views of the doctrine of republication found among Reformed theologians; and (3) the conclusion of the committee (“advice” to the church constituency). The committee is well aware of the voluminous literature on the subject in dispute. It concedes: “No doubt, some of the present disagreements have been occasioned by a resurgence of writings on the doctrine of republication, which have brought a new level of discussion and debate to the church on this matter.” Endnote 7 of the report lists many of the works in purview. This, however, is the full extent of “interaction” with the relevant literature. Such points to the lack of competency of the committee assigned to write this study report.⁹

⁶ Apparently, one of the few exceptions in granting others who were not delegates to the 2016 General Assembly early access to the report on republication, Lee Irons (a member of the Presbyterian Church in America) had the opportunity to read in advance the report in the GA minutes. According to Daryl Hart’s summary of the GA (http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=895), debate of the report concerned only its dissemination! Discussion “seesawed,” according to one internet posting (from Cedar OPC, Hudsonville, MI). Hart’s account offers an entirely fallacious and evasive reason for the denominational controversy, what he suggests to be a lack of knowledge concerning differing views over the course of the history of Reformed teaching leading up to the views of Murray and Kline (the two theologians specifically named by Hart). *Rather, the reason was most immediately and directly the teaching of Shepherd and the controversy that ensued.*

⁷ John Edward Knox, “Republication: A Pre-OPC GA Defense,” *Torrey Gazette*, June 14, 2016, <http://torreygazette.com/blog/2016/6/14/republication-a-pre-opc-ga-defense>.

⁸ Matthew W. Kingsbury, “Administrative and Substantial,” *The Presbyterian Curmudgeon*, June 13, 2016, <http://presbyteriancurmudgeon.blogspot.com/2016/06/administrative-substantial.html>. Members of the committee comprised the following: Craig Troxel (chair), Lane Tipton, Bryan Estelle, Chad Van Dixhoorn, and Benjamin Swinburnson. The principle disputants serving on this committee were Estelle (representing the mainstream Reformed view) and Swinburnson (representing the “Puritan” view).

⁹ Endnote 7 reads as follows: See, for example, the following: Lee Irons, “Redefining Merit: An Examination of Medieval Presuppositions in Covenant Theology,” in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline*, ed. Howard Griffith and John R. Muether (Reformed Theological Seminary, 2000), 253–69; Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and The Creation Covenant* (Wantrina, Australia: New Melbourne Press, 2003); R. Fowler White and E. Calvin Beisner, “Covenant, Inheritance, and Typology: Understanding the Principles at Work in God’s Covenants,” in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 147–170; Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen, *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009); James T. Dennison, Scott F. Sanborn, and Benjamin W. Swinburnson, “Merit or ‘Entitlement’ in Reformed Covenant Theology: A Review,” *Kerux* 24.3 (2009): 3–152; Brenton Clark Ferry, “Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy” (master of theology thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2009). This thesis contains a bibliography at the end. Michael Brown and Zach Keele, *Sacred Bond: Covenant Theology Explored* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2012); Mark Jones, “In What Sense?” review of *The Law Is Not of Faith, Ordained Servant* 10 (2010): 115–119; Brian Lee, “Reconciling the Two Covenants in the Old Testament,” review of *The Law Is Not of Faith, Ordained Servant* 10 (2010):120–26; Cornelis Venema, “The Mosaic Covenant: A ‘Republication’ of the Covenant of Works? A Review Article: *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*,” *Mid-America Journal of*

The first topic of analysis is the theological term “merit.” The report observes: “The topic of merit has always proven controversial in theological discussions. Indeed, there has been a long and protracted debate about the use of this term in Western theology. The same is true in this recent intramural debate on republication within our own church.” Two points are to be noted here: Firstly, the denominational controversy is erroneously dubbed “intramural;” and secondly, the difference of opinion regarding the propriety of applying the term “merit” to the prelapsarian covenant arrangement (as well as the administrative principle operative within the typological level of the Mosaic economy of redemption) is, in the final analysis, of secondary importance in terms of scholastic Reformed dogmatics. The report explains:

Since the relationship of the covenant of works to the Mosaic covenant is such a significant part of our mandate, this is one issue that we will address in light of the subject of merit. It seems to the committee that Chapter 7 of the WCF permits one to use the language of grace to describe the pre-fall situation; not redemptive grace, but in a more general manner or for other reasons—even as it was commonplace in the seventeenth century to do. Nevertheless, the

Westminster Confession does not invoke the category of grace to explain Adam’s pre-fall state, but God’s voluntary condescension (WCF 7.1). This may be a deliberate choice in light of shifting paradigms of the time. However, it is also permissible to use the language of merit in order to describe the possibility of Adam’s obedience in the covenant of works (and perhaps it is even wise this side of Karl Barth, the Federal Vision proponents, and uncritical advocates of the New Perspective on Paul). Seventeenth-century Reformed theologian Johannes Braun did so, as did the Dutch Reformed theologian Salomon Van Til (1643–1713).¹⁰

The committee understands that “Both parties [those who affirm and those who deny the works-principle in the Mosaic Covenant] can affirm WCF 7.1 wholeheartedly (on the issue of grace or merit before the fall). There is room for further reflection and dialogue on this point over which hearty and brotherly discourse may occur.” *This admission calls into question the need to raise the question regarding use of the term “merit” altogether. It does not get to the heart of the controversy.* (For years, Gaffin has used this issue to obscure and confound the issues in dispute—a ploy in the hands of the chief miscreant.¹¹)

Theology 21 (2010): 35–102; David VanDrunen, “Israel’s Recapitulation of Adam’s Probation Under the Law of Moses,” *WTJ* 73 (2011): 303–24; Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition: The Covenant Theology of Samuel Petto (1624–1711)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); Brian Lee, “Why I Hold to Republication” *Christian Renewal* (13 Nov 2013): 41–43; Mark A. Collingridge and Brett A. McNeill, *Republication: A Biblical, Confessional and Historical Defense* (Paper submitted to PNW Presbytery, available on PDF). This paper also has a 15 page appendix by David Inks, “What John Calvin Really Said,” which is a polemic against Venema’s claims; J.V. Fesko (with response by Cornelis Venema), “The Republication of the Covenant of Works,” *Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 197–227; Cornelis Venema (with response by J.V. Fesko), “*Sic et Non. Views in Review: II. Westminster Seminary California Distinctives? The Republication of the Covenant of Works*,” *Confessional Presbyterian* 9 (2013): 157–87; Andrew M. Elam, Robert C. Van Kooten, and Randall A. Bergquist, eds., *Merit and Moses: A Critique of the Klinean Doctrine of Republication* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014). This is essentially (with only slight modification) the report that was submitted by the authors to the PNW Presbytery as “A Booklet on Merit in the Doctrine of Republication,” (April 2013). This contains a

bibliography at the end; J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), especially 138–67; David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion, ed. John Witte, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), especially 282–367; Lee Irons, “Review of *Merit and Moses*” (<http://www.upper-register.com/papers/response-to-merit-and-moses.pdf>).

¹⁰ The same point can be found in Murray’s formulation of the “Adamic administration” (what in biblical theology is the original covenant of works established by God with Adam at creation).

¹¹ As argued in my previous book, *Gospel-Grace: The Modern-Day Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), the attempt on the part of Shepherd and Gaffin to exploit the speculative, scholastic nature/covenant dichotomy frequently employed in Reformed dogmatics for the purpose of dissolving the law/gospel antithesis is wholly destructive of the orthodox doctrine of justification by faith (alone) and the doctrine of the original Covenant of Works, the covenant established by God with Adam as federal head of humankind. The Report on Justification failed to advance biblical understanding of the controverted issues lying at the heart of the dispute, this serving only to perpetuate former error in the scholastic understanding

This brings us to Part One (“The Westminster Standards and Covenant Theology”). Here the report takes up the important Creator/creature distinction, what is “foundational to all covenant theology.” However, the report questions: “How can there be fellowship or any covenant relationship between man and his Creator except by God’s ‘voluntary condescension’ to him (WCF 7.1)?” The answer given: “He must descend to us; we cannot ascend to him. Thus, it is God who entered into a “covenant of life” with our race, and this through a “special act of providence” (WCF 4.2; LC 17,20; SC 12).” Appealing to the Standards, rather than to Scripture, the report insists that God’s covenant with Adam at the beginning was an addition to the prior state of nature. This nature/covenant dichotomy is unbiblical; it is simply wrong.¹² The report then moves to consider the significant role of typology in the interpretation of the Mosaic economy, that in relation to the new covenant. “An important, but indirect way of addressing the question [of republication] is to consider how our confession views typology, for those who hold to a republication of the covenant of works in some sense tend to see a more expansive than limited understanding of typology in the Mosaic economy.” Though the discussion here is of limited help, in our judgment, at least there is a recognition of its importance.

With a view to the confessional teaching concerning the principle of natural law, as that pertains to the original covenant order and to the Mosaic dispensation, the report notes: “Perhaps a door is cracked open but nothing enters the rest of the

confession to support the systematic development of any substantial republication of the covenant of works or a works principle [in the Mosaic economy]. No such principle is ever granted any typological importance in our confessional standards. Nor is the Mosaic economy bracketed off in the confession, or even offered a unique place within the Old Testament—indeed, the whole Old Testament is simply characterized as ‘the time of the law’ (WCF 7.5).” This omission (or rather silence) in the *Confession* simply underscores the need within the Reformed theological tradition for further elucidation (the seventeenth-century *Confession* does not have the last word, contrary to the opinion of the committee).

The study returns once again to the issue of “merit” in the description of the covenant-of-works feature operative in both the Adamic and Mosaic administrations. “One important subject raised in some discussions about republication is the relationship between a work and a reward. Is it the case that there is some necessary correspondence between a work and its reward? Or is a connection between the two a matter which God himself can freely determine as he pleases, but once determined, is obliged, in faithfulness to his own word, to maintain? In terms of classical theology and philosophy, is the relationship between works and rewards real or nominal (the latter being a position sometimes called ‘simple justice’, ‘*ex pacto merit*,’ or ‘covenantal justice’).” Here again the discussion is confusing and unhelpful, serving only to cloud the issues in dispute.¹³

of the Covenant of Works (wherein it is erroneously held that grace is the basis of the reward for faithful covenant-keeping). Such a view undermines the merit-principle of inheritance, that which stands in contrast to the grace-principle of inheritance in the Covenant of Grace. To dispel misunderstanding and confusion in the minds of so many today, what is clearly demanded is a reformulation of doctrine that faithfully conveys the teaching of Scripture. *The term “grace” pertains exclusively to God’s redemptive provision for fallen humanity.*

¹² Later the report maintains again: “while our first parents bore this image and were embedded with this law, the distance between God and humanity is so great that God voluntary condescended to us, without which we would have no benefit from him at all. God’s act of ‘voluntary condescension’ was to establish a covenant (WCF 7.1). In other words, the law of God was implanted in us at creation, and yet we cannot flourish without covenant, and so God brought our first parents into a covenantal relationship with himself through a ‘special act of

providence’ (SC 12). This means, among other things, that creation does not seem to be synonymous with covenant.” And again, in different terms the report states: “it appears, then, that the implantation of the moral law in the human conscience is coincident with creation, and yet the creation of a covenant falls under the realm of providence. In other words, from the viewpoint of the confession, this law on their hearts was not naked; it was clothed from (almost?) the beginning in a covenantal arrangement. It is for that reason the man and the woman were not alone together in the garden; it is in that way they were enabled to live in relationship with God. Natural law does not seem to be synonymous with the covenant of works.”

¹³ Mention of the “ontological” difference between the “one righteous act” of the First and Second Adams is wholly irrelevant. Hence, the report mistakenly concludes: “not only is there a ‘great disproportion’ between the works of the redeemed ‘and the glory to come,’ but also an ‘infinite distance that is between us and God’ (WCF 16.5). Even pre-fall merit is thus

We now come to Part Two (“Views on Republication”), the longest section of the report. Recall that the formulation of Kline has been chosen by the committee to be the focus of ongoing controversy within church and seminary (this was determined by the committee, not the General Assembly mandate). The report identifies four distinct viewpoints (as follows):

View 1: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a covenant of works, promising eternal life and/or salvation upon condition of perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience.

View 2: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a mixed covenant, containing elements of both a covenant of works and a covenant of grace.

View 3: The Mosaic covenant in substance is a subservient covenant, promising temporal life in Canaan upon condition of perfect obedience to the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws.

View 4: The Mosaic covenant is in substance a covenant of grace, although uniquely administered in a manner appropriate to the situation of God’s people at that time.

It is my contention that Kline’s formulation does embody many elements found within the Reformed theological tradition from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward. None of the views in the report is an accurate description of the Kline-Karlberg interpretation, what is demanded in this study, as defined by the committee.¹⁴ The closest is the fourth view in its taxonomy. According to the

excluded, in any proportional sense, because of the ontological difference between the Creator and the creature. Adam had a capacity for perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience, but the value of that obedience was far less than the promised reward. Quite apart from the problem of sin (also discussed in 16.5), it seems, there was no possibility of Adam or his descendants accelerating an eschatological or glorified state by means of any real merit of his own; he could only do so through a covenantal arrangement, where God, in his benevolent freedom, would reward his obedience with a gift beyond that which he had earned.” *The members of the Committee simply do not grasp the importance and significance of the law/gospel antithesis, the opposition between reward received as a matter of redemptive grace (i.e., salvation in Christ) and reward based upon covenantal obedience (the eschatological blessing proffered to Adam in the original Covenant of Works for obedience to God the Lord). Crucial here in the discussion, additionally, is the related doctrine of imputation, including the representative headship of the Two Adams, something largely neglected in the report.*

¹⁴ Alongside Professor Kline, I had the unique privilege of crystalizing Reformed interpretation of the covenants over the course of seven years of study at Westminster—three for the master of divinity, one for the masters in theology (New Testament studies), and three for the doctorate in theology (Reformation/Post-Reformation studies), leading up to the writing of my dissertation, entitled “The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A historical-critical analysis with special attention to early covenant eschatology” (Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980), available at University Microfilms International (Ann Arbor, MI and London, England: #8024938). Kline was appointed as one of the dissertation readers by virtue of his expertise and interest in ongoing discussions within the faculty that had transpired since the mid-1970s. My master’s thesis is entitled “Law in Pauline Eschatology: The Historical Qualification of Justification by

Faith” (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977). On the cover of Kline’s magnum opus I wrote: “In *Kingdom Prologue* Meredith G. Kline, foremost OT scholar and theologian at the turn of this century, weaves together in biblical-theological fashion various and complex aspects of Old Testament life and worship, preeminently in terms of the biblical concepts of kingdom and covenant. Building on the tradition of (old) Princeton theologian Geerhardus Vos, the author takes Biblical Theology to new heights in the history of Reformed interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. In the pages of this book, Kline explains to his readers the place and importance of the first book of Moses, the Book of Genesis, in the overall structure and theology of the divine covenants from the creation of the world to its consummation. At the same time Kline’s theological analysis effectively draws out the missionary and apologetic implications of the biblical text, and in so doing clarifies the unique role and mission of the Church in the world. I warmly and enthusiastically commend this work, Kline’s *magnum opus*, to the serious student of the Bible.”

Compare D. Patrick Ramsey, “In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004) 373-400; and Brenton C. Ferry, “Cross-Examining Moses’ Defense: An Answer To Ramsey’s Critique Of Kline And Karlberg,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005) 163-68. Venema remarks: “Karlberg’s interpretation of the history of Reformed covenant theology suffers from an undue attachment to the formulations of Meredith Kline. It is noteworthy that the authors of *The Law is Not of Faith* do not refer to the fine study of my colleague, J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenants: Francis Turretin’s Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007)” (42, note 8). See my critique of Beach’s study in my book *Engaging Westminster Calvinism: The Composition of Redemption’s Song* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013)—Chapter Three: “Recovering the Mosaic Covenant as Law and Gospel.” Neither Venema nor Beach has yet to respond to my criticism(s) of their formulation.

report, “Positions one and four represent opposite poles of the spectrum: from no grace to pure grace. Positions two and three represent attempts to mitigate this polarity. The mixed covenant view does this by combining works and grace as equally ultimate aspects of the essence of the Mosaic covenant. The subservient covenant does this by temporalizing the works element, restricting the relationship of works to blessings on the earthly realm only, thus mitigating the tension with works and grace at the level of eternal salvation.” In my judgment, the committee’s taxonomy is not a fair representation of the Reformed covenantal tradition. No less confusing is the following summary description of the four views (as follows):

1. The first view states that the substance of the Adamic covenant is republished to Israel pure and simple. God makes a covenant with Israel requiring perfect, personal obedience and promises eternal life upon condition of such obedience.

2. The second view states that the substance of the covenant is *in part* a republication of the Adamic covenant of works pure and simple.

3. The third view states that the substance of the covenant is a republication of the Adamic covenant of works, although adjusted to temporal blessings in Canaan.

4. The fourth view argues that the substance of the Sinaitic covenant is in substance *not* a republication of the Adamic covenant of works, but instead an administration of the unfolding covenant of grace. Any republication or restatement of the covenant of works appears solely on the administrative level, and in a way that is consistent with its fundamentally gracious substance.

The complexities involved with the interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant in Reformed theology—and Protestant evangelical theology more widely—have always been recognized. The Kline-Karlberg formulation has been offered to the Reformed academy as providing the most satisfying formulation of Scripture, building squarely upon

historic Reformed teaching. The report speaks of “two interpretations of Kline’s view.” The question for the committee is this: What is the proper interpretation of Kline’s covenant theology? Juggling two readings of Kline only adds to the tediousness of this report. Looking more closely at the failure of the committee to read Kline aright we are obliged to give account to some degree of development in Kline’s own thinking (and here is where Kline and I collaborated in reformulating the Reformed doctrine of the covenants in order to bring out the best in our theological tradition). The report correctly notes:

In *By Oath Consigned*, one of Kline’s early books, he utilizes a distinction between the Mosaic order and the Sinaitic covenant itself. He affirms that the “old Mosaic order” as a whole is an administration of the covenant of grace. Nonetheless, he speaks of the Sinaitic covenant itself as a “specific legal whole,” identifying it as making the inheritance “to be by law, not by promise—not by faith but by works.” In this context he speaks of the “difference” between this Sinaitic covenant and the covenant of grace as “radical.” He also refers to Paul’s “radical assessment of the *nature* of the Sinaitic Covenant as something opposite to promise and faith.” Kline further states that in this way the “Sinaitic Covenant” can be viewed “as a separate entity with a character of its own.” These statements directly address the nature or substance of the Sinai covenant in itself. Taken together, they suggest that Kline does view the Sinaitic covenant as a separate covenant, distinct in nature from the covenant of grace.

The fact is this: Kline modified his position in the late 1970s. The faculty of Westminster was fully aware of this change. Kline rightly faulted Palmer Robertson for deliberately ignoring Kline’s reformulation in his book of covenant theology.¹⁵ Inexplicably, the report contends:

Kline’s later works maintain similar emphases when describing the nature of the Sinai covenant.

¹⁵ See O. Palmer Robertson’s *Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

In *Kingdom Prologue*, Kline argues that the “typal kingdom of the old covenant” was a covenant “governed by the works principle.” In this “Israel as the theocratic nation was mankind stationed once again in a paradise-sanctuary, under probation in a covenant of works.” Relative to their probationary experience as a theocratic nation in the land, Israel was under a covenant of works opposite in nature to a covenant of grace. In *God, Heaven and Har Magedon* (Kline’s last work), this same theme is highlighted. There he argues that in the Mosaic era, God superimposes over the Abrahamic covenant “a works arrangement, the Torah covenant with its ‘do this and live’ principle (cf. Lev. 18:5), the opposite of the grace-faith principle (Gal. 3–4; Rom. 10:5, 6).” Later in the work he explicitly identifies this as the “Sinaitic covenant of works” and the “Torah covenant of works.” Significantly, this works principle did not apply to “individual, eternal salvation” but “was rather the governing principle in the typological sphere.” Nonetheless, these lines of argument focus on the nature of the Sinai covenant itself, which Kline’s later writings consistently identify as being a works covenant in contrast to a covenant of grace.

The Kline-Karlberg position insists that the Mosaic Covenant is an administration of the single, ongoing Covenant of Grace spanning the entire redemptive epoch (from the Fall to the Consummation). At the same time, the Mosaic Covenant is a parenthesis in the history of redemption, in that the principle of works-inheritance (antithetical to faith-inheritance)

functions in the typological sphere, and is regulative of temporal life in the land of Canaan.¹⁶

We now come to that section of the report that attempts to distill Kline’s theology of circumcision and baptism. According to Kline, the initiatory signs of the redemptive covenant, *sacramentally speaking*, convey blessing to the elect and curse to the non-elect. Consistent with the teaching of historic Reformed theology, Kline maintains that redemptive covenant is broader than election. That is to say, the *proper purpose* of redemptive covenant is salvation in Christ. But the administration of God’s covenant in the life of the church as the community of faith, across the old and new economies of redemption, is broader than securing the salvation of all those elected in Christ. The historical administration of redemptive covenant includes the non-elect, who for one reason or another are numbered among the people of God (and so this circumstance will persist until the return of Christ and the final separation of the wheat from the tares on the Day of Judgment). None of this teaching in Kline’s work is brought to the reader’s attention in the report. But it is only from this standpoint that one can make sense of what the report explains in Kline’s writings when it states:

Kline believes that apostasy is possible under the covenant of grace. Such a belief coheres with a theology admitting to dual sanctions of blessing or curse appended to the sacraments of circumcision/baptism. Those under the Lordship of God in the covenant of grace face a judgment according to works if they fail to walk by faith in the Messiah, who bears judgment for them. Kline says, “Moreover, the newness of the New

¹⁶ The committee concludes its evaluation of Kline’s view in the following words: “The four strands of teaching adduced for this interpretation of Kline indicate to many readers that he teaches a form of substantial republication. Kline himself freely speaks of the complex relation between works and grace within the Mosaic economy. He does not deny that grace is present in the Mosaic period, nor the fact that grace underlies the Sinai covenant of works probation. He also restricts the works principle to the temporal kingdom of Canaan, and rejects the idea that there was a different way of salvation under the Mosaic era. Nonetheless this does not remove the fact that on this interpretation the Sinai covenant itself is substantially and by nature governed by a basic principle that is decidedly not gracious. It distinctively reflects the substantial principles of a covenant-of-works probation in contrast to a covenant of grace.

In these paragraphs, then, and in others like them, Kline maintains that the Mosaic economy contains a distinct covenant that is itself a covenant of works in contrast to the covenant of grace. It is for that reason that Kline’s teaching on the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of works can be categorized as a form of substantial republication. . . . The works surveyed in the report below span the range of Kline’s publishing career, from his earlier work in *Treaty of the Great King* (1963) to his final published book, *God, Heaven and Har Magedon* (2006). A guide for understanding Kline, borne out by a careful reading of his entire corpus, is that his biblical theology of the covenant of grace does not undergo any substantial alteration. Rather, from his earliest works up until his final work, a basic point of continuity emerges.”

Covenant does not consist in a reduction of the Covenant of Redemption to the principle of election and guaranteed blessing. Its law character is seen in this too that it continues to be a covenant with dual sanctions...having, in particular, anathemas to pronounce and excommunications to execute.”

Kline’s theology of the sacraments becomes a critical focusing lens by which we can distinguish and relate corporate and individual apostasy and gain greater clarity on the nature of the Mosaic covenant, Israel’s national obedience, and the typico-symbolic recapitulation of Adam’s sin and exile in Israel’s protracted apostasy.

One of the reasons for the legal function of the Mosaic law—Israel’s “tutor” or “schoolmaster”—is the fact that Israel’s tenure in the promised land of Canaan is contingent upon Israel’s *own* obedience to covenantal law, not the substitutionary obedience of Christ imputed to all those united to him by grace through faith. If the basis of life in Canaan was soteric grace, then the reward (life and prosperity in Canaan) would be unlosable. The report correctly observes:

What this requires us to appreciate in Kline’s thought is the distinction between the way Christ’s obedience secures the eschatological kingdom in opposition to the way that Israel’s disobedience forfeits the tupal kingdom. Kline’s point is that Israel’s situation correlates itself to the fallen Adamic order in the way that disobedience forfeits inheritance—a scenario that stands in the starkest contrast to the way that Christ’s obedience merits the eschatological inheritance. Therefore, while the grace of Christ’s suretyship underwrites and enables Israel’s obedience at the level of the *ordo salutis*, his obedience does not secure the everlasting maintenance of the tupal kingdom at the level of the *historia salutis*. If his suretyship did secure the tupal kingdom perpetually, that order would endure forever. The tupal kingdom order did not endure forever, because its permanent maintenance was not rooted in the suretyship of Christ but the obedience of national Israel. This

is perhaps the core insight of Kline’s theology of the works principle.

At long last, we come to the committee’s summary and conclusion regarding Kline’s view of republication. The road here has been long and tedious. In summation, the report states:

Kline’s viewpoint is perhaps best described as an administrative re-enactment within national Israel of the outcome of the covenant of works with Adam, adjusted to the realities of sin, grace and redemptive typology, resulting in exile from the inheritance-land of Canaan. While other interpretations of Kline would suggest he endorses substantial republication of the covenant of works with Adam, the line of argument developed in this chapter, particularly the integral role played by Abraham as the redemptive-historical frame of reference for the nature of corporate Israel’s obedience, suggests otherwise.

As for alleged weaknesses in Kline’s formulation of covenant theology, the committee believes “his use of ‘merit’ language is ‘unfortunate’ in light of the history of the Reformed tradition, although it maintains that the substance of his views are orthodox. Even if Kline’s proposal on this reading is orthodox and coheres with the system of truth outlined in the standards, there are still areas that need further clarification and refinement.”

At the same time, legitimate questions can continue to be raised regarding the usefulness of these qualifications as applied to the term merit. Kline’s qualifications, as understood within this interpretive paradigm, are sufficient to stave off the charge of heterodoxy. Nonetheless, some could think that the qualifications are useful in themselves, but that they lose utility insofar as they apply to a nuanced view of typological merit in distinction from *ex pacto* merit. Thus, the question remains whether or not it might be desirable to find language other than typological merit to express the same concepts Kline expressed, and this question ought to provide the

context for continued intramural discussion within our denomination.¹⁷

The report tells its readers that Kline's formulation

cannot easily account for those passages of Scripture that point to a gracious substance in the Sinai covenant itself. One need look no farther than the Decalogue itself, in which the Sinai covenant is epitomized. The preface to the Decalogue reveals that the ethical dynamic of the Sinai covenant is fundamentally gracious. It is founded not first and foremost on what Israel will do for God, but what God has already done for Israel. God also promises "mercy" in offering blessing to those who keep his commandments. This "mercy" is thoroughly redemptive in character, and brings into view Israel's inherent unworthiness of any promise of reward. The fifth commandment also contains a promise of long life and blessing to those who are obedient to the law with reference to the typical kingdom. The Apostle Paul cites this verse with its annexed promise and applies it to those in the new covenant (of grace). It is difficult to account for these passages if the promised blessings are evidence of a works principle that is in sharp contrast to grace and expressive of a covenant of works arrangement.¹⁸

In the judgment of the committee "problems become more acute when obedience is said to function as the 'meritorious ground' or reward, and in this way the 'basis' or 'cause' of the reward proffered in the Mosaic covenant. This way of speaking is not consistent with our standards, which refer to the best works of sinful humans (so far as merit is concerned) as deserving only God's wrath and curse, and being the basis only of his condemnation (outside of Christ)."

¹⁷ Once again, the report falsely reduces the controversy merely to "intramural" debate, and in its judgment deems the tendency in the interpretations of both Shepherd and Kline as moving towards heterodoxy!

¹⁸ Compare the essay of VanDrunen on natural law in *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (eds., B. D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and D. VanDrunen; Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009) 283-314. Venema comments: "It is

Finally, we arrive at the recommendations and advice of the committee in Part Three (the briefest section in the report). The governing principle in God's covenant with humankind, pre- and post-Fall, is grace, either non-redemptive grace or soteriic grace—but grace all the same. The report asserts:

our standards affirm that the merit of Christ, the God-man and mediator, consists in his perfect, personal, proportional, profitable, and free obedience. Christ offers his covenant-obedience and sufferings as the representative head of the elect. He thereby fulfills the requirements and removes the penalty of the original covenant of works. Precisely because fallen man cannot fulfill these conditions, he is unable (properly speaking) to merit a reward from God of any kind.

This is the very argument that Gaffin has been maintaining since the beginning of the theological controversy in the 1970s. And it has been Gaffin's insistence that Kline's views not be taught at Westminster (Philadelphia); likewise, Kline's teaching is not welcome in the OPC. Gaffin's position has been honored in this Report on Republication. *The jury is in—Professor Meredith G. Kline, the troubler of Israel, is out!*

Karlberg on Kline: A Closing Evaluation

Historically, the two dominant Reformed views on the Mosaic Covenant—that best represented in the OPC context by the divergent thinking of Murray and Kline—have been around for a very long time. What has ignited the bitter dispute within the Westminster Seminary community and beyond, here at the close of the 20th century, well into the 21st? The clear, indisputable answer is the Shepherd-Gaffin theology. At this historical juncture, if Gaffin's teaching is in line with traditional Reformed covenant theology (as widely, but erroneously,

interesting to observe that some of the representations of the Mosaic covenant by authors of *The Law is Not of Faith*, especially in the chapter of Gordon, resemble more the Lutheran view in this respect than the traditional Reformed view" (in "The Mosaic Covenant: A 'Republication' of the Covenant of Works? A Review Article," 66, note 33). This has been a common note sounded by Shepherd and his followers many times over.

alleged), why the raging dispute over the law-works principle operative within the Mosaic Covenant? What accounts for this theological crisis in present-day Calvinism?¹⁹

Pivotal to the long-standing controversy over the doctrine of justification and the covenants is not Kline's formulation, but rather Murray's mutation ("recasting") of traditional covenant theology and, more immediately, Shepherd's unorthodox deformation of Reformed federalist teaching. The

report's "Glossary" contains the name of only one theologian, Meredith Kline, the troubler of Israel. To place Kline's work at the centerpiece of its analysis of the long-standing controversy is a wholly misconceived attempt on the part of the committee members to portray Kline as the leading adversary, the central theological figure and cause of dissension. The report is best read as the denominational tribunal on the orthodoxy of Kline's covenant theology.²⁰

¹⁹ Biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos is precursor to the modern-day Reformed doctrine of republication. In the "Introduction" the authors of *The Law is Not of Faith* reason: "With such rhetoric [urging the "recasting" of covenant theology] Murray released the clutch, and those who had studied under him or were influenced by his writings without appropriate reflection and criticism in these areas set in motion a chain of events that would produce deleterious injuries for confessional Reformed theology and beyond. Norman Shepherd, professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary from 1963 to 1982, is a case in point. In his recent book, he too showed great antipathy to any construal of republication in the Mosaic covenant and a works principle represented in such an important passage as Leviticus 18:5, for example" (17). For more on the Westminster's mode of operation, see my "Master of Deception and Intrigue: Yet Another Glimpse into the Work and Psyche of Westminster Seminary," *The Trinity Review*, Special Issue (May 2014): <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/PDF/The%20Trinity%20Review%2000304%20SpecialIssueMasterofDeceptionandIntrigue.pdf>.

Leading up to the 83rd General Assembly I posted the following three updates: (1) "Republication: A Doctrinal Controversy Four Decades in the Making," posted on *The Aquila Report*, September 4, 2014

[<http://theaquilareport.com/republication-a-doctrinal-controversy-four-decades-in-the-making/>]; (2) "Addendum to the Republication Controversy," posted on *The Aquila Report*, October 4, 2014

[<http://theaquilareport.com/addendum-to-the-republication-controversy/>]; and (3) "Current Study on Republication: Where matters presently stand," posted on *Trinity Foundation*, November 2015

[<http://www.trinityfoundation.org/update.php?id=2>]. In the last posting I made the statement: "Complicating matters, however, the Standards relate the Mosaic law to the original law of nature (what is yet another reference to the principle of works-inheritance). *Reformed theologians uniformly taught that the Mosaic Covenant contained a reiteration of the law of nature (hence the universal, binding character of the Ten Commandments upon all peoples)*. A consistent, mature formulation of the theology of the covenants would require many decades of debate and discussion – what is still ongoing within the church and the academy."

The authors of "Merit or 'Entitlement' in Reformed Covenant Theology: A Review" (*Kerux: The Journal of the Northwest Theological Seminary*, 24/3 [December 2009]) note: "Richard B. Gaffin Jr. has also raised some concerns about the 'republication thesis.' In a recent review of Michael Horton's *Covenant and Salvation*, Gaffin expressed his concern regarding Horton's view that under the Mosaic economy the judicial role of the law in the life of God's people functioned, at the typological level, for inheritance by works (as the covenant of works reintroduced) in antithesis to grace (29). Furthermore, Gaffin sees this position as creating 'an uneasy tension, if not polarization, in the lives of his people between grace/faith and (good) works obedience (*ordo salutis*), especially under the Mosaic economy' (30). Gaffin's comments do not directly address the relationship of Horton's views to the Westminster Confession and the Reformed tradition in general, but they do express his general concern regarding not only the internal consistency of the position, but also how it may detract from an accurate reading of the Old Testament" (25). They conclude: "To our knowledge, Gaffin has also extensively critiqued constructions of the Mosaic covenant as embodying a meritorious works-principle in both his classroom lectures and various public presentations on the doctrine of the covenant. The classroom lectures can be accessed online at www.wts.edu" (25, note 31). The authors are James T. Dennison, Jr., Scott F. Sanborn, and Benjamin W. Swinburnson.

In "Current Study on Republication" I noted: "*Kerux*, at present an online **journal** of biblical theology published by Northwest Theological Seminary, had previously published Kline's excellent and insightful studies in the book of Zachariah (since published as *Glory in Our Midst: A Biblical-Theological Reading of Zachariah's Night Visions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001). Now the journal has taken a decidedly anti-Klinian stance, this after mounting criticism of the Shepherd-Gaffin 'biblical theology' (which Northwest Seminary heartily commends)."

²⁰ It is curious to read the committee's report concerning the origin and development of this long-standing, disruptive controversy. Clearly it serves to reflect all the backroom chatter, church politicking, and strategizing that has been going on since the beginning of the outbreak of the seminary dispute. Gregory Reynolds (Ordained Servant Online, August / September 2012 / Issue: Biblical Theology) remarks: "Meredith G. Kline's theology is sometimes controversial in our church," and that

The Report is unnecessarily tedious, yielding only more confusion in the mind of the reader. What it does indicate is the frustration and the lack of competence on the part of the committee members assigned the task of writing the report. The report does a thoroughgoing disservice to the Reformed church and academy, resulting in a distortion of Kline's theology. Barely a word is made denouncing the heterodox views of Shepherd. Lack of interaction with the extensive literature on the subject under review is without justification, but does serve of purpose of the committee which sees the dispute over doctrine as an purely "intramural" affair. There are only three references to Shepherd's teaching, none of which identify his controversial teaching as heretical; only one indirect reference to Karlberg's writings on this subject and his critical assessment of Westminster Seminary.²¹

Kline regarded me as his "theological son"—it is reasonable that I should take the time to redress the

issues raised in the report about Kline's covenant theology and, in so doing, clear the air regarding his position and challenge/correct the widespread misreading and distortion of his work. Who is better poised to clarify matters? If advocates of traditional Reformed covenant theology hold true to their convictions, this report will not sit well; it will only generate more dissension and upheaval. *Within the OPC the root of the confusion and the deliberate, calculated diversion away from the Shepherd teaching to that of Kline as regards the Reformed doctrine of the Mosaic Covenant is the crucial law-gospel antithesis.*²² The reason for this is the unwillingness to address elements of the Shepherd formulation which continue to impact teaching in the seminaries and churches, largely the result of Gaffin's dominance. Will Westminster Seminary California follow Estelle and retreat from the doctrine of republication as formulated by Kline (as suggested by this report)? Much remains to be seen.²³

"on several areas of concern." Again, a reversal of the true state of affairs in the OPC. Clair Davis, writing to Tom Juodaitis (Trinity Foundation), laments having lost contact with Karlberg (email of March 26, 2015). Perhaps open dialogue would have saved the committee from blatant misreading of Kline's writings.

²¹ In the paper prepared for the OPC Presbytery of the Northwest, "Republication: A Biblical, Confessional, and Historical Defense," by Mark A. Collingridge and Brett A. McNeill, we read these comments:

Fathers and brothers, from one perspective, we are happy to write this paper in order to speak about the proper place of the doctrine of republication in historic, confessional Presbyterian and Reformed theology. We stand downstream of a glorious work of our God in the Protestant Reformation wherein the great *solas* of our faith were set forth as never before. Republication is an aspect of that crystallization intended to guard, uphold, and undergird such important doctrines as the law-fulfilling work of our Lord Jesus Christ in His active and passive obedience, justification by faith alone, and the liberty and freedom we enjoy as the sons of God in the new covenant Christ ratified in His blood. We are thankful for the opportunity to do our best to address questions, concerns, and confusions regarding this historic doctrine.

On the other hand, it grieves us that this paper is written under a cloud of accusations, suspicion, contention, and fear. This is never a helpful context for good, edifying, and helpful theological dialogue among brothers and sisters in Christ. Our hope is that, whether or not one agrees with this Reformed insight, these unfortunate storm clouds will dissipate and allow the light of temperance, trust,

understanding, and love to shine brightly as is fitting those united to Jesus Christ and bound in our common calling to serve the church. [iv]

²² Robertson's history of the dispute, *The Current Justification Controversy*, was published by Trinity Foundation long after being suppressed by prevailing powers in the PCA and the OPC. Robertson's account, appearing in 2003, made necessary the OPC "Statement on Justification" (2004) to give the false appearance that the denomination stood squarely within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy. Just one more attempt at deception on the part of the OPC. Included in Robertson's account is Gaffin's role in support of Shepherd. The official Westminster document providing justification for the dismissal of Shepherd from the faculty (establishing the "legal" ground for dismissal of a tenured professor) is entitled "Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd." The committee charged with the task of writing this paper had requested a paper from me critiquing Shepherd's theology, which was provided. The "Reason and Specifications" is available in John W. Robbins, *A Companion to the Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2003), and in other places.

²³ W. Robert Godfrey and D. G. Hart explain: "Westminster California was born in the heat of the Shepherd controversy and initially left the Shepherd problem to WTS (especially since Frame tended to defend Shepherd while Strimple and Godfrey had sharply criticized him.) But even with the dismissal of Shepherd in 1981, the issue of the doctrine of justification did not disappear. Some in the Reformed churches continued to defend Shepherd, others embraced the New Perspective on Paul and still others adopted the Federal Vision" (*Westminster Seminary California: A New Old School* [Escondido: WSC, 2012] 109).

From its inception, the OPC had the opportunity to realize the best in Reformed theology, ministry and mission. Of course, no denomination is perfect. As it turns out, the OPC is a failed experiment in American Presbyterianism. Pride and failure to hear and act upon *valid* criticism offered by others sympathetic to the Reformed cause has led to her downfall. What the report on republication proves is that the OPC is incapable of correction and truth-telling. She remains resolute in her refusal to repent of error and deceit. Most notably with respect to the controversy over justification and the covenants, the OPC sees herself as above reproach. Upon the

In a letter to Will Barker (then Dean of the faculty at WTS) Kline wrote: "Mark Karlberg's misgivings concerning the current theological picture at WTS/P are justified" (8/31/94). Kline added: "In my judgment, if the present tendencies are not reversed, perceptive church historians of the future will record that the erosion of Reformational theology (with respect to both the formal and material principles) that began at WTS/P in the seventies of the 20th century continued unchecked into the 21st century." Over the years, R. C. Sproul (Sr.) has been very supportive and encouraging with regard to my critiques of Westminster and all those espousing the New Theology. (One still hopes that Sproul will yet come to realize the impropriety and inappropriateness of applying the biblical-theological term "grace" to the covenant of works, wherein the works-inheritance principle, antithetical to the faith-grace principle, is operative.)

Strimple encouraged me to pursue my doctoral study at WTS. Shepherd was appointed as my doctoral advisor; followed by W. Robert Godfrey when Shepherd requested to step down from that role (Godfrey is currently President of WSC). My years at WTS provided the impetus for renewed discussions of covenant theology, and led to the invitation to bring Kline back to teach on a part-time basis. Clowney had been abroad on sabbatical and would have opposed my admittance into the doctoral program (at a time when the Shepherd controversy had consumed the administration and faculty); it was at this same time that Kuschke filed charges against Shepherd in the Philadelphia Presbytery of the OPC. At the very beginning Shepherd requested to serve as my doctoral advisor (each had respect and esteem for one another); in the end Clowney reversed his position and achieved winning Shepherd's dismissal (this after studying my doctoral work, notably as summarized in part—in the 1980 fall issue of *WTJ*). These were unsettling times for so many.

Lee Irons, in his "Response to *Merit and Moses*: A Critique of the Klinean Doctrine of Republication" (<http://www.upper-register.com/papers/response-to-merit-and-moses.pdf>), rightly laments: "with the publication of *Merit and Moses* and the formation of the OPC Republication Study Committee, it seems their charges are beginning to get some traction. They have even managed to get respected Reformed professors, such as Robert Strimple (another former professor

dismissal of Shepherd from Westminster, Robert Strimple decided to turn a blind eye to Gaffin's formulations, not wanting another agonizing round of controversy and ecclesiastical disruption to impede the work and witness of Westminster. The OPC study report on republication is the product of Westminster Seminary (East and West), as evident in the selection of committee members. With regard to the California faculty, Kline was not persuaded that it was taking a clear, decisive stand against the deviant teaching propounded by Gaffin, who has remained steadfast in his support for Shepherd (the same can be said of John Frame).²⁴

of mine at WSC), Cornelis Venema, and Richard Gaffin, to endorse their book attacking Kline and those of us who appreciate Kline's biblical-theological and covenantal insights. They also were able to get OPC pastor William Shishko to write the Foreword for their book, as well as an endorsement from Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) pastor Mark Jones, author of a recent book on antinomianism. Seeing so many take this book seriously is troubling" (2). Unfortunately, Lee Irons minimizes the error of Shepherd's staunchest defender, Richard Gaffin. As I have pointed out repeatedly, the current dispute in the OPC and in the seminary relates to the contrary views of Kline and Gaffin. For a perceptive analysis of Iron's shortcoming in this very regard, see Stephen M. Cunha, "The Critical Ingredient Missing from Richard B. Gaffin Jr.'s Soteriology," posted on the Trinity Foundation (November 2015): <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/update.php?id=3>.

²⁴ All of this has been documented in other places. Numerous times in conversation and personal correspondence Kline has asserted Gaffin's denial of the law/gospel antithesis. After engaging Frame on the California campus, Kline found it necessary "to sound the alarm against the Shepherd-Gaffin theology more loudly and pointedly than ever" in the classroom and beyond (letter of 3/15/98). With reference to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Kline spoke of "the real nature of that school's vaunted new theologizing program," urging Strimple to insure the clear separation of Westminster Seminary California from WTS. All parties closest to the seminary dispute knew that Kline and I shared the same assessment of Gaffin's role in the formulation and defense of Shepherd's teaching. There was no doubt or reservation on the part of either one of us. With respect to our mutual devotion to the Reformed faith and its covenantal exposition, Kline regarded me his "son," his theological heir. To be sure, I have been the leading critic of Frame's multi-perspectivalism, as well as the leading critic of Gaffin's own_unorthodox formulations of the issues in dispute (as their responses indicate, both Gaffin and Frame have been very much aware of this circumstance). In some quarters, I also have been falsely labeled "controversial"—a reversal of the true state of affairs! Several efforts and devious tactics have been employed in the attempt to silence me.

It was never Kline's intent that his work should be the center of controversy. The fact that it came to be so is more a sign of the times, a very sad development for Reformed orthodoxy indeed. Whether we consider Kline's opposition to Gregory Bahnsen's theonomy, the Shepherd-Gaffin reformulation of doctrine (specifically, justification by faith alone, election, and the twofold covenants), or John Murray's recasting of covenant theology, Kline surely is to be recognized and honored for his unwavering stand for the truth of Scripture, for his life-long devotion to the Church of Christ, and for his

Dennison, Sanborn and Swinburnson state: "In fairness to Fesko and Ferry, we are encouraged that they have recognized many of the historical-theological errors in Karlberg's analysis (78-79)—one that has played a large role in shaping many Klineans' understanding of the Reformed tradition. Still, they do not seem to be as forthright as they might have been about the source of many of these basic errors, namely, Karlberg's attempt to vindicate Kline's construction of the Mosaic covenant. Although (relatively speaking) their analysis is an improvement on Karlberg, they still do not seem to have moved beyond his basic commitment to reading the tradition in light of or in reference to Kline" (39 n. 40).

²⁵ There were numerous other objections that Kline had raised over the years against some of the faculty members of Westminster, including the Dillard-Longman-Enns school of hermeneutics, the multi-perspectivalism of John Frame and Vern Poythress, and Harvie Conn's contextualization of theology in various historical/societal/cultural settings.

In one of my internet postings (at Old Life Theological Society and Green Baggins) I had remarked: "Is there a suggestion here that *Westminster III* (after the dismissal of Enns and Green by the Lillback regime) is back on track, having returned to the glorious days of 'Machen and the fundamentalists,' i.e., those bearing the Westminster orthodoxy of the founding faculty? The prominent issues here are twofold: (1) biblical inerrancy; and (2) the doctrine of salvation (specifically, justification by faith alone). Of course, *Westminster I* came to an inglorious end with the departure of Professor Meredith Kline. Happily, he did leave an indelible imprint upon Westminster in California. This now raises the pressing question whether or not Westminster West remains unambiguously at odds with the new theological direction taken at Westminster East. What direction, you ask? Does Westminster West denounce unequivocally elements of semi-Barthianism that has gained widespread ground within Reformed circles today and within evangelical Protestantism more broadly, notably as regards the teaching on 'eschatological' justification and election? The question is whether or not Westminster West will commit unreservedly and uncompromisingly to clear, consistent teaching upholding the *fundamentals of Reformed orthodoxy*, that borne by Old Westminster. The test case is now front and center in the dispute within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church regarding to the

commitment to orthodox Reformed teaching. The differences between Kline and Murray (notably, interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant) moved to the forefront only as a consequence of the dispute surrounding the teaching of Norman Shepherd.²⁵ *In a word, the "Report of the Committee to Study Republication" is a travesty.*²⁶ One would hope that a newly-appointed committee of the OPC would redress the grievous wrong that has been committed with regard to this committee's reading of the work of Kline and restate the biblical teaching pertaining

classic Reformed doctrine of 'republication' (what is the peculiar role of 'law' in the Mosaic Covenant)." For more on this, see my "Current Study on Republication: Where Matters Presently Stand" (<http://www.trinityfoundation.org/update.php?id=2>).

The closing paragraph of "The Committee for the Study of Republication: 2013 Address to the Presbytery of the Northwest" reads: "Because of the limit of authority with which the Confession [WCF] can speak on the subject, members of this Presbytery are called upon to use modesty and humility in dispute and to recognize the present volatile situation as an opportunity for displaying true Christ-like virtues. It should also be remembered that the world is watching, and that anything less than the above attitude will not only lead to further fissures and distraction within the church, but is bound to deliver ammunition to those who are outside, who have long judged the OPC to be sectarian and narrow-minded. Such charges are at times well deserved and at times fueled by sheer ignorance, but we must be intentional about avoiding needless offences. Undue controversy over issues such as republication may not be conducive to or may even hinder our mission to the world" (<https://sites.google.com/site/mosaiccovenant/home>).

Peter A. Lillback in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary* (Peter A. Lillback, editor; Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016): <http://westminsterseminarypress.com/> explains: "Thus, this little work is presented to the public as an introduction to the hermeneutical method that today characterizes the biblical scholarship of the Westminster faculty" (4). He further comments: "The Christ-centered manner in which the Reformed hermeneutical method engaged Scripture developed out of the unifying principle of the covenant" (5). (He disingenuously cites WCF, chapter 7 (two covenant, works and grace.) He then concludes: "These classic Reformed emphases on the covenantal unity of the Bible highlight the necessity of an organic Christ-centered interpretation of Scripture. All of Westminster Theological Seminary's faculty and board members have committed to this confessional hermeneutic since the seminary's founding" (6). What a misrepresentation and distortion of the history and doctrinal stance of the seminary!

²⁶ It is apparent that much of the analysis in this report regurgitates the thinking found in the book *Merit and Moses*.

to the covenants, giving priority to Scripture rather than the *Confession*.

ADDENDUM: Bibliographical Note

Much has been written elucidating both the history and the interpretation of Reformed covenant theology. I have devoted a career in this undertaking. The special focus of my four closely-knit books published by Wipf and Stock—compilations of articles and book reviews—details developments at Westminster Seminary (East and West) regarding the doctrines of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), election, and the covenants. Since the early twentieth century, the Westminster seminaries have been the conveyers of the theological and confessional tradition, which was given formative expression at the Assembly that convened at Westminster in London, England (1643-49). Each volume builds upon the previous one, providing additional, timely evidence and documentation of changes which have taken place at (New) Westminster, notably, as that pertains to deviant teaching respecting the two formative principles of the Protestant Reformation, the formal (the doctrine and interpretation of Scripture) and the material (the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith).

Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology (2000): Central to my research and publications over the course of four decades, beginning with my graduate studies in New Testament (Th.M.) and in historical/systematic theology (Th.D./Ph.D.), is the subject of Reformed interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant as an administration of the “Covenant of Grace,” extending from the Fall to the Consummation (the second coming of Christ). Related topics include the following: the relation of the two God-ordained institutions, church and state, in the period of common grace (thus in distinction from the circumstance of the ancient Israelite theocracy in the period from Moses to the first coming of Christ); the distinction between the original “Covenant of Works” established with Adam as created in the image of God and the subsequent “Covenant of Grace” (including the intra-trinitarian “Covenant of

Redemption”); biblical typology as taught in the Old and New Testaments; and the intimate bond between amillennial covenant theology and biblical eschatology (reflecting the “already/not yet” structure of redemptive history and its application to individual salvation by virtue of union with Christ).

Gospel-Grace: The Modern-Day Controversy (2003): The first sequel to *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*—what is foundational to all subsequent publications—addresses the rapidly-growing opposition in evangelical-Reformed scholarship to traditional, historic Protestant teaching (*a la* Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy) concerning the antithesis between two principles of inheritance, works and (gospel-)grace. The twofold doctrine of the covenants, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, a staple in Reformed teaching, is upheld as essential to the system of Reformed orthodoxy, not an aberrant accretion of later “scholasticism.” Criticism of radically new teachings emanating from Westminster Seminary, reflective of changes taking place in evangelical theology more broadly, is carefully assessed in these pages. Pivotal in this analysis and exposé is the teaching of Professors Norman Shepherd and Richard Gaffin. Coordinate with other developments in Westminster’s department of systematic theology is the novel introduction of “multi-perspectivalism” crafted by John Frame and contextualization in the missional theorizing of Harvie Conn.

Federalism and the Westminster Tradition: Reformed Orthodoxy at the Crossroads (2006): The third in the series opens with a “commissioned” article, entitled “The Significance and Basis of the Covenant of Works: Exegetical and theological factors.” It concludes with a discussion of the present-day challenge and confrontation within the church and the academy. The exemplary work of biblical theologians Geerhardus Vos and Meredith G. Kline, on the one hand, has provided needed amplification and clarification pertaining to aspects of Reformed exposition of the covenants of God in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, marking a genuine advance in the history of doctrine. Thus, the picture is not altogether bleak; there are assuredly rays of hope and evidence of unwavering, deep-

seated conviction regarding both the veracity and the integrity of the theology of the Westminster divines in some quarters today, all for the benefit of the church for generations to come. Yet, on the other hand, the result of years of deviant theological training at Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia) is evident in the mounting upheaval and polarization within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which has had from its inception the closest of ties to Westminster Seminary. The battle for the truth of Scripture begun in the age of the Protestant Reformation is therefore ongoing.

Engaging Westminster Calvinism: The Composition of Redemption's Song (2013): Unique in the theological literature, this conclusion to my four-volume study of Reformed covenant theology combines my work as a theological writer and teacher and my career in church music. Further analysis of the contentious struggle over the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the covenants and justification by faith alone (the inheritance-principle informing the Covenant of Grace, antithetical to the works-inheritance-principle undergirding the Covenant of Works) serves as prelude to the current crisis within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, one having ramifications extending well beyond her borders across the evangelical-Reformed world. These studies of mine, among others, have helped precipitate the action of the 2014 General Assembly of the denomination in erecting a five-member study committee in an attempt to resolve the issues now dividing the churches (chiefly, its pastors and teachers). Grasping aright that which is the heart of the Gospel—justification by faith, apart from the works of the law—is requisite for the church's singing of the New Song for time and eternity. As it turns out, understanding the role and practice of music in the service of the church depends upon a proper interpretation of the revelation of God as the "theophanic Glory" and the church's place in the history of redemptive revelation. Here again, the essential and vital distinction between common grace and special grace informs our analysis. (Appended here is my complete bibliography of writings up to the date of the book's publication.)