

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.

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The Changing of the Guard

Karlberg

Publisher's Preface

For the past several years, The Trinity Foundation has published several books and essays to explain and defend the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). *The Changing of the Guard* is another in this series of essays, dealing specifically with the teaching of Westminster Seminary on the article of faith by which individuals, churches, and seminaries stand or fall.

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. He is widely recognized for his work in the history and theology of the covenants. Among his publications are *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* and *John Piper on the Christian Life*. Dr. Karlberg's concern about the Seminary and the churches it serves is clear in this critical discussion of Westminster Seminary's anti-Reformational and un-Biblical teaching on the doctrine of justification; and his love and concern for brethren who may be misled and confused by this new theology is another and still greater motive for publishing this warning to Christians and the churches.

In recent years several graduates of "evangelical" seminaries, including Westminster Seminary, have

become Roman Catholic or Orthodox. One of the best known is Robert Sungenis, who has written and edited two large volumes attacking the Biblical and Reformation doctrines of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) and the Bible alone as the Word of God (*sola scriptura*). There is reason to believe that the theological trajectories that have carried Seminary graduates to Rome or Constantinople were set in seminary. Certainly the seminaries did not correct those trajectories. Dr. Karlberg explains the doctrine of justification by faith and works not *sola fide* taught at Westminster Seminary for the past 25 years, by Professor Norman Shepherd and others.

Although Professor Shepherd was finally removed (after seven years of controversy and investigation) from the Seminary's faculty in 1982, his teaching remained. Within the Seminary, one of Shepherd's defenders has been Professor Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. Outside the Seminary, one of Shepherd's most outspoken defenders has been Dr. Gary North, who wrote *Westminster's Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til's Legacy* (1991), dedicating the book to Norman Shepherd, "the most accomplished instructor I had at Westminster Seminary," and "a loyal defender of Westminster's original confession." North, a prolific writer, has had a large influence in some circles, leading some away from the core doctrines of the Reformation.

This essay is a warning to the churches about the doctrine of Westminster Seminary.

John W. Robbins, Ph.D.

Publisher

The Changing of the Guard

At Buckingham Palace, England, the grand tradition of the changing of the guard captivates tourists the world around. Periods of social change, however, lead more often than not to the undoing of tradition, where it counts the most. The teaching at Westminster Abbey viewed as representative of Her Majesty's religion (the Church of England) has moved significantly from its historical-theological moorings, away from Calvinistic Puritanism to religious pluralism. The story of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia is also a story of change, not as radical as that of the Abbey, but radical nonetheless. The change here, though not as obvious, is equally destructive of the Christian Gospel. Comparatively speaking, the size and influence of Westminster Seminary are minuscule; judged from other considerations, however, Westminster has been highly influential, far more than its size would seemingly warrant. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, to which Westminster Seminary has had close ties from the beginning, has been described by historian Mark Noll as the pea under the mattress.¹ All this is to say that size does not tell the whole story; nor should one small book, the focus of this critical analysis of a theological institution, be deemed insignificant with respect to the history of ideas (theological or otherwise).

In *The Call of Grace*,² subtitled *How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*, author Norman Shepherd offers a popular treatment of his theological ruminations that date back to the early 1970s, if not earlier. The book is highly readable; but whether or not the distinctive argument against traditional Reformed covenant theology set forth in his pages is readily grasped by the reader is another question altogether. Let there be no doubt about it this study is highly controversial, not only in the Seminary community in which Shepherd ministered for many years, but in the wider arena of contemporary evangelical and Reformed theology. The views expressed in this book resulted in

the dismissal of Shepherd from the faculty of Westminster Seminary in 1982. Now that he has retired from pastoral ministry in the Christian Reformed Church, he has found this to be the opportunity to lay out once more his thinking concerning the covenants of God, election, and evangelism. Here is theological writing with a very practical bent to it. Of course, not only are there practical implications in all theological discourse, but it is helpful when the church theologian gives focused attention to the practical (that is, pastoral) side of his theology. Shepherd continues to believe that he has something that must be said to the Reformed churches, and that by way of exhortation and confrontation (however much this second feature of Shepherd's presentation lies under the surface).

Part 1, as Shepherd describes it, "deals with the problem of faith and works, or grace and merit," the subject previously developed in the Robinson Lectures at Erskine Theological Seminary in April 1999, now "with only minor revisions." Part 2 (re)presents material first given at an ecclesiastical gathering sponsored by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America in May 1975 and subsequently published in *The New Testament Student and Theology*, edited by John H. Skilton (1976). The reason furnished by the author for this reissue of old material is "because of continuing interest in the perspective developed in this article." Here the argument receives "a revised form" (viii). This reviewer, fully acquainted with the author's views since the mid-1970s, looks in vain for any modification or reworking of his thinking since that formative period. That being the case, this book is merely a regurgitation of long-held views, views that remain controversial. One would have hoped to find in these pages, at the very least, added clarification and defense of the author's position. But no advance in the author's argument is to be found here. My evaluation of Shepherd's covenant theology can be summed up, in part, in the words of one important document, to which we will return later: In the teachings and writings of Shepherd explicating the Reformed faith there are "deep inherent problems in the structure and the particular formulations of [his] views."³

1. Norman Shepherd's Proposal for the Reconciliation of Roman Catholics and Protestants Concerning the "Way of Salvation"

Placing the topic of this book in the broader context of contemporary evangelical-Reformed debate, one has only to note Shepherd's assault on Reformation doctrine in his assessment of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, an organization noted for its stand against modern-day challenges to the historic Protestant-Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). Shepherd is persuaded that the members of this Alliance are misguided and misinformed concerning the Biblical and "true" Reformed teaching (as he understands it). It is his objective in *The Call of Grace* to set the Reformed churches straight, once and for all, on this score. Echoing commonplace sentiment today, Shepherd alleges that for too long a time Reformed thinking has been distorted by utilization of the scholastic, rationalistic notion of law (that is, covenant) as contract. What he finds particularly repugnant is the notion of "merit" in connection with the procurement of eternal life, what was first offered to Adam, the federal head of the entire human race, in the Garden of Eden. Never, contends Shepherd, was the First or Second Adam placed in a position of having to merit the covenantal reward on grounds of legal obedience. What Shepherd identifies as the "Lutheran" notion of Law versus Gospel (or Law versus Grace) is, in his thinking, wholly unscriptural; it is what lies at the root of serious, widespread theological error in much of evangelical thinking, past and present. According to Shepherd's argument, the problem afflicting the thinking of those associated with the Alliance (among other such groups within the evangelical-Reformed camp) is itself the legacy of the Protestant Reformation. This particular theological dilemma, suggests Shepherd, resurfaces time and again in the history of Christian theology, for example, in the Marrow controversy in eighteenth-century Scotland and in the modern-day "Lordship" controversy.

It is the controversy between antinomianism and legalism. It is the controversy between Rome and the Reformation [here Shepherd means the "pure" Calvinistic branch, as he understands it]. It is the historic difference between the Lutherans and

the Reformed with respect to the use of the law [8].

Shepherd opens his popular disputation with the question, "What distinguishes the Reformed faith from all the other confessional options found among sincere Christians" (vii)? Behind the author's thinking is the supposition that what lies at the heart of genuinely Reformed theology is the doctrine of God's "sovereign grace and promise," to use the language of John Murray, Shepherd's predecessor in the Systematics Department at Westminster Seminary where Shepherd taught from 1963 to 1982. It is this that informs in a decisive way, Shepherd argues the Reformed understanding of all the divine-human covenants in the Bible, as well as the covenant between the Father and the Son in eternity. More significantly, the paternal Father-Son relationship is the model or paradigm for all the covenantal transactions in the history of revelation, from the Fall to the Consummation. And what characterizes this relationship or bond between the parties of the covenant is the grace of God as Father, the One who is the Creator and Redeemer of the world. The gift of God's grace and favor to creatures of the dust whether before or after the Fall is ever and always sovereign and unmerited. Another way of making the point is to say that the notion of meritorious reward is wholly incompatible with the attribute of divine goodness (which Shepherd calls "grace"). The erroneous idea of merit, Shepherd contends, originates with the fallen sinner's attempt to contract God's love and blessing. The doctrine of an original "Covenant of Works" (wherein works are meritorious of divine favor and reward) is thereby rejected. So then, in this line of reasoning where do we turn for a resolution of the alleged theological dilemma created by Reformed scholasticism? The answer is found "in the light of the biblical doctrine of covenant" (9). This doctrine of the covenant, as interpreted by Shepherd, is the distinctive contribution of pure, unadulterated Calvinism. We have no quarrel with the significance Shepherd attaches to covenant theology in the Reformed tradition, but rather with his exposition of it.

After the introductory chapter, "Facing a New Challenge," Part 1, titled "Covenant Light on the Way of Salvation," advances a very brief overview of the leading covenants in the Bible, namely, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the new covenants. Shepherd explains:

"We can describe a covenant as a divinely established relationship of union and communion between God and his people in the bonds of mutual love and faithfulness" (12). Implicit in the covenant relationship between God and humanity is creaturely compliance with God's law and commandments. The element of conditionality, according to Shepherd, is the underlying feature in covenants, human or divine. More particularly, the conditions of rightful membership in God's covenant (before and after the Fall) are faith and good works, which are viewed by Shepherd as the means of justification, that is, life with God.

One of the major disputants in the controversy surrounding Shepherd's teaching the controversy which first occupied the time and energy of faculty members at Westminster Seminary from 1975 to 1982 is Professor Meredith G. Kline. Reflecting the teaching of historic Reformed covenant theology, Kline opposes Shepherd's definition of covenant conditionality, comprehensive of the pre-redemptive and redemptive covenants (as well as the pre-temporal covenant between the Father and the Son established in eternity). According to classic Reformed theology, the conditions of the covenant vary with the historical circumstance. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which embodies the consensus of teaching within orthodox Reformed Christianity at the close of the Reformation age, distinguishes between two antithetical covenants, the initial "Covenant of Works" with Adam at creation and the subsequent "Covenant of Grace" after the Fall (the proper purpose of this latter covenant is the redemption of God's elect). In Shepherd's exposition the notion of "grace" as descriptive of "the way of salvation" proffered to the fallen sons and daughters of Adam is not sufficiently distinguished from "grace" as descriptive of the the way of life established in the covenant of creation, more expressly in terms of Adam's representative headship and probationary test. Neither Adam's federal headship nor the probation is given its proper due in Shepherd's elucidation of this first covenant. (We have already indicated Shepherd's distaste for the notion of works-inheritance, a formative element in confessional Reformed theology. Furthermore, application of the theological term "grace" to the prelapsarian covenant with Adam is erroneous and misleading. Grace pertains specifically to God's provisions of redemption.)

According to Shepherd, Abraham (like Adam) was required to fulfill the obligations of the covenant (16). Our author reasons: "If the promises of the Abrahamic covenant had been unconditional, the Israelites would have been able to march right into the Promised Land regardless of their behavior" (18). Abraham's own righteousness or obedience to God's law and commandments is anticipatory to that of Jesus Christ, what Shepherd regards as "*the ultimate proof of the conditional character of the Abrahamic covenant*" (18, original italicized). The Abrahamic covenant, like the first covenant with Adam, has two parts promise and obligation. (There is no covenantal discontinuity, in Shepherd's thinking, between the covenant with Adam at creation and the covenant with Adam after the Fall, the latter finding its realization in the promise made to Abraham.) The fulfillment of the covenant obligations on the part of Abraham, Shepherd reiterates, is not meritorious. And what is true for the First Adam is also true for the Second. The Son's fulfillment of the covenant obligations laid upon him by the Father in the Counsel of Redemption realized in the historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus must not be construed in any sense as meritorious. Shepherd further explicates: "Whereas promise is in the foreground in the Abrahamic covenant, obligation comes to the fore in the Mosaic covenant" (24). The obligations of this covenant of law, we are told, do not differ principally from those of the Abrahamic. Shepherd contends that there are no contrasting principles of inheritance (one of faith and one of works) as taught in scholastic Protestant orthodoxy, Lutheran and Reformed.

Because of the promise of blessings for obedience and the threat of punishment for disobedience, the Mosaic covenant has often been described as a covenant of works. It is understood to be a republication of the covenant of works that God made with Adam in the Garden of Eden, and in him with the whole human race. Representative of this view is the great Princeton theologian of a former generation, Charles Hodge [25].

Shepherd correctly points out: "The basic principle embodied in this conception of the covenant of works can be called the 'works/merit' principle." Under the constraint of time and space Shepherd abruptly ends

discussion of this matter with the following remarks remarks that indicate Shepherd's radical departure from the theological tradition he claims to represent:

Different theologians describe the covenant of works with a variety of nuances that we cannot get into here. What interests us is the idea that perfect obedience merits the reward of eternal life as a matter of simple justice. Is this how we are to understand the covenant that God made with Moses and all Israel [26]?

The answer to that question one of the central concerns in Shepherd's book is an emphatic No. Neither the Mosaic nor the Edenic covenant can be classified as a Covenant of Works. Shepherd maintains that the alleged antithesis in Scripture between works and grace, between Law and Gospel, is non-existent. Shepherd views the classic Protestant Law versus Gospel construct as wholly un-Biblical, wholly speculative. Shepherd construes the critical Old Testament text *Leviticus* 18:5 and its New Testament citation/interpretation to teach that covenantal obedience to the law of Moses (or the law of God more generally) is synonymous with "a living and active faith," the response of every sincere believer to the beneficence and love of God, whether in the pre-redemptive or the redemptive epochs. It is the very same living, obedient, and active faith that in every age justifies the ways of the sons and daughters of the covenant in the eyes of their heavenly Father. Justification according to this interpretation is not once-for-all, but rather ongoing. Part of Shepherd's misreading of the Biblical doctrine is his failure to reckon with the probationary test affixed to the original covenant with Adam, as well as the covenant with Christ, federal head of the elect seed. At the close of the probation period, Adam would have been confirmed in righteousness had he remained obedient to God's law. And where the First Adam failed, the Second succeeded. Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer in the divine act of justification is the ground of life and salvation. The justification of the sinner is the definitive, once-for-all act of God, the permanent possession of those saved by faith. Shepherd counters this interpretation by saying that obedience to divine law is never meritorious of the Father's love and favor.

At the same time Shepherd contends that the reward is a matter of promise and obligation gratuitous promise on the part of God who showers favor and mercy on creatures of the dust and obligation on the part of the sons and daughters of God, those who are called to be the keepers of God's covenant. Such is the substance of Shepherd's argument in *The Call of Grace*: The way of salvation, that is, justification, is the way of faith and (non-meritorious) works.

In Shepherd's formulation of the new covenant there is an almost exclusive emphasis upon the continuity of the covenants. Shepherd writes: "We discover in the New Testament that the new covenant, like the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, also has two parts, promise and obligation" (44). We need not detain ourselves here as to what our author sees as the "newness" of the covenant in Jesus' blood, nor what makes it a "better" covenant than the old (see below). What is critical in Shepherd's discussion is the attention he gives to the underlying continuity of the covenants throughout Scripture, which continuity is explained in terms of the way of salvation, the way of faith and good works. What is the nature of justifying faith? Shepherd reasons: "Faith and repentance are indissolubly intertwined with one another"(47). "A living, active, and abiding faith is the way in which the believer enters into eternal life"(50). As regards the interrelationship between promise and obligation, faith and works, in the covenant of God, Shepherd offers this explanation, citing *1 Corinthians* 10:1-13 and related passages:

Note that Paul can take an example from life under the Mosaic covenant and apply it to those who live under the new covenant. This shows that the principles operative under both covenants are the same. There is promise and there is obligation. The land promised to the wilderness generation was the Promised Land. It was an unearned and unmerited gift of grace. Yet the first generation did not inherit the land because of their unbelief and disobedience. This is the point made in *Hebrews* 3:18-19. Similarly for us, eternal life is an undeserved gift of grace; we enter into it by way of a living, active, and obedient faith.

The relationship between promise and obligation is also illustrated in *Hebrews* 10:35-36: "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." The requirement is perseverance in faith, which includes doing the will of God. The benefit is receiving what God has promised. But what is promised cannot be earned or merited [51-52].

Shepherd's exegesis of these Biblical texts is overly simplistic. According to Shepherd, faith, repentance, and good works are all part of one package: They are "indissolubly intertwined with one another." Faith is "living, active, and abiding." Faith "perseveres." Here is the crux of the theological dispute concerning the doctrine of justification by faith (*sola fide*): Is Shepherd affirming the view taught in traditional Protestant-Reformed theology that faith alone is the instrument of justification? Or is Shepherd saying that faith and works together are the "instrumental" means of life and salvation? Shepherd is a master of theological subtlety. What is clearly lacking in Shepherd's discussion is mention of the term "instrument" with respect to justification. It is the case that Shepherd regards this and other traditional terminology as unnecessary theological baggage more precisely, theological terminology that, in his view, is scholastic, speculative, un-Biblical in origin. What is particularly striking in this book, a book that gives central place to Shepherd's understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith (and the related doctrines of election and the covenants of God), is the avoidance of such terminology as "justification," "imputation," "ground of salvation," and "instrument" (as previously noted). According to Protestant-Reformed theology, the righteousness of God imputed to the believer is received through the sole instrumentality of faith, which receives and rests on Christ; and this righteousness of Christ imputed is the sole ground of salvation. Clearly, terms such as these have no formative role in Shepherd's theology, one that on close examination is at odds with Protestant orthodoxy. For Shepherd, the slogan "faith alone" is understood to exclude meritorious works, but not the works of faith (those good works which manifest, in Shepherd's words, the "grace of justification").

We still have not heard all that Shepherd has to say regarding the Mosaic covenant. Contrary to all that we have read thus far, Shepherd now informs us that in spite of the continuity between the two covenants, the old and the new, "[t]here was something wrong with the Mosaic covenant. It was defective because it could not succeed in doing what it was designed to do" (54). What is different about the "design" of the new covenant that makes it effective and successful in achieving its purpose? Shepherd answers: The Holy Spirit now, unlike former times, is actively applying the law to the hearts of believers so that they can obey the law and commandments of God.

The defect in the law was correspondingly twofold. First, the blood of bulls and goats could not really handle the problem of sin. . . . Second, the commandments could not impart life. . . . For both of these reasons, Israel never succeeded in being the holy people of God that the Lord called them to be under the Mosaic covenant. That covenant was faulty. It was defective. That is why it was set aside when Jesus established the new covenant [54-55].

Paul declares repeatedly that observing the law cannot save a person. The reason for this [according to Shepherd] is not that no one can keep the law perfectly as a covenant of works. Rather, observing the law cannot save a person because the Mosaic system is no longer operative. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ [56].

I leave it to the reader to compare this dispensational, non-Reformed explanation to the author's previous argumentation in *The Call of Grace*. After refuting the teaching of classic covenant theology which sees two antithetical principles at work within the Mosaic covenant (one on the typical level, the other on the antitypical), Shepherd ends up acknowledging that the Mosaic law cannot make alive. On first impression, Shepherd seemingly accommodates the Pauline contrast between "letter" and "Spirit," that is, the contrast between the Law (which works death and condemnation) and the Gospel (which brings life and

justification). But this redemptive-historical contrast remains an anomaly in Shepherd's theology of law, a theology that is poorly and inconsistently formulated.

Moving beyond the subtleties implicit in Shepherd's interpretation of justification by faith, we turn once again to his doctrine of the covenants, specifically to his repudiation of the Reformed doctrine of the "Covenant of Works." From the start, Shepherd informs his readers that he will not agree to a theology of law that incorporates the idea of works-inheritance. The Apostle Paul's negative critique of the law (pre- or post-Fall) hinges on *ad hominem* argumentation, claims Shepherd. That is to say, Paul assumes for the sake of argument only the validity of the principle of inheritance-by-works (meritorious reward) as taught by the Judaizers. "When the law is conceived of as a works/merit scheme, Paul is opposed to the law" (38). But Shepherd contends:

God does not tempt his children to try to earn their salvation [or, in the case of Adam before the Fall, life and communion with God] by the merit of their works. Nor does he tease them by offering a way of salvation that he knows will not work. More pointedly, the very idea of merit is foreign to the way in which God our Father relates to his children [39].

In the case of the Israelites, Shepherd explains further: "The obedience required of Israel is not the obedience of merit, but the obedience of faith. It is the fullness of faith. Obedience is simply faithfulness to the Lord; it is the righteousness of faith" (39). With respect to the typological reward of life and prosperity in Canaan, the land of promise, Shepherd is simply wrong. Reformed theology has correctly recognized two separate covenants made with the federal heads, Adam and Christ (the "Covenant of Works" and the "Covenant of Redemption" respectively): The inheritance-principle in both of these covenants is that of works/merit. The Mosaic covenant in its peculiar and distinctive way reintroduces the works-principle on the typological level of kingdom inheritance. (The issue here is not the mistaken notion of God tempting fallen creatures to earn something beyond their grasp or ability, specifically the procurement of that righteousness

which alone justifies. In agreement with Shepherd, we too oppose the notion of hypothetical salvation by works as an administrative principle operative within the Mosaic economy.) At the root of Shepherd's error is faulty exegesis of Scripture, including theological synthesis what belongs to the domain of Biblical theology and systematics.

Spurred on by the writings of E. P. Sanders in the 1970s, and others following in his wake, the so-called "new perspective on Paul and the law" what actually is a modification and reworking of Sanders' thesis has become the dominant view in present-day Biblical and theological studies. This revolution in contemporary theology makes possible the realignment between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism currently underway. Should agreement be reached between these two communions, the outcome would indicate that neither ecclesiastical tradition holds firm to its own historical-theological moorings. With respect to the long-standing dispute over the doctrine of justification by faith, what specifically is needed to bring about reconciliation? How promising does the union between Roman Catholics and Protestants appear to Shepherd? He modestly writes: "May I suggest that there is at least a glimmer of hope *if both sides are willing to embrace a covenantal understanding of the way of salvation*" (59, emphasis mine). And in Shepherd's judgment, this is the only real prospect for reconciliation between the two communions.⁴ In this connection two observations are quite telling: (1) Shepherd in his opening attack on the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals in this book faults both sides in the Reformation debate, Roman Catholic and Protestant, for misinterpreting the Scriptures concerning the way of salvation; and (2) students of Shepherd in recent years have been led to join/rejoin the Church of Rome precisely for the theological reasons Shepherd offers in *The Call of Grace*. On the one side of the dispute, observes Shepherd, the Church of Rome is to be faulted not only for making room for human merit in salvation, "[b]ut on a deeper level, what must be challenged in the Roman Catholic doctrine is the very idea of merit itself. God does not, and never did, relate to his people on the basis of a works/merit principle"(60). On the other side, a similar, grievous error has been committed by the orthodox Protestant-Reformed scholastics. Shepherd informs his readers: Were Rome to rethink (paradigmatically) its theology of law, "this change in

paradigm would provide a proper basis for Rome's legitimate insistence that full credence be given to *James 2:24, Galatians 5:6, and similar passages*"(61). Protestantism, on the other side of the aisle, would need to recognize and relinquish those errors which had crept into its confessional and dogmatic formulations. Here again, Shepherd assumes that his interpretation of justification by faith and (non-meritorious) works is the teaching of genuine, pure Calvinism (Calvinism of the non-scholastic variety). This assumption on the part of Shepherd is simply false. *The Call of Grace* makes no real attempt to prove the author's case on the basis of Scripture or the history of doctrine. For the most part, the argumentation is specious and shallow.

Without the painstaking exegesis of Scripture and the accurate reading and critique of historical theology, Shepherd simply asserts as the substance of his argument: "if we do not reject the idea of merit, we are not really able to challenge the Romanist doctrine of salvation *at its very root*" (61-62, italics mine).⁵ The old Roman-Protestant scholastic theology, Shepherd argues, cannot accommodate the teaching of Scripture on covenant conditionality including repentance and obedience, the warning against falling away, and the need for perseverance. *Galatians 5:6, James 2:24, and like passages* "are almost uniformly treated as problem texts because they do not fit into *a non-covenantal paradigm of salvation by grace*. Various exegetical and dogmatic devices of dubious validity are used to defuse and tame these texts so that they do fit" (62, italics mine).

Those in the Reformed camp who do not see the issues Shepherd's way are deemed antinomian. Shepherd claims that contemporary evangelical Protestants are eager

to ward off the clear danger of legalism, but in doing so, [they] gravitate toward antinomianism.... This is the dilemma that has plagued evangelicalism even to our day, as evidenced by the lordship salvation controversy and the more recent discussion surrounding *The Gift of Salvation* and the *Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals* [62].

What is totally lacking in the writings emanating from members of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, in

Shepherd's estimation, is any (legitimate) appeal to the covenant.⁶ Parenthetically, it was not until Shepherd's teaching on the covenants moved to the forefront of discussion at Westminster Seminary notably his repudiation of the Reformed doctrine of the "Covenant of Works" that many more became convinced of the error of his doctrinal formulations. But there are other equally problematic issues surrounding Shepherd's theology. And to those we now turn.

2. Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God: Shepherd's New Perspective

Shepherd begins Part 2 by challenging the view of Karl Barth on election. In the previous section, Shepherd was less combative in his attack on modernist teaching. (Barth is a pivotal figure in the Neo-orthodox school, influential especially for its reformulation of the doctrine of justification and the covenants. As a follower of apologist and theologian Cornelius Van Til, I consider Barthianism to be a variation of modernist theology. On this score, compare the penetrating case made against modernism by J. Gresham Machen in *Christianity and Liberalism*.) What accounts for Shepherd's ambivalent attack on modernism, in part, is the fact that Shepherd implicitly embraces Barth's mono-covenantalism. According to Barth's schematization of history, there is only one covenant, namely, God's single, unchanging covenant of grace beginning at creation. Coordinate with this understanding of covenant, the classic Protestant Law/Gospel antithesis is rejected outright. In its place the Neo-orthodox and modern-day revisionists speak of law in grace or grace in law. As we shall now see, this interpretation has a direct bearing on the doctrine of election. With respect to the role of human decision in salvation Barthianism is, at the same time, a hybrid of Arminianism.⁷

The Synod of Dordt (which produced the *Canons of Dordt*) met in the seventeenth century to draw up five major points of doctrine to refute the teachings of the Remonstrants, who were proponents of an Arminian understanding of free will, the decrees of God, the fall of Adam from an original state of integrity, and the accomplishment/application of Christ's atoning work on behalf of sinners saved by grace. Lacking in this confessional writing (and, as noted earlier, in the writings of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals), argues Shepherd, is the doctrine of the covenant, that

which is essential to the church's understanding of election and the way of salvation. Shepherd compares and contrasts his view on these matters by distinguishing between "election-evangelism" or "regeneration-evangelism" and his own brand of "covenant-evangelism." Those who practice the latter methodology are almost guaranteed to see results. "The New Testament represents the present age as one of unprecedented and superabundant blessing. Reformed churches ought to be experiencing that blessing in both the numerical and the spiritual growth of their congregations" (71). (One seriously wonders if this was the case in the churches Shepherd pastored.) In short, evangelistic methodology, Shepherd instructs his readers, must be oriented to the doctrine of the one covenant, rather than the doctrines of election and regeneration. Shepherd claims that the particularism intrinsic to Calvinistic theology has too often inhibited evangelistic zeal and outreach. Shepherd says of the Calvinists: "Some would go so far as to say that there is no good news in any sense for the reprobate" (80). (Shepherd's use of the term "reprobate" here is infelicitous; prior to the consummation God alone is able to discern those who are elect and those who are reprobate.) Shepherd's assessment of Calvinism ends up being nothing more than a caricature, one all too familiar at that. Shepherd erroneously states:

Because the Calvinist has an accomplished redemption that is particular in scope though always effective for the elect, he cannot apply it to particular persons. The application has to be more general and abstract because he cannot distinguish between the elect and the reprobate in real life [81].

In *The Call of Grace* Shepherd transforms the Reformed doctrine of the indiscriminate offer of the Gospel into the belief that Christ died for all indiscriminately. Clearly, Shepherd's view is in conflict with Calvinistic teaching concerning the particularism of Christ's atonement. What Shepherd fails to understand is that although the Gospel is preached to all sinners indiscriminately, as the Great Commission requires, we cannot say indiscriminately that Christ died for "you." To declare "Christ died for (an equivocal) you" is not the Gospel. That assertion is true

only for the elect of God. Election to salvation is the proper purpose of redemptive covenant. But until the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the age there are both elect and non-elect within the covenant household. The present ministry and discipline of the Word within the community of faith provides only an approximate reading of the true church, fully known by God. The revelation of the true, final, eschatological assembly of the saints awaits the Consummation, when the Bridegroom meets his Bride, and the sons of God shall be revealed.

Shepherd's exegesis of *Ephesians* 1:1-14 is marred by underlying confusion concerning the Biblical doctrine of election. Contrary to Shepherd's teaching, election to salvation is definitive by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ (that is, the accomplishment of redemption). Paul's address to the Ephesian church as the "elect of God" must be understood, accordingly, in terms of what we have identified as the proper purpose of redemptive covenant. Over the course of redemptive history covenant is broader than election. (Esau, it will be remembered, was a covenant child, but not numbered among the elect.) Shepherd presumes an election to salvation with respect to all those who are members of the covenant community: "In *Ephesians* 1, Paul writes from the perspective of observable covenant reality and concludes from the visible faith and sanctity of the Ephesians that they are the elect of God" (87-88). On the one hand, Shepherd acknowledges that such "election" is losable: "It is true that some in the congregation may fall away and leave the church. Paul issues a warning in view of that possibility. Were some to fall away, he would no longer speak of them as the elect of God" (88). Contrary to Shepherd's interpretation, Calvinism teaches that election is unlosable. Parenthetically, Shepherd equates the election of individuals within the community of the new covenant with Israel's national election under the Mosaic economy: Both are losable. When does one have the "right" to be called a child of God (see *John* 1:12)? Is it at the time one professes faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Or is it at the occasion of baptism (rightly administered), when one receives the name "Christian" the new name given only to the saints of God (see *John* 3:3-8 and *Revelation* 3:12)? The answer is the latter. (A covenantal understanding of conversion brings together personal profession of faith and institutional baptism. Membership in the church of

Christ is outwardly marked by baptism, the covenantal sign and seal of that inward grace which is sovereignly bestowed by the Spirit of God upon the elect, and the elect alone. Not all who are outwardly baptized are regenerated from above.) From this Biblical point of view, however, Shepherd mistakenly reasons:

[I]nstead of looking at covenant from the perspective of regeneration, we ought to look at regeneration from the perspective of covenant. When that happens, baptism, the sign and seal of the covenant, marks the point of conversion. Baptism is the moment when we see the transition from death to life and a person is saved....

This covenant sign and seal marks his conversion and his entrance into the church as the body of Christ. From the perspective of the covenant, he is united to Christ when he is baptized [94].

It is at this point that Shepherd confuses election God's secret work with the church's administration of baptism, the sacramental sign and seal of union with Christ. (We cannot enter here into the theology of the sacraments in any full way. That is a subject requiring extended discussion. The Biblical-Reformed interpretation has no kinship with sacramentalism. There is no *ex operato* benefit in its administration no automatic bestowal of grace to the recipient. Only by means of the regenerating work of the Spirit of God in the elect is the proper purpose of the sign of baptism realized at some point in time, before or after the actual administration of the sacrament. See footnote 11.) Shepherd would no doubt respond to my criticism by saying that the "election" of which he speaks is different from decretive election. But here lies the problem: Shepherd defines terms contrary to their proper Biblical and theological usage he employs his own special vocabulary. The attentive reader must understand that Shepherd's objections to traditional Calvinistic formulations are not semantic, but theologically substantive. Shepherd faults the orthodox Calvinists not only for their employment of scholastic distinctions and terminology, which he regards as speculative, but also for their misconception and misformulation of Biblical teaching.

According to Shepherd, some of the by-products of Calvinistic theology oriented to the doctrines of election and regeneration most evident its teaching on covenant and evangelism include preparationism, that is, reliance on the preaching of Law (God's word of wrath and condemnation) prior to the preaching of the Gospel (the call to faith and repentance) and the problems created by Calvinism in its emphasis upon personal introspection either on the part of sincere inquirers seeking entrance to the kingdom of God or on the part of longtime members of the covenant household uncertain of their election. Such introspection frequently results not in salvation by works, but in "assurance by works," an equally fatal error (99). Accordingly, Shepherd reasons, the Calvinist is led to believe that one can be certain of his election by producing the fruits of regeneration, namely, good works.

When the call to faith is isolated from the call to obedience, as it frequently is, the effect is to make good works a supplement to salvation or simply the evidence of salvation. Some would even make them an optional supplement. According to the Great Commission, however, *they belong to the essence of salvation*, which is freedom from sin and not simple freedom from eternal condemnation as the consequence of sin. Because good works are done in obedience to all that Christ has commanded, they are suffused with and qualified by faith, without which no one can please God (*Hebrews 11:6*) [104, emphasis mine].

Shepherd's understanding of the way of salvation, his readers are reassuringly told, is the only real solution to the theological dilemmas created by Calvinists. Only his understanding offers the sure confidence sinners need to rest in Christ for life and salvation. We have now come full circle. In *The Call of Grace* the author's primary thesis can be summarized as follows: The way of salvation, that is, justification, is the way of faith and good works. The faith that saves the faith that justifies is active, living, and abiding. It perseveres to the end. The way or "instrument" of justification (though

Shepherd does not employ the term "instrument") is faith and works.

3. Advice and Consent: Hearing from and Responding to Shepherd's Critics

Discussion of and debate over Shepherd's theology have taken place in various contexts over many long years, down to the present. In what follows we will draw from the body of published and unpublished writings addressing these controverted issues. Unaware of the heated dispute taking place at that time on the campus of Westminster Seminary, Sinclair Ferguson in the pages of the Scottish magazine *The Banner of Truth*, popular among Calvinists (of the Puritan type), criticized Shepherd's essay appearing in *The New Testament Student and Theology* edited by John H. Skilton. Ferguson, who was later to become Shepherd's replacement at Westminster, took Shepherd to task for his views on covenant evangelism.⁸ Ferguson wrote:

Shepherd appears to adopt the view of the prevailing academic critique of the covenant theology of the seventeenth century (forcefully presented decades ago by Perry Miller), which suggests that the doctrine of covenant somehow makes God's secret counsels less harsh. We ought therefore to look at covenant, and not at election. This analysis, both historically and biblically we reject.... From a more practical point of view was it because Whitefield and Edwards, Spurgeon and M'Cheyne managed to escape the old Reformed straitjacket and discover election in its covenant perspective that they were such great evangelists? It seems highly doubtful. And therefore we are justified in wondering whether this is really the true solution at all.

Shepherd has had the courage to state to the Reformed reader that a question mark hangs over the commonly accepted notion that the preacher cannot say: "Christ died for you." In fact Shepherd goes so far as to say that, from this covenantal perspective [of his], the Reformed preacher is under obligation to

say "Christ died to save you." But that cannot possibly be a proper assessment, for no evangelist in the New Testament shows himself to have been under an inescapable burden to say that.⁹

Another major point to which Ferguson took exception is Shepherd's understanding of the relationship between baptism and regeneration: "Perhaps, in view of the originality which the author is obviously seeking to inject into an important area of discussion, it is inevitable that he has not, apparently, thought through some of the implications of his teaching."¹⁰ Ferguson concluded: "It would be our hope that, for the welfare of the Reformed churches, Professor Shepherd would return to the drawing board, and come again, so that we may hear him further on these matters."¹¹ Sound advice, to be sure. *The Call of Grace* is Shepherd's reply to Ferguson and others among his critics. Has Shepherd been listening responsibly to the questions and criticisms which have been raised? Has he made a sincere attempt to answer them in a direct and forthright manner? We contend that he has not.

In an open letter (dated May 19, 1981) Professor Richard Gaffin, Shepherd's ardent defender and the co-father of the new, anti-Reformational teaching at Westminster Seminary, accused a specific group of critics, known as the "Committee of Forty-Five" (signers of a letter sent to a wider segment of Westminster's constituency), of espousing nothing more than "loosely supported allegations of serious doctrinal error."¹² Gaffin wrote of the "inherent implausibility of the position taken by the signers."¹³ In addition, Gaffin accused the opposition of procedural misconduct accusation "without due process." The truth is, there was ample opportunity for Professor Shepherd to clarify his position at every level of discussion both within the Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, of which he was a member at that time. Due process was given. (Of course, there are times when the courts of the church fail in their duty to uphold Biblical truth, for whatever reasons. Luther was correct in rejecting the "wisdom" of the church court in his day and in challenging the doctrinal error of the Magisterium.) The history of the controversy at Westminster in the early years was complicated and convoluted. The "Committee of Forty-Five" was convinced that the time had come for exposing the error

of Shepherd's teaching in the wider Seminary/church arena. Gaffin in his letter defended the view of his friend and theological collaborator that sinners are justified by faith and (non-meritorious) works. Citing Reformed dogmatician Herman Bavinck, Gaffin disputed the view maintained by some theologians which distinguishes between two justifications, the first being the "justification of the sinner" (attributed to the teaching of the Apostle Paul) and the second the "justification of the just" (attributed to the teaching of James). Gaffin contended that there is but one justification, combining all that is found in the writings of Paul and James. The problem here is how Gaffin and Shepherd treat the Biblical data in their formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith, one which incorporates the teaching of Paul and James.¹⁴ Gaffin concluded his letter by noting that the issue in this dispute does not only concern how we expound this singular doctrine, but also the question whether or not the "theological structure and doctrinal formulations" of the Reformation are true to the whole counsel of God this issue, he noted, involves "something more than what we imagine we already have under our control and have already mastered."¹⁵ Simply put, Gaffin and Shepherd are convinced that the Protestant-Reformed tradition is in need of correction and modification in its understanding of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith.¹⁶ (The underlying dispute concerning Scripture's teaching on the covenants does not surface here in Gaffin's letter. He and others were skillful in avoiding that subject. But what is clear is the denial of the traditional formulation of justification by faith alone on the part of Shepherd and Gaffin.)

It was not until Shepherd presented his lectures on "Life in Covenant with God" at the French Creek Bible Conference at Sandy Cove, Maryland, in the summer of 1981 that the debate over the doctrine of the covenants finally moved out into the open. Many were convinced (some for the first time) that these lectures served to clarify the underlying error in Shepherd's theology. More significantly, these lectures provided the occasion for then-President Edmund Clowney to reassess the Seminary situation. It was at this juncture that Clowney made a complete reversal in his position and proceeded to take the steps necessary to remove Shepherd from the faculty. On November 20, 1981, the Board of Trustees of Westminster Seminary called for Shepherd's dismissal. With the input of many

individuals, including my own analysis of Shepherd's Sandy Cove lectures (requested by and submitted to those assigned the task of writing the document titled "Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd Approved by the Executive Committee of the Board (February 26, 1982)," the evaluation of Shepherd's theology given by his leading critics, now including President Clowney and Robert Strimple, Dean of the Faculty, was recognized and adopted by the Board of Trustees. The eighteen-page document "Reason and Specifications" summarized briefly the history of the controversy and offered a fair and balanced critique of Shepherd's teaching on such doctrines as justification, the covenants of God, election, and the assurance of salvation. Parenthetically, Shepherd had opportunity to respond to this evaluation, but instead decided to withdraw himself from the hearing process afforded him. Shortly thereafter he transferred his membership into the Christian Reformed Church, where his views were certain to find safe harbor. In summation of the early history of the theological controversy at Westminster, both the error of Shepherd's teaching and the evasive responses supplied by Shepherd throughout the course of the controversy persuaded a growing number of theologians and pastors some previously supportive of Shepherd's teaching to support the decision of President Clowney calling for Shepherd's removal.

"Reason and Specifications," the official document of the governing board of the Seminary, stated the following as the theological basis for Shepherd's dismissal:

The Board has come to the decision that Prof. Shepherd's removal is necessary for the best interests of the Seminary with great regret, and only after seven years of earnest study and debate, because it has become convinced that Mr. Shepherd's teaching regarding justification, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, and related themes is not clearly in accord with the teaching of Scripture as it is summarized in the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Standards.¹⁷

In the historical sketch of the controversy at Westminster Seminary, the reader is informed that after admitting theological ambiguity and in an effort to distance himself from all earlier formulations, Shepherd at one point in time wished to be judged in light of two particular writings: (1) his "Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance and Good Works," submitted in November 1978 for discussion in the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; and (2) a paper titled "The Grace of Justification." Both of these were rather carefully crafted in the attempt to convince concerned parties that Shepherd's theology was indeed faithful to Scripture and to the Reformed faith.¹⁸ At this juncture these formulations did succeed in gaining some additional support for Shepherd's position and in bringing about a temporary closure to the Seminary dispute. It was not until the circulation of the letter signed by forty-five theologians, including both scholars and pastors (dated May 4, 1981), that the case reopened. "Reason and Specifications" takes note of the following: "The President [Edmund Clowney] deplored the mailing of this letter to the general public rather than to the Board and Faculty."¹⁹ This latest development, to be sure, added further conflict to an exceedingly tense situation within the Seminary community. (It should be noted here, however, that the controversy had moved beyond the faculty and the board long before this point in time. It was widely debated in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and in other ecclesiastical circles.)

Here are some of the conclusions reached in "Reason and Specifications" with regard to Shepherd's theology:

In spite of modifications that Mr. Shepherd has made in his expressions, the Board finds that the problems in his teaching are not resolved, and that they are inherent in his view of the "covenant dynamic." Although Mr. Shepherd appeals to the history of Reformed covenantal theology to support his position, the Board finds that Mr. Shepherd's construction is distinctive. It is in the distinctive elements and emphases of his theology of the covenant that the problem appears.²⁰

In his "covenant dynamic" Mr. Shepherd develops a formula that permits him to join good works to faith as the characteristic and qualifying response to grace. Obedience is the proper, full, and comprehensive term for all covenantal response, and specifically for our response in the covenant of grace.²¹

The "covenant dynamic" of Mr. Shepherd makes the function of our obedience in the covenant to be the same as the function of the obedience of Adam in the covenant before the fall ("Life in Covenant with God," Tapes 1, 2). Mr. Shepherd finds one covenantal pattern in all of Scripture. The pattern joins God's free grace and our response in faithful obedience.²²

The omission of any clear treatment of Christ as the covenant Head, of his active obedience, of the imputation of his righteousness in the fulfillment of the covenant command, of his probation in our place (this in a treatment of the covenant that professes to be distinctively Reformed, after years of discussion) evidence a lack of clarity that cannot but cause concern.²³

Mr. Shepherd insists that the threat of the curse is a necessary part of the covenant structure for Adam, for Israel, and for us. It promises blessing for the faithful and curse for the unfaithful. He has described the reservation that the threat of eternal death does not apply to believers as a "moral influence" theology of the warnings of Scripture (Faculty conference, October 26, 1981). He urged before the Board that just as Adam's posterity would not be "off the hook" if Adam had obeyed, but would be bound to fulfill the condition of obedience, so the posterity of Christ are not "off the hook."²⁴

By rejecting the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of

grace as defined in the Westminster Standards, and by failing to take account in the structure of the "covenant dynamic" of Christ's fulfillment of the covenant by his active obedience as well as by his satisfaction of its curse, Mr. Shepherd develops a uniform concept of covenant faithfulness for Adam, for Israel, and for the New Covenant people. The danger is that both the distinctiveness of the covenant of grace and of the new covenant fullness of the covenant of grace will be lost from view and that obedience as the way of Salvation will swallow up the distinct and primary function of faith.²⁵

How does Shepherd answer his critics? *The Call of Grace* demonstrates conclusively that Shepherd has no intention of reformulating his views to bring them into accord with orthodox Reformed dogmatics. Modifications previously made were merely temporary in nature, and disingenuous at that.

The dispute does not end here. Presently, Professor Gaffin continues to promote vigorously and aggressively the new theology at Westminster Seminary, all the more so in Shepherd's absence. Gaffin sees himself carrying on the work he and Shepherd began in the 1970s and earlier.²⁶ In a letter dated March 7, 1983, addressed to the "Committee of Forty-Five" and written by three members of this "Committee," attention was directed to several recent events that had then transpired. Among the several concerns expressed in this communication was the following:

[I]n its most recent communication to us [the faculty of Westminster Seminary] has totally ignored the existence of this paper ["Reason and Specifications"]. Their position is tantamount to a continuing support of the theology of Norman Shepherd, and a defense of its own position that his theological formulations were not in error.

This attitude must be treated with the seriousness it deserves. If the assessment of Mr. Shepherd's theology in the paper specifying the reasons for his dismissal

is correct, he has departed from the system of theology in the Westminster standards in the areas of justification, the covenant and assurance. For the faculty now to ignore these findings could have the gravest consequences for the Seminary.²⁷

That fear has now become reality. Unquestionably, the Shepherd-Gaffin controversy has become a watershed for Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Professor Gaffin, who remains the most dominant member of the faculty, and the current President, Samuel Logan, have succeeded in removing all opposition from within the Philadelphia faculty, even though the Seminary denies barring Shepherd's critics from faculty appointments.²⁸ This falsification of the facts is challenged in the letter of March 7, 1983 (and elsewhere). Members of the faculty, administration and board of the Seminary have for many years attempted to mislead the public about what is being taught at the Seminary. As one former member of the Philadelphia faculty commented, the problem at Westminster is theological and moral. And in the estimation of another, the well at Westminster has been contaminated. The pernicious, insidious teaching of the Shepherd school is now entrenched in the Seminary and in some of the churches it serves. From all appearances, there is little hope of seeing a return of Westminster to its original position and role in the propagation and defense of historic Calvinism. Westminster in Philadelphia no longer is the bastion of Reformed orthodoxy it once was (see footnote 26).

Those familiar with changes taking place in contemporary "evangelical" theology more broadly understand that the Shepherd-Gaffin teaching is by no means novel. In *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* Professor Robert L. Reymond observes how

a view that insists upon "grace" everywhere winds up with true grace nowhere and a kind of works principle everywhere, with [Daniel Fuller's] representation of the relation of works to justification coming perilously close to what late medieval theologians would have called works having not condign but congruent merit. One thing is

certainly clear from Fuller's representation of this whole matter: He has departed from the *sola fide* principle of the Protestant Reformation.²⁹

(In this section of his systematics Dr. Reymond relies heavily upon the work of Meredith G. Kline, leading Old Testament scholar and Reformed theologian of our day.) Since the time of Shepherd's dismissal from Westminster, exchanges between both sides in this debate have not abated. Kline remains one of the principal defenders of covenant theology within the Reformed community. In the latest edition of his *Kingdom Prologue*, the *magnum opus* of his teaching and writing career, Kline draws together the major lines of refutation to be made against the Shepherd-Gaffin theology.³⁰ The fruit of ongoing debate can be seen in these summarizing remarks:

Since the works principle is thus foundational to the Gospel, the repudiation of that principle in particular, the denial of the possibility of meritorious works where paternal love is involved (as it certainly is in the relation of the Father and the Son [in the "Covenant of Redemption" established in eternity]) stands condemned as subversive of that Gospel. What begins as a rejection of works ends up as an attack, however unintentional, on the Biblical message of saving grace.³¹

... [at creation] man's hope of realizing the state of glorification and of attaining to the Sabbath-consummation belonged to him by virtue of his very nature as created in the image of the God of glory. This expectation was an in-created earnest of fullness, to be denied which would have frustrated him to the depths of his spirit's longing for God and God-likeness. Whatever he might have been granted short of that for his obedience would be no blessing at all, but a curse.³²

The distinctive meaning of grace in its Biblical-theological usage is a divine response of favor and blessing in the face of human violation of obligation.

Gospel grace takes account of man in his responsibility under the demands of the covenant and specifically as a covenant breaker, a sinner against covenant law. Accordingly, the grace of Christ comes to expression in his active and passive obedience, together constituting a vicarious satisfaction for the obligations and liabilities of his people, who through failure and transgression are debtors before the covenant Lord, the Judge of all the earth. Gospel grace emerges in a forensic framework as a response of mercy to demerit.³³

One of the major issues of debate brought to the fore in discussions at the Covenant Roundtable, convened at Westminster Seminary for the purpose of resolving differences among some of the principal disputants, was the question of proportionality or disproportionality respecting the covenantal reward of life everlasting promised to Adam upon successful completion of the probationary test. Speaking to this issue, Kline remarks:

Another form of the attack on the Covenant of Works doctrine (and thus on the classic Law-Gospel contrast) asserts that even if it is allowed that Adam's obedience would have earned something, the disproportion between the value of that act of service and the value of the proffered blessing forbids us to speak here of simple equity or justice. The contention is that Adam's ontological status limited the value or weight of his acts. More specifically his act of obedience would not have eternal value or significance; it could not earn a reward of eternal, confirmed life. In the order of eternal life, so we are told, we must therefore recognize an element of "grace" in the pre-redemptive covenant. But belying this assessment of the situation is the fact that if it were true that Adam's act of obedience could not have eternal significance then neither could or did his actual act of disobedience have eternal significance.

It did not deserve the punishment of everlasting death. Consistency would compel us to judge God guilty of imposing punishment beyond the demands of justice, pure and simple.³⁴

Refusing to accept God's covenant word as the definer of justice, the disproportionality view exalts above God's Word a standard of justice of its own making. Assigning ontological values to Adam's obedience and God's reward it finds that weighed on its judicial scales they are drastically out of balance. In effect that conclusion imputes an imperfection in justice to the Lord of the covenant. The attempt to hide this affront against the majesty of the Judge of all the Earth by condescending to assess the relation of Adam's act to God's reward as one of congruent merit is no more successful than Adam's attempt to manufacture a covering to conceal his nakedness. It succeeds only in exposing the roots of this opposition to Reformed theology in the theology of Rome.³⁵

Gaffin counters this argument by pressing the case for scholastic federalism's use of the nature/grace dichotomy (that is, the imposition of the covenant arrangement upon an assumed, prior order of nature). This construct, Gaffin maintains, ameliorates the notion of "meritorious reward" suggested by the familiar terminology of the "Covenant of Works." According to Gaffin, the creation covenant in the Reformed theological tradition is best construed as a gracious disposition of God, the Lord of the covenant. Grace, in Gaffin's view, nullifies all talk of human "merit." That is to say, all that Adam has and receives is a matter of "sovereign grace and promise." No works, no merit. The final verdict concerning this dispute at Westminster and within the broader evangelical-Reformed community is not yet in. Those standing within the tradition of historic Protestant-Reformed orthodoxy have sounded the alert concerning clear and present dangers facing contemporary evangelicalism.³⁶

4. Closing Evaluation: Theological Ambiguities in the Shepherd (-Gaffin) Theology

Returning to the focus of this evaluation of current teaching at Westminster Seminary, a critical look at Shepherd's book *The Call of Grace*, it is clear that Shepherd's theological formulations are deeply flawed. The summation of historic Calvinism offered by Shepherd is largely a caricature; his reading of the Reformed theological tradition lacks careful documentation and analysis. (Interaction with the current literature is entirely lacking. Only the names of Charles Hodge and Karl Barth are mentioned.) Shepherd assumes that his readers will simply accept his reading of the history of doctrine and acknowledge in Calvinism the underlying problem as he sees it. The two principal theses made by Shepherd are these: First, God never relates to his image-bearers in terms of a covenant-of-works arrangement, wherein reward is contingent upon meritorious obedience on the part of the creature; second, the doctrine of the covenant(s) rather than the doctrine of election and regeneration is determinative in the church's evangelistic outreach. The author's "covenant evangelism" is presented as the remedy for Calvinism's alleged inability to make a genuine offer of grace to needy sinners. The way of the covenant is the way of faith and good works. This view stands in opposition to the traditional Protestant-Reformed doctrines of justification by faith alone and sovereign election.

In his distinctive style of writing, Shepherd claims: "Christ did not die for inanimate objects or preternatural beings, nor did he die for abstractions. He died for people, for sinners, for you and for me" (85). This assertion stands in flat contradiction to the Reformed doctrine of the definite atonement, the teaching that Christ died for the elect, for them only, and that he actually acquired their salvation. Shepherd's exegesis of *Ephesians* 1:1-14 up-ends the Reformed (and Biblical) teaching concerning the relationship between redemptive covenant and election. Rather than looking at "election from the perspective of covenant," as Shepherd would have us do, Reformed theology has in different ways, to be sure understood election to be the "proper purpose" of redemptive covenant. That is to say, covenant is broader than election. On this subject, Shepherd's interpretation is an Arminian hybrid, an attempt to extract what Shepherd sees as the best of these two diverse theological traditions, all the while

paying lip-service to the Reformed doctrine of sovereign, decretive election. Shepherd concludes his chapter on covenant and election with this thought: "In light of the covenant, we learn that the particularistic doctrines of Calvinism are pure grace and not a mixture of blessing and curse"(91). What precisely is he saying here? What might strike one at first as insightful and helpful is actually ambiguous and ill-conceived. The root of Shepherd's misformulation is his unease with the Reformed doctrine of predestination including election and reprobation especially when it comes to working out the implications of covenant theology for evangelism and Christian living.³⁷

Not only does Shepherd's teaching undermine the Reformed doctrine of the assurance of salvation, at the same time his views undercut the decisive nature of (true) conversion, including the once-for-all declaration of the sinner saved by grace, by virtue of the believer's justification and union with Christ in his death and resurrection. The divine act of justification rests upon the finished work of Christ. According to Shepherd, "evangelism does not end with regeneration, but continues as long as a person lives" (100, emphasis mine). Coordinate with this understanding of conversion, Shepherd stresses the need for obedience (that is, good works) in the way of salvation as an ongoing process. As cited previously, Shepherd maintains: "When the call to faith is isolated from the call to obedience, as it frequently is, the effect is to make good works a supplement to salvation or simply the evidence of salvation. According to the Great Commission, however, they belong to the essence of salvation" (104). In connection with his erroneous exegesis of *Leviticus* 18:5 (and its New Testament citations), Shepherd contends that God's salvation is to be received "with a living and active faith." Faith and works are the means of justification. Shepherd takes exception to both Rome and the Protestant Reformation, specifically their employment of the "merit" idea in connection with the doctrine of justification and the covenants. (Unlike the theology of Rome, Protestant theology maintains that Christ's obedience is the exclusive meritorious ground of salvation.)

Joining other voices in contemporary "evangelical" theology surfacing as early as the 1950s Shepherd's work exemplifies the renewed interest in Barth's

teaching on covenant and justification. His teaching, like Barth's, is anti-Reformational theology in the guise of authentic Calvinism. What we actually uncover in the pages of *The Call of Grace* is one more variation on Neo-orthodox themes. The controversy surrounding this book is of singular import today for Westminster Seminary and the churches it serves. The new guard at Westminster in Philadelphia is radically different from that of its early days. Since its founding in 1929, Westminster Seminary had seen itself as the conveyor of Old-Princeton theology; today it is caught up in the winds of change. No longer does Westminster stand in the stream of confessional Reformed orthodoxy. That day has passed. What remains for those standing true to Scripture and the historic Reformed faith at the turn of this new millennium is the increasingly difficult task of defending the Gospel against every assault, both within and without the halls of the academy and the church.³⁸

Footnotes

1. For a historical sketch of Westminster Seminary's formation and its ties to Old Princeton, see Mark Noll, "The Princeton Theology," *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development* (ed. D. F. Wells; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 15-35; and his "The Spirit of Old Princeton and the Spirit of the OPC," *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (eds. C. G. Dennison and R. C. Gamble; Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 235-246.
2. Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000. Page references from this book are provided in the text.
3. "Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd Approved by the Executive Committee of the Board (February 26, 1982)," 1.
4. See the argument in Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (trans. T. Collins, E. Tolk, and D. Granskou; New York: Nelson, 1964), which contains "A Letter to the Author" written by Barth.
5. Compare the similar sentiments of G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin (Studies in Dogmatics)*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 208-209; the entire chapter is highly formative

in Shepherd's thinking. To be sure, Berkouwer earns greater respect for his command of exegetical and historical theology. He is, at the same time, clearer (and more open) with respect to his own philosophico-theological commitments.

6. On the contrary, see, for example, the several articles in *Modern Reformation* (July/August 2000). To complicate matters, the founder and president of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, the late James Montgomery Boice, wavered in his thinking on the Biblical doctrine of the covenants, specifically the Reformed doctrine of the "Covenant of Works." Having moved from his earlier dispensational leanings, Boice was influenced to some degree by the teachings of Westminster Seminary (several of the faculty members attended Tenth Presbyterian Church where Boice preached). Boice developed an especially close relationship with Sinclair Ferguson, frequent speaker at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. It is also the case that the composition of the Alliance has been theologically eclectic, and that creates problems of its own.

7. See my review of Michael Thomas' *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus*, in *Trinity Journal* 20 NS (1999), 116-119, republished in my *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 147-150.

8. In the Fall of 1997 Ferguson was installed as the Charles Krahe Professor of Systematic Theology (funded by those sympathetic to his views); the following Spring (1998) Ferguson resigned, returning to Scotland where the covenant theology of the Torrance school prevails. Ferguson himself studied covenant theology at the feet of James Torrance, his doctoral supervisor. (The Torrance school is commonly, though incorrectly, viewed as evangelical both here in the States and in Britain; actually, this school of thought is Barthian.) See further my paper, "Current Theological Trends in Reformed Seminaries: The Dilemma in Ministerial Education," paper read at the Eastern regional meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (April 3, 1998). Extracts from this paper are included in the present writing.

9. Sinclair Ferguson, book review in *The Banner of Truth* 166-167 (July-August 1977), 61-62.

10. Ferguson, 63.

11. Ferguson, 63. For an insightful and helpful discussion of the Biblical teaching on baptism, see most notably Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968). The Reformed doctrine of church and sacraments differs sharply from "baptistic" interpretations which place a premium upon personal faith at the expense of the confessor's corporate standing in the church, the holy institution established by Christ. Those who preach and administer the Word have been granted the "keys of the kingdom," the authority to exercise church discipline within the household of faith.

12. Open letter of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (May 19, 1981), page 1. Gaffin's endorsement of *The Call of Grace* on the back cover reads: "This lucid and highly readable study provides valuable instruction on what it means to live in covenant with God. God's covenant is the only way of life that fully honors both the absolute, all-embracing sovereignty of his saving grace and the full, uninhibited activity of his people. *The Call of Grace* should benefit anyone concerned about biblical growth in Christian life and witness."

13. Gaffin's open letter, page 2.

14. See my "Justification in Redemptive History," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981), 213-246, republished in my *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 157-180. Here I restate the Biblical-Reformed teaching on justification by faith in terms of its two distinct aspects the constitutive and the demonstrative.

15. Gaffin's open letter, page 7.

16. At no point in the controversy, from the beginning to the present, has Gaffin taken exception to Shepherd's formulations. He has vigorously defended Shepherd thesis by thesis, point by point, adamantly insisting upon the soundness of Shepherd's views.

17. "Reason and Specifications," 2.

18. In the paper, "The Grace of Justification," J. Gresham Machen is misinterpreted by Shepherd at the

place where Machen contrasts works of merit with works of faith. Machen is not suggesting that the works of faith which New Testament authors commend are *instrumental* in justification, as Shepherd is proposing.

In a shrewd and calculated move, Shepherd's "Thirty-four Theses on Justification," which served as the basis for discussion and debate in the hearing conducted by the Philadelphia Presbytery of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (what Shepherd himself had requested of his presbytery), skillfully avoided the weightier, more controversial aspects of his teaching. Over the course of the many days of this hearing Professor Gaffin frequently answered for Shepherd, all in the effort to mislead further the church court concerning the critical issues in the Seminary dispute. (To reiterate, all discussion of the doctrine of the covenants was deliberately circumscribed during the initial phase of the controversy. Fortunately, Shepherd could not contain himself on that subject. Subsequent airing of his views on the covenants resulted in his swift removal from the Seminary faculty.) At the conclusion of his hearing, the Presbytery of Philadelphia neither affirmed Shepherd's teaching as being in accord with the confessional standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, nor ruled it out of accord it simply ended in a deadlock. A few years later Shepherd withdrew from the denomination.

19. "Reason and Specifications," 9. In response to this situation, Westminster's administration and faculty expressed their desire to censure the signers in the church courts for violation of the Ninth Commandment (respecting Shepherd's good name and that of the Seminary). That wish was never realized, though the accusation lingers on. Westminster continues to maintain this same posture in the face of ongoing criticism. See, for example, *Presbyterian and Reformed News* 6:1 (January-February 2000), 12-13; and Samuel Logan's response posted in the following issue of this publication, *Presbyterian and Reformed News* 6:2 (March-April 2000), 8. By insisting that all criticism against faculty members be presented as charges in the courts of the church, President Logan thinks he is free to ignore the critics.

20. "Reason and Specifications," 11.

21. "Reason and Specifications," 11.

22. "Reason and Specifications," 12.

23. "Reason and Specifications," 14.

24. "Reason and Specifications," 15.

25. "Reason and Specifications," 15.

26. John M. Frame speaks of the injustice of Shepherd's dismissal, in view of the fact that Gaffin, who holds the same views, remains on the Seminary faculty a rather surprising comment on the part of Frame who also sympathizes with Shepherd's teaching (see Frame's unpublished paper, "Let's Keep the Picture Fuzzy" [Westminster Theological Seminary, June 5, 1985], 5). Compare further Frame's comments in his *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Presbyterian and Reformed: 1995), 393, and my critique of Frame on Shepherd (including Frame's perspectival methodology) in "John Frame and the Recasting of Van Tilian Apologetics: A Review Article," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9 (1993), 279-296 [note: this issue of the *Journal* was published in the Spring of 1998]. I have been informed that Frame makes another attempt to answer my criticisms and those of others in his forthcoming book, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001). The first appears in the same issue of *Mid-America Journal of Theology* cited above.

Westminster Theological Seminary in California, where Frame taught for many years after teaching at the Philadelphia campus, does not for the most part recognize Gaffin's theology as being at odds with historic Reformed doctrine, even though most of the California faculty regard Shepherd's theology to be outside the bounds of confessional orthodoxy. Robert Strimple, who eventually came to oppose Shepherd's theology, finds no problems in Gaffin's teaching. Illustrative also of this institutional dilemma is Michael Horton's misleading remark that theologians Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, Meredith Kline, and Richard Gaffin all "find their roots in classical Reformed (covenant) theology" (in "Eschatology after Nietzsche: Apollonian, Dionysian or Pauline," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2 [2000], 42, n. 49). As long as the Shepherd theology prevails at Westminster East, the failure of Westminster West to distance herself unequivocally from the new theology places her in a very unstable and precarious position. In

some measure, Shepherd's teaching marks a great divide between East and West. But that line becomes fuzzy when we weigh the approval given to Gaffin's teaching. (Note again, Gaffin's endorsement of Shepherd's formulations on the back cover of *The Call of Grace*.) Clearly, Shepherd's dismissal did not succeed in removing the insidious, heterodox teaching from Westminster Seminary. Frame's point concerning the injustice of the situation is well taken (see footnote 38). Frame, unhappy with developments on the California campus, recently left Westminster; he is currently teaching at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

In a strange irony of history, Sinclair Ferguson, called to Westminster in Philadelphia as Shepherd's replacement, has also been critical of the traditional Reformed doctrine of the "Covenant of Works." Teaching alongside Gaffin in the Systematics Department, Ferguson has continued to move further in the direction of the Shepherd-Gaffin theology, including a rethinking and reformulation of his understanding of the doctrines of justification and election. See my review of Ferguson's *The Holy Spirit* in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999), 529-531, included in my *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 334-336.

27. Letter of March 7, 1983, page 1.

28. Gaffin wields wide influence within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, including its denominational publication (*New Horizons*), at Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company (which from the beginning had committed itself largely to publishing writings of Westminster Seminary's faculty and constituents), and the Seminary's own journal (*The Westminster Theological Journal*). Lee Irons laments one incident of editorial heavy-handedness: "In his article 'Covenant Theology Under Attack,' a critical evaluation of these trends [within the Reformed community], Professor Meredith G. Kline has raised a clarion call to all sons of the Reformation to rise up and repudiate such developments." For the record, Irons notes: "Several remarks were edited out contrary to Kline's intentions. The unexpurgated version has been published privately [by the congregation of the Parkwoods Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, Mo.]" ("Redefining Merit: An Examination of

Medieval Presuppositions in Covenant Theology," in *Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline* [eds. H. Griffith and J. R. Muether; Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 2000], 254, also n. 4).

Curiously, in *Fighting the Good Faith: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education and the Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995) no reference to the Shepherd controversy is to be found. It is a chapter in the history of the denomination and the Seminary some would prefer to forget or possibly erase from the historical record, were that possible. For further study of this debate, see Robert M. Zens, "Professor Norman Shepherd on Justification: A Critique" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981); and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy* (St. Louis, 1983).

29. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998) 431-432. For the similar teaching of John Piper, see my *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).

30. *Kingdom Prologue*, 107-117.

31. *Kingdom Prologue*, 109.

32. *Kingdom Prologue*, 111-112.

33. *Kingdom Prologue*, 112-113.

34. *Kingdom Prologue*, 114.

35. *Kingdom Prologue*, 115.

36. See especially my "The Original State of Adam: Tensions in Reformed Theology," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 59 (1987), 291-309; and "The Search for an Evangelical Consensus on Paul and the Law," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997), 563-579, both republished in *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 95-110 and 209-226. This collection of writings contains a wide-ranging discussion of covenant theology, Reformation and modern, with special attention to the Westminster

school. Gaffin's reading of traditional covenant theology is wide of the mark; it is a serious distortion of the clear testimony of Reformed orthodoxy, past and present.

37. See my remarks concerning Sinclair Ferguson's recent thinking on these issues in *The Holy Spirit* cited above in footnote 26.

38. See Meredith G. Kline's "Covenant Theology Under Attack," *New Horizons* 15 (February 1994), 3-5, discussed above in footnote 28. In the controversy spilling over into the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Presbyterian Church in America, it was the opinion of William Barker, Westminster's Dean of Faculty, that the Barthian view might prove to be the correct one in the minds of the Seminary faculty. What Barker was also saying is that Gaffin's views had received the faculty's support. (The current Board of Trustees is satisfied with Gaffin's work. The newest additions to the faculty, including Carl Trueman and David McWilliams, are of the same theological persuasion. And long-standing adjunct professors Robert Letham and Peter Lillback are outspoken proponents of the Shepherd-Gaffin theology.)

On the opposite side, Robert Godfrey has written: "[T. F.] Torrance's Neo-orthodox theology wants to eliminate the Covenant of Works and identify creation with the Covenant of Grace. This position fits well with a Barthian Christomonism and quasi-universalism, but is far from the fullness of the biblical revelation. The two-covenant theology of Westminster is the best understanding of the structure of biblical revelation and the best key to understanding the work of Christ" ("The Westminster Larger Catechism," *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly* [eds. J. L. Carson and D. W. Hall; Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994], 139-140). Godfrey wondered, however, what direction the Westminster school will take in the coming years. Responding to analyses by Richard Lints and Vern Poythress regarding developments within Reformed theology, including an evaluation of developments at Westminster Seminary (East and West), Godfrey acknowledged the prominence that John Murray's teaching on the covenants has had at the theological institution. He suggested that "This [resultant] change in 'Biblical theology' may have significant systematic

and confessional implications. A relational metaphor is used as the controlling metaphor with profound systematic results in the theology of the Council of Trent, Karl Barth, Daniel Fuller, and Norman Shepherd. Is Murray conceding something important to any of those theological positions? Surely that is a question that must be raised" ("Developments in Reformed Theology in the Twentieth Century: A Response," paper presented at the 45th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Washington, D.C. [November 18-20, 1993], 4). In this paper Godfrey also questioned the compatibility of John Frame's perspectivalism with confessional Reformed interpretation. Clearly, the Westminster faculties have not reached anything close to consensus of opinion regarding issues currently in dispute. Whether differences will ultimately lead to a division between the two campuses remains highly uncertain. Godfrey claims that "Westminster is now actually two schools" ("Developments in Reformed Theology," 1). The case for this claim, however, is not at all convincing. Agreeably, there are at present two faculties, but not two schools. Surely there is work to be done in bringing clarity to the pressing issues of the day and in exercising courage within the wider Seminary community. The future of Westminster West depends upon such action. For a thorough analysis of Murray's theology of the covenants and related doctrines, see my essay "Paul's Letter to the Romans in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* and in Contemporary Reformed Thought," *Evangelical Quarterly* 71 (1999), 3-24, republished in my *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 227-245.

Reaction to *The Changing of the Guard*

Editor's Note: We surmised that there would be strong reaction to Dr. Karlberg's essay, and it was not long in coming. Below is a letter from R. Scott Clark of Westminster Seminary in California to Dr. Karlberg, and Dr. Karlberg's response.

Dr. R. Scott Clark has asked us to remove his letter to Dr. Karlberg from our website, since he intended it as

private correspondence. We have done so. Dr. Karlberg's letter remains posted.

Below is Dr. Karlberg's response.

Mark W. Karlberg, Th.D.
Meadowood #836
1575 West Street Road
Warminster, PA 18974-3168
215. 672. 8862

April 9, 2001

Dr. R. Scott Clark
Westminster Theological Seminary in California
1725 Bear Valley Parkway
Escondido, CA 92027

Dear Scott:

To adapt your metaphor, you're aiming your guns at the wrong person. Your concerns should be directed to Dick Gaffin and to his colleagues on the Philadelphia faculty - not that any of them can be objective with regard to these long-standing issues of doctrinal dispute, even if one were so inclined. (You know the politics of such things!) Needless to say, there is a *very long* history in this controversy, beginning in the mid-1970s, if not earlier. At present, the vast majority of the faculty in Philadelphia is pro-Shepherd in its sentiments. What is troubling is that you and those with whom you are in close conversation on these matters within the California faculty have not looked carefully at what is available from the pens of Gaffin, Ferguson, and others (some of you refuse to do so, others simply shrug off the evidence as "misstatements"). Your letter is disappointing, but not surprising. At some point I do hope you will give my writings the study and attention they deserve, more so than your letter of April 4, 2001 suggests.

My comments will be brief. You disapprove of my 'methods' and 'rhetoric' (in part). I plead not guilty on both counts. Let's begin first with questions concerning the posture you yourself have assumed.

POSITION ONE: You say that 'Shepherd's errors are of Galatian proportions.' You acknowledge that "Boice

probably did not have a very good covenant theology." You admit "there is reason to suspect Prof. Trumper of holding the Torrance view on the covenant," and you take exception to the views of David McWilliams. What prevents you from denouncing the similar views of Gaffin, the one who has heartily endorsed Shepherd's book? (Do you know the details of the Shepherd controversy at Westminster in Philadelphia and within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church? Bob Godfrey and Bob Strimple surely do. Have they discussed these matters thoroughly with you? Are you aware of the extent of Gaffin's support for Shepherd?)

POSITION TWO: You share my "deep concern about the dangerous teaching of Norman Shepherd," and are "greatly disturbed." You are not "opposed to strong language in defense of the gospel." You state that you "will pursue [the] question (of erroneous teaching on the California faculty) vigorously," if that can be shown. Why was this not done when John Frame and Jim Dennison were on the faculty? Why did you not then "vigorously" pursue the matter in defense of orthodox covenant theology?

POSITION THREE: You acknowledge that you 'do not know what Ferguson's covenant theology is.' And as noted above, you concede that "Boice *probably* did not have a very good covenant theology" (emphasis mine). Well, did he or did he not? Do you know? You indicate your personal acquaintance with Carl Trueman, and write reassuringly that you have no reason to suspect on his part any sympathy for the Shepherd theology. The issue here, to be precise, is Trueman's adoption of the Barthian interpretation of covenant (despite his disclaimer). I refer you to his study on John Owen (*The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology*). What is your studied opinion on these disputed issues? You are taking an aggressive stance - without sufficient understanding and forethought. In sum, the case you plead in defense of classic Reformed covenant theology doesn't ring true. I do look forward to reading your thoughts on the subject in the writings to which you refer in your letter. (I hope your study will trace the origin of mono-covenantalism in the history of theology. As you are aware, I have traced it to Karl Barth as the chief proponent in the modern era.)

You share with me "deep concern" over the current theological climate, in particular, the teaching of

Shepherd on justification and the covenants. The bottom line, as I see, is this: what you find objectionable in my 'rhetoric' - different from yours - is that my criticisms of doctrinal error in Reformed academia extend to the teachings of Gaffin, Ferguson, and others at Westminster. Closer to home, what you find upsetting is my criticism of the California faculty for failing to read the seminary situation accurately. And so you should. Now you write me on the defensive. I understand that reaction to what I have published. The question is, Who is right on the issues? You or me? Your letter simply reinforces my critique of the work being done (or rather, not being done) by the California faculty. This theological dispute demands resolution; the issues that continue to divide the Westminster (and Reformed) community cannot be ignored nor swept under the rug. (See Kline's "Covenant Theology Under Attack," published and distributed by the Parkwoods Orthodox Presbyterian Church.)

You express your admiration and esteem for the work of Meredith Kline, something shared by a number of individuals, not just those on the California faculty. Meredith has clearly and consistently expressed his position with regard to Gaffin's teaching. Meredith and I are in agreement in our assessment of the extent of the Gaffin-Shepherd teaching within Westminster. How thoroughly have you discussed these matters with Meredith - in keeping with your "deep concern" and desire now to "vigorously" promote Reformed orthodoxy within the Westminster school and beyond?

There's more that can and should be said by way of reply to your letter. But these few comments offer you some indication of my resolve to stay the course. There will be no reconsideration of the matter on my part. (I've done my homework. I've read the relevant material. You, on the other hand, are absolutely certain that I am the one who is mistaken. We stand at an impasse.) In closing, the charge that I have employed the "guilt by association" method is entirely fallacious and unfounded. You do need to read carefully and thoughtfully my collected writings in *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR; Wipf and Stock, 2000) before engaging in conversation. Shepherd's book occasions a second opportunity for you and your colleagues to investigate afresh the doctrinal issues in this ongoing dispute within

Westminster Seminary, East and West. How well prepared are you and your colleagues to challenge Gaffin's promotion of Shepherd's theology? This question is something that needs to be discussed at length and in earnest. (You have assumed the position of spokesman for Westminster West.) My prayer is that the Spirit of the Lord will supply leaders in the church possessing wisdom, strength, and courage for witness to the biblical and Reformed faith at this critical hour. As I see it, there will be no third opportunity. What is done now will determine Westminster's future. That is simply the point I am making in my critique to which you have taken sharp opposition.

Respectfully yours,

Mark W. Karlberg

cc: John Robbins, Meredith G. Kline, W. Robert Godfrey, and Michael S. Horton

Letter from John M. Frame to Dr. Robbins

Reformed Theological Seminary
Orlando, Florida
Received May 1, 2001

Dear John,

Recently my name came up in an article by Mark Karlberg and a response to that article by R. Scott Clark. What follows is a somewhat revised version of a letter I wrote a friend who inquired about the exchange. Feel free to use it, or not, as you wish.

As for my role in the Karlberg-Clark exchange, I'm amused that suddenly I am said to have left WTS over the Shepherd issue. In the paper I wrote to colleagues that precipitated the final break, I don't believe I ever mentioned Shepherd or justification. I never taught soteric justification at WTS, and I pretty much avoided the issue beyond stating our points of agreement, since I knew there were hard feelings on the subject. I have never discussed it in my writings at any length, though in DKG I rather deplored the treatment of Shepherd (without naming him).

The controversy raged in the late '70s, and S. was dismissed in 1981, after I had left for California in

1980. I used to boast to people about the unity of our California faculty, that though we had some vigorous opponents of Shepherd (Godfrey, Kline), a supporter of Shepherd (me) and a supporter of the compromise that led to his dismissal (Strimple), we had managed to avoid controversy and got along fine. It seemed that the terrible divisions of the Philadelphia campus had not made the journey west. But at one horrendous faculty meeting in Oct., 99, several colleagues started accusing me of everything but the Kennedy assassination, and at that point one man (who was still a kid when the controversy raged) decided to remind everybody that twenty years ago I had supported Shepherd. We had, maybe, an exchange on that subject that lasted less than two minutes.

From my point of view, Shepherd had very little to do with my leaving. I could easily have continued teaching at WTS if the only problem was that we held different views about Shepherd. The issues as I saw them were the seminary's growing attachment to strict subscriptionism and traditionalism (see my paper on *Sola Scriptura* in my *Contemporary Worship Music*, and my piece on traditionalism at www.thirdmill.org), their rigid views on worship and culture (following the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals), their intolerance of dissent, the quality of teaching appointments, the pastoral modeling given to the students, the atmosphere of militant partisanship in the faculty and student body, the evident opposition to open-facing, evangelistic ministries of the "New Life" type. I never voluntarily mentioned Shepherd or Shepherd's views in any of the discussions that led to my resignation, and that subject never came up except for the aforementioned two-minute exchange.

As I informed my colleagues, my views of justification are precisely those of the Westminster Standards. I have never used Shepherd's language (that works are "necessary for" justification), and I consider it highly misleading. However, the question in the late '70s was not the felicity of Shepherd's formulations, but their orthodoxy. Shepherd always insisted that the "necessity" he argued for was necessity as evidence. Based on James 2, he wanted to argue that works are an inevitable, necessary fruit of justifying faith. (He also appealed to WCF 15.3 on the "necessity" of repentance.) Since I've studied logic, I understand there is a difference between a necessary condition and an

efficient cause. Works are not the efficient cause of salvation, but they are necessarily present where saving faith is present. I prefer not to use "necessary" in this way, but I did and do consider this language to be orthodox.

I was sorry to see Shepherd get fired, because his firing was an injustice, and at that point we lost a very brilliant, godly, and orthodox scholar. At the same time, I didn't sympathize with Norman's attempt to tag all his opponents with evil names (Lutheran, Arminian, Baptist, etc.) In doing that he injured his own cause, contributed to the atmosphere of partisanship, and magnified the issue beyond its proper importance.

As for the larger theological constructions (Fuller, Sanders, Kline), I've more or less avoided getting involved in all that. Those are worth discussing, but I think what we need at this time is thoughtful critical analysis, rather than heresy charges and polemics.

John M. Frame

TO JOHN FRAME, FROM MARK KARLBERG

Clarification and Comment

May 4, 2001

Dear John:

Your letter posted on Trinity Foundation's website necessitates a reply from me, since you have decided to air your opinions on aspects of the "Karlberg-Clark exchange." (To be accurate, Scott Clark initiated the exchange between the two of us.)

What I have to communicate to our interested readers is this: Juggler Frame, the artful perspectivalist (now you see it; now you don't), has done it again. You make contrary, contradictory statements. All the while, you continue deliberately to deceive the Christian community regarding the substantive issues in the Shepherd-Gaffin dispute. Let me explain in plain English. You say the issue is not "the felicity of Shepherd's formulations," which you claim are at once "highly misleading," yet "orthodox." Where's the "logic" here, John? You and others like you would like us to believe that the Shepherd dispute concerned merely the evidential character of good works in

justification. You need to read again *The Changing of the Guard* – or, perhaps, read for the first time – and then (and only then) contribute meaningfully to the present discussion and debate.

You write: "As for the larger theological constructions (Fuller, Sanders, Kline), I've more or less avoided getting involved in all that." Yet, at the same time, you are convinced that there is nothing here to be concerned about. You say "what we need at this time is thoughtful critical analysis, rather than heresy charges and polemics." (What are you implying about others who have been deeply involved these many years? You don't need to answer that question, John; it's intended to be rhetorical.) Clearly, you have settled on entertaining the Fuller-Sanders-Shepherd-Gaffin theology as a reasonable and faithful rendering of Scripture and of the Reformed faith. Although in Westminster's theological curriculum you may not have taught the class on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (which includes the doctrine of soteric justification), you have certainly expressed your opinions on these controverted matters freely in the classroom (I was there, John), in writing, and in conversations at every opportunity. The problem, as I see it, is one of pride and arrogance on your part and on the part of many others like you within Reformed academia. You presume to be above all criticism. Where is godly humility? It's still one of the Christian virtues, and one that you need to learn – all the more as you acknowledge your lack of interest in addressing polemical issues in contemporary Protestant-Reformed theology. As an apologist, you should know that polemics is *vital* in every age of church history, not an embarrassment from the past as you so frequently portray it. Heresy is still a threat to the exposition and defense of the gospel in our day. And as a church theologian you have the responsibility to guard the faith. But then again, I have already indicated in *The Changing of the Guard* that the times have indeed changed (partly because of your misrepresentations and misstatements of the truths of Scripture and the historic Reformed faith). As a "systematician" (at least in name), you have yet to learn that the Bible does contain a *harmonious system of truth*, that which the Reformed tradition – among others – has faithfully, though not perfectly, sought to explicate. (I do believe, however, that the Reformed tradition has done a better job in expounding and preserving the Biblical faith.)

It has been reported to me that your colleague and former student, Richard Pratt, has equated the decreative theology of the Westminster Standards with the Islamic doctrine of fatalism (as you may know, this has become a common criticism of historic Reformed theology in recent years). Is this report accurate? More importantly, John, is that doctrine worth preserving? Is classic covenant theology worth preserving? These are the questions I leave with you. In the meantime, I would encourage you to lay aside your pen and take up some good books this summer; the Reformed community would doubtless like to hear further from you, once you are prepared to give your studied opinion on the current state of evangelical-Reformed theology. You consider Shepherd to be a "brilliant" and "orthodox scholar." Reformed scholarship *demand*s a better take on the issues in this dispute concerning the doctrines of justification, the covenants, and election.

What I found amusing in your letter were the reasons you listed for leaving Westminster Seminary in California for Reformed Seminary in Orlando. You seem to be implying that Reformed Seminary is anti-traditionalist, anti-confessional (that is, anti-orthodox, defined in terms of an alleged "rationalistic scholasticism"), anti-polemical (that is, holding the attitude "live and let live," "believe what you want" – unless, of course, John Frame says otherwise), and Arminian in its understanding of evangelism (with reference to the message, method, and technique of gospel-evangelism; so complementing the Arminianism of Shepherd's "call to grace"). Whether or not this is what you are saying about Reformed Seminary, it does accurately describe the sentiments of many in the evangelical-Reformed camp today. Sad day, indeed, for the Reformed world.

Mark W. Karlberg

P.S. The paragraph which you asked John Robbins to delete from your letter posted here on The Trinity Foundation's website made reference to the appendices of your forthcoming book, *The Doctrine of God* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers). I'm hoping some attempt will be made by you to address my concerns and criticisms of your work in a straightforward and accurate manner. Up to this time, your response has been evasive and misleading; please,

abandon your clever sleight-of-hand. I think you can do better. Lastly, John, don't criticize my rhetoric – you are just as passionate in teaching contrary views and opinions. Let's be big enough to face the music.

By request, the following two letters are provided to our readers.

A: Richard Gaffin's Open Letter

May 19, 1981

To those concerned for the ministry of Westminster Seminary:

Recently you received an open communication concerning division within the Westminster Seminary community. Perhaps your reaction as you read was one of dismay and alarm--over the views of Professor Shepherd, as reported to you, and that a majority of both the board and the faculty of the seminary have in fact exonerated him.

Such a reaction is hardly surprising, nor is it the unintended effect of those who signed the communication. But I ask you now also to assess this communication in the light of the following observations.

1. Is this communication the constructive or even proper way to prosecute concerns about doctrinal error? Does it really serve the well-being of the church to widely publicize loosely supported allegations of serious doctrinal error? Why have the signers of the communication who, along with Mr. Shepherd, are members of Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church become involved in spreading these accusations, while persistently refusing, despite the express directive of the presbytery, to institute orderly judicial proceedings against Mr. Shepherd? Why haven't the other signers refused to become involved, at least until the procedure has been followed which is designed to protect the concerns of both Mr. Shepherd and the entire church? One thing is certain: the effect of this communication has been to undermine, without due process, what is most precious to Mr. Shepherd as a seminary professor, the confidence in him of the churches he is seeking to serve.

I hesitate to dwell on this point, because it so easily gives rise to the suspicion of evasion, of diverting attention from doctrinal issues and responsibility to "procedural matters." But no doctrinal issue, no matter how important it is deemed or in fact is, warrants wrong or questionable procedures. I have no doubt that the signers of the communication have acted out of conviction and are ready to defend what they have done. But I am bound to ask whether they have not in fact withheld from Mr. Shepherd the elemental Gospel righteousness of treating him as they would have him treat them (Luke 6:31).

2. Turning to the contents of the communication, I can't try here to put out every fire that is lit. Before focussing on the most substantial consideration, I want to make several brief observations that ought not to be overlooked.

a) All of the quotations from Mr. Shepherd's writings on pp. 2-5 of the December 4, 1980 letter to the Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary are taken and strung together out of context. (Even at that it is difficult to find fault with some of them. Take for example the quotations beginning at the bottom of p. 2 under the heading, "(Our Knowledge of Election is Through the Covenant)." Does anyone really question that the relationship between God and man is covenantal in its entirety? that there is not one word of special revelation that is given outside the context of God's covenantal dealings with his people? that salvation in all its aspects is the work of Christ as mediator of the new covenant? that every benefit of salvation, including the knowledge and assurance of our eternal election, is received, by faith, only in covenantal union with Christ? Presumably the response would be that Mr. Shepherd means something different, an erroneous election-covenant dichotomy. But that is just what remains to be proved and what these quotations, as presented, do not substantiate.)

b) The Thirty-four Theses of Mr. Shepherd were prepared by him as a basis for discussion within his presbytery and were defended by him in those discussions. Taken out of that context and read apart from those discussions they function in a way he did not intend. They are not meant as a full or balanced statement of his views on justification.

c) On page 1 of the December 4, 1980 letter you read of well-known Reformed scholars who have rejected Mr. Shepherd's position. What you are not told is that these judgments were

privately solicited by two opponents of Mr. Shepherd's views, in a manner which I and others consider something less than impartial. Nor are you informed of those whose responses were either supportive or recognized the legitimacy of Mr. Shepherd's views. And I know of one person--no one is better known or has greater influence in the English-speaking Reformed world--who did not reply because he did not believe he had been given adequate material to form a responsible judgment.

Possibly more objective is the assessment of the Lutheran scholar, Professor Milton L. Rudnick of Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota. In a recent study, American Evangelicals on Justification, published in mimeograph form, he summarizes and analyzes the responses to a survey form sent by him to the exegetical and systematic theology departments of a number of Reformed and evangelical seminaries. Considerable attention is given to the situation at Westminster (pp. 9-11, 13-17). He states, on the basis of the response to his survey questions, "Professor Shepherd articulates a clear, strong, traditional Presbyterian view of the basic content of justification" (p. 9), which also reflects "essential agreement" with Lutheran confessional theology

(p. 10). (Where he does see the difference between Shepherd and some within the Westminster community is on the relationship between justification and sanctification, namely, at the point of Shepherd's emphasis on sanctification as a benefit, coordinate with justification, flowing directly from union with Christ (pp. 16f.); cf. for a similar stress, J. Murray, Collected Writings, II(The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977): 286f.).

d) I ask you to consider the inherent implausibility of the position taken by the signers of the communication. The issue, as they see it is not some subsidiary point of doctrine; the heart of the gospel itself is allegedly at stake. This means that the majority of the board and faculty, and by implication, the vast majority of Mr. Shepherd's students in recent years, either support or are blind to a fundamental distortion of the gospel. This, though not impossible, is just not plausible. Westminster Seminary students are known for a lot things, but lamb-like docility is not one of them. If the heart of the gospel were truly in jeopardy, a massive hue and cry without end would have arisen long ago. In this respect the communication does a disservice to recent students at Westminster.

3. I ask you now to consider, necessarily at somewhat greater length, how the communication defines the basic issue of its concern. That is said to be whether justification is by faith with its works or by faith apart from its works (letter of 12/4/80, p. 6, para. 4; cf. letter of 5/4/81, p. 1, para. 5). Mr. Shepherd is in fundamental error because he holds to the former, "a clear and unambiguous witness to the truth of the gospel of grace"(letter of 5/4/81, p. 2, top) depends on maintaining the latter. I find this way of stating the basic issue of the controversy to be itself ambiguous, the source of considerable confusion, and one of the roots of the division among us.

a) Consider the Westminster Confession of Faith, XI, 2: "Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love." A proper paraphrase of this is to say that faith, contemplated just as justifying faith, the alone instrument of justification, is not alone, but works by love; that is, (justifying) faith is not "apart from its works."

No doubt further qualifications are necessary to guard this statement against misunderstanding and wrong inferences, but this does not invalidate the statement itself or its important truth. Perhaps it will be said that Mr. Shepherd means something different than the Confession, but that difference, if it exists, remains to be proved and at any rate is not identified by the way the communication defines the basic issue of conflict.

b) On page 6 of the letter of 12/4/80, paragraph 3, both John Murray and Calvin are quoted in support of the basic position of the communication. All of these quotations are taken from their contexts and made to say what they do not intend. I limit myself here to Calvin. A careful reading of the quoted statements in context will discover that in each instance Calvin's controlling concern is with the idea of merit, to deny emphatically that anything other than the finished righteousness of Christ, imputed to the sinner and received by faith, merits justification. What he is resolutely opposing is the "merit(s) of works" (Institutes, III:11:13; III:11:18), various Roman Catholic efforts to establish a "righteousness . . . composed of faith and works" (III:11:13) as the ground or basis or meritorious cause of justification; also he is opposing anything

that would deny the sole instrumentality of faith. In what other respects (than as ground or instrument) good works may or may not stand in relation to justification and faith is simply not within the purview of these statements.

This is confirmed by a highly instructive passage elsewhere in Calvin, recently called to my attention. It is from his commentary on Ezekiel 18:14-17 and has the distinction of being among the last, perhaps in fact the last, of his comments on the relationship among justification, faith and works, having apparently been written shortly before his death in 1564. It is perhaps, too, his most pointed commentary on their interrelationship. An excerpt of some length is provided here, because it needs to be read carefully and digested, and because it addresses so directly the basic issue as seen by the communication (Commentaries on the Prophet Ezekiel, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 238):

When, therefore, we say that the faithful are esteemed just even in their deeds, this is not stated as a cause of their salvation, and we must diligently notice that the cause of salvation is excluded from this doctrine; for, when we discuss the cause, we must look nowhere else but to the mercy of God, and there we must stop. But although works tend in no way to the cause of justification, yet, when the elect sons of God were justified freely by faith, at the same time their works are esteemed righteous by the same gratuitous liberality. Thus it still remains true, that faith without works justifies, although this needs prudence and a sound interpretation; for this proposition, that faith without works justifies is true and yet false, according to the different senses which it bears. The proposition, that faith without works justifies by itself, is false, because faith without works is void. But if the clause "without works" is joined with the word "justifies," the proposition will be true. Therefore faith cannot justify when it is without works, because it is dead, and a mere fiction. He who is born of God is just, as John says. (1 John v. 18.) Thus faith can be no more separated

from works than the sun from his heat: yet faith justifies without works, because works form no reason for our justification; but faith alone reconciles us to God, and causes him to love us, not in ourselves, but in his only-begotten Son.

You will see that Calvin considers the proposition, taken by itself, that faith without works justifies (remember, this is where the signers of the communication take their basic stand), to be ambiguous. It "needs prudence and sound interpretation"; it is "true yet false," depending on the way it is read. Pinpointed grammatically, Calvin is saying that when the prepositional phrase, without works, is taken adverbially, with the verb, justifies, the proposition, faith without works justifies, is true. But when the prepositional phrase is taken as an adjective, with the noun, faith, then the proposition is false. By itself, Calvin asserts, faith does not justify, "because faith without works is void." Again, "faith cannot justify when it is without works, because it is dead and a mere fiction." Calvin is saying in effect, to try to focus the balance of his remarks: faith (with its works) justifies (without works).

The significance of this passage from Calvin for the controversy at Westminster Seminary is difficult to overestimate. In it, the great Reformer, who had such an unparalleled grasp of the doctrine of justification by faith, shows himself to have wrestled until his death with an issue which has concerned Mr. Shepherd and others, but which the signers of the communication seem to consider false as well as misleading and harmful to the church. Further, so far as the communication defines the basic issue on which the grace of the gospel depends, Calvin does not stand with the signers. Rather he would reject their statement of the issue as ambiguous and misleading, and if forced to decide between the alternatives "with its works" or "apart from its works" (in an adjectival sense), there can be little doubt that he would choose for the former.

c) But what now about Bavinck? He is cited (p. 6) as the crowning witness on behalf of the communication, and his language serves its formulation of the basic issue. Is he in conflict with Calvin? Here again it has to be said that the communication in quoting him out of context has given his words a sense he did not intend.

This can be seen by referring to the attachment (see p. 8 [addendum]), which gives

the sentences cited by the communication in their immediate context. (This translation, by the way, was readily available to me, because it is part of a longer section of Bavinck which Mr. Shepherd had taken the time to have translated, just because it expresses his views and concerns.) I ask you to stop here and take the time to read it over carefully before you go on to my observations.

The "distinction mentioned" at the beginning of the excerpt is the distinction, in the application of redemption, between active and passive justification, which Bavinck has been discussing at some length. Now, in the excerpt, he focusses on the nature of faith, in the light of this distinction. Two things, then, are immediately plain: he is discussing justifying faith and he is concerned to show that it is both a "receptive organ" and an "active power." (This in itself has relevance to the communication, some of whose signers have insisted we must affirm that faith as it justifies is exclusively passive or receptive. Bavinck is arguing that that kind of emphasis is wrong because onesided.)

In the first paragraph Bavinck describes the receptive or passive character of justifying faith. In the second paragraph, where just about in the middle are found the sentences quoted in the communication, he argues at somewhat greater length that justifying faith is "at bottom a living and active faith, and it does not stand opposed to all work in every respect." This, we may say, is the topic sentence, the controlling thesis of the entire paragraph.

From this you can see how the communication has misconstrued Bavinck. The communication brings together quotations from Murray, Calvin and Bavinck to say plainly in effect, if not outright, that in the matter of justification faith is opposed to all work in every respect (and that the basic, gospel-subverting error of Mr. Shepherd, either shared or supported by the majority of the Board and Faculty of Westminster Seminary, is that he denies this). Bavinck, in fact, denies this: justifying faith is not opposed to all work in every respect.

Having stated this as the negative side of the key thought of the paragraph, Bavinck proceeds to differentiate and to spell out the different respects in which justifying faith is and is not properly opposed to works. He says it is properly opposed [sic] to the works of the law, taken either as the material cause (ground) of justification or as the instrument of justification. Further, justifying faith is properly opposed

to the works of faith, specifically when these (or even faith itself) are taken as the ground of justification.

But, Bavinck continues, (justifying) faith is wrongly opposed to working, if it is opposed to works per se, as if justifying faith is dead and inactive. Here, then, follow the two sentences quoted in the communication. Note that in context they have a qualifying, virtually parenthetical character.

The first sentence intends to remove the misconception that the Reformers were contending for a dead or inactive faith. It must be fully appreciated from the rest of the paragraph how Bavinck means this: what was not at issue for the Reformers is that (justifying) faith is living and active in the sense that it is "the principle of all good works" (17 lines from the bottom) and a "living faith, faith that includes and brings forth good works" (9 lines from the bottom). The living, active character of justifying faith is specifically its working character.

The second quoted sentence is Bavinck's statement of the real issue between Rome and the Reformation. Unless we are to find him in flat contradiction with himself, its terms must be understood in the light of the rest of the paragraph. The prepositional phrases, "with its works" and "apart from its works," are not intended by him in a sweeping, undifferentiated way. Rather, his preceding discussion in the paragraph plainly shows how they are to be understood: "with its works" has in view the introduction of works as in some sense the ground of justification; "apart from its works" refers to the rejection of works as in any sense the ground of justification. In other words, the prepositional phrases are adverbial (modifying "justifies"), not adjectival (modifying "faith"), as they are misconstrued by the communication in its statement of the basic issue.

(Bavinck also maintains that faith is not to be opposed to the works of faith insofar as the latter are a means of assurance. But this thought, it should be noted, is additional to what he has already said about the basic character of faith as active, working.)

Bavinck's discussion prompts several other remarks. (1) We are presuming ourselves to be wiser than and going beyond men like Bavinck (and Calvin and, most importantly, I believe it can be shown, Scripture), when, in discussing justification, we absolutize the opposition of faith to good works so as to exclude works other than as the ground and/or the instrument. This is the presumption of

the communication. There has always been room within the Reformed tradition to say, with Galatians 5:6, for instance, that justifying faith is working faith.

(2) Consider the following statements abstracted from Bavinck (beginning 8 lines from the bottom of the excerpt). "The faith that justifies" is a "faith that includes and brings forth good works." "Not the more passive, but the more lively and the more powerful it [faith] is, so much the more does it justify us." I submit that these statements, isolated and read as just given, are as bold and venturesome, and perhaps unsettling, as anything Mr. Shepherd has said or written. Yet they make an important biblical point, as do, I believe, Mr. Shepherd's statements on justifying faith, when they are read in context.

(3) Toward the end Bavinck touches on the perennial question of the relationship between Paul and James. Sane along the signers have insisted, in opposing Mr. Shepherd's views, that the only way the two can be reconciled and the grace of the gospel preserved is by holding that each is talking about a different justification. Bavinck disagrees. "It is indeed not right," he says, "to say that Paul speaks only of the 'justification of the sinner' and James of 'the justification of the just.'" And, after noting their common concerns, he observes the "only . . . difference" is "that Paul contends against dead works and James declaims against dead faith." J. Gresham Machen, for one, takes essentially the sane position (The New Testament. An Introduction to its Literature and History (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), pp. 238f.).

I recognize that the communication raises other points. But I have focussed on what its signers tell us is the basic issue. I have tried to show that those fathers in the faith to whom the communication appeals in support of its "clear and unambiguous witness to the truth of the gospel of grace," and in fact precisely at the points of appeal, turn out rather to occupy ground which is close, if not identical, to where Mr. Shepherd and those who support him are standing. A strange and confusing situation. It leaves me wondering where we really are and to ask the signers of the communication, in particular, to consider that the real issue is the unedifying fact that we are guilty of largely talking past each other. For the sake of the purity and peace of the Reformed community isn't it imperative that somehow we try together to discover why this is?

It has been difficult for me to write this to you. I do so with a deep sense of discouragement and loss. For the past five years I, along with others, have labored to contain the controversy at Westminster within the seminary community, not because we were trying to keep it under wraps or evade our accountability to the church, but because of our conviction that the controversy had begun there and should end there.

Others, however, have seen fit to take it into the church at large. So some response has seemed necessary. For the basic issue in the terms of the communication, some of us are convinced, is not the gospel of the gratuitously imputed, justifying righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone—which we gratefully and cordially confess from the heart—but whether all are ready to confess, with Bavinck and others, that living, justifying faith is both active and passive, that the faith that accepts, receives, and rests upon Christ alone for justification is an active abandonment of ourselves to the Savior, a restless repose in his righteousness.

But there is another basic issue, as some of us see it, that has not really been touched on here. That is whether in our midst Scripture will still have the last word, whether the whole counsel of God will be something more than what we imagine we already have under our control and have already mastered with our theological structures and doctrinal formulations. Will we, too, as the church must in every time and place, continue to return there to be reconfirmed and, when necessary, corrected in our faith, and, above all, to discover there the inexhaustible and "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8)?

My hope is still that all parties concerned with the controversy at Westminster Seminary desire the sane answer to this question.

Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

Addendum

(Bavinck, Gereformeerde Dogmatiek, 4th ed. (1930), pp. 206f.)

Thirdly, the distinction mentioned makes it possible for us to conceive of faith at the same time as a receptive organ and as an active power. If justification in every respect comes about after faith, faith

becomes a condition, an activity, which must be performed by man beforehand, and it cannot be purely receptive. But if the righteousness, on the ground of which we are justified, lies wholly outside of us in Christ Jesus, then it can obviously only become ours through our childlike acceptance of it. "Remission of sins is the thing promised on account of Christ. Therefore it cannot be accepted except by faith alone, for a promise cannot be accepted except by faith alone." Faith is therefore not a "material cause" or a "formal cause," it is not even a condition or instrument of justification, for it stands in relation to justification not as, for example, the eye to seeing or the ear to hearing; it is not a condition, upon which, not an instrument or organ, through which we receive this benefit, but it is the acceptance itself of Christ and all his benefits, as He offers himself to us through word and Spirit, and it includes therefore also the consciousness, that He is my Lord and I am his possession. Faith is therefore not an instrument in the proper sense, of which man makes use in order to accept Christ, but it is a sure knowledge and a solid confidence which the Holy Spirit works in the heart and through which He persuades and assures man that he, notwithstanding all his sins, has part in Christ and in all his benefits.

But if this faith is saving faith, then it cannot be "historical knowledge" or a "bare assent;" it is at bottom a living and active faith, and it does not stand opposed to all work in every respect. It forms a contrast with the works of the law in a double sense, namely therein, that these works can be neither the "material cause" nor the "instrumental cause" of justification. It also stands opposed to the works of faith (infused righteousness, obedience, love) the moment these are to any degree viewed as the ground of justification, as forming as a whole or in part that righteousness on the ground of which God justifies us; for that is Christ and Christ alone; faith itself is not the ground of justification and thus also neither are the good works which come forth from it. But faith does not stand opposed to works, if one were to mean by that, that only a dead, inactive faith can justify us. For the quarrel between Rome and the Reformation did not have to do with whether we are justified by an active or inactive faith, or by a living or a dead faith. But the question was, just as it was for Paul, whether faith with its works, or whether faith apart from its works, justifies us before God and in our consciences. And further, faith does not stand opposed to the works of faith, in so far as these, as the fruit of faith are used

by the Holy Spirit as a means to assure the believer of the sincerity of his faith and thus of his salvation. In this sense faith itself is a work, John 6:29, the best work and the principle of all good works. Therefore the Reformed also said that it is indeed "faith alone which justifies, but however, faith which justifies is not alone," and they spoke in addition to the "justification of the sinner" also of a "justification of the righteous." In this sense also Paul and James are not in contradiction to each other. It is indeed not right to say that Paul speaks only of the "justification of the sinner" and James of the "justification of the just." Rather, both deny that the ground of justification lies in the works of the law, and both recognize that faith, living faith, faith that includes and brings forth good works is the means by which the Holy Spirit assures us of our righteousness in Christ. In this there is only this difference, that Paul contends against dead works and James declaims against dead faith. The faith that justifies is the assurance wrought in our hearts by the Holy Spirit of our righteousness in Christ. And therefore, not the more passive, but the more lively and the more powerful it is, so much the more does it justify us. Faith works together with works and is perfected by works, James 2:22.

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B: Letter to the Committee of Forty-Five

12330 Conway Rd.

St. Louis, Missouri 63141

March 7, 1983

Dear Committee of Forty-Five:

Since our last communication with one another, several events have transpired, some of which you may not be aware:

(1) The Board of Westminster Seminary adopted a letter expressing gratitude to us for our devotion to the well-being of the Seminary. Only a very few of us actually have received a copy of this letter.

(2) The Executive Committee of the Board drew up and adopted an eighteen-page paper entitled "Reasons and Specifications

Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd Approved by the Executive Committee of the Board" and dated February 26, 1982. Although the paper begins and ends by noting that theological charges of demonstrated error in Mr. Shepherd's teaching never were drawn up formally, it nonetheless makes it quite clear throughout the bulk of the paper that the reasons for Mr. Shepherd's dismissal were indeed theological. At its recent meeting in February of 1983, the Board reiterated its commitment to distribute this paper to all who write to the Seminary requesting it.

(3) The Faculty in its most recent communication to us has totally ignored the existence of this paper. Their position is tantamount to a continuing support of the theology of Norman Shepherd, and a defense of its own position that his theological formulations were not in error.

This attitude must be treated with the seriousness it deserves. If the assessment of Mr. Shepherd's theology in the paper specifying the reasons for his dismissal is correct, he has departed from the system of theology in the Westminster standards in the areas of justification, the covenant and assurance. For the faculty now to ignore these findings could have the gravest consequences for the Seminary.

(4) The Faculty also has stated explicitly that they have instituted no sanctions regarding faculty appointments with respect to signers of the May 4, 1981 letter. This assertion is flatly contradictory to a letter by a member of Westminster's faculty which explicitly states that the signing of the May 4 letter was a reason a person who had served the seminary for over forty(!) years was not reappointed. The letter indicates that the faculty had denied an appointment to at least one other signer as well. The pertinent paragraph reads as follows:

However, I ought not to veil from you that another factor in our decision has had to be the May 4, 1981 letter and your involvement with it. Discussion in connection with a previous action of the faculty, defeating a proposed appointment for another signer of the May 4th letter, made it clear to us that an appointment for you would not pass also. While I fully supported this earlier action of the faculty, I personally wish very much that an exception could be made for you. But at the same time I have had

to recognize that I could not make a convincing case to the faculty for such an exception. Please believe me when I say this has been a source of much sadness for me. I am more than willing to discuss this with you.

(5) The special committee of the OPC Presbytery of Philadelphia has made a preliminary decision that charges ought to be brought against the twelve signers of the May 4, 1981 letter who are members of their presbytery. This action has the effect of implicating all of us. If they are found guilty, then all of us by implication are found guilty. Ironically, we could be the ones on trial, while Mr. Shepherd never has been brought formally to trial, due to his withdrawing his appeal before the Board of the Seminary after the paper declaring the reasons for his dismissal had been readied for a hearing, and due to his transferring to the Christian Reformed Church just at the point that charges had been filed once more in the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the OPC.

In the light of these developments, what should be done? The easier course would be to ignore the situation. But such a course could have awesome repercussions on our own ministries, as well as on the advancement of the true gospel.

So we propose the following:

(1) That we form an "Ad Interim Committee" so that we can respond more readily to developing situations.

(2) That the Ad Interim Committee consist of Calvin Cummings, W. Robert Godfrey, Arthur Kuschke, Palmer Robertson and Paul G. Settle, and that the Ad Interim Committee be encouraged to act in defense of our original letter, and for the promotion of the true gospel. It will of course be understood that any individual will have the right of registering his dissent in any way he chooses to any action of the Ad Interim Committee.

(3) That the Ad Interim Committee be authorized to establish an occasional letter to help the church become aware of the significance of this issue.

(4) That the enclosed letter to the Westminster Faculty be adopted for mailing to the Faculty and Board of Westminster.

(5) That the enclosed covering letter to the Westminster Board be adopted for mailing to the Board of Westminster.

We realize that these actions represent serious steps. But we are convinced that each is necessary for the maintenance of the gospel.

We hope to hear from each one of you within ten days. Your cooperation in this matter is most important.

Sincerely yours,

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May 16, 2001

Christian Renewal
P.O. Box 770
Lewiston, NY 14092

Letter to the Editor:

Doug Barnes in the May 14, 2001, issue of *Christian Renewal* (page 9) reports on the exchange between Scott Clark and myself. In that report Barnes notes Clark's outrage over the placement of his letter addressed to me on The Trinity Foundation's website. (The Trinity Foundation published my expose of the teaching of Westminster Seminary in *The Changing of the Guard* [2001], available both on the website and as a separate publication.) In this letter Clark specifies: "I am writing to you in confidence and I will be glad to hear from you privately" (p. 5). Barnes draws attention to Clark's directive: the letter "was intended to remain private correspondence." Here are the facts – (1) At the time of writing Clark circulated copies of this "private" communication addressed to me to Michael Horton, Bob Godfrey, and Meredith Kline. (Clark, Horton, and Godfrey are the leading figures in the current attack upon the Shepherd teaching in the URC); (2) what Clark intended to say was that this exchange between the five of us was to be an *internal* matter. I never

agreed to such a "gentleman's agreement" (I am reminded here of the false reading placed by Darryl Hart on the meeting of the Covenant Roundtable convened at Westminster's Philadelphia campus in the recent past in the attempt to resolve the ongoing theological dispute over justification and the covenants; see my *The Changing of the Guard*, pp. 40-41 [for the record: none of the participants at the Roundtable recall any such "gentleman's agreement"]). In both cases, the attempt has been made to restrict discussion and debate within the narrow confines of Westminster Seminary. That will not happen.

A theological and moral offense has been committed by the administration and faculty of Westminster Seminary. The time has come for *public exposure* of doctrinal error now being actively disseminated by those professors sympathetic to Shepherd's teaching. The question remains to what extent Westminster West is party to misrepresentation and obfuscation of the facts. Clark has done a great disservice to the California faculty, and it's time for President Godfrey to assume the reins. Whether that will happen or not remains to be seen.

In closing, Barnes labels me as "controversial." Here's an example of persistent falsification and misrepresentation of the truth. It is Norman Shepherd and those of his theological stripe who are the controversial ones. I am only defending the teaching of confessional Reformed orthodoxy. Is that a problem for Barnes (and others in the URC, the OPC, and the PCA)? That question must be answered in the affirmative. If there were any doubts before, it should now be clear that this is what the current dispute in the URC is all about. I do wish that Clark, Horton, and Godfrey would not equivocate on the issues, as seems to be the case in recent reporting concerning developments associated with the URC overture now being contested so fiercely.