

## REVIEWS & RESPONSES

REVIEW: Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old And New On Paul: The 'Lutheran' Paul And His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) lge. pbk., xix & 448 pp. \$35.00 Reviewed by Dr. Rowland S. Ward, Pastor of Knox Presbyterian Church, Melbourne, Australia.

Another contribution to Pauline studies from the associate professor of biblical studies at McMaster University is to be welcomed. In this case it is the revision and expansion of his *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith*, published in 1988. It has all the hallmarks of Westerholm's work: wide-reading, clarity, humour and informed orthodoxy. It deserves a wide readership.

As the quotation marks around 'Lutheran' in the book's title suggest, Westerholm is not arguing that Paul was a Lutheran, but he does make the case for the essential correctness of Luther's reading of Paul. At the same time he recognises the importance of a good understanding of Judaism in the first century.

In the first part (pages 3-97) Westerholm offers four portraits of Christian leaders who held an essentially Lutheran understanding of Paul – Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley. While each is only about twenty pages, they sufficiently illustrate that people of different temperament and in different situations concurred in the meaning of justification in Paul. Westerholm closes with a review of Paul's teaching, and lays down seven helpful points in his summary of it.

After this fitting introduction, we have a lengthy second part of about 160 pages in which the views of twenty-six twentieth century scholars are surveyed, grouped according to basic emphasis. Westerholm does not critique their views at this point but seeks to encapsulate them in a succinct and fair manner. In beginning with William Wrede's *Paul*, issued in 1908, Westerholm provides an important reminder that views of Paul's theology in which justification by faith is a secondary issue are not new. According to Wrede, Paul believed that Christ has accomplished redemption from hostile powers effective for all and appropriated by faith. Justification by faith was a side issue, an effective polemic against those who insisted Gentiles should adopt Jewish ritual practices and/or observe the commandments in order to salvation, but not the heart of his teaching.

Westerholm steadily progresses through Schweitzer, Montefiore, Schoeps, Sanders, Kümmel, Stendahl, Bultmann,

Wilkens, Drane, Hübner, Räisänen, Wright, Dunn and Donaldson until he comes to the 'Lutheran' responses of Cranfield, Shreiner and Das, Thielman and Seifrid. He closes looking at Laato's consideration of Paul's anthropology, Thurén and Aletti's emphasis on rhetoric, Martyn's study of Paul's apocalyptic world view and Jürgen Becker's understanding of Paul's theology of the cross. These scholars find coherence of thought in a 'Lutheran' reading of Paul taken along with the other aspects they have studied. A selection of quotable quotes from the anti- 'Lutheran' perspectives concludes the part.

The survey provided of a century of scholarship is of value for its own sake. Readers of this review may be particularly interested in Westerholm's summary of N.T. Wright, since he is the most conservative of writers on the new perspective, and the one most likely to impact Reformed circles. In fact, four pages are sufficient to summarise Wright's position in which justification is regarded as God's vindication of his people at the end of history, anticipated in the present, and determined not on the basis of 'works of the law', considered as boundary markers, such as circumcision, Sabbath and the food laws, but on faith in the gospel. Paul was not opposing the notion of earning one's salvation by good deeds, but a nationalism that insisted on the observance by Gentiles of the boundary markers that set apart Jews from Gentiles. Justification is about identifying who belongs to God's people not about declaring a person righteous. Thus N.T. Wright.

The third part (pages 261-445) is of great importance for here Westerholm deals with the key issues. He first takes up the *dikaio* word group (righteous, righteousness, justify, justification etc.) and distinguishes an ordinary meaning in which, in contrast with sin, righteousness is what one *ought* to do: the one who does righteousness is righteous, and the justified are those declared to be innocent of wrongdoing. It is not the hearers of the law but the doers of the law who are justified in God's sight (Rom 2:13). 'Paul insists that the good spelled out in the law is the responsibility of Jews and non-Jews alike, and that all will be judged by whether or not they have *done* this good.' (p. 273)

But there is also an extraordinary usage for the acquittal of those heretofore sinful, by which sinners are made righteous through the obedience of Christ (Rom 5:19). Westerholm puts it well (p. 275): 'No one has better grasped the absurdity of "receiving righteousness" than N.T. Wright: "Righteousness

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is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom" (*Founder*, 98). But the absurdity of it all in no way alters the fact that Paul speaks of "receiving the abundant overflow of grace and of the gift of righteousness" (Rom 5:17); and both 1 Cor 1:30 and Phil 3:9 speak explicitly of a righteousness "from God." Further, God's righteousness is referred to in a manner which shows God maintains the moral order at the same time as he declares sinners righteous (Rom 3:25-26).

When writers on the new perspective claim that righteousness refers to membership of the covenant community they fly in the face of the evidence. Ordinary righteousness is what sinners as sinners lack and need, whether Jew or Gentile. Extraordinary righteousness granted to sinners is what Jew and Gentile lack and need, whether or not they have an outward covenant relationship with God. God's righteousness could refer to God's faithfulness to his promises, but in fact righteousness itself does not mean covenant faithfulness. Indeed, Paul never explicitly links righteousness and covenant, but does stress that God's righteousness reverses human unrighteousness so that all who have faith are 'righteous.' For Paul, though not for Judaism, all men were fundamentally lost in sin and became members of God's covenant by the extraordinary act of grace which declared them righteous.

Westerholm then takes up the definition of law. He shows that while Paul sometimes uses the term *nomos* to refer to part or all of the Old Testament scriptures, his more common use is to refer to the body of law given to Israel by the hand of Moses at Mt Sinai. The broad and narrow uses need to be clearly distinguished. "The law that can be kept, done, fulfilled or transgressed is clearly "the legal parts" of the Pentateuch. The law given 430 years after the Abrahamic promise (Gal 3:17, 19) was not the Pentateuch as a whole but the Sinaitic legislation..." (p. 299). As far as Paul is concerned the essence of law in this sense is that it requires works, and justification by faith is the antithesis of this.

If justification by faith was simply a useful polemic against those Jews whose nationalism made them insist that Gentiles observe certain Jewish boundary markers, then it is not something Jews need, or, if they do, it arises from their racism. But Paul insists all people – Jews, whether or not racists, and Gentiles – are under sin and all need to be declared righteous through faith. Nor is it legalistic works done out of self-righteousness that Paul rejects as the path to righteousness, but all works.

Westerholm turns briefly to the definition of grace (pages 341-351). While it is indeed wrong to view Judaism as typically preoccupied with gaining enough merit to pass the Divine scrutiny in the judgment, rabbinic Judaism is not unequivocal in its rejection of merit and works. Judaism did not see grace and works as opposed to each other as Paul

did. Judaism thought of God's choice of Israel as according to grace, but that grace had a reason in, for instance, the merit of the patriarchs or Israel's willingness to submit to the law before God would grant it to them. Judaism was really very much in a Pelagian mould, and thus in some way thought one could contribute to salvation, whereas Paul's understanding of grace excludes any and all of our works absolutely.

A survey of justification by faith in Paul's thought (pages 352-407) and a discussion of the law summarised in nine theses (408-439) complete this stimulating volume. The new perspective's presentation tends to say the difference between Jews and Christian was not on grace but only on who was the Messiah. But Paul does not say that Gentiles should become like Jews (except for Jewish boundary markers) to enjoy God's blessings. Rather, he insists that Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners and need to stop pursuing righteousness by law but receive righteousness through faith in Jesus.

The volume is quite demanding but repays careful study. It is probably the best introduction to the issue for theological students currently available. Some issues remain, for further consideration, including how one may best state the nature of the Mosaic covenant, the proper interpretation of Romans 7, and aspects of imputation. The effect of Westerholm's study is to give a substantial rebuttal of the distinguishing marks of the new perspective, of which only the general lines have been indicated in this review, and so set us to the heart of the Gospel of Christ. ■

REVIEW: Leonard J. Coppes, *The Divine Days of Creation* (Thornton: Providence Presbyterian Press, 2004). 240 pp. Pb. \$5.00. Reviewed by Dr. Benjamin Shaw, Assistant Professor, Hebrew & Old Testament, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Since the publication of *The Genesis Flood* by Whitcomb and Morris in 1961, there has been almost literally a flood of publications by conservative Christians dealing with some aspect or another of the early chapters of Genesis. This work by Dr. Coppes is one of the most recent contributions to the literature. In nine chapters and five appendices, spread over some 240 pages, he deals with a variety of issues related to the "days" of Genesis 1. His first chapter is a discussion of hermeneutical issues which clearly sets his work in the context of a traditional Reformed approach to the understanding of the Scriptures. The second chapter is an analysis of the issue of whether or not Genesis 1 is to be considered history. The third chapter discusses the relationship of the other Ancient Near Eastern materials to the Genesis creation account. Chapters 4 through 7 treat the meaning of a number of Hebrew terms and phrases: "day," "a thousand years as a day," "evening and

morning” and “day and night.” The final two chapters deal with the issue of death before the fall and the length of the days in Genesis 1.

The appendices deal with a variety of issues related to the discussion of the Genesis 1 creation account. The first deals with the Hebrew term *raqia`* which is traditionally translated “firmament,” arguing that it should instead be rendered “expanse,” as it is in many of the more recent translations, such as the NIV, the NASB (Update), and the ESV. The second appendix deals with the fiat—the divine pronouncements—of the creation account. The third appendix deals with Herman Bavinck’s treatment of the days of creation in the first part of his systematic theological work, now available in English as *In the Beginning*. The fourth appendix deals with John Collins’s “analogical” view of the days of creation. The final appendix deals with the “6 plus 1” formula as it is found in the Ancient Near Eastern mythological material.

As the above survey shows, the book intends to deal exclusively with the issues of Genesis 1 and the interpretation of those issues in the context of the modern conservative Reformed debate about them. It is at this point that one of the major weaknesses of the work is revealed. Aside from the work of Collins, Dr. Coppes shows almost no familiarity with the modern discussion of the issues with which he deals. He relies very heavily on the forty year old work of E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*. As fine as that work is, the discussion has moved considerably beyond it at many points, and Coppes shows no awareness of that movement. His treatment of the Ancient Near Eastern materials is also dated, reflecting none of the massive amount of literature that has grown up around that material in the last generation. He deals only briefly, and in this reviewer’s opinion unsatisfactorily, with the work of Meredith Kline, whose labor in defense of the so-called “framework hypothesis” has to a certain extent set the agenda for this debate as it moves now into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The second major weakness of the work is apparent in Coppes’s “word study” approach to exegesis. He sets this out as one of his major hermeneutical principles in the statement, “Word studies should be undertaken in the light of the accepted procedures in Hebrew lexicography.” (p. 17) While this statement is, in itself, unobjectionable, his further discussion on pages 17-18 demonstrates that he is unfamiliar with the incisive critique of the approach offered a generation ago by James Barr in his *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. It is necessary when undertaking word studies to pay careful attention to the context of the material under consideration, and the possibility of the same words being used in different senses by different authors. In addition, it is necessary to separate idiomatic usages of words from more normal usages. For example, in English, no one who is a native speaker of English would consider using the clause “it was raining cats

and dogs” to come to any conclusion about the meanings of the words “cat” and “dog.” Yet when Dr. Coppes undertakes to examine the various meanings of the Hebrew word *yom* (day), he includes the idiomatic expression *b’yom* (a Hebrew idiom that simply means “when”) in his examination. Incidentally, this is a mistake also made by Kline in his arguments in defense of the framework hypothesis. This same sort of mistake is found in Coppes’s discussion of the meaning of the pairs “evening-morning” and “day-night.” He consistently fails to take into account the context of each usage, as if the meaning were separable from the larger context.

There are, in addition to these two major shortcomings of the work, a number of other deficits that might fall under the category of “annoyances.” The organization of the chapters appears to be haphazard, and the outline of each chapter is unclear. Though most of the chapters include definite conclusions, these are unhelpfully not set apart typographically. There is also no bibliography provided for the work. In short, while there is useful material here, the book cannot be recommended due to its systemic weaknesses.

RESPONSE: *Theology by Word Study and Wrong Method of Word Study.*

I very much appreciate the opportunity to respond to Dr. Shaw’s review of my book, *The Divine Days of Creation*. In answer to some of the criticism, I will simply say that it was written to help the debate within the Presbyterian churches rather than as a scholarly paper.

As to the balance of the review, I do wish that Dr. Shaw had interacted with the arguments presented in the book. It was my intention to defend the proposition that we cannot determine from the Biblical text the length of the days of creation as well as to point out the weaknesses of other approaches popular in our churches (the ordinary day view, the framework hypothesis, the day age view, and the analogical view).

We can conclude exegetically that these were real “days” in the Hebrew sense of that word, and that they were continuous, contiguous, and sequential. It is important to note that this was the position of Dr. Edward J. Young who spent a lifetime writing, lecturing, and debating this issue. Indeed, his major work in the field spent much time showing the complete inadequacy of Dr. Meredith Kline’s work (Young’s argument is summarized and extended on pages 35-56). Even though his work was done many years ago, as was the work of Calvin and others, it has stood the test of time and, like his commentaries on Isaiah and Daniel, is an example of some of the best of reformed exegetical thinking. It is of note that Young, Kline and their peers were quite aware of Dr. James Barr’s work.

I spent several years in post-graduate studies in Hebrew

and Akkadian. This is not the place to enter into a presentation and evaluation of lexicographical and philological work and the diverse approaches employed in Hebrew and related language studies. At that time, there were several approaches to language study (one of them being Barr's work). For various reasons, that work is seriously flawed methodologically. So, although I agree with some of Barr's conclusions, I do not feel that his sweeping rejection of almost all that was done exegetically (lexicographically and philologically) in reformed history stands. Hence, my argument about word studies, a major building block of proper exegesis, is intended to follow along the old paths with whatever insights from Barr and others that may be useful. So, although such diachronic and inductive argumentation is not explicitly displayed in the book, it was used in the process of deriving the conclusions. The point made in the book is that *yom* always refers to a period of time and has a much wider semantic distribution than "an ordinary day," and that a proper understanding of a given occurrence depends upon more than a word study that sets the bounds of the semantic possibilities, and one's preconceived theological necessity—it depends upon an evaluation of the requirements of the context. (Incidentally, a study of *b'yom* will unearth several places where the phrase cannot mean "when," cf., Ps. 18:1).

I am glad to see that Dr. Shaw does not seek to suggest arguments against any of the pillars supporting the book's thesis, so the thesis stands untarnished. Some of those pillars are:

1 The Hebrew word *yom* always represents a period of time and this may be as short as a moment and as long as an age. The creation account itself uses Heb. *yom* in several connotations.

2 The first day opened with darkness and closed with a period of darkness. Young correctly argues exegetically that Gen. 1:1-3 is a unit. Hence, the first day was longer than an ordinary day, or it was a day of ordinary length but extraordinary composition consisting of two nighttime and a daytime. This means that we cannot determine the length of the creation "days" from the phrase "there was an evening and there was a morning, a first day."

3 The Bible, outside of Gen. 1, never uses the evening-morning couplet to mean an ordinary day. The only other use of the couplet to signify a day appears in Dan. 8:14-26 where it signifies a day of indeterminable length.

4 The couplet used at every period and genre of Biblical literature for an ordinary day is day-night. So, the fact that this couplet is not used in the coda of days one and four also argues that an ordinary day is not in view in the coda.

5 The coda closing the days of creation is unique in days six and seven. In the first five codas ordinary Hebrew grammar is set aside and the ordinal appears without the definite article, but in codas of the last two days the article is inserted.

Hence, these two days are especially marked as concluding respectively the creating week and the entire week with its day of rest.

DR. LEONARD J. COPPES

REPLY BY DR. BENJAMIN SHAW.

I appreciate Dr. Coppes taking time to comment on my review of his book. It was helpful to have him summarize his own arguments, and I would like to respond to those summaries.

First, no one disputes something that Dr. Coppes goes to great lengths to demonstrate—that *yom* is used in a variety of senses in the Hebrew Bible. He alleges at the beginning of Chapter 4 that "there has been so much debate on the range of meaning (semantic distribution) of this Hebrew word [*yom*]." In fact, there has been very little debate on that issue. A quick look at any of the standard Hebrew lexica would satisfy anyone of the fact, that it has long been recognized that *yom* is used in a variety of senses in the Old Testament. The issue that has been debated is what *yom* means in Genesis 1, which is a different question entirely. Coppes states in his response, "The creation account itself uses Heb. *yom* in several connotations." This is technically true, since "several" means more than two but less than many. But it tends to mislead the reader. The Hebrew *yom* is used fourteen times in the creation account (Gen 1:1-2:3). Nine times it is used in the phrase "the nth day." What it means in this phrase is really at the heart of Dr. Coppes's discussion. Four times it is used in the sense of "the daylight hours" (Gen 1:5, 14, 16, 18). Once it is used in the phrase "for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Gen 1:14) where it probably has the meaning "specific, or set, days."

Second, Coppes says "The Bible, outside of Genesis 1, never uses the evening-morning couplet to mean an ordinary day." This assertion, as stated, is simply not true. I suspect that what Dr. Coppes means is that the couplet, outside of Genesis 1, never refers to the totality of an ordinary day. Instead every single case where the morning and evening occur in the same verse, they refer to a part of an ordinary day. Many of the uses refer to the morning and evening sacrifices, which took place at stated times on *ordinary* days. There is not a single verse where evening and morning are used in the same verse that refers to anything other than an ordinary day. Second, there is no place in the Bible where the precise clause "and there was evening and there was morning" occurs, outside of Genesis 1. Hence, given the fact that every verse where "morning" and "evening" occur in the same verse they refer to parts of an ordinary day, it is reasonable to conclude that the sequence "and there was evening, and there was morning" refers to the course, or the totality, of an ordinary day,

contrary to Dr. Coppes's conclusion. (It should be noted that there are some minor errors in Dr. Coppes's listing of verses on p. 109. 1 Chron 23:28 should be 1 Chron 23:30. Neither morning nor evening is used in 2 Chron 13:4. Job 4:19 should be Job 4:20.)

Third, when Dr. Coppes argues that the couplet "day-night" is necessary to conclude that an ordinary day is in view, he is arguing far beyond what the evidence will allow. As just demonstrated, the morning-evening couplet clearly refers to ordinary days, and we should not think Moses must have been constrained to the use of day-night if he wanted to refer to ordinary days. The fact the day-night does not appear in Genesis 1 simply does not give the exegete room to argue from silence that Moses must therefore have had something other than ordinary days in mind.

Fourth, due to what I perceived as serious flaws in Dr. Coppes's argument, I decided not to deal in detail with those arguments, but rather with underlying methodological issues. But since Dr. Coppes has seen fit to see in my silence an implicit approval of his conclusions, I will say the following. I agree with Dr. Coppes (Chapter 2) that the account in Genesis 1 is intended to be historical. I agree with Dr. Coppes (Chapter 3) that the Hebrew word *yom* can have a variety of specific connotations. I disagree with Dr. Coppes (Chapter 4) that Psalm 90:4 has anything of relevance to say for understanding the length of the day in Genesis 1. I disagree with Dr. Coppes (Chapters 6 and 7) that the couplets "evening-morning" and "day-night" have the significance relative to Genesis 1 that he gives them, and I further would ask the reader to evaluate those usages for himself to see whether the interpretation Dr. Coppes gives them hold up under the light of unbiased examination.

Finally, I was seriously disappointed with both the quality and the tone of Dr. Coppes's response. If he really intended to help the debate within the Presbyterian churches, he had the responsibility to determine whether Dr. Young's forty-year-old work still stood up in the light of work done since then. My own conclusion is that it was an exegetically weak argument forty years ago, and that it has not aged well. (Just as a note: in my review I state that the Hebrew phrase *beyom* simply means "when." Dr. Coppes offers Psalm 18:1 as a counter-example. It is not, as the reader can easily tell. In addition, the phrase *beyom* when it does not occur in construct with another noun, has the meaning "when," and is regularly so translated in a variety of reliable translations, including the KJV, RSV, NIV, NASB, etc.) In addition, he dismisses the work of Barr with the statement "that work is seriously flawed methodologically." While it may be that Barr sometimes paints with too broad a brush, one of the things against which Barr warns is the ignoring of context in the determination of the connotation of a word. In my opinion, Dr. Coppes regularly ignores

this stricture, and hence comes to conclusions that really are exegetically untenable.

DR. BENJAMIN SHAW ■

REVIEW: Norman Shepherd, *Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective*. A Lecture Presented at Trust and Obedience: A Symposium of Law & Gospel, March 11, 2004, Warrenville, IL. Sponsored by Reformation and Revival Ministries (Audio Recording). Norman Shepherd. *Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective* (Holland: Norman Shepherd, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Reviewed by Wayne Forkner, Pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church, Berkeley, CA (OPC).

"Covenant Theology" of Norman Shepherd versus Covenant Theology of the Westminster Standards

At a meeting called "Trust and Obedience: A Symposium of Law & Gospel" a number of speakers from various churches spoke on the distinction between law and gospel. Most of the speakers argued that the law/gospel distinction, as it is understood in Reformational churches, is not a biblical distinction.<sup>2</sup> One of the chief speakers was Rev. Norman Shepherd, who also affirmed that this commonly understood distinction between law and gospel is a false construct.

As his teachings have been at the center of much debate among Reformed churches in recent years, a little background on Rev. Shepherd and his views here follows. Norman Shepherd was a professor of systematic theology at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, beginning in 1963. While at Westminster, Mr. Shepherd's view of the doctrine of justification sparked seven years of controversy at the Seminary.<sup>3</sup> After a professorship of 20 years, Mr. Shepherd took a pastoral position at a Christian Reformed Church. Then in 1999, after his retirement from the pastorate, Shepherd again expounded his views, evoking renewed debate in the Reformed community as to the means of justification. Some of the discussion concerning his views has been heated, bringing accusations from both sides.

The main point of this review is to show that Mr. Shepherd's formulation of covenant theology is not in accord with the Westminster Standards. This is important because there ap-

1. The text of this lecture may be obtained from the author by sending a stamped (37 cents), self-addressed business size envelope to: Norman Shepherd, 436 Wave Court, Holland, MI 49424. Mr. Shepherd has been offered space for a response in the next issue.

2. One notable exception was Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman of Mid America Reformed Seminary, who called for a return to the reformed confessions, which he said, teach, explain and apply the "Law/Gospel" distinction.

3. A historical overview of the discussion at Westminster is provided by O Palmer Robertson in *The Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi: The Trinity Foundation, 2003).

pear to be ministers and elders in Presbyterian churches who agree with his views of covenant theology. Were they to teach these views, they would be denying the very standards they have vowed to uphold. My hope and prayer is that Presbyterian elders and pastors would rethink their allegiance to Rev. Shepherd's formulation, understand how it diverges from the historically Reformed view, and embrace the Westminster Assembly's biblically accurate theology of the covenant, appreciating its fullness as God's glorious truth and provision for His Church.

Mr. Shepherd's lecture given at the aforementioned meeting is entitled *Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective*. It is divided into three sections: "Law and Gospel in the Adamic Covenant," "Law and Gospel in the Mosaic Covenant," and "Law and Gospel in the New Covenant." In this review, I will deal mainly with the first section, the understanding of the Adamic covenant, for it is here that Rev. Shepherd first denies the covenant of works/covenant of grace system that finds its clearest Reformed expression in the Westminster Standards. I will then briefly show how this fundamental rejection of a covenant of works in the Adamic agreement also alters his understanding of the nature of faith and the work of Christ in the new covenant and how they do not agree with the Reformed view of the Confession.

Mr. Shepherd gives a summary of the theology of the Adamic covenant as expressed in the Westminster Standards (*Law & Gospel*, 2):

Reformed theology as it developed from the late sixteenth century onward commonly spoke of a covenant of works made with Adam and his posterity. God created Adam righteous, without sin, and promised to him and his posterity confirmation in righteousness and eternal life "upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." That is to say, Adam would earn or achieve whatever eschatological blessing and privilege was held out to him on the ground of perfect law-keeping.

Thus, Norman Shepherd correctly acknowledges that the Westminster view of covenant theology maintains that Adam was to "work" for his confirmation in righteousness. The Standards themselves define this righteousness-confirming work of Adam's as "perfect, perpetual, and personal obedience" (WCF 7.1; WSC 12; WLC 20).

#### A NEW VIEW OF THE ADAMIC COVENANT

After giving the Confession's expression of the Reformed view, however, Rev. Shepherd then introduces, "a different way of

looking at the Adamic covenant" (*Law & Gospel*, 3). He begins by stating that the operating principle in the Adamic covenant was not "works," but rather "faith".

Consider the fact that Adam was created holy and righteous, without sin. He was the original just man. He would live and live forever not by the merit of his works but by faith. He would exhibit the principle stated in Habakkuk 2:4 and reiterated by Paul in Romans 1: 17, "The righteous will live by faith." Whatever blessing was in store for him was not a reward to be earned by performance but a gift to be received by faith. (Ibid.).

Mr. Shepherd here explicitly denies that a covenant of works was ever part of God's terms of agreement with Adam. He reiterates this belief in his description of the Mosaic covenant: "The Law of Moses is not a republication of a covenant of works made with Adam because there was no covenant of works to republish" (*Law & Gospel*, 6). He further elaborates his belief that works were never a part of God's covenantal requirement by stating it more emphatically: "The Lord God did not and never does deal with His image bearers in terms of a principle of works and merit, but ever and always in terms of a principle of faith and grace." (*Law & Gospel*, 4).

As already stated, the Westminster Standards *do* affirm a covenant theology of works in the Adamic covenant; they also affirm a difference between God's dealings with pre-fall and post-fall man. God enters into a covenant of works with pre-fallen, righteous man, and a covenant of grace with post-fallen sinful man. The operative principle of the pre-fall covenant was "works" and the operative principle in the post fall-covenant is "grace."<sup>4</sup> In the post-fall covenant, the instrument that connects someone to the grace of God in Christ is faith.

#### THE METHOD OF JUSTIFICATION

Norman Shepherd's view of covenant theology affects his view of justification. In discussing justification, he says, "The method of justification for Adam before the fall is exactly what it is for Paul after the fall: 'The righteous will live by faith' (Romans 1:17)" (*Law & Gospel*, 4). He says that the method of justification for Adam was "faith." But, notice that in making this statement, Mr. Shepherd does not deal with the text of Genesis (you will not find the word "faith" anywhere in Genesis 2). Instead he quotes, without any exegesis, Habakkuk 2:4 and Romans 1:17, "*the righteous will live by faith*," and then applies an abstract "principle" of faith to Adam. In context, Paul is speaking of faith in Jesus. Habakkuk is speaking of faith in the LORD, and what He will do. In Reformed understanding, what the LORD promised to do in Habakkuk He accomplished through Jesus Christ. In both of these pre-

4. In Reformed theology the Covenant of Grace is part of the Covenant of Redemption (*Pactum Salutis*). The Son of God performs the "work" in the Covenant of Redemption which secures God's "grace" to those in the Covenant of Grace.

fall texts, the object of faith is the same: a resting on the Lord Jesus Christ and His meritorious work.

Mr. Shepherd has not only redefined the method of justification for Adam but also for believers under the covenant of grace (*Law & Gospel*, 11):

This is the promise side of the new covenant – justification, sanctification, and eternal life through union with Jesus Christ. And this new covenant, like all the covenants that preceded it in redemptive history has an obligation side as well. The obligation side of the covenant is no different from what it has always been, namely, faith, repentance, and obedience.

Here he says that what is required of those in the covenant of grace is “faith, repentance, and obedience.” So on the one hand, what was required of Adam was “faith” and on the other hand, what is required of post fall man is “faith, repentance, and obedience.” The Westminster Standards are very clear that what was required of Adam before the fall was obedience and what is required of man after the fall is faith. We must be careful not to misrepresent Mr. Shepherd’s view. He is not saying that there are two different methods of justification. Even in the above quote he says, “The obligation side of the covenant is no different from what it has always been....” So how can we understand the apparent contradiction? What we need to see is that Rev. Shepherd is blurring the distinctions between faith and obedience. That brings us to our next point.

#### NORMAN SHEPHERD’S UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH

Mr. Shepherd’s denial of the covenant of works affects his understanding of faith. In his book *The Call of Grace* he writes, “All of this [fulfillment of Abrahamic promises] is made possible through the covenantal righteousness of Jesus Christ. His was a living, active, and obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross. This faith was credited to him as righteousness.”<sup>5</sup> Here Rev. Shepherd uses one of his favorite concepts “obedient faith.” This may simply mean a “living faith” that will produce obedience as fruit. However, it is hard to believe that this is what he means. This can be seen in the Scripture text used in the above quote.

Mr. Shepherd is alluding to a statement about Abraham in Gen 15:6 and applies it to our sinless Lord. At best, this statement is confusing. When the Bible speaks of someone’s faith being “credited” to him as righteousness, it is speaking of an alien righteousness. Jesus did not have to be credited with an alien righteousness as Abraham did. One wants to ask Rev. Shepherd, “Who was the object of Jesus’ faith?” Abraham’s faith rested in the Mediator of the covenant of grace: “Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26). According to the Standards, this “faith” of Abraham was but

the instrument that connected him to the actual righteousness of Christ. While Jesus had to trust His Father, He had no need for “credited” (alien) righteousness.

The confusion about faith continues. A couple of paragraphs later Mr. Shepherd says, “But just as Jesus was faithful in order to guarantee the blessing, so his followers must be faithful in order to inherit the blessing” (*Call of Grace*, 19). Notice that where Jesus had an “obedient faith,” His follower must be “faithful” in order to inherit the promises. Now we see a clear indication that Rev. Shepherd has blurred “faith” with “faithfulness” or “obedience.” The Standards see a clear distinction between “faith” and “obedience”:

WLC 73. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receives and applies Christ and his righteousness.

According to the Larger Catechism, justifying faith “receives and rests upon Christ and His righteousness” (WLC Q. 72). What does Mr. Shepherd mean by “faithful”? Does he mean that Jesus’ followers need to be obedient to inherit the blessings? If this is what he means, then here again he is at odds with the Westminster Standards. They clearly maintain that a justified person will be obedient, but they also clearly maintain that this obedience is in no way the basis for justification. It is only the merit of Christ that justifies a sinner.

Reformed theology has not ignored an aspect of faith for pre-fallen Adam. Louis Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology* says:<sup>6</sup>

In the covenant of works the keeping of the law is the way of life; in the covenant of grace, it is faith in Jesus Christ. Whatever faith was required in the covenant of works was a part of the righteousness of the law; in the covenant of grace, however, it is merely the organ by which we take possession of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Mr. Shepherd is able to confuse “faith” and “faithfulness” in his covenant theology because he has jettisoned merit as a Biblical concept. This is our next point.

#### DENIAL OF MERIT AND ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

Mr. Shepherd’s denial of the Covenant of Works has affected his view of the work of Christ. In order to affirm that a sinner needs to be “obedient” and yet not be charged with

5. Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace* (P&R, 2000) 19.

6. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, 2000) 272.

“works righteousness,” he has categorically denied that man can “merit” anything from God. That is how he can say, “His [Jesus’] was a living, active, and obedient faith ... this faith was credited to him as righteousness” (*Call of Grace*, 19). For Rev. Shepherd to be consistent, even Jesus cannot not merit anything from God. It is here that we can clearly see the danger of his “faith and grace” principle as opposed to Westminster’s “works and merit” principle. The Standards present and preserve a “works and merit” principle for the two covenant heads: Adam and Christ. They are the only two who can “merit” anything while in covenant with God. With his denial of the “merit” principle, Mr. Shepherd ends up saying that God was gracious to Jesus because of Jesus’ faith.

Thus, the denial of the Covenant of Works also leads Norman Shepherd to deny the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. He has explicitly denied the imputation of the active obedience of Christ at a conference in 2003, in his address entitled, *Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology*. The address was published as a chapter in a recently released book: *The Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective*, P. Andrew Sandlin, ed. (Nacogdoches: Covenant Media Press, 2004).

The Westminster Standards affirm both active obedience and merit in WLC 55 (bold emphasis added):

*How does Christ make intercession?* Christ makes intercession, by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth, declaring his will to have it applied to all believers; Answering all accusations against them, and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings, access with boldness to the throne of grace, and acceptance of their persons and services.

In summary we see that Norman Shepherd’s denial of the covenant of works with Adam has an effect on the entire structure of his theology. It produces a system of doctrine that is clearly different than the system found in the Westminster Standards. The words of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel seem prophetic:<sup>7</sup>

Acquaintance with this covenant [of works] is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will very readily deny that Christ by His active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for

the elect. This is to be observed with several parties who, because they err concerning the covenant of grace, also deny the covenant of works. Conversely, whoever denies the covenant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well.

I would urge officers in Reformed churches to be very careful when a new and untested theology comes along. Certainly, because Rev. Shepherd’s theology is new and there has been no systematic expression of it, there may be some misunderstandings of it, and I for one welcome any correction from him if I have misconstrued any of his statements. But one thing is perfectly clear: Mr. Shepherd’s covenant theology is different from the covenant theology of the Westminster Standards. ■

REVIEW: Robert Traill, *Justification Vindicated* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2002) xii, 77pp. Puritan Paperback Series. Reviewed by Andrew J. Webb, Pastor of Providence Presbyterian Church (PCA).

It would be understandable if a reader of *Justification Vindicated* were to conclude that this book had been written only quite recently, for in it Scottish Presbyterian Pastor Robert Traill was responding to the rise of alarming new views on justification within the Presbyterian and Reformed community that seemed to run contrary to what he rightly described as “the good old Protestant doctrine” of justification by faith alone. These “new” views will be eerily familiar to observers of some contemporary movements in Presbyterian and Reformed thought with their repudiation of the active obedience of Christ as a vital component in the biblical doctrine of justification, their emphasis on the necessity of the holiness and obedience of the believer in order to be justified, and their criticism of those who hold to the older view of justification by faith alone as “antinomians.”

Traill (1642-1716) however, was not writing for today’s readers. His book, which originally appeared in 1692, was written to outline and respond to an alarming decline in the beliefs of English Presbyterians regarding the doctrine of justification in his own time. Its enduring value to modern readers lies not only in the fact that Traill’s defense of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone is as edifying and instructive as it was when it was written over 300 years ago, but also in the fact that many of the issues in contention regarding justification in his day have resurfaced in contemporary debates. For instance, the neonomian view of justification espoused by Traill’s contemporary, Richard Baxter, has many similarities with the views of modern neonomians<sup>1</sup> such as Norman Shepherd. Therefore, it is not going too far to say that if a reader is well acquainted with the justification controversy

7. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria Books, 1992) 1.355.

1. Neonomians deny that justification depends upon the imputation of Christ’s perfect obedience to the law and instead

as it existed in Traill's day, he will be better equipped to understand and deal with the errors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At only seventy-seven pages in length in the Banner of Truth paperback edition, it is difficult to think of a book length examination of the doctrine of justification that is as succinct and easy to follow as *Justification Vindicated*. Buchanan's magisterial work, *The Doctrine of Justification*, may be more comprehensive, and indeed readers whose appetites are whetted to learn more about justification by faith alone would be well advised to tackle that work as well; but those wishing an introduction to the doctrine and the ways in which it can be and often is misunderstood would be well advised to start with *Justification Vindicated*.

Why is maintaining and defending the biblical doctrine of justification so important? Traill answers that question by pointing out that justification is the keystone in the arch of all Christian doctrine (Traill, 67):

All the great fundamentals of Christian truth centre in this of justification. The Trinity of persons in the Godhead; the incarnation of the only begotten of the Father; the satisfaction paid to the law and justice of God, for the sins of the world, by his obedience and sacrifice of himself in that flesh he assumed; and the divine authority of the scriptures, which reveal all this, are all straight lines of truth that centre in this doctrine of the justification of a sinner by the imputation and application of that satisfaction. There can be no justification without a righteousness; no righteousness can be but what answers fully and perfectly the holy law of God; no such righteousness can be performed but by a divine person; no benefit can accrue to a sinner by it unless it be some way his, and applied to him; no application can be made of this but by faith in Jesus Christ. And as the connection with, and dependence of this truth upon the other great mysteries of divine truth is evident in the plain proposal of it, so the same has been sadly manifest in this, that the forsaking of the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ's righteousness, has been the first step of apostasy in many, who have not stopped till they revolted from Christianity itself.

Traill was by no means alone in his convictions regarding the centrality of justification by faith alone to true Christianity. One of his contemporaries on the continent, the Dutch Puritan Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) wrote:<sup>2</sup>

[Justification] is the soul of Christianity and the fountainhead of all true comfort and sanctification. He who errs in this doctrine errs to his eternal destruction. The devil is therefore continually engaged in denying, perverting, and obscuring the truth expressed in this chapter and, if he does not accomplish this, to prevent exercise concerning this truth. When

new errors appear on the horizon, even when they initially do not pertain to justification at all, they in time will eventually culminate in affecting this doctrine. One must therefore be all the more earnest to properly understand, defend, and meditate upon this doctrine.

Traill was also quite prescient in his conclusion that if the English Presbyterians persisted in their denial of the necessity of Christ's righteousness to justification, they would inevitably become Arminian and from there it was but an easy step to Socinianism,<sup>3</sup> a development which sadly occurred as the majority of English Presbyterians ended up becoming Unitarian in their theology.

In *Justification Vindicated*, therefore, Traill sets out from the very beginning not only to defend the true doctrine of justification from the unjust charge of Antinomianism, but also to defend the absolute necessity of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer for justification. As a "guiding principle," Traill gives us the following definition of justification (Traill, 9):

That a law-condemned sinner is freely justified by God's grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; that he is justified only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to him by God of his free grace, and received by faith alone as an instrument; which faith is the gift of the same grace.

Traill goes on to state that those who were most zealous to defend the concept that justification is entirely founded on the imputation of the righteousness of Christ and does not depend in any sense the works of the believer, nevertheless also maintained that those who are truly justified will inevitably manifest holiness and good works. By doing so, Traill shows that the link between justification and sanctification is inseparable, but is never to be confounded. The good works of the believer are the "fruits" of justification, and as such they are an evidence of a lively faith, but are never in any sense the grounds of a believer's salvation.

Indeed, Traill is zealous to point out the differences between the evangelical doctrine of justification and the new scheme regarding the place of the works of believers. He denies, for instance, the mixing of faith with the obedience of believers, holding fast to the idea that faith is the "hand or

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assert that it is the covenant obedience of the justified believer that is necessary. This evangelical obedience does not need to be perfect but it must be *sincere*. Thus for neonomians faith is often indistinguishable from the believer's faithfulness.

2. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993, 1999) 341.

3. Socinians were followers of Socinus. They rejected both the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ, and became the precursors of modern Unitarians.

instrument, receiving the righteousness of Christ, for which only we are justified” rather than the belief held by many in his day of “faith’s justifying as it is the spring of sincere obedience” (Traill, 15, 57).

This idea of the mixing of faith and evangelical obedience as the grounds of salvation, was not only a problem for the “new schemers” of Traill’s day; many modern theologians who hold to some form of what is often called “Covenant Nomism” have posited the necessity of the believer’s obedience for salvation or final justification. One such clear example of this tendency to confuse faith with obedience can be found in the twenty-third thesis of Norman Shepherd’s *34 Theses on Justification*:<sup>4</sup>

23. Because faith which is not obedient faith is dead faith, and because repentance is necessary for the pardon of sin included in justification, and because abiding in Christ by keeping his commandments (John 15:5; 10; 1 John 3:13; 24) are all necessary for continuing in the state of justification, good works, works done from true faith, according to the law of God, and for his glory, being the new obedience wrought by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer united to Christ, though not the ground of his justification, are nevertheless necessary for salvation from eternal condemnation and therefore for justification (Rom. 6:16, 22; Gal. 6:7-9).

Shepherd is not the only contemporary advocate of a *new scheme* of justification who includes “sincere obedience” as a vital part of the faith that justifies. This tendency is also seen throughout the works of those who advocate a “New Perspective on Paul” (NPP) and the biblical doctrine of justification. N.T. Wright for instance has written:<sup>5</sup>

Faith and obedience are not antithetical. They belong exactly together. Indeed, very often the word “faith” itself could properly be translated as “faithfulness,” which makes the point just as well.

Traill, no doubt would have seen the above definitions of faith as very similar to the defective definitions in vogue amongst late 17<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterians of which he said (Traill, 12):

Instead of justification by perfect obedience,<sup>6</sup> we are now to

4. Norman Shepherd, *Thirty-four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works*, Presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church November 18, 1978, Thesis #23.

5. N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 160.

6. By which he refers to the active obedience of Christ imputed to believers and received by faith alone.

be justified by our own evangelical righteousness, made up of faith, repentance, and sincere obedience.

One of Traill’s central purposes in writing *Justification Vindicated* was to prove that any patchwork of our own righteousness and Christ’s, whether it be proposed as part of the popular Neonomianism of Traill’s age or the Covenant Nomism of our own, could never justify or save any man. Traill firmly believed that the very antithesis that N.T. Wright denies in the above quote lay at the heart of the biblical gospel. Simply put, justification and therefore salvation is either all of Christ or it is no justification at all. As Traill put it so very eloquently (Traill, 69-70):

It is also true that whatever variety and differences there are in men’s notions and opinions (and there is a great deal) about justification, they are all certainly reducible to two; one of which is every man’s opinion. And they are, that the justification of a sinner before God, is either on the account of a righteousness in and of ourselves, or on the account of a righteousness in another, even Jesus Christ, who is “Jehovah our righteousness.” Law and gospel, faith and works, Christ’s righteousness and our own, grace and debt, do equally divide all in this matter. Crafty men may endeavour to blend and mix these things together in justification, but it is a vain attempt. It is not only most expressly rejected in the gospel, which peremptorily determines the contrariety, inconsistency, and incompatibility between these two; but the nature of the things in themselves, and the sense and conscience of every serious person, witness to the same thing, that our own righteousness, and Christ’s righteousness, do comprehend all the pleas of men to justification – one or other of them every man in the world stands upon – and that they are inconsistent with, and destructive one of another, in justification.

If a man trusts to his own righteousness, he rejects Christ’s; if he trusts to Christ’s righteousness, he rejects his own. If he will not reject his own righteousness, as too good to be renounced, if he will not venture on Christ’s righteousness, as not sufficient alone to bear him out, and bring him safe off at God’s bar, he is in both a convicted unbeliever. And if he endeavour to patch up a righteousness before God, made up of both, he is still under the law, and a despiser of gospel-grace (Gal. 2:21). That righteousness that justifies a sinner, consists in *aliquo indivisibili*, and this every man finds when the case is his own, and he serious about it.

Let us hope that in our own time, theologians in the mold of Traill will arise once again to strive for and vindicate the “Good Old Protestant doctrine” of justification from its enemies, for certainly the warning Traill sounded regarding

the controversy over justification is just as true of the current situation (Traill, 50):

Lastly, We complain, that the scheme of the gospel contended for by our opposers, is clouded, veiled, and darkened by school terms; new, uncouth, and unscriptural phrases; whereby as they think to guard themselves against opposition, so they do increase the jealousies of their brethren, and keep their principles from the knowledge of ordinary people, who are as much concerned in those points as any scholar or divine.

This controversy looks like a very bad omen. We thought we might have healed our old breaches, in smaller things; and, behold, a new one is threatened in the greatest matters. We did hope, that the good old Protestant doctrine had been rooted and riveted in the hearts of all the ministers on our side; but now we find the contrary, and that the sour leaven of Arminianism works strongly. Their advocates do not yet own the name; but the younger sort are more bold and free: and with them no books or authors are in esteem and use, but such as are for the new rational method of divinity....

It is undoubted that the devil designs the obstructing of the course of the gospel; and in this he has often had the service of the tongues and pens of good men, as well as of bad. Yet we are not without hope, that the Lord, in his wisdom and mercy, will defeat him; and that these contentions may yet have good fruit and a good issue. ■

Review: *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision. The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision.* Edited by E. Calvin Beisner. Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004. 331 pp. \$16.00. Reviewed by J. Ligon Duncan III, Ph.D., Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS (PCA), and Adjunct Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary. Dr. Duncan is also presently Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in America, and President of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.

Before offering a brief review of this volume, it will perhaps be helpful to the reader to know some of the background as to the need for its existence. Especially since the content of this book is itself the result of a significant event in a developing ecclesiastical debate.

For some years now there has been a handful of voices within the reformed community advocating for theological revision. Concerned that the reformed churches have been too influenced by revivalism and rationalism, and believing the traditional reformed doctrine itself has not escaped the

blindspots of its contexts, these men have articulated a need for reformed pastors and churches to undertake some serious theological reassessment. A small sub-culture has grown up around these voices, and their message has been spread via the internet, weblogs, newsletters, self-published books, conferences, tapes/CDs/MP3 downloads and various other media. This diverse group of conversation partners has more recently embraced the designation "Federal Vision" as a description of its collective aspirations. Among other things, they believe that classical Covenant Theology is in need of a biblical makeover and a fresh deployment in the reformed churches and in the lives of reformed Christians. Their proposals have not been widely embraced, but they have sparked controversy in the American reformed community.

Several things in combination have put this issue on the front-burner. In the year 2000, P&R published Professor Norman Shepherd's little book, *The Call of Grace*. Mr. Shepherd left Westminster Seminary under a cloud in the early 1980s, after a long-running controversy around his doctrine of justification. He had not had a high profile in the reformed-evangelical community since that time, but the publication of his book drew new attention to him, and set the stage for a more positive assessment of his views by some affiliated with the Federal Vision. His own criticisms of "regenerational evangelism" in favor of a "covenantal approach to evangelism" clearly resonated with many in that sub-culture. In 2002, the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA) of Monroe, Louisiana held a Pastor's Conference in which key aspects of the Federal Vision were articulated. Douglas Wilson, Steve Wilkins, Steve Schlissel, and John Barach all spoke. As word of their messages filtered out into the American reformed community, there was an immediate reaction of surprise and suspicion. Indeed, in July of that same year, one smaller reformed denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States produced resolutions condemning the teaching propounded by these four men at the Monroe conference. Soon thereafter it became common to refer to the new views of covenant, election and sacraments as "the Auburn Avenue Theology."

The various churches of all four of these pastors responded with strenuous denials of the label "heresy" regarding their pastors' views, and in September of 2002, the session of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church issued a statement attempting to clarify its views on covenant, baptism and salvation, and to demonstrate that these views are consistent with subscription to the Westminster Standards. Late in 2002, Douglas Wilson elaborated on his own views, in his self-published "*Reformed" is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant*." This book, far from clarifying the issues and settling the growing concerns of the larger reformed community, succeeded in merely heightening the controversy.

Meanwhile, in 2002-2003, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was conducting a trial of an elder whose teachings resembled those of Norman Shepherd and intersected at points with the teachings of some Federal Vision advocates. When his previous conviction was overturned on appeal at the OPC General Assembly, there was widespread concern about the influence of Shepherd's views in the OPC, and a fear that the OPC was weak in its embrace of the traditional reformed doctrine of "justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone."

In 2003, the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, again hosted a Pastor's Conference with Douglas Wilson, Steve Wilkins, Steve Schlissel, and John Barach speaking. This time, however, a group of reformed stalwarts were called in to serve as respondents, among them Joseph Pipa, Morton Smith, Carl Robbins, and R.C. Sproul Jr. These men had longstanding friendships with a number of the Federal Vision proponents, and so it was hoped that forthright presentation and debate would clear misunderstandings and remove suspicions of "heresy." Once again, rather than quelling fears, this conference resulted in even more widespread awareness and concerns relating to the Federal Vision. *Christian Renewal* magazine ran interviews with the Auburn Avenue Conference's proponents and opponents of the Federal Vision.

That same year, 2003, saw a vigorous online discussion (via PCANews.com) of the New Perspectives on Paul, in which men affiliated with the Federal Vision criticized RTS professor Douglas F. Kelly's negative assessment of the New Perspectives on Paul and plead for a more positive evaluation of the work of N.T. Wright by the reformed community. The debate publicly revealed the diversity of opinion and intensity of feeling within the PCA on matters relating to the Federal Vision and the New Perspectives.

In August of 2003, Dr. E. Calvin Beisner, a personal friend of many of the key players in the 2003 Auburn Avenue Conference, brought them together, along with other prominent proponents and opponents of the Federal Vision, in Florida, in hopes that further face-to-face discussions in a non-threatening environment would dispel concerns, clarify misunderstandings and lead to unity in the truth. Once again, the best hopes were disappointed, and opponents of the Federal Vision were more concerned than ever about its content and consequences. The content of the book that is the subject of this review was first presented at this meeting.

In 2004, the Reformed Church in the United States adopted a statement condemning the teachings of Norman Shepherd on justification, and three books relating to the Federal Vision controversy were produced. (1) *The Federal Vision*, edited by Steve Wilkins, and published under the auspices of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, provides chapters by Douglas Wilson, Steve Wilkins, Steve Schlissel, and John

Barach, but also has articles from James Jordan, Peter Leithart, Rich Lusk, and Mark Horne. (2) *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*, resulting from the aforementioned symposium sponsored by Knox Theological Seminary, and moderated by Cal Beisner. And (3) *Backbone of the Bible: Covenant in Contemporary Perspective*, edited by Andrew Sandlin, appeared, with a foreword by John Frame. This book featured chapters by Norman Shepherd, Randy Booth, Roger Wagner, and others, and contains the incredibly unhelpful assertion regarding the relation of the Bible to Christian doctrine: "The Bible is unchanged and unchanging (1 Pet. 1:23-25); but doctrine, which is flawed human reflection on the Bible, is dynamic and developing." No Arian could ever hope for a better formulation of that issue!

All the while that discussion and debate has been proceeding on the Federal Vision via books, blogs and conferences, there have been denominational investigations moving ahead as well in both the PCA and OPC. Nevertheless, the January 2005 rendition of the Auburn Avenue Pastors Conference featured Church of England Bishop N.T. Wright, the most effective and prominent proponent of the so-called New Perspectives on Paul, with a rejoinder from Professor Richard Gaffin of Westminster Seminary.

This historical background to the content of this book, perhaps suggests why the volume is important. First, this book provides the reader firsthand accounts of the views of key proponents and critics of the Federal Vision in their own words. Second, it is the record of a significant attempt to meet face-to-face in hopes of promoting the peace of the church by attempting to clear up misunderstandings, alleviate misplaced concerns and create consensus on disputed matters. Both of these points are significant because of the regular assertion of Federal Vision proponents that their critics are misreading them, falsely accusing them, uncharitably dealing with them and failing to meet with them and hear them out. This is clearly not the case with regard to the interactions in this book—which are the result of critics of the Federal Vision going out of their way to understand precisely what the proponents are saying, to deal fairly and Christianly with them, and yet also to express sincere concerns about the theological assertions and formulations of the Federal Vision.

Third, the Federal Vision proponents who are contributors to this volume are ministers in various reformed denominations. This is significant for at least two reasons. The first is that this indicates that the Federal Vision is having at least some influence amongst the ministry of various reformed and evangelical churches in North America. Yet it has been propounded without the affirmation of any major reformed denomination. That is, though its advocates assert it to be both consistent with and an improvement upon historic reformed confessional formulations, no reformed denomination of

standing has recognized it as such, and yet ministers within those communions are openly and publicly promoting it, among clergy and laity alike. This seems to be a very individualistic way to promote a view that claims to have a higher view of the church than that of the prevailing evangelical culture. Secondly, this is significant because one of the interesting features of the promotion of the Federal Vision, especially in the world of the internet, has been the factor of those who lack theological and ecclesiastical credentials advocating the doctrinal reformation of the churches. It is nice to have ministers, at least in this volume, taking up that task, because some of the occupants of the blogosphere advocating for the Federal Vision (1) are possessed of no formal theological education, and (2) have not been recognized as having the qualifications for the teaching office, even by a local church—that is, not only are they not ordained as ministers, they have not even been recognized as elders in a local church.

The book is divided into four parts, and twenty-three chapters. Cal Beisner's introduction helpfully invites the reader into the debate with a healthy dose of context. It is an introduction not to be skipped. The first section of the book is an overview of some of the concerns of the proponents of the Federal Vision, as well as of concerns about the Federal Vision by its critics. It will give the reader a good feel for the issues in play in this debate.

Douglas Wilson speaks for the Federal Vision side. Wilson assures the reader of the Federal Vision's commitment to divine sovereignty and election and argues that this discussion should be treated as intramural—that is, he wants to stress that both Federal Vision proponents and opponents are legitimate members of the reformed, orthodox, Christian, community, and thus that all discussion about the Federal Vision proposals should acknowledge that and reflect it in tone. His several emphases include: highlighting (1) the Federal Vision's desire to articulate and practice a more consistent view of the place of children in the covenant community and in relation to the promises of God; (2) the Federal Vision's concern to use language more biblically than has been the case, in their opinion, in traditional reformed dogmatics, as well as its desire to subject traditional, confessional systematic theology to a rigorous scriptural re-think; (3) the Federal Vision's concern to coordinate the doctrine of union with Christ, with the doctrine of the Church, so as to correct what it sees as an errant distinction between (or at least an unhelpful deployment of the idea of) the visible and invisible church in traditional reformed ecclesiology; asserting (4) that the Federal Vision is squarely in the center of the Reformed tradition, but desirous to recover something that the original reformers had discovered but which the reformed church of late seems to have misplaced; and that (5) the Federal Vision wants to use what it thinks is more scriptural language and

categories relating to faith and obedience. The Federal Vision does not think that the New Testament entertains the kind of opposition between faith and obedience that is often articulated in evangelical explanations of the relation between law and gospel, between faith and work.

Dr. Joseph Pipa of Greenville Seminary provides the rejoinder to Wilson and, after expressing appreciation for some of the Federal Vision's diagnosis of modern evangelicalism, proceeds to indicate a string of problems: (1) a faulty hermeneutic and exegesis, including a naive and sometimes irrational version of biblicism; (2) a faulty view of systematic theology; (3) confusion in theological definition; (4) an imbalanced, pastorally problematic covenant theology; (5) an incipient sacramentalism; and (6) deviant views of covenant and justification.

Section two of the book commences with Steve Schlissel's meandering essay "A New Way of Seeing" in which he attempts to position the Federal Vision proponents as those who see the big cultural and theological picture, while their detractors are small-minded nitpickers arguing about tassel-length on vestments while Lenin rides a boxcar into Russia. He sees the culprit behind this narrow-mindedness as the Babylonian captivity of the church to Hellenistic philosophy, and posits a propositional-personal dichotomy that is reminiscent of the one many readers will have heard from their Barthian professors in halls of divinity thirty years ago. Chris Hutchinson's reply is humble in tone and devastating in content.

Peter Leithart's essay in chapter five is the most impressive piece in the whole volume from the pro-Federal Vision side. Leithart's intellect and theological training come through in his outline for a trinitarian recasting of reformed theology. Those familiar with the work of T.F. Torrance will already be acquainted with a number of Leithart's themes. Leithart's signature tags regarding "reification" and "abstraction" appear here, and nicely complement Schlissel's diatribe.

Rick Phillips' essay "Covenant and Salvation or What is a 'Christian?'" begins the third and longest section of the book, and is the first of two sturdy pieces he contributes. We may note in passing that though all of the contributions of the critics of Federal Vision theology are solid and competent, Phillips, Hutchinson's and Robbins' chapters stand out. Rich Lusk's chapter ten response to Morton Smith's essay will quickly introduce the reader to themes Lusk often develops in his writings (if you have not read him on the internet before), as will John Barach's chapter eleven contribution on "Covenant and Election" to his standard fare. The sources Lusk cites, by the way, on the history of the covenant of works do not reflect a grasp of the state of the art on that historical theological issue. Carl Robbins' piece on regeneration in chapter thirteen is a treasure trove.

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