

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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Master of Deception and Intrigue: Yet Another Glimpse into the Work and Psyche of Westminster Seminary by Mark W. Karlberg

Publisher's Preface

Dr. Mark W. Karlberg holds three earned degrees from Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia: Master of Divinity, Master of Theology in New Testament Studies, and Doctor of Theology in Reformation and Post-Reformation Studies.

Since the publication of Dr. Karlberg's *The Changing of the Guard* in 2001, several other books have been published pertaining to the Shepherd controversy, Richard Gaffin's false teaching, and the problems at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and its impact in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and several other Reformed Presbyterian denominations – *The Current Justification Controversy* by O. Palmer Robertson (2003), *A Companion to The Current Justification Controversy* by John W. Robbins (2003), *Gospel Grace: The Modern-day Controversy* by Mark W. Karlberg (Wipf and Stock, 2003), *Can the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Be Saved?* by John W. Robbins (2004), *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism: The Spiritual Crisis in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Beyond* by Paul M. Elliott (2005), *The Auburn Avenue Theology: A Biblical Analysis* by Brian Schwertley (American Presbyterian Press, 2005), *Federalism and the Westminster Tradition: Reformed Orthodoxy at the*

Crossroads by Mark W. Karlberg (Wipf and Stock, 2006), *Covenant Theology and Justification by Faith: The Shepherd Controversy and Its Impacts* by Jeong Koo Jeon (Wipf and Stock, 2006), *The Emperor Has No Clothes: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.'s Doctrine of Justification* by Stephen M. Cunha (2008), and *Engaging Westminster Calvinism: The Composition of Redemption's Song* by Mark W. Karlberg (Wipf and Stock, 2013).

Despite the publication of the above books and several articles, “*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*” (“the more things change, the more they stay the same”). In fact retired professor, Richard Gaffin recently presented a lecture at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, despite a lengthy written protest (472 pages and 137 pages of appendix) by a member of the church, demonstrating Gaffin's error on the doctrine of justification by faith, in which the member asked the session to rescind its invitation to Dr. Gaffin. His concerns were dismissed by the session, and Gaffin delivered his lecture “Inerrancy: Adam and the Gospel” this March. That member has since resigned his membership at Tenth and has moved out of the PCA altogether.

Dr. Karlberg brings us up to date in this sequel to *The Changing of the Guard*.

--Thomas W. Juodaitis, Publisher

Introduction

Once sound institutions can and do err, resulting in the loss of theological and moral footing. This fact of church history is readily acknowledged by those committed to the preservation and propagation of Reformed orthodoxy in its essentials. The hard part for many is to recognize when and where deviation in the fundamentals of doctrine occurs in institutions once held in high regard. It is required – above all – that one remain faithful by taking a stand for truth, rather than demonstrating an unwillingness, a reluctance, or a refusal to speak out. Of course, there are those who will continue to support an institution for gain, whether personal or otherwise. Seduced by false rhetoric, charmed by personalities, threatened by retaliation or retribution of one kind or another, far too many individuals and organizations retreat from their obligation. Rather than “cross the line” – a line drawn by the miscreants themselves – many take shelter in silence and / or willing ignorance, oftentimes in varying combinations of the two.

Given the current upheaval within the Reformed community, the question arises: What accounts for the unending stream of articles, books, and “statements of faith” – institutional and organizational – upholding the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone (apart from good works)? Why the necessity for all these writings and reaffirmations? The answer is simply the fact that the Biblical, Reformed doctrine of justification (more broadly, the doctrine of union with Christ) is under fierce assault from a variety of sources. Hence the urgency over the last four decades to restate and to defend the teaching of historic Protestant-Reformed orthodoxy. A second question to be asked is: *What is the chief source of defection within the evangelical-Reformed camp? And why the widespread reticence to name this source in academia? Should there be any doubt, let it be clearly said: the primary source of deviant teaching so prevalent today is Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.*¹ In the final instance it is

fair to ask: Why are so many students leaving Westminster with views contrary to that of classic Reformed teaching, especially as regards the formal and the material principles of the Protestant Reformation (the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of justification by faith respectively)? What lies before us is not a minor skirmish, but a crisis of confidence and trust. What we are facing is an ever-widening spread of theological corruption, one that is severely impeding the work of the kingdom of Christ and witness to his Gospel of saving grace.

As noted often in my previous writings, Reformed theology is the theology of the covenants. This essay addresses two related elements in the system of doctrine – one that is primary, the other secondary. Denial of the first element results in a *radical* reinterpretation of covenant theology (leading to heterodoxy); a faulty understanding of the latter results in a defective view of the Covenant of Works, one nevertheless falling within the bounds of historic Reformed orthodoxy.² A leading feature of covenant theology (or federalism) is the antithesis between the two principles of inheritance / reward in the covenant(s) between God and his people: (1) *meritorious works* in the covenant established by God with humankind at creation, as well as in the temporal, symbolico-typical sphere of life in earthly Canaan during the Mosaic economy (the law serving as Israel’s pedagogue), and with respect to the reconciling work of Christ as Second Adam (necessitating his meritorious obedience in the place of the sinner’s transgression, covenant-breaking, and guilt); and (2) *saving faith* as instrumental in the reception of Christ’s perfect righteousness imputed to the elect, and to them alone. On this point of doctrine we meet up with the Protestant consensus (Lutheran and Reformed) concerning the law / grace antithesis. *Within the Reformed tradition this contrast has been uniquely applied to the covenantal structure of Biblical history, redemptive and pre-redemptive.* And so it is that this doctrine of the covenants distinguishes the Reformed tradition from all other Protestant

¹ *The Changing of the Guard: Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2001). Available online at www.trinityfoundation.org. Republished in my *Gospel Grace: The Modern-day Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock,

2003). This article serves as a sequel to this previous publication.

² The first element pertains to the crucial law/gospel antithesis; the second to the misapplication of the Biblical term “grace” to the preredemptive epoch (notably, the Covenant of Works).

traditions. In modern times, the first major assault on this doctrine came from Karl Barth; in more recent times, in the work of Norman Shepherd and Richard Gaffin, Jr. of Westminster Seminary.³

My doctoral study at Westminster in Philadelphia began under Shepherd. As early as matriculation into the M.Div. program, I was captivated by the work of Meredith G. Kline. Before long, I became instrumental in encouraging Professor Kline's return to Westminster to teach on a part-time basis (he was serving on the faculty of Gordon-Conwell Seminary at the time). In God's providence, my study at Westminster coincided with the outbreak of the Shepherd controversy on campus, first surfacing in 1975. Subsequent study at Westminster led to my master's thesis on *Romans 7*, giving special attention to the apostle Paul's interpretation of the Mosaic law. That was followed by the writing of my 1980 dissertation (*The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics*). All told, these studies had an impact on the course of the Shepherd controversy. After careful study of the issues in dispute (including my studies on the doctrine of the covenants and justification), President Edmund Clowney reversed his prior, favorable stance toward Shepherd, and now began taking the steps necessary to have Shepherd removed from the faculty (*the decision having been based upon Shepherd's erroneous, heterodox teaching*). This complete about-face soon led to the writing of "Reasons and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd by the Executive Committee of the Board" (February 26, 1982). As part of the review process, I had been asked by the Committee charged with producing this document to provide a critique of Shepherd's theology on justification, election, and the covenants. Needless to say, these years at Westminster were exceedingly

³ See my four-volume study, wide-ranging and detailed, offering a comprehensive bibliography: *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000); *Gospel Grace: The Modern-day Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003); *Federalism and the Westminster Tradition: Reformed Orthodoxy at the Crossroads* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006); and *Engaging Westminster Calvinism: The Composition of Redemption's Song* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013).

turbulent. Up to the current time, the situation remains much the same within the seminary community-at-large.

Prior to Clowney's reversal, he had attempted unsuccessfully to contain the crisis within the seminary, denouncing Shepherd's critics (notably, the signers of the May 4, 1981 "Letter of Concern") for having sounded the alarm to outside scholars and pastors.⁴ *In the end, in statements made in the Christian media and elsewhere, Clowney committed his biggest mistake by misleading the public regarding the true grounds for Shepherd's dismissal – downplaying Shepherd's false teaching, and emphasizing the need to distance the seminary from ongoing controversy.* This misjudgment was motivated, in part, by legal challenges raised by the theological accrediting agencies standing in the wings to protect the name and reputation of tenured professors. The same miscalculation – and for the same reason – was later repeated by President Peter Lillback and the seminary faculty in the dismissal of Peter Enns from the Old Testament department. Making matters more difficult in the prior case, President Clowney found Gaffin – Shepherd's staunchest supporter and the co-author, if not father, of the new teaching – to be a formidable force with which to contend. Since the time of Shepherd's dismissal, rupture within the faculty has never been repaired, and differences never resolved. Collegial estrangement continues to prevail to this day. Of course, the chief reason for ongoing conflict is fundamental disagreement in theological interpretation, involving issues of doctrinal substance.

Westminster East Today

Espousing anew a high view of Scripture – which members of the faculty have done throughout the history of the institution, even during its latter-day forage into novel and at times relativistic views of Scriptural interpretation (beginning in the mid-1970s)⁵ – Westminster today is hoping that its

⁴ The major impetus for the turnaround on the part of the President of the seminary was dissemination of this May letter signed by forty-five theologians and pastors voicing objection to Shepherd's exoneration. See the literature on the Shepherd controversy for additional details and developments.

⁵ It was during the days of the Shepherd controversy that faculty members were intent upon teaching freely their own

attempt to “hold the line” with regard to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture will overshadow the justification dispute, relegating the latter to a controversy in the distant past. *What has been up for grabs is the interpretation of Scripture, including radical reinterpretations.* Here we note five instances of such: (1) Harvie Conn’s utilization of contextualization and its effect upon the (re)statement of modern-day Reformed dogmatics; (2) Peter Enns’ allegorical interpretations in portions of recorded Biblical history (building upon the prior work of Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman);⁶ (3) Moisés Silva’s promotion of redaction criticism, which in this instance amounts to a variation on multiple theological perspectives such as that advocated by John Frame; (4) the employment of Barthian doctrine (specifically, the notion of the priority of grace to law resulting in denial of the traditional Protestant Law/Gospel antithesis) by Norman Shepherd, Richard Gaffin, Sinclair Ferguson, David Garner, Peter Lillback, Carl Trueman, William Edgar, and Scott Oliphant (to name only some of Westminster’s faculty); and (5) Frame’s invention of multi-perspectivalism as a replacement for traditional Reformed systematics, resulting in a change in theology and methodology.⁷ All of these streams feed into the single delta, the theological watershed known as New School Westminster.

In the February 8, 2014 issue of *World* magazine, P&R Publishing advertised two new, “seminal” books, *Thy Word is Still Truth* (edited by Lillback and Gaffin), and Frame’s *Systematic*

views, without others looking critically over their shoulders; support for Shepherd entailed an implicit pass to teach without restraint, at least to the degree to which they could get their views across without stirring outside concern or objection.

⁶ Enns, like his colleagues in the Old Testament department, claimed to uphold “inerrancy” – the problem lay in his (re)interpretation of Scripture.

⁷ This methodology has enabled Frame to be ambiguous, vague, and evasive on certain issues, waffling on others. Such is the craft of the “artful dodger.” See the exchange between Frame and Karlberg on the Trinity Foundation’s website, *Trinity Review* (Mar/Apr 2001) at www.trinityfoundation.org. For further analysis of Frame, see “On the Theological Correlation of Divine and Human Language: A Review Article,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (1989) 99-105; and “John Frame and the Recasting of Van Tilian Apologetics: A Review Article,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9 (1993) 279-296.

Theology.⁸ With regard to the latter, the advertisement claims: “This magisterial opus – at once biblical, clear, cogent, readable, accessible, and practical – summarizes the mature thought of one of the most important and original Reformed theologians of the last hundred years.” Together these two books once again bring into view the formative principles of the Protestant Reformation, the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of justification by faith alone, two of many crucial doctrines in Reformed dogmatics. In Frame’s book, the author takes yet another occasion to castigate Shepherd’s critics; he proceeds then to instruct the Reformed world how to think theologically.⁹ To be sure, Frame’s methodology and doctrinal formulation do find a following among some, but his work nevertheless remains highly controversial and highly contentious.¹⁰

*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*¹¹ is a distillation of Frame’s

⁸ *World* magazine, 33. *Thy Word is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today*, Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., editors (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013); and John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2013).

⁹ In characteristic Framian arrogance, subtly cloaked in the veneer of humility – hallmarks of Frame’s writings!

¹⁰ Frame’s attempt to answer his critics is evident in both the design and the content of his *festschrift*, where Frame hand-picked his contributors to commend, promote, and defend his work; see *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009). At Westminster Seminary’s “Alumni and Friends Lunch” conducted during the 2013 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Gaffin addressed the topic of Biblical inerrancy. He was joined on this occasion by Frame. The seminary is striving to put the best face on the school in the presence of ongoing criticism from various quarters and on several issues of doctrinal import.

¹¹ The Westminster Bookstore announces on its website (www.wtsbooks.com): “*Systematic Theology* is the culmination and creative synthesis of John Frame’s writing on, teaching about, and studying of the Word of God. This magisterial opus—at once biblical, clear, cogent, readable, accessible, and practical—summarizes the mature thought of one of the most important and original Reformed theologians of the last hundred years. It will enable you to see clearly how the Bible explains God’s great, sweeping plan for mankind.” Frame’s study has won numerous accolades from evangelical theologians – endorsements provided by the publisher at the opening of the book (comprising twenty pages preceding the title page), are an obvious attempt to buttress Frame’s

theological ruminations over the course of his teaching career (billed as his *magnum opus*). As has been pointed out by many, Frame's book and approach are subjective, amounting to a subtle, and not so subtle, attempt to repudiate traditional Reformed dogmatics at a number of key points in the theological system. His methodology can only yield at best an "introduction," not a summary or compendium of Reformed, Biblical teaching. The author prides himself on his own thinking – free of what he sees to be the dogmatism of the "traditionalists" – with token regard for historic Reformed theology on several critical points of doctrine. Curious at this point in the controversy is the ambivalence and the duplicity concerning Shepherd's distinctive teaching, what Frame regards as mere quibbling over formulation. *Frame does not regard Shepherd's theology to be unorthodox, rather that is ascribed to the thinking of his critics.*¹² Frame substitutes his multi-perspectivalism, his many triads of *theological application* (which includes the believer's experiential appropriation of the Word), for the unique Scripture principle (which identifies Scripture as *self-interpreting*). Frame's approach has a leveling effect on the authority of Scripture and human understanding of the Word. Frame employs a (new) version of church tradition of his own liking. Frame's lengthy work lacks adequate interaction with the broader theological literature,

theology, methodology, and reputation. J. I. Packer provides the Foreword in which he denounces critics of the author – not surprising from one who has himself abandoned, in places, traditional Protestant-Reformed teaching (see, in particular, Packer's role in writing the ecumenical document "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," 1994). My prior published comments and critique of Frame's theological work pertain equally to this latest publication, one which feebly sets out to clarify and modify the author's formulations in light of criticisms. To be certain, the book contains no substantive changes whatsoever.

¹² Concerning the doctrine of justification, Frame maintains that "Shepherd reflected remarkable insight into the teaching of Scripture" (*Systematic Theology*, 975). And with regard specifically to the covenantal structure of Biblical revelation, pre- and post-fall, Frame proudly admits that his argument is "dependent on Shepherd." Here he cites Shepherd's *The Call of Grace*, which publication Gaffin had commended in glowing terms on the book's back cover (*Systematic Theology*, 71 n.18).

preferring highly selective citations to works addressing issues with which the author disputes and with theologians with whom he disagrees (notably those within the Westminster community). Frame is novel in his approach and in many of his conclusions; as a whole, the book is idiosyncratic and out of step with traditional dogmatics (which is the intended goal of Frame's theologizing).

The battle for truth and honesty at Westminster has been uphill all the way for those "outside" the citadel. And new, fresh blood on the faculty has, likewise, been incapable of extricating the seminary from its errors and missteps. Regrettably, one cannot look to Gregory Beale's recently published *magnum opus*, titled *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*,¹³ for help sorting out the long-standing, divisive issues concerning the justification dispute at Westminster (even though, to his credit, Beale did take an aggressive stand against the views of Peter Enns on Biblical inerrancy and interpretation). Beale's hesitant and reserved comments in this volume further confuse and compound the grievance against the seminary faculty in an ever widening dispute.¹⁴

Westminster East and West: Similarities and Differences

Firstly, despite common roots extending back to the founding of Westminster by J. Gresham Machen in 1929 – both campuses claiming to be following Machen's vision and theological convictions and to be bound by the teachings of the Westminster Standards – the two have largely parted ways. This in itself is indicative of grave problems in theological understanding and genuine commitment to the Reformed confessions. As noted in the introduction, discord and estrangement continue to prevail, ever since the days of Shepherd's dismissal from the faculty.¹⁵ The action by President

¹³ Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2011.

¹⁴ For additional critique and analysis, see my *Engaging Westminster Calvinism*, chapter two ("Conflating Faith and Works in Final Judgment / Justification: The Teaching of New School Westminster").

¹⁵ William Dennison, a member of the faculty of Covenant College and Northwest Seminary (a hotbed for anti-Klineans), offers several barbs against the theological position of David VanDrunen, illustrative of the war raging within the broader

Clowney and the Board of Trustees did not bring about a fruitful, lasting resolution by any measure of assessment. Secondly, despite the opposition of the two faculties on matters relating to the doctrine of justification by faith, union with Christ, and the Covenant of Works (to name only a few), Westminster West's position on justification is compromised by endorsement of Gaffin's alleged "orthodoxy." As a consequence, the faculty of Westminster West sits precariously on the fence in the ongoing battle over sovereign, justifying grace (in contrast to inheritance / reward by "the works of the law"). Doubtless it is out of fear of retribution and loss of support for the California institution that the faculty finds itself in this position. The faculty is fully cognizant of Gaffin's dominant role in the Shepherd controversy and his own problematic (even deviant) formulations. *Never has Gaffin publically disassociated or distanced himself from Shepherd's theology – at least not to any significant or meaningful degree. The true state of affairs is this: Gaffin's position has not changed substantively in any way (contrary to all false, misleading reports).*¹⁶

seminary community. Dennison has frequently aired opinions against members of the faculty at Westminster in California, including his dislike for all who oppose the distinctive teaching of New School Westminster (in Philadelphia). In his "Review of VanDrunen's *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (WTJ 75 [2013] 349-70), Dennison asserts: "The breadth of VanDrunen's volume and the scholarly analysis, however, remains elementary and exhibits a number of shortcomings" (351). Overall, a "shallow interdisciplinary study" (352). Dennison concludes the review by warning: "anyone intending serious scholarly use of his volume should proceed with grave caution.... We still await, therefore, a definitive work on *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* in light of Reformed orthodoxy; at best, VanDrunen's study serves as a minor footnote to any sincere historical study of the subject" (369). Just one more barometer on the dampening climate hanging over the Westminster community.

¹⁶ After years of debate and conflict, Shepherd, Gaffin, and Frame came to acknowledge the active obedience of Christ in the procurement of salvation. Yet this element in their theology remains meaningless, given their rejection of the traditional Lutheran-Reformed antithesis between law and grace – the former being obedience to God's commands, on which basis covenant reward is earned in the original Covenant of Works; the latter being inheritance by faith alone (apart from "good works"). It is the contention of Shepherd, Gaffin, and Frame – and many others schooled in their

Frame found himself unwelcome at Westminster California, and when the opportunity came to leave for greener pastures at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Orlando he was eager to go. Here he found a safe, hospitable environment in which to carry on his theological work. The faculty at RTS proved to be very supportive and nurturing. Since leaving Westminster, Frame has taken numerous pot-shots in his writings against several faculty members on the Escondido campus on a number of critical issues. Echoing the stance of many in censuring opponents of Shepherd and Gaffin, repeated attempts are made to silence all opposition, either by misrepresentation, false caricature, or cover-up – ignoring as far as possible valid criticism as if it did not exist or was unworthy of engagement. Both Westminster East and West are culpable for mishandling the controversy and deceiving the public; any difference in culpability is merely one of degree. As in the case of Princeton Seminary in the early twentieth century, the tide has changed for Westminster, most notably in Philadelphia. All this has resulted in a loss of confidence, trust, and respect for the faculty and the institution(s). Only by taking a firm stand will Westminster West earn

teaching – that the classic law / grace doctrine is Lutheran, not genuinely Reformed.

Gaffin's 2006 study, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* has just been republished and released by P&R in March of 2014. In the "Preface to the Second Edition" Gaffin writes: "The revisions in this edition are not extensive, though occasionally they are substantive. In a number of places I have rewritten to be as clear as I can, particularly in light of criticisms of the first edition. At several points I have addressed specific criticisms" (xvii). *At the critical points in the Shepherd-Gaffin dispute on justification and the covenants Gaffin's position has not changed one iota.* Both Gaffin and Frame are well aware of the criticisms of their work, but they refuse to listen with any degree of honesty or integrity. They remain adamant in their repudiation of the classic Protestant-Reformed Law/Gospel antithesis; they refuse to correct erroneous, heterodox teaching, teaching so immediately and directly identified with Shepherd's teachings. How could genuine change be forthcoming after four long decades of controversy? See my combined review of Paul A. Rainbow's *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2005) and Richard B. Gaffin's "*By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Bletchley, UK: Paternoster, 2006) in *JETS* 50 (2007) 423-428; republished in *Engaging Westminster Calvinism*.

the title of “courageous Calvinists,” to which it so eagerly aspires. Until such time, the future of historic orthodox Calvinism in America is highly uncertain; what prevails is the further erosion of truth among the churches of the Reformation.¹⁷

Westminster Seminary in California was founded as a seminary-in-exile (a residence largely for opponents of Shepherd who were teaching on the Philadelphia campus).¹⁸ It would appear that Frame was sent to Escondido as a watch-dog for the Philadelphia faculty. The plan was to keep the two campuses together institutionally, but over time that relationship was severed. Redeemer Theological Seminary (Dallas, Texas) is yet another, more recent offshoot of the Philadelphia campus. It was founded originally in 1999 as an extension campus, but the school obtained independent status in 2009 (after the dismissal of Peter Enns from the Philadelphia faculty in 2008). Among the faculty members are Dan McCartney (unwavering supporter of Enns), Clair Davis (defender of Shepherd), and Sinclair Ferguson (whose own work has been shaped in significant ways by Gaffin’s theology).

Westminster’s Impact on the Evangelical-Reformed Churches

The teachings of Westminster Seminary, a leading Reformed academic institution, have had an enormous impact upon the churches. Over the years, the seminary has made inroads into the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America (including its denominational seminary, Covenant), the United Reformed Churches of North America, and other institutions like Mid-America Reformed Seminary. The latest effort has been taken by the Presbytery of the

Northwest (OPC) calling for a denominational study of the works-inheritance principle in the Mosaic Covenant.¹⁹ The central issue at stake here is, once again, the Protestant-Reformed Law / Gospel antithesis.

Denial of the tutelary works-inheritance principle functioning within the Mosaic economy (properly restricted to the typological, earthly sphere of life in Canaan) not only entails a blatant misreading of the Old and New Testaments, but also the imposition of an erroneous interpretation of the covenants spanning pre-redemptive and redemptive history. At issue also is a faulty conception of the principle of federal headship pertaining to the First and Second Adams. The Biblical idea of meritorious reward in the Covenant of Works, that is, reward based upon Adam’s fulfillment of the requirement of God’s law

¹⁹ See the website, “The Study of the Mosaic Covenant” (<https://sites.google.com/site/mosaiccovenant/home>). A lengthy paper of ninety-seven pages was submitted to presbyters at the April 2013 Stated Meeting, in hopes of persuading the Presbytery to overture the General Assembly, calling for a denominational study to evaluate sharply differing views on the Mosaic Covenant and to help resolve deep-seated conflict and disagreement within the church. A second, subsequent paper written by three former students of Westminster in California was made available to these same presbyters prior to the September 2013 meeting of Presbytery advocating the republication view (countering the position of the first paper). In my judgment, the former grossly distorts both the history and the import of the Shepherd-Gaffin controversy. The proposal being adopted, the Overture reads: “The Presbytery of the Northwest respectfully overtures the 81st General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to establish a study committee to examine and give its advice as to whether and in which 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 a review of Ryan M. McGraw’s *Christ’s Glory, Your Good: Salvation Planned, Promised, Accomplished, and Applied* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), Geoffrey Willour comments: “Of particular significance for contemporary discussions within churches of the confessional Reformed and Presbyterian family (including the OPC) are McGraw’s emphasis on the eternal covenant of redemption, his exposition of the bi-covenantal structuring of God’s historical dealings with mankind (i.e., the covenant of works and the covenant of grace), his emphasis on the importance and centrality of union with Christ, and his defense of the active obedience of Christ, showing how Christ by his active obedience fulfills the covenant of works on behalf of his elect” (*New Horizons* [November 2013] 21-22).

¹⁷ Compare David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Crossway 2014), growing out of a multi-volume analysis of Protestant “evangelicalism” more broadly, beginning with *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). Wells demonstrates a masterful grasp of the present-day theological canvas.

¹⁸ While serving on the Philadelphia faculty, Jay Adams pioneered “nouthetic” counseling, though he was unsuccessful in applying this spiritual discipline to the faculty during the days of turbulent upheaval brought about by the Shepherd controversy. Joining the others, Adams relocated to the Escondido campus in 1983.

(whereby human obedience earns the blessing of God after a period of probationary testing), is essential for maintaining the parallel drawn by the apostle Paul with respect to the two Adams. The reward that would have been granted by God to Adam, had he fulfilled his covenantal, legal obligation, would obviously not have been won by a substitutionary, divine representative as is the case in the Covenant of Grace (wherein the exclusive ground of eternal life is the perfect righteousness of Christ, the Second Adam, imputed to the elect). Inheritance by works – contrasting with inheritance by grace – is required by God’s covenantal law first given to humankind; entailed here is the crucial Law / Gospel antithesis. Discussion within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and elsewhere, will not advance until the Shepherd-Gaffin heterodoxy is clearly and honestly identified – and decisively excised. Instead of majoring on the minor (what I have identified above as the “secondary element” in the doctrine of the Covenant of Works, namely, construal of God’s covenantal reward for obedience as a gift of grace, rather than meritorious accomplishment on the part of the First Adam, had he kept God’s command), full attention must be directed to Gaffin’s repudiation of the classic Protestant-Reformed law / grace contrast. To do anything less is to obscure and cover over what is central in this four-decade-old controversy regarding justification by faith.

Biblically defined, the term “grace” – fundamental and all-determinative in this dispute – refers *exclusively* to sovereign, electing grace (“saving” grace, the *only* grace to which the Bible refers). Application of this term as a qualification for the way in which Adam would have received the consummate blessing of God and reward for successful completion of probation under the original Covenant of Works (before Adam’s fall into sin) has proved not only to be confusing, but has opened the door to erroneous interpretation of the two-fold covenants (Works and Grace). *The time has come in the history of orthodox federalism (that is, Reformed dogmatics) for ambiguity and misformulation to be acknowledged and finally resolved – by modifying and correcting the teaching of the church to conform to Scripture.* Failing to do so will only perpetuate division within the academy

and the churches, division that in the final analysis is unwarranted and unnecessary.

On other fronts, objection had been formally raised against the decision of the Session of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia for having Gaffin speak in March 2014 at The Boice Center, a ministry of Tenth Church.²⁰ (Gaffin’s topic was “Inerrancy and the Self-Witness of the Bible.” Gaffin changed his lecture to the following: “Inerrancy: Adam and the Gospel.”) The response of the church elders was to consult Cornerstone OPC where Gaffin worships and has an active hand in the affairs of the congregation.²¹ Cornerstone’s answer was to reassure inquisitors that Gaffin was unhesitatingly sound and unquestionably orthodox. How’s that for a fair, judicious handling of a complaint by a concerned church member! (That individual has since resigned his membership on the rolls of Tenth Presbyterian Church.) Likewise in

²⁰ The deviant teaching of Westminster Seminary was introduced long ago to Tenth Presbyterian Church by its senior pastor, James M. Boice, who had befriended Sinclair Ferguson (currently serving as professor of systematic theology at Redeemer Theological Seminary and as a teaching fellow at Ligonier Ministries). Boice came to denounce the Reformed doctrine of the “Covenant of Works.” Subsequently, neither Phil Ryken, Boice’s immediate successor, nor the current senior pastor, Liam Goligher, nor any other members of the pastoral/ministerial staff, past or present (most of whom were trained at Westminster), have ever distanced Tenth from Westminster’s pernicious teaching. Apparently, silence is golden! The strategy, here as elsewhere, has been to look the other way. In the past Tenth Church has endorsed, and now continues to endorse, Westminster Seminary as the champion of Reformed orthodoxy. Wishful thinking at best! Presently, the onus falls upon Goligher to do his own thinking, based on study of the literature now widely available. The chief responsibility at Tenth is his. (Jeffrey Jue, the Provost / Dean of Faculty of Westminster regularly worships and teaches at Tenth.)

²¹ For more insight into Cornerstone Orthodox Presbyterian Church, see Stephen M. Cunha, *The Emperor Has No Clothes: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.’s Doctrine of Justification* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2008). Gaffin left Calvary OPC in Glenside – across the street from Westminster Seminary – to help organize Cornerstone and, at the same time, to seek ways to alleviate tensions within the seminary community where possible. Arthur Kuschke, a member of the Glenside congregation, kept a very close eye on all developments stemming from the Shepherd dispute. See histories of the controversy for additional background on Kuschke’s active and highly significant role in opposing Shepherd’s teaching both in the seminary and the OPC.

March 2014 John Piper, popular Baptist pastor and teacher, was selected as the speaker for Westminster's Seventh Annual Gaffin Lecture in Theology, Culture, and Missions at the seminary, and also as special speaker at Proclamation Presbyterian Church in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania (where Peter Lillback is *pastor emeritus* and David Garner serves currently as a pastor of teaching). Piper's topic at Proclamation was "Suffering and the Supremacy of Christ." All this to say, this was a strategic move on the part of the seminary, given the fact that Piper's views on covenant and justification are wholly in sync with the teaching of New Westminster.²² Piper's visit would potentially galvanize the Westminster community in the Philadelphia area and help secure maximum support for the school.

The controversy regarding the Biblical doctrine of Scripture and justification by faith is not just a problem isolated to the Westminster (Reformed) community. It is deeply divisive within the Evangelical Theological Society. One should be reminded that adherence to the formal principle of the Protestant Reformation, historically understood, is one of the few doctrinal planks of the Society. Needless to say, the organization has been unable to hold all members to this pledge (Enns being one example). The title of Enn's paper at the 2013 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society was "Abandoning Inerrancy Is Necessary for Evangelical Integrity."²³ The Society serves as a useful gauge of present-day trends within Protestant "evangelicalism."

One of the most respected and influential popularizers of Reformed theology today is R. C. Sproul, Sr. In his newly released book, *Everyone's a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology*,²⁴ we read contradictory teaching on the Covenant of Works, teaching that has become all

too familiar within Reformed scholarship, teaching that can readily lead to a false understanding of the relation between faith and good works in the article of justification. Sproul rightly distinguishes the works-covenant from the grace-covenant by explaining that "the destiny of the human race was decided on the basis of performance, specifically on the basis of the obedience of Adam and Eve. If they remained obedient, they would enter into an eternal state of blessedness. However it they failed to conform to that stipulation, then they would die, along with their descendants."²⁵ *Rightly understood, this is nothing other than the works-merit principle functioning with respect to human obtainment of the promised, covenanted reward (wherein God freely obligates himself to bless, not curse, humankind represented in Adam on grounds of perfect obedience to the law of God).*

Unfortunately, this crucial teaching concerning the law / grace antithesis is undermined by Sproul in his following remarks: "Another misunderstanding comes from how we identify the two covenants. Because the first is called 'the covenant of works' and the other is called 'the covenant of grace,' we tend to think that the first covenant had no grace." Sproul speculatively contends that "for God to enter into any covenant with a creature, to give any promise to us whatsoever under any conditions, is in itself a gracious act. God is not required to promise His creatures anything" (123). This entails an erroneous assessment of the Biblical covenants, one that can only jeopardize the law / grace antithesis Sproul himself is eager to maintain.²⁶ At the opening of

²⁵ *Everyone's a Theologian*, 123. The probationary test hinged on Adam's "one act of righteousness:" Eve would either affirm or deny the lordship of God (including either upholding or undermining the role and responsibility given to Adam as federal head in the original Covenant of Works).

²⁶ Sproul was a critic of the Shepherd theology, one of the signers of the now historic May 4, 1981 letter sent out to a broader Reformed audience objecting to the seminary's exoneration of Shepherd. With regard to the Mosaic Covenant, Sproul acknowledges the works-principle in operation, a principle antithetical to that of saving grace (functioning in the new covenant). He explains that "we are saved by grace, and grace comes through the person and work of Christ.... He came into the world and placed Himself under the stipulations of the original covenant of works.... Justification is through faith in Christ alone because Christ alone fulfilled the

²² Mark W. Karlberg, *John Piper on the Christian Life: An Examination of His Controversial View of 'Faith Alone' in Future Grace* (Great Bromley: CRN [Christian Research Network], 1999), republished in *Gospel Grace: The Modern-Day Controversy*.

²³ Currently, Enns is on the faculty of Eastern University.

²⁴ Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2014. As an introduction, Sproul's concise volume is vastly superior to Frame's in laying out the fundamentals of the faith – and does so far more reliably.

history with the establishment of the covenant with Adam, federal head of all humanity, God pledged to bind himself to this covenant, one of his own making, one which he *freely* ordained. God was not obliged to do so. *To be sure, the covenant at creation was an act of divine condescension and beneficence, but it was not “gracious.” That term is descriptive exclusively of redemptive covenant (the so-called “Covenant of Grace”).* Biblical interpreters cannot have it both ways.²⁷ Theological

covenant of works” (164). The doctrine of the covenants and the role of Old Testament typology are major features of Reformed Biblical theology, a discipline fully compatible with systematics when the two are rightly formulated. Graeme Goldsworthy in *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012) offers an alternative to the views of Geerhardus Vos, the father of Biblical theology in the twentieth century, and Edmund P. Clowney, a champion at Westminster of the Biblical, redemptive-historical approach. In making his case Goldsworthy rejects the doctrine of the Covenant of Works. This has profound implications for Biblical and systematic theology, two mutually compatible methodologies, both essential in explicating the full teaching of Scripture.

²⁷ Sproul’s elaboration on the difference between justice, on the one hand, and grace and mercy, on the other, leads him to assert (correctly) that “grace is not justice. Grace and mercy are outside the category of justice, but they are not inside the category of injustice” (*Everyone’s a Theologian*, 69). In defining the term “grace” in the later section of the book dealing with soteriology, Sproul explains: “At the outset, we must distinguish between grace and justice. Justice is something that is earned or merited by our works” (163). It is necessary here to underscore that this earning on the part of the creature made in God’s image is based wholly upon God’s covenant arrangement established at creation – what federalists call reward *ex pacto*. “So justice is related to a standard of merit. In contrast, grace is undeserved; that is, it is not earned or merited. Rather, grace is given freely by God. He is not obligated or required to give it” (163).

For additional clarification it must be said that the grace freely given to sinners – something not required of God – is wholly descriptive of the Covenant of Grace. Though the first covenant at creation, the Covenant of Works, was freely bestowed (as an act of divine condescension and beneficence), it was not an act of “grace,” which pertains exclusively to God’s redemptive provision. Had Adam obeyed the command of the Lord in that first covenant, he would have justly earned the promised reward of eternal, eschatological life (leading to consummate transformation into the image of the Glory-Spirit, who initially hovered over the creation of the world as earthly habitat and the creation of humankind as God’s image-bearer). Theological terminology must conform to the teaching of Scripture, not church tradition (dogma) which conveys at

systematization demands consistency and clarity of expression. Above all, my good friend and respected expositor of the Scriptures, R.C., should know this well.

Where Now Do Federal Confessionalists Stand?

The legacy Westminster has bequeathed to the Reformed world, notably to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, is found wanting. Widespread theological confusion and misunderstanding brought about by the Shepherd-Gaffin teaching finds its roots in formulations by the early Reformed federalists, conveyed most immediately to students of the seminary chiefly through the work of John Murray, Westminster’s leading systematician in the early days of the seminary.²⁸ One of the most recent engagements with the ongoing dispute over justification and the covenants appears in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, in an article entitled “Missing, Presumed Misclassified: Hugh Binning (1627-1653), the Lost Federal Theologian,” written by Donald John MacLean (*WTJ* 75 [2013] 261-78). Here MacLean sets out to counter the dominant Barth-Torrance critique of scholastic federalism (specifically, criticism of the law-grace, or Law-Gospel contrast). At the heart of the dispute is the understanding held by some regarding (*non-saving*) grace as the basis for (*unmerited*) reward in the Covenant of Works. Wherein precisely does “grace” and “Gospel-grace” differ with respect to the way of receiving the inheritance promised in the first covenant with Adam, the federal head (upon

times rationalistic speculations. There is and continues to be progress in doctrinal formulation within the history of the Christian church; such progress entails *better apprehension* of the Scriptures as God’s self-revelation, *not new truths*. This is the result of the Spirit’s illumination of the Word in the hearts and minds of believers.

²⁸ Larry R. Helyer, *The Witness of Jesus, Paul and John: An Exploration in Biblical Theology* (InterVarsity, 2008) expresses indebtedness to Karlberg for his critique of covenant theology at Westminster Seminary, notably that of Murray. Compare the studies by Jeong Koo Jeon: *Covenant Theology: John Murray’s and Meredith G. Kline’s Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004); *Covenant Theology and Justification by Faith: The Shepherd Controversy and Its Impacts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006); and *Calvin and the Federal Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009).

successful completion of probationary testing, resulting in confirmation in righteousness and the securing of life everlasting)? *Crucial with regard to this question in Reformed covenant theology is the essential and vital idea of meritorious reward (as that informs Christ's work as Second Adam, and as regards the operation of the works-principle in the Mosaic economy)*. Without it, there is no Law/Gospel antithesis. Biblically defined, the theological term "grace" applies *exclusively* to redemptive promise and reward. Within scholastic Reformed federalism the notion of (pre-redemptive) "grace" as the basis, reason, or justification for the reward promised to Adam in the Covenant of Works is foreign to the witness of Scripture. Perpetuation of this un-Scriptural terminology with respect to the pre-Fall covenant only perpetuates a defective interpretation of the divine covenants and of justification by faith alone (apart from the "works of the law"). Covenantal inheritance is either by faith in the Covenant of Grace or by works in the Covenant of Works (broken by Adam's fall into sin). In Christ the promise has been secured for elect humanity, necessitating the imputation of his perfect righteousness to those justified by grace through faith.

Regrettably, MacLean promotes the view held by Samuel Rutherford (and Hugh Binning), "that God showed grace to Adam in establishing this covenant [the original covenant of works] with him. He believed that Adam could have served God perfectly forever and never earned a right to confirmation of eternal life. Therefore God's promise was to reward obedience above what it merited and, for Rutherford, is demonstrated that even the covenant of works contained grace.... This acknowledgment of grace in the covenant of works did not prevent Rutherford from sharply distinguishing that grace from the grace shown in the *foedus gratiae*, stating that there was 'no Gospel-Grace' in the covenant of works" (274-275). The author informs his readers that Binning would agree with Rutherford's understanding. "Indeed, Binning stated that 'it was Paul's great business in preaching, to ride marches between the covenant of grace, and the covenant of works'" (275n.99). This doctrine of pre-Fall grace is the result of abstract speculation on the part of federalist expositors,

whether seventeenth-century or contemporary.²⁹ *In the case of Shepherd and Gaffin, this feature or element of doctrine has become the foil for radical reinterpretation of the Reformed doctrine of the covenants.*³⁰

To be sure, there is pressing need to correct misformulations based on rationalistic speculation. As superb as it is, we must always remember that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is not an infallible document. It remains subject to modification and clarification in light of the teachings of Scripture. In the earliest days, American Presbyterians (with Biblical justification) altered the confessional understanding on the matter of church-state relations. The time has surely come to correct the confessional understanding of "voluntary condescension" (specifically directed against the notion of human meritorious reward).³¹

²⁹ Andrew Woolsey's 1988 dissertation *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought* (Glasgow University) published in 2012 by Reformation Heritage Books is somewhat dated, in that it does not interact with literature since 1988 (hence, no analysis of the Shepherd-Gaffin school of interpretation now requisite in such studies). The author holds essentially to the position of John Murray on the covenants, though he does not call for a "recasting" of covenant theology as Murray had done. For a critique of Woolsey's book similar to mine, see Andrew J. Martin's book review of Woolsey in *WTJ* 75 (2013) 425-428. Commendable also is Mark Kim's analysis of Michael Horton's federalism in relation to this present-day controversy (see "Michael Horton's Covenant Theology as a Defense of Reformation Theology in the Context of Current Discussions," Th.D. dissertation, Toronto School of Theology, 2013). Among recent publications upholding the two-fold covenants, we take note of these: Daniel W. McManigal, *Encountering Christ in the Covenants: An Introduction to Covenant Theology* (West Linn, OR: Monergism Books, 2013); Mark Brown, *Christ and the Condition: The Covenant Theology of Samuel Petto (1624-1711)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); and the republication of Johannes Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, translated by Casey Carmichael (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, September 2014). For interaction with Beach's reading of Johannes Cocceius and Francis Turretin, see my "Recovering the Mosaic Covenant as Law and Gospel: J. Mark Beach, John H. Sailhamer, and Jason C. Meyer as Representative Expositors." *EvQ* 83/3 (2011) 233-250, republished in *Engaging Westminster Calvinism*, chapter three.

³⁰ For detailed elaboration, see my *Gospel Grace: The Modern-Day Controversy*.

³¹ "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as

For those denying the “merit” principle operative in the Mosaic and creation covenants, what Biblical basis remains for upholding the crucial the Law/ Gospel antithesis? We see where its renunciation has led Shepherd and Gaffin, primary crafters of the New Westminster theology.

Where there is greater light, there is greater accountability. Rather than continuing its campaign of misleading and deceiving the public (with all the intrigue that tactic conjures up), the seminary is obliged to respond openly and straightforwardly to her critics – rather than ignoring, misrepresenting, and caricaturing them in backroom banter. Nothing less will bring about renewed credibility, confidence, and respect for leadership in the church and in the academy. As sounded by Robert Godfrey years ago, there is (and remains) a theological *and* moral problem at Westminster. The offense has only been compounded in the intervening decades, cementing a culture of deceit. For too long, deception and intrigue have ruled the day at Westminster; such has become the seminary’s *modus operandi*. What we find are false shepherds leading the blind, and an institution bearing a similar cast to the Church at Rome in terms of theological and moral corruption.³² Christian

institutions are to be held to the highest standards, especially seminaries which train and prepare future pastors and church leaders. Of course, there is room for mistakes, followed by correction: Human error is part of the fallen human condition, and repentance is a work of God’s grace. Public offences must be publicly righted. This is Westminster’s solemn duty and calling. But after four long decades, the replacement of faculty and board members who do not carry soiled baggage may be the only remedy for the school. Professor Meredith Kline once remarked that it would be better to close the doors of the seminary than have the current state of affairs persist. Wise judgment from an extraordinarily gifted, humble, and godly servant of God, who gave so freely and generously of himself – evidence of his love for Christ and his church. Kline bore faithful testimony to the truth of God’s Word for those who have ears to hear what the Spirit says in the Scriptures. We need more servants of this caliber, giftedness, and devotion in the church and in the academy today.

their blessedness and reward, but by some *voluntary condescension* on God’s part, which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant” (WCF 7.1). “We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, *by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God*, whom, by them, we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants: and because, as they are good, they proceed from His Spirit, and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God’s judgment” (WCF 16.5). *Emphasis added*. For further analysis, see especially my *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, which builds upon my doctoral study.

³² *Secrets of the Vatican*, a PBS *Frontline* documentary aired on February 25, 2014, gives a window into the operation and maneuverings of some Christian institutions, in this instance the Church of Rome. The PBS website notes that this documentary “reveals the culture of a Vatican few outsiders have seen, plagued by corruption, cover-ups and ruthless power struggles.... ‘Unless you spend some time inside this kind of culture, it’s very hard to believe that it could be like this,’ journalist Robert Mickens tells *Frontline*. How did the Vatican get to this point? Just how far does the corruption

extend? Is there hope for meaningful reform?” Parallels here with Westminster’s handling of the Shepherd-Gaffin dispute are striking. We are prompted to raise the same question: “Is there hope for meaningful reform” at Westminster? The prospect is not encouraging, given the seminary’s track record.