

REVIEWS & RESPONSES

REVIEW: A Response to the Coppes-Gallant Exchange Regarding Paedocommunion (*The Confessional Presbyterian*, 2.193–205). By Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, President and Professor of Doctrinal Studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

In a recent issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian* (vol. 2, 2006), Dr. Leonard J. Coppes offered a lengthy review of Mr. Tim Gallant's book, *Feed My Lambs: Why the Lord's Table Should Be Restored to Covenant Children*. In the same issue, the editor granted Gallant opportunity to reply to Coppes' review. After Dr. Coppes informed the editor that he was not able to provide a rejoinder to Gallant's reply, I was asked to "enter the fray," so to speak, and continue the discussion by responding to both Coppes' and Gallant's comments. Though there is a danger in entering a conversation mid-stream, I have accepted the editor's invitation to offer some additional comments on the discussion thus far. Let it be noted that I do so as an advocate of the historic Reformed position that covenant children should be admitted to the Lord's Table only after they have publicly professed their faith, thereby attesting the kind of faith that is able to remember, proclaim, and discern the Lord's body as they participate in the sacrament.

1. SOME INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

Before addressing directly the most important aspects of the exchange between Coppes and Gallant, I would like to begin with some introductory observations regarding how the subject of paedocommunion should be addressed.

First, as Reformed believers, our answer to the question whether covenant children should be admitted to the Lord's Table must ultimately be based upon the teaching of the Scriptures. Though the historical practice of the church, and in particular the summary of Scriptural teaching set forth in the confessional symbols of the Reformed churches, are important considerations in determining our answer to this question, they are not the final norm for the church's faith and practice. The reformational principle of *sola Scriptura* requires that we be prepared to address this question in a fresh way, and upon the basis of a renewed study of the Scriptures. Both Coppes and Gallant properly concur in acknowledging this principle in their respective contributions to the discussion.

Second, though the confessions of the Reformed churches are subordinate to Scripture, and not the ultimate norm for the

church's faith and practice, Coppes correctly argues that their summary of Scriptural teaching militates against the paedocommunion position. Coppes cites in support of this claim the Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. & A.s 171, 173, 174 & 177. In addition to these confessional references, he might have also appealed to the WCF Chap. 29.7; the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 81; and the Belgic Confession, Art. 35.¹ Though Gallant maintains that an advocate of paedocommunion could as justifiably appeal to the confessions in support of his position (fn 1, p. 199), this claim does not comport with the language of the confessions or the historical practice of the Reformed churches, which represents an application of their teaching. Furthermore, it is not only the explicit statements of the confessions regarding those who may properly be admitted to the Lord's Table that is apropos to the debate about paedocommunion. It should also be observed that the sacramental theology of the Reformed confessions includes a clear insistence that the use of the sacraments requires that they be received in the way of an active faith response, which is worked in their recipients principally by the Spirit through the Word. The sacraments never confer the grace of Christ to their recipients apart from the Spirit's authoring faith in the hearts and minds of believers through the Word. Coppes' criticism of Gallant's presumption that all covenant children are fully united to Christ through baptism (and therefore ought to be received at the Lord's Table) properly reflects this understanding of what is required for the proper reception of the sacraments, baptism as well as the Lord's Supper.

Third, the way a question is posed often compels a particular answer. Gallant, like other advocates of paedocommunion, wants to call his position a "covenant communion" view, and the historic position a "credo-communion" view. In my judgment, the language of "covenant communion" tends to bias the discussion by its implicit suggestion that the historic Reformed view is "non-covenantal." According to Gallant, the membership of children in the covenant of grace is a sufficient warrant for their reception at the Lord's Table. Failure to admit the children of the covenant to the Lord's Table represents a kind of sinful partition of the body of Christ, which includes children as well as adults (p. 205). Gallant's insistence at this point seems to me an example of "begging the question." It

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1. "It should be noted that the Scripture proofs cited by the confessions include: John 6:35, 40, 47, 48, 50, 51, 53, 54; 1 Cor. 11: 20, 34; 10:19–22.

assumes what must be proven, namely, that the covenant of grace in its New Testament administration does not stipulate that recipients of the Lord's Supper meet certain pre-requisites to their participation. The debate regarding paedocommunion concerns the nature of the administration of the new covenant and its ordinances. If that administration requires that members of the covenant community participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the way of an active, believing reception of the sacramental elements, then that would properly be described as a "covenant communion" position. As a matter of fact, theologians of the Reformed church have always been "covenant theologians" and advocates of a "covenant communion" view. They have simply understood the requirements of the covenant differently than contemporary advocates of paedocommunion.

Fourth, a related observation is that Gallant misrepresents the historic Reformed view of the relation between baptism and the Lord's Supper. Toward the end of his response to Coppes, he characterizes this view as follows: "The Lord's Supper is therefore not a 'special attainment;' it is not the final rung for the really and truly sanctified, a final plateau on some pagan ziggurat to heaven; it is the table of Christ for the body of Christ" (p. 205). It must be admitted that Gallant's description has a kind of rhetorical appeal. However, what he describes (ostensibly as the Reformed view of things) is mythical. I know of no responsible defender of the historic Reformed position who would grant this description. A better description would be to say that the baptism of covenant children, which signifies and seals the gospel promise in Christ and calls for a believing response, is preparatory to the reception of such children at the Table of the Lord. The church's catechesis or nurture of such children aims to prepare them for their expected reception at the Lord's Table. Such children, who are taught the rudiments of the Christian religion (the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments), are expected to come in due season, having attested the kind of faith required to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The historic practice of the Reformed churches never viewed such nurture or catechesis as "setting the bar so high" as only to admit the privileged few, who are sufficiently sanctified and therefore permitted to come to the Table. The path from the baptismal font to the communion table is a straight path, not a high bridge. And in the interim period between baptism and admission to the Table, the children of the covenant are nourished with the richest of spiritual food in Christ, the preaching and teaching of the Word of the gospel. They even participate to a degree in the sacramental meal, as they sit together with the covenant community and witness the celebration of the sacrament, which reminds them of the privilege that will soon follow upon their profession of faith.

Fifth, though Coppes does not respond in his review to the

subtitle of Gallant's book ("Why Covenant Children Should Be Restored to Covenant Children"), it should be observed that this represents another instance of "question-begging" on Gallant's part. An examination of the historical practice of the Christian churches in admitting or not admitting all covenant children to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is beyond the scope of my comments here. However, the historical evidence that paedocommunion was the earliest, and universal, practice of the Christian church, is at best uncertain. Unlike the strong evidence for paedobaptism as the earliest practice of the church, the evidence for paedocommunion warrants only the inference that it was a practice introduced into some sectors of the church by the middle of the third century. However, there is earlier and third-century evidence that indicates that paedocommunion may have been an innovation when it was first introduced. Though the practice of paedocommunion was widespread in the western church until the twelfth century, it was never uncontested and it was eventually discontinued for a variety of reasons. Moreover, an evaluation of this practice also needs to remember that it was often based upon a dubious view of the efficacy of the sacraments (particularly baptism) in granting regeneration and new life in Christ by their simple administration (*ex opere operato*).

And sixth, Gallant properly notes that, in Coppes' review of his book, his important exegetical arguments from 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 are not directly or adequately addressed. These arguments are the linchpin of Gallant's case, since they treat the most comprehensive and relevant New Testament passages that bear upon the question of the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper. An adequate review of Gallant's case for paedocommunion requires an examination of his exegesis of these passages. Therefore, in my treatment of the exegetical arguments for and against paedocommunion, I will give special attention to Gallant's handling of these passages.

2. THE PRINCIPAL EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

None of my observations thus far goes to the heart of the debate between Coppes and Gallant. The heart of the debate centers upon exegetical considerations of two kinds. The first of these addresses the subject of the Old Testament precedents for the participation of children in various covenant meals, especially the Passover feast. The second of these addresses the subject of the New Testament's teaching regarding participation in the Lord's Supper, especially in passages like 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 and 11:17-34. In order to evaluate adequately the exchange between Coppes and Gallant, these considerations must now be addressed.

Gallant's argument from the Old Testament for paedocommunion appeals primarily to two kinds of evidence, the second of which is the most important. First, he appeals to the inclusion of the children of believers within the covenant

community and their participation in a number of the observances of the older covenant. And second, he appeals to the participation of children in the celebration of the Feast of the Passover, which is regarded as the most important Old Testament type of the New Testament sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Since the teaching of the New Testament is the ultimate norm for the faith and practice of the new covenant community, the church, I will briefly comment on this portion of Gallant's argument for paedocommunion, particularly his appeal to the participation of children in the Passover meal. My primary focus will be reserved for his appeal to the New Testament, particularly the passages in 1 Corinthians.

Throughout his book and in his response to Coppes' review, Gallant insists that the Old Testament Passover constitutes a clear precedent for the inclusion of children in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which is its new covenant fulfillment. This insistence may not go unchallenged, however, since the Old Testament evidence is not nearly as unambiguous as Gallant claims. A balanced evaluation of the Old Testament evidence yields, in my judgment, the following conclusions:

1. Any consideration of the precedent of the Old Testament Passover must keep in mind the important distinction between the first and subsequent celebrations of the Passover. Whereas the first Passover in Egypt was clearly a household celebration, the stipulations for later celebrations of the Passover require that it and the other two pilgrim feasts (Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Weeks) be kept only by the male members of the covenant community (Deut. 16:16; Ex. 23:17; 34:23). Though the stipulation that only circumcised men of the covenant community keep the Passover at the centralized sanctuary in Jerusalem does not expressly exclude the participation of women and young children, it does represent a significant change in the way the Passover was to be celebrated. These Deuteronomic provisions for the annual celebration of the pilgrim Passover do not require, nor do they seem to anticipate, the participation of the women and younger children of the covenant community. They certainly militate against the idea that covenant membership by itself entails participation in the Passover meal.

2. Gallant's claim that all the children of the Israelite households ate the Passover meal is a possible construction of the Old Testament evidence, but it is not as likely as he claims. Even Gallant is compelled to acknowledge that unweaned infants could not eat some of the elements of the Passover meal (for example, the meat). While acknowledging this restriction upon the participation of unweaned infants, Gallant and other proponents of paedocommunion appeal to the language of Exodus 12:4, "according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb," to argue that the only requirement for eating the Passover was the capacity to consume the meal (p. 61, *Feed My Lambs*). Since a similar phrase is used in

Exodus 16:16,18,21, to refer to the manna that the children also ate, this language is taken to imply the participation of all members of the household, the only exception being the infant children. But as the English Standard Version of this phrase suggests, this passage does not mean simply what our expression, "so many mouths to feed," means. Rather than referring to the number of persons in the household, the language of this text refers to how much each member of the household was capable of eating. Whether infants and very young children were able to eat all the elements of the Passover meal remains, so far as the meaning of this phrase is concerned, undetermined. These elements of the Passover meal included roast lamb, unleavened bread (a kind of dry biscuit), and bitter herbs (Ex. 12:8ff.; Num. 9:11). While newly weaned infants and younger children might possibly be able to eat the unleavened bread, it is implausible that they could digest the roast lamb and particularly the bitter herbs.

3. In connection with the question whether infants and very young children were able to consume the elements of the Passover meal, it should also be noted that subsequent Passovers included an additional element, namely, the cup of blessing. This cup of blessing added wine to the elements that typically belonged to the traditional Passover meal. Even though it is not clear how this element came to have a prominent role in the celebration of the Passover—it is not stipulated in the Old Testament legislation regarding this rite—its addition to the elements of the Passover meal adds a further obstacle to the claim of paedocommunionists that all the children of the household shared fully in the Passover meal. Since wine is an intoxicant and not suited to consumption by infants and very young children, it hardly seems to be an element of the Passover meal that they would be permitted to consume.

4. The Passover feast included, as one of its prescribed features, a kind of "catechetical" exercise. At a certain point in the Passover rite, the children of the household were to ask, "What do you mean by this service?" (Ex. 12:27). In reply to this question, the head of household was to declare, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses." The presence of this catechetical exercise in the context of the Passover rite does not by itself argue conclusively for or against the participation of infants and younger children. Thus, advocates of paedocommunion will observe that an intelligent participation in this feature of the Passover celebration is not a pre-requisite for keeping the feast. All of the children of the household could share the Passover meal, even if only the older children could express this question and fully understand their father's answer. However, when this feature of the Passover rite is interpreted in the light of the common practice within Judaism (see point 5

below), it does suggest that the children of the household participated in a different manner, depending upon their maturity and age. The spiritual significance and benefit of the Passover feast embraced all of the children of Israel, men and women, mature and immature, old and young. No one was excluded from an enjoyment of the covenant privileges that the Passover signified and commemorated. Nevertheless, in order for all members to benefit from the Passover rite, it was not necessary or obligatory that all directly participated in every aspect of the Passover celebration. Just as the women and younger children were not required to keep the Passover in Jerusalem, though they benefited from its spiritual significance, so the younger children might not have participated in some features of the Passover celebration without being denied their proper place in the covenant community. The

2. Evaluating the significance of the Old Testament Passover as a precedent for the inclusion of children in the New Testament Lord's Supper, also requires a consideration of the differences between these two covenant rites. In his evaluation of Gallant's book, Coppes correctly argues against overdrawing the similarities between them, since the Lord's Supper is a fulfillment of all the covenant meals of the older administration. The following differences are of special importance. First, when Christ consecrated the cup as a token of his blood shed upon the cross, he declared "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28; par. Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). This language is derived from Exodus 24:1–11, which provides an account of the covenant fellowship meal that was eaten by Moses, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel on the top of Mount Sinai. Rather than connecting the meaning of the elements of the Lord's Supper with the celebration of the Passover meal, Christ connects it directly with the covenant renewal ceremony of Exodus 24, a ceremony that was itself reminiscent of the way the Lord had confirmed His covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:7ff.). Unlike the Passover meal, which was originally a household observance in Israel, the meal that constitutes the most important Old Testament antecedent for the Lord's Supper was shared only by Moses and the twenty-four elders of Israel. Second, whereas the Passover was an old covenant observance that commemorated the event of the Exodus from Egypt, the Lord's Supper is a new covenant observance that commemorates Christ's sacrificial death, which is the fulfillment of all the types and ceremonies of the law, especially the sin and guilt offerings of the old covenant. It is certainly true that the Lord's Supper fulfills the Passover. Christ is, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "our Passover lamb." However, in the New Testament's understanding of Christ's sacrificial death, it is not the Passover but the sacrifices that typify atonement for the guilt of sin that are most pertinent. Third, the Old Testament Passover was an *annual* observance, which required the participation of the male members of the covenant community (and, in traditional practice, only those males who were "sons of the commandment"). Fourth, the observance of the Passover was to take place in a *particular place* where the Lord had placed His name. The Lord's Supper, however, was instituted by Christ to be celebrated wherever His people gather as a fulfillment of the old covenant temple. And fifth, though the New Testament does not explicitly command the women of the new covenant community to participate, their participation is an evident implication of the New Testament's teaching of their participation in Christ through faith (cf. Acts 2:42; Gal. 3:28). There are, accordingly, a number of striking differences between the manner of the administration of the Passover and of the Lord's Supper.

fact that some members of the covenant community did not partake of all elements of the Passover meal, or share in every feature of the ritual, would not compromise their place in the covenant community.

5. The historic practice of Judaism does not support Gallant's claim that all members of Israelite households ordinarily participated in the Passover Feast. The history of Jewish practice teaches us that the inclusion of women and younger children in the Passover feast was not the characteristic pattern in the Old Testament economy. The practice of Israel during the Old Testament era was largely shaped by the provisions in the law for keeping the pilgrim Passover annually in Jerusalem, not the household Passover in Egypt. Only circumcised males were required to keep the Passover Feast, and preparations for the Feast included fasting and the ceremonial cleansing (cf. Num. 9:6; John 18:28) of the pilgrim celebrants. In the traditions of Judaism, an "age of discretion" was stipulated for those who kept the Passover. Whether that age was twenty, as in the period prior to the first century A.D., or thirteen, as in the period that coincides with the New Testament's writing, it was not the practice of Judaism prior to the destruction of the second Temple to encourage the participation of younger children who were not yet "sons of the commandment" or obliged to keep all of the laws of the covenant. While it appears that the participation of women and children began to be encouraged after the destruction of the temple and a return to a household celebration of the Passover, this was not the typical practice of Israel during the Old Testament era.

I do not intend with these comments to settle the question of the participation of children in the Old Testament Passover. I only intend to illustrate that there is no unambiguous evidence that the Old Testament Passover constitutes a sufficient precedent for the participation of all covenant children in the New Testament sacrament of the Lord's Supper.²

2.2 THE NEW TESTAMENT'S TEACHING

Though Gallant appeals to the Old Testament Passover as a precedent for the practice of paedocommunion, he properly rests his case upon the most relevant evidence, which derives from the New Testament. The heart of his case, which I want now to consider directly, is based upon his interpretation of the apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 10 & 11.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:16–17

In his response to Coppes, Gallant notes that 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 is "my most frequently cited passage" (p. 204), though Coppes does not refer to it at all in his review of his book. The importance of this passage in the context of Paul's argument(s) in 1 Corinthians cannot be overstated. For in this passage, the apostle establishes the all-important principle that "the

Lord's Supper is the table of the body." As Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The theme of the unity of Christ's body and the full participation of all members of the covenant community in him, runs like a thread throughout 1 Corinthians. The Lord's Supper, as this passage clearly shows, is a beautiful expression of the oneness of the body of Christ and the fellowship that all of its members enjoy together in union with him. This constitutes the background to Paul's sobering rebuke to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11, where the apostle points out how their divisiveness in the way they celebrated the Lord's Supper was a sin against Christ's body, the church. For this reason, the judgment of the Lord had fallen upon some of them, just as the Lord's judgment fell upon the disobedient Israelites in the days of Moses (1 Cor. 10: 6–10).

According to Gallant, the foundational principle that is operative throughout Paul's treatment of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 & 11 is this theme of the oneness of the community of faith, and the full participation of all its members in Christ. Already in 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul has noted that the children of believers are "holy." Furthermore, at the outset of 1 Corinthians 10, Paul describes how believers of the old covenant were "all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea," "ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink," and "drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (vv. 2–4). This description not only provides an Old Testament precedent for all members of the covenant community, including the children, having a part in Christ, but it also constitutes the setting for Paul's emphasis upon the "fellowship" or "koinonia" that all members of the church have in Christ. The implications of this for the question of paedocommunion is clear, according to Gallant: any participation in Christ by means of the Lord's Supper that inappropriately divides the congregation into segments (rich and poor, adults and children), and excludes some from full participation in the body of Christ, falls under the apostle's admonition of the Corinthians. The practice of excluding covenant children from participation in the Lord's Supper strikes at the heart of what the sacrament means.

I do not believe that Gallant's interpretation of the implications of Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 upon the Lord's Supper as the Table of the body, the church, can be sustained without considering the particular teaching of 1 Corinthians 11. If 1 Corinthians 11 teaches what the Reformed churches historically have understood it to teach, then Gallant's appeal to 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 will prove to be premature and unwarranted. By this observation, I do not mean to ignore the particulars of Gallant's handling of this

passage. I only mean to insist that the *most decisive* passage for determining whether all covenant children should be admitted to the Lord's Table is 1 Corinthians 11:17–34.

However, there are two further observations that should be made in response to Gallant's appeal to the principle set forth in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, namely, that the Lord's Supper is the table of the body. First, membership and participation in the covenant community may be genuine, even though not all the privileges of such membership are enjoyed immediately and in the same way by all members. It is noteworthy that the participation in Christ of which the apostle Paul speaks at the outset of 1 Corinthians 10, was inclusive of non-circumcised persons (and even animals!) who accompanied the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings. The meals that were eaten during this period of history did not require circumcision, and were not governed by the Deuteronomic stipulations that applied to the annual Passover meal (something Coppes properly emphasizes). To appeal to these Old Testament observances as precedents for the new covenant meal, the Lord's Supper, seems faulty for several reasons, not the least of which is that it proves too much. And second, to reiterate a point made earlier in my introductory observations, Gallant's representation of the historic Reformed practice is needlessly prejudicial at this point. Representing the historic Reformed practice as though it "cut off" the children of believers from participation in Christ and the covenant community may have rhetorical punch, but it is a "straw man." Historic Reformed practice acknowledges that the children of believing parents are members of the covenant community and of Christ. This practice also acknowledges that they should come to the Lord's Supper in order to enjoy the nourishment in Christ that this sacramental feast provides. However, it also insists that the way believers come to the Table is stipulated in Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11: 17–34. And so to that passage we must now turn.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17–34

Undoubtedly, 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 is the most important and decisive passage in the Scriptures in terms of addressing the question of the proper recipients of the Lord's Supper. In this passage, we have the most extensive New Testament treatment of the sacrament, and one that spells out in precise language what is required of those who, as members of the body of Christ, eat the body and drink the blood of Christ. Since this is not the place to present a complete exegesis of the passage, my treatment of it will simply address several features of Gallant's exegesis that I find unpersuasive.

1. Though Gallant properly emphasizes the particular occasion for Paul's instructions in this passage, he tends to use this occasion in a way that diminishes the precise instructions that the apostle gives for a proper celebration

and reception of the sacrament. Because Paul is admonishing the Corinthian believers for an abusive practice that wrongly divided between different segments of the Lord's body, Gallant argues (as do other advocates of paedocommunion) that the one over-riding imperative that must govern any celebration of the Lord's Supper is: make no distinctions between members of the covenant community (whether between rich and poor, or between adults and children), lest the meaning of the sacrament as a Table of unity be undermined. I have no quarrel, of course, with a proper emphasis upon the occasion for Paul's teaching in this passage. Context is always of special importance to the interpretation of any Scriptural passage. What I object to in this case is the use of context to override the clear particulars of a passage.

In the historic Reformed interpretation of this passage, it has often been noted that Paul moves from a description of the problem in Corinth (vv. 17–22), which is followed by a repetition of Christ's words of institution (vv. 23–26), to a series of imperatives regarding a proper participation in the sacrament (vv. 27–32). Though the apostle begins with a specific occasion in the life of the Corinthian church, he moves to a series of *general* instructions that apply to *all members* of the covenant community. In these instructions, the apostle repeatedly uses "generic" language ("anyone," "whoever") and speaks in third person singular verb forms. Calvin's comments on this movement are still on target: "Some restrict it [i.e. the application of the passage] to the Corinthians, and the abuse that had crept in among them, but I am of the opinion that Paul here, according to his usual manner, passed on from the particular case to a general statement, or from one instance to an entire class." This means that we must pay special attention to the general instructions for a proper participation in the Lord's Supper, which the apostle Paul presents in the context of describing the erroneous practice of the Corinthian church.

2. In his handling of the words of institution that Paul quotes in this passage, Gallant argues that we should translate the language, "do this in remembrance of me" (vv. 24–25) as "do this unto my remembrance." In Gallant's view, the remembrance in question is not a subjective act on the part of the believer who receives the sacrament, but an objective act on the part of God (and the believing community) in which the sacrament's observance is itself the memorial. In this connection, Gallant appeals to the language of Leviticus 24:7 and the general Old Testament theme of "remembrance/memorial." I do not find this interpretation convincing, though it is certainly useful to Gallant's case. If Gallant's interpretation is correct, it is not permissible to appeal to the language of receiving the sacrament "in active remembrance" of Christ to exclude immature and non-professing members of the covenant community. The grammatical question here is whether "of me" in the original language of the text is an "objective"

("remembrance of me") or "subjective" ("my remembrance") genitive. It is instructive that English translations of the text usually take it to be an "objective" genitive. Within the setting of Christ's words of institution, and the imperative addressed to the recipient of the sacrament ("do this ..."), this seems to be the likeliest translation. To quote the common words employed in the administration of the sacrament, recipients of the sacrament are summoned to "take, eat/drink, remember and believe ...". In the historic understanding of the Reformed churches, a public profession of faith on the part of a covenant child is the ordinary means whereby the presence of that kind of faith is confirmed.

3. The most significant features of this passage, however, are found in verses 27–29. In these verses, the apostle Paul sets forth general stipulations for a "worthy" participation in the Lord's Supper. For our purposes, the stipulations that are most significant are: one, that the covenant member "examine himself" prior to eating the bread and drinking the cup (v. 28); and two, that the covenant member "discern the body" when he eats and drinks (v. 29). A few comments on each of these stipulations will have to suffice.

In his treatment of the requirement regarding self-examination, Gallant attempts to restrict its application to what he calls a "preventative measure" in the case where repentance from the kind of sin that was present in Corinth is needed (p. 203). This command, he maintains, was given "in reaction to a crisis" and is not "part of the original institution" of the Lord's Supper. The implication of these observations seems to be that such self-examination is not necessarily required of every one who receives the sacrament. The problem with Gallant's argument at this point is that he fails to deal adequately with the way Paul moves from the specific occasion for his teaching to a general, apodictic command to "everyone" who partakes of the sacrament. Paul does not say, "to whom it applies, let him examine himself ..." Rather, he says, "whoever eats ... let him examine himself."

Gallant also maintains that, even were the call to self-examination required of all who participate in the sacrament, the verb Paul uses, on "its strongest reading," is "not itself some sort of entrance exam; it is a means for calling oneself to repentance" (p. 203). Though I am not sure I understand Gallant's point here, I am confident that he has not done justice to the idea of "self-examination" present in this passage. The verb Paul uses, which is also used in several other passages in his epistles (see Rom. 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; 14:22; 1 Cor. 3:13; 11:28; 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:8, 22; 13:5; Gal. 6:4; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 3:10), seems to have the general meaning of "to test something to determine its genuineness." The closest possible parallel to this passage is 2 Corinthians 13:5, where the apostle summons all believers to "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith." Though Gallant wants to

“freight” the term with the excess baggage of an introspective, protracted process of spiritual inventory-taking, the normal understanding of the term in the Reformed tradition is that it requires a responsible testing on the part of the believer to see whether his faith is genuine. This requires no more nor less than looking for the three components of true, Christian faith that are treated, for example, in the Heidelberg Catechism: an acknowledgement of sin and its consequences; a heartfelt trust in Christ and his saving work; and a genuine desire to live gratefully in obedience to the Lord.

The second stipulation in these verses—that the recipient of the sacrament participate in a way that includes “discerning” the body of Christ—also requires comment. Gallant, like other advocates of paedocommunion, would like this discernment to be understood in a broad ecclesiological manner. In the context of the problem in Corinth, the “discerning” of the body amounts to a simple recognition of the identity of the covenant community. Since covenant children are members of the body of Christ, this discernment, contrary to traditional Reformed practice, requires their inclusion at the Lord’s Table, not their exclusion. In my judgment, this interpretation fails to do justice to the verb Paul uses, which requires a proper “recognition” or “understanding” of the body of Christ that was offered as a sacrifice for sin. Though this recognition or understanding has obvious ecclesiological implications, namely, that all who participate sacramentally in Christ are members of the one body, the church, it primarily focuses upon a right understanding of the body of the Lord represented in the sacramental elements of bread and wine. This discernment will be reflected in a pattern of conduct within the body of Christ that is consonant with the meaning of Christ’s body and blood that were given as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. Again, this does not require the kind of construction that Gallant wants to place upon it, namely, that believers have an extraordinary level of sanctification and intellectual apprehension of the meaning of Christ’s body. But it does require of every participant in the sacrament that he come to the Table and partake in the way of an active faith, which is capable of remembering, proclaiming, and discerning the body of Christ. The historic practice of the Reformed churches, which requires the attestation of such faith by way of a public profession, amounts to an application of this instruction to the life of the church.

For these reasons, I remain convinced that a proper reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 provides sufficient warrant for the historic view and practice of the Reformed churches. The children of believing parents must be instructed and nurtured in the Christian faith in order to prepare them to profess publicly the kind of faith that is required in order to receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Such a public profession amounts to a confirmation that their participation in Christ

by means of the sacrament will be an eating and drinking “with the mouth of faith.”

ADDITIONAL NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE

At the risk of extending a response that is already too long, I would also note that there are at least two additional pieces of New Testament evidence that Gallant tends to minimize in making his case for paedocommunion. These pieces of evidence constitute “corroboratory evidence” for stipulating that believers be admitted to the Table of Lord only after having publicly attested the kind of faith requisite to a remembrance and proclamation of Christ’s death.

1. The first piece of evidence is the language used by our Lord in the institution of the Lord’s Supper. In the Gospel accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the Lord instructs those who celebrate the Lord’s Supper to take or receive the sacramental elements, and to do so “in remembrance” of him (Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23). Participation in the Lord’s Supper occurs in response to a command, “do this,” and calls accordingly for a *responsible engagement* on the part of those who take and eat the bread, and take and drink the wine. The act of taking or receiving the sacramental signs and tokens of Christ’s body and blood is to be performed as a means of *remembering* and *believing* that Christ’s death was an atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. In this respect, the communicant’s reception of Christ through the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is different from the way the sacrament of baptism is received. Though the language is not altogether satisfactory, the Lord’s Supper requires the active participation of its recipient in a way that is not required of the recipient of baptism, who in a manner of speaking is the *passive* recipient of the sacramental sign and seal of the gospel promise.³ The language of the words of institution requires that the church’s practice conform to the principle that those who participate in the sacrament do so in responsible obedience to the Lord’s command to “do this in remembrance of him.”

2. One of the most important passages in the New Testament for addressing the issue of paedocommunion is John 6. Since this passage contains a long discourse by our Lord on the manner in which believers partake of his body and blood, it has significant implications for how this participation is effected sacramentally. This holds true whether or not

3. This language does not deny that the recipient of baptism, whether an adult or a child of believing parents, must respond to the gospel promise, which is signified and sealed to them in baptism, with an active faith. However, in the case of infants and children of believing parents, such faith is not a pre-requisite to the reception of the sacrament. The ground for the baptism of any member of the covenant is the gospel promise in Christ, which God makes to *believers and their children even before they are old enough to understand or respond properly.*

the discourse refers to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as many in Christian tradition have maintained. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a divinely-appointed means whereby its recipients enjoy a true participation in Christ's body and blood. The description of the nature of *any such participation*, which is given to us in this discourse, is, therefore, of particular significance for the question how Christ is received in the sacrament.⁴

The implication of this passage (see esp. vv. 35, 40, 47–8, 50–51, 53–54) is expressed well in the language of the Belgic Confession, which declares that “the manner of our partaking [of Christ by means of the Lord's Supper] is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith” (Article 35). Without specifically citing John 6 as a proof text, the Belgic Confession echoes the teaching of Jesus' discourse, when it insists that “we ... receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls, for the support of our spiritual life.” The point of these affirmations in the Belgic Confession is to emphasize that those who commune with and partake of Christ by means of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper do so in the way of faith. There is no communion with Christ apart from a believing appropriation of the gospel Word that declares him to be the Word become flesh for us and for our salvation. Unless the Father grant a believing response to the gospel in the hearts and minds of believers, they will not be able to come to Christ to eat his body and drink his blood. The necessary pre-requisite to a full participation in Christ is this divinely-worked response of faith. Now, if this holds true for the believer's general participation in Christ, it holds true for the believer's particular, sacramental participation in him and his saving work.

Admittedly, John 6 does not speak directly to the question of paedocommunion. I am not even convinced that it refers directly to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. But the general teaching of John 6 regarding how believers participate in

4. Gallant does address this passage in *Feed My Lambs* ([Grand Prairie, Alberta, Canada: Pactum Reformanda Publishing, 2002] 38–40). Though he believes the passage is speaking rather directly of the Lord's Supper, he does not comment on the way the Lord emphasizes that eating his body and drinking his blood requires a divinely-authored faith on the part of the believer who partakes of Christ. Gallant rejects the Eastern Orthodox Church's appeal to this passage to prove a doctrine of sacramental efficacy and necessity (no participation in the Eucharist, no participation in Christ), but his interpretation of the passage implies precisely the Eastern Orthodox view. Throughout his study, Gallant seems to teach that covenant children who are not yet admitted to the Lord's Table are spiritually malnourished and deprived of a true, full participation in Christ. In my judgment, this kind of representation of the historic Reformed view betrays a kind of sacramentalism that is foreign to the Reformed tradition, however high a view it may have of the efficacy and proper use of the sacraments.

Christ's body and blood has a clear and compelling implication for *any mode of communion* with Christ, whether by means of the gospel Word or the sacrament that accompanies the Word. The church's requirement that those who are admitted to the Table of the Lord confirm in a public manner that they are genuine believers is a legitimate application of the teaching of this passage. Without becoming sidetracked with questions about the precise age at which such faith may best be publicly attested, I believe that the teaching of John 6 lends important support to the historic insistence of the churches that communicants first profess their faith before they be admitted to the Lord's Table.

CONCLUSION

There are additional elements in the Coppes-Gallant exchange that might also be addressed. However, I have already exceeded the boundaries of a short commentary on their previous contributions to *The Confessional Presbyterian*, and so will have to draw my comments to a close rather abruptly. Though Gallant has admirably and thoroughly presented the case for paedocommunion, I remain convinced, for the reasons mentioned, that the historic view of the Reformed churches is a “covenant communion” view. But it is a covenant communion view that endeavors to apply the principles of New Testament teaching to the way the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered. Those principles demand that covenant children be prepared for their participation in Christ by means of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Such preparation aims to nurture the kind of faith that is required for the privilege of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ in the sacrament.

RESPONSE: A Reply to Dr Cornelis Venema on Paedocommunion. By Tim Gallant.

I would like to thank Dr Venema for taking interest in this conversation, and the editor for inviting further response. Given the limited space available, I trust the reader will forgive my brevity in places; hopefully, my points will be nonetheless clear. I believe that my book, *Feed My Lambs*, answers most of the issues Venema raises, and many more. Additional material is freely available from paedocommunion.com.

1. RESPONSE TO VENEMA'S INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS
First, Venema takes me to task for calling my position “covenant communion” and his “credocommunion.” He says that this “tends to bias the discussion by its implicit suggestion that the historic Reformed view is ‘non-covenantal.’” I observe: 1) “Covenant communion” reflects my *rationale* regarding why believers' children ought to be included in the sacrament, which is *covenant membership*. That is why *paedocommunion*,

while also a convenient shorthand, is rather vague—I do not believe in communing the child *because* he is a child; nor do I believe that *all* children are to commune, but only covenant children. 2) If “covenant communion” is biased in my direction, “credocommunion” is biased at least as far in the other direction. For my understanding of Scripture is that covenant children are regarded as believers,¹ and therefore, I am just as much a credocommunionist as Venema. The matter between us ultimately boils down to whether children must become as adults in order to enter into the sacrament, or whether such a position belies Jesus’ insistence that conversion runs the other way around (Matt. 18:3).

Second, when I say that the Lord’s Supper is not some sort of “special attainment” or a “plateau on some pagan ziggurat to heaven,” Venema objects that this “misrepresents the historic Reformed view of the relation between baptism and the Lord’s Supper.” I respond: 1) It must be remembered that this rhetoric was in response to Coppes, who repeatedly has argued for a multi-tiered view of church membership, and has repeatedly stated that the sacrament is only for those in a high state of sanctification.² I am more than willing to grant that Coppes’s view is an anomaly at odds with the best of the Reformed tradition. 2) While Venema asserts that that “[t]he path from the baptismal font to the communion table is a straight path” rather than “a high bridge,” it must be asked whether the Reformed, *in practice*, frequently implement the Supper in a manner liable to the criticism I have lodged against Coppes. If the path from font to table were so clear and straight, surely the Reformed churches (particularly in the continental tradition) would not have such a dominant pattern of late profession of faith (late teens and beyond). With respect to much Reformed practice, perhaps my rhetoric is not so exaggerated. 3) I have engaged in *analysis*. If paedocommunion is biblical, then the self-understanding of Venema and others in the tradition is beside the point. Peter did not see himself as failing to “walk straightly with the truth of the gospel” – and yet, that was Paul’s apostolic verdict (Gal. 2:14).³ The surest way to demonstrate that my rhetoric is misplaced is to show that I am wrong.

Third, Venema claims that the subtitle of my book (“Why the Lord’s Supper Should Be *Restored* to Covenant Children”) is “question-begging.” This is absurd, given that *an entire chapter of Feed My Lambs* is dedicated to the historical case. If Venema disagrees with my take on the evidence, he should offer a credible alternative, rather than write as if no case has been made, and then raise unsubstantiated and vague claims regarding the evidence. For instance, he claims without documentation that there is “third-century evidence that indicates that paedocommunion may have been an innovation when it was first introduced” and also claims – again, without documentation – that “it was never contested.”⁴ (In any case, my argument does not rest on universal practice.)

Venema further obfuscates the issue by adding that “an evaluation of this practice also needs to remember that it was often based upon a dubious view of the efficacy of the sacraments (particularly baptism) in granting regeneration and new life in Christ by their simple administration (*ex opere operato*.)” Venema fails to note that this line of argument would tell at least equally against infant baptism. Neither does he explain what the Fathers meant by “regeneration” (and how it might differ from the baptismal references to Titus 3:5 in Q/A 71–73 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*). Granted, he does not want to use up valuable space, but “catch” terms such as *ex opere operato* in the context of generalizations permit him to create fear without being specific enough to be refuted.

The Reformers had good reason to reject then-current views of Rome regarding the sacraments. (Most of their objections had nothing to do with the notion that Rome credited too much efficacy to the sacraments.) We cannot engage the developmental history of *ex opera operato* here. But to answer the only point that Venema addresses: it is not true that the sacraments lack efficacy apart from a *conscious, active* response of faith. We agree, after all, on *negative* efficacy: an *unbelieving* response issues in judgment. Moreover, according to the *Belgic Confession*, infant baptism is efficacious, *not only* at the time of administration, but *also* throughout life.⁵ The *Heidelberg* asserts that infants are ingrafted into the Church in baptism (Q/A 74), with nary a hint that this ingrafting only really “takes” much later, when the child has cognitive ability.

The notion that Christ blesses only when a human mind acquires a certain amount of facility and learning is untrue;

1. If this were not so, Jesus could never have said that “of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:14). If the kingdom of heaven centers upon faith, in terms of the “human side” of things, then we can only say that covenant children are believers, or they could not possibly be presented in this paradigmatic fashion.

2. See e.g. *Daddy, May I Take Communion*, p. 19: self-examination “requires mature sanctification;” p. 93: children must “become their own covenantal head” [*sic*] before they can commune; p. 124: “Under Jesus, only federal heads can approach the table and ‘take Christ’ to themselves;” p. 144: worthy partaking means “having met all of God’s requirements relating to sanctification;” p. 149: unlike Passover, the Lord’s Supper requires “deep sanctification” etc. On Coppes’s assumption that the NT carries forward the OT’s levels of graded holiness, see e.g. *Daddy*, pp. 253ff.

3. Note well that the issue in context was table fellowship (Gal. 2:11) and had to do with the full covenant membership rights of all the baptized (3:27).

4. The reader should perhaps be aware that this is the same man who in a seminary classroom claimed that Augustine did not believe in paedocommunion. I refer the reader to the direct quotations from Augustine on pp. 118–120 of *Feed My Lambs* to determine whether Venema is close to being a reasonable judge of the history.

5. Article 34: “Neither does this baptism avail us only at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life.”

Christ took little ones in His arms and *blessed* them. That blessing *happened*, no matter how little they may have cognitively understood. *The Reformed objection to ex opere operato does not consist of a claim that baptism has no efficacy until the child is old enough to respond in an active cognitive way*, and certainly the *Bible* allows us no room for such a response. The claim that paedocommunion was practiced on the basis of an *ex opere operato* viewpoint is a red herring.

2. PRINCIPAL EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 OLD TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS

In this section, Venema deals primarily with my appeal to Passover as an antecedent to the Lord's Supper.

2.1.1.1, 5. Venema insists that one "must keep in mind the important distinction between the first and subsequent celebrations of the Passover." The former was a household celebration, while the latter were observed at the central worship center (ultimately Jerusalem). As I noted in my book, however, "Historical differences there undoubtedly were, but Ex. 12:25 makes it clear that it is *this rite* (i.e. the one presently instituted) which will be observed in the land of promise" (*Feed My Lambs*, 60–61, n63).

Venema writes that Deuteronomy's "provisions for the annual celebration... do not require, nor do they seem to anticipate, the participation of the women and younger children of the covenant community. They certainly militate against the idea that covenant membership by itself entails participation in the Passover meal."

Two points: 1) Without argument, Venema takes an unsubstantiated step up the ladder (not only was Passover not *required* for women and children; it supposedly was not *anticipated*). 2) He equivocates by stating my position in the way he does: "covenant membership by itself entails participation." (In this narrow context, what is meant by "by itself" and "entails"?)

But even a casual reading of my book shows that I have dealt with the Passover evidence more fully than one would suppose from Venema's sweeping comments (all of chapter 2—pp. 44–71—is devoted to Passover). I am aware that neither women nor children were *required* to attend Passover – or any other sacrificially-based rite of the law, for that matter, because

6. His goal, after all, is not merely to demonstrate that (small) children aren't *required* to come to the table, but that they are not *permitted* to do so. On the matter of rights and requirements, see esp. *Feed My Lambs*, 49–51.

7. E.g. the matter of males becoming "sons of the commandment."

8. *Feed My Lambs*, 56. The reference is to *Sukkah* 42b in the Gemara.

9. I only mentioned it in a footnote, while noting *via* cross-reference and Jewish interpretation that Venema's alternative translation is inherently less likely (see p. 64, footnote 66).

these were tied to the central Jerusalem location, and God was practical enough to take the logistics (and the weakness of His people) into account. Certainly, God did not envision that *all* women and children would participate regularly; in that sense, covenant membership did not "entail" sacramental participation automatically.

But that is not the point at issue. The only application suitable to Venema's purpose must not only show that children were not *required* to celebrate Passover; it must show that they were not *permitted* to do so.⁶ Moreover, although women and children weren't *required* to participate, contrary to Venema's denial, the law does indicate an *anticipation* that they *will* do so (Deuteronomy 12:6–7, 11–12), even if that participation is not universal and consistent (I cite this on page 63 of *Feed My Lambs*).

This same flaw (ignoring the difference between *not required* and *not permitted*) runs through much of Venema's argumentation regarding Passover, so I won't break things down section by section. But by way of example, note that the supposed Jewish precedents to which he appeals⁷ (which in any case are largely unprovable, in terms of relevant chronology) refer again to *requirement*, not *permission*. As I showed in *Feed My Lambs*, the rabbis said that children were to be admitted if they could eat so much as an olive-sized piece of lamb.⁸

2.1.1.2–3. Regarding Venema's further suggestion that children's participation in the original Passover meal "is not as likely" as I have claimed, it is to be noted that none of Venema's attempts to weaken my case accomplish much. For instance, I scarcely rested any weight on Exodus 12:4 to begin with.⁹ It is not clear why Venema thinks that newly weaned infants (or, for that matter, those who were still nursing but nonetheless eating solid food) couldn't digest roast lamb. I won't pretend to know exactly how ancient Israel dealt with the bitter herbs; but *we do* know that children celebrated Passover, and this matter has to do with a relatively minor aspect of the logistical *how*, not *whether*.

Somewhat more humorous is Venema's argument from the supposed Passover "element" of the cup of blessing. Not only is this not an element mandated by the law; not only is this a much later addition; not only is there no evidence of a certain required amount to drink – beyond all this, one must observe that on-duty priests and Levites (and Nazirites, period) were barred from consuming wine (Lev. 10:8–11; Num. 6:2–4). But nobody suggests that priests and Nazirites did not celebrate the Passover.

2.1.1.4. Venema repeats the tired line that the original Passover prescribed a sort of catechetical exercise. This too I have shown to be false (*Feed My Lambs*, 44–46); the question envisioned in Exodus 12:26–27 was not at all prescribed, much less a prerequisite for participation. Like the parallel situations

where God foresaw that various Israelite institutions would raise questions in the minds of covenant children, He told Israel how to respond wisely (see Joshua 4:6–7; Deut. 6:20–21). The question is foreseen precisely because the children in view were already partaking; the term for “children” in 12:26 is the same that appears in 12:24: “you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever” (NASB).

2.1.note 2. In a footnote, Venema follows Coppes in drawing out differences between Passover and the Lord’s Supper. Many of these are simple redemptive-historical differences (obviously, the Supper involves Christ’s blood, not a literal lamb etc) and are clear enough to all. But nobody thinks that the Lord’s Supper *is* Passover, any more than anyone thinks baptism *is* circumcision.

Venema also appeals to the echo of Exodus 24:8 found in Matthew 26:28 and parallels; from that he draws attention to the fact that this “most important antecedent... was shared only by Moses and the twenty-four elders of Israel.” I dealt with this both in the book and my earlier response to Coppes: the part of Exodus 24 which Jesus cites is not the account of the meal with the elders on Sinai (Ex 24:9–11), but the *sprinkling of blood upon the whole congregation* (24:8). The point in view has to do with Christ cleansing *all* His people, not the representative meal that came later. (Of course, the representative character of the Exodus 24 meal itself points to something more inclusive. This is the nature of representation.) The allusion to Exodus 24 supports the whole-body position I propound, not Venema’s position (See *Feed My Lambs*, 87–88; cf. *Confessional Presbyterian* 2.201–202).

2.2 NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

2.2.1. Venema begins his discussion with 1 Corinthians 10, but his response to my position consists of two paragraphs. The first of these virtually asserts that 1 Corinthians 11 trumps the passage in view. The second does little more than argue in a circle; Venema claims that “membership and participation in the covenant community may be genuine, even though not all the privileges of such membership are enjoyed immediately and in the same way by all members.” Venema then adds,

It is noteworthy that the participation in Christ of which the apostle Paul speaks at the outset of 1 Corinthians 10, was inclusive of non-circumcised persons (and even animals!) who accompanied the children of Israel during their wilderness wanderings.... To appeal to these Old Testament observances as precedents for the new covenant meal, the Lord’s Supper, seems faulty for several reasons, not the least of which is that it proves too much.

Venema’s argument is unclear. The first sentence above suggests that *not all members participate*, at least not in the

same way; he follows that immediately by observing that Paul’s case study involves *unexpected participants*, and then concludes that the examples in 1 Corinthians 10 are misguided as precedents for the Lord’s Supper.

First, let us note that it is not *I* who created the link between the new covenant sacraments and the events referred to in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 10; it is *Paul*. It is *Paul* who uses baptismal and Eucharistic language to refer to the Red Sea crossing and the manna, and then in short order begins to talk about the new covenant sacraments directly. It is *Paul* who places us within the same covenantal and sacramental matrix (not least by using *tupos* language in vv. 6, 11)¹⁰ with Israel in the wilderness. So let’s not say that the link is “faulty.”

Second, let’s observe something biblical-theologically. There was *no* circumcision in the wilderness, which is why the generation that entered the land was circumcised *en masse* (Joshua 5:1–12). And it is not coincidental that it was precisely on that occasion that 1) the manna ceased; and 2) Israel again observed Passover. It is thus clear that the apostle rightly interprets the Red Sea passage and the provision of manna as an outside-the-land substitute for circumcision and Passover. This is particularly fitting for the purpose of addressing a largely Gentile church, since it thus involves a virtually “Gentilic” situation for Israel herself.¹¹

Third, let us be clear with this: If 1 Corinthians 10:17 says that we are all one body *because* we partake of the one bread, it is mere hand-waving to claim that the Lord’s Supper could be a privilege not to be enjoyed by all members. That is in flat contradiction to the text, and Venema’s case is weakened even more by Paul’s sacramental parallelism two chapters later, when he uses “all” terminology with reference to the two sacraments (1 Cor. 12:12–13; see my development in *Feed My Lambs*, 36–37).

2.2.2. Venema is emphatic that 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 is the be-all and end-all; it is “the *most decisive* passage for determining whether all covenant children should be admitted to the Lord’s Table.” It is “undoubtedly... the most important and decisive passage in the Scriptures in terms of addressing the question of the proper recipients of the Lord’s Supper.”

Venema’s emphatic “undoubtedly” notwithstanding, doubt *should* be raised: 1 Corinthians 10:17 identifies clearly to whom the table belongs (the body); 1 Corinthians 11 does *not* in fact deal with “the proper recipients of the Lord’s Supper.”

10. The terminology here is much stronger than many of the translations have it, with renderings such as “examples.” *Tupos* refers to a mold or matrix, and its use here indicates that Paul believes a binding pattern has been established which determines the shape of covenant life for us.

11. Whatever we may wish to say regarding the animals, it is to be noted that they were included with Israel in Exodus 10.9 as dedicated to Yahweh for sacrificial purposes.

Venema does not say directly what granting precedence to 1 Corinthians 11 will mean for him hermeneutically, but he shows us in practice. It amounts to this: Because this is the “decisive” passage, Venema will interpret it independently of the matrix established in the preceding chapter. The passage becomes not only “decisive,” but *virtually independent*. His position can’t work otherwise.

As we’ve already seen, before this passage begins, Paul has already outlined the shape of covenantal realities in connection with the sacraments. As Israel of old, those who have been baptized (10:2) and participated in sacramental food and drink (10:3–4) will fall under *judgment* if they disqualify themselves (9:27; the terminology is *adokimos* – closely related to *dokimazo*, the word in 11:28 usually translated along the lines of “examine”). Thus note well: as early as 1 Corinthians 10:4, we already have the themes of “self-examination” and judgment. By 10:17, the participation together of the body in Christ is established. And all of this within an overarching view that Israel’s experience is paradigmatic for ours.

That is why, given space constraints, I’m disinclined to go verse by verse through 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 with Venema.¹² I disagree with his reading at numerous points,¹³ but that is a side issue. Even if I grant virtually every *exegetical* detail that Venema can defend, *he cannot prove his application*. The reason is simple: *Paul has grounded the whole within the existing covenantal pattern*, established in Israel’s history. The old covenant relationship between God and His people involved matters of judgment, disqualification, and so on. As I argued in *Feed My Lambs*, there is biblical precedent for the ideas of “self-examination” we find in 1 Corinthians 11, such as Isaiah 1:10ff.¹⁴

As important as it is, 1 Corinthians 11 is not a free-standing text. It grows out of the conceptual context Paul has provided in 9:24–10:22, and behind that, the whole old covenant substructure and history which provide the matrix for (covenantal and sacramental) new covenant realities. And what that implies is that if the old covenant invited children to the sacramental table (as it clearly did),¹⁵ then an application of 1 Corinthians 11 that reverses that pattern is utterly illicit.

12. I have already provided verse by verse discussion in the book.

13. E.g. his dismissal of the biblical antecedents for the *remembrance* terminology of 11:24–25 and his simple assumption that “discerning the body” has to do with the body of Christ in the sacrament rather than with the church body.

14. See esp. pp. 92–93; cf. 149–150. Note e.g. Isa. 66:2–4; Amos 5:21–24; Mal. 1:10. Even Venema’s questionable notion that 1 Cor 11:27 refers to discerning the body of Christ in the sacrament is not without precedent, in terms of old covenant norms; after all, Paul says in 10:18 that those who eat the sacrifices are participants in the altar.

15. See again esp. *Feed My Lambs*, 49–50, 60–64. Relevant texts include Exod. 10:9; Deut. 12:6–7, 11–12; 16:16, etc.

16. Or the whole string of texts connecting belief with baptism: Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12–13; 18:8; 19:4.

Venema and other credocommunionists are *hermeneutically* Anabaptist on this point. It is not at all clear why we should give 1 Corinthians 11 independent, detached authority on communion, and not Acts 2:38 (“repent and be baptized”)¹⁶ with regard to baptism. The Reformed have defended infant baptism primarily by detailing a covenantal consistency in Scripture, whereby Christian baptism takes up circumcision and the various washings of the old covenant. And yet, in 1 Corinthians 11, we have a passage in close proximity to an earlier passage (9:24–10:22) which clearly declares that the structure of new covenant life (explicitly in connection with the sacraments) is governed by an established matrix. And yet Venema appears to believe that we should interpret and apply 1 Corinthians 11 in isolation from—indeed, in contradiction to—that pattern.

No. With all due respect to the history of Reformed exegesis on 1 Corinthians 11, this is not a responsible approach to the text.

2.2.3. Venema concludes the main section of his piece with “additional New Testament evidence.” Here, he manages to create a long paragraph out of the simple “Do this” of the institution of the Lord’s Supper. I cannot discuss all of Venema’s unsupported claims here. Suffice to say that, by the nature of the case, covenantal meals have always involved *doing*. Indeed, they also involved *remembrance*, as I showed in *Feed My Lambs* (E.g. 83–87). Moreover, I have also dealt extensively with Venema’s active/passive distinction—a real distinction which has nonetheless been overblown, and has always been an aspect of the covenant (See esp. *Feed My Lambs*, 137–138). There is no reason to suppose the active/passive distinction implies any more now than it did with regard to circumcision and the old covenant meals which admitted children.

Venema also appeals to John 6. He suggests that whether or not it refers to the sacrament, it does tell us “the nature of *any such participation*” in Christ’s body and blood, and is therefore significant. He adds,

There is no communion with Christ apart from a believing appropriation of the gospel Word that declares him to be the Word become flesh for us and for our salvation.... The necessary prerequisite to a full participation in Christ is this divinely-worked response of faith. Now, if this holds true for the believer’s general participation in Christ, it holds true for the believer’s particular, sacramental participation in him and his saving work.... [T]he general teaching of John 6 regarding how believers participate in Christ’s body and blood has a clear and compelling implication for *any mode of communion* with Christ.

I too address John 6 in *Feed My Lambs* (38–40), and point out that if we deny the sacrament to children, “we thereby belie their participation in the benefits of Christ’s life and

death” (p. 40). Here it is Venema who has “proved too much.” If John 6 governs *any mode of communion* with Christ, and it requires an active faith that can be confirmed in a “public manner,” then covenant children are not united to Christ at all until they are able to make public profession of faith. This is not the historic Reformed position.

John 6 supports paedocommunion, precisely because of the genuine tie between reality and sign that Calvin himself insisted upon when writing about baptism: If infants “are participants in the thing signified, why shall they be debarred from the sign?” And again: “infants receive forgiveness of sins; therefore, they must not be deprived of the sign.”¹⁷ Either we take the view that covenant children are to be counted among the believers, and therefore have access to Christ, such that they eat and drink of Him, or we must abandon the Reformed confession and say they have no part in Him.

CONCLUSION.

Like Leonard Coppes before him, Dr Venema repeatedly raises objections as if they had not already been anticipated and dealt with in *Feed My Lambs*. It is one thing to engage my argument and then to disagree; it is another to ignore it. This exchange confirms what I learned when first researching the subject: the credocommunion case does not have a hermeneutically-responsible answer to paedocommunion.

A Further Reply to Tim Gallant on Paedocommunion, by Dr. Cornelis P. Venema.

I would like to thank the editor, Mr. Chris Coldwell, for granting me the opportunity to write a further reply to Tim Gallant on the subject of paedocommunion. These kinds of exchanges could go on indefinitely, but I will restrict my remarks to the most significant features of Gallant’s reply to my earlier response.

REGARDING MY INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

As I read Gallant’s response to my introductory observations, it appears that he takes exception to three of my points.

First, Gallant is not pleased that I am unwilling to concede the language of “covenant communion” to those who, like himself, advocate the admission of all covenant children to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Since he uses this language to call attention to the “rationale” for the admission of children to the Table, Gallant believes that it is the most appropriate term for his view. He also adds that his view is as much a “credocommunionist” view as mine, since he regards covenant children as “believers.”

Though I do not much care to quibble about terms, I remain persuaded that those who hold the historic Reformed view on the question of paedocommunion ought not to

concede the language of “covenant communion.” Advocates of paedocommunion believe their position is most consistent with the implications of the doctrine of the covenant. Indeed, the entire Reformed tradition from Calvin onward, though it thought itself covenantal in doctrine, has failed to reckon with the consequences of a consistent covenant view. Elements of “baptistic” thinking allegedly continue to infect Reformed practice at this point. My point regarding the language of “covenant communion” is that this claim needs to be challenged directly. The historic Reformed view regarding the administration of the Lord’s Supper is a covenantal communion view. It has merely argued that the biblical terms for the administration of the covenant stipulate requirements for admission to the Table that militate against the paedocommunion position.

I am not sure how to respond to Gallant’s unqualified assertion that the children of believers are themselves “believers” and that his is therefore as much a “credocommunion” view as mine. If he means to say that the children of believing parents are covenant members, or that they should be regarded as members of Christ who are to be nurtured in the Word of the covenant in preparation for their admission to the Table, I have no quarrel with him. But it is still proper to distinguish between believers and their children (as the apostle Peter does in Acts 2:39, when he says the “promise is to you *and to your children*”; cf. 1 Cor. 7:14). It is also necessary to insist that the children of believers attest their faith by responding appropriately to the gospel promise. Gallant boldly asserts that all the children of believing parents are “believers.” But it is not clear what this assertion means? How does the church confirm the presence and authenticity of their faith? What belongs to the kind of “faith” that is an appropriate response to the covenant Word, which was signified and sealed to them in their baptism? Is there a kind of “infant faith” that differs from the kind of faith that is normatively defined in the Reformed confessions (see, e.g., Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 7)? If Gallant affirms that all covenant children are believers, what objection remains to the church’s insistence that this faith be attested by means of a public profession of faith?

Second, in my comments on Gallant’s response to Coppes, I took exception to his caricature of the Reformed view, when he compared its insistence upon a profession of faith prior to admission to the Lord’s Supper to a “special attainment” or a “plateau on some pagan ziggurat to heaven.” I am happy to note that Gallant concedes that this comparison may not fairly represent the best of the Reformed tradition and practice regarding admission to the Lord’s Table. I am surprised, however, that, after having made this concession, he then proceeds

17. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.16.5; IV.16.22, respectively.

to characterize the practice of most (especially Continental) Reformed churches in similar terms. The gist of my introductory observation at this juncture was that the case for paedocommunion is not advanced by misrepresenting the historical position of the Reformed churches. To reiterate the point of my introductory observation: the historical Reformed view does not place any arbitrary or unbiblical wall between the baptismal font and the communion Table. It simply requires those who are admitted to the Table to come in the way of a believing response to the gospel Word concerning Jesus Christ. Catechetical instruction in the Reformed churches aims to prepare the baptized children of believing parents to make a profession of faith in Christ that is able to remember, proclaim, and discern the body of Christ in the sacrament.

Third, Gallant is especially displeased with my suggestion that the subtitle of his book ("Why the Lord's Supper Should Be Restored to Covenant Children") is "question-begging." Because he has dedicated a chapter of his book to the historical case for paedocommunion, Gallant thinks it is "absurd" for me to offer this suggestion. Whether my observation about Gallant's title is "absurd," as he claims, depends upon whether the claim embedded in his title deserves to be as confidently asserted as he thinks. Admittedly, part of my objection to the book's subtitle is a simple matter of preference. I don't particularly like titles that pronounce in an almost-pontifical fashion that a book's argument is beyond dispute. Something like that seems to be the case with Gallant's subtitle. Another part of my objection here is that Reformed Christians never want to imply that their faith and practice is simply a matter of adherence to tradition, however hallowed or venerable. But my primary objection is that Gallant's subtitle (and the chapter dedicated to the historical evidence) *overstates* and *exceeds* the reach of the historical evidence that we presently possess.

As I noted in my earlier response to Gallant, this is not the place to canvass the historical evidence regarding the practice of paedocommunion. I have actually done this in a series of articles published in *The Outlook*.¹ When this series is completed, I hope to submit it for publication in the form of a book on the question of paedocommunion. From my

1. Ed. *The Outlook* is a monthly magazine published by Reformed Fellowship Inc. <http://www.reformedfellowship.net/>.

2. I hesitate to reply to Gallant's footnote regarding what I am alleged to have said in the classroom at Mid-America Reformed Seminary regarding Augustine's view. What I may or may not have said in a classroom at Mid-America is irrelevant to the present discussion. I do know, however, that Augustine's view is less clear than Gallant claims, and that there are features of his thinking about the sacraments that militate against paedocommunion (and likely played a role in the Western church's later consensus view against the practice). The reader may wish to consult Matthew Winzer's article in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*. Winzer makes a similar point regarding Augustine's view.

study of the historical evidence, I have come to the following conclusions:

1. The testimony to the practice of paedocommunion in the antiquity of the church does not compare to that for the practice of paedobaptism. The evidence for paedocommunion warrants only the inference that it was a practice introduced into some sectors of the church by the middle of the third century. However, there is earlier third-century evidence that indicates that paedocommunion may have been an innovation when it was first introduced.

2. By the time of Augustine and thereafter, the practice of paedocommunion became increasingly widespread in the Eastern and Western branches of the church. The practice of paedocommunion in the Eastern church, which continues to the present, was established during this period. The practice of paedocommunion in the Western church became the prevalent one until the twelfth century. However, even in this period the practice of paedocommunion was never as universal in the West as it was in the East.²

3. Any evaluation of the widespread practice of paedocommunion in the church during the period prior to the high Middle Ages and the Reformation must take note of the diverse reasons offered to encourage or to discourage this practice. An assessment of the practice of paedocommunion may not ignore, for example, the close connection between a growing sacramentalism, which viewed baptism as a means of granting new birth to its recipients, and the admission of children to the Lord's Table. Those who would appeal to the practice of paedocommunion in this period have to reckon with the dubious sacramental views that encouraged the admission of children to the Table.

4. The reasons for the decline of the practice of paedocommunion in the Western church are complex. Advocates of paedocommunion often cite the emergence of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the growing fear of desecrating the consecrated elements if paedocommunion continued to be practiced. They also appeal to the practice of withholding the cup from the faithful, a practice that allegedly made the participation of infants in the sacrament by means of intinction difficult, if not impossible. Though these factors may have played a role in the decline of paedocommunion, there are other factors that tend to be overlooked, for example, the long-standing conviction of the church Fathers, Augustine included, that insisted upon a believing and informed reception of the sacrament of communion. The development of the sacrament of confirmation and its association with the admission of believers to the sacrament has its roots in the earliest teaching and practice of the church.

As these conclusions indicate, I am convinced that the evidence for the practice of paedocommunion in the early church is mixed, and that it is not nearly as strong as that

for the practice of paedobaptism. I also remain persuaded, despite Gallant's complaint that it is a "red herring," that the theological arguments for the practice of paedocommunion in the third and subsequent centuries are *directly relevant* to our evaluation of the historical evidence. As one of my introductory observations noted, Reformed believers do not finally determine their faith and practice by an appeal to historical tradition. Such tradition must be biblically evaluated. The tradition of paedocommunion in the church, such as it is, must be evaluated precisely in terms of the sacramental theology that under-girded it. By the standard of biblical teaching and the Reformed view of the sacraments, that theology is often unbiblical and rife with a kind of *ex opere operato* conception of sacramental efficacy.

THE MOST IMPORTANT EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In his response to my comments on the most important exegetical considerations that are relevant to the question of paedocommunion, Gallant focuses upon my handling of the Old Testament Passover as a precedent, as well as my interpretation of 1 Corinthians 10 and 11.

THE OLD TESTAMENT PASSOVER

In my comments regarding the Old Testament Passover, I am primarily interested in showing why it does not constitute a legitimate precedent for admitting children to the new covenant sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Since Gallant, like many paedocommunionists, adduces the Old Testament practice as an important leg in the argument for paedocommunion, I only wish to observe that the evidence does not warrant the weight many paedocommunionists rest upon it.

First, the stipulations in the Deuteronomic legislation, as Gallant acknowledges, do not require that all members of the covenant community participate in the annual Passover Feast in Jerusalem. Women and children are not required to keep the Passover as it was celebrated throughout the Old Testament economy. Gallant mistakenly thinks my point here is that "not required" means "not permitted," as if I were arguing that the Deuteronomic legislation expressly proscribed the participation of women and children in the Passover. But this is not the point I wish to make by way of this observation about who was required to keep the Passover feast. My point is a modest one: if the Lord genuinely embraced such women and children within the covenant, but did not require their participation in the Passover meal, then non-participation in the Passover meal has no adverse implications for their covenant status. In Gallant's book, however, it is often implied or expressly stated that non-participation in the Passover meal or its New Testament counterpart, the Lord's Supper, is tantamount to a form of "ex-communication" so far as one's covenantal participation in Christ is concerned.

Second, my observations about the likelihood of all members of the households of Israel participating in the Passover meal remain valid, despite Gallant's impatience with them. I do not claim that children took no part in the Passover meal. What I claim is that it is unlikely that *all* the children participated fully, or in all the elements, of the meal. What evidence do we have that all the children of the covenant (with the possible exception of unweaned infants) ate the roast lamb, the bitter herbs, and engaged in the prerequisite preparations for keeping the annual feast? Gallant simply assumes that they did so, largely on the basis of what he thinks occurred at the first celebration of the Passover in Egypt. Perhaps he is right. Perhaps he is not. My argument only claims that it is unlikely that they did so. Though I am fully aware that the cup was not one of the stipulated features of the Passover legislation, the traditional inclusion of the cup, and the drinking of wine, only adds to the unlikelihood that all children took part in all elements of the Passover meal. There is evidence from Jewish tradition that supports this conclusion.

And third, historical studies of traditional Jewish practice within the period of the Old Testament economy also show that young children did not participate in the annual Passover feast. Though I suppose it is possible to argue that such traditional practice represents a failure to abide by the stipulations of the covenant, it still remains true that there is no real precedent in Jewish practice for the insistence that all covenant children participated in the Passover meal.³

The point of these observations regarding the Old Testament Passover is rather limited. I mention them because they belie the oft-repeated and overly-confident assertion of advocates of paedocommunion that the Passover constitutes an important precedent for admitting children to the Table of the Lord.

1 CORINTHIANS 10

In his response to my comments, Gallant reiterates his conviction that 1 Corinthians establishes a kind of interpretive "matrix" for our reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. If I understand him correctly, Gallant seems to believe that this passage virtually proves that all covenant children ought to be admitted to the Table of the Lord. The argument seems to be something like this: because the children of Israel participated in Christ during their Exodus from Egypt and wilderness wanderings, and because the Lord's Supper is a participation in Christ for the new covenant people of God, all members of the

3. My summary of the history of traditional Jewish practice is based upon the following sources: Roger T. Beckwith, "The Age of Admission to the Lord's Table," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38/2, 136–51; idem, "The Age of Admission to Communion," *The Churchman* 85 (Spring, 1971) 13–31; and J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover from the Earliest Times to A.D. 70* (London: O.U.P., 1963).

new covenant community (including the children of believers) must be admitted to the Table of the Lord. Furthermore, since this is clear from 1 Corinthians 10, it is impossible that Paul could have intended any restrictions upon participation by non-professing members of the covenant community, when he addresses the subject of the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. As I see it, the argument here has three significant problems.

First, the argument assumes what needs to be proved, namely, that the children of the covenant community have no participation in Christ, unless they participate in Him by means of the sacrament. But I see no reason to concede that this is the case. The women and children of the old covenant who did not participate in the "sacrament" of the Passover were not thereby excluded from a genuine participation in Christ or the covenant. Why then must we conclude that the children of believing parents who do not yet participate in Christ through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper have, on that account alone, been denied their place in Christ or His body?

Second, Gallant's argument treats the sacrament as though it were "constitutive" of the oneness of the body of Christ. This is apparently the way he understands the language of 1 Cor. 10:17 ("Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"). On this understanding, any failure to eat the body or drink the blood of Christ in the sacrament would be tantamount to being excommunicated from the body of Christ. If this is Gallant's view, it is rather far removed from a Reformed understanding of what the sacrament does in relation to the gospel Word. In my reading of this language, Paul is simply calling attention to the implications of the sacramental sign of the "one bread": this bread confirms the oneness and fellowship of the church with Christ, and excludes any participation in eating foods that were offered in worship to idols.

And third, it is not permissible to draw prematurely conclusions from 1 Corinthians 10 that prevent a careful, responsible reading of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 on the question of how the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated. Though Gallant calls my approach here a kind of "AnaBaptist" [sic] hermenutic, I would argue that it preserves an important principle of all exegesis: the text is the ultimate determiner of its own meaning within the boundaries of the "analogy of faith." My interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 is squarely within the mainstream of a long-standing tradition of Reformed exegesis. Though it may

4. See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) 201. Hereafter BAG.

5. See BAG, 184. The Greek term Paul uses in this verse occurs nineteen times in the New Testament, including seven times in the Pauline epistles (see Rom. 4:20; 14:23; 1 Cor. 4:7; 6:5; 11:9; 11:31; 14:29).

not convince Gallant, it hardly deserves to be characterized as unreformed. If I may be permitted an *ad hominem*, I would prefer to keep company with John Calvin and the best exegetes of the Reformed tradition rather than with Gallant and some contemporary advocates of paedocommunion.

1 CORINTHIANS 11

Though I nowhere suggest that 1 Corinthians 11 is the "be all and end-all," as Gallant chooses to represent my view, I do believe it constitutes an insuperable obstacle to the paedocommunion case. In this passage, the apostle Paul sets forth two requirements for the worthy reception of the sacrament: first, the participant must "examine himself" prior to eating the bread and drinking the cup (v. 28); and second, the participant must "discern the body" when he eats and drinks (v. 29).

The verb Paul uses to describe the first requirement for a proper reception of the sacrament has the general meaning of "to test something to determine its genuineness."⁴ Though Paul gives no specific information regarding what such a testing or examining of oneself means, the verb he uses is found in a number of New Testament passages, including other Pauline epistles (see Rom. 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; 14:22; 1 Cor. 3:13; 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:8, 22; 13:5; Gal. 6:4; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:3; 1 Tim. 3:10). The closest parallel to this passage is 2 Corinthians 13:5, where the apostle summons all believers to "examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" Another parallel passage, which also uses this verb with a reflexive pronoun, Galatians 6:4, speaks of the need for each believer to "test his own work." These passages teach that the believer is obligated to examine his faith and conduct to determine whether it corresponds to what is expected of a person who belongs to Christ. In 1 Cor. 11:28 Paul requires this of all who would partake in a worthy manner of the Lord's Supper.

The second stipulation in these verses is that the recipient of the sacrament "discern the body." Gallant takes "body" in this verse to refer primarily to the church. However, in the immediate context of verse 29, Paul refers on two occasions to the body of Christ, first in reference to the institution of the Lord's Supper (v. 24), and then in reference to the sacramental eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ (v. 27). Both of these references to the "body" are references to the body "of Christ," which is signified and communicated by means of the sacramental elements of bread and wine. I understand this language, therefore, to require a believing discernment of the body of Christ that was given as a sacrifice on behalf of his people. Because the sacrament is a means of remembering and proclaiming Christ's sacrificial death until he comes, those who receive Christ in the sacrament must do so in the way of an active recognition of his body.⁵ Gallant's

view that this discernment refers only to an ecclesiological identification of those who belong to the covenant community does not do justice to the immediate context of this verse or to the meaning of the verb Paul uses.

TWO CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

I would like to conclude my remarks on Gallant's response with two closing observations.

The first observation relates to Gallant's method of argument, both in his book and in his responses to Coppes and myself. Gallant presents arguments and draws exegetical conclusions that may be possible. There is a difference, however, between a possible argument and one that is incontrovertible or incorrigibly true. Exegetical, historical, and theological arguments are not always as compelling or obvious as we would like them to be. One of the characteristics of Gallant's method of argument is that he seems rather overconfident about the strength of many of his arguments. Even when he draws conclusions at variance with those of venerable Reformed exegetes, he is rather too eager to declare his view the only responsible one, while branding the historic view "Anabaptist" or "not responsible." When reading Gallant's book, I am reminded of the adage, "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link." Stringing together a series of possible, but yet unlikely, arguments does not amount to a strong, cumulative case.

The second observation has to do with what I judge to be the *one over-riding premise* that governs Gallant's handling of the evidence: all covenant children are believers who enjoy a full and saving communion with Christ, and therefore to insist that they confirm their faith-response to the covenant promise before coming to the Table of the Lord is tantamount to an act of "excommunication" that cuts them off from participation in Christ. This premise, which is the real engine driving the advocacy of paedocommunion on the part of Gallant and others, is evident in his closing comments on John 6. Whereas I appealed to John 6 to illustrate the necessity of faith to any participation in Christ, Gallant insists that this represents a denial of the meaning of baptism and fails to "count" all covenant members, including children, "among the believers."⁶ The assumption here seems to be that all covenant members who are recipients of the covenant promise in baptism enjoy the fullness of saving communion with Christ until they fall away or apostatize through unbelief. This assumption, which Gallant holds in common with contemporary advocates of what is known as the "Federal Vision," does not conform to the teaching of Scripture or the summary of Scriptural teaching in the Reformed confessions. ■

A REVIEW: Peter Enns' Incarnational Doctrine of Scripture: Reformed or Not? Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005). Paperback, 208 pages. \$17.99. Reviewed by Stuart R. Jones, Instructor in Polity, Ministerial Training Institute of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Pastor of First OPC, Baltimore, Md.

A recent book by Peter Enns, Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, has occasioned a number of reviews. Generally favorable reviews have appeared in *Modern Reformation* (Longman, November/December 2005), the *Denver Journal* (Volume 8, 2005, online); less committal reviews in *JETS* (Eschelbach, December 2005) and *Review of Biblical Literature* (Green, 2006, available online); and more critical reviews in *JETS* (Beale, September 2006; cf. forthcoming in *Themelios*); *Reformation 21* (online, April and May 2006, Helm and Carson) and *New Horizons* (Ferry, October 2005). With so many reviews, what more can be said? For readers of *The Confessional Presbyterian*, it may be of interest to ask how all of this relates to a Reformed versus Evangelical view of Scripture. Enns is interested in bringing evangelicals up to speed on recent scholarship and the environment out of which Scripture arose. The human environment of ancient suzerainty treaties, for example, has provided forms which we readily recognize in the Old Testament. By itself, this is not particularly controversial. Do Reformed adherents, knowledgeable as they are of Meredith Kline's contributions to Old Testament exegesis, have a dog in this fight and if so, which dog? The following excerpt from the *Nicotine Theological Journal*—not to be confused with any fundamentalist or evangelical publication—illuminates one area of concern:

Westminster Theological Seminary faculty used to see its task as one of studying and explaining the "whole counsel of God." Most of its professors still do. But can a theological seminary fulfill its mission if it lets the equivocation of the university seminary room govern debates among a theological faculty? Pete Enns may have unintentionally forced a school, once known for its rigor, orthodoxy and willingness to defend the Reformed faith, to decide whether it wants to maintain this reputation.¹

The above comment raises the problem of ignoring systematic theology and the provisionalism one finds expressed by Enns with regard to the doctrine of Scripture. Ironically,

6. This sentence probably should have the adverb "ordinarily," since I am aware of the important qualification noted in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 10.3. ■

1. Editorial by D. Hart, "Westminster Enns," *Nicotine Theological Journal* 10/2 (April 2006) 3.

Enns appropriates the dogmatic category of incarnation about which the early church was anything but provisional in her conclusions.

The following review, rather than traversing old ground, will provide an overview of certain problematic aspects of Enns' general work, not merely his most recent book. Enns would argue that his book is meant to help Evangelicals rather than set forth a rigorous doctrine of Scripture. He wants to get a conversation going. It appears that he wants evangelicals simply to become Reformed. The masterful article by Richard Gaffin which was used to refute Rogers and McKim is cited in a footnote.² Enns maintains (in his response to Beale) that

The position laid out here by Bavinck represents my own deep Reformed commitment as to the nature of Scripture, my pre-suppositional epistemological starting point for how I work out the implications of the relationship between the divine and human elements of Scripture, and the very principle upon which my book is based. (*JETS*, June 2006, 324)

Though this sounds like Van Til and Bavinck, there is a disconnect. It is not just philosophically naïve evangelicals who have a problem with Enns' book and work.³ One gets the impression that Enns has cherry picked his citations and reformed sources. Since two can play that game, we will offer our own comparisons here. First Enns:

I am suggesting, therefore, that we can be of tremendous help to lay readers by being very intentional in articulating definitions of inerrancy that account positively for the diverse phenomena of Scripture rather than giving the impression, however unintentional, that contrary or non-compliant data

2. Cited from "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?" *WTJ* 44 (1982) 250-89 and 45 (1983) 219-72 in *JETS* 49/2 (June 2006) 325. In 1979, Rogers and McKim sought to appropriate Kuyper and Bavinck as sympathetic figures for a less rigorous view of Scriptural inerrancy (sometimes associated with Old Princeton). Gaffin's articles supplied clarifying context to Kuyper and Bavinck in works that were not then available in English (Kuyper's "Dogmatic Lectures" is still less accessible, though Bavinck's relevant work has now been translated).

3. Richard Pratt's address on the Westminster Confession's doctrine of Scripture to a recent PCA General Assembly (available for download online), while not mentioning Enns by name, contains a thinly veiled critique of his approach, particularly as he references the phrase "true myth" which Enns reportedly uses in classroom lectures. Dr. Richard Pratt, "Westminster's Approach To The Scriptures In Light Of Recent Evangelical Approaches," a lecture delivered at the *Westminster Confession for Today Conference*, June 19-20, 2006. See 2006 PCA General Assembly Recordings, <http://www.pcaga.com/shop.asp?action=details&inventoryID=46060&catId=8020>.

4. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (ET; Bold and Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 1:424.

should be marginalized in view of preconceived notions of how Scripture ought to behave (*JETS*, 322).

Note also his statement regarding "extrabiblical archeological and textual evidences" in *Inspiration and Incarnation*:

Though they are not determinative, they are wholly relevant to how we understand today what the Bible is. To state the opposite, I reject the notion that a modern doctrine of Scripture can be articulated in blissful isolation from the evidence we have. (*I&I*, 48)

Now note Bavinck:

The so-called phenomena of Scripture cannot undo this self-testimony of Scripture and may not be summoned against it as a party in the discussion. For those who make their doctrine of scripture dependant on historical research into its origination and structure have already begun to reject Scripture's self-testimony and therefore no longer believe that Scripture.⁴

Though Enns and Bavinck, taken in context, are not in direct contradiction here, there is a different orientation towards the phenomena of Scripture. We add here the extended testimony of E.J. Young:

It will be said that we are paying attention to the teaching of Scripture at the expense of its phenomena or characteristics. "You listen only to the doctrine which Scripture teaches about itself" so the charge runs, "but you pay no heed to the facts or the phenomena of Scripture. If you would begin your study with the phenomena of the Bible you would obtain a very different picture from that which you receive when you pay attention only to what the Bible says about itself." This charge is often raised in our day against those who are concerned to defend the full and complete authority of Scripture. It is, of course, not a recent charge. It was made even in the days of Benjamin B. Warfield, and he regarded it necessary even in his day to refute it.

At first glance, it might appear that there is some justification for the position that the teaching of the Bible and its phenomena are to be placed upon a par each with the other, and that the phenomena of Scripture should be just as regulative of an acceptable doctrine of Scripture as the express teaching thereof. A little reflection, however, should make clear how untenable and unjustified such a position really is.

On the airplane I fall into conversation with the man in the seat next to me. He introduces himself as a Mr. Smith from New York, and tells me that he is on his way to San Francisco.

Why should I not accept his testimony to himself? Normally, we assume that a person is telling the truth unless there be convincing reason to the contrary. But, for the sake of the argument, I am unwilling to accept Mr. Smith's testimony. For one thing he speaks with a Southern accent; again I notice that the last initial on his briefcase is not S, but B, and finally I happen to note that he holds an airline ticket between New York and Chicago, not between New York and San Francisco. I have been studying the "phenomena" of Mr. Smith and from them conclude that he is not from New York, nor is he on his way to San Francisco, nor for that matter is his name Smith. Prudence, however, dictates that I keep my findings to myself. But I am quite convinced that a study of the "phenomena" has given me the truth about Mr. Smith or whatever his name is, and I am sure that I have been far more scientific and scholarly in my procedure than a poor extreme fundamentalist who naively accepts Mr. Smith's words at face value. A study of the phenomena has contradicted the testimony of Mr. Smith. His statements about himself are not to be trusted. The "phenomena" have disproved them. It is a comfortable feeling to be so up to date.

As our flight progresses, however, Mr. Smith speaks further. I learn that he has only lived in New York for three years, but that he was born in Georgia. He shows me pictures of his birthplace and tells me that he has recently visited it. There was, it seems, a family reunion, and there is Mr. Smith in the midst of it. There are photographs of himself, and these bear his name. The mystery is beginning to clear. As we talk I learn that he is meeting a friend in Chicago and that the two of them plan to make a leisurely business trip from Chicago to San Francisco. Furthermore, I learn that the briefcase belongs not to Mr. Smith but to the friend, and that Mr. Smith is carrying it to Chicago to give to his friend. Thus, my study of the "phenomena," interesting and "objective" as it was, led to wholly wrong conclusions. And the reason why it led to such wrong conclusions was that I did not know enough to judge the "phenomena" correctly. By my study of the "phenomena" I had concluded that Mr. Smith was not telling the truth, and this was an utterly unjustified procedure by my study of the "phenomena" I did Mr. Smith a grave injustice. It may be well to note that certain assumptions underlie the position that man by a study of the phenomena of Scripture is capable of passing judgment upon these phenomena and so upon Scripture itself. And the fundamental assumption, often uncritically adopted, is that the mind of man, without the assistance of divine revelation, can make pronouncements as to whether certain parts of the Bible are from God or not. Even the study of textual questions can only be ultimately fruitful if it be based upon theistic presuppositions. And a philosophy of error can only have meaning if it be grounded

upon the truth. Man of himself does not know enough assert that there are errors in Scripture. If we assume that we may set ourselves up as judges of the Bible, what we are in reality doing is declaring ourselves wiser than God. Scripture speaks of itself as "God-breathed;" we assert that we know enough to belie its claim.

And this brings us to the heart of the matter. The idea that a study of the phenomena of Scripture as opposed to mere acceptance of the teaching of Scripture can bring us to a true view of the Bible leads inevitably to the conclusion that the teaching of the Bible concerning itself is in error and must be corrected. It produces the conclusion that the Bible is at bottom wrong about itself, and that we must revise its teaching on this point. This can hardly be regarded as a satisfactory conclusion, for if Scripture is fundamentally mistaken about itself, how do we know that it is correct in anything else that it teaches? The Bible asserts that it is "God-breathed," but we have checked up on it and we find that that characterization will not apply. The Bible has deceived us in telling us about itself, and our study of the phenomena has compelled us to modify the teaching which the Bible gives us as to its own nature. Such is the sad conclusion to which one must inevitably come if he engages in a study of the "phenomena" of the Bible instead of willingly accepting the Bible's claims concerning itself.

There is of course a proper method of examining the "phenomena" of Scripture and that is to study them in the light of Scripture's doctrine of itself. If we do this we shall see that the so-called phenomena, when properly interpreted, simply support the doctrine of Scripture about itself.⁵

In fairness, Young is addressing direct attacks on inerrancy and Enns is not quite in this group. But has Enns redefined error to allow for mistakes in the doctrine of inerrancy? We will look at this further in connection with Enns' approach to 1 Corinthians 10:4.

Another way of expressing the problem with Enns' approach is there is little or no serious consideration of the antithesis concept so basic to Reformed thought.⁶ He speaks in terms of "trajectories" and "conversations." According to him, liberals and conservatives make the same error (*I&I*,

5. E.J. Young, "Scripture God-Breathed and Profitable," *Grace Journal* 7/3 (Fall 1966) 4-5. Young adds that there is a place for studying the phenomena but again, the orientation and emphasis differs from Enns.

6. The fact that he can recommend both Warfield and Smyth (NB "honesty and spiritual sensitivity" on the same page of his book *I&I*, p. 22) ignores Warfield's serious critique of Smyth (cf. *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 5 [1894], 169-179) and suggests a lack of coherence or cherry picking of his materials.

p. 21). One wonders how Machen and company ever chose to fight along side with “fundamentalists” rather than liberals with such intellectual and moral equivalence and so much property at stake. I overstate here for effect, but the point remains. Where is the Reformed antithesis? It is blurred. Extrabiblical “evidence” is, rather than being read through the lens of Scripture, allowed to furnish its own lens for reading Scripture and ascertaining a proper doctrine thereof. Enns may quarrel with such a characterization but a case study on how he views 1 Corinthians 10:4 will highlight our point. The text reads (NKJV, italics added): “...and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

About ten years prior to his recent book, Dr. Enns wrote two journal articles which tell us something specific about how he views the function of extrabiblical material in approaching Scripture. Stated in simple terms, the exegetical environment or surrounding culture in which the Bible was produced, seems to compel certain formulations even when these formulations would be rejected today as not true.

With regard to the Protestant canon, this is illustrated by Paul’s unquestioning belief in a Jewish legend about a moveable water source that accompanied Israel in the wilderness. In his article in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996) he states (italics added here for comparative purposes):

Why, after all, in the midst of a dire warning from Israel’s history, would Paul incorporate an exegetical tradition of a mobile rock? The answer, it seems to me, is that Paul did *not actually incorporate* the tradition. To suggest such a thing is to imply that Paul’s allusion to this tradition was conscious, which should not be assumed. To put it another way, Paul’s incidental comment in 1 Cor 10:4 suggests that he was an inheritor of an “interpreted Bible.” He is *not himself interpreting* the rock of the Old Testament, nor is he consciously adducing an existing exegetical tradition; rather, he is simply talking about the biblical story in the *only way he knows how*, in accordance with the way he

7. R.T. France, while somewhat open on the question, does not go as far as Enns. Cf. “Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis,” *Themelios* 1/1 (1975), p. 14 (available online): “Clearly Paul was familiar at least with the idea of a mobile rock/well, even if not with the bizarre details of the later midrash, and found in this ever-present source of supply and help an apt illustration of Christ. Whether he regarded the tradition as historical fact is debatable, but he cited it not for its historical value, but for its spiritual significance: *pneumatikēs* here probably indicates that he interpreted the tradition typologically. To try to confine Paul’s thought to the traditional material from which he drew his illustration would be to do violence to his expressed intention in making the allusion. It is referred to not for itself, but for its illustrative value; the focus of his thought is Christ.”

8. E.E. Ellis, “A Note on 1 Corinthians 10.4,” *JBL*, 76/1 (March 1957) 53–56.

(and apparently his audience as well) had received it. In other words, the exegetical tradition of the “moveable well” actually represents the way in which Paul *understood* the provision of water in the wilderness narratives of the Old Testament. Therefore, to ask why or how a holy apostle could have “employed” such a tradition raises unnecessary obstacles and even obscures the issue. Paul’s understanding of the miraculous provision of water in the desert is a *product of the exegetical environment* in which he, as a learned Jew, lived and was taught (Phil 3:4–6; Acts 23:6; esp. Act 22:3). (*BBR*, p. 32).

Enns else where asks “What is the process that would have led to the existence of such an apparently fanciful and biblically unsupported notion.” (p. 28) Though the context for the question needs to be appreciated, the question recognizes that a legend or fable of dubious historical value is in view. Another way of saying this is that we know better than Paul—perhaps because we live in a different exegetical environment. It is not that Paul lacked an Old Testament text and was forced to rely only on traditions about the OT. His environment shaped his understanding and that uncritical acceptance of his culturally bound understanding has found its way into the Protestant canon.

This is an idiosyncratic interpretation. One strains to find any commentators of the last two centuries that believe there was actually a moveable rock in the OT, but there is no shortage of commentators of various stripes who, while seeing allusion to a Jewish legend in 1 Corinthians 10:4, regard Paul’s reference as passing or illustrative rather than endorsing the idea, consciously or otherwise.⁷ Enns’ own footnotes indicate some who reject such a notion including Herman Kuitert whose lack of orthodoxy was a concern to an older generation of Westminster faculty members. We could add the ICC, F.F. Bruce, and E. E. Ellis to those who do not regard Paul’s allusion as endorsement of the legend. In E.E. Ellis’ 1957 *JBL* article,⁸ Driver is cited to the effect that acceptance of such a fable was “totally out of harmony” with Paul’s mind.

Enns takes a similar approach when writing an article for a Romanian journal that touches on a book in the Romanian Canon (Wisdom 10:20–21). He states (italics supplied for comparative purposes):

It seems that for Ps-Solomon, his retelling of Scripture includes these traditions to the extent that the *incorporation* of these traditions are merely a matter of reflex. In fact, even to speak of “*incorporation*” may be inaccurate in that it implies a *degree of consciousness exegetical activity*. It seems that Ps-Solomon is *not actually conscious* that his biblical exposition includes these extra-biblical traditions. Rather, he is merely *retelling Scripture in the only way that might be expected of him*.

For him and his contemporaries, certain traditions about the Bible had simply become associated with the Bible itself. So that the biblical text and the interpretation of that text went hand in hand.⁹

If Enns adopts a curious view on how text in a Romanist canonical book is produced while writing in a Romanist journal, little harm to the Protestant doctrine results. It seems cavalier for a Reformed Seminary professor required to subscribe to the Westminster Standards to call an apocryphal book “Scripture,” but we will consider his target audience for the moment as an excuse for this liberty. What is interesting is the parallel between his statement in *Biblica* and his statement regarding Paul in *BBR*. It is evidence that an idiosyncratic theory shapes his approach to the biblical data rather than a theory properly constructed out of biblical data. Paul’s product in 1 Corinthians 10:4 is a product of the exegetical environment as much as material in an uninspired book. If pressed, Enns might argue that Scripture does not teach a moveable well—because there is an Old Testament record that we can interpret properly. Yet 1 Corinthians 10:4 is Scripture. This does not seem to bother Enns. That’s just the way the Bible behaves as far as he is concerned and so we should accept it. But it is not how the Bible behaves—it is an idiosyncratic spin on texts based accommodation needs as he sees them. Paul condemns Jewish myths (cf. Titus 1:14), but Enns would have him unconsciously propagating one in Scripture. Enns’ view of the phenomena of Scripture trumps its own self-testimony at this point. The same accommodationist impulse leads him to see polytheism as a view that goes pretty much unchallenged (the antithesis problem again) in the early history of the OT; this despite Deuteronomy 32 and other places that refute his idiosyncratic accommodationist views (cf. Beale’s refutation in *JETS*).

Enns’ theory apparently implies that the modern interpreter may have a better grasp on the historical reality or details of an OT text than Paul. Why Paul could not distance himself from Jewish fables and simply read the OT texts like we do is a curious thing. It is all justified as part of the humanity of Scripture. If to err is human, then we may gain an insight into what sort of incarnational analogy with which Enns is operating.¹⁰ But Enns avoids using the word “error;” though, having fables in the Bible that are not detectable as such is acceptable. But where in Bavinck or Van Til do we find such an idea? This entails a new theory of inerrancy which—leaving aside the disclaimer of notarial accuracy in Bavinck—regards undetectable fables as fine (i.e. undetectable to inspired writers). Enns may not like the word “fable” but it fits as well as tradition or legend (cf. Driver). This is not Bavinck’s view, it has no support in the Westminster Standards, and it is not Reformed by any usual Westminster understanding of that

word. A doctrine of inerrancy that allows for an inspired author to make both an exegetical and historical error is either dishonest or nonsense.

The fact that we cannot explain all the Bible “problems” is something that great Reformed scholars once accepted. Occasionally when confronted by an issue, Dr. Enns will say, he does not know; but not often enough. But in 1 Corinthians 10:4, Enns goes out of his way to create a problem; then he in effect tells us, “no problem.”¹¹ It is a flexible definition of inspiration or inerrancy that he thinks avoids the modern mindset and its preoccupation with facts but somehow does not really mean much. The Van Tilian sound of Enns’ protestations must not be allowed to disguise the irrationalism resulting from an autonomous accommodationist theory using extrabiblical data to distort the biblical data. A view of humanness—even in its servant form—that allows for error and control by unredeemed culture is an autonomous construct. It is not worthy of the legacy of Dr. Van Til.

Since his articles ten years ago, Dr. Enns appears not to have substantially changed his views. In his inaugural address at Westminster Seminary,¹² he used the word “depend” to interpret Vos’s view of how Paul derived his two age construct from the surrounding exegetical culture of Second Temple

9. P. Enns, “A Retelling of the Song at the Sea in Wis 10:20–21,” *Biblica* 76 (1995) 23.

10. Various views of how helpful the incarnational analogy is, are addressed in Paul Wells’ work, *James Barr and the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980)—especially chapter one. Enns seems to use the analogy as an all purpose excuse for his own speculative views of how the exegetical culture influences the production of Scripture. That our human and creaturely condition calls for revelation adapted to our capacities is a valid concern but one that does not justify any and all speculations made in the name of an incarnational analogy.

11. It is beyond the scope of this review to interpret the text at length. We would note that Paul’s governing argument is to emphasize the continuity (cf. the words “all” and “same” in vs 1–4) of the OT wilderness experience with the Corinthian sacramental experience. This enables Paul to issue a sober warning against presumption. The continuity ultimately focuses on the sameness of Christ’s presence as the Rock and in the life of the Corinthians. The word “following” in verse 4 may indeed point out an allusion to a Jewish legend, but the incidental nature of such an allusion is no solid basis for Enns’ conclusions. Another incidental allusion in 1 Corinthians that interpreters recognize must not be pressed to make extended theological points concerns baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29. Enns reads the incidental nature of Paul’s allusion as tacit endorsement of the larger legend in Paul’s mind. The systematic and canonical bent of Paul’s mind seems not to temper such speculation in Enns.

12. P. Enns, “The Bible in Context: the Continuing Vitality of Reformed Biblical Scholarship” (Inaugural Lecture, March 2006) cf. <http://www.wts.edu/alumni/conted.html>. The title is reminiscent of lectures given in 1994 and produced in a volume entitled, “The Vitality of Reformed Theology” (eds. Batteau, Maris and Velig; Kampen: Kok).

Judaism.¹³ That communication depends on adopting the language of one's culture is one thing. But Enns always seems to be saying a bit more and that bit more is aimed at placing more emphasis on extrabiblical material. That there is a system of doctrine set forth in Scripture setting boundaries to our exegetical enterprise is something that we hear little or nothing of in his teaching. Has the *analogia fidei* of Westminster Confession, chapter one become too theologically constraining for biblical studies today? The *Nicotine Theological Journal* posed a choice for Westminster Seminary. Hopefully the biblical studies faculty will not find itself exalting in the words of James Sanders who on the recent 125th anniversary of the Society of Biblical Literature sniffed:

As the modernist-fundamentalist controversies of the latter part of the nineteenth century subsided, the SBL attracted increasing numbers of those who subscribed to critical study of Scripture no matter how they spent their weekends. By the end of the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, most seminaries of most denominations included critical study of the Bible in their curricula, including the Presbyterian denomination that had in 1893 condemned a Union scholar as a heretic for teaching the Bible by the historical-critical method instead of through the prism of the Westminster Confession.¹⁴ ■

Review: D. G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High-Church Calvinist*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005. 256 pages. ISBN 0-87552-662-4 \$22.99 (cloth). By Alan Strange, Associate Professor of Church History, Theological Librarian, and Registrar for Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

D. G. Hart, with his recent work on John W. Nevin, has made a significant contribution to the new series *American Reformed*

13. Cf. G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 27–28, n. 36. Vos speaks of a piece of Jewish theology being “incorporated.” Vos does not say this was done unconsciously. Further, Paul is said to have had Jesus “as a predecessor in this.” I leave it to the listeners of Enns’ address to determine if the word “depend” as he uses it to argue for his use of historical studies and an historic apologetic is appropriate or illuminating. N.B. Since this review was first drafted, an edited version of Enns’ address has appeared in the *WTJ* 68/2 (Fall 2006). On page 213, the newly edited formulation qualifies the expression in his oral address with the words “to a certain degree”: “[Vos]... concludes that Paul’s eschatology is to a certain degree dependant upon this earlier theological development [i.e. backdrop of Second Temple Judaism].” This qualification is an improvement, though the earlier formulation fits with Enns’ expressed views in his treatment of 1 Corinthians 10:4; cf. treatment of Wisdom 10:20–21.

14. Review in *Review of Biblical Literature* (SBL) of John Collins, *Encounters With Biblical Theology* by James Sanders at <http://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=4968>. ■

Biographies, published by P&R Publishing. Nevin, though previously neglected by historians and theologians, has received more attention in recent decades. One might account for a revival of interest in Nevin, on the one hand, from those who are interested in Nevin as an ecumenist in a pre-ecumenical era, and, on the other hand, from those who have discovered valuable insights in Nevin’s views on the Eucharist and the church. Nevin remains obscure to many, however, and is certainly not as well known as his nineteenth-century contemporaries like Charles Grandison Finney, Horace Bushnell, or even Charles Hodge. We are thus indebted to Dr. Hart in his work for demonstrating the importance of “Nevin in context” as well as seeking to assist us in recovering a “usable Nevin.” Nevin was important then and now, and we will attempt here to take some measure of his theological stature.

Hart’s thesis about Nevin and his abiding significance can perhaps best be gathered by some of Hart’s closing comments. Hart concludes his work, reflecting on “Nevin’s Singular Contribution,” and discovers it in this: “Christianity’s primary influence needs to be evaluated not by the church’s ability to influence society but by its performance of sacred rites and recitation of holy words through which the body of Christ grows” (238). In other words, Nevin grasped that “the church is primarily an agency of grace through word and sacrament,” having “a unique work to perform with instruments unlike those of any other human organization or institution” (237). Nevin longed for the recovery of the centrality of the church in a nineteenth-century American culture that was increasingly egalitarian and individualistic, imbued with an ethos of “Jesus, my Bible, and me.”

While many confessional Reformed and Presbyterian churchmen today would promote a high view of the church and the means of grace, and thus applaud Nevin’s savaging of American anti-ecclesial sentiments, those same committed churchmen might find themselves differing considerably from Nevin as to how such an undertaking might be carried out. The devil, as they say, is in the details, and we must examine Nevin’s proposed remedies carefully. It is my aim in this review to consider how we can appreciate, and appropriate, Nevin’s call for a recovery of high churchmanship without falling into Nevin’s errors. We do indeed need to recover a historic Reformed and Presbyterian biblical high churchmanship that embraces Nevin’s strengths while identifying and rejecting his weaknesses.

As we seek to evaluate what we might learn from Nevin, both positively and negatively, a survey of some of Hart’s biographical treatment of him might prove useful. Nevin was born in rural Franklin County, Pennsylvania in 1803 (36). Being born on the centenary of the birth of Jonathan Edwards, whatever historical notice Nevin might otherwise have received on commemorations of the important events

of that year, has always, and probably always will be, eclipsed by remembrances of the more celebrated Edwards (13). This has resulted in an ironic overshadowing of Nevin, the revival critic, by Edwards, the great revival supporter and champion of the First Great Awakening.

Nevin was classically educated by his father and others and catechized in the Presbyterian Church (39–40). He always looked back to these early years of his catechism training as the time when his religious life was formed and argued that the normal Christian life was one shaped by such Christian nurture. This is not to say that he, as have some, uncritically appropriated Horace Bushnell's view of the importance of nurture over against the need for conversion to change one's nature. Rather, Nevin was more decidedly ecclesio-centric and supernaturally-focused than was Bushnell, who tended to downplay the supernatural and, in emphasizing nurture over nature, intended to pit training and teaching against the emphasis on one's need for a change of nature in regeneration (190–92). Let there be no confusion here: Nevin believed in the supernaturalism of Edwards, wrought, however, not routinely through dramatic crisis-conversions, but through the ordinary means of grace, as administered on a regular basis in the church. Nevin was an ardent supernaturalist, believing that God ordinarily worked through the appointed means of grace.

Nevin went to Union College in Schenectady, New York, from which he was graduated as a Bachelor of Arts in 1821. Afterwards, he studied at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, from which he was graduated with his divinity degree in 1826. In both of these institutions, Nevin encountered too little of a catechetical approach to piety and too much of a revivalist model, as he saw it at any rate (41–50). During his college years, he encountered the Second Great Awakening in the person of Asahel Nettleton. Nettleton was a moderate Calvinist of the pre-Finney stage of the Second Great Awakening and came to Union College to conduct services in which he called the students to come to Christ. Nevin had not yet publicly professed his faith and thus appeared as particularly fair game for the visiting revivalist, as Hart put it, "ripe for the picking" (44). Nevin responded to the urgings of the preacher and professed Christ. Nevin never questioned the sincerity of Nettleton, though he came to question his own experience in the situation and to regard this whole approach as misguided. Nevin came to view the "revival/conversion experience" suspiciously, complaining that in the eyes of his "spiritual advisers" at the time of his responding to Nettleton's ministry, he was at that point "converted and brought into the church—as if I had been altogether out of it before" (47).

Nevin resented what he perceived as the machinations of Nettleton and other Awakening preachers and seemed not to have been comfortable with the strenuous, almost violent,

piety of the revivalists, preferring the still small voice heard in the administration of the Eucharist and in catechizing. Hart notes throughout the work (see 45–47, 171–173, e.g.) that Nevin, who had various digestive and other problems, was the sort of person who for many years seemed to think that he was dying. Perhaps Nevin's physical, mental, and emotional condition shaped his religious predilections (nervous, preferring a low-key to a more energetic liturgical approach) and his slightly dyspeptic disposition may have played a significant role in his anti-Awakening mentality. Though Nevin thought for years that his death was imminent, there were periods of his life, in fact, in which he performed arduous manual labor, and lived, ultimately, for eighty-three years. Apparently, Nevin was not in as bad a physical state as he often assumed himself to be in. One can well imagine that Nevin's dislike for a revivalistic model and embrace of a high churchmanship was influenced by his delicate health, Nevin preferring what he perceived to be a less hurried spirituality. And given his longevity, ultimately, one might wonder whether Nevin's maladies were not more psychosomatic than purely physical and ponder how this mental and emotional state affected his outlook on and approach to spirituality and all the questions associated with it.

Interestingly, after being graduated from Princeton in 1826, Nevin served for two years as an instructor in Bible and oriental languages in that same institution (50–52). The occasion of this temporary appointment was Charles Hodge's going to Europe for study. This is remarkable for two reasons: firstly, Hodge studied in Germany and was not influenced by German critical thinking in any marked way, and Nevin did not study in Germany, but was deeply influenced by German thinking. Secondly, Hodge and Nevin later become theological opponents, with the Princetonian critiquing Nevin on a host of theological matters, including Nevin's doctrine of the Incarnation and the Church, the Eucharist, the influence of German philosophy on Nevin, etc. Hodge could have learned a more Calvinistic view of the Eucharist from Nevin and a generally higher view of the institutional church, but Nevin was, to Hodge's mind, too wrong on too many things for Hodge or the wider church to benefit (127–37).

When Hodge returned from his European studies, Nevin took a teaching position at Western Theological Seminary where he taught for more than a decade (54–60). Western, being as it was part of the Presbyterianism in the Pittsburgh area, was conservative Old School. Certainly Nevin resonated more with the Old School than the New, given the higher churchmanship of the former, but he was also not afraid to take contrary positions, both questioning the rectitude of the 1837 Old School/New School split and maintaining an abolitionist position in an Old School that was either anti-abolitionist or did not want to touch the issue at all. Nevin

thus showed himself to be a man of conscience, unafraid to stake out contrary positions for fear of disapproval. Nevin was not a “go-along to get-along” sort.

Nevin did not remain, as Hart puts it, in “Presbyterian Provincialism,” for the rest of his career, leaving not only Western Seminary for a German Reformed seminary but also leaving the Presbyterian Church for the German Reformed Church (61–84). Hart notes that though Nevin was “one of the most creative theologians of the nineteenth century” (226), he labored in comparative obscurity. Had he gone to Princeton from Western perhaps it would have been different. He may have been better known, interacting with and influencing a wider circle of churchmen. On the other hand, he may have been less widely known: having the theological convictions that he did, had he held and written about such at Princeton, he probably would have had a short career there, perhaps forced to leave the ministry or to retire in frustration to an obscure parish.

Nevin left Western and Presbyterianism, then, in 1840, to teach in Mercersburg Seminary in the German Reformed Church. Nevin had already come under the influence of some German theologians and historians, particularly Johann August Neander and Isaac Dorner, and so the transition from Presbyterian to German Reformed did not seem such a stretch. In fact, Nevin welcomed the change in some ways, longing for a more European and less Americanized Reformed faith. He assumed that he might discover a more historically Reformed and less anti-ecclesial spirit in a church with ties so strong to the old world. The German Reformed Church, however, as Nevin learned to his disappointment, had imbibed American individualism and revivalism too and such an embrace on the part of that church would dog Nevin even in the courts of the church, where some alleged that Nevin’s distinctives imperiled the gospel, tending toward Romanism.

Nevin would not back down from his attack on American revivalistic practices, even though charged over the course of years by some within his own denomination with cultivating an overfed ecclesiology and a malnourished soteriology (85–109). Shortly before being joined by Philip Schaff in 1844, with whom he would establish what came to be known as the Mercersburg theology, Nevin published his first important work critical of the so-called “New Measures” of the Second Great Awakening, *The Anxious Bench* (1843). The Second Great Awakening had begun, like the First, as Calvinistic, at least moderately so. Timothy Dwight, Asahel Nettleton, and others had preached a modified form of Jonathan Edwards’s message. Charles Grandison Finney was another matter, however. Whereas Edwards had stressed inability, Finney hated the doctrine of human inability. Finney declared that man had full ability to come to Christ and employed certain “new measures” to ensure converts. These new measures included

“exerting direct and often public pressure on individuals, sometimes by name, press[ing] for an immediate decision about conversion. Other innovations included sustained prayer, women praying in mixed groups, encouragement of lay participation, and the mourner’s bench” (*Dictionary of Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, 174).

The mourner’s bench, or, as Nevin called it in his critique of it, the anxious bench, was a special pew near the pulpit where those “under conviction,” i.e., seriously considering conversion, might sit. Nevin objected to such a display, lamenting that the revival tent had so come to shape the worship of the church. Given that the atmosphere in the worship services in churches thus influenced was more circus-like than reverent, Nevin longed for a recovery of the worship practices of the magisterial Reformers. While his *Anxious Bench* was a withering critique of what was wrong with revivalism, his positive program for rectifying the wrongs of the church was set forth in his 1846 work, *The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*. It is in this work that Nevin showed what had been lost, only to be replaced by the new measures (111–138). A robust view and practice of the Lord’s Supper, particularly as held and bequeathed by John Calvin, was the true birthright of the Reformed churches, sadly squandered for a mess of revivalistic pottage. Nevin argued in this most crucial of his works that a recovery of Calvin’s Eucharistic theology was indispensable in restoring true Reformed Christianity.

Nevin’s observations that the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper had fallen onto hard times in the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches served as a stinging, and accurate, indictment of those churches. Many nineteenth-century Scottish and American Presbyterians, for instance, openly took issue with Calvin’s view of the Supper, regarding it as irrational, incomprehensible, etc. William Cunningham, Robert Lewis Dabney, and Charles Hodge, for instance, all took exception to Calvin’s mystical view of the Supper to some degree. Nevin averred that much that passed for Reformed was Zwinglian and not Calvinistic in terms of Eucharistic theology. That few affirmed the real presence as did Calvin and believed in the importance of the sacrament as did that Reformer can scarcely be denied. Nevin was convinced that what was needed for the health of the church was a vigorous commitment to catechizing the youth coupled with a regular and robust administration of the sacrament of holy communion. This, for Nevin, instead of new measures, was the ecclesiastical need of the hour for the American church.

Though Nevin contributed a number of articles to journals and was involved in matters like producing, and defending, a revised liturgy for his church, in later years, he never wrote thereafter on the new measures and Calvin’s Eucharistic theology as significantly as he did in these two works from

the 1840s (169–223). As noted above, he suffered bouts with poor health. Additionally, Hart notes time and again how heavy his duties were as a family man, seminary professor, minister, college president, churchman, etc. The rest of his life, once he entered academia, was spent there, in the church, and on behalf of his family. Nevin, in his lifetime, seemed to do the work of several men. Perhaps because of these many duties, as well as his personal disposition, there is a kind of resignation, if not to say sadness, that hangs over his life. He was so frustrated with the Reformed churches, including his own, that he seriously contemplated in the 1850s leaving and joining the Roman Catholic Church. Nevin's conception of the church was in development during his career and he experienced such profound frustration with the American reformed church that Rome appeared as an attractive alternative (139–168).

What drew him to Rome was his understanding of the centrality of the church. Nevin saw the church as the mediator of salvation, a divine institution that as a corporate body was a kind of continuation of the Incarnation. In fact, Nevin saw a close connection between God incarnate in and as Christ, the Eucharist which so formed God's people as partakers of Him and thus as Christ's body, and that body, the church, as the divine mediator of salvation in the world. Such a view of the church is, obviously, quite different from what Nevin came to call the Puritan concept of the church. It was this Puritan notion of the church that stressed preaching, conversion, personal piety, etc. that Nevin saw reigning in America and that constituted for him a clear departure from historic Christianity, certainly from the Christianity of the ancient and medieval church. Nevin's question in the 1850s, then, was not whether many of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches had departed from this ancient pattern—it was obvious to him that they had—but whether even the Reformers of the sixteenth century had rightly conceived the church. If the Reformers themselves had abandoned historic Christianity, then the Reformation was not justified and Nevin saw that he would have no warrant to continue as a Protestant.

Nevin's view of the Incarnation (145–148) might sound closer to the Eastern than to the Roman church at points, prompting theologically sensitive readers to wonder if he, with his view of the church's participation in the Incarnation, approached something like theosis (or deification) at points. Hodge and other critics raised some points along these lines, noting Nevin's apparently greater interest in the Incarnation than the atonement (which points in the direction of Orthodoxy) and his greater focus on the sacraments than preaching (which also points in a Roman direction). It is probably not the case, however, that Nevin was influenced here so much by Eastern Orthodox thinking as by German Idealism. To be sure, accompanying this vigorous churchmanship, and perhaps a

concomitant of the German idealism, was an argument about the Christ of Scriptures being self-authenticating, requiring no evidentialist demonstration, a point that later Protestants would pick up and appreciate over against the Scottish Common Sense realism of the Princetonians. This point ties in with our assertion that Nevin's view of the Incarnation and of the church as divine institution has a distinctly German Idealistic ring about it, specifically a Hegelian tone to it.

Though neither Nevin nor his teachers studied under Hegel, as did Schaff's professors, Nevin encountered Hegelian thought through various German influences, as noted above, and particularly through Friedrich Rauch, a colleague at Mercersburg who died only a year after Nevin's arrival there. What, briefly, was Hegel's project? Even as Plato sought to account for universals and particulars by placing the stasis of Parmenides in the world of the form and the flux of Heraclitus in the world of matter—with Aristotle bringing form down into matter—so Kant sought to account for the rationalism of Descartes and the empiricism of Hume by his distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, with Hegel bringing the noumenal down into the phenomenal, unfolded in the development of the dialectic. In other words, Hegel sought to make immanent the absolute: Nevin's position on the Incarnation and the church, for all its resemblance to Eastern orthodoxy, was more German than Byzantine, Nevin seeing the church as a kind of immanentization of the absolute. Granted, as Holifield noted in his excellent, insightful analysis of the Mercersburg Theology, "the Hegelian God was an impersonal principle except insofar as it reached self-consciousness through human consciousness. Nevin's God was personal" (*Theology in America*, 476). Though it was evidently not Hart's intention to give concentrated attention to what role Hegelian thought may have played in the basic structure of Nevin's theology, it is a task that perhaps should be undertaken from a confessional Reformed perspective if we are fully to assess the value of Nevin for the church in our day.

That Nevin had the view of the Incarnation and the church that he did, with all the attendant problems that Hodge and others then and now have pointed out, does raise questions as to how positively we in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches should assess him. Hart's assessment of him seems to be cautiously positive. If one restricts what Nevin was vying for as, negatively, opposing revivalism and, positively, promoting a higher view of the institutional church and of the Lord's Supper particularly, then many in our churches would welcome such an emphasis. It seems, however, that he was arguing for considerably more than that. That he would even consider leaving the Reformed church for the Roman Catholic Church in the mid-nineteenth century is remarkably telling. The Roman Catholic Church of Nevin's day was not the ecumenically friendly Roman church of today (even

if we only grant a difference of tone in the post-Vatican II church), but the undiluted Tridentine church of, arguably, the most ardently conservative pope of the modern era, Pius IX. This was a Roman church that unqualifiedly believed, as John Henry Newman well knew when he went over to Rome, that the Protestant doctrine of justification was anathema and that outside the Roman church there was no salvation. That Nevin would seriously consider entering such an institution credits Hodge's contention that Nevin at least significantly downplayed justification, imputation, and other theological concerns associated with those key Protestant doctrines as expressed in the Reformed confessional documents. Nevin's serious consideration of the Roman church calls into question his essential understanding of and sympathy for a vigorous, uncompromising Protestantism.

Is Nevin and the Mercersburg theology a pattern for us today? It seems that Nevin and Schaff wanted comprehension more than anything, a uniting of the best elements of the Roman and Protestant churches (149–63; 194). Some today seem to call for the same thing, even in our confessionally Reformed churches. This is not in any measure, it should be noted, Hart's position. But others hold such a view. Is this, however, a right way to view the Christian landscape, with Rome, Constantinople, Geneva, Wittenburg, Canterbury, etc., each seen as bringing something to the table for the common good? An amalgam of them all that we agree to call Christianity? While we may appreciate that other traditions may have insights worth appropriating, we must reject the notion that what we ought to be about is some sort of Christian pastiche in which the church is a mixing of all the aforementioned faith traditions. The Reformed tradition is the Catholic faith. Other expressions of Christianity may be more or less pure in this regard, but we do not regard the Reformed faith as needing supplementation by Rome or any of the other faith traditions. This was the conviction of our Reformed forebears, and, if it is not ours, whatever we may be, we are not Reformed.

With all his emphasis on recovering the sacrament of holy communion and restoring it to its rightful Calvinist place, Nevin did not properly emphasize the centrality of preaching, as did the Reformers (236). As important as the sacraments were for the Reformers and the Reformed churches, they viewed nothing as more important for the Reformed faith than the preaching of the Word. Perhaps Nevin felt that there was enough stress already placed on preaching, if not too much, and that his era needed to hear more about the Supper than preaching. But to emphasize the sacraments without also properly highlighting the divine activity involved in preaching is deadly. One might contend, in fact, that the American church had let slip a proper view not only of the sacraments but also of preaching as well. There was a downgrade of office and preaching that was occurring before and after the U.S.

Civil War, and Nevin does not seem nearly as interested in addressing the downgrade of preaching that was occurring in his own time as he does the marginalizing of the Lord's Supper that had already occurred.

Sometimes, this lower view of preaching reflects the curious conviction that conversion is unnecessary for those baptized and thus already in the church. One hopes that Nevin's animus against Asahel Nettleton's preaching, for instance, as he came later to reflect on it, stemmed from some perception on Nevin's part that Nettleton was misguided or wrong-headed in some way, not simply that Nettleton preached the necessity of conversion. This must be said, because any notion that there is anyone who does not need to be converted is simply unbiblical. The Bible plainly teaches that without conversion we will not attain heaven. We may not experience a crisis conversion and we should especially not look for such in our catechized children. Conversion itself, however, is nothing other than turning to God in faith and repentance from our idols. Those who never thus turn, and continue turning, in fact, are at best nominal Christians and not those whom the Scriptures recognize as true heirs of eternal life.

There are also questions about Nevin's theology: does he rightly affirm predestination, the decrees of God, and the implications of such for ecclesiology in the invisible/visible distinction; does he tend towards a defective view of the Incarnation and the church; does he appreciate the importance of Christ's active and passive obedience; does he minimize the role of the Holy Spirit in making efficacious the means of grace; and does he realize the significance of imputation, and, in fact, of all that is associated with the Reformed doctrine of justification? As long as questions along these lines remain, questions which Hodge and others raised about Nevin and to which Hart gives no unambiguous answer in this work, Nevin's work, arguably, remains of dubious value to us. Nevin may help us to recover some things that we need to recover from Calvin and others. But we do not need Nevin if his project in any measure serves to obfuscate the gospel (188–90). The Reformers clarified matters for us and we need to continue that glorious work of ever sharpening our theological expressions and formulations, not dulling them to a kind of least common denominator approach to the faith, an approach that is inconsistent with what the Reformed approach has always been.

Dr. Hart has elsewhere (in his *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003]) called for an approach to the Reformed faith that does not involve so much a doctrinal, experimental, or a worldview Calvinism as one that involves what he styles a Reformed liturgicalism. Hart's call for a recovery of liturgical Calvinism is much appreciated and gravely needed. We do indeed need such a liturgical recovery, but one that engages the

whole person—that is, a liturgical recovery that does this as richly as doctrinal Calvinism engages the mind, experimental Calvinism engages the affections, and worldview Calvinism engages the life. Otherwise, such a liturgical recovery is likely to devolve into the mere formalism that often characterized orthodoxy when it was challenged by pietism centuries ago. There was a reason for the revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: the Protestant churches had become moribund in various ways and in different places, needing reviving, even as we, in our own ways, continue to need revival in our day. We need, however, a lively liturgical recovery that does not overshoot the mark, neither adopting an ecclesiology that swallows up soteriology, nor embracing a soteriology that eclipses ecclesiology. We need ecclesiology and soteriology (as well as each of the other loci) strenuously maintained.

We need, in other words, the recovery of a liturgical Calvinism in which doctrinal, worldview, and experimental Calvinism take their place in a properly balanced way, expressed through a rich, dignified, and warmly engaging liturgy. We need to recapture something that even the Princeton tradition did not fully appreciate. Hodge could have learned something from Nevin, we should admit, which he apparently failed to learn: a vigorous view of the Lord's Supper, rightly cast along the line of Calvin's teaching, accompanying the primary means of grace, the preaching of the Word. Whatever mistakes Nevin made in seeking to repositinate Calvin's Eucharistic doctrine could have been rectified rather than rejected out of hand. But Nevin clearly hurt his own case by, *inter alia*, downplaying preaching, muddying even his doctrine of the Lord's Supper with his view on the Incarnation and the church, and regarding the Roman church as positively as he did.

It would be even better, in my estimation, if we would recover the Princeton tradition and a vigorous liturgicalism. At his best, one may see something of this notion in Nevin. But in other moments one hears him calling for an approach to the church and its life that is at variance with the genius of the Protestant Reformation. What we need is a vigorous preaching of the whole counsel of God, the sacraments faithfully observed, discipline faithfully practiced, prayer regularly offered and God's people responding in faith and love. Whether the life and work of Nevin is best suited to encourage us in that direction remains doubtful.

What is not in doubt is the value of Hart's book, which ought to be read by all interested in the questions raised therein. Some in our day who have discovered Nevin have appropriated him more modestly, calling particularly for a greater appreciation of the Lord's Supper. Others have more widely embraced his project and are calling for a large-scale adoption of the Mercersburg theology. While the former arguably have a point, the latter are problematic. This is why all who are theologically interested should read Hart, and

others on Nevin, as well as Nevin himself: so that we may all better assess the relative worth of the particular positions being forwarded these days about John Williamson Nevin, an American theologian worthy of both appreciation and criticism. ■

REVIEW: Robert L. Reymond, *The God-Centered Preacher: Developing a Pulpit Ministry Approved by God* (Ross-shire, Scotland, U.K.: Christian Focus Publications, 2003). 352 pages. Paperback. £12.99. Reviewed by Dr. W. Gary Crampton, Th.D.

Dr. Robert L. Reymond is Professor of Systematic Theology at Knox Theological Seminary in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He holds B. A., M. A., and Ph. D. degrees from Bob Jones University and has done doctoral and post-doctoral studies in other seminaries and universities. Professor Reymond is an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America, and has lectured in various countries in Europe and the East. Prior to teaching at Knox Theological Seminary, he taught for over twenty years at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. He has authored numerous articles in theological journals and various reference works, and has written over a dozen books. His *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, in this reviewer's opinion, is the best one volume systematic theology in the English language available today.¹ To say the least, Dr. Reymond is a well-educated, highly trained, and skilled theologian.

The volume under review, *The God-Centered Preacher*, is divided into two parts. Part One consists of eight lectures given by the author in both this country and abroad. Part Two, on the other hand, consists of ten sermons which are offered to illustrate the types of sermons that Dr. Reymond thinks "Protestant and Reformed pastors should be preaching from their pulpits, namely, sermons that are biblically grounded, rational, God-centered, theologically accurate, and that focus on some specific condition of the Fall and provide a Christological solution" (9–10). As Part Two is "For Purposes of Illustration" (195) of the points made in Part One, this review will focus on and analyze Part One only.

In Chapter One the author studies "The Need for a Scripturally-Grounded Pulpit" (13–30). Throughout its history the Christian church has asserted, as taught in Chapter 1 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* ("Of the Holy Scripture"), that God has revealed Himself to mankind, not only in general revelation, but also in special revelation. Special revelation is now found only in the sixty-six books of the Old and New

1. See W. Gary Crampton, a review of *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, *The Trinity Review* (February 1999).

Testaments, and the canon of Scripture is closed, i.e., there is no additional special revelation, “those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.” Further, the church has claimed that the Bible is the (“immediately”) inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, and that it is “the only rule for faith and life.” The church avers that “the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Finally, God has preserved His Word through the centuries of time “by His singular care and providence,” so that it is the final authority “in all controversies of religion,” due to the fact that “none other than the Holy Spirit speaks in the Scripture.” That which is taught by the Westminster theologians on this subject is the same as taught in the Bible itself. “The Holy Scripture itself,” says Dr. Reymond, “is replete with this claim” (13–14).

Of course, there have always been those who have disavowed this high view of Scripture. Here the author considers two objections to the view espoused by the Westminster Assembly. The first objection is that of the Neo-orthodox theologians which contends that “Religious truth will always be existential truth,” i.e., it is subjective “truth for me, the human existent.” Neo-orthodoxy denies that the Bible is objective, propositional revelation. Language, it is alleged, is inadequate to convey truth; at best language serves as a “pointer” to the “existential truth encounter” that lies behind the actual words of the text, wherein the recipient of the words subjectively “experiences” this existential truth. The truth God speaks to men in biblical revelation is not historical truth; rather it is the truth outside of history, “primal” history. The Bible is full of mistakes, contradictions, and logical paradoxes. Truth must be encountered experientially in a “non-verbal direct theophany” (16–17).

This, however is not the view taught by the Bible itself. The Bible claims to speak to us in propositional statements. Propositions are logical, understandable combinations of words which objectively teach something. They are the meaning of indicative sentences. Propositions are either true or false. What makes a proposition true is that God thinks it to be true. There is no such thing as truth apart from propositions; truth is a characteristic, an attribute, of propositions alone. God thinks propositionally, and He gives us His truth in propositions. The truth of the Word of God is not somehow “above” the words, or only in the mind of the interpreter; neither are the words secretly symbolic, merely pointing to some higher truth.

2. See W. Gary Crampton, *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark* (The Trinity Foundation, 1999) 49–50.

Rather, the truth of God’s Word lies in the logical meaning of the words themselves. We come to a knowledge of the truth via our understanding of the propositions. God is not irrational and neither is His Word. There are no contradictions or logical paradoxes in Scripture. The same is true when it comes to the events of history and their meaning. The Bible does not merely tell us about certain events which occurred in history and leave the “subjective” meaning of the events to the reader to figure out on his own. God tells us in His Word the events and the meaning of the events as well.²

The second objection to the concept of propositional revelation from God to man contends that human language is not capable of expressing literal truth. Wilbur Marshall Urban, for instance, wrote: “Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as literal truth in any absolute sense, for there is no such thing as absolute correspondence between expression and that which is expressed.” All truth is symbolic. Human language is incapable of expressing itself non-symbolically (23). This theory is based on the premise that human language has evolved to its present state from the original grunts of earliest man; all language is sensory in origin.

This theory of language, of course, is self-defeating in that one only need only ask Urban (and other proponents of the theory) if his (or their) theory is “literally true.” If the answer is negative, then one need not accept it at all. If, on the other hand, the answer is positive, i.e., that it is literally true, then his theory is false, for it shows that there is such a thing as “literally true” language. If, however, he should respond that is not literally true, but “symbolically true,” then one only need ask “symbolically true of what?” And whatever Urban might say in response, according to his own theory, could only be symbolically true of something else *ad infinitum*, which infinite regress would render his theory unjustifiable.

Scripture does tell us that God has created man in His own image (Genesis 1:26–27), with the ability to have fellowship with his Creator. Further, the Bible avers that it is God who, as the source of and originator of language, “has made man’s mouth” (Exodus 4:11) in order that he could communicate with God in “literal” truth. Language as given by God is capable of communicating absolute and literal truth from God to man. Scripture confirms that the divine-human dialogue is not only possible, but it actually takes place (from as early as Genesis 1–3). And God assures us in His Word that He has supernaturally “inspired” the entirety of His revelation to us (2 Timothy 3:16) by means of “holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

Ultimately, says the author, any theory of language that denies that literal truth can be propositionally revealed to mankind is an attack on Jesus Christ Himself. For He, in the days of His flesh, spoke to the multitudes in the known

language of the day, claiming that He was imparting literal, eternal truth. The Christian minister must take this divinely given revelation and teach it to others. For “it is only as he teaches and preaches truth originating from God Himself that he can speak with authority and demand that his audience give heed to what he says” (30).

Chapter Two has to do with “The Need for a Rational Pulpit” (31–53). Since we are to understand that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, then it is from the in-scripturated Word of God that the gospel minister must derive his theology. “Theology” by definition means “rational discourse about God.” Hence, a biblically based pulpit is going to be one in which the preacher teaches “rational” theology to his auditors. Irrationalism has no place in Christianity. Yet, in our day there are large doses of irrational thinking entering into Christian circles, fostered, not only by Neo-orthodoxy, but also by (alleged) evangelicals. There is a present day drift heaped upon the effort to systematize the teaching of the Word of God. In this chapter the author analyses “two commonly-held and oft-expressed opinions which reflect this drift”: First, the question regarding the nature of the relationship between God’s knowledge and the knowledge of man, as derived from Scripture. And second, the role which logical paradox (which is distinguished from rhetorical paradox) is to be granted in our formulation of the teachings of Scripture (31–32).

First is the false teaching that “God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge never coincide at any single point.” Or, addressed another way, the question may be asked: “are the content of God’s knowledge and the content of man’s knowledge that is derived from Scripture ever the same?” Sadly, there are theologians in the evangelical camp who would answer this latter question in the negative. They assert that the relationship between these “two contents” is an analogical relationship rather than a univocal relationship. These terms have to do with the precise meaning of a predicate when applied to a separate subject. If the predicate applied to the subject is “univocal” in meaning, then the subject would understand the meaning of the predicate in an identical sense. The opposite of a univocal understanding would be an “equivocal” understanding, which would indicate that the meaning was understood in a “completely different and unrelated sense.” In between univocism and equivocism is “analogy.” When a predicate is employed analogically to the subject there is neither a completely similar (univocism) nor a completely dissimilar (equivocism) meaning, but one that is partly the same and partly not the same. The question then is: Are the content of God’s knowledge and the content of man’s knowledge that is gained from God’s Word univocal, equivocal, or analogical? (32–33).

Thomas Aquinas, as opposed to Augustine, averred that nothing can properly be predicated of God and man in a

univocal sense. To say that God is good and man is good does not in any sense mean that they are good in the same way. God’s goodness far surpasses man’s goodness. Of course, said Thomas, neither must we say that we intend an equivocal meaning when we speak of both God and man being good, for this would assert that man is not able to know anything about God. Such a meaning would lead to total ambiguity and epistemological skepticism. Thomas took the Aristotelian *via media* (middle way) and opted for an analogical predication. Here the problem arises, because in any analogical relationship between the subject and predicate there must be a univocal element implicit in it. Otherwise we would have mere equivocism. When we speak of God as good and man as good, although there is a vast difference between these two “goods,” there must be a univocal point that draws attention to the idea of good or we would have no analogy at all. In the author’s words: “What I am urging here is that the success of any analogy turns on the strength of the univocal element in it.” If we take Thomas’ viewpoint of analogy without the element of univocism, as Gordon Clark has properly said, the analogical relationship between God and man would not be analogical at all, but rather equivocal. Moreover, if Clark is correct (and he is), then Thomas’ natural theology (which is grounded in his understanding of the *analogia entis* [the analogy of being]), is necessarily defective, for he applied two entirely different meanings to the word “existence”—one for God and one for sensory data in the world in which man lives. Therefore, his argument from the “existence” of sensory data to the “existence” of God always commits the error of equivocating, in that he was using the single word “existence” with two different meanings in the same argument (34–35).

The error fostered by Thomas Aquinas regarding our analogical knowledge of God has found its way into the Reformed camp of Christianity. Cornelius Van Til has insisted that man’s knowledge must always be analogical to God’s knowledge, so that there is never a univocal point at which man’s knowledge meets God’s knowledge. “What this means for Van Til” says Dr. Reymond, “is the express rejection of any and all qualitative coincidence between the content of God’s mind and the content of man’s mind.” This means that for Van Til “man qualitatively knows nothing as God knows a thing.” To quote Cornelius Van Til: “All human predication is analogical reinterpretation of God’s pre-interpretation. Thus the incomprehensibility of God must be taught with respect to any revelational proposition.” Man’s knowledge is “at no point identical with the divine mind.” And “we dare not maintain that [God’s] knowledge and our knowledge coincide at any single point” (36–37).

The issue here is not over the knowledge of God being “quantitatively” greater than man’s knowledge. All parties recognize this to be the case. The issue has to do with the

“qualitative” knowledge of God. Is the content of man’s knowledge qualitatively different than God’s knowledge? Van Til said “yes” it is; Drs. Reymond and Clark, and Reformed theology in general, say “no” it is not. But even here a distinction must be made. God knows all things “by eternal intuition whereas men learn what they know...discursively.” Too, God’s knowledge is certainly qualitatively higher than man’s in that God qualitatively knows all things without flaw, whereas man does not. The real issue here is over the fact that Van Til insisted that there is no “univocal” point at which man’s knowledge meets God’s knowledge. This view, if followed consistently, will lead to absolute skepticism. Gordon Clark wrote:

If God knows all truths and knows the correct meaning of every proposition, and if no proposition means to man what it means to God, so that God’s knowledge and man’s knowledge do not coincide at any single point, it follows by rigorous necessity that man can have no truth at all.

And again, said Clark:

If God and man know, there must with the differences be at least one point of similarity; for if there is no point of similarity it would be inappropriate to use the one term *knowledge* in both cases.... If God has the truth and if man has only an analogy [of the truth] [this “analogy” containing no univocal element], it follows that he (man) does not have the truth.

The reason here being that an analogy of the truth is not the truth. Preachers of the Word must hold to the fact that there is a “univocal” point where man’s knowledge coincides with God’s knowledge, for the Bible clearly teaches, as Francis Schaeffer has said, that man may indeed have “true though not exhaustive knowledge” (38–40).

Second is the false teaching that “Christian truth will often, if not always, be paradoxical in appearance” (44). The author begins this section with the statement that every Christian should believe that: 1) God is rational, i.e., that He thinks and speaks according to the “laws of logic” that are founded in the Scriptures—the law of identity (A is A), the law of non-contradiction (A is not non-A), and the law of the excluded middle (A is either A or non-A); 2) that God’s knowledge is self-consistent; and 3) that He cannot lie. These things being so, we must insist that the revelation He has given us in His Word must be rational, self-consistent, and true. This means that there can be no contradictions in Scripture.

However, again sadly, there are some theologians in the evangelical camp who aver that the Bible contains logical paradoxes, as distinguished from rhetorical paradoxes (which are literary devices utilized to challenge the reason of persons, to invigorate their thoughts, causing them to delve more deeply

into a particular subject; see Matthew 10:39; John 11:25–26). It is commonly stated that the logical paradoxes found in the Bible, while not contradictory (i.e., they are only “apparent” contradictions), can never be reconciled before the bar of human reason. The first thing that needs to be said is that the recognition of a paradox in the Bible (or anywhere else for that matter) is a totally subjective enterprise. What appears to be a paradox to one person may not be at all paradoxical to another. Nevertheless, doctrines such as the Trinity, the one person of Christ (one person with two natures, one divine and one human), the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man, unconditional election and the free offer of the gospel, etc., are often considered to be logically paradoxical. J. I. Packer and Cornelius Van Till are two theologians who hold to this view of logical paradox. Packer, who prefers the term “antinomy” to “paradox, maintains that a biblical antinomy is “insoluble.” “What should one do ... with an antinomy? Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent contradiction as real.” Van Til averred that because man’s knowledge is only analogical to God’s knowledge, “all the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory.” We “do not fear to accept that which has the appearance of being contradictory ... we do not expect to have a logically deducible relationship between one doctrine and another. We expect to have only an analogical system” (46–47).

As the author points out, “one must conclude, if such is the case, that it condemns at the outset as futile even the attempt at *systematic* (orderly) theology ... since it is impossible to reduce to a system irreconcilable paradoxes which steadfastly resist all attempts at harmonious systematician.” This alone reveals the problematic issue raised by such a faulty doctrine as espoused by men such as Packer and Van Til. But there is more. First, when one states that there are paradoxes in the Scriptures that cannot be reconciled before the bar of human reason it implies a claim to omniscience (which is an attribute of God alone), or that he has universally polled every person who has ever lived, is living now, and who ever will live (which is an impossibility), and has hereby ascertained that these alleged paradoxes cannot be reconciled before the bar of human reason. If only one person was or is able to reconcile these so-called paradoxes, it would render the claim of irreconcilability vacuous (47–48).

Second, if these paradoxes are irreconcilable before the bar of human reason, how does one know that they are merely apparent contradictions and not real contradictions? If they are not reconcilable to man, an apparent contradiction and a real contradiction would appear the same; they would both appear to be contradictions, and we could never be sure whether or not they were real or apparent. Third, says the author, “the *coup de grace* to the entire notion that irreconcilable (only

‘apparent,’ of course) contradictions exist in Scripture,” is that “once one asserts that truth may legitimately assume the form of an irreconcilable contradiction, he has given up all possibility of ever detecting a real falsehood.” Why?; because every time a proposition is rejected as false because it somehow contradicts the teaching of the Word of God, or because it is in some way irrational, the person rejecting the proposition needs only to contend that his proposition merely appears to be contradictory or irrational, and that his proposition is just one more of those paradoxes that are only apparently contradictory while not actually so. This means, of course, “both the end of Christianity’s uniqueness as the revealed religion of God since it is then liable to—nay, more than this, it *must* be open to—the assimilation of any and every truth claim of whatever kind, and the death of all rational faith.” This being so, it is simply not enough to claim that we must believe both sides of the apparent contradiction because they are both taught in the Word of God, because we would be claiming to believe an irrational faith, which is itself irrational. The Bible itself claims that it cannot contradict itself. “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33. His Word is not both “Yes and No,” but in Christ it is “Yes ... to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 1:19–20; Reymond, 48–49).

Dr. Reymond concludes this chapter by asserting that he is not calling on the church to exercise some sort of “Cartesian rationalism which presupposes the autonomy of human reason and freedom from divine revelation.” Rather, he states: “I am here calling for a Christian rationalism which forthrightly affirms that the divine revelation which it gladly owns and makes the bedrock of all its intellectual efforts is internally self-consistent, that is non-contradictory. And I urge the preacher and the ministerial candidate ... to strive for nothing less than the same consistency in both their theological formulations and their preaching deduced from that revelation” (52–53).

Chapter Three concerns itself with “The Need for a God-Centered Pulpit” (55–98). Every preacher will have either a “God-centered” or a “man-centered” theology. To be faithful to the Word of God, however, the man of God must stand strongly against the latter view. A faithful minister of the Word will recognize, as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 1) teaches, that man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. But he must realize as well that it is also God’s chief end to glorify Himself and to enjoy Himself forever. The Bible is sated with Scriptures that teach this (see Isaiah 43:7, 21; Jeremiah 13:11; Psalm 106:7–8, Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14; *passim*). A God-centered pulpit will preach this truth showing that God’s seeking to glorify Himself is central to His eternal plan, and that God is absolutely sovereign in His dealings in His creation; He brooks no competition. As taught

in chapter 3 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, “God [as the eternal first cause] from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.” Yet He did so in a manner that the liberty of “second causes” is not “taken away, but rather established.” Moreover, “by the decree of God, for the manifestation of His own glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.” Further, not only has God decreed the eternal destiny of all mankind (as well as the angels), either in heaven or in hell, but for His own glory He has “foreordained the means thereunto,” such as the cross work of Christ; the effectual calling of fallen elect creatures who are in an ethical state of total depravity, unable to do anything that pleases God; the Spirit’s regenerating work by which faith and repentance are brought about in the elect; and justification and sanctification. God is the absolute and sovereign first cause of all things that ever occur, but He decrees that His eternal plan will be carried out by means of second causes, such as men’s free choices (55–57).

There are theologians (such as Clark Pinnock), who deny the absolute sovereignty of God. According to Pinnock, Reformed theology makes God the author of sin; it relegates man to little more than a puppet; it denies man’s free will; etc. It is asserted that if man is to be held responsible, he must be free. It is also alleged that subsequent to the Fall man was not, as taught in the Reformed faith, in an ethical state of total depravity. He is capable of doing some ethical good, such as choose God. Those persons who perish do so because they have rejected God’s plan for them, and for no other reason at all. God did not so decree their perishing.

As Dr. Reymond shows, “Pinnock’s solution is both unbiblical and irrelevant.” The author marshals a catena of biblical passages which clearly reveal that, in the words of Calvin, “God’s will is, and rightly ought to be, the cause of all things” that ever have been, are, or ever will be. Dr. Reymond goes on to show that Pinnock’s views are not biblically based at all. Further, it is not so that if God is absolutely sovereign that man cannot be held accountable. Responsibility has to with obligation to a lawgiver, and because God is the Lawgiver who has declared that man is to give an accounting of his doings and dealings to God, man is thereby held responsible. Then too, Reformed theology does not deny that men make free choices. To the contrary, the Reformed faith asserts that man is a free moral agent, who freely chooses whatever he desires to choose; he possesses a liberty of spontaneity, and no violence is ever done to this freedom by God. What Reformed theology does deny is that man has a liberty of indifference. That is, man is not free to choose apart from God’s sovereign decrees, from his own intellect, his own limitations, habits, and so forth. Ultimately we must take our stand and maintain

that because God is holy (and cannot sin), and because He is absolutely sovereign and His will is the first cause of all things, God cannot and does not sin, nor is He the author of sin; only second causes sin.

Chapter Four is on “The Need for a Theologically Articulate Pulpit” (99–114). In his Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) the apostle Paul stresses the need for a theologically articulate ministry in the church of Jesus Christ. A man who occupies the pulpit in a biblically based church must be one who is well-qualified and able to exhort in sound doctrine, as well as to refute those who oppose the teachings of Scripture. Among other things, this requires the minister of the Word of God to be well prepared in his theological training. This being so, we must stress, in the words of B. B. Warfield, that “the systematic study of divine truth ... is the most indispensable preparation for the pulpit. Only as the several truths to be presented are known in their relations can they be proclaimed in their right proportions and so taught as to produce their right effects on the soul’s life and growth” (101).

Dr. Reymond gives “three illustrations from Christology” to make the point “that there is an urgent need in our time for a generation of preachers who have acquired a systematic grasp of divine truth.” The first illustration has to do with the implicit subordinationism of Christ’s essential deity found in the Nicene Creed (A. D. 325). The Nicene fathers averred that “He [Christ] is very God of [ek, ‘out of’] very God.” What is not understood by so many today is that this statement was meant to indicate that the Son, the second person of the Godhead, derived His deity (not merely His person) from the Father. John Calvin was one of the first to challenge this claim. The Geneva Reformer agreed that there is a subordinationism in the “economic” Trinity (which is not a subordination of essence, but of function or role), but within the ontological Trinity, Christ (as well as the Father and the Holy Spirit) is *autotheos* (God Himself). As the author states, great care needs to be taken here whenever the church recites the Nicene Creed to guard against the use of the phrase “He is very God of very God,” because “to use a phrase in [one’s] description of Christ which detracts from His full deity and propagates by implication serious theological error” is a sinful thing (101–104).

The second illustration is in the misuse of the Pauline statement in Philippians 2:7 that Christ “emptied Himself.” Many pastors, says the author, err at this point when they endorse (either intentionally or unintentionally) the kenotic heresy—which heresy maintains that at the time of the incarnation, the Son of God He emptied or divested Himself of one or more of His divine attributes. To adopt such a view is tantamount to asserting that from the time of His incarnation God the Son is less than fully divine. If the eternal Son of God has given up any of His divine attributes then He is

no longer God, which is impossible because an eternal God (by definition) cannot ever cease being God. Rather we must assert, says Dr. Reymond, that “the uniform New Testament representation of the outcome of His incarnation is that God the Son, without ceasing to be what He is as God, took into union with Himself what He was not, making our human nature His very own” (106).

The third illustration, that “the finite can contain the infinite,” follows on the heels of the second one. Just as it is foolish to assume that from the time of the incarnation of Christ that His divine nature can be “emptied” in any way, it is just as foolish to affirm, as does the Lutheran church, that by virtue of the union of the divine and human natures of Christ, the human nature acquires divine attributes. The finite cannot contain the infinite. Reformed pastors seldom would fall into such error. But there is a tendency for some in the Reformed camp to adopt a similar error, and that is the belief that although Christ, as touching His human nature, did not possess the divine attribute of omniscience during “the days of His flesh” (Mark 13:32), nevertheless, after His resurrection and ascension the human nature is omniscient. This is a false view. As Warfield wrote, Christ’s “human nature is ever finite,” the wisdom He has as a man “is not and can never be the infinite wisdom of God.” Reformed theology “has no reserves ... in confessing the limitations of the knowledge of Christ as man, and no fear of overstating the perfection and completeness of His humanity.” Again, great care needs to be exercised in how preachers set forth the truth of biblical Christianity in all of its fullness. A “theologically articulate pulpit” will make all attempts to avoid such errors (109–110).

Chapter Five studies “The Need for a Godly Pulpit” (115–125). In 1 Timothy 4:7, the apostle Paul tells Timothy that he, as a gospel minister, must “exercise himself to godliness.” Dr. Reymond tells us that in essence Paul is commanding Timothy: “Since you would instruct others in godliness, do not neglect but rather continually devote yourself to the systematic cultivation and earnest exercise of your own spiritual life.” A man of God is to be a “man possessed by God.” All of God’s people, of course, should be dead earnest about exercising themselves in godliness, to the point where they are God-intoxicated people. But it is especially true of the minister of the Word of God that he be a man of integrity. As the author explains: “For without that inner life which is produced only by much time spent in consideration of and meditation upon the Word of God in purposeful self-examination, and before the presence of the Lord in earnest prayer, we who hold ordination to the Christian ministry will never obtain that blessed ministry which the Puritan writers described as ‘powerful,’ ‘painful,’ that is, laborious, and ‘useful’—that high ministry to which one must eagerly aspire if the call of Almighty God to the teaching ministry has truly been written large upon his heart” (115–117).

Dr. Reymond goes on in the rest of this chapter to tell us why this must be the case for a faithful man of God. First, “only a flourishing spiritual life and a genuine walk in godliness with God will fortify the ordained teaching minister in times of discouragement” (117). Second, “only a flourishing spiritual life and walk with God will protect him from the perils of success in the ministry” (120). And third, “the cultivation of personal godliness—‘training oneself to be godly’—is crucial to all true ministry because only a flourishing spiritual life and walk with God will lend the needed power and effectiveness to one’s labor in the gospel” (122).

Says the author: “God honors that ministry that blazes with the passion and fire of a Spirit-filled heart, and He pours out His power upon that ministry.” In the words of Robert Murray McChesney, “The greatest need my flock will ever have is to see their pastor walking before them in holiness.” Since the chief end of man, as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 1) tells us, is to “glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” then “our greatest passion in life should be to learn to know God better than we know anyone or anything else in this world and to enjoy God more than we enjoy anyone or anything else in this world, for only in such devotion will our lives publicly display as they should the glory of God and thus give as they should all glory to Him” (123–125).

Chapter Six deals with “The Need for a Protestant Pulpit” (127–158). The author begins by (correctly) claiming that the Judaizers in the first century were the forerunners of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Church, as did the Judaizers, confesses that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God, in whose name is salvation. Rome, as did its first century counterpart, believes that this same Jesus, after His death, burial, and resurrection, ascended into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of the Father (as King of kings and Lord of lords), and that one day He will return to judge the world. But the Roman Catholic Church, as with the Judaizers, also contends that faith in the perfect obedience and finished cross work of Jesus Christ in behalf of lost sinners is insufficient for their justification before God. In addition to faith (which is necessary), the sinner must also perform good works which are meritorious in completing the work of faith, which works contribute to final justification. Dr. Reymond cites numerous, documented Roman Catholic teachings to confirm these statements.

Where Holy Scripture and classical Protestantism have asserted their *solus* (“alone”) in the area of soteriology (*sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura, solus Christus, soli Deo Gloria*), Rome has placed its *et* (“and”). First, states the author, there is “Rome’s ‘And’ in the accomplishment of the atonement” (130). Whereas the Bible and classical Protestantism aver that Christ’s saving cross work was a “once for all” atoning work which accomplished salvation for His elect people (Romans 6:

10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12, 25–28; 10:10–14), the Roman Catholic Church adds its “and.” According to Rome, the Roman Catholic priest (who serves as a priest in the Aaronic [*sic*] order) must continue to sacrifice Christ for sins committed after water baptism in the “unbloody sacrifice” of the Mass.

Then there is “Rome’s ‘And’ in the Application of Redemption” (137). Whereas the Bible and classical Protestantism teach that Christ, by His Word and Spirit, applies the benefits of His completed, redemptive work to the elect, Rome adds the “meritorious” work of Mary the Mother of Jesus. She cooperates in her Son’s redemptive work; she continually intercedes for believers and for the entire world; and she reigns as “Queen of the Universe.” Here, says the author, “Roman Catholicism has become the most populace cult in Christendom—the Marian cult” (139).

Next there is “Rome’s ‘And’ in Ecclesiology” (140). Whereas Scripture and classical Protestantism teach that the Christian’s relationship to the church of Christ is determined by his saving faith relationship with Christ, Rome teaches the opposite. In Roman Catholic theology, faith in Christ and faith in the church are really one act of faith, because Christ and His church are one (the church is literally the “body of Christ,” and Christ is its “Head”). Scripture teaches that one is to place “implicit faith” in Christ and His Word alone. Rome disagrees. A Roman Catholic must place “implicit faith” in the Roman Church when he joins the church, because that is one and the same thing with placing implicit faith in Christ. According to this false theology, the church’s Magisterium cannot err in its teachings because there is a sense in which the church is the continuing “whole Christ” as it is guided by the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches no such thing. Jesus Christ is the only “single subject of salvific activities,” says the author, and the gospel “is always Theocentric and Christocentric and never ecclesiocentric.” Scripture never represents faith in Christ as the gift of the church, but as the gift of God alone (140–143).

Finally there is “Rome’s ‘And’ in Eschatology” (143). Whereas the Word of God and classical Protestantism maintain that one’s final state (eschatology) is determined by his relationship with Jesus Christ by faith alone, the Roman Catholic Church demurs. Rome claims that final justification is obtained by faith in Christ, plus meritorious works, along with the “And” of indulgences. According to Romanism, the great majority of Christians (the minority here is the “saints”) are imperfectly justified in this life and they must go to the suffering fires of purgatory after death where they “undergo purification.” Rome’s required indulgences will help to reduce the time spent in purgatory. These indulgences are said to be expiatory with regard to sins, and they may be given by persons still here on earth to aid those suffering in purgatory. Allegedly, the pope has the authority to mete out these indulgences, as he holds the “keys” of Christ as Christ’s vicar

on earth. The keys given to the pope allow him access to the “treasury of supererogatory merits,” which consist not only of Christ’s redemptive cross work, but also the prayers and good works of Mary, as well as the prayers and (supererogatory) good works of the “saints”—those men and women whose works went beyond that which is required. Such teaching, of course, is soul-damning heresy.

The Roman teaching is based on the apocryphal book 2 Maccabees at 12:46 (which in distinction from the Protestant church, Rome avers to be inspired), and a false understanding of 1 Corinthians 3:15; 1 Peter 1:7; and Jude 22–23. The Protestant church has correctly rejected the erroneous doctrines of indulgences and purgatory, claiming that Christ’s work alone merits complete salvation for His elect people. As Dr. Reymond declares, “to suggest that a finite sinful creature could by his suffering for a finite number of years expiate the infinite disvalue of his sin against the true and holy God is a pernicious error of massive proportions.” As stated in the words of Laird Harris, this is just “another one of those foreign growths that has fastened itself like a malignant tumor upon the theology of the Roman Catholic Church.” Too, as Dr. Reymond continues, “it is a doctrinal promulgation devised in the interest of sustaining the Roman Catholic priestcraft and the entire indulgence system of the church which, I [Reymond] would suggest, is its chief source of income” (144–145).

The reader of this chapter, states the author, might bristle at the remarks made about the soul-damning teaching of Rome. After all, it may be claimed that Roman Catholics believe in and confess their faith in some of the great creeds of the church: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon, and the Athanasian Creed, which is true. But as Dr. Reymond goes on to say, “I would contend that one can believe from his heart that every statement” of these creeds “is true and still be lost, if in order to be saved he is trusting to any degree in his own character, and/or if he believes that he must contribute at least some good works toward his salvation, and/or if he is trusting in Christ plus anyone or anything else.” It is entirely possible for a person to believe in these creeds, but “also believe at the same time that if one would go to heaven when one dies one must still put some kind of ‘and’ or a ‘plus’ of his own good works after Christ’s perfect work of obedience.” In conclusion the author assures us, with the zeal of a true evangelist, that “upon the doctrinal distinctives of classic Protestantism—its great *solas*—hang the destinies of immortal souls” (154–155, 158).

Chapter Seven has to do with “The Need for an Evangelical Pulpit” (159–176). Dr. Reymond opens this chapter by lamenting the fact that there is a “new vocation within the ranks of the ministry [which] has appeared in our time.” Those who pursue this calling are the “church futurists.” Their job is

to forecast what pastors and church leaders must do if their churches are to survive the onslaught of the post-modern era. The author, of course, does not take the “church futurists” seriously; neither should we, his readers. Nevertheless we must ask ourselves what we are to do in our own generation, and the answer (as with all things) comes from the teaching of the Word of God. First we must recognize that the problems the church faces are primarily from within. The church of Christ has all too frequently opted for a truncated gospel and a refusal to preach the whole counsel of God. The apostle Paul tells us in his second letter to Timothy that in the last days (i.e., the days that began with the first advent of Christ and will terminate at His second advent) there will be such times as we face. Persons who refuse to endure sound doctrine will “heap up for themselves teachers” who will turn their auditors away from the truth to fables and false doctrine. What then is the church to do? Paul’s words to Timothy in the first century are the same for us today: “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.... Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” The faithful gospel minister is not to shrink back from proclaiming the whole counsel of God (159–161).

Dr. Reymond clarifies what Paul’s commands to Timothy (and all gospel ministers) involve, but his major focus is on the charge to “do the work of an evangelist.” He explains that to do the work of an evangelist is not simply telling people how they are to be saved, though it will include that. Rather, it is to announce or herald the “good news” that Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected Savior, has ascended to the right hand of God the Father, where He sits enthroned as the King of kings and Lord of lords, reigning over the universe in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The gospel is a “royal announcement—the King’s proclamation of the appearing of a great Victor and of an equally great victory over sin and death.” In a nutshell, “to evangelize” means to proclaim faithfully “the whole truth about Jesus Christ both as Savior and Lord” (169–173).

Finally, Chapter Eight is on “The Need for a Reformed Pulpit” (177–192). The author’s concern in this chapter is boldly set forth in the very first paragraph: “In this address I want you to consider with me a notion that prevails virtually everywhere today, the notion that Christianity, as a way of life, makes no real life-transforming demands on its adherents—that to be a Christian in name only is sufficient as far as commitment is concerned—and what should be done about it.” According to Dr. Reymond, what is often seen in the church of Christ is a “doctrinal nominalism”: a “who cares about doctrine” mentality. Biblical doctrine is given lip service, and little more. We also see an “ethical nominalism”—a lack of concern for matters of

Christian piety to the point where much of the church has become “worldly and carnal.” The problem is also seen in the “ecclesial nominalism” which is rampant among alleged Christian groups, wherein “allegiance to the church as the family of God and the communion of the saints is rare and undernourished.” Far too many persons in the church are “nominal Christians”; they are Christians in name only, and mere spectators as far as commitment to Christ and the teaching of His Word is concerned. In a word, says Dr. Reymond, “the modern church is in desperate need of revival and reformation” (177–178).

In the remainder of this chapter the author addresses two areas: “Reformed church growth” and “Reformed worship.” First, if there is going to be genuine church growth, it must be done according to the Reformed, Calvinistic theology taught in the Westminster Standards. Genuine Christianity is Calvinistic, and the large majority of great missionaries and evangelists have been Calvinists. If the church is going to be successful in its evangelistic task, it must preach the distinctives of the Reformed faith. Much of today’s gospel is a gospel without cost, without repentance, without commitment, etc. This is a false gospel, a gospel which is often accompanied with “borrowed techniques from the advertising industry to grow themselves” (181), and it cannot be successful in promoting the truth. Any attempt to bring about church growth that is not preaching the true gospel is bound to fail. God’s ordained way of bringing about church growth is by means of the preaching of the true gospel of Christ. We must return to God’s way.

Second, the church needs to return to the Reformation’s view of worship known as the “regulative principle.” This is the view of worship taught in the Westminster Standards and other Reformed creeds and confessions. It is defined in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21:1) as follows: “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.”

The author concludes this chapter (and Part One) with the following very telling and significant words: “How important is it, then, to plant and to grow Reformed churches? I believe it is absolutely and vitally important. There is no greater work in which one could be involved. So let’s not hide our Reformed light, graciously given to us in Holy Scripture, under a bushel. Let’s give everything we are and have in demolishing the stronghold of nominal Christianity by the establishment of Reformed witnesses to God’s truth that will endure for all generations. No less than the survival of biblical Christianity is at stake” (192).

In the opinion of the present reviewer, Dr. Reymond’s book is a must read for all pastors and teachers of the Word of God. It is an extraordinarily well written and much needed book. ■

REVIEW: *Justification Report of the Committee to Study the Doctrine of Justification* (Willow Grove, Pa.: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2007) paperback, 176 pages. \$7.50. Reviewed by Rev Dr Rowland S. Ward, minister of Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, Melbourne.

The Report on Justification received and commended for study by the 2006 General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is a document of some 70,000 words prepared after two years consideration. A rather thorough piece of work on a current subject it is appropriate that it has recently been published in a neat paperback format of 176 pages with minor emendations. There is no index. Six men served on the Committee: David M. VanDrunen (Chair), L. Anthony Curto, Sidney D. Dyer, John V. Fesko (Secretary), Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., and Alan D. Strange (Vice-Chair). The mandate was “to critique the teachings of the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ (NPP), ‘Federal Vision’ (FV) and other like teaching concerning the doctrine of justification and other related doctrines, as they are related to the Word of God and our subordinate standards, with a view to giving a clear statement to the presbyteries, sessions and seminaries....”

About 33% of the Report is a general introduction providing an outline of biblical and confessional teaching. A second brief section reminds us of the ecumenical dimension of recent discussions between Rome with Lutherans and some evangelicals on justification. A third section of about 23% looks at the issues related to justification raised by the NPP. The next section (about 33%) considers the Federal Vision (FV). A section summarising sections 2–4 follows with recommendations concluding the Report. The recommendations are that presbyteries include detail coverage of justification and related doctrines in examination of candidates. Fourteen topics are noted which reminds one of the way doctrines are inter-related. The church is to be pro-active in maintaining the purity of the gospel over against NPP and FV errors, and the Report is to be distributed and receive further study within the Church.

In reviewing the Report and considering some of the responses of those whose views are criticised, one finds oneself in not the easiest of situations. There are so many aspects and motivations that it is hard to know where to start, so this review will be nearer a statement of the issues than a critical analysis. The report itself claims (p. 125) that “one’s conception of the covenant is crucial for the doctrine of justification.” While Ralph Allan Smith—allied with the FV position—mistakes this as a claim that the doctrine of justification depends upon a Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace form of the doctrine of the covenant, something for example that Lutherans do not explicitly propound, the Report is surely correct. How we formulate the doctrine of the covenant will impact

our doctrine of justification. But we may go further and say that how we understand God will affect our understanding of covenant. So perhaps we should start with the doctrine of God as the more basic category.

THE TRINITY

As regards the Trinity, the Report (p. 125) criticises Ralph Allan Smith's doctrine of God in which he affirms that the holy, undivided fellowship of the three persons of the Trinity entails covenant. While one should avoid any suggestion that the persons of the Trinity are related to one another simply by a covenanted commitment, for this would imperil their unity and lead to tritheism, it is not evident to me that Smith does this, and I think the Report takes up Smith the wrong way. Scripture stresses creation is the work of the Triune God. How do the persons relate in this? The Father creates through the Son and in the Spirit. Or, to use Smith's words, "the creation was the gift from the Father to the Son through the Spirit so that He can present it back to the Father. This is covenantal fellowship in love."¹

It is this loving, self-giving holy God who freely determines to create. For NPP and FV advocates Adam cannot be less than a son loved by his Father. And surely that is absolutely right both from explicit texts (such as Luke 3:38) and the implications of Scripture's doctrine of redemption. I think we need to very clearly abandon notions that Adam was created a servant who would attain sonship as a result of his obedience.

Abraham Kuyper spoke of the original relationship as that of a servant who serves for wages,² others that of a servant not a son, with sonship in view when the probation is completed.³ Charles Hodge affirmed that Adam had to merit eternal life,⁴ and that Luke 17:10 proves man can claim a reward for obedience (Hodge, 3.244). This kind of teaching may not be unconfessional, since the WCF is a consensus document which lays out broad contours of covenant theology rather than finalised dogma at every point,⁵ but it does not develop from those basic contours in helpful ways. In this matter the work of men like the Southern Presbyterians J.L. Girardeau and R.A. Webb and the Scot, T. J. Crawford, is on more biblical lines, as was that of Witsius in the 1670s and Herman Bavinck a century ago.

1. A Response to the OPC Committee on the Doctrine of Justification, http://www.berith.org/#new_essays [accessed 2 April 2007].

2. Abraham Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno* (Amsterdam, 1895) 2.389.

3. J. H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings* 1.264ff; Robert L. Dabney *Systematic Theology*, 1878 ed., 300ff.

4. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2.364.

5. Richard Muller puts it this way: "...the brief definition found in the Westminster Standards represents not a strict finalization of a dogma rigidly propounded, but a historical marker in an ongoing development. The formulators of the doctrine allowed for a significant flexibility in terms and definitions..." R.A. Muller & R.S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2007) 70.

In considering the nature of the relationship between God and creation we should confess that creation is made to respond appropriately to its Maker according to the norms God has established. The Report (128) clearly affirms the filial: "Man was created in law", and adds: "This is the way God made Adam: he made Adam as his son wanting to please his father. There has never been any tension between the legal and the relational in this respect..." These statements are surely correct and, so far as the consistency of the filial and the legal is concerned, is the general position of the 17th century.

Still, I would have liked to see a greater emphasis on the filial in the Report. Indeed, Adam as God's son was to receive an inheritance from his Father—eternal, unlosable life in God's favour and fellowship, in the way of obedience. This is a significant plank in the contention for the existence of a covenant of works with Adam. J.B. Torrance famously contrasted 'covenant' and 'contract' in a 1970 *Scottish Journal of Theology* article. And of course as we use the term today 'contract' does not imply friendship/love between parties and usually involves a mutually exploitative arrangement. But biblical covenants are not lawless; thus a marriage covenant is based on love but involves obligations as well. The same is true of God's covenant with Adam, and the Report gives the needed attention to the obedience required of Adam which is neglected or denied by NPP and FV.

NPP and FV advocates do not contrast works (before the fall) and grace (after the fall), but think in terms of one covenant of grace requiring faith/faithfulness before and after the fall. This confuses things that differ. Advocates of the traditional covenant of works do not claim Adam could have rendered acceptable obedience without trust/faith in God. Of course such was essential before the fall. But the faith/trust in God necessary after the fall is centred on the Redeemer promised, typified and now come, Yahweh our Righteousness (Jer 23:6).

Shepherd's position, and similar viewpoints are unstable (cf. Report, 20). If perfect obedience was not required of Adam why should it be required of Christ? To the extent that we minimise or downplay the obedience required of Adam, to that extent we seem to minimise the obedience required of Christ and thus weaken our grasp of his mediatorial work. Again, if eschatological life was not in prospect as the inheritance promised to Adam, God's son, how is it that this blessing is obtained by Christ? If it was because of his perfect obedience then why cannot we affirm that perfect obedience was required of Adam? If it was not because of Christ's perfect obedience, how do we account for it?

WRIGHT'S NEW PERSPECTIVE ON PAUL

The main features of the NPP are well known, particularly as formulated by N.T. Wright. There are some things we can agree with right away.

(1) Judaism was/is not a merit based religion in the teaching of the OT. God set his love on Israel according to his gracious election and not according to what Israel deserved. The law was given to a redeemed people.⁶ Jews did not doubt they were God's people. The chief issue in their eyes was remaining in his covenant with him—staying saved, if you will.

(2) We readily acknowledge the great significance of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God without the necessity of observing Jewish distinctives. The true Israel is not replaced but expanded by the inclusion of believing Gentiles. This was indeed the mystery hidden in earlier times (Eph 3:6).

(3) We need to recover an emphasis on the significance of the resurrection of Jesus for Christian faith and life and not treat it as a mere appendage to the atoning death of Jesus.

(4) We should not underestimate the excessive individualism in much of evangelicalism today which discounts the importance of the church as the people of God and fosters an inner-personal religious experience neglecting the call to loving communal service here and now.

But on certain key issues Wright's NPP formulation must be rejected.

(1) Although the OT faith of Israel was not merit based but rooted in the electing grace of God, the practical reality of law-keeping for salvation can easily be present, as we know in our personal experience and also from the NT. Roman Catholicism is not a religion of merit either, and emphasises the necessity of God's grace, yet in effect human merit was very much to the fore in Luther's day as it is in our own. Neither Paul nor Luther were combating those who held to a crass version of salvation exclusively by works. We need to be careful of caricatures, yet the NT is first hand evidence of attitudes, and much was clearly in the category of self-righteousness.

(2) The NT shows that Judaism was heavily influenced by the idea that law keeping was necessary to secure God's intervention for the nation's restoration. In this light, Paul's quite opposite emphasis—that God has acted already in Jesus Christ so that the life of real obedience flows from the crucified and exalted Jesus—is naturally set in the sharpest contrast to law keeping as the means of salvation.⁷

(3) While understanding NT Judaism correctly is important, discussing justification in the context of vindication before the world rather than before the bar of God's justice—which is the overall context of Scripture—is fundamentally flawed. Paul's views are formed by Scripture and in fact there are no references to rabbinical sources from the Second Temple period in his writing. Thus Paul's teaching of the pervasive depravity of humanity is not typical of NT Judaism or of Judaism today either. Further, neither the later Augustine nor Luther nor the other magisterial Reformers regarded Romans 7 as the struggle of a person with an introspective conscience seeking justification, but as expressive of the conflict in the already justified.⁸

(4) Ordinarily, 'righteousness' is what one ought to do, and is set over against sin, which is what one ought not to do. The one who does righteousness is righteous (1 John 3:7). The good spelled out in the law is what Jews and non-Jews alike must do and all will be judged accordingly (Rom 1:18–3:20). Understanding righteousness as covenant faithfulness just does not fit in many contexts.

(5) There is also a righteousness which is extraordinary. It is 'from God' (Rom 3:21; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9), it is a 'gift' (Rom 5:17) and enables God 'to be just and yet the justifier of whoever believes in Jesus' (Rom 3:25–26) since it is through the obedience of Christ that sinners are made righteous (Rom 5:19). Wright may say, as he does say, 'Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas that can be passed around the courtroom.'⁹ Yet there we have it in Scripture as God's gift grounded on Christ's obedience, and all the cries of 'legal fiction' cannot remove it. Consequently, the reality of imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer, however absurd it may seem, is not an unbiblical category although there may be different ways of stating it, some more adequate than others.

(6) In Scripture justify/justification is mostly law court language, a declaration one is righteous and thus it is the opposite of condemnation (Prov 17:15; Rom 5:16; 8:34). In salvation contexts it is not a declaration of righteousness at the end of a process of moral renovation, but it is the declaration of righteousness before the bar of God's justice here and now. It is a once-for-all-time declaration of a right standing with God so that peace with God is enjoyed now (Rom 5:1), and the wrath of God will not be experienced in the future (Rom 5:9).

(7) If we speak, as we may, of a future justification, then it is only the public recognition of what is granted in God's grace in this life now when we come to faith in Jesus Christ. Wright's view appears to be that Christ's death and resurrection sets his people free from the guilt and power of sin, and the work of the Spirit enables them to conform to God's law so that in the end a favourable verdict is secured and they are vindicated in the Judgement. While Wright rejects the merit of the believer's life, since his good deeds are wrought through the Spirit, yet

6. Cf. the answer to Shorter Catechism 44: 'What does the preface to the ten commandments teach us?'

7. This point is well made by a former supporter of the NPP in Francis Watson, "Not the New Perspective"—an unpublished paper delivered at the British New Testament Conference, Manchester, September 2001. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/articles/watsonart.htm> [accessed 5 Jan 2004].

8. One might note the essentially similar positions on justification in Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley outlined in Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 3–87.

9. N.T. Wright, *What St Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1997) 98.

it is hard to escape the view that in the last analysis the focus is on our own covenant keeping.¹⁰

IMPUTATION

On the imputation of Christ's righteousness the Report is somewhat of a consensus as all such reports must be. The long-standing distinction between the obedience of Christ's life (the so called *active* righteousness) and the obedience of his death (the so called *passive* righteousness) is affirmed, as might well be expected in the OPC given Machen's famous words on his deathbed.¹¹ Richard Gaffin, following closely on Calvin, emphasises that the union and communion the believer has with Christ is manifested in many benefits, as the Larger Catechism puts it. These are not links in a chain accessed one after the other, but complementary—distinct from each other yet inseparable, since Christ cannot be divided and those united to him share in all his benefits.¹² To the same effect is Calvin's comment concerning union with Christ: 'We do not, he says, 'contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.'¹³

We may locate this imputed righteousness in the obedient law-keeping of Jesus Christ's life. This is the traditional form. It enables us to say that justification is not simply God treating us "just as if I'd" never sinned but also "just as if I'd" fully obeyed, which, in Jesus, is true. We may speak of this as an alien righteousness, wrought outside of us by Christ, so long as we also remember that this alien righteousness is

ours along with all other saving benefits by virtue of union with Christ (Gaffin, 178).

Theologically we are on the mark in the traditional view. One may agree with William Cunningham, the great Scottish theologian, that the distinction between the passive and active righteousness of Christ 'is not of any great practical importance, and need not be much pressed or insisted on, if men heartily and intelligently ascribe their forgiveness and acceptance wholly to what Christ has done and suffered in their stead.'¹⁴

Still, biblically we might be better locating Christ's righteousness in the vindication he received in his resurrection, which of course is not far from the thought of some FV proponents. The crediting of righteousness is intimately linked with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in Romans 4:24, and so we immediately go on to read that 'he was handed over to death because of our offences and raised to life for our justification' (Rom 4:25). If Adam brought condemnation for all through his one act of disobedience, Jesus, by his one act of righteousness/obedience—his obedience to the command to die which summed up the whole course of his life—has gained justifying life (Rom 5:18–19). Rejected of men, but accepted by the Father, he is now the Righteous One. 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor 5:21).

There are other issues dealt with in the Report, including the FV tendency to regard baptism as actually effecting union with Christ, and the failure to maintain the distinction between the church as visible and the church as invisible. One may say of these that in some respects they represent reaction against a virtually baptistic attitude that has impacted American Presbyterianism for more than a century.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Report is quite comprehensive and the summary will help the less theologically literate grasp the issues. It is also a consensual report and should not be criticised for a measure of diversity of statement which reflects legitimate variation within the limits of the confession. It could be a little more constructive in its discussion, although one can understand the difficulty of debate with some Presbyterian ministers who clearly reject the covenant theology of the Confession. Certainly the report is a bit defensive in its endorsement of the active/passive distinction in its treatment of imputation, even using the intention of the OPC as interpreting the Confession on this matter despite its consensus statement (145). But in the crucial issues it is right on the money. It is my hope that the current debate will have positive results in a more clear and careful nuancing of our covenant theology, of the vital subject of union with Christ, and on that justification which is by Christ meritoriously, by faith instrumentally and by works evidentially. ■

10. Notice the comment of Herman Ridderbos: 'Every attempt to make certain reductions from the absolutely unanalytical character of this justification of the ungodly, whether understanding justification as an anticipatory pronouncement on the ground of the subsequent ethical transformation of the ungodly, or by looking on the judicial aspect of the work of God in justification in unity with the ethical aspect of the work of God in sanctification, indwelling, etc., must be rejected as a violation or obscuring of the specific significance of Paul's pronouncement.' *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 174–175.

11. "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen, a biographical memoir*, 3rd (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1978) 508.

12. So Richard B. Gaffin, Jr, 'Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards' in *WTJ* 65 (2003) 173ff.; also Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove 1993) 177ff.

13. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [trans F.L. Battles] (Philadelphia: Westminster 1960) 3.11.10.

14. W. Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (1862, reprinted London: Banner of Truth, 1967) 404.

15. See my review of L.B. Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2003) in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 2 (2006) 181–184.