

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

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

Number 346 © 2018 The Trinity Foundation Post Office Box 68, Unicoi, Tennessee 37692 January, February 2018  
Email: [tjtrinityfound@aol.com](mailto:tjtrinityfound@aol.com) Website: [www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org) Telephone: 423.743.0199 Fax: 423.743.2005

## “False Light” After 500 Years

By Brad K. Gsell

*Editor's note: Brad Gsell is the President for the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and the Editor for Redeeming the Time quarterly publication. He is an elder in the Bible Presbyterian Church Faith Presbytery. This article first appeared in the Summer 2017 issue of Redeeming the Time. It is used by permission and slightly edited. For a copy of the original article you may write to Redeeming the Time, Post Office Box 26281, Charlotte, North Carolina 28221-6281, or visit their web site at <http://rttpublications.org>.*

With “prayers of repentance and lamentation for past divisions,”<sup>1</sup> the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) met with leaders of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Church Unity (PCPCU), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the World Methodist Council (WMC), and others, in a major ecumenical event. The ceremony, held on July 5, 2017, was to mark the association of the WCRC with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, first signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the LWF in 1999.<sup>2</sup> The WMC affirmed the Declaration in 2006. Letters of encouragement were received from Pope Francis, Eastern

Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and the World Council of Churches.<sup>3</sup>

Held during the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, the ceremony was held in the *Stadtkirche* (Town Church) in Wittenberg, Germany, where Martin Luther once preached. Instead of celebrating the Reformation principles brought to light from the Scriptures by Luther and the other Reformers, the event was an insult to this Biblical heritage, which revolutionized the church and the world at large.

The action of signing this Joint Declaration was in effect a repudiation of these Reformation principles — *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), *Solus Christus* (in Christ alone), and *Soli Deo Gloria* (for the glory of God alone).

The Joint Declaration declares that the “condemnations” found in the Protestant Confessions and the Canons and Decrees of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent “are still valid today and thus have a church-dividing effect.” However, the remainder of the document declares that the churches have come to “new insights,” and that “the divisive questions and condemnations” are now seen in “a new light.” “By appropriating insights of recent Biblical studies and drawing on modern investigations of the history of theology and dogma, post-Vatican II ecumenical dialogue has led to a notable convergence concerning justification....” Because of this new “consensus,” “the corresponding doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to today’s partner.”

Were the Reformers mistaken on the doctrine of justification by “faith alone”? Has Roman Catholicism

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Brown, “WCC Hails Wittenberg Declaration Aiming to Overcome Reformation Divisions,” World Council of Churches press release, July 5, 2017, <https://pres-outlook.org/2017/07/wcc-hails-wittenberg-declaration-aiming-overcome-reformation-divisions/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Gryboski, “Reformed Church Body Signs Declaration on Justification to ‘Overcome Divisions’ with Catholic Church,” *The Christian Post*, July 10, 2017, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/reformed-church-body-signs-declaration-on-justification-to-overcome-divisions-with-catholic-church-191494/>, December 28, 2017. — *Editor*.

<sup>3</sup> See note 1 above.

changed its doctrine to eliminate the necessity of human “merit” for salvation? The answer to both these questions is No. The “new insights” discovered by these men and organizations in recent times is a clear result of their apostasy and departure from the Scriptures, which never change.

Such agreements can only take place because of several important factors:

1. Most of the leaders of these “Protestant” organizations have long ago discarded belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and in the doctrines clearly presented there. Through tortuous theological obfuscation, the clear and original meanings of Bible terms have often been supplanted with definitions far removed from what the Bible teaches.

2. The desire for “Christian unity” is given greater place than the desire for purity and obedience to God’s Word. True unity always requires fidelity to the truth of Scripture.

3. Advocates of the social gospel, Liberation Theology and other such heretical movements often wrest theological terms from their Biblical meaning to be deceptively applied to so-called “social justice.” All Christians are to care for the poor and disadvantaged, but these men often advocate an unbiblical, utopian, socialistic agenda. This replacement of the Scriptural emphasis on God and all His attributes, the duty God requires of man, and the true Gospel of Jesus Christ leads to a dangerous and unwarranted misunderstanding of what the Scriptures teach.

4. Vague, and often incomprehensible, statements are made which are difficult to nail down and thus often allow different meanings to be held by the most ardent Christ denier, as well as by the compromising evangelical. This practice is seen in pronouncements both of liberal Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church, and allows for a false unity.

Years ago, Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng stated concerning the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent that “the Church...never looked at these decisions as rigid and frozen formulations, but rather as living signposts for continued research...”<sup>4</sup> This, of course, is not true to historical fact. Many of the statements in the Canons of Trent bear an “anathema” if one fails to hold to Rome’s doctrine. Merriam-Webster defines “anathema” as “a ban or curse solemnly pronounced by ecclesiastical authority and accompanied by excommunication.” Does this sound like Trent was

issuing “living signposts for continued research”? But ecumenical documents are full of such doublespeak in order to bring together what has hitherto been unreconcilable.

Interestingly enough, Küng made this comment in a book about Protestant theologian Karl Barth, who was the principle advocate of Neo-Orthodoxy, a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century movement which itself spoke in vague terms and redefined Biblical terms to fit “new insights.”

Despite all the “new insights,” the present, official Roman Catholic *Catechism* still teaches its long-standing heresies.

### **Rome Still Mixes Sanctification with Justification, which Strikes at the Heart of the Gospel**

Rome still holds a doctrine which mixes sanctification with justification. The answer to *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Question 33 declares: “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” The answer to Question 35 states: “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” The *work* of sanctification always accompanies justification and begins in the new believer immediately, but it is distinct from the instantaneous *act* of justification and has no saving merit of its own.

Yet, the Roman Catholic *Catechism*, quoting Trent, states: “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.”<sup>5</sup> Rome teaches that because of Christ’s work we are *infused* with righteousness by the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are *actually* made righteous. The Bible teaches that we are guilty sinners who have Christ’s righteousness *imputed* to us. To put it very succinctly, our justification comes from what Christ did *for* us, not in any goodness *within* us.

This unbiblical teaching of Rome sets the stage for additional heresies.

### **Rome Still Believes in a Doctrine of “Merit,” “Cooperation with the Spirit” and “Good Works.”**

Rome still believes in a doctrine of faith plus works. The official Roman Catholic *Catechism* states:

Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of

---

<sup>4</sup> Hans Küng, *The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 101.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC hereafter), Second Edition (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1994, 1997), 482.

forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life.<sup>6</sup>

In several other places, the Roman Catholic *Catechism* states: “The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man’s free acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful.”<sup>7</sup> “Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods.”<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, the Council of Trent had declared:

If anyone says that the good works of the justified man are gifts of God in such a way that they are not also the good merits of the justified himself, or that the justified person, by the good works he performs through the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ (whose living member he is), does not truly merit an increase in grace, eternal life, the attainment of eternal life itself (if he dies in grace), and even an increase in glory, let him be anathema.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere, it stated: “If anyone says that...[good] works themselves are solely fruits and signs of justification received, and not also a cause of its increase, let him be anathema.”<sup>10</sup>

Trent further declared:

If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema.<sup>11</sup>

Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge wrote:

---

<sup>6</sup> CCC, 487, ¶2010.

<sup>7</sup> CCC, 486, ¶2008.

<sup>8</sup> CCC, 490, ¶2027.

<sup>9</sup> *Dogmatic Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Trent hereafter), Canon 32, Session VI, January 13, 1547 (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1912), 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Trent*, Canon 24, 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> *Trent*, Canon 30, 56.

The doctrine is so repugnant to the inward teachings of the Spirit, as well as to the teachings of His Word.... The children of God...do not trust for their salvation, either in whole or in part, to what they are or to what they do; but simply and exclusively to what Christ is and has done for them.<sup>12</sup>

Despite Rome’s very clear, continuous belief in the necessity of good works in justification, the World Communion of Reformed Churches says that they “value the careful nuancing of the place of good works among the justified”<sup>13</sup> in the Joint Declaration. We would describe the language of the Joint Declaration — unlike what is taught in the Word of God — as vague and incomprehensible.

In contrast, the Scriptures are clear on this subject, and bring great joy to the heart of the believer:

Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (*Romans* 3:20, 23-28)

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (*Romans* 4:6-8)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (*Ephesians* 2:8-9)

The great hymns of Protestantism are likewise replete with this wonderful testimony of the Scriptures. Here are just a couple of examples:

---

<sup>12</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Volume III (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 242-243.

<sup>13</sup> “Association of the World Conference of Reformed Churches With the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” 5. See document at <http://wrc.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/WCRC-Association-to-JDDJ-EN.pdf>.

In the hymn “Rock of Ages,” Augustus Toplady wrote:

*Not the labor of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

Norman Clayton, in his hymn “My Hope Is in the Lord,” wrote:

*No merit of my own  
His anger to suppress,  
My only hope is found  
In Jesus’ righteousness.*

### **Rome Still Believes that Baptism Is Necessary to Justification and Salvation**

In addition to good works, the Roman Catholic *Catechism* has quite a bit to say concerning the necessity of baptism for one to be justified:

Baptism is a bath that purifies, justifies and sanctifies.<sup>14</sup>

From the time of the Apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages...certain essential elements will always have to be present: Proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion.<sup>15</sup>

Baptism is necessary for salvation... The church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude.<sup>16</sup>

By baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as punishment for sin.<sup>17</sup>

Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte “a new creature,” an adopted son of God, who has become a ‘partaker of the divine nature,’ member of Christ and co-heir with him...<sup>18</sup>

Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just

by the power of his mercy. Its purpose is the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life.<sup>19</sup>

This shows that the Roman Catholic Church still stands with the pronouncements of Trent, which declared concerning justification: “The instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified....”<sup>20</sup> “If anyone says that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema.”<sup>21</sup>

Baptism is certainly very important, but the Reformed churches have uniformly held the Scriptural view that “Although it is a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance [baptism], yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Both Roman Catholics and Protestants Make “Justification” to Include “Social Justice”**

Protestants and Catholics have always placed importance on helping the poor and sick and those who are being treated unjustly. Protestants hold to the Biblical teaching that the believer, justified through faith alone, grows in grace and brings forth good fruit pleasing to the Lord.

However, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a “social gospel” was formulated whereby the Gospel of Christ, as taught in the Scriptures, was changed into a here-and-now philosophy of “empowerment of the disenfranchised,” aiding the poor, *etc.* Some of these efforts were not bad in themselves, but this eventually led to more radical movements such as so-called “Liberation Theology.” This began in the 1960s in Latin America, and eventually spread around the world. It often promoted some of the principles of Marxism and considered capitalism to be inherently evil. The World Council of Churches developed its Programme to Combat Racism, which gave large sums of money to Communist terrorists in Africa and elsewhere.

The Roman Catholic Church had many priests who adhered to this philosophy, but the Vatican itself often had strong words against it. For many years, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger — later to become Pope Benedict XVI — headed the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which often spoke authoritatively to doctrinal issues within the Church. Under Ratzinger’s leadership,

<sup>19</sup> CCC, 482, ¶1992.

<sup>20</sup> Trent, Session 6, Chapter VII, “What the Justification of the Impious Is, and What Are the Causes Thereof,” 30.

<sup>21</sup> Trent, Canon 5 (“On Baptism”), Session VII, March 3, 1547.

<sup>22</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 18:5.

<sup>14</sup> CCC, 315, ¶1227.

<sup>15</sup> CCC, 315, ¶1229.

<sup>16</sup> CCC, 320, ¶1257.

<sup>17</sup> CCC, 321, ¶1263.

<sup>18</sup> CCC, 322, ¶1265.

the Congregation issued an “instruction” concerning Liberation Theology. It stated in part:

The present Instruction [is] to draw the attention of pastors, theologians, and all the faithful to the deviations, and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology which use, in an insufficiently critical manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought...<sup>23</sup>

It continues:

...But the “theologies of liberation,” which reserve credit for restoring to a place of honor the great texts of the prophets and of the Gospel in defense of the poor, go on to a disastrous confusion between the “poor” of the Scripture and the “proletariat” of Marx. In this way they pervert the Christian meaning of the poor, and they transform the fight for the rights of the poor into a class fight within the ideological perspective of the class struggle. For them the “Church of the poor” signifies the Church of the class which has become aware of the requirements of the revolutionary struggle as a step toward liberation and which celebrates this liberation in its liturgy.<sup>24</sup>

Pope Francis, however, has abruptly changed course, and is an active evangelist for Liberation Theology. He may express criticisms of some tenets of Marxism, but many of his teachings have sounded quite similar. Even socialist Bolivian President Evo Morales, who presented Francis with a crucifix which had Christ hanging on a hammer and sickle (the Communist symbol), approvingly told the Associated Press that the Pope’s “emphasis on a world without exclusion amounts to socialism.”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Signed by Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect [later Pope Benedict XVI], this instruction was adopted at an Ordinary Meeting of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was approved at an audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect by his Holiness Pope John Paul II, who ordered its publication. Given at Rome, at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on August 6, 1984, the Feast of the Transfiguration. August 6, 1984. See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19840806\\_theology-liberation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html), accessed December 28, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> See note 23 above.

<sup>25</sup> “Is the Pope a Socialist?,” *Catholic News Agency*, July 22, 2015, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/is-the-pope-a-socialist-95558>, accessed December 28, 2017.

In line with this, a letter was read at the ceremony in Wittenberg from Pope Francis. The Pope exhorted the signers of this Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: “May it mark a new stage of fellowship and cooperation in the service of justice and peace in our human family.”<sup>26</sup> True justice and peace on this Earth are important, but this is not at all what the Scriptures include in the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches also includes many who have advocated for Liberation Theology. The WCRC states that justification comes from the same Greek word as “justice.” Thus, they quote the International Reformed–Catholic Dialogue report, “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent of Justice,” where it states: “...the doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression and violence in today’s world.”<sup>27</sup>

The WCRC then goes on to quote “Communion: on Being the Church,” a joint affirmation of the WCRC and the Lutheran World Federation: “God’s covenant of grace intends a ‘setting right’ that is world-embracing — including even political, economic and ecological realities.”<sup>28</sup> Instead of Christ’s Great Commission to “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel...” (*Mark* 16:15), the WCRC tells us that Christ “sends us into all the world to be a sign of God’s kingdom to preach and live the gospel of reconciliation in a common concern for justice, freedom, peace and care for creation.”<sup>29</sup>

In addition, the concerns of the Feminist movement were brought in. The Rev. [*sic.*] Najla Kassab, of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon gave a message at the event, where she declared: “Here I stand, a Middle Eastern woman in the pulpit of Luther... If only Luther had imagined this, this could have been his 96<sup>th</sup> question to the church. Not, ‘Why there is a woman in this pulpit?’ but ‘Why did it take so long?’”

### **The One-World Church**

The WCRC statement associating itself with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification concludes: “The present achievement and commitment are viewed

---

<sup>26</sup> Tom Heneghan, “Reformed churches endorse Catholic-Lutheran accord on key Reformation dispute,” *Religious News Service*, July 6, 2017, <https://religionnews.com/2017/07/06/reformed-churches-endorse-catholic-lutheran-accord-on-key-reformation-dispute/>, accessed December 28, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> “Association of the World Conference of Reformed Churches With the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” 6.

<sup>28</sup> See note 27 above.

<sup>29</sup> See note 27 above.

by the four parties as part of the pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians.”<sup>30</sup> We have little doubt that there will be additional “new insights” forthcoming in the years ahead which will bring together a worldwide apostate church, based on human reasoning, rather than the precious truths of God’s Word.

Even the more conservative evangelical world has seriously compromised on these matters over the past 50 years. The World Evangelical Fellowship has ecumenical relations and has signed joint statements with the Roman Catholic Church, and its officials regularly travel to the Vatican for audiences with the Pope.

The “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” document, signed in 1994 by such men as Prison Fellowship’s Charles Colson, Southern Baptist Richard Land, Regent College’s J.I. Packer, Geneva College’s John White, and others, along with representatives of the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Fellowship, was a major step in this false movement for reconciliation.

The 2005 book *Is the Reformation Over?* by Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, discusses many ecumenical ventures since the 1960s and states: “Among evangelicals and Catholics who are open to cooperation there now exists a broad and deep foundation of agreement on the central teachings of Christianity.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, they fail to give any great significance to those differences which the Reformers believed were critical to the souls of men.

May those of us who are “outside the camp” (*Hebrews* 13:1) rejoice in this 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, which stripped away the superstition, tradition and apostasy that had so obscured the teaching of the Word of God, and brought the life-giving Gospel of Christ to multiplied millions. May our stand ever be “for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation* 1:9).

---

### New Lectures Posted

The lectures from the Reformation at 500 Conference have been posted to our web site and are available to download or purchase an MP3 CD. There is also a new book package available with this CD collection.

---

<sup>30</sup> “Association of the World Conference of Reformed Churches With the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” 7.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 230.

### Dr. Ronald Cooke’s Church History Tracts Still Available

We still have a few sets left of Dr. Cooke’s series on Church History. There are 30 tracts in the set. The cost is \$50 plus \$15 for shipping for each set. If interested, please call The Foundation at 423.743.0199.

---

### New Podcasts Coming to Our Web Site

We are planning to add Podcasts to our audio web site in 2018, with several podcasts per month and archived on our site. They will be hosted by Steve Matthews, author of *Imagining a Vain Thing: The Decline and Fall of Knox Seminary*. Stay tuned for details.

---

### Christian Worldview Essay Contest

The Trinity Foundation is pleased to announce the return of the Christian Worldview Essay Contest. The topic for the 2018 Christian Worldview Essay Contest is *The Emperor Has No Clothes: Richard B. Gaffin Jr’s Doctrine of Justification* by Stephen M. Cunha. In light of recent statements by John Piper about “final” justification by works (see the November, December 2017 *Trinity Review*), the topic book is apropos in dealing with a dangerous, heterodox view of justification. The Christian Worldview Essay Contest is open to those 16-25 years of age, and winners will be announced on October 31, 2018. See flyer in mailing or at our web site for details.

---

With the Essay Contest in mind, both Mr. Cunha’s Preface and Introduction to his *The Emperor Has No Clothes* are included in this edition of *The Trinity Review*.

#### Preface

*The Emperor Has No Clothes* was written in the summer of 2008 and sent to the Session and Diaconate of Cornerstone Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church congregation over which Dr. Richard (“Dick”) Gaffin serves as an Elder, to outline the reason for our family’s decision to leave that congregation. It was also distributed to selected leaders in the Reformed community, including five seminary Presidents, and others.

The title selected for the work was not in any way intended as a personal invective against Dr. Gaffin. Rather,

the metaphor was chosen because I do not have a seminary degree, am not an ordained officer in the church, and work in the business world. For these reasons, I am identifying myself as the boy in Hans Christian Andersen's classic story. I believe the metaphor is apt, though, to be sure, unlike the boy in the story, I am not the first person to publicly call attention to Dr. Gaffin's teaching on the doctrine of justification.

With the submission of *The Emperor Has No Clothes* to the Cornerstone Session, I made the following appeal: "If, after reading the tract, you feel that I have in any way created a straw man, overstated the case, uncharitably read more into Dick's words and public endorsements than what is there, twisted or taken Dick's words out of context, please show me where. If you feel that any of the fundamental doctrinal assertions made in the tract are at odds with the system of truth revealed in Scripture and succinctly summarized in the Westminster Standards, please show me." The gist of their response was to assert that *The Emperor Has No Clothes* misunderstands and misrepresents Dr. Gaffin's teaching on the doctrine of justification, while in the same breath refusing to interact in writing with its substance. I found this response to be most remarkable because, in my judgment, the most convincing portion of the work is the body of quotations from Dr. Gaffin himself.

As the book acknowledges, Dr. Gaffin is capable of making orthodox statements on the doctrine of justification. However, it is my firm conviction that orthodox statements alone, including the endorsements of other orthodox works, are not sufficient. What is requisite is a public recantation of teaching and endorsements that have undermined the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Also, the notion that an intellectual may modify his "thought" over time without publicly announcing the change may be appropriate in some academic disciplines, but is entirely unacceptable for an Elder of the church when the "thought" relates to the Gospel of God, which is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (*Romans 1:16*).

I appreciate The Trinity Foundation's willingness to publish this work. It is presented here in its original form with the exception of some minor edits. The writing of *The Emperor Has No Clothes* was not a pleasant task. It is my hope that it will, in some way, be used by the Lord for the good of His church.

### Introduction

Is justification by faith without its works or by faith with its works? The Protestant Reformers unequivocally asserted the former over against the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Dr. Richard Gaffin Jr., a recently retired professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, a Reformed Protestant seminary, and an ordained teaching elder of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), appears to be teaching the

latter.<sup>32</sup> Are believers, by their justification in Christ, freed fully from the condemning power of the law of God? Is their guilt completely removed legally through the blood of Christ? The Protestant Reformers proclaimed to all the world that through faith in Jesus Christ a believer is fully and irreversibly pardoned from the guilt incurred through his transgression of the law of the Creator of the universe. In contrast to the teaching of the Reformers, Dr. Gaffin appears to be teaching that a believer is not yet fully freed from guilt and condemnation.

More astonishing than Dr. Gaffin's apparent diversion from the historic teaching of the Protestant Church on a doctrine Martin Luther believed was the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (i.e. the article by which the church stands or falls) is the fact that Dr. Gaffin's teaching on justification has, with a few exceptions, gone virtually unchallenged within the Reformed seminary community, the OPC, and the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). Quite the opposite, Dr. Gaffin's most recent book, *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, which contains the problematic aspects of his teaching on justification, received the endorsement of David Peterson, the now former Principal of Oak Hill Theological College in London,<sup>33</sup> and a glowing review from Reverend John Mahaffy in the February 2007 issue of *New Horizons*, the denominational magazine of the OPC.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Gaffin's "Justification and Eschatology," is the leadoff chapter in a book, *Justified In Christ: God's Plan For Us In Justification*, which contains an introduction by Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary and a Senior Minister within the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and accompanying chapters written by other men associated with Westminster Theological Seminary including Dr. Carl Trueman, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Historical Theology and Church History, and Dr. Peter Lillback, President of the Seminary, Professor of Historical Theology, and a Senior Pastor within the PCA.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Both Westminster Theological Seminary and the OPC formally adhere to the Westminster Standards.

<sup>33</sup> Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, (Paternoster Press, 2006), back cover.

<sup>34</sup> For example, Mahaffy writes, "Dr. Richard B. Gaffin's most recent book, '*By Faith, Not by Sight*,' is refreshing, like a breeze flowing in off the ocean. As it wrestles with issues of substance, it models how believers can and should communicate with and about one another."

<sup>35</sup> It is remarkable that the "Select Bibliography On Justification," prepared by the librarian at Westminster Theological Seminary Philadelphia "to bring together the key works that have been consulted by the contributors to this volume so that the interested reader may pursue them for further study," does not include James Buchanan's classic work, *The Doctrine of Justification*.

The Biblical doctrine of justification addresses the all-important question of how a sinful human being can pass from a state of condemnation to a right standing with the Judge of all the earth. The Bible, confirming our own experience, declares that all, with the exception of Jesus Christ, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. As a result of the Fall, all children of Adam are by nature sinners and therefore objects of God's wrath. The question of how a sinner can be made right with God, therefore, concerns the eternal destiny of every human being in all ages of the world.

The Apostle Paul, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Book of *Galatians*, says twice for emphasis in chapter 1 that if anyone preaches a Gospel to the Galatians other than the one they have received, "let that person be accursed" (*Galatians* 1:8-9).<sup>36</sup> The doctrine of justification is at the heart of the Gospel, so, regrettably, the teaching of Dr. Gaffin on justification, as well as the apparent tacit approval of this teaching by other highly esteemed men within the Reformed community, cannot be overlooked. To challenge this distinctive teaching on justification is not to write off or dismiss all of the teachings of Dr. Gaffin or these other men.<sup>37</sup> It is not to question heart motives or the service and usefulness of these men to the church. Unfortunately, the issue at stake here is a doctrine that is at the very heart of the Gospel.

The ultimate touchstone for determining who is right on the doctrine of justification, the Protestant Reformers or Dr. Gaffin, is, of course, the Bible. However, another point needs to be made at the outset of this discussion. The teaching of the Protestant Reformers on what the Bible says about the doctrine of justification is codified in the subordinate standards of the Reformed churches. Westminster Theological Seminary and the OPC, for example, both adhere to the Westminster Standards. If Dr. Gaffin were correct in his assessment of the Bible's teaching on the doctrine of justification, over against the teaching of the Protestant Reformers and the subordinate standards of the Reformed churches, is it proper and acceptable for him to promote these views through his teaching of future ministers of the Gospel at Westminster Theological Seminary and through the publication of books and articles that are available to all believers?

Writing from the vantage point of a lay person within the church, this writer can testify that the various, conflicting "voices" publicly sounding out via print and other media from respected leaders in the Reformed

community on the doctrine of justification is, to say the least, unsettling. The fault does not lie with those publicly teaching and defending the traditionally held view. If an individual or group of individuals feel that a church's subordinate standards need to be adjusted to better align with the Scriptures, shouldn't a procedure be followed in which the proposed changes are submitted for discussion and agreement among the ordained officers of the church *before* they are positively introduced to the flock? If, after sufficient debate, the proposed changes are not accepted, the individual or group of individuals who proposed the changes may either accede to the judgment of the church leadership or leave to join or establish a church body that shares their convictions.

In Hans Christian Andersen's classic story "The Emperor's New Clothes," it is a small child who points out that the emperor, who is proudly displaying his new "clothes" in a public procession, has nothing on.<sup>38</sup> The purpose of this book is to demonstrate and call attention to the fact that Dr. Gaffin is teaching a doctrine of justification that is contrary to the Westminster Standards and, more importantly, to the Word of God. In this writer's opinion, the key factors influencing Dr. Gaffin's distinctive teaching on justification are the application of the already/not yet concept to justification and, I shudder to say, a distorted understanding of the resolution between Paul's assertion that justification is by faith alone and James' assertion that justification is not by faith alone, which subtly, yet gravely, compromises the classic Law/Gospel antithesis taught by the Reformers. This is not to say that these are the exclusive factors. Also, in charity, it is possible, though it cannot be objectively demonstrated, that Dr. Gaffin's distinctive teaching is responsive to the danger of antinomianism that admittedly plagues the church. The true Gospel is always confused by legalists to be the teaching of antinomianism and is practically abused by real antinomians who do not understand the true Gospel or the Scriptures.

This book does not attempt to be exhaustive in its analysis of Dr. Gaffin's teaching, but only to provide sufficient evidence to make the case that Dr. Gaffin is teaching a doctrine of justification distinct from the Westminster Standards and foreign to Scripture. It is not this writer's intention to personally attack Dr. Gaffin. I write in the spirit of the Bereans who examined the teachings of the Apostles themselves, men uniquely inspired by the Holy Ghost in such a way as to be, at times, infallible, in light of the Scriptures. This writer is responding to Dr. Gaffin's teachings publicly because the teachings have been broadcasted publicly to the extent that their reach transcends the OPC and even the broader Reformed community.

<sup>38</sup> Hans Christian Andersen (Author), Virginia Lee Burton (Illustrator), *The Emperor's New Clothes* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> *The 1599 Geneva Bible*, (Tolle Lege Press, 2006-2007).

<sup>37</sup> For example, this writer used Dr. Sinclair Ferguson's book in an evangelistic outreach to incoming First Year students at the University of Virginia. See Stephen Cunha, "Banner Title Used In Evangelistic Outreach" in *The Banner of Truth Magazine*, Issue 438, (March 2000). I am also grateful to Dr. Lillback for his role in the *1599 Geneva Bible Restoration Project*.