

The Denial of the Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ: Piscator on Justification

By J. Wesley White

INTRODUCTION

The recent controversy over the so-called Federal Vision and the views of Rev. Norman Shepherd has focused our attention on many issues, including the denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ (hereafter IAOC). On the one side, Norman Shepherd claims that the classic Reformed theologians such as Calvin and Ursinus did not hold to the IAOC and that it was an invention of later Reformed theologians.¹ On the other side, Shepherd's opponents have countered that Calvin and Ursinus did hold to the active obedience and that the denial of the active obedience of Christ must be condemned, pointing particularly to the French Reformed synods of Privatens (1612) and Tonneins (1614).² What are we to make of this issue? Should a denial of the active obedience of Christ be tolerated in the Reformed Church? Was it tolerated historically? If Shepherd or the proponents of the so-called Federal vision do deny it, should they be driven from the ministry?

HISTORICAL ORIENTATION

To begin with, even though this denial was condemned by the French Reformed Churches, a great part of the Reformed Churches did not reject as ministers those who denied the IAOC, let alone count them as heretics.³ For example, clearly Gataker, Twisse, and Vines denied the IAOC, but they and their views were tolerated by the Westminster Assembly.⁴ Second, there were various ministers throughout the Reformed Churches who held this viewpoint, such as John Jacob Alting who taught at Groningen in the Netherlands in the 17th century.⁵ Third, the proponents of the theology of Saumur denied the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. Of course, the Swiss Reformed Churches condemned this viewpoint and other Salmurian views in

the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, but other Churches did not. Fourth, this denial was extremely common amongst the German Reformed Churches including theologians such as Piscator, Ursinus, Pareus, Crocius, Wendelin, and Scultetus (among others!). From all this, we observe that a significant minority did deny the IAOC, often with toleration.

Some have particularly objected to the view that Ursinus denied the IAOC because his views have implications for the Heidelberg Catechism, which the continental Reformed Churches hold as a secondary doctrinal standard. We believe that Shepherd is probably right that Ursinus did deny the IAOC. Consider three prominent authorities who say that Ursinus did deny the IAOC. First, Heinrich Heppe, the great historian of German Reformed history, claims this in his *Reformed Dogmatics*.⁶ Second, Johann

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1. See Norman Shepherd, "Justification by Works in Reformed Theology" in *Backbone of the Bible*, ed. by Andrew Sandlin (Nacogdoches, Tex.: Covenant Media Press, 2004) 103–120.

2. See R. Scott Clark, "Do This and Live" in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, ed. by R. Scott Clark (Philipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2007). In this article, Clark also demonstrates quite convincingly that an affirmation of the IAOC was certainly the majority view.

3. On the 17th century view of heretics, see Samuel Maresius, *Systema Breve Universae Theologiae* (Groningen: Johannes Collanus, 1659) 492–510.

4. Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1883) 149–156.

5. Bernhardinus De Moor, *Commentarius perpetuus in Joh. Marckii compendium theologiae christianae didactico-elencticum*, vol. 3 (Lugdunum Batavia, 1765) 968.

6. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G.T. Thomson, rev. & ed. by Ernst Bizer (London: Wakeman Great Reprints) 460.

Gerhard, the great Lutheran scholastic, placed him alongside Piscator as one who denied the IAOC. Gerhard provides no quotation but simply lists Ursinus along with several other German Reformed theologians.⁷ Third, the great Dutch Reformed theologian of the 18th century, Bernhardinus de Moor, in his *Commentarius Perpetuus*, dealt at length with this issue, citing a rare (to us!) source to shed light on this issue.⁸ De Moor was an ardent proponent of the IAOC, but he admitted that Ursinus did deny it. De Moor cited John Jacob Schultens who demonstrated at length that Ursinus held to this position;⁹ however, Schultens also added that Ursinus did not hold to this position before 1566.¹⁰ One final piece of evidence demonstrates that Ursinus did deny the IAOC is the fact that his great pupil, David Pareus, who assembled Ursinus' famous *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, also denied the IAOC. There-

I would put in the same category the views of Albrecht Ritschl in his *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, tr. by John S. Black (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872) 248.

7. See Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1865) XVI.57.

8. On the weight of De Moor's opinion, consider Richard Muller's comment on him, "De Moor's efforts did for late Reformed orthodoxy what the massive system of Quenstedt did for Lutheranism in the concluding years of the seventeenth century: the work was so exhaustive and so complete in its detail and bibliography that it virtually ended the development of Reformed doctrine in the form of orthodoxy system." *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003) 83. J. Van den Berg calls it a "monument of Voetian oriented orthodoxy," in "Het stroomlandschap van de Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland tussen 1650 en 1750" in *Een richtingenstrijd in de Gereformeerde Kerk: Voetianen en Coccejansen (1650-1750)*, ed. by F.G.M. Broeyer and E.G.E. van der Wall (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1994) 23.

9. De Moor, *Commentarius*, 969. The work is called *Omstandigen Brief aan den hr. Nic. Holtius over de zaak van A. v.d. Os*, 117-360.

10. Ibid. De Moor refers his reader to pp. 158 and 213-219 of the work just cited. This is also confirmed by a citation of the German theologian Marcus Friedrich Wendelin in Alexander Schweizer, *Die Glaubenslehre der Evangelisch-Reformirten Kirche*, Vol. 2 (Zürich: Orell, Füssli, und Comp., 1847) 384-385. Note also that R. Scott Clark points back to Ursinus' 1561 work *Summa Theologiae* where Ursinus affirmed the IAOC. "Do This and Live," 231-232.

11. *Ecumenical and Reformed Creeds and Confessions* (Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 1991) 46.

12. See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001) 209. Interestingly, Arminius also revolted strongly against this threefold imputation described by Beza; see James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1, tr. by James Nichols (London: Longman, Hurst, etc., 1825) 253-254.

13. Turretin, *Institutes*, XIV.xiii.32. See also the citations in Clark, "Do This and Live," 231.

14. For more information on Piscator see the appendix to this article on "The Life and Work of Johannes Piscator."

fore, it seems that we must conclude that Ursinus did deny the IAOC but not before 1566.

In light of this evidence, it is also important to note that the Heidelberg Catechism does teach the IAOC. The Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 63 states, "Yet God without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed any sin, and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me."¹¹ Shepherd is wrong to say in reference to this question, "Interpreting these [the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness] as a reference to the imputation of active obedience is a reading back into earlier Reformed theology of views that developed only at a later time" ("Justification by Works," 115). On the contrary, Shepherd is the one who has read something back into the past. He has read Ursinus' later views back into the Heidelberg Catechism without warrant. According to Schultens, Ursinus did not deny the IAOC until after 1566, but Ursinus wrote the Heidelberg Catechism in 1562/3. Instead, we should note that the Heidelberg Catechism reflects most probably the views of Beza who posited a threefold guilt arising from Adam's sin and a threefold imputation of Christ's righteousness to answer that guilt.¹² The plain language of Lord's Day 23 does, then, affirm the IAOC.

Shepherd's implicit claim that Calvin denied the IAOC is dubious at best and for the same reasons listed above. Whether it is Hepppe, De Moor, or Gerhard, none of them speak of Calvin as holding to this position, even though Hepppe and Gerhard had no reason to refrain from mentioning it, had such been the case. When this issue is brought up, historical writers and theologians refer to Piscator, not Calvin, and the Lutheran George Cargius. Beyond this, the affirmation of the IAOC can be demonstrated from Calvin's writings, as Turretin did in his *Institutes* when debating this very issue.¹³ We are on safe ground when we say that Calvin did not deny the IAOC.

We have seen thus far that there was diversity within the Reformed communion over the question of the denial of the IAOC, with the majority affirming it. The question still remains as to exactly what the denial of the IAOC meant for those reformed theologians who did deny it.

In order to understand this denial better, we would like to look briefly at the views of Johannes Piscator.¹⁴ He is the patriarch of this view among the Reformed, and the theologian most often mentioned in connection with the denial of the IAOC. We shall examine his views from his little book *A Learned and Profitable*

Treatise on Man's Justification.¹⁵ It is a polemical work against the famous Papist apologist, Robert Bellarmine. After that, we shall compare his views to those of Norman Shepherd.

PISCATOR'S VIEW

First, in the matter of the justification of a sinner, Piscator says, "Man by himself and his own nature unjust is accounted for just" (5). Piscator emphasizes that man is accounted just or righteous not because of anything in man, even faith. "For to speak properly, that which is in a man, is not said to be imputed to him, but that which is without a man. And faith is in a man, but Christ's satisfaction which faith apprehends is outside a man" (30). Furthermore, Piscator notes that all our works "whether they be done by the strength of free will or by grace" (32) are not the ground of our justification. Consequently, Piscator could readily agree with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* XI.1 which says that God does not justify sinners "for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness."¹⁶

What, then, is the source of man's righteousness? It is Christ's satisfaction imputed to the believer. "[God] accepts Christ's satisfaction for the elect ... imputes the same unto them; and thereupon receives them into favor, and adopts them for sons and heirs of eternal life" (Piscator, *Justification*, 5–6). In opposition to Piscator, many have objected that to have forgiveness of sins is not the same as being accounted righteous. After all, if Christ's active obedience is not accounted as our righteousness, then how can Christ be our righteousness? Piscator responds that when sins are forgiven, someone is counted not only as not having committed any sins but also as having done all things required. In other words, as he says, "The reason of which thing is this, that remission of sins, wherein man's justification consists is remission of all sins: and therefore not only of sins of committing, but also of sins of omitting" (106). Thus, Christ is our righteousness "by a metonymy of the effect," that is, once Christ's satisfaction is imputed to us, we are counted as being righteous, even though we ourselves remain inherently unrighteous.¹⁷ Piscator would not agree that if only Christ's passive obedience is imputed to us, then we ourselves must supply positive righteousness. Rather, once Christ's satisfaction is imputed to us, we are in a state of having done everything required because our sins of omission are forgiven. Thus, for Piscator,

the source of our righteousness in justification is only Christ's satisfaction imputed to us.

This becomes even clearer when we examine Piscator's view of faith. Faith is simply the instrument by which a sinner applies to himself Christ's righteousness. He writes:

And therefore that man is justified by faith only because he is counted just, and by consequence pronounced just, for Christ's satisfaction only which is imputed to him by faith only: for that He does not apprehend and apply it to himself but by faith (Piscator, *Justification*, 5).

He emphasizes that even faith itself is excluded as a part of our righteousness before God. Moreover, "There is no other instrumental cause whereby Christ's satisfaction is apprehended" (91). Piscator clearly teaches that faith is the alone instrument of justification and insists upon it over and over again throughout this work. This is, of course, one of the central disputes between Bellarmine and himself.

The consequence is that all of our works are excluded from our justification. While Christ's satisfaction imputed to us is the sole source of our righteousness, we are by nature unrighteous. Moreover, even the righteous acts that we do after grace and faith are excluded from our justification, which, according to Piscator, continues to rest solely in the satisfaction of Christ imputed to us. He argues against Bellarmine that all of our works are excluded from our justification before God. He argues from the fact that Paul "speaks of works in general, whether they be done by the strength of free will or by grace, [because] he entreats [in Romans 4] of Abraham's works, those which he had done of grace and faith, as that he was obedient to God's commandment" (Piscator, *Justification*, 32). Piscator holds strongly to the *sola in sola fidei*. He does not say that we are forgiven of our sins and then become inherently righteous people who

15. *A Learned and Profitable Treatise of Mans Iustification: Two bookees. Opposed to the sophismes of Robert Bellarmine, Iesuite. By Iohn Piscator, professor of diuinitie in the famous schools of Nassouia Sigena* (London: By Thomas Creede, for Ralphe Iackson, dwelling in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Swanne, 1599).

16. *Ecumenical and Reformed Creeds and Confessions* (Mid-America Reformed Seminary, 1991).

17. I have taken the phrase "metonymy of the effect" from Hans Boersma's discussion of this issue. He has a helpful discussion of these issues in their British context and also demonstrates that Richard Baxter also went beyond the denial of the IAOC in his view of justification. *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993) 220–231.

are justified on that basis. Even those works that flow out of faith are clearly excluded from our justification. Even our final justification at the judgment day will simply be a repetition of the same justification that occurred in history in our consciences by the Holy Spirit, as Piscator says,

And in that day of judgment, Christ being appointed of the Father Judge of all, will with His mouth openly before all angels and men, pronounce just, and crown with life eternal the reward of justice, all those that before were justified in this life, both by imputation of justice, and by that secret testimony of the Holy Ghost (Piscator, *Justification*, 4).

The same pronouncement that gave us comfort in this life that we have a righteous standing before God will then be pronounced openly by the Lord Jesus Christ: “You are righteous on the basis of My satisfaction imputed to you.”

Finally, what are the results of this justification? For Piscator, we are not only forgiven of our sins, but when we receive Christ, we also have a right to eternal life, for when someone is justified, God “receives them into favor, and adopts them for sons and heirs of eternal life” (6). The reason why this can occur, according to Piscator, is because God has said, “Do this, and you will live” (Lev. 18:5, Mat. 19:17, Gal. 3:12).¹⁸ Once our sins are forgiven:

It comes [about] that he to whom God forgives sins, is so accounted, as if he had not only committed nothing which God has forbidden in his law, but also omitted nothing of that which he has commanded: and therefore, as if he had perfectly fulfilled the law of God (106).

Consequently, Piscator goes on to say, “God gives eternal life as a reward to those unto whom He has promised it, to wit, unto those that keep His law, such as He accounts all those whose sins He has forgiven” (Piscator, *Justification*, 108).

18. See Piscator, *Justification*, 107.

19. Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2000) 19. “All of this is made possible through the covenantal righteousness of Jesus Christ. His was a living, active, and obedient faith that took him all the way to the cross. This faith was credited to him as righteousness.”

20. All quotations are from the *New King James Version* unless otherwise noted.

21. Norman Shepherd, “Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 14/1 (2005) 75–76.

In Piscator’s view, we are not righteous because God sees us as having done all that Christ did. Rather, we are considered righteous because our sins of commission and omission are forgiven on the basis of Christ’s satisfaction. Thus, we are still dealing with a view that causes men to look wholly outside of themselves and to Christ for their righteousness. We agree with the conclusion of De Moor who said, “However much these learned men may be deceived on this point, it must be confessed that they place our right to eternal life in Christ alone without any of our works” (De Moor, *Commentarius Perpetuus*, 968).

THE EXEGESIS OF SHEPHERD AND PISCATOR

Does this mean that Shepherd’s viewpoint should be tolerated in Reformed Churches? We should not draw this conclusion because Shepherd’s viewpoint deviates radically not only from the majority position but also from Piscator’s. We shall illustrate this first from their exegesis and then by a brief comparison of Shepherd’s view of justification with Piscator’s.

First, they have a very different exegesis of the key passages on justification. Romans 4:5 says that for the one who believes his faith is credited as righteousness, following Gen. 15:6. Piscator interprets this as teaching “that man is justified by faith inasmuch as he lays hold on, and applies to himself Christ’s satisfaction” (Piscator, *Justification*, 29). On the contrary, Norman Shepherd does not believe that these and other texts refer to the justification of a sinner alone. Norman Shepherd believes that this text refers to the way that any human would be justified by God. Thus, Shepherd says that Jesus Christ’s “faith was credited to him as righteousness.”¹⁹ Piscator would say that this text refers only to the justification of a sinner. Shepherd says that they refer to the only justification possible whether for sinners or Christ or Adam before the fall.

For Martin Luther, one of the key passages teaching justification by faith alone was Romans 1:17. It says, “For in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”²⁰ Once again, Shepherd does not refer this simply to the justification of the sinner. He claims that this is the method of justification for all creatures whether sinful or not. He writes concerning Adam, “He would live and live forever not by the merit of works but by faith. He would exhibit the principle stated in Habakkuk 2:4 and reiterated by Paul in Rom. 1:17.”²¹ He goes on to say, “The method of justification for Adam before the fall is exactly what it is for Paul after the fall: ‘The

righteous will live by faith' (Rom. 1:17)." In contrast, Piscator believes this passage refers only to the justification of a sinner. He writes,

I think [the righteousness of God] is to be simply expounded as that which God gives to be imputed, namely, through faith, the righteousness acquired by the death of Christ. Meanwhile, I also confess, that this righteousness is opposed to the righteousness of men, that is, the righteousness that men would obtain, if they fulfilled the law by their own ability. And the Apostle clearly sets down this antithesis in [Romans] 10:3 as well as Phil. 3:9.²²

Whereas Piscator considers this passage to be clearly setting forth the Gospel in distinction from the law, Shepherd blends the two and considers this passage as speaking of the way that God deals with all humans, even unfallen ones.

Second, there is also a difference in the exegesis of the texts that refer to the law. Piscator takes the "do this and live" passages as referring to the perfect obedience to which God promises eternal life, as we have already seen. Piscator says that when God forgives our sins on the basis of Christ's satisfaction, this includes our sins of omission and so we are reckoned as having obeyed the law perfectly and consequently worthy of eternal life. Shepherd says that this statement in Leviticus 18:5 was not meant to show that perfect obedience was necessary for eternal life but rather that it "was designed to nurture the righteousness of faith," which means, for Shepherd, that "Israel's welfare depended upon her faithfulness to the Lord" (Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*, 33). According to Shepherd, if this verse is taken out of context, it might mean that there is salvation by works. However, rightly understood, this passage teaches that salvation is by faith and grace. In other words, Shepherd is saying that in their proper context, "do this and live" means the same thing as "the just shall live by faith." This is something with which Piscator certainly would have disagreed.

As we shall see more fully below, this difference is also seen in how they interpret the works of the law that are excluded from justification. Shepherd says, "The works of the law are the works of meritorious self-righteousness that only serve to mask gross sin and disobedience."²³ Shepherd here does not mean those works that are literally "meritorious." Rather, he means that they are works by which someone thinks that they can merit, even though they are still in great sin. Shepherd interprets the works that are excluded from justification as only some works commanded by the law or works of

a certain type. In contrast, Piscator holds to the most obvious meaning of the terms and says that works of the law are simply "that which the law commands" (Piscator, *Epistolarum Pauli*, 31).

Finally, we see a great difference in the way that the two men interpret those passages that describe the effects of faith. Consider, for example, their exegesis of James 2.²⁴ Shepherd describes the attempts to say that James and Paul are speaking of justification in different senses as "various exegetical and dogmatic devices of dubious validity ... used to defuse and tame these texts so that they ... fit" (Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*, 62). In contrast, Piscator concurs with the classic Protestant exegetical tradition in affirming that Paul and James are speaking of faith and justification in different senses. He comments on James 2:

But it is to be diligently noted before all things that the question of this passage is not over how a man is justified, which Paul treats in Romans and Galatians. Rather, after it is established that a man is justified by faith alone, he inquires what sort of faith it is or with what sort of faith man is justified.²⁵

Piscator emphatically distinguishes the questions treated in James and Romans. Shepherd says they are the same.

Another passage often cited in this connection is Galatians 5:6. Here Norman Shepherd says that this is referring to our justification before God. He writes:

When we come to verse 6 we are clearly in the sphere of judgment and justification, and in this verse faith expressing itself through love is set over against circumcision (the presence or absence of works of the law),²⁶ which do not avail for justification (Shepherd, "Justification by Faith," 93).

22. Johannes Piscator, *Analysis Logica Epistolarum Pauli* (London: George Bishop, 1591) 10. "Puto simpliciter exponendum, quam donat Deus imputando scilicet per fidem iustitiam partam morte Christi. Interim fateor, hanc iustitiam opponi iustitiae hominum, hoc est, quam homines adipiscerentur, si ex propriis viribus satisfacerent legi: quam antithesin aperte instituit Apostolus infra 10:3, item Phil. 3:9"

23. Shepherd, "Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology," in *Backbone of the Bible*, 99.

24. Norman Shepherd, "The Grace of Justification" (Document online: http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/norman_shepherd/the_grace_of_justification.htm). All online materials for this article were accessed as of May 10, 2007.

25. John Piscator, *Analysis logica Septuaginta Epistolarum Apostolorum que Catholicae appellari solent* (London: John Wolf, 1593) 15.

26. Note that Shepherd does not mean by works of the law all works whatsoever. He only means a limited amount of works. See the discussion below on Shepherd's view of justification.

According to Shepherd, faith expressing itself through love avails for justification. In contrast, Piscator says, "In Christ only faith avails for justification" (Piscator, *Epistolarum Pauli*, 332). According to Piscator, in this passage, the Apostle specifically says that circumcision cannot avail for justification against the false Apostles. He sees the Apostle as answering in 5:6 the specific charge of whether or not this doctrine takes away godliness and answers by saying that "faith is active in performing the duties of love, and thus true faith is known from its proper effects" (332). But Piscator denies that these effects can avail for justification.²⁷

In the exegesis of Piscator and Shepherd, we see a wide divergence. Piscator basically interprets the passages of law and Gospel according to a traditional Protestant framework. Shepherd, on the contrary, interprets the Gospel passages as being applicable to Christ and pre-fall Adam (such as Rom. 4:5 and 1:17) and the law passages as referring to the Gospel (such as Lev. 18:5 and Gal. 3:11). Moreover, whereas Piscator with the classic Protestant tradition carefully distinguished passages which spoke of justification by faith alone and those which speak of the effects of faith in sanctification, Shepherd blends the two together, referring the works in Gal. 5:6 and Jas. 2 to our justification before God. The result is a radically different doctrine of justification.

PISCATOR'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION COMPARED WITH SHEPHERD'S

Just as their exegesis diverges significantly, so Piscator's and Shepherd's view of justification is also very far apart. First, for Piscator, the righteousness of faith is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, that is, His satisfaction credited to our account by faith. For Shepherd, the righteousness of faith is the result of obedience to the law. "The righteousness of those who obey the law is

27. Amazingly, Shepherd claims, "Calvin, however, did think this verse was talking about justification, and Calvin was right." "Justification by Faith," (92). Calvin, however, disagrees and refutes the very idea that Shepherd is presenting in his article. He says, "When you are engaged in discussing the question of justification, beware of allowing any mention of love or of works, but resolutely adhere to the exclusive particle. Paul does not here treat of justification, or assign any part of the praise of it to love." John Calvin, *Commentaries XXI* (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1999) 153.

28. Norman Shepherd, "Justification by Faith in Pauline Theology" in *Backbone of the Bible*, 94.

29. Shepherd does believe that faith in the post-fall situation does apply Christ for washing away our guilt and corruption, but this helps us to attain "faith," which, for Shepherd, is the righteousness by which we are justified. See my article "Saying 'Justification by Faith Alone' Isn't Enough," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006) 256–266.

not the righteousness of meritorious achievement, but the righteousness of faith."²⁸ For Shepherd, faith itself is the righteousness by which we are justified, and this is why he can say that Jesus' "faith was credited to Him as righteousness." On the contrary, Piscator says that faith is credited as righteousness because of what is connected to faith, namely, Christ. He then goes on to say, "For to speak properly, that which is in a man is not said to be imputed to him, but that which is without a man. And faith is in a man, but Christ's satisfaction which faith apprehends is without a man" (Piscator, *On Justification*, 29–30). Thus, the difference between Piscator and Shepherd is that Piscator says that Christ's satisfaction is our righteousness before God, whereas Shepherd says that faith itself is our righteousness before God.

It hardly needs to be said here that Piscator and Shepherd disagree on the instrumentality of faith. Piscator believes that faith is an instrument taking hold of the righteousness of another. Shepherd does not. Shepherd believes that faith itself is our righteousness. He says that for pre-fall Adam and for us, the method of justification is the same, "the just shall live by faith" (Shepherd, "Law and Gospel in Covenantal Perspective," 76). Since faith in pre-fall Adam cannot be understood as an instrument apprehending the righteousness of another, the faith that justifies sinners cannot be understood as an instrument in that sense either. For Shepherd, faith is our righteousness, not an instrument taking hold of the righteousness of another.²⁹ For Piscator, faith is not our righteousness before God.

Finally, they differ significantly on what works are excluded from our justification. Shepherd rightly says, "We have to ask what are the works of the law that Paul sets over against this faith and excludes from justification" (Shepherd, "Justification by Faith," 95). But Shepherd wrongly answers, "By works of the law Paul means obedience to a *limited selection of laws* found in the Scripture (emphasis mine)" (97). In contrast, Piscator says, "He speaks of works in general, whether they be done by the strength of free will or by grace" (Piscator, *On Justification*, 32). Shepherd says, "These works of the law were not good works; they were *not the obedience of faith wrought by the power of God* (emphasis mine)" (Shepherd, 99). Piscator says otherwise, "He entreats there of Abraham's works, those which he had done of grace and faith," and "Moreover, it is false that the Apostle understands those works only which are done according to God's law by the strength of free will" (Piscator, 34). Here is the major difference. Piscator excludes *all* of our works from our justification, and Shepherd only excludes *some*. In other words, Piscator

says we are justified by faith alone, and Shepherd says that we are justified by faith and works.

CONCLUSION

There were certainly theologians amongst the Reformed who denied the IAOC, and they were tolerated in many places. The reason for this is, as De Moor says, “however much these learned men may be deceived on this point, it must be confessed that they place our right to eternal life in Christ alone without any of our works” (De Moor, *Commentarius*, 968). But neither De Moor nor we can say the same about Shepherd. Shepherd views the righteousness of a sinner as his own righteousness by the help of Jesus Christ. Piscator says that we have everything for justification in Christ. Piscator’s view still points people to Christ alone. Shepherd points people to Christ and then back to themselves. This is a radical difference. Perhaps we can tolerate Piscator’s views, but we cannot tolerate Shepherd’s or any other view that mingles faith and works in our justification.

APPENDIX – THE LIFE AND WORK OF JOHANNES PISCATOR

The English theologian Edward Leigh (1602–1671) wrote in his *Treatise of Religious Learning* concerning Piscator, “He was an excellent Scripture-Divine, but no School-Divine, and therefore no marvel if he want the accurateness of Scholaistical expressions.”³⁰ Whatever Leigh may have meant, Johannes Piscator or Fischer (March 27, 1546–July 26, 1625) has remained a controversial figure in the area of systematic theology, even though his greatest work was as a Biblical commentator and translator.

Piscator was born in Strasburg in 1546. He studied in various places throughout Germany and eventually became a teacher. In 1576, he was professor at the Heidelberg University along with Tremellius, Junius, Olevianus, and Ursinus.³¹ After the Elector of the Palatinate turned to Lutheranism, Piscator departed with the others and taught at Siegen, Neustadt, and Moers in various schools.

On July 10, 1584, a new university was founded in Herborn in the Wetterau districts of Germany to do the work that could no longer be done at Heidelberg.³² Caspar Olevianus (1536–1587) was chosen to organize and teach at the new university. Piscator, who was also Olevianus’ son-in-law, joined him at the university and taught there until his death in 1625.

The university prospered greatly under the work of

Olevianus and Piscator. The university received students not only from Germany but also from Poland and Hungary. After Olevianus’ death in 1587, Piscator became the leader of the school. J.I. Good notes that “his aim was to make Herborn a purely Reformed university” (Good, *Origin*, 228). Piscator was seeking to make a Reformed university in contrast to a Lutheran one as many of the Lutheran areas of Germany continued to become Reformed during this time period.³³ The school was especially successful during Piscator’s tenure there. In 1606–1610 it boasted a student population of three to four hundred students (Good, *Origin*, 227). Piscator’s students went throughout Europe and included the first of the great Buxtorfs, Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629), the great Hebrew scholar of the day who produced *Synagoga Judaica*,³⁴ a description of the Old Testament Church, and the Hebrew lexicon of his day.³⁵

Piscator lived a long and productive life of nearly 80 years. In that time, he produced numerous works on a wide range of subjects in theology, exegesis, and logic.³⁶ He was most famous for his work in systematic theology and Biblical translation and exegesis.

His most famous work in systematic theology was his *Aphorisms of Christian Doctrine*. The subtitle tells us that it is for the most part excerpted from John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and set forth in brief sentences. It was reprinted numerous times and was translated into English and printed in London in 1596. Piscator wrote numerous other works on systematic theology, but he is best known for his denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. If one finds him mentioned in histories of doctrine or theology, he will most likely be mentioned as one who denied this doctrine. Piscator was also a rather extreme supralapsarian.³⁷

30. Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Religious Learning and of religious and learned men* (London, 1656) 291.

31. See *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, document online: http://www.bautz.de/bbkl/p/piscator_j.shtml.

32. See J.I. Good, *The Origin of the Reformed Churches in Germany in the James I. Good Collection* (The Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, 2004) 225–228.

33. See Good, *Origin*, for the entire story of how the Reformed Church in Germany came out of the Lutheran Church.

34. See <http://www.uwm.edu/~corre/buxdorf/myintro.html>.

35. J.I. Good, *The Swiss Reformed Church Since the Reformation in the James I. Good Collection* (The Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, 2004) 159ff.

36. See the entire list in the *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*.

37. See Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1903) 338–339.

In spite of his fame (or infamy) for the denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, Piscator's great work was as an exegete and Bible translator. He commented on all of the books of the Bible. In 1602–1603, he issued the first new German translation of the Bible with notes since Luther's translation. It was adopted officially as the Bible of Bern and a few places in Germany. He also published a Latin version of the Old Testament with Beza's Latin version of the New Testament in several volumes from 1601–1615. He also published with it his commentary on the Old Testament as well as Junius and Tremellius' version of the Old Testament. His commentaries were later published separately.³⁸ In spite of the often severe disagreement with his views on the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, Reformed theologians continued to appreciate his exegetical labors. As Neele notes, Petrus van Mastricht recommended that pastors and theologians read Calvin, Piscator, Poole, and others after they had done their own exegetical work.³⁹

Piscator continues to be a controversial figure in the history of the Reformed Church. He represents the labor of the post-reformation theologians to consolidate, appropriate, and organize the work of the Reformation through his exegetical and polemical labor. He also represents the controversies that arose in the attempt to clarify the original work of the Reformation. As with so many other figures of post-reformation history, more work should be done to understand the life and work of this significant theologian. ■

Newman provides a few excerpts from Piscator's debate with Conrad Vorstius to illustrate Piscator's supralapsarianism. Newman claims that Piscator eventually became an Arminian, but he provides no documentation. I have been unable to substantiate his claim from any of the sources I examined. The *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* does mention that he became an Arminian, but it cites Newman's work. Confusion may have come about because Piscator denied the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, and the Arminians did as well. But note that they did this for different reasons. Piscator said that when Christ's passive obedience is imputed to us, we are considered completely righteous, but the Arminians said that faith itself was counted as our righteousness.

38. The information in this paragraph is taken from James Townley, *Illustrations of Biblical Literature Exhibiting the History and Fate of the Sacred Writings* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856) 484.

39. Adriaan C. Neel, *The Art of Living to God: A Study of Method and Piety in the Theoretico-practica theologia of Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706)* (Pretoria, South Africa: University of Pretoria, 2005) 138.

In Brief: Alexander M'Leod on a Pastor According to God's Heart

The Pastor according to God's heart, has a life corresponding to the functions of his holy office.

There is a striking analogy between a saint and the church. Grace is not complete until it terminates in glory; and the church militant is imperfect. Professions are frequently hypocritical, appearances are often discovered to have been without reality. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?—And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Ministers may have a divine call to the office, and yet afterwards give themselves up to the service of Satan, and betray their master. Judas was an Apostle. There must therefore be a check upon Christian confidence. It is not sufficient that the Pastor has been regularly called, he must also adhere to his instructions. He that is *near the heart of God*, כִּלְבִי, has not only received a regular ordination, but also continues to perform faithfully the duties of the pastoral office. Ministers are to be honorably received, and diligently watched. While they continue to live a life corresponding to their ministry, let them be esteemed as the servants of God, as the ambassadors of Christ. But when they shall have forsaken God, let them be rejected by the church. You will bear, my brethren, with our personal infirmities; you will sympathize in our calamities; you will pity our intellectual weakness; you will mourn for our unsuccessfulness; and if we should never acquire great popularity, we are not, merely on that account, to be rejected of the church. Not great attainments in eloquence, not courtly manners, not a talent of pleasing the high or the low, not popularity, nor even the degrees of success with which a ministry is accompanied, can determine whether a Pastor be far off, or near the heart of God. He is a Pastor approved of God, who is *pious, diligent, and faithful*.

The constitution, character, and duties of the Gospel ministry: a sermon, preached at the ordination of the Rev. Gilbert McMaster, in the First Presbyterian Church, Duanesburgh (New-York: Printed by J. Seymour, 1808) 48–49. ■