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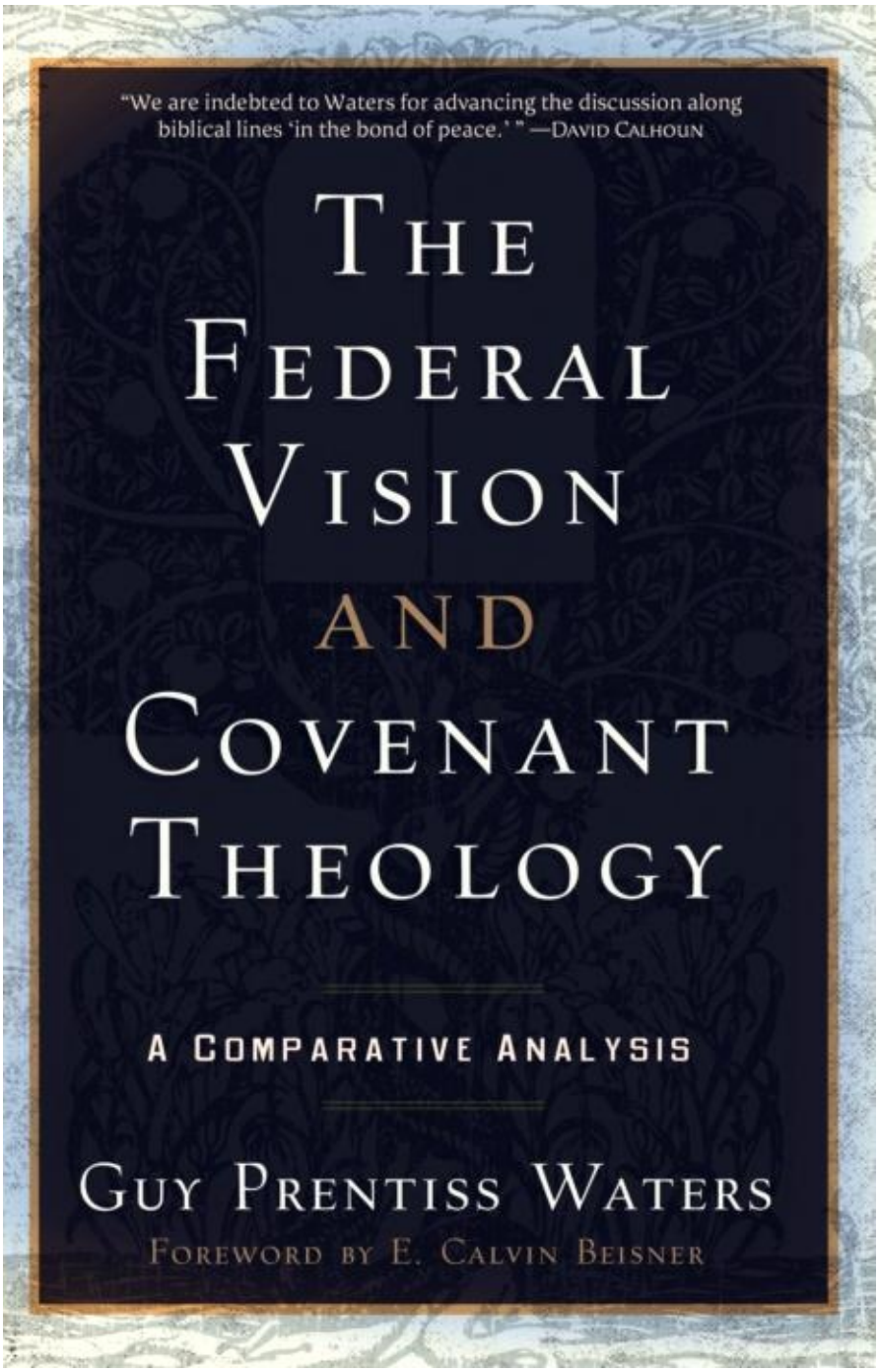
The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology

A Comparative Analysis

Guy Prentiss Waters

Foreword by E. Calvin Beisner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Foreword

In the last five years or so, first the North American and now increasingly the British and European Reformed communities have .been bewildered by a theologically loose-knit but sociologically tightly woven movement of fairly recent origin but with deep historical roots. Even determining a name by which to designate it is a challenge. One might call it

- Auburn Avenue Theology, after Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in Monroe, Louisiana, which has hosted conferences at which the movement's ideas have been most consistently promoted;

- the Federal Vision (its proponents' preferred name), playing on the movement's emphasis on reworking traditional Reformed covenant theology and giving prominence to vision (story) over propositional system;

- Shepherdism, in recognition of the seminal role of former Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) systematic theology professor Norman Shepherd in articulating and promoting several of its key doctrines, especially subsuming the covenant of works into the covenant of grace and, in the process, critically redefining the latter;

- monocovenantalism, which repudiates the historic Reformed distinction between a covenant of works and a covenant of grace, insisting instead that there has been but one, gracious covenant between God and man from creation onward, both before and after the fall;'

- or neonomism or neolegalism, labels applied by some of its sternest critics, who believe that its peculiar understandings of covenant theology imply a synergistic soteriology in which works join faith as both instrument and ground of justification, and thus threaten or jettison the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

All of these names fit it to varying degrees, and all have inadequacies. Whatever is the case, the growing and constantly metamorphosing movement has Reformed heads swirling.

After nearly three years of reading and listening widely and carefully to the Federal Vision's proponents,' including voluminous correspondence with many of them, I am convinced that what the Federal Vision offers is not a renewal or improvement of the historic Reformed faith but a wholesale replacement of it with a curious hybrid affecting soteriology, sacramentology, and ecclesiology, closely similar to and heavily influenced by the New Perspective on Paul associated with James D. G. Dunn, E. P. Sanders, and N. T. Wright.

In soteriology, by redefining the traditional terms of the Reformed ordo salutis and viewing them all "through the lense of the covenant" rather than "through the lense of the decree," the Federal Visionists offer a hybrid of three components. The first is a modified Amyraldianism. Original Amyraldianism posited a hypothetically universal atonement; the Federal Visionists hold that the atonement is hypothetically for all in the historical-objective covenant but effective only to the "elect," who equal those "justified" by faith who don't apostatize and wind up condemned by works. The second is a modified Arminianism. Original Arminianism affirmed that Christ died as substitute to pay the penalty for the sins of all people. The Federal Visionists will affirm that Christ died to pay the penalty for the sins of all in "the covenant," including some who wind up in hell. One's "election" ultimately depends on whether he is "faithful" to "the covenant," and one can be "justified" and wind up in hell through apostasy. The third is a modified Roman infusionism. We are "justified" at first by grace through faith but at last by the merit (despite how much some proponents of that view hate the word merit) of the works produced in and through us by God.'

In sacramentology, Federal Visionists offer a modified sacerdotal sacramentalism that borders on affirming the Roman Catholic doctrine of ex opere operato.4 The sacraments are objectively effective means of converting, not only of sanctifying, grace5 because they are administered by properly ordained people in the community of the faithful. Thus, one of the most prominent of the Federal Visionists, Steve Wilkins, has said, "If [someone] has been baptized, he is in covenant with God"; "covenant is union with Christ. Thus, being in covenant gives all the blessings of being united to Christ....

Because being in covenant with God means being in Christ, those who are in covenant have all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places.'" It follows necessarily from these two statements that if someone has been baptized, he has all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places-which certainly seems to include salvation in the sense of being destined for heaven rather than hell. Yet, paradoxically, the sacraments' efficacy can be frustrated by the recipients' unfaithfulness.

In ecclesiology the Federal Visionists are more nearly Roman Catholic than Reformed. I could not help thinking immediately of the Federal Vision when I read this passage in a recent book on developments in Catholic-Protestant relations: For Roman Catholicism,

> Christ and his church are one! This basic confession explains why Catholics can offer salvation through baptism into the church. It is why the pope (as the vicar of Christ) can speak without error in matters of faith and morals. It is why ... only priests in connection with a bishop, in connection with the pope, can offer valid sacraments. It is why Protestants may not share a Catholic Eucharist.... It is why a church marriage is unbreakable. It is why . . . "No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother." It is why Mary is called the mother of the church.... This is why the church is self-correcting.... It is why the word of the church is higher than individual conscience and reason. It is why sin against God is also sin against the church.... It is why Catholics view the Protestant Reformation as such a drastic mistake-a splintering of the church is an attack on Christ himself.'

This is not to say that the Federal Visionists embrace all those Roman Catholic doctrines. They don't. But just as Rome's ecclesiology underpins its errors in soteriology and sacramentology, so also the Federal Visionists' ecclesiology, by taking the metaphor of Christ and the church as Head and body literally rather than metaphorically, nearly equates Christ and the church and so is the foundation of both their soteriology and their sacramentology. To be in the church is salvation. To receive the sacraments is to be in the church. Therefore to receive the sacraments is salvation. But after that neat syllogism there comes a great retreat. Suddenly salvation doesn't mean one is going to heaven; it means he's been delivered out of the sin-ruled world into the Christruled church, and perhaps, if he remains faithful to the end, it will mean he goes to heaven instead

of hell. But it isn't clear just what it means to the Federal Visionists to remain faithful. One thing is crystal clear: it doesn't just mean one believes the gospel, or, in the words of the Westminster Confession, that he rests "upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace," for faithfulness means something more than faith. It means measuring up to some standard of what earlier generations, especially in the Wesleyan tradition, called "evangelical obedience"-which is not the perfection demanded by the moral law but some approximation of it accepted in its place.

Three years ago, after hosting a colloquium that brought proponents and critics of this theology together for discussion, I wrote with restraint in my conclusion to the book containing the papers they had prepared for the colloquium, singling out individual flaws in the Federal Vision. At the time I still hoped much of the controversy could be explained by mutual misunderstanding and ambiguity. If I were to rewrite that conclusion now, it would be much more comprehensively and seriously critical.

Guy Waters's painstaking historical and theological analysis in this book makes up, to a large extent, for my over-restraint in that conclusion. Courteous, scholarly, gracious, yet patiently driving to the point time after time, Waters offers here a helpful contribution to ongoing discussion. While he deftly resists the temptation to smooth over significant differences among the movement's main proponents, he demonstrates an overall unity to the Federal Vision that makes it a distinct alternative to the theology of the historic Reformed confessions: the Belgic Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms-indeed, even the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. He also goes far toward showing the historical roots of the Federal Visionists' thinking, roots that he traced more thoroughly in his earlier book, justification and the New Perspectives on Paul, which really should be read alongside this book, giving readers the opportunity to see the close affinity between the Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul.

The eventual outcome of the Federal Vision controversy cannot yet be predicted. What can be predicted is that this book will be an important contribution to the debate.

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Preface

The Federal Vision (FV) presents to the Reformed church at the dawn of the twenty-first century possibly her greatest challenge and opportunity.

The challenges posed by the FV are legion. Some of them pertain to coming to terms with what the FV is and what it is not. Is the FV an unwelcome label unfairly imposed on a loosely associated group of men, or does it represent a concerted theological vision and project? Does the FV represent the quintessence and acme of centuries of Reformed thought, or is it an aberration from the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Standards? Has the FV purged classically Reformed theology of supposed "baptistic" and dispensationalist sympathies, or has it reshaped it after the image of Anglo-Catholicism? Is the FV covenant theology come into its own, or is it fundamentally a betrayal of covenant theology?

Some of these challenges are pointedly theological and practical. They invite us to consider and reconsider many crucial questions pertaining to Christian faith and practice. What is a covenant? What do we mean when we say that God is triune? How may biblical covenants be said to relate to the decree, or to one another? May we speak of a "covenant of works"? What does it mean to say that a sinner is justified, or that a Christian is "elect"? How may a Christian be assured of grace and salvation? What is the nature and import of baptism? What difference does it make to my Christian experience that I or my child has received the sacrament of baptism?

Other challenges transcend these particular questions. They strike at the core of the way in which we think about the Bible and the way we think about the world around us. FV proponents pose such questions as the following: Does the contemporary Reformed church emphasize the individual at the expense of the corporate people of God, the ingathered church? Has she yielded to a scholasticism that lays the mystery of God upon the altar of human rationalism? Does she at present lack the theological apparatus to engage the wider world, as

some conceive that engagement?

With these challenges, however, comes an opportunity. Not every question that the FV raises is profitable or worthy of wide consideration. The FV, however, is responding to certain legitimate and perennial questions that surface in Christian experience. It is heartening that FV proponents attempt to provide theologically reasoned answers to those questions. It is disappointing that FV proponents have arrived at the particular answers that they are presently propounding.

This state of affairs invites the Reformed church to appreciate afresh her rich confessional heritage. The Reformed denomination in which I am privileged to serve, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), receives the Westminster Standards as its confession of faith. These documents are, to be sure, theologically penetrating statements of biblical doctrine. They are equally penetrating guides to the Christian life. They offer to the church consistently biblical answers to the pastoral questions to which proponents of the FV have plied themselves.

The goal of this project is to show that the FV, when measured against the Scripture and against the Westminster Standards, not only falls short of the "whole counsel of God," but, at any number of points, counters biblical teaching. It is not my intention to offer an exhaustive restatement of the Standards' doctrine on each point in question. It is my hope, however, that readers will take two things from this work. First, they will see that the FV fails not only to rise to the measure of its own professed aims and intentions but also to withstand the light of biblical and confessional scrutiny. Second, they will have awakened in them an interest in studying more deeply our confessional standards as theologically and practically relevant statements for the twenty-first-century church. It is my desire that British Puritanism, from which these Standards emerged, and American Presbyterianism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which these Standards came to marvelous expression, will commend themselves more and more to study by the modern church.

In the preparation of this work, I have become increasingly and keenly conscious of my debts to numerous individuals. I am appreciative of particularly fruitful conversations with Drs. J. Ligon Duncan III, W. Duncan Rankin, and Alan Carter. Dr. E. Calvin Beisner, Dr. Scott Clark, Mr. Charlie Dykes, Rev.

Chris A. Hutchinson, Rev. James T. O'Brien, Rev. Richard D. Phillips, and Dr. W. Jason Wallace have thoughtfully and critically read earlier drafts of this work. I am indebted to the many good comments, suggestions, and corrections that these men have offered and trust that this work is the stronger for them. I assume, of course, full responsibility for the content of these pages. I am grateful for the labors of the FV's critics at the 2003 Knox Colloquium. Their work has helped to crystallize for me many of the important issues in this debate. I am similarly indebted to the criticisms in Cornelis Venema's published review of Norman Shepherd's The Call of Grace. Mrs. Cindy Mercer, Mrs. Susan Smith, and Mr. Jeremy Smith kindly supplied editorial comment, and Miss Abigail Shanks helped prepare the bibliography in its present form. Mr. Stephen Tindal, Mr. Jonathan Sherrod, and Mr. Jeremy Smith provided invaluable research assistance. The faculty and administration of Belhaven College have been steadfast in their encouragement and support, and for this I am grateful. I also wish to thank Thom Notaro and the staff at P&R for their work in preparing this project for publication.

A particular word of appreciation must go to my wife, Sarah, and to my daughters, Phoebe and Lydia. Their continued patience and encouragement in the course of this project has been a balm to me in my labors. My daughters are, through my wife, descended from men and women who sat under and, I trust, profited from the ministries of Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards. It is my fervent hope that the biblical doctrine preached from that pulpit in Northampton will, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, thrive in the Reformed churches of my own and my young daughters' generations.

The origins of this book are traceable to two sources. First, the Ad-Hoc Study Committee of the Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA), chaired by Dr. Duncan, appointed me in the spring of 2004 to study and to prepare material, for the benefit of committee, pertaining to the Federal Vision. Second, the session of the First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi, invited me to deliver, in the fall of 2004, the third series of the John Hunter Lectures. These lectures, graciously sponsored and underwritten by the First Presbyterian Church, became the foundation of this present work.

It is, then, in recognition of their steadfast and unreserved dedication to the cause of God and truth that this work is warmly and gratefully dedicated to the ministers, session, staff, and congregation of the First Presbyterian Church,

Jackson, Mississippi; and to the ministers and elders of the Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA).

Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Federal Vision

In this book, we are expounding and analyzing a theological system and movement that, in many respects, strikes very close to -home: the Federal Vision (FV), or the Auburn Avenue Theology. There are at least three reasons why the FV has rapidly gained the attention of many within Reformed churches. First, recognized proponents of the FV are cross-denominational (within the Presbyterian Church in America [PCA], the United Reformed Churches [URC], the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches [CREC], as well as independent churches). They are distributed geographically across the United States and Canada, and have effectively used new technologies to disseminate and promote their views into the homes and offices of many ministers, elders, and nonofficers. Specifically, they have used the Internet to create communities that transcend geographical and denominational boundaries and limitations, that are resistant to the oversight and accountability that published discourse and ecclesiastical discourse would otherwise afford, and that permit more democratized and coarsened theological dialogue than conventional print media have generally allowed.

A second reason explaining recent interest in the FV is that the FV has purportedly developed its system from covenant theology. Covenant theology, of course, is near and dear to the Reformed faith. Any theological system that claims its origin and genius from covenant theology understandably gains the ear of many Reformed men and women.

Third, the FV, as its name indicates, offers a vision that is comprehensive and sweeping. It articulates an epistemology, a Trinitarian theology, a doctrine of redemption and its application, and a conception of the church, culture, and

Christian living in this world. Many FV proponents not only promote this vision as stemming from their understanding of covenant theology but also charge the Reformed world with having failed to live up to what covenant theology entails for belief and practice. Consequently, ministers, elders, and laypersons are being pressed anew with the question, what does it mean to be Reformed?-a question that few Reformed church officers can now afford to ignore.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will address six matters: (1) the terminological options that have been proposed to label this system; (2) the sources we have consulted in preparing this material; (3) a brief historical account of the rise and progress of the FV; (4) a brief biographical introduction to the major proponents of the FV; (5) the FV's definition of the term covenant; and (6) the FV's attempt to reformulate the doctrine of the Trinity in view of covenant.

Terminology

Leaving aside such pejorative labels as the "Monroe Four," not fewer than three terms have circulated in connection with the theology that we are about to study.

(1) "The New Perspective on Paul," as a label, was applied by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (RPCUS) to the views expressed by participants of the 2002 Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (AAPC) Pastors' Conference (AAPCPC).' Others have spoken of the FV's "inclusion of doctrinal innovations such as the New Perspective on Paul. "2

While there is, to be sure, some overlap between the concerns of the NPP and the concerns of the FV, it is not accurate to describe them as a single movement.3 They properly represent different theological traditions and different constituencies, and have separate aims and objectives. Although the label "New Perspective on Paul" appears to have gained some currency within the church, it seems wisest to reserve this to describe the academic movement formally launched by E. P. Sanders and sustained by James D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright.'

(2) A second label that has gained some attention and use is "Auburn [Avenue] Theology."' This name, of course, derives from a significant nerve

center of this movement, the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, Louisiana, the congregation that has occasioned the controversy surrounding these doctrines. This church has sponsored the conferences at which the doctrines of the FV have been advanced and defended.' It has also drafted a statement that defends FV doctrines of election, covenant, and baptism;' has supplied two ministers (Steve Wilkins, Rich Lusk) who have prolifically written in support of these views; and has sponsored a press that has promoted the doctrines of the FV.8

This label is, in many respects, an improvement upon "NPP"; it is nevertheless deficient. It risks misstating certain FV proponents' views. While, for example, Wilkins and Lusk are proponents of paedocommunion, Steve Schlissel is currently not.9 Wilkins and Lusk, furthermore, articulate a distinctive view of baptism that is not paralleled in Schlissel's writings on the subject.10 The term "Auburn [Avenue] Theology" can also suggest that the FV originated from the AAPC. Unquestionably the proximate origins of the FV lie partially in the AAPC. As we shall argue below, however, the ultimate origins of the FV likely lie elsewhere.

(3) One of the reasons a third label, "The Federal Vision," is preferable to the others is that it has been adopted both by Wilkins" and Wilson12 and by critics of its doctrines.13 It appears then to have been met with broad-based acceptance and to be as unencumbered with pejorative overtones as such a label can be. Another reason why this label is appropriate is that it addresses the root concern of the system for which it stands: federal theology, or covenant theology. It also fairly represents this system as broadly casting a theological, ecclesiastical, and social "vision" from the standpoint of its understanding of covenant theology.

At this stage, we might address an understandable objection against the use of any labels whatsoever to describe the theological views in question. Some proponents of the FV have strenuously objected that there is no such thing as a "federal vision"-whether in the sense of a movement or a theological system.14 We may certainly recognize that there are genuine limitations and conceivable liabilities inherent to the label "FV." At the same time, we shall be arguing that the men who have identified themselves or have come to be identified with this movement have much in common that distinguishes them theologically from many others within the contemporary Reformed and Presbyterian world.

In view of this state of affairs, we have before us both a task and a caution. Our task is to define what, theologically, unites and distinguishes these men. We are interested in examining and analyzing the theological system that emerges from a concentrated study of the theological writings of these men. Our caution is to avoid defining the FV in such a way as to impute one FV proponent's views to another FV proponent who does not share those views, or to assume that one FV proponent's rhetorical expression of a doctrine would necessarily and in all respects be approved by all other FV proponents.

At the same time, we can be too cautious. If a FV proponent articulates a distinctive and otherwise unparalleled view, we must ask what, theologically speaking, has made that view possible. In some instances, we will see that what makes such distinctive views possible are other and prior distinguishing views held in common among FV proponents. It is here that we will see some of the clearest indications that the FV is a theological system.

Sources

What materials have I consulted in this study of the FV? Part of the difficulty in addressing this issue is the fact that FV proponents have made effective use of the Internet. They operate wellmaintained Web sites and post articles, sermons, and essays with frequency. Many make use of private presses (Canon, Athanasius), which enable swift and prodigious dissemination of book-length material. Both of these considerations mean that quantities of information are being added on a regular basis.

In view of this unceasing influx of information, one might be tempted to say that to draw theological conclusions at this stage is premature. In view of the nature and amount of the existing literature, however, the newest literature that continues to be posted on the Web or that is being privately published in one important sense adds little to our understanding of the basic positions of the FV that had not hitherto been known. Even responses to criticisms frequently restate the positions rather than offering substantial refinements or modifications of previously articulated positions.

Given this state of affairs, let us outline the sources that I have consulted for this project. In general, I have accessed and quoted from sources that were

intended for public consumption. Paramount have been the AAPCPC Lectures, from both the 2002 and the 2003 conferences. I have made use of transcriptions of the original addresses.15 Given the impromptu nature of the conference format, I have not made recourse to the question and answer sessions of either conference. I have also made use of the Knox Colloquium, The Auburn Avenue Theology, and the recently published collection of essays, The Federal Vision. For other writers, I have consulted the pages of Credenda/Agenda and Biblical Horizons, the writings of Canon Press (Moscow, Idaho), and the Web sites maintained by individual authors or congregations." These Web sites were accessed between May and August 2004.

Generally, when titles appear in a stand-alone fashion-that is, without facts of publication in the bibliography and in the first citations of sources in each chapter's notes-they are unpublished articles that appeared on the Internet." Owing to the unedited nature of some of these sources, quotations from FV spokesmen are sometimes, understandably, roughly stated. I have noted a few typographical errors with the word sic, but have not wanted to call attention to all such occurrences.

The literature in this work is current through July 1, 2005. At times, FV proponents have revised their literature. Where appropriate, revisions that have come to my attention at a later stage in the composition and preparation of this book have been entered in the footnotes for readers' benefit.

The Rise and Progress of the Federal Vision

While we shall reserve more extended consideration of the theological origins and ultimate causes of the FV to the final chapter, we may now trace the development of the FV in the recent past. In that chapter, I will argue that the FV is peculiar to the theological concerns and conclusions of that form of reconstructionism frequently termed "theonomy."

While one can trace rumblings of the concerns for sacramental objectivity that would be incorporated into the FV as early as the 1980s,18 and the mid 1990s,19 the FV may properly be said to have taken its beginning in late 2001. In October 2001, Steve Schlissel delivered a controversial address at Redeemer College (Ancaster, Ontario), "More than Before: The Necessity of Covenant Consciousness." This address elicited critical replies by David Linden, a URC

elder in Alberta, and Cornelis Venema, theological professor at Mid America Reformed Seminary (MARS).

In this address, Schlissel argued for a couple of things that would characterize his subsequent addresses and that would be paralleled in other FV pieces. First, Schlissel charged the Reformed tradition with succumbing to dispensationalism, to "fundamentalistic" and "baptistic" theologies. The Reformed, he argued, had unwittingly followed Luther's bifurcation of the Old Testament and the New Testament. In so doing, the Reformed had neglected the genius of their key biblical insight: covenant. Schlissel asked, then, "What's new about the New Testament? Grace? NO. Faith? NO. Christ? NO. The new thing about the New Testament is Gentiles are incorporated into Israel. THAT IS IT. "20 The NT, for instance, was not consumed with the question of "salvation by faith as opposed to works," but "salvation that included Gentiles as Gentiles.""

Second, Schlissel also argued that the Reformed had succumbed to a hermeneutical problem. We have not read the Bible in the manner in which it was intended to be read. "One difficulty, then, is the Greek versus the Hebrew way of thinking. "22 What does Schlissel mean by the "Greek" and the "Hebrew" epistemologies? By the former, Schlissel has in mind an interest in or concentration upon propositional truth. He approvingly summarizes another writer's analysis of "the Word of God for Western Christians."

> The Word of God seems to interest modern Christians only to the extent that it reveals certain truths, propositions, inaccessible to human reason. We open the Bible to find out certain articulations. These truths themselves are conceived as certain doctrinal statements, and the Word of God finally is reduced to a collection of formulas. They are detached from it, moreover, so they can be reorganized into a more logically satisfactory sequence.

Schlissel then amplifies this concern.

> Whether we realize it or not, the result is that the Word of God appears as a sort of nondescript hodgepodge from which the professional theologian extracts, like a mineral out of its matrix, small but precious bits of knowledge, which it is his job to clarify and systematize.

We've gone so deeply into the systematization that we become system worshippers.23

By the latter, Schlissel appears to have in mind a certain understanding of what a covenant is,24 one that is "organic" and is "not abstract," but "active and dynamic." What is the value of such an understanding? For one thing, we will be able to "live in the cusp of the tension of the covenant," namely, how it is that God "is able to fulfill His promises generationally while denying them to unbelief in any given generation."" Schlissel chides Reformed preaching for "telling [congregants] that they are bound for hell because of all sorts of various inconsistencies in their internal organs-gross willful ignorance, secret reserves in closing with Christ." To do so is evidence of our "Pharisaism," that is, our "perfect propositions, and our internal observations, and our morbid introspectionism. "26

What then does covenantal Christianity look like? In place of "Luther's question, `How can I be saved?'" the question we embrace is "What does God require?"" In other words, rather than attempting to resolve the above-mentioned "tension" of subjecting one's affections to scrutiny, believers and their children should get about the business of obeying what God commands.21 In fact, such obedience is the gospel of God: "That's what God requires: to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. That is the gospel that Gentiles have been incorporated into through Jesus Christ.""

It was shortly after Schlissel's address that the 2002 AAPCPC Lectures were delivered to the public. The response of the RPCUS in June 2002 has already been noted. This response elicited several replies and counter-replies from Douglas Wilson, Steve Schlissel, and their respective congregations, and the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church in the summer and fall of 2002.3° Douglas Wilson in particular responded with a volley of statements and responses to the RPCUS charges," culminating in his fall 2002 book, "Reformed" Is Not Enough.32

In January 2003, the AAPC sponsored another pastors' conference in which many of the 2002 speakers were invited to speak, along with responses from critics of the theology promoted by the previous year's conference. The fact that two of these critics were a long-standing professor of theology (Morton Smith) and the president of a Reformed Seminary (Joseph A. Pipa) helped to launch the

AAPC controversy to a broader scale of attention within the Reformed community.

In August 2003, Knox Seminary hosted a colloquium in which several proponents of the FV and their critics presented papers and responses. An edited version of these papers, as has been mentioned, was published in the spring of 2004. At present, sessions and presbyteries of many Reformed denominations have formally or informally begun discussions and deliberations concerning the FV theology. At stake is the acceptability of the FV theology within denominations that subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards. The debate, at present, shows no signs of abatement.

Introducing the Major Proponents of the FV

We will now take the opportunity to present the dramatis personae-the individuals whose theological output we shall study and critique. Each of these individuals has identified himself or has been identified, in some way, with the FV.

(1) Douglas Wilson is pastor of Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho (Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches [CREC]). Wil son began his ministry as an independent pastor of broadly evangelical convictions, but without formal theological training. He has recently described himself as an adherent of "postmillennial, Calvinistic, Presbyterian, Van Tillian, theonomic, and reformed thought."" His influence has come, over the last decade, through his magazine, Credenda/Agenda, and his press, Canon Press, which has published not fewer than two dozen of his books, as well as those of Peter Leithart, Ralph Smith, Steve Wilkins, and Mark Horne. He has also founded New St. Andrews, an alternative undergraduate institution, at which Peter Leithart serves as senior fellow of theology and literature. Wilson has played an important role in establishing the classical Christian school in North America. His impressive rhetorical abilities and his distinctive satire and humor have also helped to attract a substantial following within the Reformed community.

(2) Peter Leithart is a senior theological instructor at New St. Andrews, Moscow, Idaho, and a longtime associate of James Jordan's.34 Leithart is one of the most intellectually precocious and broadly read of FV proponents, having completed doctoral studies under John Milbank at Cambridge.35 He has also

undertaken studies that have acquainted FV audiences with the sacramental theology both of Eastern Orthodoxy and of post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism. Unlike Wilson, whose ministerial credentials are in the CREC, Leithart holds his ministerial credentials in the PCA. Leithart, however, is currently serving a CREC congregation in Moscow, Idaho.

(3) James Jordan does not hold ecclesiastical office but has formal theological training. Jordan's influence has come largely through well over two decades of newsletters and self-published books and symposia, through which he has promoted both theonomic Christianity and his ingenious biblical-theological readings of Scripture. In many respects, he bears a large share of the responsibility for generating the critical mass within the theonomic movement that has resulted in the FV, a movement with which he has identified himself.36

(4) Steve Schlissel is pastor of Messiah's Congregation, New York City, a congregation formerly affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church, but now independent. He was an invited speaker at both the 2002 and 2003 AAPCPC and has become known for his rhetorical flamboyancy.

(5) John Barach is presently pastor of a URC church in Alberta. Barach has been heavily influenced by the theology of Norman Shepherd and the concerns of the Liberated churches.

(6) Ralph Smith is a minister in the CREC who serves overseas in Japan. An aficionado of Jordan's covenant theology," Smith is perhaps best known for his attempts to reshape the doctrine of the Trinity in view of FV concerns.38

(7) Steve Wilkins is a longtime PCA minister who serves as senior pastor of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, Louisiana.

(8) Rich Lusk is a former PCA minister who once served as the assistant pastor of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church. He is pastor of the Trinity Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama.

(9) Joel Garver is a PCA officer in the Philadelphia area. Garver serves as assistant professor of philosophy at LaSalle University and is well regarded by FV proponents as an able defender of their views. His theological influence has come largely through his essays posted on his Web site.

(10) Mark Horne is serving as assistant pastor, Providence Presbyterian Church, in St. Louis. Horne's well-maintained Web site has served to collate and promote essays and articles that are sympathetic to the FV.

The Federal Vision and Covenant: A Definition

We may begin our exposition and critique of the FV by asking a very basic question: What, to FV proponents, is a covenant? On this issue of definition, we find a broad-based consensus-both negatively (what a covenant is not) and positively (what a covenant is).39

Most proponents are agreed that a covenant is essentially a re- lationship,40 as seen in a representative sampling of their descriptions:

> It is most important that we ourselves understand what covenant is and I am going to tell you in the most simple words what covenant is. Covenant is relationship. That is what covenant is. Relationship.
>
> Now, when we speak of covenant, specially, we speak of it as a defined relationship.41 (Steve Schlissel)

> Covenant isn't a thing. Covenant isn't a thing that you can analyzecovenant is a relationship. It is a personal, ordered and formally binding relationship. It's personal; it's not just a legal relationship. Sometimes people present the covenant as if it were something somewhat cold and impersonal, like a business contract.42 (John Barach)

> Covenant as it relates to man, simply and perhaps too simplistically stated, is the relationship of love and communion with the living, Triune God.43 (Steve Wilkins)

> A covenant is a relationship between persons. That relationship has conditions, stipulations, and promises. Put another way, there is no such thing as a personless or abstract covenant. Put yet another way, a covenant does not consist of a list of names, but is rather a relation between persons (whose names can certainly be formed into a list).44 (Douglas Wilson)

> The covenant is a personal-structural bond which joins the three persons of God in a community of life, and in which man was created to participate.45 (James Jordan)

Attendant to these definitions, as may be seen especially from Barach's quotation above, is a resistance to defining a covenant in legal or administrative terms or in terms of an agreement. Even Ralph Smith's recognition that "agreement" may still be considered part of one's definition of a covenant must be seen against the background of his argument that "relationships also involve making agreements which express the relationship."" When we come to our study of the covenant of works in the next chapter, we will find this priority assigned to relationship expressed in explicit terms by a number of writers.

How do FV proponents defend their claim that a covenant is essentially a relationship? Many do so by pointing to biblical metaphors, most notably that of marriage.

> But when the Bible talks about covenant, it talks about it in terms of a marriage, for instance. You may choose to view your marriage as a legal contract-your wife wouldn't appreciate that-hopefully your marriage is more than just a legal contract.47 (John Barach)

> To define the covenant biblically, we also must take into account the fact that of all the covenants that appear in the Bible, no type of covenant is used to describe the relationship of God with His people with greater frequency or deeper emotion than the marriage covenant.48 (Ralph Smith)

> A covenant does not consist of a list of names, but is a relation between persons (whose names can certainly be formed into a list). But these names are not the covenant any more than the two names on an invitation constitute a marriage. They may accurately describe the parties to the marriage, but they are not the marriage itself.49 (Douglas Wilson)

Before we proceed to show how FV proponents draw their doctrine of covenantal objectivity from the above consideration, let us summarize and make some critical observations. FV proponents (quoted above) are not simply saying that a covenant entails a relationship. Few Reformed individuals would deny this

point. FVproponents are saying, however, that a covenant is itself essentially a relationship. Frequently, this claim is asserted, not argued. The problem with this claim is twofold. First, proponents are not entirely clear about what they mean by the term relationship. Wilkins is clear that relationship entails vital union and communion between God and the soul.

> In fact, covenant is a real relationship, consisting of real communion with the triune God through union with Christ. The covenant.. . is union with Christ. Thus being in covenant gives all the blessings of being united to Christ. There is no salvation apart from covenant simply because there is no salvation apart from union with Christ. And without union with Christ there is no covenant at all.so

While other definitions are at best less clear, frequent use of the marriage metaphor from Scripture to illustrate FV definitions of covenant suggests that Wilkins's definition is not unique to him. To say, however, that relationship (as Wilkins defines it) lies at the essence of covenant jeopardizes the integrity of the legal or formal relationships within the covenant of grace that Reformed theologians have under stood the Scripture to teach.5' Few FV proponents will categorically deny that the covenant of grace has legal or forensic dimensions. The emphasis, however, decidedly lies in the personal-vital dimensions. This is made possible by equivocal uses of the term relationship. In so doing, FV proponents practically deny multiple senses of membership (legal/vital) within the covenant of grace, resolving them into a single undifferentiated way of the covenant member relating to God. Note again Wilkins:

> According to the Bible the privileges of covenant membership go far beyond opportunity, mere opportunity, or privilege. According to the Scriptures to be in covenant with God is to really and truly be swept up into the glorious communion and fellowship of the Triune God, and be part of His family. Being in covenant involves then a concrete, substantial reality, and thus the Apostles could declare the blessings of salvation that are true of everyone who is a member of Christ, and declare them to be true without qualification, even though they didn't know the decrees.52

This raises two further questions, which we will probe in subsequent chapters: (1) Given that FV proponents universally understand children of believers to be members of the covenant of grace, what does this membership entail? (2) Given

the diminished concern with a covenant as a legal or forensic entity, and the enhanced concern for a covenant as a vital relationship, what implications does this have for the doctrine of justification?

A second problem with FV claims that a covenant is essentially a relationship is that proponents offer dubious biblical support for their doctrine. Much of the evidence they cite does prove that Scripture can speak of covenant in terms of a marital relationship, and that in its personal and vital dimensions. This, however, does not prove that the marriage metaphor exhausts all that is entailed in membership within the covenant of grace. In other words, just because some persons in covenant relate to God in that way does not necessarily prove that all persons in covenant relate to God in similar terms.

Much of the biblical language in describing covenants, furthermore, is patently legal or forensic, and speaks of covenants in terms of an agreement.53 FV proponents do not necessarily deny this, but they practically neglect these data in their discussions of covenant. Their discussion, then, is selective and produces an unbalanced picture of a covenant. FV proponents illegitimately privilege the marriage metaphor at the expense of the total witness of the biblical data.

Covenantal Objectivity

Understanding covenant to be a relationship and the biblical metaphor of marriage to describe the essence of covenant, many proponents articulate what has come to be known as the doctrine of covenantal objectivity. Before we proceed, it will be important to emphasize that no FV proponents presently deny that some within the covenant community prove in the end not to have been genuine believers, or that covenant faithfulness includes more than external obedience to the commands of God.54 What is under question is how any member of the covenant of grace at any given time may regard himself and his standing before God; and how members of the covenant of grace are to be addressed by and regarded in the public teaching of the church.

Proponents sometimes contend that a covenant is an objective relationship independent of the covenant member's subjective considerations of the strength or nature of his membership.

> And a covenant is also objective, like your marriage. It's there whether the members of the covenant feel it's there, or they believe it's there, whether they even believe in the covenant or not. If you were to stop believing that you were married, you would still be married. If you stopped feeling married, you would still be married. Your marriage exists.55 (John Barach)

Such an understanding of a covenant is not infrequently framed polemically against the subjectivism thought to leaven much of Reformed Christianity.

> And here is the basis of visible covenant faithfulness-here is our central duty. Morbid introspection is a counterproductive fight with a tarbaby. Are you a Christian? Look by faith to Christ-in the Scriptures, in the preached Word, and in the sacraments.56 (Douglas Wilson)

> Objective assurance is found in real faith responding to an objective gospel. Objective assurance is never found through trying to peer into the secret counsels of God, or into the murky resources of one's own heart. The gospel is preached, the water was applied, the Table is now set. Do you believe? The question is a simple ones' (Douglas Wilson)

We might note parenthetically that Wilson's question ("Do you believe?") is one that Wilkins argues cannot be competently answered by the believer within the realm of assurance. This state of affairs underscores an important inconsistency between two FV proponents.

The chief consequence of covenantal objectivity is that a premium is placed on that which is visible, external, and tangible." Distinctions within the covenant of grace based on subjective considerations are either muted or rejected.

> As in the old covenant, so in the new covenant. There is an objective covenant made of believers and their children. Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union, then, with Christ and with the triune God. The Bible doesn't know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant, really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant, just being in the sphere of the covenant. The Bible speaks about the reality, the efficacy of baptism. Every baptized person is truly a member of God's covenant.59 (John Barach)

Negatively, this means, to the session of the AAPC, that many Reformed Christians have been mistaken in their efforts to discern the difference between a true and a spurious work of grace.

> It would appear that we must be willing to speak of the undifferentiated grace of God (or the generic, unspecified grace of God). In their reading of Heb. 6:4-5, some theologians try to draw subtle distinctions to make highly refined psychological differences between blessings that do not secure eternal salvation and true regeneration, which does.... Thus, the solution to Heb. 6 is not developing two psychologies of conversion, one for the "truly regenerate" and one for the future apostate, and then introspecting to see which kind of grace one has received. This is a task beyond our competence. The solution is to turn from ourselves and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1ff).6o

Rich Lusk, a former pastor of the church whose session adopted the statement above, explicates this position in an essay on Hebrews 6:4-8. Lusk rejects the conventional Reformed view that "there is some qualitative difference between what the truly regenerate experience and what future apostates experience, and that this distinction is in view in Hebrews 6:4-6."61 "The difference between the truly regenerate person and the person who will fail to persevere is not clear on the front end; rather, it only becomes clear as the one continues on in the faith and the other apostatizes. "62 Genuine covenantal membership, therefore, is not to be measured inwardly and subjectively, but outwardly and objectively.

Positively, this means that one may speak in very strong terms about what is true of the member of the covenant of grace. Citing Paul's address to the Ephesians in Ephesians 1, Steve Wilkins argues that the reason that Paul can say that his audience has been blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," "chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world," "rede[emed] through his blood," and the like, is because of their relationship to the covenant.

> [Paul is] speaking to a particular, living group of people-real people, who were sinners, that he didn't know the decrees of God about, but what he knows is what the covenant means. That's what he knows. He didn't know

> the decrees, he didn't know their hearts, he didn't know the genuineness of their conversion, or the genuineness of their faith. He didn't know any of that. What does he know? How could he talk like this? Because he knows what the covenant means. The covenant is communion-living communion-with the triune God. It's a living relationship with the living God.63

In other words, the reason that the apostle addresses believers in the manner he does is derived from the nature of covenantal membership.

Barach confirms such a view, rejecting the traditional view that the apostle addresses believers in such terms according to a "judgment of char- ity"-that the apostles speak of believers according to their profession.

> When we look around the congregation and we see other people in the congregation, we do not give them a "judgment of charity" that says "Well, I don't know; maybe he's a Christian; maybe he isn't. So I'll be charitable and I'll regard him as a Christian and I'll treat him as a Christian. I've got my doubts." Instead we go by God's promise. He has said that this person is in Christ and therefore believing God's promise, we treat that person as who he really issomeone who is in Christ.6a

Such a view extends even to the covenantal membership of duly baptized children, as Wilkins makes plain.

> Traditionally, the Reformed have said, we have to view our children as presumptively elect or presumptively regenerate. And therefore, Christian, if we are willing to take the Scriptures at face value, there is no presumption necessary. Just take the Bible. And this is true, of course, because by the baptism, by baptism the Spirit joins us to Christ since he is the elect one and the Church is the elect people, we are joined to his body. We are therefore elect. Since he is the justified one, we are justified in him. Since he is the beloved one, we are beloved in him.... Children are joined to Christ by their baptisms and must be viewed and treated in the light of this reality. They are to be nurtured in the faith.65

In this rejection of the conventional Reformed explanation of the doctrine of the "judgment of charity," and in the absence of a distinction between the

membership of children of the covenant of grace and of adult believers, we find that what characterizes FV conceptions of covenant is that membership in the covenant of grace is to be understood in an undifferentiated sense. In other words, we are not to define membership within the covenant community by drawing distinctions along the lines of the doctrines of regeneration and conversion.

To do so, FV proponents often aver, is to violate the spirit and letter of Deuteronomy 29:29.

> We can never, in this life, know with absolute certainty who are elect unto final salvation. For this reason, we have to make judgments and declarations in terms of what has been revealed, namely, the covenant (Dt. 29:29).66 (AAPC Summary Statement)

> We are to take the baptisms of others at face value. We also take the teaching of Scripture at face value, and the behavior and the words of these covenant members at face value. If there is conflict between what baptism means and what the baptized are openly doing and saying, then we are at liberty to point to the inconsistency and say that it constitutes covenantal faithlessness. But we need to be extremely wary of pronouncing on the secret things (Dent 29:29). We have cited this verse a number of times in this book-it would be a good verse to memorize.67 (Douglas Wilson)

We therefore do not publicly distinguish among covenant members along the conventional lines of a profession of saving faith. Within the covenant of grace, the working admissible public distinction is between "covenant keepers" and "covenant breakers."" Perseverance, FV proponents generally argue, is that which distinguishes the covenant keeper from the covenant breaker. We shall examine this doctrine in more depth in a subsequent chapter. We may observe that Wilson's statement (above) closely resembles the doctrine of the judgment of charity.69 This appears to place him in conflict with Barach's rejection of this doctrine. This difference represents a significant hermeneutical inconsistency among certain FV proponents.

In many respects the doctrine of covenantal objectivity will resurface in our consideration of the FV's understandings of perseverance and apostasy, and of

the sacraments. Given the importance of the doctrine to the FV, we may make a few preliminary critical comments. First, it seems that the doctrine of the judgment of charity has been too hastily discarded by FV proponents. The question at hand, of course, is how the apostles can speak of believers as "elect," "sanctified," "heirs of glory," and in terms of similar expressions, mindful that some in the audience may prove in the end to be unregenerate. All are agreed that the apostles had no infallible knowledge of the state of the hearts of their audience.

One important passage in this regard, and one that has been untreated in the FV literature I have studied, is 1 Peter 5:12: "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" What does this passage tell us? We gain a window into the mode of the way that the apostles speak of fellow believers. The affirmation that Silvanus is a "faithful brother" is the way, Peter tells us, that he "regard[s] him." In other words, Peter receives Silvanus according to his profession and according to the life that accompanies, corroborates, and adorns that profession.

Second, the doctrine of covenantal objectivity also fails to account for biblical teaching that speaks of the covenantally unfaithful as those who were never truly members of the covenant of grace in the first place.70 We may consider two representative passages, 1 John 2:19-20 and Matthew 7:22-23. In 1 John 2:19-20 ("They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us, but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know."), we may notice what John says: "they were not really of us"-not "they failed to persevere." In this statement is a distinction drawn within the covenant community: "those who are really of us" and those who are not. The apostasy of the latter, John says, proves that they were never really believers at the outset.' This conclusion is confirmed by the reassurance given to believers in verse 20: they are said to have an "anointing from the Holy One." Those who departed, we may fairly infer, did not possess this anointing.72 The difference, then, between apostates and believers does not consist merely of the fact that the latter persevere and the former do not. The difference, John says in both verse 19 and verse 20, is qual- 73 itative in nature and is inherent from the beginning.

In Matthew 7:22-23 ("Many will say to Me on that day, `Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, `I never knew you; Depart from Me, You who practice lawlessness.'"), Jesus says of individuals who, notwithstanding their religious activity and usefulness to the kingdom, are proven to have been false, "I never knew you." Jesus does not say, "Once I really knew you, but now I don't. "74 Although they were members of the covenant community and recognized as such, Jesus' verdict is that he never knew them. They were not his, and they never were.75 This proves that we are not at liberty to understand membership in the covenant of grace in an undifferentiated way.

Covenant and the Trinity

FV proponents frequently defend their definition of a covenant as essentially a relationship by appealing to the doctrine of the Trinity. Both these appeals and the grounds for their doctrine of a covenantal Trinity merit consideration. Wilkins, for example, argues that the "covenant into which we are brought is this very same covenant that has always existed within the Godhead from eternity."76 Furthermore, "Covenant is a gracious relationship with the Triune God, in which we are made partakers of His love and participants in the communion and fellowship that has existed from all eternity in the Godhead. "77

Two individuals who have extensively developed a covenantal doctrine of the Trinity are Peter Leithart and Ralph Smith.

Peter Leithart

Leithart has recently synthesized his views on the Trinity and their implication for theology in his contribution to the Knox collo- quium.78 While he does not explicitly reflect on whether the intratrinitarian relations are themselves covenantal, his discussion is not immaterial to consideration of that question. Leithart raises Karl Rahnet's charge that the West, following Augustine, has adopted a doctrine of the Trinity that is essentially Unitarian, "begin[ning] with the one God, the one divine essence as a whole, and only afterwards does it see God as three in persons."79 Leithart, believing that he is following a trajectory set forth by Jonathan Edwards, argues that a "complete Trinitarian re-casting of theology" is necessary.80

One place where Leithart argues that this is especially needed is the doctrine of the Trinity. Leithart argues that Van Til's doctrine of the Trinity as "absolute Person" needs to be reclaimed by the Reformed tradition.81 Such an understanding will ground the "thoroughly personal character of all reality."82 But such a concept of divine and created personality requires, Van Til maintains, the doctrine of the Trinity.83

What does this mean for the vision propounded by the FV? Leithart explains that only such a doctrine of "Trinitarian personalism" rescues the church from "reification" and "abstraction.""

> Basic concepts and categories and terms in theology repeatedly have fallen prey to these mental twists. Some terms in theology gravitate toward reification and abstraction in a way that appears to be almost inevitable. What do we mean by talk about the "nature of God," for example? Does the phrase "nature of God" mean anything other than "God"? What is added by adding "nature"? If the phrase refers to God's attributes, well and good, though I prefer the more personalist connotations of "attributes." But the phrase can hint that there is some reality that we can call "nature of God" that is different from the Sovereign Person we call "God," and that hint is dangerous and heretical if pressed.85

Leithart is going to develop this argument in ways that are extremely important to our consideration of FV views of the sacraments (specifically) and of anthropology and the application of redemption (broadly). For the present, we may observe both a concern and a conclusion that Leithart has drawn.

Leithart's concern is that the West has viewed reality in a depersonalized way. We have separated attributes and form from being. This concern Leithart has correctly adopted from Van Til who (mistakenly in my judgment) understood this false conception of reality to be an epistemological consequence of the fall. Such a concern prompts Leithart to ask whether the doctrine of the Trinity has not fallen prey to such a conception of reality. He concludes that it has when certain individuals speak of the "nature of God" abstracted from "the Sovereign Person we call `God.'" Leithart, then, appears to evidence discomfort with traditional formulations of the nature of God's being because of their potential abuse in this direction. Emphasis will be placed on Trinitarian formulations that

stress the personhood of God and the mutual interactions within the Godhead.86 There is therefore a skepticism toward the nature of being and a preference in expressing the relations or activities of that being.

Ralph Smith

Smith offers one of the most thoroughgoing and developed articulations of the Trinity hitherto set forth by FV proponents. In so doing, he attempts to relate the Trinity in expressly covenantal terms. In his 2002 Paradox and Truth, Smith engages Cornelius Plantinga's "social view of the Trinity."" Smith, while admiring the social emphases of Plantinga's doctrine, nevertheless concludes that Plantinga "at least invites tritheism," if one is to define tritheism as the denial of any "real identity of [God's] nature with the persons, singly or sev- erally."88 Smith rightly concludes that "three persons who merely share the same nature or essence are not ontologically one."" In this sense, Plantinga's social doctrine of the Trinity falls short.

In this same work, however, Smith is attracted to Van Til's understanding of "God, that is, the whole Godhead [as] one person."" After defending Van Til's doctrine of "one person, three persons" from the charge of contradiction91 by appealing to the incomprehensibility of God and the necessity of apparent contradiction posed by the incomprehensibility of God,92 Smith argues that what is absent from Van Til's doctrine is an understanding of the "persons of the Trinity [as] eternally united in a covenantal bond of love," a deficiency that Abraham Kuyper supplies.93 When posing the question why such an understanding is important, Smith answers, "A covenantal relationship among the persons of the Trinity introduces the possibility of a worldview in which the doctrine of God is the fountain from which all other truths flow. "94 Such an understanding of the Trinity is important, then, because it enables a worldview with global implications. It helps us to see that the "whole world [is] a covenantal system.""

Such a view of the Trinity is important, Smith argues, for another reason.

> Without the doctrine of the covenant among the persons of the Trinity, the tendency to abstraction dominates thought about God, and there is no basis for a real link between God as He is in Himself and God as He relates to man. Also the doctrine of man, both as individual and as related

> to society, suffers from a neglect of the doctrine of the Trinitarian covenant, for to rightly understand man, we must view him as a covenant personality.96

Similarly to Leithart, then, Smith argues that the problem of theological abstraction must be resolved by, and the proper conception of human nature must be grounded in a right understanding of the Trinity.

What does a covenantal doctrine of the Trinity entail? The Reformed tradition, Smith claims, has maintained that "the attributes of God are qualities of His essence," which "the persons of the Trinity share."" But this means that "intratrinitarian love is ruled out by definition."98 At the very least Reformed theology requires an overhaul of the traditional language of "essence" and "substance."

> Traditional Reformed theology ... appears to presuppose something close to the very notion Van Til objects to: the idea that the essence of God is an impersonal substratum. As a matter of fact, traditional Reformed theology has been significantly influenced by the Aristotelian and medieval idea of "substance" in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity. Needless to say, this influence is not limited to Reformed theology; it is the mainstream church tradition. But it is not the only approach. As far back as Athanasius, the notion of God's essence was defined apart from Aristotelian notions of substance.99

We need rather to conceive of such attributes as love, righteousness, and faithfulness as "point[ing] to God as covenantal in His essential nature."""

Smith concludes:

> If the words used in the Bible to describe God's attributes are covenantal terms and if we take God's revelation of Himself in the economy as a true revelation of who He is, then we may infer from this covenantal language that there is a covenantal relationship among the persons of the Trinity and that it is ultimately in that everlasting covenantal relationship that words like love, covenantal loyalty or faithfulness, and righteousness have their meaning.'o'

In other words, "faithfulness" is "the total commitment of each of the persons of the Trinity to the covenant relationship among them"; "righteousness means that each of the persons of the Trinity is wholly dedicated to preserving the properties of the others. They never transgress the boundaries of their personhood but rather act to protect them by blessing and glorifying one another. They uphold the law-covenant of their triune being, the essence of which is love. 11112

Before proceeding further, we can make two preliminary comments by way of criticism of Smith's trinitarianism. First, Smith appears to regard the intratrinitarian relationships to be themselves covenantal. He argues this because certain biblical words (love, righteousness, faithfulness) are used in the context of the biblical redemptive covenants to disclose God's character. But it is not at all clear why such words must be grounded in a covenantally divine character in order for God to use them in revealing himself in redemptive history. Since Smith argues this in more detail in a separate treatment, we will defer consideration of this point until our assessment of that discussion.

Second, while Smith has raised valid concerns about Plantinga's tritheism and desires to guard the unity of the Godhead, his own formulations do not sufficiently safeguard God's oneness.'°3 This concern applies equally to Leithart. The ontological skepticism of both men effectively results in our being able to affirm little about the essence of God, except that it exists. What can be affirmed are the relations that the persons of the Godhead sustain to one another. When the unity of God is spoken of, Smith prefers to speak of it in terms of eternal union in the covenantal bonds of love. Again, his preferred means of giving expression to the divine unity is relational but not ontological. The thrust of this doctrine is to emphasize the plurality of God in such a way as to attenuate the divine unity.

Let us take up Smith's efforts to relate the biblical covenants to his covenantal trinitarianism. Smith concluded Paradox and Truth by observing that "the covenant in God is the ground for the existence of the covenant in creation."'" In his 2003 Eternal Covenant Smith attempts to relate the doctrine of the Trinity (so conceived) to the biblical covenants.105

Smith explains his concerns at the outset of his Eternal Covenant. First, he is concerned that the "covenant of works" in Reformed theology has illegitimately "constitute[d] the paradigmatic covenant" for covenant

theology.106 As we shall see in the next chapter, Smith argues that the covenant of works, classically conceived, must be discarded. Second, Smith is concerned that the covenant of redemption has been wrongly constructed after the pattern of the covenant of works-as too closely "oriented to redemption" and as tied to the concept of merit.107 Third, Smith proposes that we place the covenant of redemption at the center of covenant theology, indeed, as "not only the key notion of systematic [and] biblical theology, but also the essential link between these two disciplines" and "the very center of the whole Christian worldview. "108 But Smith argues that we need to reconceive the covenant of redemption in terms of a distinctive "covenantal relationship among the persons of the Trinity."109 It cannot be, he argues, "a mere agreement entered into in order to respond to the situation of sin. "110 Properly speaking, then, it is not a covenant of redemption.

How does Smith argue this last point? What biblical evidence does he perceive to require this conclusion? We will summarize and respond to three major arguments that he advances. First, Smith, following Van Til,11 argues that God's act of creation is itself covenantal. Smith concedes that "the word covenant is not specifically used in the creation account," but observes that the chapter nonetheless provides us with all the necessary elements of a covenant."' Four arguments are worth rehearsing. (1) We have "creation by command," which "determines His lordship over that which He has com- manded."13 (2) We have "covenantal progression," namely, "command, evaluation, and blessing."'" (3) God institutes a covenant at Genesis 9:1f. "that unambiguously replicates the relationship between God and Adam"; therefore, creation itself is covenantal."' (4) in biblical history, "there is no other means of interpersonal relationship between God and man except through a covenant."'" Therefore the "weight of presumption falls on the side of those who see God's covenantal work in history as an expression of the fact that He is a covenantal God in eternity, that covenant in history manifests the covenantal nature of the triune God himself."'"

In response to (1) and (2), we may observe that while Smith has drawn plausible consequences from the biblical narrative of creation, he has not drawn, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, good and necessary consequences from the biblical narrative of creation (WCF 1.6). In other words, the text of Genesis does not require that the act of creation itself is covenantal. The elements that Smith has isolated (command; the pattern of command-

evaluation-blessing) do not prove the existence of a covenant in Genesis 1.

In response to (3), the repetition of the creation command of "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" at Genesis 9 need not prove that creation is itself covenantal. It need only prove that it is of the nature of the Noahic covenant to uphold and preserve the created order. In response to (4), Smith overlooks the fact that what has been traditionally termed the "covenant of works" is not instituted until Genesis 2. In other words, the biblical narrative tells us that there is a temporal gap (of some unspecified time) between the creation of man and the first covenant between God and man. This certainly seems to be the understanding of the Confession (WCF 7.1). It is not true, then, that God has only and, therefore, can only relate to man by way of covenant.

In summary, Smith has not established his case either that creation is covenantal or that God himself is thereby covenantal.

A second line of argument that Smith offers to prove that the covenant of redemption is grounded in a covenantal Trinity is that "when we have the elements of a covenant, we have the covenant."118 This argument in and of itself is not objectionable. It is the way Reformed theologians have traditionally and successfully proven both the covenant of redemption and the covenant of works as biblical doctrines.

Smith, however, applies the argument in a manner that few if any Reformed theologians have done. He contends that "when the Bible speaks of a relationship in which there is a hierarchy, responsibility, commands, and stipulations, and a promised blessing, the Bible calls that relationship a covenant."'" On the basis of this observation, and in view of several passages from the gospel of John, Smith concludes that the eternal intratrinitarian relationships are themselves covenantal.120

It is unclear that these passages actually prove Smith's point. To be sure, they most certainly prove the covenant of redemption. Unproven, however, is the assertion that the covenant of redemption must itself be identified with eternal, intratrinitarian relationships. Smith has not disproven the possibility that the former may be analogous to but not identical with the latter.121 The likelihood that they are not to be identified in the manner in which Smith has proposed is seen from the covenant of redemption's concern with the redemption of the

people of God. Such a relatively narrow concern militates against its simple equation with the eternal and ontological intratrinitarian relationships.

Smith's third and final argument that the covenant of redemption is grounded in a covenantal Trinity is that John 17 "assert(s) a basic parallel between the covenant that God has with His people and the relationship between the Father and the Son. The obvious impli cation of this language is that there is a covenant among the persons of the Trinity that serves as analogue and ground for the covenantal relationship that God has with His people. 11122 It is not simply that John 17 may require such conclusions, Smith argues; it is that it must require such conclusions. 123

To what passages does Smith point in John 17 as necessitating this conclusion? Jesus prays for believers' unity "in covenantal faith and obedience (21a)."124 Such "covenantal unity of believers has its ground in His dwelling in them and its pattern in the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity (21b, 23a)."125 The "purpose" of this pattern is "the extension of covenant blessing to all the world (21c)."126 It is through the Spirit that "we share the covenant life of God" (v. 22).127 Finally, "Jesus implies that His indwelling the Church brings about increased covenantal unity over time" (v. 23).128

How are these passages said to prove Smith's point?

> The mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son is the pattern for the unity of believers, which can only mean a covenantal unity, for ontological unity among believers in the same way that there may be ontological unity among the persons of the Trinity is unthinkable, and a mere unity of love or fellowship does not do justice to the fact that indwelling is a common covenantal theme, nor to the fact that when the notions of love and fellowship are infused with their most profound biblical meaning, these are words of covenantal relationship. 129

Smith's argument, however, breaks down at a couple of key points. First, while the bond of unity constituted among the people of God results from what God has done in and for them in the covenant of grace, Jesus in John 17 does not isolate that bond as covenantal. Smith points to such concepts as unity, faith, and obedience that, in the context of the argument of John 17, are only remotely covenantal. In other words, they are only covenantal here in the sense that they

are the result or byproduct of the covenant of grace, a concept that itself is a couple of steps removed from the explicit argument of John 17. The proposed Johannine connection between human-unity-as-covenantal and divine-unity-as-covenantal is therefore an exceedingly tenuous one.

Second, it is true that "indwelling is a common covenantal theme" both in the old covenant and in the new covenant.130 Having entered into a covenant with his people, God's dwelling with his people (a promise of the covenant of grace), is therefore covenantal. Similarly, "love and fellowship" (which God pledges as part of the covenant of grace), when exercised toward sinners, are therefore covenantal. It is that context of the indwelling, the love, and the fellowship, that renders them covenantal. But it is not at all clear that this particular context necessarily conveys when those same terms are affirmed of the eternal intratrinitarian relations among the persons of the Godhead.

Third, the divine unity and the human unity in view in John 17 are, by Smith's own admission, not in all points identical. The former, after all, is ontological, while the latter is not. But we may also reason in reverse: the nonontological unity of believers does not and cannot necessitate the nonontological eternal unity of the persons among the Godhead. Consequently, even were we to grant Smith's point that the unity among believers in John 17 is explicitly covenantal (it is not), that does not necessarily pave the way for understanding the ontological Trinitarian unity as covenantal.

In summary, Smith's argument regarding the eternal, intratrinitarian relations among the persons of the Godhead rests neither upon explicit biblical testimony nor upon the good and necessary consequences of explicit biblical testimony. We may grant with Berkhof that "the archetype of all covenant life is found in the Trinitarian being of God, and what is seen among men is but a faint copy (ectype) of this. "131 Smith, however, speculatively appears to understand this relationship in terms of identity, not analogy.

Given that Smith's speculations attend his radical reconception of the doctrine of the Trinity; and given that this reconception is employed within the FV to reconceive, as we shall see, in a similarly radical way anthropology and soteriology, we cannot dismiss this as a harmless speculation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered FV proponents' definition of a covenant and their (reworked) doctrine of the Trinity, which is a consequence of that definition. In our next chapter, we will continue our study of FV proponents' understanding of a covenant. Specifically, we will turn our attention to the way in which FV proponents conceive the number, nature, and division of the biblical covenants, as well as the outworking of these covenants in biblical history.

Chapter 2

Covenant and Biblical History

Having considered FV proponents' views of what a covenant is and how this understanding relates to (and alters, for some) the doctrine of the Trinity, we turn to two related trajectories. We may represent these trajectories in the form of two questions. (1) How do FV proponents understand the nature and divisions of the covenants of biblical history? A resultant, practical question will concern FV proponents' views of justification. (2) How do FV proponents relate their understanding of a covenant to the decree? A resultant practical question will concern FV proponents' views of ecclesiology, perseverance, assurance, and apostasy. Bringing these two questions together in our penultimate chapter will be the sacramentology of the FV.

Let us then proceed down the first of these two trajectories, considering now the way in which the covenants of biblical history are conceived and ordered by FV proponents. In doing so, we may recall a couple of conclusions that we drew concerning the FV perspective in the previous chapter. These are foundational to the study that follows: (1) A covenant is essentially a relationship, specifically a vital relationship consisting of communion and fellowship between God and man. (2) Not only is creation covenantal, but the eternal intratrinitarian relations among the persons of the Godhead are covenantal.

At this juncture in particular, it becomes exceedingly difficult to generalize a single FV position regarding the nature and divisions of the covenants of biblical history. There exist, however, a finite number of threads and agreements among proponents. We will concentrate our attention on the way(s) in which individual FV proponents conceive the order and progress of the covenants within biblical history; present arguments concerning what has been traditionally

termed "the covenant of works" and "the covenant of grace"; and attempt to relate the covenants of Scripture into some unified whole.

The Division of the Biblical Covenants

Douglas Wilson

The Adamic covenant. Wilson argues that the dealings of God with Adam in Genesis 2 were both nonredemptive' and covenantal in nature.2 In "Reformed" Is Not Enough, Wilson appears reluctant to speak of this covenantal arrangement in terms of a "covenant of works." In an Internet posting from the summer of 2002, Wilson twice refers to the first covenant as the "covenant of works."' There does not appear, then, to be an absolute rejection of the phrase, and the evidence speaks against concluding that Wilson had rejected using that wording by the fall of 2002.

Wilson axiomatically claims that this covenant is gracious and therefore must not include considerations of "merit": "God did not have an arrangement with Adam in the garden based on Adam's possible merit. Everything good from God is grace. If Adam had passed the test, he would have done so by grace through faith."4 What is not clear from Wilson's comment is whether he, like some other FV proponents, equates "merit" with a "works principle." What is clear is Wilson's emphasis upon grace as the hallmark of the first covenant and as the principle that unites the first and second covenants.

> I believe that God established two distinct covenants with mankind, one before the Fall, and one after. The first covenant was called a covenant of works in the Westminster Confession (7.2). 1 would pre fer to call it a covenant of creational grace. The condition of covenantkeeping in this first covenant was to believe God's grace, command, warnings, and promise. If Adam had avoided sin in this temptation, he would have had no grounds for boasting, but could only say that God had graciously preserved him. "Perfect and personal obedience," even for an unfallen man, is not possible unless he trusts in God's goodness and grace. Because God endued Adam with the power and ability to keep covenant with Him (WCF 19.1), Adam was a recipient of grace, and thus, the sin that plunged our race into death was a revolt against grace.

> The second covenant is a covenant of redemptive grace. The thing that the two covenants have in common is grace, not works. The condition for keeping this covenant is the same as the first, although the circumstances are different. The condition is always to believe God.'

Wilson, therefore, places great emphasis upon continuity, not contrast, between the first covenant and subsequent covenants.

Subsequent covenants. The postlapsarian covenants, Wilson says, "are not a series of disconnected covenants, as though God kept changing His mind about how do deal with men. His covenants unfold successively, and they cannot be understood apart from one another. Ultimately, they constitute the same covenant.'" These successive covenants are those with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. These all "find their ultimate fulfillment in the Lord of the covenant, that is, in Jesus Christ.'"

The law/gospel distinction. Is there any sense in which we may speak of a "law/gospel" distinction operating among the covenants? Wilson stresses that, because the covenants are gracious, this distinction is illegitimately applied to our understanding of the relationship among the covenants.' He addresses New Testament passages that seem to speak less than favorably of the Old Testament law.

> A central part of our problem is caused by the New Testament refutations of the Pharisaical distortions of the law of Moses. They are commonly assaulted with their own (heretical) terminological dis tortions (i.e., words like "law"). But the contrast in the New Testament is not between Old and New; the contrast is between Old distorted and Old fulfilled!

While Wilson stresses that the movement into the New Covenant was as bold and as radical as a movement from death to resurrection," he nevertheless maintains that this movement does not warrant a law/gospel distinction in any of its traditional forms.

> The Scriptures divide men into two great categories, those who believe and those who do not (Matt. 25:33). This in turn gives us two fundamental hermeneutics-one of faith and love and the other of unbelief and hatred.

> To the unbelieving heart, the Word of God in its entirety comes as law, condemning the sinner. This is particularly evident with the moral imperatives of Scripture (Rom 3:20; 5:20), but it is equally true of the words of consolation and hope....
>
> To the believing heart, the Word of God in its entirety comes as gospel, bringing the sinner to salvation.... [This is] true of the Ten Commandments, which are words of joyful deliverance and salvation (Ex 20:1).'1

The law/gospel distinction, as applied to Scripture, is therefore grounded in the subjective state of the sinner, not within the biblical covenants themselves.

In summary, then, we have a flattening of a confessional understanding of the relationship among the covenants. The principle of works, at the very least, appears to have been muted or diminished in Wilson's statements concerning the first covenant. The office of the law in continuing to convict the believer of sin appears to be diminished in favor of formulations that stress biblical obligations as "gospel."12

Ralph Smith

Ralph Smith has written extensively and polemically against the covenant of works as a biblical doctrine. It is from his arguments against the covenant of works that his conception of the covenants of biblical history emerges. We may recall from our previous chapter that Smith registered a preliminary objection against the covenant of works, that it had too long shaped our conception of the covenant of redemption. We observed that he objects to the covenant of works as "paradigmatic" of the covenant of redemption.13 Back of this objection is an understanding of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works as "a covenant in which Adam merits blessing on the basis of his works, though most writers acknowledge the goodness of God in the covenant arrangement. 1114 As with Wilson, Smith seems to express concern that the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works embraces merit.

If, however, we conceive the eternal, intratrinitarian relationships as covenantal, Smith argues, this will radically reorient our understanding of the relationship among the covenants of biblical history.

> For if there is a covenant relationship among the persons of the Trinity, it-not the covenant of works-ought to constitute the paradigmatic covenant and therefore supply not only the key notion of systematic as well as biblical theology, but also the essential link between these two disciplines. Indeed, it should be the very center of the whole Christian worldview.15

How does Smith apply this doctrine to the covenants of biblical history? Smith sets his crosshairs upon the covenant of works, particularly the covenant of works as it has been articulated by Meredith G. Kline. Smith critiques it in three propositions. We shall both examine and interact with these propositions and their supporting arguments.

"The covenant of works is antiquated."" Smith argues that the doctrine is "clearly antiquated because of its notion of merit." He cites WCF 7.1 and 7.2 in support of this claim." Where does Smith see "merit" in these sections of the Confession? Citing an article of Lee Irons," Smith contends that the Standards have enshrined "the medieval voluntarist understanding" of "congruous merit" over and against a doctrine of "condign merit." Such an adoption, Smith concludes, is "unbiblical and theologically detrimental."" Irons, Smith observes, concludes that one must redefine the term merit as "covenantal faithfulness." Smith proposes, however, dispensing with the term merit altogether. The concept "covenant faithfulness" may be preserved, provided "we understand the persons of God to be in covenant.""

Smith, furthermore, claims that Westminster has embraced "a notion borrowed from the nominalist school of thought and the covenantal thinking of medieval Franciscans."" This is an intriguing assertion, but it is unsupported by any argument that the Divines were indebted to this theological strain of covenantal reflection.

Nor is it clear that, in Smith's words, God's reward of Adam's obedience was "an arbitrary decision of God."22 When we recall that the Confession does not require a doctrine of creation as a covenantal act or the creation of man in covenant (as both Meredith Kline and Smith appear to argue), WCF 7.1-2 makes sense. Men, by virtue of their creation, owe obedience to God. To experience "fruition of [God]" as "blessedness and reward," however, an additional or supplemental arrangement was required. Such an arrangement need not be dismissed as arbitrary. One may more charitably regard it as one ordered and

executed according to the wisdom and goodness of God.

"The covenant of works is unbiblical." Smith objects that the covenant of works is unbiblical because it conceives "the covenant of works [as] bestowed upon man after he is created by a divine act of `voluntary condescension.' 1121 We responded in the previous chapter to Smith's objection. The temporal order of the creation and the institution of the first covenant in Genesis 2 militate against a doctrine of covenantal creation.

Smith also outlines the doctrine of the covenant of works to which he objects, citing a perceived fatal flaw with that doctrine.

> If the garden itself is the sanctuary and place of blessing, then to truly have a covenant of works, Eden and all its blessings would have to be off limits until Adam and Eve had obtained the merit by which they would be justified and therefore qualified to enjoy the rewards of the covenant. They should be outside the garden sanctuary, work24 ing their way in.

This is especially so, Smith argues, because the Tree of Life was not withheld from Adam during his period of probation. But the covenant of works, on its own terms, should have withheld the Tree of Life from Adam during this time of testing.25

Such an objection to the doctrine of the covenant of works is unwarranted. Few proponents of the covenant of works have argued that the "life" held forth to Adam as the blessing of obedience to the stipulations of that covenant was life in an absolute sense. It rather consisted, at the very least, of confirmation in his estate of innocence. There was, therefore, continuity between his prelapsarian state and what would have been extended to him had he sustained his probation. In view of this continuity, some Reformed theologians have contended that the Tree of Life was sacramental in character, as "a sacramental pledge to [Adam] of the promised result," one that he "enjoyed ... during his rectitude."" In other words, there is no necessary difficulty in Adam's partaking of the Tree of Life prior to the fall.

Positively, how does Smith conceive this arrangement in Genesis 2? He argues for essential parity between Adam and the believer in their respective covenants.

> Kline's two basic criticisms of the traditional covenant of works have profound implications. If Adam's relationship with God is by creation a covenant relationship that defines in what ways man is God's image, and if merit for Adam means "covenant faithfulness," then what is required of Adam is that he persevere in the covenant by being faithful, living out of his faith in God by doing works that correspond with it. In this way, though Adam has no sin nature and is not in a covenant of redeeming grace, he is in a position similar to ours. He is in covenant with God and what is required of him is just perseverance, faithfulness to the covenant. What is required of a Christian? We could say, "To believe! Nothing more, nothing less!" That would be a correct answer, as far as it goes. But we could add, as James did, that faith without works is dead ... [Adam's] works were contrary to faith in God. In Adam's case, without the provisions of forgiveness that come with the gospel, one sin brought about the end of the covenant. In our case, because of the death of Christ, we can repent and return unto God when we sin. But the basic situation is still similar. We are required to be faithful to the covenant by having a living faith in God, one that works by love (Gal. 5:6).27

Notable in Smith's construction of the Adamic covenant is the idea that it operates on precisely the same terms as the present-day covenant of grace. The sole exception appears to be that believers' sins do not necessarily or automatically conclude their tenure in the covenant of grace. This conclusion is especially evident by Smith's isolation of perseverance by covenantal faithfulness as the hallmark condition of the Adamic covenant and of the covenant under which the believer finds himself. There is, therefore, no appreciable disjunction along the lines of principle of operation of each covenant (works/grace). Smith is affirming, rather, utter continuity.

"The covenant of works is theologically inadequate." Smith argues that if "covenant expresses the life of God" and the "fellowship of the covenant is [God's] essential being," and if "covenant is definitive of man," that is, "essential to what it means for man to be in God's image," then certain conclusions must follow." First, it "eliminates the possibility of a covenant understood merely as an agreement." Second, "the covenant of works can no longer be paradigmatic," since the notion of merit within the Trinity is absurd.29

We ought to see, rather, in the place of a covenant of works, a "covenant of

love"; "God is a God of love because He is a covenantal God in whom three persons are committed to one another in absolute love."30 This is so, especially, because this covenant is grounded in the creation of man after the image of God, the creation of man as intended to enter into marriage and thereby "reflect the covenant love of God.""

Seen in this way, the intention of the covenant is to test the love of Adam and Eve "so that it may become a mature love of personal and clear choice, a covenant love of mutual fellowship. "32 Noteworthy in this aspect of Smith's definition of the covenant of works is his diminution of the legal aspects of this covenant and obedience as the principle or condition of the covenant. It is, rather, essentially a covenant of personal or vital "relationship" wherein Adam and Eve are challenged to maturity in their love for God.

By way of criticism, we may reiterate our point, drawn in the previous chapter, that to attenuate "agreement" to one's definition of covenant is to compromise the testimony of the biblical data. Smith's conclusions on this score are furthermore not required since the Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith do not teach that man was created in covenant. Moreover, if the intratrinitarian relations are not themselves covenantal, then Smith's objections to the conventional Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works fall to the ground. There is, in other words, no obstacle to "works" as the operational principle of this covenant. This is not to say that this principle of "works" is without precedent in the covenant of redemption. Traditionally, Reformed theologians have grounded the covenant of works in the covenant of redemption, which itself has been conceived not as an unqualified and general "eternal covenant of love,"33 as Smith argues, but as an eternal covenant intended to procure the redemption of the elect. To speak of the covenant of redemption in the manner that Smith does runs the risk, moreover, of conflating this covenant with (or collapsing it into) the interpersonal relations within the ontological Trinity.

An objection considered. Smith, in concluding his consideration of the covenant of works, attempts to field an objection against his doctrine: does not a denial of the traditional covenant of works entail a denial of the gospel?34 Citing Kline's articulation of this objection, Smith correctly responds that Kline's doctrine of merit by means of "strict justice" as the condition of the covenant of works is not the universal opinion of Reformed theologians." Smith concludes

that if to "affirm ... the gracious character of [the Adamic] covenant does not contradict or dilute the Reformed conception of the gospel, neither does the idea of a covenant of love. "36

It is at this stage that Smith contrasts his own doctrine of the Adamic covenant (a doctrine indebted to that of James Jordan) with traditional conceptions of the covenant of works. The traditional doctrine sees the "gift of life" as that which was offered to Adam; for Smith, it is "maturity in the covenant ... which includes confirmation in the blessings of the covenant." The traditional doctrine says that "Adam has transgressed the law and his punishment is a matter of strict law and justice"; Smith claims that his view "does not deny law or justice," or even the "legal aspect of the covenant," but "focuses" rather upon "the rejection of God's covenant love."37 Such a doctrine, Smith continues, detracts in no way from the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity or of Christ's righteousness to believers. One's doctrine of the covenant of works, then, need not compromise one's embrace of imputation.38

If one rejects "merit" from discussions of the covenant of works, how then are we to understand the work of Christ? Again, Smith argues that "merit" is not necessary to explain the biblical doctrine of the work of Christ.

> In contrast with Adam, Christ comes into the world as a representative of a race of men under the curse and out of the garden. As our representative, He must be faithful to the covenant and die on the cross to win eternal life for us. It is not "merit" that is imputed to us, but a righteous status before God.39

We have, then, an explicit recognition in Smith's writings that one's conception of the covenant of works has immediate bearing on the doctrine of the covenant of grace, specifically, the nature of the federal relationship between Christ and his people.

By way of criticism, we may note that it is not clear that since the covenant of works as a gracious administration does not compromise the gospel, the same may be affirmed of "the idea of a covenant of love." Reformed theologians, after all, have always maintained that a "works" principle lies at the heart of both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Jordan's formulation at the very least attenuates the works principle in the Adamic covenant and may well reject

that principle altogether." The same may fairly be said of Smith's doctrine.

This becomes especially evident in Smith's rejection of the historic Reformed doctrine of imputed righteousness, a rejection paralleled by Jordan in his recent essay, "Merit Versus Maturity." Jordan writes:

> This brings up the matter of Jesus' "active and passive obedience." The merit theology sometimes assumes that Jesus actively earned a reward, and passively went to the cross. This notion cannot stand inspection.... Even when this view is refined to say that Jesus' active and passive obedience are inseparable, like two sides of one coin, the notion remains that the active side of His obedience was meritorious. We have seen that this cannot be the case.
>
> It also brings up the matter of double imputation. That there is a double imputation of our sins to Jesus and His glory to us is certainly beyond question, and I am not disagreeing with the general doctrine of imputation, or of double imputation....
>
> [But there seems to be nothing in the Bible to imply that we receive Jesus' earthly life and then also His death. His earthly life was "for us" in the sense that it was the precondition for His death, but it is not given "to us." What we receive is not His earthly life and His death, but His death and His glorified life. What we receive is not Jesus' merits, but His maturity, His glorification.41

While both Smith and Jordan claim to adopt a form of imputation, both deny that which has historically been understood to be imputed to the believer-the merits of Christ. This, to be sure, is a clear departure from the Standards' doctrine of the work of Christ: the "efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ" as the ground of the believer's perseverance (WCF 17.2); the "merit of [Christ's] obedience and sacrifice on earth" as the ground of His intercession (Westminster Larger Catechism, 55).

It is also a clear departure from the way in which the Standards relate that work to the believer in justification (LC 70: "[God] par- doneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight ... only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them ..."; cf.

LC 71). What Smith claims is imputed, rather, is the status into which Christ has entered consequent upon his resurrection and glorification. This is counter to the biblical doctrine of justification, as we shall explore more thoroughly in our next chapter. We may for the present simply underscore the point that this erroneous formulation of the Adamic covenant has led directly to certain pointed deviations from the historic Reformed doctrine of justification. Smith's claims that revision of the Westminster Standards regarding these doctrines would "not entail a contradiction of the theology of the covenant that they teach, nor does it undermine the doctrine of justification by faith" are simply mistaken.42

Rich Lusk

Another sustained critique of the conventional Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works is offered by Rich Lusk in his contribution to the Knox Colloquium.43 After arguing that the doctrine of justification is not endangered by the theological absence of the covenant of works, and that the Reformers were remiss in not throwing "out the antiquated concept of merit as well [as] ... the medieval understanding of salvation," Lusk lays out his case that merit has no proper place in reflection upon the biblical covenants.44 He does so by presenting his understanding of the nature of and relationship among the various covenants of Scripture.

The definition of "merit." With respect to the prelapsarian covenant, Lusk appears to identify "merit" with "strict justice," rejecting the latter on the grounds of the Creator/creature distinction.45 Elsewhere, Lusk will speak of merit in terms of "strict merit. "46 It appears, then, that Lusk is primarily sparring with Meredith Kline's understanding of the covenant of works as an arrangement of "simple justice."47 Because the Standards do not adopt a definition of "strict merit" with respect to the covenant of works, Lusk contends, the "question" of merit is "open for further debate and discussion. "41 But Lusk's discussion appears to assume that theological reflection upon the covenant of works has historically proceeded upon the necessity of some notion of merit to that administration. He does not appear to have seriously considered that one may refrain from using the term "merit" without denying that the covenant of works operates along the lines of a "works" principle. In other words, Lusk's objection to and dismissal of the term merit in fact constitutes a subversive dismissal of the traditional administration of the covenant of works.

The creation covenant and the prelapsarian covenant. Lusk contends, furthermore, that the prelapsarian covenant must be understood without recourse to "merit," and offers five reasons why this must be so. First, not only does the Creator-creature relationship forbid "strict merit," but the nature of God himself forbids it.

> In fact, if we understand that the Triune God himself is the archetype of the covenant, we see that Adam must have existed in loving fellowship with his creator from the beginning. The Trinity, not Ancient Near Eastern suzerain treaties, must define our view of the covenant. Several theologians have recently argued that Father, Son, and Spirit are related covenantally not just in the economy of creation and redemption, but ontologically and eternally as well. But if this original covenant was a non-meritorious relation of love and favor, the first manifestation of that covenant in the creation must have been as well. The covenant within the Trinity is the model for extra-Trinitarian covenants.49

In other words, the eternal intratrinitarian relationships are covenantal. This requires that God's covenants with men must have, at their core, "loving fellowship" and must be "non-meritorious." Lusk's understanding of the relationship between the covenant of works and a covenantal Trinity very closely resembles Smith's. Many of the criticisms levied against Smith's doctrine apply to Lusk's argument here.

Lusk offers a second reason why the prelapsarian covenant must be conceived apart from "merit." The fact that the act of creation is inherently covenantal" means that God could not have related to Adam as "an employee who had to earn the wages of eternal life."" In related fashion, the many tokens of God's favor to Adam in the garden were to him a "free gift." Such a state of affairs means that Adam "only had to continue in what he already possessed."" But the "meritorious covenant of works ... suggest[s] that God's favor could only come at the end, after Adam had done work for God."53

There are at least two problems with this argument. First, the doctrine of creation as covenant, as we have argued above, is a dubious doctrine. Second, Lusk contends that the traditional doctrine claims that "God's favor could only come at the end." Few proponents of the covenant of works, however, deny that God showed favor to Adam prior to the institution of the covenant of works. The

covenant of works arrangement stipulates, at the very least, the continuation of Adam in his created estate. The notion that God's favor was absolutely withheld from Adam until the completion of his probation, as Lusk states the doctrine to teach, is a misunderstanding of the covenant of works.

A third reason why the first covenant must be understood apart from "merit" pertains to Lusk's preference of the category of "maturity" to explain this administration. Lusk, reflecting a doctrine observed in our discussion of Smith and Jordan above, asks whether Adam "was ... to earn this glorified life or ... to mature into it through patient and faithful service? Would it come to him as a wage or an inheritance?" Adam, further, "would make his way towards this goal of maturity by faith, not by chalking up brownie points in a merit system."" When we bear in mind that Lusk appears to equate the "merit" with the "works" principle of the conventional Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works, we may observe that the way in which Lusk has framed his discussion here effectively displaces the "works" principle of the first covenant with a substitute category-maturity.

Fourth, Lusk argues that the condition of the Adamic covenant was "faithfulness-or, faith filled obedience."" This is counter to the covenant of works, which "seems to imply" that Adam was to "trust in himself or his own resources."" This assertion, we might add, is simply mistaken. No Reformed theologian has denied that Adam was to exercise faith in the covenant of works.57 Nor has the "works" principle been construed in the manner in which Lusk outlines it. To state things this way obscures the nature of the governing principle of the covenant of works, namely, that covenantal blessing would come by obedience to the moral law and to the command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Lusk's argument further gives credence to the charge Lusk unsuccessfully attempts to deflect: that this argument effectively "flat- ten[s] out the differences between the pre-fall and post-fall situations."5S

Fifth, if we do not adopt such a model as Lusk articulates, he warns us, and "if grace has to be added to nature, it can never work through nature from within or rehabilitate nature's fallenness in the post-Genesis 3 situation. All kinds of dualisms are created." In other words, "God's grace is always extrinsic to the created order, such that salvation can only take place in a Gnostic `spiritual'

realm.' »59 But this argument hangs on an equivocation. While one may improperly use the term grace to speak of both the prelapsarian and postlapsarian situations, the term, strictly speaking, must be defined differently with reference to each. The respective absence and presence of sin in each requires such different definitions of grace.

Even granting Lusk's argument, it is simply not correct to say that the "grace" exercised toward sinners after the fall is identical to the grace said to be within the creation. Lusk, therefore, does not escape his own criticism. More fundamentally, why is it that dualism must inevitably result from understanding nature and grace in such a manner? Lusk asserts the point without establishing the connection between the traditional view and the proliferation of "dualisms."

The Mosaic covenant. Arguing against a "law/gospel dichotomy," Lusk contends that the Mosaic covenant is no " `republication' of the original covenant of works."" It is not clear whether Lusk is objecting to a doctrine that understands the Mosaic covenant formally to republish the covenant of works, or to a doctrine that understands the covenant of works to surface in some sense in the law. Regardless of that to which Lusk may be objecting, his criticisms effectively target both doctrines.

In support of his criticism, Lusk offers several reasons why the Mosaic covenant must be understood as gracious. Many of these are unremarkable and do not necessarily disprove the thesis that the covenant of works surfaces in the law in some sense. Since relatively few contemporary Reformed theologians would disagree that the Mosaic covenant is essentially gracious, let us examine two particular arguments that Lusk advances to establish why this gracious character categorically precludes the covenant of works from the Mosaic covenant.

First, Lusk argues that the Reformed have misunderstood the requirement of the law.

> The law did not require perfect obedience. It was designed for sinners, not unfallen creatures. Thus, the basic requirement of the law was covenant loyalty and trust, not sinless perfection. This is why numerous sinful but redeemed people are regarded as lawkeepers in Scripture. Stretching back to the pre-Mosaic period and all the way forward to the New Testament,

> we find that Noah (Genesis 6:1-8), Jacob (Genesis 25:27), job (1:1), Joseph (Matthew 1:19), and Zecharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6) were all blameless in God's sight. Moses was right: this law was not too hard to keep, for it was a law of faith (Deuteronomy 30:11ff; cf. Romans 10:1-12).61

Lusk appears to regard the biblical testimony concerning the obedience of sincere believers (the doctrine of evangelical perfection) as indication that the law never required perfect obedience at its outset.62

We may observe that Lusk has recently attempted to extract himself from this argument.

> Obviously, in one sense, the law does demand perfection (and in doing so it reveals our imperfection; Rom 3:20). The law says, "Be holy, as I am holy" (Lev 19:2). God cannot wink at sin. The law is always a perfect rule of righteousness (WCF 19). But my point was primarily pastoral. Perfect obedience is not required of us in order to be regarded as law keepers or covenant keepers (e.g., Lk. 1:6), nor to receive the blessings of the covenant that pertain to this life and the life to come (e.g., Eph. 6:3). The Torah itself made provision for sin and foreshadowed the gospel of Christ (Heb. 10:1). Furthermore, God really is pleased with the imperfect obedience of his believing children. This does not mean God is offering us salvation at a bargain price (a "relaxed law"); rather, on the basis of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession, our works really can be regarded as "good" and "holy" in God's sight (WCF 16.5-6).63

This statement is undoubtedly an improvement upon his earlier comments, but the explanation simply fails to account for his unqualified statements in his 2003 article (quoted above) that "the law did not require perfect obedience" and that "this law was not too hard to keep."

Lusk's latter, qualifying statement also does not alleviate the difficulties presented by his rejection of the definition of Torah as "legal code," a definition, he charges, that "has been shaped far too much by Roman (particularly Stoic) modes of thought rather than Hebraic." It is "not a brownie point system for aspiring Pelagians, but fatherly wisdom and counsel."" Commenting on 1 Timothy 5:4, he observes that "the relationship [in view in that verse] is not

controlled by an abstract justice but by personalized covenant loyalty. Satisfying rela tional obligations is the essence of Hebraic `righteousness.' "65 Such a definition, however, appears to denigrate the law as that which requires obedience to specific commands (Gal. 3:10-12).

Lusk's latter statement of clarification also leaves a certain matter unclear. Historically, the Reformed have argued that the imperfect obedience of believers is acceptable to God through Christ, whose perfect obedience and sacrifice has completely satisfied the demands of divine justice. Lusk appears to make a similar point when he states that it is "on the basis of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession" that the believer's works are accepted and enable him to receive covenantal blessing. But when we consider, as we shall see in the next chapter, that Lusk articulates a doctrine of imputation similar to that articulated by Smith and Jordan, this charitable interpretation is by no means certain.

Second, having posed problems in two traditional uses of the first element of the "law/gospel" distinction (the covenant of works, and the covenant of works as resurfacing in some fashion in the law), Lusk attempts to articulate the relationship between Moses and the new covenant. Lusk states his position generally: "The Mosaic law was simply the gospel in pre-Christian form. Or to put it another way, the New Covenant is just the Old Covenant in mature, glorified form. The Torah is an earlier chapter in the same glorious Christ-centered story of grace and blessing. "66 Lusk, therefore, looks to the principle of "maturity" in order to explain the relationship between the old and new covenants.

Specifically, Lusk offers two arguments in support of this position. First, he argues that "law and gospel actually perform the same (rather than contradictory) functions."67 The law "gave a blueprint of the coming gospel" (Matt. 5:17ff., Rom. 8:1-4), and the gospel "can condemn every bit as much as the law" (John 15:12-14; Acts 2:16ff.; 2 Cor. 2:16; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 2:1ff.).6S Therefore, echoing Wilson's comments cited in the previous chapter, Lusk states, "Whether or not a particular piece of God's revelation is comforting ('gospel') or condemning ('law') depends on the state of the heart to which it comes. "69 It is difficult, however, to see how this proves Lusk's point, since a historic Reformed covenant of works framework can say much the same thing by contending that the Mosaic covenant is an administration of the single covenant of grace. This, moreover, by no means precludes the understanding that the covenant of works

is present in the Mosaic covenant in some sense, as the apostle Paul appears to have understood it to be (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12), and as the Westminster Divines understood Paul to have taught.70

A second argument that Lusk advances in support of his maturity doctrine is that "the law belongs to the same story of salvation as the gospel. Paul offered, in short, an eschatological critique of the Torah. "" While the "Reformers were concerned with matters of individual soteriology and assurance," they neglected to address sufficiently Paul's additional concern with "the great redemptive historical transition"-"the Judaic, typological, childhood phase of redemptive history had given way to the worldwide, fulfillment, mature phase. He was concerned with the new identity and configuration of the people of God.""

In response, we may note that Paul may have critiqued the Torah on eschatological grounds. Does this mean, however, that he could not have spoken of the covenant of works as surfacing in some sense in the law-to which his opponents looked to establish the grounds of their justification? Why does the former necessarily preclude the latter?

As an example of this very phenomenon we may note Paul's argument at Galatians 3-4, a passage that Lusk cites as evidence of his second point above. It is true that Paul sees an important shift in the history of redemption-from the time of the Mosaic law to the time of the new covenant. But in the very same passage the apostle raises the question of "faith" and "works" (Gal. 3:10-13). Here, as I have argued elsewhere, Paul can only mean that individuals are looking to the law as the ground of their justification.73 But, Paul responds, the law requires perfect obedience. No man can obey the law perfectly. It is for this reason that everyone who is of the works of the law is under a curse (3:10). Paul does not say here that men are "under a curse" because they are clinging to an antiquated economy within the history of redemption. Lusk's exegesis, then, is inadequate. When we take into account the entirety of the biblical data, we find that the Scripture holds together what Lusk proposes we rend asunder.

The new covenant. Lusk objects to the doctrine that the covenant of grace is gracious to believers because it is first and foremost a covenant of works to Jesus Christ.

The bi-covenantal construction badly skews the covenant by turning it

> into a rather impersonal contract. The legal swallows up the filial, subordinating theology to anthropology. On this model, at best, the Trinity is grafted on to the covenant as an afterthought. But the covenant is not intrinsically Trinitarian. Jesus is regarded as a dutiful servant who has to earn favor ...
>
> ... [T]his is the picture the covenant of works construction seems to paint since it reduces everything to a matter of merit and strict justice.74

Lusk claims that Jesus' identity as a Son meant that he never had "to earn the favor of God."75 The fact, furthermore, that "the Father graced him with such a name as a gift (Philippians 2:9)" meant that "even his exaltation was of grace not of merit!" "Jesus moved from glory to glory, but also from grace to grace. "76

Lusk's construction succeeds, however, only if we accept a faulty assumption: "Works can only mean strict contractual justice quite apart from a context of personal fellowship or relationship"; and only if we accept Lusk's several unsubstantiated dichotomies: "legal/filial" "servant/son" "contract/covenant" "favor/merit." Why could the Son and the Father not enter into a legal arrangement? Why could the Son not perform the duties of a servant? Why could the Son not be in the favor of the Father and yet accomplish terms set by the Father as necessary to the redemption of the elect and the exaltation of the Son? Lusk simply dismisses these without argument.

Positively, Lusk's conception of Christ's role and work within the covenant is consciously indebted to the position outlined in Jordan's "Merit versus Maturity."77 Lusk argues that the transition from old to new is one from immaturity to maturity. Therefore, as "the entire human race under the Old Covenant was `in Adam' and therefore in an immature phase of history," so too Christ "at his resurrection ... becomes the first mature man, the first graduate out of the old world into the new."78 Consequently, while Christ's "active obedience is necessary to guarantee the efficacy and worth of his death and to guarantee his resurrection on the other side"-that is, as "precondition"-the imputation of that obedience to the believer "is problematic. "79

More significant to the Scripture is Christ's resurrection.

The resurrection is the real centerpiece of the gospel since it is the new

thing God has done.

> This seems to be the thrust of Romans 4:25. It is not Christ's life-long obedience per se that is credited to us. Rather, it is his right standing before the Father, manifested in his resurrection. His resurrection justifies us because it justified him. Again, it is not that his law-keeping or miracle-working are imputed to our account; rather Christ shares his legal status in God's court with us as the One who propitiated God's wrath on the cross and was resurrected into a vindicated, glorified form of life.80

Reflecting the results of scholarship sympathetic to the New Perspec- tive(s) on Paul, Lusk concludes that Romans 4:4-5 does not teach the imputation of Christ's active obedience; and that "God's righteousness is his own righteousness, not something imputed or infused"; it is "his covenant trustworthiness."8'

In the following chapter, we will see that this foundation laid by Lusk has significant conclusions for the doctrine of justification. His argument above entails a denial of the historic Reformed doctrine of justification, his protests notwithstanding.

Before we turn to the doctrine of justification, however, let us briefly examine five more FV proponents who share similar and common concerns regarding the covenants: John Barach, Steve Schlissel, Joel Garver, Mark Horne, and Peter Leithart. With the exception of Leithart, the arguments and conclusions of these men have for the most part been reviewed in one or the other authors examined above. We shall therefore be concerned simply to summarize their arguments below.

John Barach

One of Barach's most thorough extant treatments of the covenants is his 2002 AAPCPC lecture, "Covenant and History." In this address Barach affirms his understanding of the eternal intratrinitarian relationships among the persons of the Trinity as covenan- tal.SZ He argues that creation itself is a covenantal act: "He created a world to be in fellowship, to be in covenant with Himself. Creation itself is covenantal."" The covenant with Adam, Barach stresses, was "a relationship-Adam is a son of God. This isn't a labor contract-it's a covenant.""

This "pre-fall covenant" is "a gracious covenant."85 The "first covenant," furthermore, never entailed "the Lord requir[ing] Adam to earn or to merit anything," rather "everything that Adam has is sheer gift, sheer grace."" Furthermore, echoing Jordan's argument, the fact that Adam ate sacramentally from the tree of life meant that "he would be growing in maturity. He would be growing and developing in his relationship with God and doing his work under God's blessing. "87

This covenant shapes all subsequent covenants. Adam's failure was that he did not "persevere into glorification." Hence, "every covenant, until the new covenant, is an Adamic covenant and cannot save from death, cannot overcome death and bring glorification."88 Once again, a doctrine of covenantal maturity shapes the manner in which the covenants of biblical history are conceived and related to one another. The Mosaic covenant is "Adamic" in the sense that it could not issue in glorification. But it was not "a covenant of works republished."89 Barach raises concerns regarding the law's requirement of perfection similar to those advanced by Lusk.

> Those [elements of the Mosaic covenant] are all gracious elements. The sacrifices in the law are also a gracious element in the law. The law was never meant for a sinless people. It's not as if the law required you to keep the commandments perfectly and was very disappointed when you didn't and had no provisions for lawbreaking. The law was meant for a sinful people. The Lord knew His people would sin, and every sacrifice is a promise in the law.9o

It seems that, in Barach's judgment, the presence of grace in Moses categorically militates not only against conceiving it as having republished the covenant of works, but also against understanding it to require perfection.

The newness of the new covenant, Barach argues, consists essentially not in Christ bearing the "covenant curse" (whereby "there is a legal basis for forgiveness")-although he certainly does so-but in the "resurrection": "what the Jews expected, what they longed for at the end of history, has now happened in the middle of history in Christ."" Barach, with Smith and Lusk, appears to understand justification as grounded in Christ's resurrection: "Because we are united with Christ, because He is our covenantal representative, when He was raised from the dead and vindicated by God, we were vindicated by God,

justified."92

Steve Schlissel

We observed in the previous chapter that Schlissel's 2001 lecture not only perceived problems in but rejected the traditional law/gospel distinction. In his 2002 AAPCPC lecture, Schlissel reiterates this rejection.

> This law/Gospel dichotomy is a false one. It is unbiblical. It is a result of asking and demanding that Scripture answer the wrong questions. It has made us unable to hear things to the point where we actually have people who divide the Bible into discreet verses, every one of which is regarded as a proposition or demand for law or Gospel. Everything in the Bible is either law or Gospel.93

Unfortunately Schlissel does not cite examples among contemporary Reformed writers of what would admittedly appear to be an extreme adaptation of the law/gospel distinction.

In related fashion, Schlissel dismisses the doctrine of the threefold use of the law: "The very idea of a first, second, and third use of the law is illegal and unbiblical. It demands that the law conform to what we want from it, and if it doesn't do so then we will have none of it. But the law itself is to be our life."" Schlissel contends that this distinction has occasioned a fundamental misreading of the Bible.

> The question has always been What does the Lord require? We have changed the question since Luther's day-perhaps imperceptibly to some but quite drastically if you look at it carefully. The question today is commonly What must I do to be saved? But that is the wrong question. The biblical question is What does the Lord require?95

With this question in mind, and with an understanding that "the Bible as a whole is a covenantal book," we may escape the practical consequences of the law/gospel dichotomy.96

How then are the covenants of biblical history to be conceived and ordered? Axiomatic to Schlissel is that "the Word He has given us is one."" With other FV

proponents, Schlissel contends that "when [God] revealed Himself at Sinai, it was not a reiteration of the covenant of works."" Schlissel raises pointed concerns regarding the name "covenant of works,"99 and the covenant of works is strikingly absent from his published retelling of biblical history.'°°

What renders the New Testament "new"? "The truth of the New Testament is that there is no new truth in the New Testament. There might be a new administration because something unusual happened when the Gentiles came in."" "Incorporation of the Gentiles, consequently, would become the issue of the new administration, not justification by faith, God help us.""

Joel Garver

Garver's comments regarding the covenant of works manifest sympathy with the views of other FV proponents. Interacting with Kline's articulation of the covenant of works, Garver defends the notion that the "covenant of works is both gracious and nonmeritorious (at least with regard to any notion of strict merit)."103 In his discussion, Garver appears to reason that because the term merit is employed historically by Reformed theologians in only a qualified sense, "then surely it is a use of the term we can live without and still formulate theology appropriately, as many Reformed theologians have done."" This does not, Garver assures us, have any "direct bearing upon the nature of Christ's obedience and its value to us for salvation." Because Christ's deity ensured that his sufferings and death were of "infinite intrinsic worth," we may speak of them as meritorious, but not in terms of the merit of reward.105

Garver claims that "the terminology of `works' is applied retrospectively and by way of eminence from the viewpoint of the covenant of grace." After quoting Patrick Gillespie, Garver concludes that "the covenant of works, considered in its original integrity could be construed as a covenant of grace. It is only from the vantage point of the superabundance of grace upon grace in the second covenant that the first one is said to be `of works.' "'06 Garver, furthermore, appears to use the term grace equivocally in reference to both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.107

While Garver's discussion of the covenant of works is more nuanced than other FV proponents' discussions, and while Garver is willing to entertain genuine and welcomed contrasts between the first and the second covenants,"'

there is a decided emphasis in his discussion upon the similarities and continuity between the two covenants.

Mark Horne

Mark Horne has trenchantly raised criticisms of the law/gospel distinction,"' as well as the propriety of certain understandings of the covenant of works.'1° We may address these criticisms through a consideration of Horne's understanding of the nature of and relationships among the biblical covenants.

The covenant of works. As with other FV proponents, Horne responds to a doctrine of the covenant of works that entails strict merit.

> Some people think that, before sin entered the world, man was in a position to earn or merit blessing from God. But, while it is true that sin corrupts everything we do now, even apart from sin our works could never put God in our debt. The older Protestant theologians knew this. [A discussion of James Fisher's catechism ensues.]
>
> James Fisher was only one of many who understood the true God and therefore rejected all human merit."'

Elsewhere, Horne argues that because "the grace of God was upon" Jesus as a youth (Luke 2:40), "it cannot be wrong to claim that Adam, like our incarnate Lord, received grace from his Father."112 Using the theological term grace equivocally,"' Horne concludes that "God's relationship with Adam was not that of an employer with an employee, but that of a parent and child. As Norman Shepherd has argued so well, the covenant of works with Adam was not a `labor contract,' but rather a familial one. 11114 Horne expresses, then, some of the same lines of discomfort with the covenant of works as have been observed in our discussions of other FV proponents.

The covenant of works and Moses. Horne disagrees that Jesus' dealings with the rich young ruler and Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan evidence Jesus' espousal of what has come to be known as the usus secundus, the use of the law in driving sinners to Christ by exposing to them their inability to keep its commands to perfection.'15 Similarly, Horne argues that an usus secundus reading of Galatians 3 is mistaken.

> The contrast between Law and Promise [in Gal. 3] is not a contrast between meriting and freely receiving. Rather it's a contrast between two contents. The content of the Promise was that all nations would be blessed in him-in his seed (vv. 8, 16). The Law, however, established division, especially division between Jew and Gentile (v. 20).116

We must not also understand Leviticus 18:5 cited at Romans 10:5 to speak of "earning God's favor by obedience" in the way of "a modern demand for perfect, sinless, obedience." It rather instructs "the Israelites to live in faith and repentance toward God rather than toward other gods."'" When we do contrast law and gospel, we should see the contrast as "that of promise and fulfillment, type and substance, and partial and completeness."'"

In summary, we are not to understand Moses as "the Republication of the Covenant of Works," something Horne claims is never affirmed by the Westminster Standards.119 Horne, we might note, understands the republication doctrine he has in mind to teach that God intended to give the Mosaic law as a covenant of works,120 an understanding that, at the very least, requires defense and clarification.

The new covenant. If we are to excise merit from consideration of the Adamic covenant, then we are in no danger, Horne continues, of diminishing the role of merit with respect to Christ's obedience.

> Denying merit to Adam in no way detracts from his demerit. A wife being unfaithful to her loving husband is far more evil than an employee failing to fulfill all his contractual obligations. Adam deserved Hell because of his sin.
>
> Nor does denying merit to Adam deny it also to Christ, who is not a mere Creature but God himself and who voluntarily did an undue work that he had every right to refuse. Jesus' merits are not jeopardized in any way.'21

Even so, Horne continues:

> It needs to be pointed out that Jesus' consciousness was centered on trusting his Father, not earning merits. Otherwise, all the exhortations to

> endure suffering and follow the example of Jesus would not be exhortations to have faith, but exhortations to earn God's favor. This is unthinkable. Jesus trusted God to save him and so should we.122

Notable in Horne's discomfort with the language of merit in connection with Christ's sufferings and obedience is his coordinate emphasis upon Christ as an exemplar of faithfulness to those who are within the covenant.

Peter Leithart

There are two pertinent discussions in Leithart's writings that merit our attention in a discussion of the covenant of works.

First, Leithart, as we observed in the previous chapter, has articulated in a thoroughgoing way a doctrine of "Trinitarian personalism" that is amenable to and has actually been placed in the service of criticism of the covenant of works. Second, Leithart, in recent entries that he has authored and posted on his Web site, 12' has raised a number of troubling questions regarding the covenant of works and the doctrine of imputation. (1) Leithart questions whether Romans 5:12-14 teaches the historic Reformed doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity.124 (2) Leithart claims that Paul's use of "imputation" in these verses "doesn't appear to mean precisely what it means in traditional Reformed theology. "125 (3) These verses teach that "Adam's sin is `imputed' in the sense that it renders him liable to the curse of death; and because of Adam's position as the head of the human race, others suffer the consequences of his sin as well. 11121 Leithart asks, "How is it just for people between Adam and Moses to suffer the curse of death if they are not held guilty of Adam's sin?"127 (4) Leithart claims that the historic Reformed doctrine of imputation is a "`good and necessary consequence' of Paul's argument rather than explicit teaching."" But Leithart's preferred method of explaining not only Romans 5:12-14 but also the relationship of Adam to his posterity in general undercuts this claim.

> But it may also be that this [i.e., Leithart's question (above)] can be explained simply in terms of Adam's position as the first man and as a covenant representative. For instance, Abel was not allowed to return to the garden, but this was not because he was directly held guilty of Adam's sin. Perhaps it was simply because his father had made a terrible error and God cast him out of the garden, and that God determined that no one

> would return until a perfect sacrifice had been offered, until "dying you shall die" had been carried out on an innocent substitute. (Abel was still born in sin, since he was born under the curse and born to parents who were alienated from God.)121

It appears, then, that Leithart has called into question the historic Reformed doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity.

Leithart draws other observations about the historic Reformed understanding of the close relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He appeals to certain sixteenth-century theologians as evidence that "these writers did not see a covenant of works as being essential to the formulation of the gospel."'" Leithart also forthrightly rejects the Reformed doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer.

> Christ obeyed perfectly, fulfilling the law without sin; Christ subjected Himself to the judgment of the Father on our sin, obeying "passively"; the Father was pleased, and judged Jesus to be the Righteous One, declaring that verdict by raising His Son from the dead; in raising Jesus, the Father was saying, "I judge My Son to be the one who has obeyed perfectly even unto death; by union with Christ, that verdict is also passed on us. In this construction, there is no "independent" imputation of the active obedience of Christ, nor even of the passive obedience for that matter; we are regarded as righteous, and Christ's righteousness is reckoned as ours, because of our union with Him in His resurrection. What is imputed is the verdict, not the actions of Jesus, and this is possible and just because Christ is our covenant head acting on our behalf."'

Back of this is Leithart's suggestion that "Paul did not see Jesus as fulfilling a `covenant of works.' Jesus does not come into the world under the covenant of works; He is born `under the Law' (Gal 4:4). Jesus fulfills Torah, and THEREBY reverses the sin of Adam. "132

Conclusions

In summary, let us draw some observations highlighting certain theological conclusions that have surfaced in our study of FV proponents as well as their points of deviation from the Westminster Standards. We may observe seven.

(1) We grant that the Standards refrain from using the term merit in connection with the covenant of works. At the same time, we have seen that the Standards are plain in their application of the term to the work of Christ under the new covenant. Some FV proponents clearly reject the application of this term to the work of Christ. This is a departure from the Standards.

(2) Some FV proponents appear to equate "strict merit" with the "works" principle in the covenant of works. Rejecting the former, they thereby reject the latter, substituting such terminology as "maturity" in capturing the essence or operational mechanism of the covenant. The Standards, however, are clear that a "works" principle lies at the heart of the first covenant. To dispense with it is not a formal difference with the Standards. It is to dispense with the doctrine altogether.

(3) Many FV proponents, in their arguments concerning the graciousness of the first covenant and the covenant of grace and in their placing the believer within the covenant of grace in situ Adam-in the very situation and place of Adam-flatten the biblical and confessional distinction between the two covenants (WCF 7.3; LC 20, 22; SC 12, 20). The label of "monocovenantalism," protests notwithstanding,"' may therefore be an apt description of certain proponents' doctrine.

(4) At least one FV proponent seriously questions whether the Adamic covenant entailed the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity in the way that the Standards frame that doctrine (WCF 6.3; LC 22; SC 16).

(5) Most FV proponents reject the doctrine that the Mosaic covenant republishes the covenant of works. We have observed that many of their criticisms reject any connection between the covenant of works and Moses. This latter rejection, however, is itself a repudiation of the exegesis that underlies key paragraphs of the Standards' exposition of the covenant of works at WCF 7.2, 19.1; LC 20 (citing both Gal. 3:12 and Rom. 10:5).

(6) We have observed some FV proponents explicitly rejecting the imputation of Christ's righteousness, particularly his active obedience. It is, they claim, his status and not his obedience that is imputed to believers. Such a claim counters the testimony of the Standards, again, that it is Christ's obedience and satisfaction that is imputed to them (WCF 11.1; LC 70-71).

(7) Following the above observation, it will be difficult to reconcile FV understandings of imputation with the Standards' doctrine of justification-that Christ's obedience and satisfaction are the sole ground of the believer's justification (WCF 11.1; LC 70-71).

As we proceed into our investigation into FV doctrines of justification in the next chapter, we must earnestly inquire into what constitutes the ground(s) of the believer's justification.

Chapter 3

Covenant and Justification

In our study of the FV, we have been tracing two fundamental questions: (1) What is a covenant? What bearing does this definition have on the doctrine of the Trinity? (2) How are we to understand the nature and order of the covenants in biblical history?

We have seen that a number of conclusions are drawn in FV discussions that occasion our further reflection on the doctrine of justification. There is the discomfort with, if not the rejection of, the covenant of works as grounded upon a "works" principle. There is also the rejection of the term merit to describe the work of Christ; and the rejection of the imputation of Christ's sufferings and obedience to the believer.

It is tempting to leap immediately into a consideration of the doctrine of justification within FV writings-to weigh further their statements on imputation and to evaluate their understandings of the believer's righteousness in justification and of the office of faith in justification. But before we do so, we must consider two necessary matters. First, we will examine Leithart's application of his doctrine of Trinitarian personalism to the application of redemption. Second, we will observe the way in which FV proponents express appreciation for and appropriate the New Perspectives on Paul.

In doing so, we will find that FV proponents, as they approach discussions of justification, frequently conceive redemption to be fun damentally relational and social in nature. This understanding will shape their perspective on what constitutes the believer's justification. An assessment of the social character of redemption within FV writings will also help to prepare us for our discussion of the sacraments in the theology of the FV in chapters 6 and 7.

Peter Leithart and the Nature and Application of Redemption

Leithart, we observed in the first chapter, argues that a needed corrective to Western theology is Van Til's doctrine of the Trinity as "absolute Person." Adoption of such a perspective, he contends, will help to restrain our inborn tendencies toward abstraction and reification. We concluded, in view of his doctrine of the Trinity alone, that Leithart exhibits a skepticism toward the nature of being and a preference in expressing the relations or activities of that being. But how does Leithart apply this concern to other theological loci? He does so in two related directions-anthropology and soteriology.

Anthropology

Leithart argues that we must "frame anthropology in Trinitarian terms" and that "the pattern of inter-Trinitarian life necessarily does and is supposed to set the pattern for human life.'" How is this so? Leithart points to John 17 as evidence that "restored humanity is to be unified, and this unity has a twofold relationship to the interTrinitarian communion of Father and Son.'" One component of this twofold relationship is that "human life as lived in the church is modeled on the divine life of the Father and Son."3 John 17, Leithart maintains, provides "an exegetical ground for our effort to reasoning about anthropology by reflecting on the life of the Trinity.'"

Faulting Augustine for attempting to construct a Trinitarian anthropology "in the human mind rather than in man as a complete being," Leithart, following the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas,s suggests that we ought to place "the vestiges of the Trinity not in the human mind but in human relationality. "6 He summarizes the argument.

> The word "God" does not refer to a substratum of deity that stands behind the Three Persons. Divine substance is not a fourth alongside Father, Son and Spirit, for there is no anhypostatic divine substance. And this means that the word "God" refers to the One God who is a Trinity of Persons. One God is Father, Son, and Spirit, the eternal communion of life and fellowship. The origin of all creation is Divine Persons in a communion of love. This means, John Zizioulas argues, that for God "being is communion." It is not the case that God first exists, and then enters into communion or relationship. God is only as God is communion among the Three. God is Godin-communion-with-God.'

This is why, Leithart continues, "man, as the image of God, is preeminently created as a `being-in-communion' and a 'being-forcommunion."" "Just as there is no God except as He is in communion, so there is no man except as He is in communion, in relationship, with things and persons outside of himself."' Just as "each of the Persons of the Trinity, insofar as each can be considered in se, is what He is in relation to the others," so too "man is what he is only in relation to God, to other humans, and to the world." One's "existence" and "identity" may not "be distilled and isolated from [one's] multiple relationships with [one's] wife, [one's] children, [one's] students, [one's] friends, [one's] Presbytery, and so on.... These relationships constitute the real me."" In short, "relationality constitutes identity and the nature of the person.""

Leithart, as we have observed, raises a number of questions concerning classical Trinitarian formulations. His own formulations emphasize the plurality of the Godhead and express the divine unity in fundamentally relational terms. Such formulations underlie his anthropology: man's being must reflect that of the triune God (so understood). This means that anthropology is weighted toward conceiving man in essentially relational terms. We expect, then, that soteriology will be similarly conceived.

Soteriology

Leithart contends that just as the doctrine of the Trinity is subject to "reification," so too is the doctrine of salvation.

> We often use "salvation" as if it were an entity in itself, but salvation is no more a thing than grace is. "Salvation," I have written elsewhere, is grammatically a noun but theologically an adjectiveit "modifies" or indicates the condition of creation and especially of persons. Ultimately, "salvation" will describe the full restoration and glorification of creation. Currently, it describes the condition of those persons who are united to Christ and the life they live in fellowship with the Triune God and with one another or, more broadly, the creation insofar as it participates in the "already" of the eschaton. I would add that "salvation" language is frequently "adverbial," describing God's acts in history.'2

We expect and we find in Leithart, then, an exposition of salvation in dynamic and relational terms. He warns us of conceiving "grace," "covenant," and "faith"

in a "depersonalized" way.13 Grace, for example, is not to be conceived as "a substance" but "shorthand for describing the Triune God's personal kindness to human beings and the gifts, especially the self-gift of the Spirit, that flow from that kindness."14 Faith must not be conceived as an "object" but "the thoroughly personal response of trust to the thoroughly personal revelation of God." It "describes a certain kind of personal relationship."15 As with Trinitarian theology and anthropology, soteriology must be conceived not in fundamentally ontological terms but in terms of relationship.

One of the most remarkable hallmarks of FV doctrines of soteriology is their proximity to the doctrine of ecclesiology. Leithart is one of the most thoroughgoing and probing advocates of this doctrine.

> A Trinitarian anthropology implies that ecclesiology and soteriology are two sides of the same coin, not sharply distinct loci. Soteriology has to do with God's actions to bring sinful human beings back into right relationship with Himself and to reverse the effects of sin in the world, and with the changes in the world produced by those actions. If human beings are as I described above, then God's saving acts necessarily produce the church. As image of the Triune God, man is created as a "being-in-relation," and sin perverts and damages and breaks human relations and societies. Chiefly, sinful man is estranged from God, and must be reconciled to Him, but sinful man is also estranged from sinful man, and the reversal of the curse and the overthrowing of sin must involve the reconciliation of man with man. Scripture's name for the location of reconciliation is "church." The church is where man's communion with man is being re-established, because it is where man's communion with God has been re-established.16

Two points from this excerpt are worth underscoring. First, Leithart consciously melds ecclesiology and soteriology. This melding stems from his prior reflections upon the Trinity and anthropology. Second, Leithart understands sin and redemption primarily (but by no means exclusively) in terms of fragmented relationship (whether human or divine) and restored relationship, or reconciliation. Salvation is therefore essentially social, or more to the point, ecclesiological. Salvation will, to be sure, have individual implications, but this does not change the corporate focus or direction of salvation.

Appreciation for the New Perspectives on Paul

These considerations immediately broach a related concern: the extent to which proponents of the FV express appreciation for and have drawn from the exegetical and theological conclusions of the NPP. Our approach to this question is threefold: first, to explain why this question would and should surface at this point in our discussion; second, to cite examples of general appreciation for the NPP in the writings of FV proponents; third, to explore specific exegetical and theological interactions with NPP writings. We shall reserve this last point for our discussion of justification below.

Why This Question?

What would occasion this question? What theologically is present to link these two diverse theological movements? To answer this, let us rehearse the background and aims of the NPP.17 The "NPP" refers to an academic movement within historicalcritical New Testament scholarship." It arose in the 1960s and gained steam with a landmark 1977 publication, E. P. Sanders's Paul and Palestinian Judaism.19 It has been imported into the evangelical church in no small measure because of the efforts of the Anglican churchman and biblical scholar, N. T. Wright." There is, to be sure, exegetical and theological diversity within this movement, but there is a central core of concerns common to these proponents.

What are the hallmarks of the NPP? We might briefly identify two. First, Sanders's work trenchantly set forth a case that Judaism was not a works-based or works-centered religion but a religion of grace. This gracious pattern of religion Sanders calls "covenantal nomism." Paul, therefore, did not disagree with his Jewish opponents on soteriological grounds. He disagreed, Sanders says in a famous statement, with Judaism because it was not Christianity.

Second, Paul's disagreements with Judaism were salvation-historical and swirled around differing answers to two questions: Is Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah of God? May Gentiles be incorporated into the people of God on precisely the same terms as Jews, namely, faith?

N. T. Wright has furthermore argued that the church has misunderstood Paul's understanding of such concepts as "works," "justification," and "faith.""

The "works of the law," Wright argues, are not human attempts to obey the law so as to earn, merit, or otherwise procure salvation. They are not even specifically tied to activity as such. "Works" rather are preeminently those status-demarcating boundary markers upon which Jews of the New Testament era relied to distinguish themselves from non-Jews. Examples include circumcision, the Sabbath, and the dietary laws.

Justification is not primarily a soteriological but an ecclesiological term. It answers not the question, what must I do to be saved? but the question, how do I know who is in the people of God? Justification is God's declaration that Jews and Gentiles are now members of the one people of God. Paul rejects the "works of the law" in connection with justification because they are not sufficiently reflective of the inclusivity of the people of God, Jew and Gentile. Wright speaks of "faith" in two ways: we are justified by faith in the present in that faith is a boundary marker that identifies us as part of the true people of God. We are justified by faith in the future (i.e., at the judgment) in that our covenantal faithfulness is the basis or ground upon which God justifies the covenant member.22

This raises the question of the relationship of the death of Christ to the ground of one's justification. Wright, unlike other proponents of the NPP, argues that Christ's death was expiatory and propitiatory. Wright, however, denies that Paul teaches that Christ's obedience and sufferings are imputed to believers. Believers, rather, are united to Christ in such a way that their sins may truly be said to have been dealt with in him. The net effect of such formulations is that one's covenantal faithfulness constitutes the ground of one's justification at the judgment.

To return to our original question: Why are we considering the NPP at this juncture? We have observed in one important FV proponent a tendency toward conceiving anthropology and soteriology in fundamentally corporate terms that de-emphasize the individual. The NPP proposes a reading of the apostle Paul in just these terms. It is no surprise, then, when we find FV expressions of appreciation for and appropriations of NPP scholarship on these points.

General Statements of Appreciation for the NPP

Mark Horne, Rich Lusk, Douglas Wilson, Steve Schlissel, and Peter

Leithart each provide statements of appreciation for the NPP. Not all appreciate the NPP in the same ways or to the same degree, so we will examine each one in turn. I will offer critical reflections where appropriate.

Mark Home. Horne's general assessment of the NPP is that it "is not a rejection of the Reformed doctrine."23 How is this so?

The NPP and Judaism. Horne has used the term "covenantal nomism" in a positive way.24 It is not clear, however, that he uses the term in precisely the same way as Sanders. Horne appears to accept the term as describing "the pattern of religious belief and practice in first-century Palestinian Judaism."

> God graciously establishes a structured relationship based on promises, a "covenant," with undeserving sinful creatures. In response, those people are to gratefully follow God because they trust him. The law . . . was given to Israel to mark them out as God's covenant people and to give them a tangible way to show their trust in God's promises.25

And yet, unlike Sanders, Horne also argues "that Covenantal Nomism was perverted at that [sic] time of Jesus."" Some were "setting aside God's word in favor of their own commandments," while others taught "that if one kept properly (as defined by rather rigid, man-made standards) certain ritual aspects of God's covenant, one was safe from the wrath of God even though one was flouting the moral laws that God had given his people."" Addressing the significance of the Jerusalem Council, Horne argues-in terms echoing categories of N. T. Wrightthat the debate was not one concerning "legalism" but whether "one is [any] longer identified as belonging to God's people by circumcision" or the "gift of faith-responding to the Gospel by repentance and submission to baptism.""

Sympathy with the New Perspective. In a summary exposition of the New Perspective," Horne assures us that he had come to some of the same conclusions as the New Perspective not from study of Wright, Dunn, or Sanders, or even Second Temple Judaism, but from his own study in the Scripture.30 Horne evidences sympathy with the NPP on a number of points:

(1) The emphasis upon ecclesiology: "unity among Christians is not some optional extra. It is salvation.""

(2) An understanding of the thrust of redemptive history to be to provide "reconciliation" among the nations as well as with God.32

(3) A relational (although not thereby nonethical or nonmoral) understanding of sin as that which causes division, and of the gospel as that which effects unity and reconciliation among "sinfully separated people and groups."33

(4) With respect to the "works of the law" Horne questions "the common assumption ... that what Paul has in mind are those who attempt to earn God's favor by offering him their good deeds as a kind of bribe. But is this really what Paul is dealing with?" In responding to this question, Horne interprets the "works" at Galatians 4:10 to comprise ethnic boundary markers, "not abstract good deeds."34 At the very least, Horne evidences discomfort with the traditional view of works as activity.

Defenses of the NPP. Horne has also drafted several pieces vehemently defending the NPP against its Reformed and evangelical crit- ics.35 In doing so, he offers the following claims. First, N. T. Wright's doctrine of the atonement preserves the doctrine of imputation. The differences between Wright and the Standards are formal-the former preferring the term "reckon" to the term "impute" and a "disagreement with the Westminster Assembly's prooftexts, not its actual doctrine."36

Second, N. T. Wright has been misread by certain Reformed critics, most notably Douglas Kelly, Richard Phillips, and Ligon Dun- can.37 Douglas Kelly was mistaken to say that Wright's doctrine of justification is "`insufficient' and that the insufficiency is a failure to deal with the need for God to be propitiated in regard to sin."38 Wright, Horne contends, "add[s] to the traditional picture of Paul, without taking away what is affirmed. "39 Wright, after all, "uses forensic terms" in speaking of Christ's death, and even speaks of Christ's death as propitiatory and substitutionary.40 In fact, when Wright speaks of "Christ's death [as] the moment when God punished sin" this "should alleviate all concern."" Wright, furthermore, maintains that "justification [is] the bestowal of a legal status, not a process or change in a person's moral character.""

Third, Horne claims that the NPP is not "self-consciously opposed" to "Reformed soteriology," that "Reformed orthodoxy" does not hinge on a single "interpretation of Galatians and/or Romans"; nor on the identity of Paul's

opponents as "merit-legalists.""

Critique. We may raise two points of criticism. First, Horne's readings of the NPP are unpersuasive. This is borne out especially by his failure to alert the reader to Wright's trenchant and sustained denials of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. It is simply inaccurate to claim that Wright does not detract but simply adds. Horne appears to have missed the alarm calls of Duncan, Kelly, and Phillips that Wright's use of forensic language to speak of justification and his articulation of Christ's death as substitutionary, atoning, and propitiatory cannot mean, in the absence of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, the same thing that Reformed theologians have meant by these doctrines. Second, Horne's discomfort with "works" as what he terms "abstract good deeds" is in fact a discomfort with the doctrine of the Westminster Standards, which understand works in precisely the sense of activity (WCF 16.5, 7; LC 70, 73).

Rich Lusk. Lusk has drafted several short pieces affirming his sympathy for the NPP and defending the NPP against attacks from PCA quarters.44 Like Horne, Lusk charges that Wright's Reformed critics have "misread and mischaracterized Wright's theology.""

Judaism. Lusk is more appreciative than Horne of the NPP's understanding(s) of Second Temple Judaism. While he does not wholeheartedly endorse NPP conceptions of Judaism or wholeheartedly reject traditional conceptions, Lusk attempts to cite problems in the data. To this end, he advances a number of claims. First, "the NPP has not claimed that no Jews were proto-Pelagian legalists," and "such a claim" could never "be proven." Second, many verses of the New Testament could also be read "in a legalistic, meritorious fashion." Third, many Second Temple texts may reflect poor theology but not the true state of the hearts of Jews of the day. Further, these texts were drafted in a "covenantal context," a factor that "colors and conditions the way exhortations to obedience are couched." Fourth, some "NT passages could be read as teaching that the Jews en masse were walking along in covenant fidelity before Jesus came," although others appear to teach the opposite. "The complex picture has yet to be fully grasped."" In summary, the NPP is correct to say that the "protoPelagian Jews are [not] the ones Jesus and Paul have in cross hairs at all times.""

The attractions of N. T. Wright. Lusk describes several aspects of Wright's exegesis of Romans that are attractive to him.48 Lusk believes that Wright expresses a "commitment to the Reformed faith" and, more fundamentally, to the Scripture. "He is a true sola scrip- tura Protestant."" Lusk appreciates Wright's emphasis upon "redemptive-histor[y]," and sees Wright's commentary on Romans as "a self-contained course in biblical theology.""

Lusk also lauds Wright's "explicit commitment to sola fide and sola gratia. "s" He agrees with Wright's conclusions that pistis Chris- tou means "the `faith of Jesus Christ.' '52 Wright's doctrine of baptism, a "high view of baptismal efficacy," is furthermore attractive to Lusk.53 Lusk also embraces the social impulses of Wright's exegesis: "Grace brings healing and transforming power to more than just the individual heart." Wright takes no "truncated, pietistic view of the gospel" but appeals to those "influenced by worldvieworiented Dutch Calvinism and theocratic Puritanism."" Finally, Lusk is attracted to Wright's doctrine of justification," to which we now turn our attention.

Justification. Lusk believes that Wright's doctrine of justification is a defensible expression of the doctrine for Reformed persons. In fact he argues that Wright's doctrine "harmonizes with, complements, and yes, even improves, more traditional Reformed formulations."56 Lusk outlines and defends Wright's doctrine in several points. He maintains that Wright's doctrine conceives justification to be "forensic"; although Wright demurs from using the language of imputation, he uses "virtually synonymous terms such as `reckon'" and understands Christ's death to be propitiatory.57 Wright "simply uses union with Christ to do in his theology what imputation does for traditional Reformed systematics. Of course the net result is the same: sinners are right with God because of what Christ did in their stead. "58

Wright's doctrine is "situate[d]" in "metanarrative" and is "corporate" in nature. But, Lusk stresses, Wright does not deny the personal and soteriological dimensions of justification.59 Wright, then, preserves the Old Testament background of Pauline "righteousness" language-as "not strictly legal but relational ... not so much distributive justice as promise/covenant keeping."60 Wright also emphasizes the future dimension of justification, a point on which "both Rome and the Reformers must be found wanting."61 Lusk cites favorably Wright's comment that "future justification, acquittal at the last great Assize, always takes place on the basis of the totality of the life lived. "62

Works of the law. Lusk also evidences sympathy for NPP readings of the "works of the law." In his article on the Galatian heresy," Lusk maintains that the "object of Paul's critique" is what is "uniquely Mosaic or Jewish," the "temporary function of the law in God's purposes . . . ," not "a timeless, abstract critique of moralism and human merit. 1164

Specifically, the "works of the law" are not "meritorious attempts to earn divine favor and salvation." Paul's concern rather is to contrast "the universality of grace" with "Jewishness," not "the sovereign nature of grace" with "works-righteousness. "65

While Paul was not himself (semi-) Pelagian, he was not combating a (semi-) Pelagian heresy in the Galatian church. Paul and his "Jewish opponents," in fact, were agreed on the doctrine of justification by faith.66 Paul's disagreement with his opponents, rather, centered upon the question, " Who are the justified? Those who have faith in Jesus, sealed by baptism? Or those who believe in Jesus, and maintain the traditional Jewish sign of circumcision?"67 Back of this was an eschatological debate: the "essential difference was Paul's realized eschatology in Christ versus the Judaizers [sic] commitment to ongoing practice of Torah."" Lusk, however, will maintain that "works" [not "works of the law"], in such places as Romans 11 and Titus 3 refers to "Pelagian-style works of merit done to earn salvation." "Works of the law," however, means "living Jewishly as the way defining the covenant community in the messianic age.""

Contemporary implications. Lusk sees at least two contemporary implications of the NPP for the Reformed and Presbyterian church. First, in reflecting on the Galatian controversy, Lusk maintains that the "real tragedy" of Galatians is not "merit theology" but "division of the church." Reformed neglect of the latter, Lusk suggests, may explain our "history of fighting over one issue after another, rending the fellowship of Christ's body, all for the sake of preserving an ideology. "70

Second, Lusk argues that the NPP makes it "clear [that] justification functions as part of an anti-racist, anti-ethnocentric polemic. "71 This means that the "gospel itself is intrinsically social and ecclesial" and calls us to address, among other things, the problem of racism as a church. We need to challenge not only our individual self-righteousness but also our "corporate righteousness": our

"deepest personal identity" must be "marked out by ... baptism/faith."72

Lusk is concerned to stress that the social and the individual are not an "either-or." He sees the NPP and the Reformation as compatible: "We have focused almost exclusively on ordo salutis; the NPP gives us the historia salutis as a broader context in which to understand personal salvation."73 In this sense, one's commitments to the Reformation need not militate against a warm and sympathetic appropriation of the NPP.

Critique. We have raised a number of concerns regarding justification and the works of the law elsewhere74 and will address some of these concerns below. We may limit our concerns to Lusk's ambivalence concerning three central issues. First, it is one thing to say that social concerns and inclusivity within the church are an implication of the gospel. It is another thing to say that they are the gospel. The problem is that Lusk at points appears to advance both propositions. In view of the claims both of the Reformation and of the NPP, however, both statements cannot be true.

Second, Lusk's conclusion regarding Second Temple Judaism seems to be that because we cannot speak with certainty about Judaism as a whole, therefore aspects of the portraits of Judaism presented both by the NPP and by traditional readings of Second Temple Judaism must both be correct. Traditional and NPP conceptions of Second Temple Judaism, however, are simply not as compatible as Lusk believes them to be.75

Third, an exegetical corollary of the above observation is Lusk's reading of "works" and "works of the law." The former corresponds to traditional readings of Pauline works; the latter to Dunn's and Wright's readings of Pauline works. Few, however, would find this to be a compelling solution to the debate.

Douglas Wilson. Wilson's interaction with the NPP has been profoundly shaped by the RPCUS's June 2002 description of Wilson's theology as sympathetic to the NPP. Owing in part to this challenge, Wilson devoted an entire issue of his magazine, Credenda/Agenda, to laying out his position toward the NPP.76 His understanding of the NPP is admittedly derivative-he primarily relies on a recently published booklet that summarizes the NPP for his information.77 Wil son's discussion takes the summarizations of his source and employs them as launching pads for theological reflection on a number of

questions that have not necessarily been drawn from NPP discussions. The discussion is of value, however, because many of these issues surface around the doctrine of justification.

Wilson's tone is generally dismissive of the nonecclesiastical academic wing of the NPP.7S He is, however, much more open to N. T. Wright as a "Christian gentlem[a]n" who "has a lot to contribute."79 He expressly appreciates Wright for seeing Paul as "a thorough-going covenant theologian"; for seeing that "the gospel has a total claim over all human life-social, cultural, political, economic"; and for his "exegesis of particular texts."" More recently, however, Wilson has advanced criticisms of Wright's theology."

On what issues does Wilson sympathize with the NPP? He claims sympathy with what is said to be the NPP denial of three points: that "justification by faith was a new revelation; that faith replaced works; that law stands in opposition to grace. "12 Of more significance are the points regarding which Wilson differs from his understanding of the NPP. He lists three.

First, Wilson claims to differ from NPP denials "that Paul's focus was on the individual's relationship to God." Wilson believes that the controversy can be resolved by seeing it as a substantial misunderstanding.

> This simply appears to me to be a category confusion-different people are talking at different levels about different things. This is what I meant in an argument I presented elsewhere about eggs and omelets. When I am cooking breakfast, it appears to me to be misdirected and confused to ask if my "focus" is on eggs or omelets. I have no way of making sense out of this kind of question.... Those who talk about corporate entities over against individuals have created a quite unnecessary distinction, and a stumbling block to go with it.83

In other words, the individual and corporate are "in complete harmony, and the dislocations and fragmentations of modernity are what create the problems for us."84

Wright is one, Wilson claims, who "affirms individual justification as a theological truth." Wilson's difference with Wright "at this point," he informs us, is "exegetical," not "theological.""

Second, Wilson dissents from NPP constructions of Judaism. He first attempts to critique the concept of "Second Temple Judaism" as "an abstraction."" He sees, rather, "the biblical contrast ... between faithful Jews and unfaithful Jews."87 This point is in keeping with what we observed earlier to be Wilson's understanding of the law/gospel distinction: Scripture is all law and all gospelthe difference being the subjective state of the one to whom that Scripture comes.

Third, Wilson dissents from NPP claims that "the pre-Christian Paul [was] a man with a robust conscience," and that his transition from Judaism to Christianity involved simply the "add[ition of] a belief in Jesus. "S8 Rather, the pre-Christian "Paul was a faithless (but externally faithful) Jew. "89 Even so, when Paul did convert, "what Paul had left behind was not Judaism, but rather his own wicked perversions of it. "90

In summary, it appears that Wilson's engagement of the NPP is generally less appreciative than that observed by Lusk and Horne. The areas in which he does attempt to express appreciation can prove to be platforms for him to express his own views that are not necessarily germane to the issues raised by the NPP. Perhaps the most significant comment by Wilson is his belief, paralleled above in our discussion of Lusk, that, with respect to justification, the corporate emphases of the NPP are no threat to but a complement of the individual emphases of traditional Protestantism.

Steve Schlissel

2003 AAPCPC lecture. We may recall Schlissel's insistence, observed in chapter 1, that the inclusion of Jew and Gentile into the people of God constitutes the essential difference between the Old and the New Testaments. In his 2003 AAPCPC lecture, Schlissel relates this point to the doctrine of justification.

> Incorporation of the Gentiles, consequently, would become the issue of the new administration, not justification by faith, God help us. Not justification by faith. But the incorporation of the Gentiles. And justification by faith would come to be shorthand for incorporation of the Gentiles apart from their needing to become Jewish. Or, apart from Jewish corruptions of their status, which saw the law as a method by

> which they could accumulate points and so ingratiate themselves with God by way of merit.91

In these words we find a clear acceptance of an important theme in NPP writings: defining justification nonsoteriologically and ecclesio- logically; defining the Jewish "problem" in terms of status. In fairness to Schlissel, however, we may register that he does speak of Jewish attempts to merit favor with God, something few NPP proponents concede. Later in the same talk, furthermore, Schlissel seems to back away from his strong statement above by more tentatively speaking of "the issue of justification by faith [as] linked inextricably to the issue of Gentile inclusion in the church. "92

Schlissel is sensitive to the charge that he has derived these arguments from N. T. Wright. He insists that "contrary to some ignorant allegations, I have read only two essays by him." Where did Schlissel's views come from? "A reading of the Bible. "93

The Federal Vision (2004). That Schlissel has amplified his views more thoroughly since his 2003 talk is evident from his contribution to the 2004 volume, The Federal Vision.94 In this essay, Schlissel reiterates his earlier point that "an emphasis on `justification'" found among many Protestant readings of the Bible "simply does not exist in the Bible. "95 As it is true of Ephesians,96 it is also true of Galatians.

> Galatians was not written to tell us about a new way of salvation: salvation has always been by grace through faith. It was written to guard the new way of inclusion, of being reckoned among the people of God.97

> The issue addressed in [Galatians] was not justification by faith as opposed to covenantal obedience, but justification for the Gentiles apart from becoming Jewish. The Gospel Paul was defending was not assent to a proposition, but was rather the good news that Gentiles need not become Jewish to be Christian.9S

Schlissel's concerns regarding justification are tied throughout this essay to his animadversions to the law/gospel distinction. Justification at Ro mans 3:20, he insists, is not a matter of contrasting "faith versus obedience" (this is "nonsense in every sense") but of Paul's rejection of "Jewish exclusivism"-which "Christ's

resurrection made .. . anachronistic. "99 When we turn to Schlissel's understanding of the office of faith in justification, we will see that his conclusions observed above direct him in a decidedly non-Reformational direction.

Peter Leithart. Leithart's expressions of appreciation for the NPP surface periodically in his writings. We may cite two examples.

Justification at Galatians 2:16. Leithart argues that "especially for Protestants, Paul's introduction of the issue of justification in Galatians 2:16 seems irrelevant to the issues under discussion. "loo Although Luther was correct to say that "we find peace with God through Jesus, by trusting in Him and not by any moral goodness that we can achieve," Paul "was asking different questions and addressing different issues," specifically, "How are Jewish and Gentile believers related in the church?"" This is seen from the fact that "table fellowship has to do with making a covenant, with forming bonds of friendship and communion. Eating with someone shows that we are in a relationship of friendship and peace or that we are forging such a relationship by means of the meal."102 Peter here "was treating the Gentiles as covenant-breakers, as if they were not `righteous,' not `justified.' " Paul's response is that the Gentiles "were part of God's covenant people, since all who have faith in Jesus are justified and should be treated as covenant-keepers and table fellows. "103

Leithart's redefinition of justification will be addressed below. For now we may note that for Leithart the debate at Antioch centered on what constituted the "boundaries of table fellowship." Was the true boundary faith or was it necessary that one believe and "also keep Jewish food laws, observe Jewish food laws, observe Jewish cleanliness regulations, and [be] circumcised"?... The debate, then, was fundamentally ecclesiological not soteriological in nature.

The gospel. What is the gospel? Echoing N. T. Wright, Leithart argues that the gospel is focused not on questions of salvation but on making known Jesus Christ.

> Throughout the New Testament, the gospel is an announcement of what God has done in Jesus (e.g., Acts 2:14-36). It is not a guide on "how to get saved" but a history lesson, telling the story of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. According to the New Testament, through

> these actions, Jesus inaugurated a new epoch of history, a new order of things. This new age is not just one additional stage in God's dealings with His people but the final and climactic epoch of history.... When Jesus appeared, an old age waned to be replaced by a new.105

With Wright, Leithart diminishes the soteriological dimensions of the gospel. The gospel is fundamentally a message that there has been a transition in the ages and that this transition has been effected by "what God has done in Jesus." This does not mean to Leithart that there are no soteriological implications of the gospel. "To be saved means to be delivered from the present evil, Adamic age and transferred into a new age of life, righteousness, and joy."106 But even so these soteriological concerns are properly implications or effects of the gospel rather than the gospel itself. "Applied to individual sinners," Leithart contends, "the gospel is the good news that God has acted to establish a new world and that the blessings and privileges of that world are available to all who will repent and believe. 15107

Justification

It is at this stage that we wish to turn our attention to the doctrine of justification proper. In this segment of our discussion, we will see that the appreciation expressed for NPP exegesis among some FV authors is evident in their treatments of justification. The appropriation of this exegesis drives them to conclusions that place them outside the pale of the Westminster Standards. Let us look at FV views on three particular topics or doctrines, each of which is related to justification: imputation; the righteousness of God and of the believer; faith, faithfulness, and final justification.

Imputation and the Nature or Shape of Justification

We have already observed the patent discomfort expressed by such authors as Lusk and Leithart concerning the confessional doc trine of the covenant of works. Leithart calls into question the Reformed doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity. Lusk finds problems in the "works" principle conventionally understood to belong to the covenant of works. He adopts rather a model based upon Adam's movement from immaturity to maturity. It is unclear how or where, for Lusk, the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity fits in the scheme that he has articulated.

What about the Reformed doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness-his obedience and sufferings, his active and passive obedience-to the believer? What about the doctrine that that righteousness constitutes the sole ground of the believer's justification? We will consider three FV proponents who have written at some length on the doctrine: Lusk, Smith, and Wilson.

Rich Lusk. Lusk is clear that the active obedience of Christ is not imputed to the believer for his justification.

> The notion of [Jesus'] thirty-three years of Torah-keeping being imputed to me is problematic. After all, as a Gentile, I was never under Torah and therefore never under obligation to keep many of the commands Jesus performed. Moreover, much of what Jesus did was, in the nature of the case, not required of others. Surely God does not require everyone to work as a carpenter or to turn water into wine or to raise a twelve year old girl from the dead. These works were not accumulating points that would be credited to Jesus' people; rather, they were vocation fulfilling acts that prepared the way for the "one Man's righteous act," namely his death on the cross....
>
> The active obedience itself, then, is not saving in itself. Rather, it's the precondition of his saving work in his death and resurrection.'"

Such a doctrine, Lusk opines, is subject to the charge of "legal fiction."'" Rather, Lusk argues, "the resurrection is the real centerpiece of the gospel since it is the new thing God has done." The " `active obedience' model ... de-eschatologizes the work of Christ. The new age is not brought by his fulfillment of the old law; it is inaugurated in his resurrection. The gospel, in other words, is thoroughly eschatological. "110

Does this mean a rejection of what has historically come under the banner of the doctrine of imputation? Lusk insists no.

> [N. T. Wright, Don Garlington, and others] uphold the intention of the doctrine of imputation and affirm everything imputation is designed to safeguard. But they cover the same ground in a different way.
>
> These theologians focus on union with Christ. They suggest

> justification presupposes union with Christ. If I am in Christ he is my substitute and representative. All he suffered and accomplished was for me. All he has belongs to me.111
>
> Surely, it is plainly obvious that nothing from the typical "imputation of Christ's active obedience" formulation has been lost-only nuanced. Everything found in that wonderful answer to WSC 33 is preserved. Indeed, the imputation of Christ's active obedience is tightly included in my view, since the verdict the Father passes over the Son in the form of the resurrection is grounded upon his perfect obedience. The imputed verdict brings with it the perfect record of obedience upon which the verdict was based. Thus, my view makes the imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience, as well as the resurrection, integral to the doctrine of justification.'"

What does this mean for the doctrine of justification?

> Justification requires no transfer or imputation of anything. It does not force us to reify "righteousness" into something that can be shuffled around in heavenly accounting books. Rather, because I am in the Righteous One and the Vindicated One, I am righteous and vindicated. My in-Christ-ness makes imputation redundant. I do not need the moral content of his life of righteousness transferred to me; what I need is a share in the forensic verdict passed over him at the resurrection.113

Such a position, in short, "does not necessarily employ the `mechanism' of imputation to accomplish justification, but gets the same result."""

Lusk offers us an overview of his doctrine. He argues, in summary, not that the historic Reformed doctrine of justification is wrong, but that it is inadequate. Justification is, rather, a "three-layered doctrine."""" It consists of three elements: (1) "Jesus' resurrection was his justification." (2) "Jesus' resurrection was our justification as well." Consequently, justification "presupposes union with Christ." This jus tification, we have seen Lusk argue, does not require the doctrine of imputed righteousness. (3) "the resurrection was not only Jesus' justification and our justification; it was also God's justification." Lusk explains: "The resurrection is the righteousness of God; it is the gospel. It is his salvation, his act of covenant keeping on behalf of the world."16

At this point we may offer some critical comments regarding Lusk's discussion. First, Lusk's view puts him out of step with our confessional standards, which argue that the "perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ" is imputed to the believer in his justification. Lusk's protests notwithstanding, the affirmation that Christ's obedience is the ground of the "verdict the Father passes over the Son in the form of the resurrection" is not the equivalent of our confessional statements.

Second, Lusk does not explicitly address the imputation of Christ's passive obedience, but his position seems to be that the death and resurrection of Christ makes it possible for God to pardon those who are united to him. It is not clear, on the terms of Lusk's system, precisely how Christ's death effects pardon. It does seem to be clear, however, that Christ's obedience, his fulfillment of the law, is not imputed to the believer.

This seems to do two things. (1) It reduces justification to pardon only-again, against our Standards, which define justification as the pardon of sin and the accepting and accounting as righteous in the sight of God. (2) It raises the question whether the believer's covenantal faithfulness becomes the ground of his acceptance at the judgment of the last day, that is, whether the believer's covenantal faithfulness has effectively displaced Christ's active obedience in Lusk's scheme of justification. Lusk, of course, has argued in this same essay that the law does not require perfect obedience. This would permit him to say that one's covenantal faithfulness need not be sinlessly perfect to pass muster. But what precisely is the standard or bar that must be met? Lusk suggests that this standard consists in one's not " 'apostatiz[ing]' from the [covenantal] relationship by adultery or desertion."" Given that the law does require perfect obedience, it is difficult to conceive, however, how such modest obedience would satisfy this requirement.

Third, whereas the Westminster Standards do not deny and in fact affirm that Christ was raised for our justification (Larger Cate chism 52), Lusk appears to invest much more in the connection between justification and resurrection than students of the Standards have hitherto done. Lusk appears to be arguing more than that the resurrection was necessary to our justification ("raised for our justification," LC 52). He seems to be arguing that the resurrection is our justification. Coupled with his backtracking from the Reformed doctrine of imputation, Lusk's view does not appear to be an innocent development beyond

the statements of the Standards.

Fourth, Lusk's doctrine seems to share the ontological philosophical skepticism that we have been observing in certain FV proponents. Imputation is derided as conceiving "righteousness" as something reified.'" This nominalism, we may observe, exists in striking relief against the realism evident in many FV proponents' discussions of redemptive sacramental efficacy.

Ralph Smith. Smith provides fewer data in answering this question, but what he does provide leaves certain questions unanswered. We may recall from our discussion of imputation that Smith has rejected Kline's argument that a denial of the covenant of works entails a denial of the gospel because of the connection forged by the New Testament between the work of Adam and the work of Christ.119 Smith has, himself, rejected the covenant of works and so has interest in this question.

Smith argues that "[Meredith] Kline is correct in affirming that the facts that we are involved in Adam's sin, that our sins were laid upon Christ, and that we are counted as righteous because of His faithfulness to the covenant (Kline's revised view of merit) cannot be denied without denying the gospel." Smith hastens to add, however, "To affirm these truths, one does not have to agree with Kline's particular formulation of the covenant of works or any other view of the covenant of works."""

What therefore is the significance of Christ's death?

> In contrast with Adam, Christ comes into the world as a representative of a race of men under the curse and out of the garden. As our representative, He must be faithful to the covenant and die on the cross to win eternal life for us. It is not "merit" that is imputed to us, but a righteous status before God.'21

But for this latter statement, one might have read Smith's endorsement of Kline's position (although not his terminology) as implying acceptance of the imputation of Christ's obedience to believers for justification. When Smith speaks positively of what is imputed to believers, however, he speaks of "a righteous status before God." What is left unclear by this statement is what constitutes the ground of this righteous status. Is Smith working under the particular "union with Christ"

model promoted by Lusk? Is Smith working under the "union with Christ" model of classical Reformed orthodoxy? Smith's refusal to specify Christ's sufferings and obedience as that which is imputed to the believer at the very least calls for further clarification on Smith's part.

Douglas Wilson. Wilson is more accepting of historic Reformed formulations of imputation. He denies that justification consists of "an infusion of righteousness" and argues that it "is the pardon for sins and the legal reckoning of our persons as righteous."" Wilson argues, however, that this doctrine is inadequate and that we must speak of a doctrine of corporate justification, a doctrine that Wilson insists "does not contradict the realities of individual justification."123

The doctrine of corporate justification "begins with the justification of Jesus, our Head, which cannot be thought of as justification in the tradition of crisis conversions. 11124

In support of this statement, Wilson, citing Leithart, argues that Romans 4:25 and 1 Timothy 3:16 are the exegetical foundation for this doctrine.125 We may also recall that Lusk cites these passages in support of his doctrine of resurrectional-individual justification. It may be, therefore, that Wilson distinguishes two doctrines (individual/corporate justification) that Lusk appears to have collapsed into a single reality.

Wilson ties the doctrine of corporate justification to his understanding of the relationship between election and covenant, an understanding that we shall explore in the next chapter. Consequently, while all members of the church share in this verdict of corporate justification ("God publicly vindicated us, owned us as His people, and established us in the world as His own righteous people. 11121), some will remain "unjustified members of the Justi- fled Body. "127 This doctrine, Wilson reminds us, corresponds to the necessary "distinction between the covenant and secret election. "128

In summary, Wilson is more measured than Lusk in his appropriation of a corporate understanding of justification. It is not immediately evident, however, that corporate and individual justification may coexist as peacefully as Wilson suggests. This is so because FV conceptions of covenantal and secret election are by no means easily distinguishable-whether in theory or in practice.

Righteousness and the Doctrine of Justification

The biblical language of righteousness has traditionally played an important role in discussions of the doctrine of justification. The ground of believers' justification is said to be divine "righteousness," and justification is at times said to demonstrate God's "righteousness" before the world. NPP proponents generally argue, however, that God's "righteousness" is his covenantal faithfulness, his pledge to keep his promises to Israel. Frequently rejected is an understanding of "righteousness" as the obedience and merits of Christ imputed to the believer in his justification. 129

Coupled with FV discomfort with the Reformed doctrine of imputation is a reworking of our understanding of "righteousness" in the context of justification. In this reworking we see the influence of certain NPP readings of the biblical language of righteousness.

Peter Leithart. Leithart's essay, "Judge Me, 0 God," available on the Internet and recently published,13o is widely esteemed by FV proponents as a significant step forward in our understanding of the biblical language of righteousness and justification.131 Leithart first takes issue with the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification. He does so in two ways. First, he claims that Protestants have overprivileged the "courtroom" metaphor of the doctrine of justifica- tion.132 This is a true representation of the biblical data, Leithart contends, but an inadequate one. The Reformation has "illegitimately narrowed and to some extent distorted the biblical doctrine" by such a maneuver.... Protestants, Leithart contends, have nevertheless not been blind to the existence of what Turretin calls the "improper" uses in Scripture of the term Justification. 134 Second, Leithart believes that recent scholarship's conclusions that "righteousness ... is a covenant term, describing loyalty within a covenanted relationship" must be taken seriously. 135

God's righteousness. Consequently, when we speak of God's righteousness in justification, we are speaking of God's "keeping his covenant promises with those counted righteous."136 This is why the Reformation's insistence on forensic justification has attenuated the biblical doctrine.

> The Protestant doctrine has been too rigid in separating justification and sanctification.... I argue below that, when examined under a military-

> conflictual metaphor rather than solely under the imagery of the "courtroom," justification and definitive sanctification are not merely simultaneous, nor merely twin effects of the single event of union with Christ (though I believe that is the case). Rather, they are the same act. God's declaration that we are justified takes the form of deliverance from sin, death, and Satan. God declares us righteous by delivering us from all our enemies.137

Leithart wishes to remind us that he is not speaking of "infusion of grace" in the way of "progressive sanctification." After all, "grace is not the kind of thing that can be infused (since it is not a `thing')."138

In summary, for Leithart, justification is "never merely declaring a verdict," rather it includes the execution and declaration of that verdict in such phenomena as "deliverance from enemies" and "restoration of good fortune."139 This point, Leithart will argue at length, is established from the way in which the Old Testament (Psalms and Prophets) uses "righteousness" language and the way in which the apostle Paul quotes that Old Testament "righteousness" language in Romans. This state of affairs explains Rom 6:7 ("justified from sin where the term "justify" must mean "liberate" or "deliver:" "Our vindication takes the form of deliverance from accusing and attacking enemies."'" It also explains the Pauline connection between the resurrection and our justification.

> For Paul as well as for David, to "justify" is not merely to issue a statement that so-and-so is righteous; God declares His verdict of "not guilty" by delivering the "righteous one" from oppression and from enemies. As Richard Gaffin has argued, the resurrection of Jesus is the ground of our justification (Rom. 4:25) because it is first of all the vindication (justification) of Jesus (1 Tim. 3:16). The resurrection is not the result of a prior verdict from the Father; the resurrection is instead the public declaration of the verdict.... By raising Jesus, the Father proclaimed that His Son, condemned by Roman and Jew alike, was in fact the Righteous One and was righteous precisely in His obedience to death on a cross. Obviously, the resurrection did more than change Jesus' "legal" status. Deliverance from death was the verdict.
>
> Jesus' resurrection is the paradigmatic case of justification. We are justified because we are joined to the One who has been justified by being

> raised from the dead. Since Jesus' justification is the pattern of our justification, our justification must likewise involve deliverance from the power of death and from the threat of enemies, including the enemies of sin and Satan. In this sense, justification and definitive sanctification are two ways of describing the same act: God renders a verdict in our favor by cutting off our enemies ... and by delivering us from their power. This is still a "forensic" act, but it is "forensic" in the full biblical sense.'41

It is fair to say that Leithart's doctrine of justification represents a marked shift from the Reformed, confessional doctrine, which conceives justification to be a strictly forensic grace.

The believer's righteousness. When we speak of the believer's righteousness in justification, are we also speaking in terms of covenantal faithfulness? Leithart addresses the believer's righteousness.

> "Justification," too, is intimately connected with the covenant. In Greek, the word "justify" is related to the word normally translated into English as "righteous," and throughout Scripture, "righteousness" and related words refer to correct behavior within some kind of covenant relationship. Righteousness is conformity to the demands of a covenant.... The gospel of Christ is a revelation of God's righteousness because, in Christ, God has fulfilled all the promises made and sworn to Abraham, and thereby has shown that He does what He is obligated to do by His covenant with Israel. In this context [Gal. 2:11-21], to "justify" someone is to count him as righteous, that is, as a covenant-keeper.142

In addressing Paul's doctrine of justification at Galatians 2, Leithart might appear to conclude that the believer's "righteousness" in view is his own covenantal faithfulness. Recently, however, Leithart has claimed that this conclusion is a misreading of the above statement.143 "Justification in the quotation has to do with God's counting someone as a covenant-keeper, not with the justified person's own covenant-keeping. Sinners who [are] covenant-breakers are counted as covenant-keepers because we are in the covenant-keeper Jesus, and His covenant-keeping is regarded as, and is, ours through faith."'" We may respond to Leithart in two ways. First, it is by no means clear that the quoted excerpt in question carries the sense that Leithart has recently assigned to it. At the very best, it is an ambiguous statement. Second, in charity we may and ought

to welcome Leithart's latter statement of his view. For Leithart, then, the believer's "righteousness" in justification is not his own covenant keeping, but inextricably tied to the covenant keeping of Christ to whom he is united.

We may make four observations by way of critical interaction with Leithart's comments. (1) It should be clear that Leithart's discussion of justification does far more than supplement the Reformed doctrine. We have departures from the doctrine, not least of which is a rejection of justification as a strictly forensic doctrine.

(2) Leithart advances his position in a hermeneutically objectionable way. The doctrine of justification, he appears to argue, should consist of the sum total of biblical uses of the term justify. But systematic theologians do not argue that our theological terms should be defined in that way. Leithart appears to read the Bible as a systematic-theological textbook. But it is not. That is why systematic-theological uses of certain terms may legitimately differ from their biblical counterparts. That is why Turretin can quite rightly speak of proper and improper uses of the term justify.

(3) Leithart's definition of justification in terms of what he calls "definitive sanctification" illegitimately defines the doctrine of justification in nonforensic, transformational categories. I have my doubts that "definitive sanctification" is a biblical teaching at all. Its descriptions frequently appear indistinguishable from those of regeneration. But even on Leithart's own terms, notwithstanding his qualifications, such a teaching still compromises the forensic doctrine of justification. He concedes that at Romans 6:7, Paul does not have guilt or the courtroom in mind.145 We have rather the "deliver[ance] from [sin's] hand, from his lordship and mastery. "146 It is difficult to conceive of this deliverance, however, in nontransformational categories, that is, in terms that are removed from or other than the renewal of the sinner in regeneration.

(4) Leithart's formulation is consistent with the philosophical skepticism that we have earlier observed to surface in his writingsa reluctance to speak of divine righteousness in terms of an imputed "something." Rather the divine righteousness is fundamentally conceived in terms of relationship and activity.

Mark Home. More briefly, we may see that Horne holds a similar view of righteousness in justification. He argues that one may adopt Wright's

understanding of the "righteousness of God" and yet remain faithful to the Standards' teaching that "the righteousness of Christ is imputed to sinners who are united to Christ by faith. "147 God's righteousness is "his own character, his faithfulness, demonstrated in his work of salvation for his people-displaying Christ publicly as a propitiation in his blood."" Such a view is taught not only at Romans 3:1-6 but also at Romans 3:21-26.

Citing Genesis 15:6 as quoted by James (2:23), Horne argues that "being given the status of righteous before God means being made God's friend."" Elsewhere he speaks of the believer's righteousness as "blessings from God that are a public declaration that his people are righteous in his sight."" More generally he will speak of it as "our vindication from God. "151

In conclusion, while Horne wants to stress that he is not denying the Reformed doctrine of imputation, it is clear that he advances positive definitions of divine and human righteousness that move in a different and noncomplementary track-the track of relationship and reception of status.

Faith, Faithfulness, and Final Justification

Our final stop in our study of FV proponents' discussions of justification touches upon a cluster of related questions and issues: the nature and office of faith in justification; the nature of what is termed "final justification" and the place of one's faith and obedience in that event. With all Reformed students of Scripture, FV proponents stress that saving faith necessarily yields obedience. But some FV proponents seem reluctant to affirm that faith, in justification, is exclusively receptive.

Steve Schlissel. Steve Schlissel has argued that the contrast between law and gospel does not have a significant role in the doctrine of justification. Justification is primarily concerned with the question of the place of Jews and Gentiles within the people of God. This has implications for the place of faith in justification.

> When we say that Gentiles are incorporated into Israel by faith "alone," the word "alone" is not used to set faith against covenantal obedience. It is rather used to distinguish the true means of covenantal inclusion from three erroneous ones: 1) That one must become a Jew to have access to

> God in Christ. 2) That one must approach God through the Levitical priesthood, offerings, and Temple. 3) That one is made right with God by one's own merit.152

Schlissel is clear that faith in justification excludes merit. What he does not necessarily exclude, in the above definition, is one's (nonmeritorious) covenantal obedience from consideration in the act of justification. Faith is not necessarily conceived as exclusively receptive in justification.

Such a conclusion is warranted when we consider that Schlissel argues that Protestants have historically misread Romans 3:28. The "deeds of the law," Schlissel argues, are "something uniquely Jewish" and "not . . . something uniquely convicting," for "Paul never sets faith against obedience."153 The contrast in view in these verses, Schlissel reiterates a little later in his argument, is not "faith versus obedience. 11154

Such a conclusion is also warranted when we consider Schlissel's interpretation of Romans 2:13.

> This statement is not a theoretical proposition concerning some meritorious method of being righteous before God. The presuppositions undergirding Paul's statement include the facts that the Law is "obeyable," that truly responding to the Law (the Word) in faith does justify, and that such justification is not an exclusively Jewish possession.'"

The implication of Schlissel's reading of this verse is that justification embraces one's faith-prompted, nonmeritorious obedience to a law that can be kept.

In summary, when Schlissel states that "justification by faith would come to be shorthand for incorporation of the Gentiles apart from their needing to be Jewish,"'" it seems that the distinguishing characteristic of faith in justification is that it is not uniquely Jewish. The contrast between "faith" and "works" in view is not centered upon a Pauline rejection of activity in justification.

Rich Lusk. When we consider the office of faith in justification in Lusk's writings, we must remember three important conclusions of Lusk's work that we have already drawn. First, Lusk has rejected the classical Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works, particularly the "works" principle active in that

administration. He has rejected this covenant of works as surfacing in some sense in the law.'" Lusk casts doubt upon the historic Reformed connection between perfection of obedience and entrance into life.

Second, Lusk understands the believer's justification to be explicable in terms of one's union with Christ and the resurrection of Christ, to the exclusion of an imputed righteousness. The believer is united to the resurrected Christ and thereby shares in his glorified status-since Christ was "justified" the believer was "justified." Third, Lusk rejects the doctrine of imputed righteousness. The active obedience of Christ is a precondition for the believer's justification, but is not imputed to the believer for his justification. Given his polemicizing the doctrine of imputed righteousness generally, it is unclear that Lusk accepts in classical terms the imputation of even the passive obedience of Christ. It may be, for Lusk, that Christ's sufferings and death in some way make it possible for God to pardon the sins of those whom he unites to his Son.

The tenses of justification. These three considerations raise the question of the office of faith in justification. In order to address this question, we must address one prior question: the "tenses" of justification in Lusk's writings. Lusk stresses that we must understand justification in two senses: future and present justification.15S This is so because "justification partakes of the same eschatological, already/notyet dynamic as every other aspect of our salvation."""

Lusk speaks of final justification and salvation interchangeably.

> Works of faith-filled obedience, in a secondary way, cause our final justification and salvation. Works are the means through which we come into possession of eternal life. The path of obedience is the way we must trod if we are to be justified at the last day. For Calvin, works are non-contributory instruments and non-meritorious conditions of final salvation.16'

In view of this conflation, Lusk appears to understand all that is requisite for salvation to be true of what is requisite for justification at the last day. Is this simply saying that our good works evidence the truth of our faith-is that all that the verdict of final justification will ask of our works? No.

Works do not justify in their own right since they can never withstand the

> scrutiny of God's inspection. But we will not be justified without them either. They are not merely evidential (e.g., proof of our faith), but even causal or instrumental ("means") in our final salvation. Faith is the sole instrument of initial justification, but faith comes to be perfected by good works. At the last day, faith, as the solitary instrument of union with Christ, and obedience, as the fruit of our union with Christ, will be one and the same-distinguishable, yes, but separable, no.161

As with the formulations of Norman Shepherd concerning justifica- tion,162 Lusk's formulations are vulnerable to the charge of rendering justification a process and of denying the uniquely receptive office of faith in justification.

In a certain sense, we can see the necessity of such formulations. In the absence of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, some positive act of law keeping must be produced on the sinner's behalf at the last judgment. For Lusk, this seems to be the believer's covenantal and faith-prompted obedience, graciously accepted by God.163

But what of the perfection required by the law? Lusk responds that the law never required perfection-it was given to sinners whom God knew could not keep it. Such an understanding informs Lusk's interpretation of James 2.

> [It] cannot be referring to a demonstration of justification, e.g., justification does [not] and cannot mean something like "show to be justified." Rather, James has in view the same kind of justification as Paul-forensic, soteric justification. Good works justify persons in James 2, not faith or one's status as a justified sinner. James is not telling his readers how to "justify their justification" or how to "give evidence of a true and lively faith." Instead he says their persons will not be justified by faith alone, but also by good works of obedience they have done. The use of the preposition "by" is important since it indicates a sort of dual instrumentality in justification. In other words, in some sense, James is speaking of a justification in which faith and works combine together to justify. Future justification is according to one's life pattern. No one dare claim these works to be meritorious, but they are necessary.'"

Such conclusions, Lusk contends, do not threaten the doctrine of sola fide, which refers to our "initial justification."

> Final justification, however, is according to works. This pole of justification takes into account the entirety of our lives-the obedience we've performed, the sins we've committed, the confession and repentance we've done. At the last day our works will not have any meritorious value. In that sense, even before the great white judgment throne, we will plead nothing but the blood and resurrection of Jesus. We will place no confidence in anything we have accomplished-even what God has done in us and through us! Nevertheless, God's verdict over us will be in accord with, and therefore in some sense based upon, the life we have lived.'65

Lusk argues that this system is nonmedieval and non-semi-Pelagian: Lusk believes his system to be fully "monergistic," to give the "utter sufficiency and uniqueness of Christ's self-offering on the cross" its due, to take into account God's "gracious forbearance and fatherly indulgence," and to explain the biblical descriptions of "believers and their works" as "good" and "worthy. "166

Development or retraction? In a recent article defending himself against Reformed critics, Lusk makes statements concerning final justification that appear different from the statements examined above.16'

> Rome wouldn't have me because I insist that justification is fully forensic and is received by faith alone. With the Reformers, and against Trent, I view justification as a law court term, not a process of moral renewal. Justification is the divine verdict, pronounced over us once and for all, when we are united to Christ by faith.
>
> This does not preclude a future dimension to our justification, but it does mean that whatever justification is yet to come, when we are "openly acquitted" at the last day, will simply be a renewal and application of the verdict already received at conversion (WSC 38). Even when God continually forgives our sin .... we are receiving nothing more than a reapplication of his prior justification. My colloquium essay does not even hint that I believe in infusion (a term I never use), as [Morton] Smith claims. In no way do I believe that our works produce or cause our justification. In no way do I suggest our works satisfy God's justice or form the ground of the favorable verdict we receive. These things shouldn't even come up for discussion; they're not on the table with the

AAT [Auburn Avenue Theology] as far as I can tell.168

What are we to make of such statements? We may certainly welcome them as improvements over previous formulations. But certain questions remain.

In an earlier essay, Lusk has spoken of faith-produced works as "causes" or "means" of our salvation, a term, we have observed, that appears to be used interchangeably with our final justification. Lusk has also spoken of our final justification in ways that lend support to the conclusion that he conceives justification as a process and not a definitive act. This is evident from the way in which he speaks of the verdict of justification both as "pronounced over us once and for all" in the present, and as "in accord with, and therefore in some sense based upon, the life we have lived" at the day of judgment. His critics, then, were certainly warranted in raising the concerns that they did.

When we consider that Lusk's previous statements were attempts to reflect positively and nonpolemically on justification; and that Lusk has, in his response to his critics, not retracted those statements, it becomes difficult to take these recent comments at face value. We may be grateful for Lusk's recent affirmations, but our appreciation must be tempered by his prior and contrary formulations that he has not retracted.

The instruments of justification. Lusk's argument becomes even more complex when we take into account his development of a point referenced above-that we may speak of multiple instruments in justification.

He has spoken of faith and works as co-instrumental in final justification. In a short article, Lusk wishes to hold to the "unique role" of faith in justification. But he argues that "works can be instrumental in another sense," namely, at final justification, which Lusk again appears to use interchangeably with the term "salvation. "169

Lusk has also spoken of a third instrument in justification: bap- tism.10 In discussing present justification, Lusk will even speak of "baptism's instrumentality in justification," citing Acts 2:38, which he glosses as "baptism is `for' the remission of sins. "171 Because the Westminster Confession (11.4) and the Shorter Catechism (92) both use a form of the word apply, Lusk concludes that we may rightly say that "baptism is the instrument through which Christ is

applied to us unto justification." That is, "faith is the instrument of justification on our end, while baptism is the instrument on God's side. God offers Christ and applies Christ to us through the instrument of baptism. We receive Christ as he is offered in the sacrament with the outstretched and open hand of faith. Baptism is not a good work we do to earn justification; it is a gift of grace through which God grants justification to faith. 11172

Critique. We may offer four points of criticism of the above considerations concerning faith in justification.

(1) The apparent interchangeability of the terms justification and salvation (so that what may be predicated of the latter may be predicated of the former) is neither biblical nor confessional. While Paul may say, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12), he never says, "Work out your justification." The sinner is entirely receptive in justification. This is because what is received is entirely extrinsic to the sinner-the sufferings and obedience of Jesus Christ. The Larger Catechism speaks of obedience as "the way which [God] hath appointed them to salvation," but not to justification (LC 32).

(2) Lusk places too much distance between what he terms "present" and "final" justification. Reformed theologians who employ this language often do so in a guarded manner. Final justification does not necessarily imply that justification is a process, that what is declared in our present justification can be at all altered, supplemented, or diminished, or that good works cooperate with faith as an instrument of justification. Rather, in the language of our catechism, what transpires at the judgment is the open acknowledgment and acquittal of the believer. The ground of that acquittal is and can be nothing other than the perfect righteousness of Christ. The believer's works simply evidence the truth of that saving faith by which he has appropriated Christ and his righteousness. But Lusk's formulations clearly imply a process: he speaks of the co-instrumentality of faith and the obedience of faith; of good works in such a way that they appear to be the necessary supplement to the basis of the believer's present justification; of good works as playing a "more-than-evidentiary" role at the judgment.

(3) Lusk appears to understand our good works to be necessary to our justification. Had he said that our good works are necessary evidences of our justification, we could not quibble. But Lusk explicitly uses the language of

means or causality in relating our works to our justification. He argues that the language of "evidence" is insufficient to relate works to our final justification.

Lusk appears to find our works acceptable in justification because they are nonmeritorious. But Paul's concern with works in justification is not merit as such. It is with the fact that they constitute activity, and such activity is categorically excluded from the arena of Justification (Rom. 4:4-5; 11:5-6). Lusk appears to have missed the concerns raised by friendly critics that he has imported merit back into justification.173 He is satisfied that, having dismissed the term merit, his system is impervious to merit. We must continue to raise the question of whether Lusk's system does not more closely resemble the medieval systems from which he is understandably concerned to distance himself.

(4) Lusk is, at the very least, injudicious in using the language of instrumentality to speak of baptism and faith in connection with our present justification. It suggests to the reader or hearer that baptism constitutes a necessary ceremonial complement to the act of justification-that in the absence of the administration of the sacrament of baptism, I cannot be justified. This, however, is patently unbiblical. We might consider the example of the thief on the cross (Luke 23). Such an affirmation, furthermore, opens a wide door to the sacramentalism we see in the Roman Catholic Church, which also employs the language of baptismal instrumentality in justification.

Conclusions

We can now specify the challenges that the views expressed by FV proponents above pose to the doctrines of the Westminster Standards. These views may have gained currency among FV proponents other than those surveyed above. In the absence of that evidence, however, these views, of course, should only be taken as representative of their respective proponents.

(1) We have observed a denial of the imputation of Christ's "perfect obedience and full satisfaction" (LC 70, cf. 71-73), with that denial falling most heavily on the doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ.

(2) We have observed a departure from understanding resurrection to be necessary for our justification (LC 52) to understanding resurrection to be our justification.

(3) We have observed justification being framed in more than forensic categories, namely, the category of transformation, thereby blurring the necessary distinction between justification and sanctification (justification "pardons" sin; sanctification "subdues" it, LC 77).

(4) We have observed an interchangeability of justification and salvation, two terms that both Scripture and our Standards intentionally distinguish.

(5) Whereas our Standards speak of the day of judgment as the "open acknowledgement and acquittal" of the believer, thereby making public what has unalterably transpired in his justification, we have observed a view of "final justification" that appears to supplement the verdict of "present justification."

(6) Whereas our Standards speak of justification as an "act," we have observed formulations that render justification a process.

(7) We have observed affirmations that good works are necessary to the believer's justification, against the Standards' insistence that saving faith simply "receives and rests upon Christ and his righteousness" in justification (LC 72).

(8) Whereas our Standards speak of faith as the sole instrument of justification, we have observed not fewer than three instruments proposed, at various stages, in believers' justification.

Chapter 4

Covenant and Election

We inaugurated our study of the Federal Vision by examining what, according to FV proponents, a covenant is and how this understanding informs or transforms our understanding of the Trinity. We moved in the first of two trajectories in the previous two chapters: the nature and order of the covenants in biblical history, and the doctrine of justification.

We now are prepared to launch a second and no less important trajectory. We begin with a study of the way in which covenant and election are related. This study will stem from two conclusions drawn in the opening chapter: the FV doctrine of covenantal objectivity and the FV doctrine of the undifferentiated nature of covenantal membership. From our studies and conclusions in this chapter, we will be prepared to consider in the next chapter FV discussions concerning the nature of covenantal membership and their doctrines of perseverance, assurance, and apostasy.

Norman Shepherd

We have observed a general level of appreciation for what the NPP has done for Pauline exegesis. While FV proponents are not altogether agreed upon the degree of their appreciation for the NPP or upon the way(s) in which the NPP should be appropriated, we have seen that these appropriations have had a significant impact on their own conceptions of biblical history and of the doctrine of justification.

When we turn to those concerns raised by FV proponents that we shall address in this and the next chapter, we find a single figure who has played a

significant role in shaping the way in which certain FV proponents have articulated their understanding of election and covenant. This figure is Norman Shepherd, professor of systematic theology from 1961 to 1982 at Westminster Theological Seminary, and the focus of a storm of controversy at the seminary and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church that centered upon his teachings on justification and, back of that, election and the covenant. Peter Leithart, Mark Horne, and Rich Lusk have all expressed their appreciation for Shepherd's writings on just this point.' Other writers, such as John Barach and Douglas Wilson, have framed "covenant" and "election" in a manner reminiscent of Norman Shepherd's characteristic formu- lations.Z In what follows, we will summarize the teaching of Shepherd as he relates covenant and election, defines the nature of covenantal membership, and relates covenantal membership to baptism.'

Covenant and Election

Shepherd argues that the Reformed tradition tends to read covenant through the eyes of election. Election, rather, must be read through the eyes of covenant. This orientation gives rise to a distinct method of preaching and evangelism. In responding to what he has termed the predominant regenerational model of preaching and evangelism, Shepherd argues that such a system has come into existence because covenant has been strained through the category of election. The solution consists of reversing this order.

> The prophets and apostles viewed election from the perspective of the covenant of grace, whereas Reformed theologians of a later day have tended to view the covenant of grace from the perspective of election.
>
> From the perspective of the covenant there is mystery because man is the creature and God is the Creator. Man cannot know God exhaustively; God remains incomprehensible. Man can never know the decree as God knows the decree, and for that reason man can not begin to reflect on his salvation from the point of the decree although his salvation originates in the predestinating love and purpose of God. To look at covenant from the perspective of election is ultimately to yield to the primal temptation to be as God. The proper stance for Adam and for all men after him is a covenantal stance of faithful obedience-from which perspective alone election can be understood as grace.'

Shepherd, then, argues for election as understood through covenant by appealing to the Creator/creature distinction. To approach the decree independently of or prior to the covenant is to deny the incomprehensibility of God and man's finitude as a creature.

Shepherd also contends that because the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 "arises out of and is patterned after the covenant made with Abraham," Christ bequeaths to the church a methodology that is oriented to the covenant and not to election or regeneration.' Consequently, the covenant will give rise to a method of preaching and evangelism that is distinct from that which arises from a regenerational or election-centered model. What are the contours of this model?

For one thing, Shepherd says, covenant evangelism "does not address men in the first place as a mixed multitude of elect and reprobate with a view to separating the former from the latter." Rather, "evangelism addresses men as covenant breakers in rebellion against God and opens up to all men covenant life in union and communion with God."6 Men, then, are to be divided, but along the lines of covenantal terminology not decretal terminology. We might observe parenthetically in Shepherd's latter statement a matter that could admit of further clarification: when evangelism addresses certain individuals as "covenant breakers in rebellion against God," which covenant does Shepherd have in mind?

Consequently, the mode of address to an audience will be in "utter sincerity and without equivocation."' Shepherd, apparently sensitive to the charge that Reformed preaching, in its concern to safeguard the doctrines of election and the limited atonement, mutes biblical exhortation to the sinner,' responds that covenantal evangelism does not blunt or compromise the offer of the gospel to the sinner.

> The evangelist labors in the confidence that God really stands behind the message which he has authorized him to preach to all men. This is evident in the fact that God has wrought a finished and complete redemption in terms of which salvation, and not merely the possibility of salvation, is offered sincerely and without equivocation to all....
>
> With respect to this verse of Scripture [John 3:16], the essence of the gospel, the Arminian finds it necessary to hedge on the absolute

> sufficiency of the atonement, and the Calvinist frequently hedges on the extent of the world because both look at the words [of John 3:16] in terms of the doctrine of election. From the perspective of the covenant all of the words mean exactly what they say.9

Shepherd then concludes that the "Reformed evangelist can and must say on the basis of John 3:16, Christ died to save you ... He died for people, for you and for me."10 Quickly anticipating criticism that he has compromised the doctrine of the limited atonement, Shepherd responds that his critics would be correct were he speaking from "the perspective of election."11 But John 3:16 is "embedded in the covenant documents of the New Testament" and is therefore "not an elaboration of the doctrine of election as God views election or a commentary on the extent of the atonement in an absolute sense, but covenant truth.""

The Nature of Covenantal Election

Shepherd claims that the Scripture speaks of election and reprobation in principally corporate and covenantal and not individual and decretal terms. He will take up consideration of how election and reprobation are to be understood within the covenant so considered. He argues that even as "no man knows the decree of God as God knows His decree" so "in this sense no man knows who are elect and who are reprobate. "13 Even so, men abuse the language of election and reprobation by attempting to use this language from the very same perspective of God. When they do so they therefore conclude that "if you are elect, you're safe. Heaven is assured. You can relax. There are no mortal dangers. The only concern is to seek for some assurance that one is elect and that process may, of course, cause some heartache."" Nevertheless, Shepherd cautions, "Men do not need to have insight into the eternal decree of God in order to be able to use the words `elect' and `reprobate' of particular persons."" When we remember that "all of Biblical language is covenant language, then we may use these terms properly, that is, as covenantal terms.

Shepherd offers three biblical examples as illustrations of the doctrine of covenantal election. He draws them from Ephesians 1:3-14, John 15:1-8, and the language of election and reprobation as applied to nations in the Old Testament.

Ephesians 1:3-14. Shepherd addresses Ephesians 1:3-14 at more than one point in his writings as proof that Scripture understands election through the lens

of the covenant." He observes that the objects of election are specified to be "us" (v. 4), the "saints" of Ephesians 1:1. The question is why Paul indiscriminately addresses the church at Ephesus as the "elect" of God.

> One could say ... that Paul knew, as an organ of revelation, that each and every member of that congregation, together with himself, was eternally elect of God. The utter artificiality of [this view] ... will satisfy few interpreters. One could argue that there were nonelect in the congregation but that they are not addressed by the letter.... But concretely, are we to think that Paul addressed only some of the members on the roll of the Ephesian church and had nothing to say to the rest? ...
>
> [Rather] Paul speaks from the perspective of observable covenant reality and concludes from the visible faith and sanctity of the Ephesians that they are the elect of God. He addresses them as such and encourages them to think of themselves as such."

The language of election, as applied to these saints, therefore rests "on the basis of the relation which the Ephesians sustain to the covenant of grace."" Alternately, "unbelievers can be called reprobate because they show the marks of their reprobation in disobedience. "20 Shepherd will stress that this distinction between elect and reprobate, while manifested in "behavior," has its "roots in the will of God from before the foundation of the world. 1121

John 15:1-8. Shepherd rejects a common Reformed explanation of John 15:1-8: that there are some branches that are in Christ "outwardly," and others that are "in Christ `inwardly' or savingly. "22 Such terminology is reflective of viewing the covenant from the standpoint of election, and not vice versa. This distinction, Shepherd maintains, nullifies the warnings of verses 1-8 to the covenant community. The "outward branches cannot profit from it," and the "inward branches do not need [it]." When we read this passage covenantally, however, we have a "grand exhortation to covenant faithfulness enveloped in the overflowing grace of Christ."23 This exhortation, we may note, is without explicit reference to the doctrine of decretal election.

The language of election and reprobation as applied to nations in the Old Testament. Some of Shepherd's most fertile reflections on this subject fall under this category: the application to individuals of the biblical language of election

and reprobation affirmed of nations. Shepherd stresses that concomitant with covenantal election are "dangers," "temptations," and the necessity of "persever[ance]."24A biblical example of this dynamic is the nation of Israel. Citing Deuteronomy 7:9-11, Shepherd argues that "election ... establishes Israel in the covenant, in the way of righteousness, and if Israel does not walk in that way, Israel will most surely be destroyed."" The rejection of Israel as an "elect nation" proved not to be a hypothetical scenario, but historical fact.26 The crises of 722 B.c. and 587/6 B.c., however, did not prove to be the end of the story.

> Now, you see, if the exodus is the great election, then the exile is the great rejection. It is surpassed only by Israel's election in the restoration and her rejection in 70 A.D. because she turned her back upon her Messiah.27

> If the Exodus is the great election of Israel, as we saw, the exile is the great rejection or reprobation of Israel (2 Kings 17:20).... And the same holds true of Judah. Nevertheless, precisely the rejected nation is once again elect [citing Isa. 14:1].2S

> Israel is the elect nation. God did not choose the other nations.... God has passed them by. And He punished those nations for their sins and He did that according to His own will. And, in comparison with elect Israel, the nations were reprobate. Nevertheless, in the fulness of time, the nations are called into covenant with God to be numbered among the elect.29

Nations, then, may in a covenantal sense vacillate between election and reprobation. Their status as elect or reprobate is a function of their perseverance in obedience to the stipulations of the covenant.

Shepherd applies this observation to individuals by observing that "what is true of the nation is also true of the person," citing as examples of this principle Judas Iscariot, the offending Corinthian of 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, Simon Magus (Acts 8), and the false teachers of 2 Peter 2:20 ("For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first."). Each of these examples, Shepherd stresses, shows us "elect persons who are excommunicated. 1130

Shepherd also argues that the apostle Paul has applied this national principle

to individuals in his epistle to the Galatians. Having referred to Gentiles as "sinners" (Gal. 2:15), he subsequently speaks of believing Gentiles as "saints" (Gal. 3:28). "The reprobate has been elected to eternal life," Shepherd concludes.31

When we consider election and reprobation as covenantal terms, then, we will find that these terms undergird both biblical exhortation and perseverance in covenantal faithfulness. "Both reprobation and election are presented as covenant truth. The way in which God realizes election is the way of faith. Election does not annul the need for faith but calls forth faith. Because man is by nature unbelieving, he must receive faith as a gift."32 When employed in this light, Shepherd maintains, such terms are faithful not only to the best of Reformed teaching, but also to biblical descriptions of both election and reprobation.

The Church: Visible and Invisible?

Shepherd undermines the traditional distinction between the church visible and invisible. This observation is a just inference from what we have witnessed him argue in the preceding section. If we are to understand election and reprobation in the sense that Shep herd has maintained, it becomes impossible to sustain with any consistency the distinction between the church visible and invisible.

In his observations on John 15:1-8, Shepherd appears to argue in this vein.

> The word "inward" and "outward" are often used in Reformed theology to describe the two sides of the covenant from the perspective of election. Indeed, the seeming indispensability of this formula is just indicative of the fact that the covenant is prevailingly viewed from the perspective of election, rather than election from the perspective of the covenant. The formula is necessary to account for the fact that the covenant community appears to embrace both elect and non-elect. The non-elect are then said to be only "outwardly" "in" the covenant.
>
> The pair of terms, outwardly-inwardly, are biblical, but when Paul uses them in Romans 2:28, 29, however, he does not employ them as virtual synonyms for elect and reprobate. They describe the difference

> between covenantally loyal Jews and disobedient transgressors of the law. The categories derive their meaning from the covenant, not from the decree.33

While, to be sure, the terms inward/outward, or elect/reprobate do not correspond exactly to all usages of invisible/visible, there is sufficient overlap to warrant the conclusion that Shepherd has posed problems in, if not functionally departed from, this standard Reformed ecclesiological distinction.34

Baptism

Shepherd argues that baptism, the objective sign of the covenant, must be given a higher premium than Reformed theologians have hitherto assigned it. When we bear in mind that a concern for subjectivism within the Reformed tradition (a subjectivism that has encouraged individuals' search for the marks or evidences of individual election) has animated Shepherd's reflections on the covenant and election, we may naturally ask how Shepherd answers the question, how may one know that he is truly within the covenant?

In one sense, we have observed Shepherd answering this question by pointing to the necessity of persevering in the way of covenan tal obedience. But Shepherd will point to baptism as that which not only serves as a sign of the covenant of grace but also supplants the uncertainties and anxieties produced by the self-examination that is said to be encouraged and promoted by experiential traditions within Reformed teaching and preaching.

Covenantal baptism. In 1976, in continuity with his 1974 study of New Testament baptismal language," Shepherd affirmed that "baptism rather than regeneration is the point of transition from lostness in death to salvation in life," qualifying this affirmation by asserting "the position here advocated should not be confused with the sacramentalist doctrine of baptismal regeneration. "36 In response to Sinclair B. Ferguson's criticism, Shepherd retracted this statement," and reformulated it, "baptism marks the transition from death to life.""

In his 2000 The Call of Grace, Shepherd has considerably reworked this passage, although with few substantive changes.

But instead of looking at covenant from the perspective of regeneration,

> we ought to look at regeneration from the perspective of the covenant. When that happens, baptism, the sign and seal of the covenant, marks the point of conversion. Baptism is the moment when we see the transition from death to life and a person is saved.
>
> This is not to say that baptism accomplishes the transition from death to life, or that baptism causes a person to be born again. That is the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which is rightly rejected by Reformed churches. The Holy Spirit works where, when, and how he pleases, not necessarily at the precise moment of baptism.
>
> From the perspective of election, regeneration is the point of conversion. Regeneration, however, is a secret work of the Holy Spirit, and so we do not know when it takes place. We do not have access to the moment of regeneration. What we hear from the converted sinner is a profession of faith, and what we see is his baptism into Christ. This covenant sign and seal marks his conversion and his entrance into the church as the body of Christ. From the perspective of the covenant, he is united to Christ when he is baptized.39

In question is the point of transition from death to life. Shepherd argues that, depending upon whether this transition is viewed from the perspective of election or it is viewed from the perspective of the covenant, one's identification of this point of transition will vary. From the standpoint of election, the turning point is regeneration. But, Shepherd argues, the church's officers have no "access" to that precise moment; they have access only to a profession and, correspondingly, to baptism. From the standpoint of the covenant, therefore, baptism will "mark the point of conversion. "40 This is, according to Shepherd, the standard way by which the New Testament represents this transition.41

Covenantally speaking, furthermore, we may speak of such a person as "united to Christ when he is baptized." We may also note the qualifications that Shepherd has inserted, undoubtedly in response to objections that may be raised against his mode of expression. He is not arguing for a doctrine of baptismal regeneration or an ex opere operato understanding of the sacrament. He also stresses that "baptism is ... to be understood as of a piece with the total transformation which is salvation. It is the sacramental side of a total renewal (regeneration in the broad sense) of both the inner and outer man."" In view of

these considerations and concerns, the qualifications one expects immediately to follow his affirmation that a person is "united to Christ when he is baptized" are unfortunately not forthcoming.

Baptism and the discipline of the church. Shepherd argues that a covenantal view of baptism will have tremendous implications for the way in which discipline is conducted within the church, whether discipline is understood broadly in the sense of pulpit admonitions and exhortations or more narrowly in terms of process within the courts of the church. In contrast with what he terms "regenerationevangelism," covenantal preaching and evangelism will not attempt to dichotomize men into those who are regenerate and those who are unregenerate.43 To do so is to traverse the well-trod path of the subjectivism about which Shepherd cautions us.

A covenantal approach must extend into the more formal reaches of ecclesiastical discipline.

> All who have been baptized and are seeking to do the will of God are to be regarded as Christian brothers.... Discipline does not begin with mental excommunication-the brother is not regenerate and never was one of us-to be followed by verbal scolding and eventual neglect. Discipline, like discipling, is a matter of teaching and encouraging the brother to observe all that Christ has commanded in view of the hope that is laid up for all who love Christ and his commandments.
>
> If the brother persists in sin, then he must be excommunicated, not by subtle innuendo from the pulpit, but by physical ejection from the congregation. Until discipline has been carried to that point the brother must continue to be regarded and treated as a brother in Christ. This is not some condescending "judgment of charity," but a right the brother has on the ground of his baptism."

Unlike the regenerational model, which, Shepherd asserts, promotes stealth excommunication from the pulpit and suspicions regarding one's regeneration and ultimately terminates in the neglect of the offending party, the covenantal model offers us another way. Every believer, by virtue of his baptism, has a "right" to be regarded as a brother in precisely the same sense as any other baptized believer until and unless process has resulted in his excommunication.

In other words, from the standpoint of the covenant, the only right someone has to suggest that a person is not a true member of the covenant is granted by that person's "physical ejection from the congregation." Such an approach, one can easily imagine, would have a tremendous impact on the way in which church attendees are addressed from the pulpit and would require serious revisiting of the general and long-standing practices of British and American Calvinist preachers.

Conclusions

Shepherd bequeaths not fewer than four important planks that will be picked up, in one form or another, by various proponents of the FV.

(1) Election needs to be understood from the perspective of the covenant, not vice versa. This has shaped Shepherd's readings of Ephesians 1 and John 15, readings that not infrequently surface in FV discussions of election. One practical consequence of Shepherd's doctrine is that John 3:16 may, covenantally speaking, be pressed upon a preacher's hearers in a way that historically Calvinists have found objectionable.

(2) Election and reprobation should be understood in fundamentally corporate, not individual, terms. In other words, what is affirmed of election and reprobation is affirmed fundamentally of the church (collectively) and only then applied to individuals. This was manifested in Shepherd's discussion of election and reprobation as applied to nations in the Old Testament.

(3) There is an undermining of the distinction between the church visible and invisible and an understanding of church membership derived from the above considerations of covenant.

(4) There is a concerted emphasis upon baptism (rather than regeneration and its marks) as the subjective counterpart of Shepherd's doctrine of the covenant and church membership.

Let us now, in this and in the following chapters, consider each of these points as they are reflected in writings of FV proponents.

Election and the Covenant

In our opening chapter, we considered the FV doctrine of covenantal objectivity. This doctrine is related to a frequent topic of discussion among FV proponents: the relationship between the doctrines of the covenant and election.45

What It's Not: Covenant through the Eyes of Election

The problems with the traditional views. FV articulations of the relationship between election and covenant are generally framed against what are perceived to be current understandings, within the Reformed community, of their relationship. John Barach begins his discussion of the doctrine of election that equates covenant and election by pointing to what he conceives to be that doctrine's problems. He cites several. Barach raises James Daane's charge that the classical Reformed doctrine of election is unpreachable. This, incidentally, is a charge that occasioned Shepherd's shift from a historic Reformed doctrine of election to one resembling the view promoted by Barach.46 It is also a charge that Barach appears to accept. Barach will argue that a view of election that equates covenant and election means that "you don't end up preaching the promises to everybody." One may preach "in the first person ... or the second person ... when you are talking about sin," and one's "duty," but "we resist saying to the congregation `Christ died for you; your sins are forgiven' or anything like that.""

In connection with the former concern, Barach charges that this doctrine of election leads to problems concerning assurance of salvation, and that this doctrine offers little genuine comfort to individual believers, or their children. Barach also contends that this doctrine attenuates the biblical fullness of the sacrament of baptism, especially as that sacrament extends assurance to believers." He cites Kuyper's doctrine of apparent baptism (schijndoop) as an example of this attenuation.

> Baptism is only real when it is applied to the elect, and for the rest it is a false baptism. Now of course, if that were the case, and we know from our confessions and from Scripture, that baptism is intended for our assurance, could you ever look at your baptism in terms of assurance? You wouldn't know if it is real.... If God would give out counterfeit promises so that baptism is only baptism if you are elect, and for the rest of you that everything the minister said as he was administering baptism,

> wasn't really true. You couldn't trust those promises. What good is baptism if I don't know if it is real? If I don't know if it applies to me? If I don't know if these promises are mine?49

In summary, Barach argues that this doctrine makes "the covenant ... as invisible and unknowable as God's eternal predestination. We lose the ability to speak the language of Scripture, to apply it directly to the flesh-and-blood people who sit in our pews, and to give them the comfort God intended them to have."50

Mark Horne argues that conventional Reformed understandings of election are unwholesomely subjective.

> Anyone who knows he is elect knows he is perfectly safe, but not all those who profess faith actually are elect. Some do not persevere (Second Timothy 2.14-19). People end up looking for marks that they can claim accompany only those who are elected to eternal life. Invariably, these marks are incredibly subjective. Some raised in this doctrine will be unsure where they would end up if they were to die in the next hour, even though they have been raised to believe the Gospel message. They are not sure that they are elect."

In other words, this doctrine offers assurance on terms that are subjective and that can too often produce doubt and rob one of assurance.

Rich Lusk likewise argues that the identification of covenant and election promotes unwholesome subjectivity. He also argues that it promotes a denigration of the outward means of grace and of church membership.

> On the one hand, some so totally identify covenant and election that to be in covenant and to be elect are one and the same. In other words, no non-elect persons ever enter the covenant. We don't know if someone becomes a covenant member at baptism because we don't know if that person is elect. On this view, the covenant is divorced from the concrete church community and the sacraments that identify and mark out the church. The covenant remains an invisible reality, known only to God. Obviously, this opens the door to a highly introspective and individualistic faith. In the end, my local church affiliation doesn't really matter on this scheme; what counts is being a part of the "invisible church," known only unto God."

Lusk again points to the "comfort and assurance" that can result by forsaking the model of reading covenant through the eyes of election.

> In the Bible, election is always presented as good news-as pure gospel-for the covenant people of God. Yet, in many modern Calvinistic presentations, the doctrine takes on an ominous, threatening character. It raises the question, "Am I elect?," a question anxious souls want to have answered. But we cannot peer into the eternal decrees of God to see his roll of chosen ones. Nor do we have spiritual X-ray vision ("cardio-analytic abilities," as one theologian puts it) that allows us to gaze into the depths of our hearts to see if we are really regenerate.53

> God loves everyone in the covenant. Period. You don't have to wonder if God loves you or your baptized children. There is no reason to doubt God's love for you. You can tell your fellow, struggling Christian, "You're forgiven! Christ paid for your sins!" This is far more helpful than only being able to tell someone, "Well, Christ died for his elect, and hopefully you're really and truly one of them! " ... Election does not have to remain an abstraction; through the covenant, it is "brought down to earth," so to speak.54

All the views surveyed above cite specifically pastoral problems with what are said to be understandings of election in circulation within the Reformed church. Barach and Lusk in particular promote their alternative position for its pastoral benefits-its ability to offer individual believers a more solidly grounded assurance than has hitherto been available to them.

The traditional views. How do FV proponents understand the conventional Reformed doctrine of election? Barach offers us interaction with several representative views within the Reformed tradition. Barach addresses the view that "God makes the covenant with the elect only."" This means that the "congregation [is] a mixed multitude, some are in covenant, some aren't." It requires ministers to "divide up the congregation with all those various categories and then try to preach to each one of them": elect/nonelect, regenerate/nonregenerate, in covenant/not in covenant, in the sphere of the covenant/really in the covenant. Some "Puritans" are said to be especially egregious in this regard,56 although Barach also appears to have in mind the Protestant Reformed churches and the Netherlands Reformed churches.57

While some may claim Larger Catechism 31 as evidence of this view, Barach stresses that "the WLC has a broader view of who is in the covenant than" the view that the boundaries of covenant and election are coextensive.58

Barach, however, recognizes that there is another view represented in the Reformed tradition, one closer to his own: "The covenant is made with people who are elect and with people who are not elect. "59 Barach states that this view is an improvement over the former: it holds that "the covenant is with them [i.e., believers and their descendants], whether they recognize it or not, whether they respond to it or not"; and that "every baptism is a genuine baptism. "60 To Barach, however, this view falters by failing to offer the biblical comforts of election to those within the covenant.

> On that view, how do we apply the comfort of election if we do it at all? ... Do we leave it up to [the people in our congregation] so that they have to examine their faith or perhaps try to measure the number of good works that they have accomplished to see if they really are elect or not. Or we could ask the question another way. Can we actually say as pastors to the congregation, "You are elect; God chose you"?61

For all intents and purposes, this second view, Barach appears to believe, practically divorces covenant and election in the same manner in which the first view does.

Before we proceed, we may make two observations from the preceding criticisms-observations that will surface again in our exposition of FV views of election as understood from the perspective of covenant. First, we find a reticence in grounding the marks or evidences of election in anything inward or subjective. Rather, election is tied to that which is perceived to be objective, namely, baptism and covenantal membership. Second, we find what we observed in chapter 1: an undifferentiated understanding of covenant membership. God deals with members of the covenant of grace in the same way. That is to say, the promises, by divine intention, are said to come to the possession of all in the covenant in precisely the same way. The doctrine of election, covenantally understood, therefore is very closely tied to the doctrine of undifferentiated covenantal membership.

What It Is: Election through the Eyes of the Covenant

Several FV writers argue that election must be understood, rather, through the eyes of the covenant.62 In using this language they thereby acknowledge a debt to Shepherd's own formulations-to the way that Shepherd has framed the issue and to the conclusion to which Shepherd himself was drawn.63

John Barach sets forth a helpful definition of what he means by viewing election through the eyes of the covenant. He terms his own view a "modification" of the previous second position addressed above-one that, in his judgment, gives due to the comforts election should offer to each believer in the covenant. Barach conveniently summarizes his view of the relationship between covenant and election.

> We need to hold three things together as we think about the relationship between covenant and election.
>
> First, God has eternally predestined an unchanging number of people out of the whole world to eternal glory with Christ. We read that from Genesis 1:1 on. We know that from Ephesians 1:11: God "works all things after the counsel of His will."
>
> Second, God's covenant includes some who have been so predestined to eternal glory with Christ, but it also includes others who have not been predestinated to eternal glory with Christ but who will apostatize.
>
> Third, God addresses his people as a whole, and that includes each one in the covenant, head for head, as His elect. That is the big issue we need to think through. God, in the Bible, through His prophets and apostles, addresses His people publicly as elect, as chosen.6a

One concern that we may raise at this juncture is precisely how we are to "hold together" these three propositions: how do we reconcile God's addressing "each one . . . head for head, as His elect" when some in the covenant "will apostatize" because they are "not ... predestinated to eternal glory with Christ"? How may we reconcile these disparate propositions without recourse to dialecticism?65

First, Barach reminds us that "we don't have to understand all the connections perfectly. We don't have to have all of our theology worked out in exhaustive detail before we can do what Scripture teaches us to do."66 Even so,

Barach raises an objection-is this not a "lie"? "No," Barach answers. "You have spoken the truth."67

> In Scripture, truth is more than just conformity to the facts. It is trustworthiness and faithfulness. You have spoken to these people in a trustworthy manner. You have spoken to them in a faithful manner, a manner that they can bank their whole lives on, because you have spoken to them in accordance with God's revelation.6S

Barach, in a footnote, qualifies this above statement: "I am not saying that our speech here is out of conformity with the facts. It is in conformity to the fact that the people we are addressing are God's covenant people, in God's sight as much as in ours, and the fact that God teaches us how we are to address them in a way that is trustworthy and faithful to Him and to them."69

Barach also points to Ezekiel 33:13f. as proof of this position." He comments:

> This is how God speaks. He says to people, "You will surely live," and then they die because they trust in their own righteousness instead of trusting in Him. But God was telling the truth to them when He says to them, "You shall surely live." He was not lying to them. He was saying something trustworthy. When he says to the wicked man, "You will surely die," He's saying something trustworthy to that man and the man takes heed to what God has said. He trusts what God has said. He believes that if he stays on the path on which he is going he will surely die. In faith he trembles at the warning and he will surely live.71

Consequently, because "God speaks to His people and He calls them elect ... therefore we also need to speak to God's people this way. We must. We have no other choice but to let God teach us how to address His people, even if we don't have it all worked out in our minds."72

We might raise some objections against this argument. First, Ezekiel, in this passage, is speaking in terms of righteousness and wickedness and the consequences of these respective ways of life. The question in view, however, is one of election and reprobation. Barach is asking whether we may say to the church "God chose you for salvation, and Jesus died for you" even though "some

of those people fall away and apostatize and end up in hell."" He is asking whether we may predicate and affirm what is true of the elect, of individuals who will in the end prove reprobate.

It is therefore not clear that Ezekiel 33 is immediately germane to the discussion at hand.

Second, Barach overlooks the conditions that Ezekiel lays out. When God says, "When I say to the righteous he will surely live," he means, "When I say to the one who professes to be righteous who continues in his righteousness, he will surely live." Alternatively, "When I say to the wicked, `You will surely die,'" God can only mean, "When I say to the wicked, if you remain in your sins, `You will surely die.'" Is this reading anything into the passage? Surely not. First of all, the connections between righteousness and life and between wickedness and death reflect a long-standing principle often repeated in the Scripture (e.g., Gen. 2:17; Lev. 18:5). We ought then to take God's statements ("When I say to the righteous, he will surely live"; and, "When I say to the wicked, `You will surely die.' ") to be restatements of this oft-repeated and long-standing principle.

God through his prophet furthermore argues that death comes upon the one professing righteousness who proves, by his deeds, that he is not in fact righteous. The very fact that he "trusts in his righteousness" evidences that he is not a righteous man at all. Ezekiel 33 is trying to curb or cut off a perversion of the above principle-no one may presume that his present righteousness assures him of the possession of future life without any regard to his intervening behavior. This is precisely the concern of Ezekiel 33:12, the verse immediately before the passage that Barach considers: "And you, son of man, say to your fellow-citizens, `The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression.... a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin." Back of this is the people's claim, "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?" (v. 10), to which God responds, "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, 0 house of Israel?" (v. 11). The context of the passage, therefore, makes plain the targets of the prophet's exhortations: to wicked men and women who reason "why bother doing anything? It won't do us any good"; to "righteous" men and women who presume upon past righteous deeds as sure indicators of present and future acceptance with God.

Corporate Election, Then Individual Election

Frequently argued among FV proponents is that biblical statements concerning corporate or national election are determinative of our understanding of individual election.74 These arguments sometimes begin with Old Testament affirmations of Israel's election and then proceed to interpret New Testament statements of election in light of them. That this is intentional is evident from a comment by John Barach.

> Some, in fact many popular treatments of election, I think, for example, of R. C. Sproul's book "Chosen By God" which is in many ways a very good book, but some popular treatments of election, make it sound as if the doctrine of election unto salvation is something that is revealed only in the New Testament. Sketchy things [such as] "Jacob have I loved; Esau I hated," [appear] in the Old Testament. But on the whole the doctrine is [said to be] a New Testament thing.75

Rather, Barach argues, we must "first start with the Old Testament."76 Let us now look at three representative and common attempts to articulate election from this perspective. We'll examine arguments from Rich Lusk, Mark Horne, and John Barach.

Rich Lusk. Lusk argues that our understanding of election must start with biblical affirmations that address the whole covenant community.

> I suggest "viewing election through the lens of the covenant" is one helpful way of conceptualizing what Paul is doing in these texts such as these [Eph. 1 and Acts 20:28-30; Rom. 8 and 11:17f.]. Paul is treating the generally, or corporately, elect, as specially elect until and unless they prove otherwise. True, corporate election may not issue forth in final salvation, as the nation of Israel shows (cf. Dt. 7; Rom. 9-11). Apostasy is a real possibility for all covenant members, and is to be warned against. But corporate election is the context in which special election is worked out. There is indeed an election with [within?-GPW] an election (cf. Rom. 9:6), but for pastoral purposes, the two can and must be collapsed into one another."

In short, we must "look at special (individual) election through the lens of general (corporate) election."78 We may note parenthetically that, although Lusk uses language here resembling the doctrine of charitable judgment, it is clear that he is arguing for an alternative way of explaining the biblical passages that charitable judgment endeavors to explain.

Mark Home. In broaching the subject of election, Horne quotes 1 Peter 2:4-9, Exodus 19:4-6a, Deuteronomy 7:6-8, and Deuteronomy 9:1-6. He concludes that "just as God chose Israel, or Jesus chose his twelve disciples, God chose the Church, a transnational institution. The church is an instance of corporate election."" Hence, "The results of individual election are ordinarily found in the context of corporate election." Horne explains, "God predestinates the eternally elect to that everlasting glory by working in their lives to bring them into his people the Church, by word and sacrament (Matthew 28.18-20)."80 Horne's approach is the same as that observed in Lusk above: individual election is to be understood in terms of the Scripture's teaching on corporate election.

John Barach. In Barach we find one of the most thorough arguments attempting to set forth and to elaborate a doctrine of election in a primarily corporate context. In several discussions Barach, attempting to relate covenant and election positively, cites many of the same passages and Old Testament language:

- Deuteronomy 4:37; 10:14-15; 7:6; "His chosen ones" (Psalms); "not My people" (Hosea)."
- Deuteronomy 4:37; 10:14-15; 7:6f.; Hosea; Isaiah 14:1.52
- Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6ff.; 10:14-15; "His chosen ones" (Psalms).S3
- Deuteronomy 4:37; 10:14-15; 7; Hosea 1:9; Isaiah 14:1.84

In addressing these and other biblical passages, Barach draws several conclusions. First, God's election "happens in history and is identical with the Exodus in Dent. 7."" This, Barach qualifies in commenting on Samuel's choice of David, "reflects and is the outworking of His historical manifestation of God's eternal predestinating choice."" It is, he will also stress, unconditional. Second, God's election "involves not just a group or the class either, as many Arminians

would like it to, but it involves the members. "87

Third, just as God chose people in history, he may also reprobate them and elect them again.

> Though God declares Israel "my people" early in her history, we discover in Hosea that God later calls Israel "not my people" (Hos. 1:9). He made them His special people, and then He reprobated them in history: "Not my people." Later in Hosea He prom ices to call Israel "my people" again. He promises to preserve a remnant and to bring in the Gentiles as well. He promises to choose, to elect, Israel one more time.
>
> That sounds strange to us, but it is scriptural language. [Isa. 14:1 cited] God chooses Israel again. He continues to choose Israel as His people even though many of them apostatize.88

We may then speak of election in terms of a process: the fact that one is elect is no guarantee that he shall remain elect. Reprobation, to use Barach's term, is a genuine possibility for the elect. This argument, we may underscore, hinges on Barach's equivocation of "Israel." The Israel whom God (re-)elects is a numerically different entity from the "Israel" whom God had earlier reprobated.

Fourth, it is this pattern, Barach argues, that shapes the New Testament's understanding of election. In support of this statement, he points to 1 Peter 2:9ff. Peter references the "exodus motif" and speaks of "individuals," of "all of us as members of the Church." He is not simply speaking of "the Church as a class."" It is for this reason, Barach concludes, that we are to understand the New Testament as adopting the Old Testament pattern of speaking of election. Parallel to this statement, he continues, is Paul's address to the Ephesians at Ephesians 1:1-6, among which is a statement that believers have been chosen "in Him before the foundation of the world" (1:4). How are we to take this language? "Paul is here writing to the whole church. He is writing to husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters, as he goes on to say (5:22-6:9). Everything he says in this letter presupposes that he is not speaking to a few of the Ephesians but to all of them, head for head."" We again have the same dynamic illustrated in Old Testament affirmations of Israelites' election.

In addressing a third New Testament passage that speaks of believers'

election (2 Thess. 2:13: "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."), Barach argues that we must reject three routes of explanation. (1) We must reject the view that "Paul [has] apostolic insight to know that every last person in the church there at Thessalonica is predestined to glory with Christ."" (2) We must reject the view that "Paul is speaking to some only," for this "would rob the whole church of the very comfort Paul wants to give them."" (3) We must reject the notion that "Paul [is] just making a charitable judgment: `I will treat them as if they are elect even though they may not be.'" Paul had "names and faces in mind," and "no guesswork was necessary on Paul's part or on their part" concerning whom he was addressing in this instance.93 (By way of preliminary criticism, it should be observed that one using charitable judgment does in fact have "names and faces in mind.")

This position is amplified in Barach's treatment of Ephesians 1.

> To whom is Paul saying those things? He's writing to the church at Ephesus "to the saints and faithful ones." Does that mean that Paul is writing only to the ones in the church who happen to be elect, whoever that may be, and the people in the church aren't even entirely sure themselves that really applies to them? They don't know if Paul is talking to them in his whole letter. Or does it mean that Paul is writing only to those who are really believers? Who is Paul writing to? It is better to read Paul as writing to the entire church, head for head, men, women and little children at Ephesus.9a

The only way, Barach argues, that Paul's language of election may be taken seriously is if we take his address to encompass every single recipient of his letter in the church of Ephesus and, by way of application, every single church member today.

A fifth conclusion that Barach draws from his study of the biblical testimony concerning election is that one must draw a distinction between what he terms "covenantal election" and "individual election to salvation." Of the former he affirms that they "have been incorporated into Christ, brought into Christ, those who have been baptized into Christ. Covenant members are those who are in Christ. They are the ones that Paul is speaking to here in Ephesians

when he says, `He chose us in him before the foundation of the world."" How, then, does Barach conceive this distinction between covenantal and decretal election?

> Covenantal election and individual election to salvation, aren't actually that far apart. We can distinguish them perhaps, but we cannot, and we may not divide them completely. What is the connection? The connection has to do with God's promise, God's speech to us. God has promised every covenant member that he or she is elect in Christ. What do I mean when I talk about a covenant promise? I don't mean a prediction-this is going to happen, no matter what. That's part of the problem. We start thinking about election and we think this way. If I knew I was elect, then I could sin all I want, because I am going to heaven no matter what. The Bible doesn't know about that kind of election. The Bible doesn't have a hyper-Calvinist bone in its body. There is no such thing as that kind of election that allows you then to sin all you want and still end up saved on the last day.96

Apparently, then, not everything that applies to the doctrine of decretal election, or individual election to salvation, may be predicated of covenantal election.

We may now offer four critical observations of Barach's doctrine of election. First, it is not entirely clear that Barach's distinction between covenantal and decretal election may be sustained. For one thing, if corporate election is the context of statements of individual election, and if many important texts (e.g., Eph. 1) that have been historically regarded as affirmations of individual election are in fact affirmations of covenantal election, then two questions arise: (1) By what criteria do we determine that a given passage is speaking to us of covenantal or decretal election? (2) How, in fact, do we know of the existence of decretal election at all? If we are to view election through the lens of the covenant, then on what grounds may we speak of a decretal election?

We might frame the question another way. Were there no Reformed confessional tradition to inform us of decretal election, would Barach's method lead us to discover that doctrine in Scripture? We must answer in the negative.

Second, it is also not clear why texts addressing corporate election must shape the way that individual election is understood. It is true that the Old

Testament can speak of election corporately, as in God's choosing of Israel. But it is not at all clear that 1 Peter 2:9 (or any other New Testament passage for that matter) is proof positive that the apostles speak of individuals in the church as elect in the same way. The only link that Barach appears to offer is the fact that 1 Peter 2:9 hearkens to language used by God at the time of the Exodus. But, in view of what he wishes to prove, this link is tenuous indeed.

Third, Barach's assertion that we must speak in an undifferentiated manner of all church members ("head for head") as "elect" counters the full witness of Scripture. We have previously argued that such passages as 1 John 2:19-20, Matthew 7:14, and 1 Peter 5:13 assume and express differentiation of membership within the covenant community. In rejecting the doctrine of charitable judgment, Barach makes it impossible to understand apostolic addresses to the church that use these biblical distinctions.

Fourth, Barach has not escaped the charge that his doctrine is Arminian. He may, to be sure, understand corporate election to include individuals and not simply a class of persons. But it is hard to escape the conclusion that, in speaking of someone conceivably moving from election to reprobation to election again, Barach is propounding a doctrine of conditional election-that election, conceived as a process, is a function of one's obedience to the terms of the covenant.

In summary, Barach embraces two distinct but overlapping doctrines of election. He affirms both decretal election and what he calls covenantal election. Decretal election for Barach has little practical value. He prefers to speak of covenantal election. Covenantal election, as Barach expresses it, bears remarkable similarities to the Arminian doctrine of conditional election. It is in this sense, notwithstanding his profession of the Reformed doctrine of (decretal) election, that we may say that Barach's overall doctrine of election is Arminian or at least semi-Arminian.

Is the Visible/Invisible Distinction Passe?

Visible/invisible? One question that the above discussion raises is whether there is place for the historical distinction between the church invisible and visible. Douglas Wilson is well known for the concerns that he has raised about this doctrine.97 Wilson insists that he does not deny the propriety of speaking of

the church as "visible" or "invisible," provided that one uses these terms properly. But, he argues, too often these terms evidence the church's smuggling of "Hellenism" into her ecclesiology.98

Specifically, these terms are illegitimately used to "divide into categories, visible is down here and invisible is an ethereal church in the heavenlies.... If we are thinking like Hellenists, what we say is we have an invisible church composed of all the elect and then the visible church down here."99 The problem with this view, Wilson contends, is that it makes the visible church "at best as only an approximation of the true Church." It also means that "when you have two churches existing at the same time, with the membership lists not identical, this creates a problem. We know there is only one Church, so which one is the real one?"'" Most evangelicals, moreover, argue that the invisible church is the real church, a state of affairs that "eventually necessitates ... a baptistic understanding of the Church."101

Wilson argues, however, that the terms invisible and visible are conceivably redeemable. They must not speak to "ethereal and material realms together" but simply to the fact that part of the church is literally invisible to me and part of it is visible to me.102

Such a distinction, for Wilson, is of limited utility. He has argued that the distinction between the church visible and invisible is a medieval scholastic attempt to refine the concept of the church militant."' He calls such a "distinction (terms aside) ... a necessary one," but believes that other and preferable terminology should be employed."'

Historical and eschatological. Since there is but one church, Wilson contends, our terminology ought not to suggest that there is more than one church. For this reason, citing John Murray as an authority "who drove me most of the way down this particular road,"'" Wilson prefers the terms historical and eschatologicalcorresponding to historical stages of the church: the "gathering" church and the "gathered" church.106 Such a distinction accomplishes, Wilson argues, the very same thing that the invisible/visible distinction was intended to accomplish.

> If we abandon the Hellenistic ontological division between invisible and visible and adopted a more Hebraic biblical way of thinking and toppled

> the whole thing on its side, the invisible church is the eschatological church and the visible church is the historical church. Now notice what this now does, if I topple the whole thing on its side and it is now in history, the eschatological church is now the historical church and it is at the culmination of history, all right, and the visible church is that same church at an earlier point in time.107
>
> It would be better to consider the one Church under a different set of terms, discussed earlier, and which preserve the necessary distinction made by visible and invisible-historical and eschatological. Because time is taken into account, we preserve the understanding of just one Church, and at the same time preserve the necessary distinction between those Church members who are ultimately saved and those who are ultimately lost. The historical Church is the counterpart to the visible Church, and consists of those throughout history who profess the true faith, together with their children. The eschatological Church is the elect, but it is not invisible. At the last day, every true child of God will be there, not one missing, and every false professor will have been removed. At the resurrection of the dead, this Church will be most visible.'08

In this way, Wilson stresses, we may preserve the spirit of the definitions employed by WCF 25.1 and 25.2 (definitions that "can be very helpful, but ... can create a few problems") without their liabilities.'09 Wilson is eager to stress that he does not wish to render "a charge of Hellenism against the Westminster Confession of Faith. "10

The benefit of such definitions is that it takes history seriously. The elect will be seen not as "composing an invisible church in hyperspace" but as "composing the eschatological church-the church as it will be visibly on the last glorious day of history-ecclesia tri- umphans. "111 The historical church will take into account "the Church as it grows, develops, and matures throughout all history."112 In short, "those who are in the historical Church should not see that church as defiled because it is earthly, but rather as immature because it is early. "113

We may raise a couple of principal objections against Wilson's proposals. First, Wilson's concerns with the visible/invisible distinction are concerns raised

against abuses of the doctrine but not what Reformed proponents of the doctrine have historically maintained. No one, to my knowledge, has argued for two distinct churches with two distinct rolls. The distinction is often articulated in terms of a single church-the church as God sees it (invisible) and the church as man sees it (visible). I am not aware of any Reformed individual who has seriously argued that the invisible/visible distinction corresponds to a so-called Hellenistic spiritual/materialistic dualism. In other words, when potential excesses are removed (and we may note for the record that Wilson's own terms are liable to misunderstanding and abuse) there is nothing intrinsically objectionable to a properly defined use of these terms.

Second, it is laudable that Wilson wishes to understand his position as in keeping with the distinctions and doctrine taught by the Westminster Standards. Nevertheless, it does not seem that Wilson has simply transferred the visible/invisible distinction into a more faithfully historical category. It is not entirely clear that Wilson's historical/eschatological distinction is interchangeable with the visible/invisible distinction.114 The manner in which our catechisms use the invisible/visible distinction is such that it cuts through the church's experience at any given moment in history (LC 61ff.). But, understanding invisible to be interchangeable with eschatological, Wilson seems to defer this stage of the church's existence to the consummation.

In this sense, that which in part the doctrine of the invisible church is concerned to guard-the existence of a body of sincere believers who are discernible to God and to themselves by certain infallible marks (marks that hypocrites do not and cannot possess)is functionally neglected in Wilson's ecclesiology. Wilson says, "The Bible teaches clearly that in the historical Church there are fruitless branches (but real branches nonetheless) which will not be there in the eschatological Church."115 This means-a point which we shall take up in our next chapter-that the practical distinction between the sincere believer and the hypocrite is not ontological (they possess different types of grace) but historical in nature. It is the sincere believer's perseverance that Wilson will stress to be what identifies him as a genuine believer. Wilson's ecclesiology, therefore, requires a reorientation of our understanding of the doctrines of perseverance, assurance, and apostasy. It is simply not the case that Wilson is offering us the same doctrine but new terminology.

Conclusions

We have been, in this chapter, tracing the impact of Norman Shepherd on FV considerations of covenant and election. We have paralleled three important views of Shepherd and various FV proponents: (1) election needs to be understood from the perspective of the covenant and not vice versa; (2) corporate election provides the foundation for our understanding of individual election; and (3) the distinction between the church visible and invisible is problematic if not false.

There remains one final position of Shepherd's that finds parallel in many FV proponents' writings: the place of baptism in our understanding of election and covenantal membership. Before we take up the subject of the sacraments in general and baptism in particular, we need to raise one further question-one occasioned by the discussions that we have observed in this chapter, but particularly by Wilson's formulations. How do the conclusions that we have considered impact the doctrine of the Christian life, particularly the doctrines of perseverance, assurance, and apostasy? It is this question to which we presently turn.

Before we do so, let us summarize the concerns that we have registered in this chapter, that is, the ways in which FV formulations pose challenges to the doctrines of the Westminster Standards. (1) FV formulations jeopardize the confessional integrity of the doctrine of election in two ways. (a) They effectively supplant decretal election with a doctrine of covenantal election and fail to establish criteria that enable biblical readers to distinguish the two types of election. (b) They challenge the confessional doctrine of unconditional election through formulations that speak of election as a process and that make one's election a function of his covenantal obedience. (2) Wilson formally and materially departs from the doctrine of the church visible and invisible. His formulations raise the question of whether his ecclesiology may comport with confessional statements on assurance, perseverance, and apostasy.

Chapter 5

Covenant and Assurance, Perseverance, and Apostasy

We are in the midst of considering a second track of the theology of Federal Vision. Having begun with the question, what, to FV proponents, is a covenant? we have pursued, in our previous chapter, the relationship between covenant and election. We observed that the common FV supposition that election is to be understood through the lens of covenant has profound implications for the way in which one may speak of the application of redemption and for the classical Reformed distinction between the church visible and invisible. The net effect of this approach is to conceive of the church in an undifferentiated way and to weaken if not eliminate the practical distinction between sincere and hypocritical believers.

At this juncture I want to take up a set of practical questions that stems from the preceding. How does this ecclesiology affect the doctrine of assurance? How does this ecclesiology impact the doctrine of perseverance? In related fashion, how does this ecclesiology shape a doctrine of apostasy? In other words, how are we to account theologically for the fact of apostasy in the church?

In taking up these questions, we want to be reminded that different proponents have different ways of expressing and articulating these doctrines. In fairness to them, we will want to consider proponents separately, mindful, as we draw our conclusions, that there are certain threads that tie various proponents together.

The Covenant and Assurance

The Westminster Doctrine

One question that arises from FV ecclesiological statements is how believers are biblically to attain to assurance of grace and salvation. We may summarize briefly a historic Reformed statement of the doctrine as it is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger Catechism. We may do so in four points.

First, assurance of grace and salvation belongs to "such as truly believe in Christ, and endeavour to walk in all good conscience before him" (LC 80). Assumed in this definition, therefore, is a distinction between saving faith and faith that falls short of saving faith. Also assumed is a requirement that the subject purpose to walk sincerely before the Lord.

Second, there is a threefold foundation of assurance: (1) "by faith grounded upon the truth of God's promises"-faith receives the promise; (2) "by the Spirit enabling them to discern in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made"-the believer, by the ordinary operations of the Spirit ("without extraordinary revelation"), recognizes in himself those Spirit-wrought graces which the Bible teaches are sure indications that the individual is a true believer; there is, therefore, a genuinely and indispensably inward or subjective dimension to the believer's assurance; (3) "by the Spirit ... bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God"-the believer, by the Spirit's testimony,' comes to know that he is a true child of God.

Third, such an assurance is "infallible" (this, however, is no warrant for presumption or "looseness," WCF 18.3, 1) and enables the believer to know that he "shall persevere therein unto salvation" (LC 80). Fourth, this assurance is not "of the essence of faith" (LC 81). Consequently, believers may waver, for manifold reasons, in the possession, strength, and degree of their assurance.

Steve Schlissel

Schlissel charges the church with a general "failure of covenant consciousness. "2 One indication of this failure, he states, is Reformed subjectivity.

> Compounding this evil (i.e. every man for himself) has been the notion that God doesn't want to save anyone and the idea that "me, myself, and I" are the only ones who can truly read and interpret His Word. Not only

> do I have to come to an understanding of His Word by myself, I must develop a conversion testimony-while the credibility of someone else's conversion becomes suspect, to say the least.'

One place where this is keenly evident is in "a book on assurance" authored by "a contemporary theologian." Schlissel doesn't mention the book or author by name, but he quotes from it-a quote that closely approximates the opening paragraph of Joel Beeke's The Quest for Full Assurance.'

In this quote (which we reproduce below-with Schlissel's interpolation), Schlissel comments, "we find just about everything that is wrong in the world:"

> One of the greatest struggles of the theologian and pastor of the post-Reformation churches lay with the area of personal assurance of faith and its relationship to saving faith. Their labor for theological precision in this area gave rise to a rich technical vocabulary in which they distinguished between assurance of faith and assurance of sense; the direct, actus directus, and reflexive, actus reflexus, acts of faith; assurance of the uprightness of faith and assurance of adoption; the practical and mystical syllogisms; the principle and acts of faith; objective and subjective assurance; assurance of faith, understanding, and hope; discursive and intuitive assurance; the immediate and mediate witness in assurance; and the being and well being of faith. [Ohhh ... There ain't enough Excedrin in the room!] Such terminology was used within the context of a series of correlative issues such as possibilities, kinds, degrees, foundations, experiences, times, obstacles, qualifications, and fruits of assurance-all placed within a word regulated, Christologically controlled, and Trinitarian framework. With such scholastic distinctions the modern church and most scholars have little patience.'

Why does Schlissel object so vehemently to this statement? He states that his differences with its author are "presupposition[al]" in nature.' Schlissel elaborates:

> The presuppositions governing the above-quoted view on personal assurance and saving faith reveal certain ideas about God and His Word that are, basically, false. In this approach to assurance we find a God who is manifestly reluctant to save and is looking for excuses to forbid people

> entrance into His kingdom. The presupposition is that the Bible's word and promises cannot be trusted. Salvation is now based upon internal works. Instead of the Pharisaical building of a house made of external works, which are relatively easy to perform, we have the reversal-an internalization of this house, which is virtually impossible to achieve. And this religion of impossibility, requiring a new technical vocabulary, is brought to us by people who think that Romanism is bondage!
>
> The presupposition is that the people of God are unknown and unknowable. The presupposition is that life should be lived on hold, because in order to live one's life fully for the glory of God we have to have some sort of confidence of who we are in Him-whether we are His and accepted in the Beloved or whether we have to wait until we can become accepted and then begin our works that would be acceptable to Him.'

How, positively, should the believer attain to assurance? Schlissel argues that we must understand that "God is not reluctant to save." We should understand that the Bible enables us to "teach our children to believe in everything that God has told us about our identity in Him." Further, "everyone who is baptized is to be regarded as belonging to Christ with obligations to live in accordance with the covenant in which he has been placed by the grace of God." Specifically, we must "accept God's testimony in baptism.'"

> Citing Ephesians 4:1, Schlissel argues:
>
> Such a calling is objective and rests upon every baptized person. When we bring our children to the font for baptism to receive the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is because the children are under a calling from God that is as real as death, as real as a heart, as real as blood, and we teach them to grow up and live in terms of that calling and to seek to honor God in it.9

Such a covenant calling, Schlissel explains, is "vitally important and applies to everyone. It tells us what our status is and what our obligations are.""

> The alternative, Schlissel explains, is the "assurance problem":

> [We] begin our enterprise in Christ with doubt. We never get a footing from which to grow and develop in the consciousness of who we are in Christ. How many times does God have to tell us how much we mean to Him and how much He loves us? We spurn His love and despise His overtures. We don't believe. We teach our children to doubt. We teach our congregations to doubt."

Furthermore, Schlissel argues, his position is superior to the one represented by Beeke because of the former's simplicity.

> Sadly, we read this claptrap about assurance and how many different new words in our vocabulary are necessary to believe the truth. Why is the Gospel so hard to believe? Of course, in a sense we could ask, "Could it be true? Can it be that I should gain?" Amazingly, the answer to our question is yes! All the assurance we need is that God said it.12

In summary, Schlissel ties his doctrine of assurance to a doctrine of undifferentiated covenant membership. He appears to be saying that the primary or even sole ground of one's assurance is God's biblical statements concerning the whole covenant community. These statements must be received by the individual to refer to him personally (lest one doubt). Schlissel will especially highlight God's testimony in baptism as a form of divine speech that must not be doubted.

We may note four critical observations concerning Schlissel's argument.

First, leaving aside Schlissel's judgment that his difference with the view represented by Beeke is presuppositional in nature (this is debatable), it is not clear that Schlissel has accurately represented the position with which he disagrees. What is it about this classical Re formed doctrine, after all, that teaches that God is reluctant to save and wishes to exclude men from the kingdom? Although the gospel invitations are broad, and though many appear to respond favorably, Scripture and experience teach that not all who initially respond favorably prove to be true believers. Is it not fairer to say that the historic Reformed doctrine of assurance is attempting to be faithful to this state of affairs?

Surely Schlissel would not disagree with the statement that good works are

necessary to salvation, or that a truly good work must be measured not simply by the deed itself but also by its underlying motive and intended goal. If so, how then may a biblical doctrine of assurance ignore good works so defined? How does this produce a doctrine of "salvation by works"?

Second, Schlissel seems to be saying that the Christian life cannot be lived (or at least cannot be lived well) unless the believer has confidence and assurance that he is accepted in the beloved, that is, assured of his salvation. Scripture, however, teaches that God may "suffer even such as fear Him to walk in darkness and to have no light" (WCF 18.4; Isa 50:10). Schlissel may disagree with the doctrine that assurance of grace and salvation are not of the essence of faith. But, as he would well know, this is an intramural theological difference, not a presuppositional difference.

Third, Schlissel chides those who do not accept the covenant calling for themselves. He appears to say that God's speech to the church in such places as 2 Thessalonians 1:11, Hebrews 3:1, and 2 Peter 1:3 must be taken at face value by all members of the covenant.13 To do otherwise is to doubt God's speech. There are at least three problems with this argument. (1) To say that a promise is extended to a mixed or differentiated assembly is different than saying that a promise must be received by all persons in that assembly in precisely the same way. Schlissel doesn't appear, however, to entertain the distinction-one that would have tremendous implications for his argument.

(2) Schlissel appears to point to covenant membership and baptism as grounds upon which a believer may receive the promises to be his. Neither of these, however, is a secure ground. We have plenty of examples in both the old covenant (many in the wilderness generation) and the new covenant (Demas) of covenant members who have proven to be no true Christians at all. We have examples in both the old covenant (Esau) and the new (Simon Magus) of individuals who have received circumcision or baptism and have proven to be no true believers at all. In other words, there is nothing in either covenant membership or baptism that can provide "infallible assurance" that one is in an estate of grace and salvation.

(3) More fundamentally, what is the content of the promise? Schlissel chides us for fostering doubt in what God says. But Schlissel's argument holds only if the Scriptures say that a particular promise is intended for Mary, Ralph, or

Donald. Scripture, however, does not speak that way. No Scripture says, "Mary, Ralph, or Donald are saved."" Rather, one may know that the promises of life and salvation are his if he possesses faith to receive them and if his life comports with the nature and character of those promises. One must reason syllogistically. Scripture says that all those who believe sincerely in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord will be saved (major premise); I sincerely believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (minor premise); I will be saved (conclusion). Is this the imposition of scholasticism on the biblical text? No, the very nature of God's speech requires that we reason this waywhatever terminology we wish to employ to express it.

A fourth and final point regarding Schlissel's statements on assurance is that Schlissel appears to charge this Reformed doctrine with compromising the simplicity of the gospel. He, however, appears to understand simplicity to require an absence of distinctions. This is hardly a defensible position. While Schlissel's position may entail fewer distinctions than the one with which he disagrees, it is unclear that, for the believer attempting to acquire assurance of grace and salvation, it is at all simple. It leaves the believer in precisely the same quandary of incertitude in which he started.

John Barach

Barach shares a number of Schlissel's criticisms of the doctrine of assurance as that doctrine is taught within the Reformed community.

> When you read some books, even some Reformed books about assurance, they will say something like this, that anyone can have assurance provided he continues in godliness for a certain space of time. How long? Five minutes? good. Does it have to be ten? Does it have to be a year or two of godliness before you can have any assurance? And I began to wonder what do you do with somebody who has struggled against sin, who falls into sin, terrible sin, wants to flee from them, finds himself terribly attracted to them, can a person like that have assurance of salvation or does that wait until much later on after he has already conquered his terrible sins that he is struggling against? But then how do you conquer sin when you have no assurance? How do you battle against sin when you are not sure that God loves you? When you are not really sure that Christ died for you? And when you're not really sure that you're one of his people, how could you ever fight against sin? What power

> would you have to fight with if you are not really sure that he has given you his Holy Spirit?15

Barach's argument seems to be that any subjective dimension to assurance robs the believer of his ability to grow in grace. In other words, a believer must be absolutely assured of his salvation in order to war against sin. We anticipate, then, a pointed reorientation of the doctrine. How does he do this?

We observed in our previous chapter that Barach promotes a doctrine of covenantal election, or election understood through the eyes of covenant. He makes direct application of this doctrine to the question of assurance. Like Schlissel, Barach appears to ground the believer's assurance in God's speech to the covenantal community.

> God's speech to us is trustworthy [sic] because it is God who is speaking. And He speaks to us in a promissory way. In speech God gives and pledges Himself to us, to be our God. He assures us of all His blessings in Christ.
>
> God administers His salvation by speaking to us, telling us who we are in Christ and what we have in Christ. He does not simply say, "I chose some people." He says to us, "I chose you. You are mine. You are special. You belong to me." And that promise is good news.16
>
> When God speaks to his people and calls them elect, he is not simply predicting that this will happen, he is making a pledge to them. God's promise comes in all of his speech. His promise is not simply something that will happen in the future that needs to be fulfilled later on. His promise is this that he administers his salvation to us by speaking to us, by telling us who he is for us, telling us what he has done for us, and he can promise us stuff that has happened in the past. "Jesus died for you" can be a promise, but he pledges that it is for you. And God in the gospel, and through baptism, promises us that he unites us to Christ. So that Paul can address the entire congregation, men, women and children as those who are in Christ and who are chosen in Christ."

To raise the fact of God's speech to the covenantal community is, in Barach's mind, necessarily to broach the doctrine of election.

Barach, we may recall, wishes to preserve the historic Reformed doctrine of election, understood in a decretal sense. He therefore functions with two doctrines of election: one covenantal and one decretal. Barach does not wish covenantal election to be understood as something that is contentless or of no value to the believer seeking assurance. On the contrary, Barach invests much significance in the role that one's covenantal status ought to play in a believer's quest for assurance.

> Because we are united with Christ, because He is our covenantal representative, when He was raised from the dead and vindicated by God, we were vindicated by God, justified. In Christ, we have sanctification .... we have new life ... [and] the Spirit ... [and] have been glorified....
>
> But who shares in those blessings? ... who is in Christ? The answer that the Bible gives is that those people are in Christ who have been baptized into Christ.... there is an objective covenant made with believers and their children. Every baptized person is in covenant with God and is in union then with Christ and with the Triune God. The Bible doesn't know about a distinction between being internally in the covenant, really in the covenant, and being only externally in the covenant.... Every baptized person is truly a member of God's covenant.... every baptized person is in Christ and therefore shares in his new life, ... and still receives, not only the covenant's promises, but also the covenant's demands and the covenant warnings.18

We see in the preceding quotation a view of covenantal membership and of covenantal objectivity that has surfaced in other FV writings. We also find the raw materials for a doctrine of assurance.

We may outline Barach's view of assurance as follows: Every member of the covenant of grace is united with Christ. Why? The covenant is objective and covenant members have been "baptized into Christ." Because the practical distinction between inward and outward covenantal membership is decisively rejected, and because Barach claims that "every baptized person is truly a member of God's covenant" (a membership that Barach clearly articulates in vital terms: "and therefore shares in his new life"), it would seem that, for Barach, baptism (presumably water baptism) and covenantal membership are the grounds of one's assurance of grace and salvation.

This is confirmed by Barach's statement elsewhere that "you don't need a special, dramatic, revivalistic conversion to let you know that you are elect. You had the special experience that God gives you. It was called baptism."" Elsewhere he states the same point.

> And every Ephesian church member hearing Paul's letter should have said the same thing ["I'm one of God's chosen people. I'm part of this chosen nation. I belong to the LORD!"]. Even the children are included in the us there in the first chapter. Paul's writing to them, too (6:1). God sends preachers to proclaim the promise of election to His church every Sunday.
>
> But how do you know that promise is really for you and not just for other people in the church, people who've advanced further in their sanctification or who've had some special experience that convinced them of God's love?
>
> The answer is that you've had the special experience. You've been baptized. All God's salvation-from election to glorification-is found in Christ. And when you were baptized, God promised to unite you to Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be baptized into Christ. You're united to Jesus and all His salvation is for you.
>
> At baptism, God promises that you're really one of His elect: I will be your God and you will be my child. And God never hands out counterfeit promises. If He made that promise some times but not all the time, then you could never trust the promise. But God's Word is true and you must trust him. Doubting your election when God has promised it to you is sin.20

We may note that it appears that by baptism Barach means the sacrament of water baptism.

Barach qualifies his comments, quoted immediately above, by stating that "a promise is not a prediction. God never promises that you will be saved regardless of whether you respond to Him in faith and love. His promise always makes you responsible." Barach also recognizes that not all who are covenantally elect will in fact prove to be decretally elect.

> God chose you to have that bond [of love with the triune God of Scripture] with Him in Christ.
>
> That choice, worked out in history when you were baptized and brought into Christ's church, is grounded in God's eternal predestination. In eternity God chose to have you baptized into Christ, the elect one, and the church, His body, to be among His chosen people....
>
> But in God's wisdom, He has decreed that some of those whom He has chosen to bring into a covenant relationship with Him will enjoy that relationship only for a time. God brings those people into His covenant and unites them to Christ for a time (John 15; Hebrews 6). They really experience His love, but they do not respond with repentance and faith and love.21

This does not mean, however, that we are to address our congregations in a differentiated way.

> ... [W]e need to be able to tell our congregations ... and tell individual members ... , "Jesus died for you personally," and we mean it, to them, head for head, every one of them. How do we know that? Because they are in covenant with God and we view them as brothers and sisters because that's who they really are. But we look around the congregation and ... we do not give them a judgment of charity that says, "Well, I don't know. Maybe he is a Christian, maybe he isn't, so I will be charitable. I will regard him as a Christian." ... Instead we go by God's promise. He has said that this person is in Christ and, therefore, believing God's promise, we treat that person as who he really is, someone who is in Christ.22

When pressed to explain how these two lines of thought are at all compatible, Barach responds that we may reconcile them if we properly understand the nature of divine promissory speech-an argument that we reviewed and critiqued in the previous chapter.

Before we register our objections below, we might raise an objection that Barach fields in his lectures. Does not 2 Peter 1:10 counter Barach's doctrine? Doesn't the apostle point to the believer's inward graces-wrought by the Holy

Spirit-as that by which he may "make certain about His calling and choosing"? Wouldn't this militate against Barach's exclusively "objective" tokens of assurance? Barach counters by arguing that many Reformed interpreters have misunderstood this passage.

> Peter doesn't say to them, "Find out if you are called and elect." He calls them "called and elect." He doesn't say, "Make yourselves sure about your call and election." He says, "Make your calling and election sure." What does he mean? The context here is not dealing with personal assurance. He is also not saying that we can somehow contribute to God's election or that God's election is based on something in ourselves or something we have done. But what he is saying is that by our lives we have to ratify and confirm God's calling and election. We have to work it out. We have to live it out, and as we do that, Peter assures us, we will not fall short of God's everlasting kingdom.23

Barach appears to take the phrase commonly translated "make ... sure" (Gk.: bebaian ... poieisthai) as "ratify and confirm." In this sense, he argues, the passage doesn't treat the issue of assurance at all. To understand assurance in a subjective sense, Barach appears to suggest, is to compromise biblical grace, in that we "contribute to God's election" or election is grounded on human works.

We may offer four points of critical observation. First, Barach has misconceived the nature of a divine promise.24 We have already responded to his handling of Ezekiel 33 to show that the exegetical grounding that Barach claims for his understanding of divine speech is dubious. He claims that for divine promissory speech to be genuinely promissory, it must be directed to individuals. Specifically, we are to take apostolic statements such as those found at Ephesians 1 as intended by God to refer to each and every baptized covenant member of the church. This argument falls, however, on two grounds: (1) We have previously argued, in the first chapter, that these statements were made according to what has been termed a "judgment of char- ity"-the apostles spoke in this manner charitably regarding their audiences' profession of faith to be sincere. (2) It is not true that these promises were individually true by virtue of congregants' water baptism or covenantal membership. It is doubtful, for instance, whether such passages as Romans 6:1-3 and Galatians 3:27 have primary reference to the physical application of water baptism.25 We shall return to this point in subsequent chapters.

How then were these promises individually appropriated? If we see "that what God pledged (salvation) was conditioned (not meritoriously but instrumentally) on the hearer's believing the promise," then the problem is resolved.26 God may extend promises liberally to the congregation, but the substance of the promise is received and appropriated only when the congregant believes.

In rejecting the inward/outward distinction of covenantal membership, Barach appears to close the door to such an interpretation. His doctrine of covenantal objectivity and undifferentiated covenantal membership constrains him to find something that is both external and common to all covenant members to be the ground of receiving the promise. For Barach that "something" is water baptism and covenantal membership.

A second line of criticism is that water baptism and covenantal membership are insufficient grounds for a believer's assurance. This raises two issues: (1) Neither water baptism nor covenantal membership, as we have observed, is a guarantee that an individual will persevere to the end. Barach, as we have seen above, concedes this point. This raises questions concerning his commitment to the Reformed doctrine of perseverance. (2) More immediately, Barach has argued that one must be absolutely assured of his salvation in order to war against sin. He faults the doctrine that understands assurance subjectively on just this point. Barach, however, concedes that his own doc trine cannot infallibly assure a believer that he shall persevere to the end. In other words, his own doctrine suffers from his own criticism: it cannot offer the rock-solid assurance that he claims is needed to war against sin.

Third, Barach's exegesis of 2 Peter 1:10 is not compelling. What Reformed interpreter has ever argued that to conceive assurance subjectively (in the sense frequently argued by the Reformed from 2 Peter 1:10) is to ground divine election on human works or to conceive election synergistically? It is surprising to see a Reformed interpreter such as Barach suggest a claim that one would expect to come from an antinomian critic, if in fact Barach is suggesting this.

Barach, furthermore, is mistaken to claim that Peter is not concerned to address a matter of assurance. The entire letter, in one sense, is a running contrast between true, biblical Christianity and the false perversion thereof

promoted by false teachers. Such a concern is evidenced by Peter's language in the first chapter. He speaks of a "faith of the same kind as ours" (2 Peter 1:1b), distinguishing saving faith from other, nonsaving faiths. Peter is not simply saying, "There is a right way and a wrong way, follow the former." He is giving the church the means to discern whether and if they are on the right way. This is fundamentally a question of assurance.

In this sense, Barach's argument that we must translate the phrase in question "ratify and confirm" is a moot one because it immediately raises the question "ratify and confirm what?" The answer must surely be "ratify and confirm that your Christian life conforms to the biblical pattern listed in 2 Peter 1:5-9," a pattern that involves inwardly wrought graces with, of course, their outward manifestations. The examination by which we "ratify and confirm" this pattern is the very meat of personal assurance.

Fourth, what vitiates any further comfort that could be derived from Barach's doctrine is his equivocation of "election" as "covenantal election" and "decretal election." Given that the latter most certainly issues in the believer's salvation and that the former does not necessarily issue in the believer's salvation, we expect corresponding clarity in his terminology. As E. Calvin Beisner has demonstrated from a study of Barach's 2003 AAPCPC lecture,27 however, it is just this terminological clarity that we lack. It is clear, then, that Barach senses no particular burden to inform the reader on all occasions which sense of the term "election" he is using. It is just this precision, however, that is necessary to deliver Barach's own system from the charges that he levies against the conventional Reformed doctrine.

Steve Wilkins

Criticisms of a classical Reformed doctrine of assurance. Wilkins's doctrine of assurance is noteworthy for its insistence on the sacrament of baptism as the primary if not the sole ground of the believer's assurance. He publicly stated this concern in his January 2001 address at the AAPCPC. He argues against a certain Reformed doctrine of assurance-its effects on children and adults, respectively.

> Children are given a false assurance. They assume that because they have passed the entrance exam of the elders, by giving them a testimony (or by memorizing their catechism, or going through a communicants class), that

they truly have repented and believed....

> Children have a "faulty" assurance-i.e., an assurance focused not upon the grace of God but on their own knowledge or experience. Covenant children often have great problems with assurance simply because they grew up faithfully and have had no conscious conversion experience which is often made a necessity for admission to the table.
>
> As a result, they end up either fabricating an experience which will satisfy the elders, or wonder whether they have ever been saved because they have not had such an experience. This is in part at least, a consequence of our present practice where we imply some special "conversion" is necessary after baptism.28
>
> The same however can be said about adults. How many adults (how many of us) have been confounded when we were told to examine our hearts to see if we see the marks of a new heart there. Was our repentance genuine? Have we truly believed in the Lord Jesus or have we deceived ourselves? The implication that we must look within for our assurance of salvation is mistaken and sure to result in deeper confusion.... Our assurance cannot be based on what we see within ourselves but Christ himself.... Our salvation is based upon His faithful work and faithfulness not upon our own works or experiences no matter how genuine they might be.29

In his 2002 AAPCPC lecture, Wilkins continued to criticize the Reformed doctrine as subjectivistic. He cites what he terms William Perkins's "ten stages by which a man should go through in order to arrive at saving faith," stages that did not always "end in full assurance." Assurance, then, "was a rather elusive thing. "'0 Furthermore, Wilkins claims in a summary of Puritan thought on assurance, "If a man had doubts of his assurance, this was considered sound assurance. If you had no doubts about your assurance, that was clearly false and presumption."" This theology "clearly implies a god who is very, very careful in dispensing mercy and not very free in it at all. "32 Wilkins does not see this to be a minor error. The New England Puritans in particular "completely ignored the significance of baptism and consequently misunderstood the nature of salvation."33

Baptism and assurance. Wilkins, with other FV proponents, argues that we

must understand our election through the eyes of the covenant.34 He also claims that we need to look to our baptism if we are to attain to assurance. This is seen in part because of what baptism entails.

> The Bible teaches us that baptism unites us to Christ and by his, and to his body by the power of the spirit. By one spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we've all been made to drink of one Spirit.
>
> Paul says that at baptism you are clothed with Christ Jesus. For as many of you as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union. The clothes make the man. With our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings.35
>
> By the blessing of the spirit, baptism unites us to Christ and his church and thus in him gives us new life [Rom. 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:17 cited]. By our baptism we have been reborn, in this sense, having died with Christ, we have been raised with him [Rom. 6:3-4 cited]. You have been given new life by virtue of your union with him.
>
> Christ's baptism meant that the old things were passed, the sin and the curse of the law had passed away and all things had become new. The same is true for all who are baptized. You die to the old covenant relationship to the world, you are resurrected to a new covenant relationship with the Savior and henceforth are required to walk in newness of life.36

Wilkins emphasizes that, by the use of such language as that above, Scripture does not refer to a doctrine of presumptive election or of presumptive regeneration, or even a doctrine of the judgment of charity.37

> [Paul is] rather stating the objective reality that is true of [the Corinthians] by virtue of their baptism and union with Christ. The glorious reality of the covenant which is established at baptism is that our children and all who are baptized have this real, living, objective, gracious relationship with God.38

Wilkins spells out the pastoral implications of this doctrine.

> All the things that you and I are rightly concerned about, externalism, presumption, things we see all around us, the covenant prevents that when it's preached in its fullness. We belong to Christ. Baptism is the infallible sign and seal of this, and now we must learn to live faithfully and never depart from him.... In regard to our assurance, we are pointed away from ourselves, and what we think we perceive to be true of us inwardly, which no one can know. And pointed to Christ, the only ground of your assurance ...39

The problem with subjective assurance is that it requires us to discern matters "which no one can know." Baptism, on the other hand, is an "infallible sign and seal" of our belonging to Christ.

Such sentiments are echoed by the session of the AAPC, of which Wilkins is pastor.

> All covenant members are invited to attain to a full and robust confidence that they are God's eternally elect ones. Starting with their baptisms, they have every reason to believe God loves them and desires their eternal salvation. Baptism marks them out as God's elect people, a status they maintain so long as they persevere in faithfulness.4°

The session of the AAPC recognizes that the sacrament of baptism cannot guarantee with certainty the believer's final salvation. Immediately following the sentence quoted above, we read:

> By looking to Christ alone, the preeminently elect One, the One who kept covenant to the end and is the Author and Finisher of the faith of God's people, they may find assurance. Those who take their eyes off Christ, who desert the Church where His presence is found, will make shipwreck of their faith and prove to have received the grace of God in vain.41

Elsewhere in the AAPC Summary Statement, we find the same point stressed: "Once baptized, an individual may be truly called a `Christian' because he is a member of the household of faith and the body of Christ (I Cor. 12). However, not all who are `Christians' in this sense will persevere to the end. Some will fall from grace and be lost. "42

In summary, we see many of the same lines of the doctrine of assurance propounded by other FV proponents. In addition to these similar lines, we also see, however, similar liabilities. First, Wilkins speedily dismisses a believer's competency to gain assurance of his salvation by inward examination. But this clearly puts him out of accord both with Scripture (2 Peter 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:5) and our Standards (LC, WCF). Second, Wilkins appears to take a host of baptismal passages as referring primarily to the sacrament of baptism, the physical act. But this is by no means certain. We shall turn to some of these passages in the next two chapters. Third, although he calls baptism an "infallible sign and seal" of one's belonging to Christ, Wilkins denies that the sacrament of baptism guarantees the recipient final salvation. His doctrine of assurance is able to offer, then, no assurance to a believer at any given moment in time.

Douglas Wilson

Whereas Wilson directs much of his attention proportionally to the question of perseverance and apostasy, he does also address the question of assurance. We might recall that Wilson's ecclesiology, specifically his insistence upon covenantal objectivity and his questioning of the classical Reformed doctrine of the visible and invisible church, appears to render it practically impossible to frame the question of assurance in any traditional subjective sense.

This is not to say that Wilson rhetorically assaults this Reformed doctrine of assurance in the same way that Schlissel and Barach do. Unlike Barach, Wilson takes 2 Peter 1:10 in its classical Reformed sensea passage that speaks to the believer's assurance.43 He further contends that part and parcel of biblical assurance is "self-examination," which Wilson is quite willing to distinguish from the "morbid introspection [that] holds up the mirror of self and spews forth doubts. "44 In his chapter on assurance, Wilson sets forth various marks whereby a Christian may be assured of salvation. They include "holding fast to Jesus Christ," "the gift of the Spirit," "love for the brothers," "humility of mind," "delight in the means of grace," "understand[ing] spiritual things," "obedien[ce]," and "chasten[ing] for disobedience."45 These marks, we may observe, clearly embrace subjectively and inwardly as well as outwardly discernable realities.

In the close of his chapter, however, Wilson presses the need for "objective assurance," which, he argues, is "found in real faith responding to an objective

gospel," not by "peer[ing] into the secret counsels of God, or into the murky recesses of one's own heart." The question that Wilson poses is, "The gospel is preached, the water was applied, the Table is now set. Do you believe? The question is a simple one."46 It is not clear that Wilson's "objective assurance" is anything other than what he has outlined throughout the chapter. It is difficult to see, moreover, how certain of Wilson's subjective marks, outlined earlier in this chapter, could be discerned by any means other than looking into "one's own heart." At very best, Wilson has outlined in this chapter a doctrine of assurance containing two unreconciled components, namely, subjective and objective assurance.

That Wilson rhetorically may be operating with two distinct and irreconcilable views of assurance is illustrated by a comment he makes regarding assurance in his 2002 AAPCPC lecture, "The Curses of the New Covenant."

> God is kind to those who continue, he is severe with those who fall. But the falling is defined by God's holy law. Falling is not defined by morbid introspectionism. That's not where we find the definition of falling. When you, if you want to search inward, if you want to look inward on any given day, you can always find more than enough to hang you. There is no assurance looking inward, assurance always comes from looking out, look out to God, look out to his promises, look to Christ on the cross, look at what God has said, you look away, you don't look in.47

In this statement, Wilson appears to define subjective assurance and objective assurance antithetically. At the very least, Wilson's two categories of statements concerning assurance (subjective and objective assurance versus only objective assurance) require harmonization and clarification.

Wilson's posture toward the doctrine of assurance, we may observe parenthetically, parallels his posture toward justification and the visible/invisible church distinction observed in chapters 3 and 4. There is both a reticence to inveigh against classical formulations of Reformed doctrine and a belief that both the classical Reformed and the FV doctrines are true, in that they view the biblical teaching from different but complementary perspectives. We have in each instance questioned whether those perspectives are in fact as complementary as Wilson presents them.

Mark Horne

Assurance. Horne raises concerns about "some traditions (this pops up in Presbyterian history from time to time) [that] stress that faith and assurance are so distinct ... that a person can be saved and yet be in complete uncertainty whether or not he is headed toward eternal glory or eternal condemnation. "48 Citing Romans 10:13, Horne argues that the Scripture "giv[es] us criteria so that we can identify to whom God will grant resurrection in glory rather than damnation. "49 And yet, while he points to faith and calling upon the Lord as marks of a Christian, Horne, in the first quotation above, evidences impatience with a doctrine that permits believers to be in "complete uncertainty" of their own salvation.

Further, he comments that the "warnings [i.e., of John 15:1ff.; Rom. 11:17ff.; 1 Cor. 10:1ff.; Heb. 6:4-8; 10:19-30] do not throw us into turmoil as to whether or not we are `truly saved' but encour age us to throw off every sin that encumbers us and confidently continue in the salvation Christ has promised us (cf. Hebrews 12.1-3)."So

Elsewhere he appears to resolve assurance into persevering in covenant faithfulness.

> The condition of perseverance, and the warning against abandoning God's covenant, does not lead to the same sort of introspective problems as has plagued less Biblical formulations. God's promises are sure. No one needs to worry about what will happen if they were to die in the next hour. God loves the church and he will not allow one of his promises to fail. He is not going to say, "Sorry, I never elected you and you weren't really regenerate so I don't have to honor any of my promises." Rather, continuing in God's kingdom is proof that one is welcome to God, is chosen by him, and is alive to him.51

What is telling in Horne's formulation is that he appears to believe that perseverance will prevent the "introspective problems" that other approaches have purportedly generated. This way of putting it raises the question of whether Horne conceives perseverance (and therefore assurance) to be largely if not entirely externalistic in nature. In summary, we have in Horne a decided aversion toward conceiving the marks of assurance subjectively.

Assurance and the 2002 AAPCPC Lectures. Horne has attempted to show that the positions propounded at the 2002 AAPCPC comport with Westminster's doctrine of assurance.52 After quoting liberally from each of the four speakers on the subject of assurance, he concludes that "these four ministers are trying, in their own minds, to defend the grace of God in salvation and encourage people to actually trust God for that grace rather than trying to produce some sort of work that will win God's hard-to-obtain favor. "53 Given that Horne has quoted Schlissel's critique of Beeke with apparent approbation, it would appear that Horne in fact does have similar reservations about Westminster's doctrine.

When Horne outlines his own doctrine of assurance, he continues to express concern regarding the role of subjective considerations therein. Citing 2 Corinthians 13:5, Horne asks whether this passage is "a prooftext for claiming that Christ might not indwell a profess ing believer. "54 He answers in the negative, arguing that 2 Corinthians 13:1-3 states a "threat of impending excommunication."55 Consequently, Paul only "raises questions about the status of some of the Corinthians ... when he is ready to excommunicate them. Until that point he assures them that they are members of Christ and that God is faithful to confirm them to the end."56 That 2 Corinthians 13:1-3 threatens excommunication, we might note parenthetically, is not at all certain. Even if Horne is simply stating that Paul spoke of his congregation using the judgment of charity (and Horne's language seems stronger than this), it is clear that Horne's doctrine of assurance possesses a decided hesitation toward the inward and subjective.

Covenant and Perseverance/Apostasy

One objective of assurance, our Standards state, is to enable believers to know that they "shall persevere therein [i.e., in the state of grace] unto salvation" (LC 80). We have seen that FV proponents tie the doctrine of assurance not fundamentally to the subjective graces wrought by the Holy Spirit in a believer, but to the sacrament of baptism. We have also witnessed a universal concession that water baptism does not guarantee to the recipient final salvation.

This raises a related and legitimate question. How do we account for those individuals who have received baptism and yet prove to be no true believers at all? This, of course, is the question of perseverance and apostasy.

Douglas Wilson

Covenantal membership. In taking up Wilson's doctrine of perseverance and apostasy, we need to review his working ecclesiological distinctions. We have seen that, for Wilson, one either is a covenant member or is not a covenant member. The former Wilson breaks down into two further categories: believers (covenant keepers) and unbelievers (covenant breakers).57

To these two categories corresponds Wilson's law/gospel distinction: they are "grace-readers" and "law-readers," respectively."

For Wilson, covenantal membership, however delineated, is fundamentally objective. In other words, "a Christian is one who would be identified as such by a Muslim. Membership in the Christian faith is objective-it can be photographed and fingerprinted."59 While Wilson admits the existence and presence of hypocrites within the covenant community and stresses the necessity of the inward operations of the Holy Spirit for an individual's salvation, his ecclesiology is weighted toward defining the Christian in an undifferentiated way. His rejection of the classical Reformed distinction between the visible and the invisible church and his concomitant doctrine of undifferentiated covenantal membership mean that, in practical terms, we speak of Christians as relating to the covenant of grace in the same way.

It is in this context that we must read Wilson's statements to the effect that one ought to regard an individual who is seriously defective in doctrine (a heretic) or in life (a practicing homosexual) as a "fellow Christian," provided that such a one is "lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."" This latter concern appears to stem in part from Wilson's view of baptism: "Baptism means, if you receive baptism, then you are saying that that baptism you receive means what Jesus Christ says it means not what that group says it means as I said before."61 He argues strenuously that we must not delve into the "secret things"; rather, we must "address those people that God calls by his name, address those people that God has summoned by means of an objective criteria [sic] which I can see, baptism. My responsibility is to treat them as a covenant member and I am expected to be treated as a covenant member. "62 We may point out "inconsisten[cies]" between "the mark of Christ in [one's] baptism" and his doctrine or life, but we must not "traffic in motives and intents of the heart. "63

In preaching and pastoring, Wilson counsels against attempting to raise explicitly the question of hypocrisy. "Pastorally, you don't need to flush these people out by probing and doing private detective work of a pastoral nature. What you need to do is just back God's truck up to the pulpit and unload it."64 This is not, Wilson stresses, defaulting on one's pastoral duties. Ministers preach the Scriptures, Wilson argues, which "have all these severe warnings in the New Tes- tament."65 He seems fairly confident that hypocrites, under such preaching, will generally choose to leave rather than "to slug it out."66

An undifferentiated word (at least in terms of its application to various groups within the church delineated according to the doctrine of regeneration) is therefore to be preached to an undifferentiated church. Wilson is confident that hypocrites will be discovered and unmasked if the "warnings" of the New Testament are proclaimed faithfully. This raises the questions, which are the warnings of the new covenant? and, how do they function?

Curses of the new covenant. Wilson has also been insistent that we must speak of the new covenant as dispensing not only blessings but also curses. Curses, in fact, are constitutive of Wilson's conception of a covenant: "A covenant is a solemn bond, sovereignly administered with attendant blessings and curses. "67 Wilson insists that just as "we have two kinds of covenant members," so too we have "two `covenants,' corresponding in their turn to the blessings and curses of the one covenant.""

Such an understanding of the covenants must shape the way in which we conceive of apostasy, our explanation of those who fall away. It helps us to avoid two errors: the "Arminian" error that says "that despite God's best effort, some people just get lost"; and the "Reformed Baptist" error that says that "the person never was a member of the church," and that "we put them out of the church because we realize that they were never in the church."" This latter approach "says you were never really, were never really, a member of the tree [i.e., the olive tree of Rom. 11].1170

Wilson points to three New Testament passages that he understands to speak of covenantal curses under the New Testament.71 They are 1 Corinthians 10:1-14, Hebrews 10:26-31, and Romans 11:17f. We will consider his discussion of each in turn.

1 Corinthians 10:1-14. Wilson summarizes the passage.

> The Corinthians were proud that they had a baptism and that they had a spiritual meal. They said, we are baptized, we were baptized into Christ and we have the Lord's Supper, we have a spiritual meal, we have a spiritual baptism. Don't put on airs Paul said, the Jews in the wilderness had all of that and their bodies were scattered all over the place. All right? God judges his own people. Now re member, behold the kindness and severity of God. Kindness to those who continue, severity to those who fall. But the falling is gross idolatry. . . .72

In other words, the curses of the covenant fell upon Israel; so too, Paul reasons, they may fall upon the New Testament church.

Hebrews 10:26-31. Wilson addresses one of the well-known "warning" passages from the book of Hebrews. He takes the author's phrases "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" and "a terrifying expectation of judgment" to refer to the coming Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 wherein the Temple system was destroyed, ending the Jewish sacrificial system.73 The "evil heart of unbelief," therefore, must refer to the denial of "the once for all sacrifice of Christ on the cross" by "going back to the Temple."74 It "is not something that we should read to take encouragement for a morbid introspectionism," which Wilson exhorts us to distinguish from "godly self-examination.""

With this background established, Wilson argues that "we are taught here that the Son of God, that the covenant of the Son of God has severer chastisements, severer curses than those found under the law." Just as we had "blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience" under the old covenant, so too we have them under the new covenant.76

Romans Wilson insists that Paul's olive tree metaphor offers the church no "hypothetical warning," for "God's covenant judgments are not hypothetical."" It is in the context of discussing this passage that Wilson articulates his understanding of assurance. We are to "look to God ... look to Christ ... look to these things outside [one]self ... look to His promises" whereby "that takes [us] up out of [our]sel[ves] and God's grace is operative in [us]. "7S

Wilson asks in reference to the broken branches of Paul's metaphor, "How

can I be assured when someone right next to me fell away?" Wilson answers: "This is how assurance is possible. Don't do what they did. Don't do what they did."79 If we look then to the prom ises (Wilson does not specify which promises or in what manner we are to look), and if we persevere, then we attain to assurance that we shall not fall away.

Apostasy. Wilson's distinctive ecclesiology and his understanding of curses in the new covenant shape the way that he treats the doctrine of apostasy. He stresses that apostasy is something that must be taken seriously and realistically.

> Apostasy is a real sin in real time. It is important for us to settle in our minds at the outset what an apostate falls away from. In shorthand, he falls away from Christ; he falls from grace (Gal. 5:4). But what does this mean? In the text quoted above, he has been enlightened (an early Church expression for baptism), he has tasted the heavenly gift, he has been made a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and so on. There is a certain kind of reality to this experience that is assumed. The cut-away branch has no fruit (which is why it was cut away)-but it has had sap (which is why it had to be cut away).80

The last sentence of this quotation suggests that Wilson conceives the apostate to have been in a more-than-outward relationship with Christ. The illustration he uses ("sap")-an illustration he has used elsewhere81- speaks to a vital relationship between Christ and the apostate.

How then does Wilson conceive the apostate, especially with regard to his relationship to Christ? Quoting John 15:6a, Wilson argues that "the one cast out as a branch was a branch, and not some bit of tumbleweed caught in the branches. So there is such a thing as genuine covenantal connection to Christ which is not salvific at the last day. 1112 This branch, Wilson continues, was "fruitless" and therefore "cut away."83

Elsewhere he elaborates the nature and status of this broken branch.

Branches can lose their position on the tree. You can be on the tree, someone can be on the tree right next to you and he is as much on the tree as you are, he's as much a partaker of Christ as you are, he is as much a member of Christ as you are and he is cut away and you are not and you stand by faith, so

don't be haughty, but fear.84 Wilson, in keeping with his ecclesiology, speaks of the privileges and benefits enjoyed by the broken branch in precisely the same way as he does of those who remain. Positively, he speaks (above) of the apostate as having been in "genuine covenantal connection to Christ." What does this mean?

Wilson explains in part by quoting approvingly from S. Joel Garver.

> Now, as a shadow cast by this picture, we can, of course, say that there is a sense in which those who persevere were specially (or individually) elect and those who were elect for a time were only covenantally (or generally) elect (to use Calvin's language for a moment). And that's not an unwarranted theological conclusion. But that's not the way the Scriptures generally speak, I think, and it is precisely in our "covenantal" election that "special" election is realized and made known. Thus, we should not drive a wedge between "special" and "covenantal" elections, for special election simply is covenantal election for those, who by God's sovereign electing grace, persevere. For those who fall away, covenantal election devolves into reprobation.S"

In one sense, then, we may say that the apostate (who is reprobate) was covenantally elect, and that the one who perseveres (who is decretally elect) was specially elect. But it is also legitimate and more fundamental to speak of all covenant members as elect in an undifferentiated way. When we ask what practically distinguishes the apostate from the one who is truly elect, the only answer appears to be that the latter perseveres while the former does not. Wilson, then, refrains here from defining apostasy in qualitative terms-that, apart from considerations of the grace of perseverance, the grace given to the elect is qualitatively different from that given to the reprobate.S6 Rather, apostasy is defined temporally: the apostate is one who simply does not persevere. This, of course, offers the believer no possibility for assurance at any given moment. He may, in hindsight, reflect upon his perseverance, but even that "perseverance" will not be known to him to be genuine perseverance until the day of judgment.

Wilson clarifies his position regarding what distinguishes the apostate from the nonapostate.

> The grace experienced by the apostate and the persevering grace

> experienced by the elect differ, and ... they differ in the hearts of those concerned. In other words, the difference is not just found in the inscrutable decrees of God. I would maintain further that the nature of the difference does not have to do with what is the present possession of the covenant member-Christ and his covenant-but rather with whether or not the moral nature of the man in question has been changed in what we have come to call regeneration. At this point, I am in broad agreement with [Carl D.] Robbins' paper.S7 Regeneration extends (or not) to every covenant member. If it does not, then that covenant member (despite his covenantal union with Christ) is also a fruitless son of the devil. He is unregenerate. 88

Wilson's comments, however, do not substantially alter our analysis above. His affirmations regarding the necessity of individual regeneration are appreciated, but do not resolve the issue at hand. Few FV proponents, after all, deny the necessity of individual regeneration.89 The question at hand is whether apostate members of the covenant were ever at all properly said to be regenerate. In other words, were they renewed only to become unrenewed in the course of or as a consequence of their apostasy? Wilson raises this question when he says (quoted above), "He is as much a partaker, member of Christ as you are, and he is cut away and you are not." While we may hope that Wilson does not affirm such a doctrine, his understanding of the apostate as having been in vital ("sap") union with Jesus Christ leaves open this question.

Critique. Before proceeding, we may register a few further criticisms of Wilson's doctrine.

First, Wilson's pattern of preaching (preach an undifferentiated Word to an undifferentiated church) is not in keeping with Scripture. We have frequent examples of God addressing hypocrisy as such in the Old Testament. He does not simply utter warnings of judgment against the entire community. See, for example, Jeremiah 7:1-12, Isaiah 1:10f., Amos 5:21f., and Psalm 78:34-37. We have parallel examples of exhortations and concerns expressed regarding sincerity and hypocrisy in the New Testament, as in 1 Corinthians 9:27, Ephesians 6:24, and 2 Corinthians 13:5. The pattern of biblical teaching and preaching in both the Old and New Testaments, then, respects and addresses the distinguishing heart conditions found within the visible church. This does not, of course, presume a minister's competence to discern the thoughts and intents of

another man's heart. That is the prerogative of the Spirit of God working by and with the Word of God. It is, however, to be faithful to the divinely prescribed manner in which the preached Word is to be brought to bear upon the hearts of the hearers.

Second, Wilson's doctrine of new covenant curses raises certain questions. How then may we affirm Paul's declaration that Christ has borne the curse of the law for believers (Gal. 3:13)? How may we say, with Paul, that believers no longer fall under condemnation (Rom. 8:1)? In speaking this way, Paul clearly anticipates that believers in his audience may and will come to the point where they will know that they are freed from God's "curse" and that they are under his blessing.

This is not to say, of course, that the warnings of the New Testament are not addressed to the whole visible church. Nor is it to deny that members of the visible church who are reprobate will come under severe divine judgment. It is to say that Wilson's doctrine of covenant curses fails to do justice to the biblical teaching that, in Christ, sincere believers may know that they are no longer under the law's curse.

More to the point, Wilson's doctrine appears to be an extension of his doctrine of covenantal election. On this doctrine, New Testament election is understood to be a counterpart of the corporate election of the nation of Israel. In the same way, the blessings and curses of the Old Testament Mosaic administration become paradigmatic for the individual believer in the new covenant era.

Is this, however, the most satisfactory way to explain Hebrews 10:26f.? One may agree in principle with Wilson that "covenant members in the new covenant are judged more severely than the covenant members of the old were," but Wilson's explanation of Hebrews 10:26f. in terms of specifically covenantal curses is a dubious one. When we consider its likely connection to Wilson's doctrine of covenantal election, we are further inclined to be skeptical of its merit.

Third, it is gratuitous, that is, baseless to say that Jesus' analogy in John 15:1-6 teaches that the broken branches partook of the sap of the vine. Jesus does not use the term sap in this parable. That metaphor is an inference that

Wilson has drawn. As Beisner has rightly commented, "It is dangerous enough to draw doctrines from parables; it is more dangerous to draw doctrines from details within parables; it is exegetically fatal to draw doctrines from details that are not even there! "'0

There is no hint in this parable that the broken branches ever existed in any vital, living relationship with Christ. Far less is it clear that the broken branches sustained the same relationship to Christ as those who prove to be decretally elect. Wilson's argument fails to overturn conventional Reformed readings of this passage, which see branches that are outwardly and inwardly united to Christ.

AAPC

Summary statement. In September 2002, the session of the AAPC issued a "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation." This document was subsequently revised in April 2005. We turn to consider this document before we turn to two FV proponents who have been associated with this congregation: Rich Lusk and Steve Wilkins.

This document adopts the doctrine, common among FV proponents, of covenantal election (without wishing to deny the existence of decretal election)" and appears to understand covenant membership in an undifferentiated way.92 It affirms that covenant members "formally enter" the "Church, the body of Christ" "by means of baptism. "93 Each person who is so baptized is counted elect. "When someone is united to the Church by baptism, he is incorporated into Christ and into His body; he becomes bone of Christ's bone and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30). Until and unless that person breaks covenant, he is reckoned among God's elect and regenerate saints. "94 To be baptized is to be the recipient of great blessings.

> By baptism one is joined to Christ's body, united to Him covenantally, and given all the blessings and benefits of His work (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:Iff; WSC #94). This does not, however, grant to the baptized final salvation; rather, it obligates him to fulfill the terms of the covenant (embracing these blessings by faith, repenting of sins, and persevering in faithful obedience to God). One can only fulfill the terms of the covenant by faith, not by works. And even this faith is the gift of God, lest anyone should

boast.95

In other words, to be baptized, notwithstanding the great blessings that attend it, is no guarantee that one will be saved.

Positively, one may be baptized and yet apostatize. The difference between the grace in possession of a baptized apostate and of a baptized nonapostate, excepting persevering grace, is not said to be qualitative in nature.

> God mysteriously has chosen to draw many into the covenant community who are not elect in the ultimate sense and who are not destined to receive final salvation. These non-elect covenant members are truly brought to Christ, united to Him in the Church by baptism and receive various gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. Corporately, they are part of the chosen, redeemed, Spirit-indwelt people. Sooner or later, however, in the wise counsel of God, these fail to bear fruit and fall away. In some sense, they were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit. God, however, withholds from them the gift of perseverance, and all is lost. They break the gracious new covenant they entered into at baptism.96

> It would appear that we must be willing to speak of the undifferentiated grace of God (or the generic, unspecified grace of God). In their reading of Heb. 6:4-5, some theologians try to draw subtle distinctions to make highly refined psychological differences between blessings that do not secure eternal salvation and true regeneration, which does. For at least two reasons, it is highly unlikely the writer had such distinctions in mind. First, it is by no means certain that those who have received the blessings listed in 6:4-5 will fall away. The writer merely holds it out as a possibility, a danger of which they must beware. In fact, he expects these people to persevere (6:9). If, however, the blessings catalogued imply something less than regeneration, and these people might persevere after all, we are put in the awkward position of saying that non-regenerate persons persevered to the end (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1)! Second, the illustration immediately following the warning in 6:7-8 indicates these people have received some kind of new life. Otherwise, the plant metaphor makes no sense. The question raised does not concern the nature of the grace received in the past (i.e., real regeneration vs. merely common operations

> of the Spirit), but whether or not the one who has received this grace will persevere. Thus, the solution to Heb. 6 is not developing two psychologies of conversion, one for the "truly regenerate" and one for the future apostate, and then introspecting to see which kind of grace one has received. This is a task beyond our competence. The solution is to turn from ourselves and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1ff).97

In summary, "The Bible does not explain the distinction between the nature of the work of the Spirit in the reprobate and the nature of His work in the elect, and even uses the same language for both.""

How then is one to account for the difference between an apostate and a nonapostate? What constitutes that difference? The difference appears to be that apostates do not persevere, whereas nonapostates do persevere. The document speaks of the latter in terms of a "gift of perseverance."" This gift does not appear to be endowed at baptism, since it is baptized persons who are specifically said to apostatize.loo

How is perseverance (and apostasy) defined? The document defines both in terms of covenantal faithfulness: "Those elect unto eternal salvation are always distinguished by their perseverance in faith and obedience by the grace of God. "101 The distinction, then, between apostate and the true believer is defined, as we saw above in Wilson, in fundamentally temporal terms: the former falls away, but the latter perseveres to the end.

Critique. We may offer four critical reflections on the AAPC's 2002 statement regarding perseverance and apostasy. First, we have a contradiction with Scripture in this document. The statement states that "by baptism one is joined to Christ's body, united to Him covenantally, and given all the blessings and benefits of His work," 112 and yet it also states that perseverance is not guaranteed by baptism. The clear implication is that perseverance is not one of "all the blessings and benefits of [Christ's] work." But, Scripture teaches that perseverance is a benefit purchased by Christ.

We may draw a corollary from the preceding observation."' According to this document, some who receive "all the blessings and benefits" of Christ's work are not given "final salvation." This means that "final salvation" is not a

"blessing or benefit" of Christ's work. It must therefore be the result or fruit of someone else's work. Such a doctrine is a straightforward rejection of solo Christo ("by Christ alone"). It denies that the believer's salvation has been completely and perfectly accomplished by Jesus Christ.

Second, when the document states that "by baptism one is ... given all the blessings and benefits of His work," it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the document is promoting a form of baptismal regeneration. The only way the statement could conceivably escape this charge is to say that these are the possession of the believer covenantally and not savingly. It is difficult, however, to see how such a qualification could rescue the doctrine. It would mean that no covenant member could ever truly know whether he possessed justification, adoption, and other blessings savingly or in some manner less than savingly. This would be so because perseverance, the sole practical distinguishing factor between apostate and nonapostate, can be measured only in hindsight. The New Testament, however, is clear that believers can know with certainty that they are presently justified (Rom. 5:1) and adopted (1 John 3:1).

If, however, we have a doctrine of baptismal regeneration, then we have a doctrine of apostasy that puts this document outside the Calvinistic pale. One may possess the reality of salvation and then forfeit or lose it. On this reading, the document is theologically Arminian.104

Third, the doctrine that we ought to make no practical distinction between saving and common operations of the Spirit counters the teaching of our Larger Catechism (see LC 68) and renders impossible the Standards' doctrine of assurance, predicated as that doctrine is upon the thoroughly qualitative difference between the grace possessed by believers and the "common operations of the Spirit" possessed by unbelievers (if at all).

Fourth, the document is unclear as to what constitutes sufficient perseverance to pass the mark, and what constitutes apostasy. In other words, it offers no pastoral and practical guidance to the believer how he may know whether and if he is persevering. Ironically, the docu ment compels its adherents into the very kind of morbid introspectionism FV proponents attribute to others' teaching. Such introspectionism, furthermore, can have no end or resolution because the doctrine of this document offers no guidance as to what constitutes biblical perseverance.

Rich Lusk

Lusk has drafted two articles that address the subject of perseverance and apostasy.105

The nature of apostasy. In his general study of apostasy, Lusk stresses that while there is a difference between "the covenant member who will persevere to the end" and "the covenant member who will apostatize," "from our creaturely, covenantal point of view . . . there is no perceptible difference. "106 Pointing to the narratives of Saul and David, Lusk concludes that "Saul received the same initial covenantal grace that David, Gideon, and other saved men received, though God withheld from him continuance in that grace."107

Saul, in fact, "really did taste of God's mercy and love; he really did possess the Holy Spirit and the new creation life the Spirit brings; he really was adopted into God's family and really lived a godly, exemplary life for a time. But he failed to persevere."108

This is a telling statement because it means that the similarity between an apostate and a nonapostate is not simply a matter of external perception. This similarity appears to embrace the grace that each man possesses. The difference between each is temporal-one perseveres to the end and the other does not-a difference that elsewhere Lusk nevertheless seems to describe as "qualitative" in nature.109 In Lusk's words, "We need to be willing to speak of the undifferentiated grace of God (or the generic, unspecified grace of God). "110

Lusk is clear that the example of Saul has direct application to the Christian life today.

> The application should be clear: We are like Saul in Chapter 10. We have received the Spirit and been adopted by God in our baptism/anointing. But now we must persevere. If we sin, we must not make excuses, blameshift, pridefully try to save face, etc., but must, like David, cry out in humble repentance and brokenness and move on knowing God has forgiven us.'"

We are, as Christians, in situ Saul, in the very situation and place of Saul.

Lusk also attempts to define what it means to break covenant.

> Think of the covenant as a marriage. Baptism is your wedding ceremony, uniting you to your husband Christ (Rom. 6:1ff, Eph 5:22ff). So long as you remain faithful, Christ will keep you under his protection and care, and share all he has with you. But if you become an adulterous spouse, an unfaithful spouse, Christ will cut you off and divorce you.
>
> What, then, does it mean to be unfaithful to the terms of the covenant? Not all sins are grounds for divorce from Christ, just as not all sins are grounds for divorce in an earthly marriage. Indeed, Christ is a very forgiving, merciful husband and will put up with all kinds of sin on our part. (These are sins that do not lead to death, 1 Jn 5:16). He does not demand perfection from us, only loyalty. Even serious sins need not be considered covenant breaking in the full sense, provided we are willing to confess our sin and struggle against it. (Just look at David and Peter!) God looks at a video of our lives, not merely a snapshot; he looks at the whole story of our lives, not just a single chapter. He is concerned with our direction, not perfection. A life of sustained faithfulness is what counts, however great or numerous our failings may be along the way.'"

Following this metaphor, Lusk argues that excommunication is "the point at which someone is finally divorced from Christ."13

Lusk also raises and answers the question whether apostates may be "given another chance."""

> Yes! If someone apostatizes and is cut off from the covenant community in excommunication, that person is always free to repent and return to the church and the Lord. Indeed we must recognize that one purpose of excommunication is to restore the wayward brother (1 Cor. 5, 1 Tim. 1:19-20). We see at least one such apostate repenting and returning to the church in Paul's Corinthian corre spondence. Mt. 12:31ff, Heb. 6:4-6 and 1 Jn 5:16 have sometimes been used to deny the freedom of apostates to return. But this is a misreading of these passages.'"

We have then in this doctrine of apostasy a visible illustration of the movement from election to reprobation to election that we earlier observed in FV

articulations of the doctrine of election.

Lusk also responds to several objections to this doctrine: First, is not this teaching contrary to the Westminster Standards? Lusk answers in the negative.

> The WCF does not address apostasy explicitly or directly; it is primarily concerned with the decretal, election perspective. It does teach the warnings are genuine, not hypothetical (14.2). But it also uses terms like "saved," "justified," etc., only in relation to those who enter into final salvation, and thus they are virtually synonymous with "elect." This perspective is fine as far as it goes; the things discussed here are extra-confessional, in that they do not deny any confessional teaching, but supplement it. I should add that after the Arminian controversy in the early 16th [sic] century (giving rise to what became known as Reformed scholasticism), the Reformed church became quite pre-occupied with the decretal perspective. It was in this environment that the WCF was written. This emphasis was quite necessary and helpful at the time, though early Reformed theologians were undoubtedly more balanced.'"

In other words, this doctrine of apostasy is not contrary to the Confession but supraconfessional. The Confession is written from a decretal perspective, a consequence of the controversies of the day. Lusk cites the writings of the early Reformers and more contemporary Reformed theologians such as John Murray and Norman Shepherd as models of theological reflection upon these doctrines.

Second, what about 1 John 2:19? Doesn't this verse pose a problem for Lusk's argument? Regarding this passage, Lusk says that "the key issue concerns the `us' that the apostates have departed from." He concludes that it could refer either to the apostles or to the "elect/ persevering community" (Lusk appears to use this term in its decretal sense).'" Without attempting clearly to resolve this question, Lusk claims that "John does not deny that they were `of us' in every possible sense," and it may be that John says "they ceased to be part of us, rather than that they never were part of us." In summary, the issue here is not "whether or not [the biblical writers'] hearers have received grace; usually this is taken for granted. What they question is whether or not their hearers will continue in the grace they have received."""

Third, doesn't this doctrine counter the "infallible assurance of faith" of

which the Westminster Confession of Faith speaks as the desired possession of true believers (WCF 18.2)? Lusk's response is telling. He warns that "assurance must never lead to presumption, complacency, or carelessness." We need to be "shock[ed] out of our spiritual doldrums," because "our Calvinistic preoccupation with the decrees tends to make us rather complacent (the `frozen chosen'!)."19 He comments anecdotally that "when I've talked to people who have had their assurance shaken by this kind of teaching, in virtually every case, after conversation with the person, it came out that the basis of their assurance was flawed." Lusk points to such flawed bases as "a past experience," and the "iron-clad logic" of systematic theology. 120 Tellingly, none of Lusk's replies to this question really answers the question.

Hebrews 6:4-8. Lusk has also addressed at some length Hebrews 6:4-8, a passage that traditionally has surfaced in Calvinist and Arminian disagreements concerning the doctrine of perseverance and apostasy. Lusk attempts to clear the air by rejecting certain conventional Reformed interpretations of this passage. The warnings here are not "hypothetical," nor can we say that "the package of blessings in Hebrews 6:4-5 is less than full regeneration."" As an example of the latter position, Lusk points to John Owen's argument that "we must distinguish between merely `tasting' (6:5) the heavenly gift (which future apostates may do) and really `feeding' upon it (which the genuinely regenerate do)."122

Lusk comments:

> Subtle psychological distinctions of this sort are bound to make one hopelessly introspective, always digging deeper into the inner recesses of one's heart to find some irrefutably genuine mark of grace. We are always left asking, "How ... do I know I've experienced real regeneration, and not its evil apostate twin? How do I know I have the real thing and not merely a counterfeit?" One's assurance is swallowed up in the black hole of self-examination. 123

We do not have in Hebrews 6 "two differing psychologies of conversion (or regeneration), one for those who will persevere and one for those who will not." Rather we have "an extended exhortation to perseverance. "124

When seen in this light, Hebrews 6:7-8 can be put in its proper place. The writer states that "his readers are like the earth ... that has been watered (an

obvious allusion to baptism or perhaps the means of grace more generally). New life has sprung up from the ground. We might call this new life `regeneration' in a generic, unspecified sense. There is no question the person has been made alive. The question is, What will this new life produce? "125

In view of the genuine character of this new life, we have therefore a doctrine of "real apostasy. Some people do indeed fall away, and it is a real fall from grace," from the "covenant community's objective standing in grace. "126 Lusk will remind us of the "paradoxical quality" of assurance, that "we can only be assured of our salvation against the backdrop of our possible damnation. "12'

Critique. We may offer three points of criticism of Lusk's doctrine. First, Lusk argues for a doctrine of the undifferentiated grace of God. Saul and David possessed the same grace and the same benefits, excepting the former's lack of the gift of perseverance. It is for this reason (the lack of perseverance) that Lusk will term the difference between apostates and the elect who persevere "qualitative." This is a misleading term. It suggests that the grace that apostates and nonapostates do possess in common is different. This is not, however, what Lusk is affirming. A doctrine of undifferentiated grace, as we have already observed, runs counter to the doctrine of the Standards. It is simply not true to claim that these formulations are supracon- fessional. They are anticonfessional.

Second, Lusk appears to accept the cavil that the Reformed doctrine of assurance produces moral laxity or presumption. He cites the phrase "frozen chosen" as a consequence of the doctrine. The West minster Confession of Faith, however, explicitly states that assurance, rightly understood, is intended to produce the opposite effect (WCF 18.3). Assurance, far from promoting or even being the equivalent of presumption, is calculated to resist just such a sin. It appears, furthermore, that Lusk differs materially with the Confession's insistence that a believer may attain to an "infallible assurance." Such an assurance, Lusk appears to believe, could only be productive of spiritual evil.

Third, Lusk's exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-8 is objectionable. His disagreement with Owen's exegesis and his own understanding of this passage in terms of undifferentiated grace suggests an affinity with Arminian interpretations of this passage.

The notion, furthermore, that the individuals of Hebrews 6:7-8 who produce

"thorns and thistles" have been brought to "new life" in the same, "generic, unspecified sense" as their "vegetation" counterparts is mistaken. If we are to speak of what transpires in verse 8 as "life," we must do so in terms qualitatively different than that about which we read in verse 7. Why is this so? Lusk argues that this passage speaks of individuals who make the same start but who subsequently part ways-one perseveres, one does not. That is not, however, what this passage is saying. The passage is saying that the ground produces either vegetation or thorns and thistles.121

Again, we have within Hebrews 6:7-8 a thoroughly qualitative difference-ground that lies under common rain will inevitably produce only one of two different harvests.

This being the case, we must see Owen's effort as not only exegetically and theologically defensible but also required by this passage. The blessings of Hebrews 6:4-6 must be other than the saving operations of the Holy Spirit. They must be qualitatively different from what can be experienced only by the regenerate. With these principles in view, one may also have ample resources for responding to Lusk's dubious interpretation of 1 John 2:19.

Steve Wilkins

Wilkins, as we have seen in our first chapter, shares the common FV understanding of an undifferentiated covenantal membership. In other words, all who are covenant members are said to share alike vi tally in the blessings and benefits that are found "in Christ." This doctrine provides the foundation for Wilkins's doctrine of apostasy.

> All in covenant are given all that is true of Christ. If they persevere in faith to the end, they enjoy these mercies eternally. If they fall away in unbelief, they lose these blessings and receive a greater condemnation than Sodom and Gomorrah. Covenant can be broken by unbelief and rebellion, but until it is, those in covenant with God belong to Him and are His. If they do not persevere, they lose the blessings that were given to them (and all of this works out according to God's eternal decree which He ordained before the foundation of the world).129

These forfeited blessings, "objectively true of [the Corinthian church] by virtue

of their union with Christ in covenant," Wilkins has just noted, include redemption through Christ, justification, sanctification, and the resurrection body (at the last day).'" He explicitly lists "the forgiveness of sins, adoption, possession of the kingdom, [and] sanctification" as that which the apostate forfeits.131 These blessings, Wilkins insists, must be "real" and not simply "potential"; they must be "actually theirs," not "blessings we thought they had."132 The apostate is distinguished by his failure to persevere.133 Perseverance, then, does not appear to have been a blessing bestowed to the apostate individual by virtue of his being in the covenant.

Wilkins's approach to John 15:1-8 is similar to what we have above observed in the writings of other FV proponents. In his 2001 AAPCPC lecture, he quotes and embraces Shepherd's interpretation of this passage.134 Specifically he commends Shepherd's observation that the branches in view in John 15 may not be distinguished according to those who are in Christ externally and those who are in Christ savingly. Such an approach, Wilkins says, is "completely unwarranted,"" "implausible," and "invented."136 We must rather read this metaphor "covenantally."" We must see that "all the branches are truly and vitally joined to the vine."138 Taken this way, we may see that the "covenant ... is a gracious relationship, not a potentially gracious relationship." Even so, it is "not unconditional. It requires persevering faithfulness."139 It is just such a condition that distinguishes apostate from nonapostate.

Conclusions

We can draw several conclusions about what we have studied before we proceed in the next two chapters to FV discussions concerning the sacraments. But first, we may ask a question. Why are we moving from discussions of assurance and perseverance to discussions of the sacraments, particularly baptism? First, we have found FV proponents consistently stressing what they term an objective assurancean assurance that is grounded on something outside the sinner. Many FV proponents will point to water baptism (as we have seen) as a chief ground of assurance. Baptism plays, then, a principal role in the practical Christianity of most FV proponents.

Second, broached in FV discussions of perseverance and apostasy has been the doctrine that apostates forfeit genuine blessings they really enjoyed. These blessings, FV proponents argue, stem from the apostate's covenantal

membership. Some FV proponents tie the origins of these blessings to the sacrament of baptism, thereby raising the question of sacramental efficacy.

As we have done in previous chapters, we now raise several conclusions concerning our discussions of assurance and perseverance, underscoring FV proponents' deviations from the Westminster Standards.

Assurance

(1) We have seen a consistent effort to ground assurance in covenantal membership and in (the sacrament of) baptism. Such an effort has been framed polemically against the socalled morbid introspectionism of the Reformed tradition. This effort departs from the Standards in two ways: (a) by elevating one's baptism to be a secure ground of assurance; (b) by diminishing or practically eliminating the subjective grounds of assurance (those graces, inwrought by the Holy Spirit, to which the promises are directed). This tendency, we have observed, has even extended to questioning the believer's competence to discern those subjective grounds of assurance.

(2) FV proponents are unable to provide the grounds for an "infallible assurance of faith" (WCF 18.2). Their own proposed grounds for assurance are aptly described through the words of the Westminster Confession as "a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope" (WCF 18.2).

(3) Some FV proponents argue that assurance (so defined) is necessary to the Christian's growth in grace. Such a doctrine, while dimly reflecting a long-standing Continental and BritishAmerican Reformed difference,140 is nevertheless out of keeping with the Westminster Larger Catechism, which explicitly defines assurance not to be of the essence of faith.

Perseverance

(1) Just as FV proponents operate with a straw-man Reformed doctrine of assurance ("this morbid introspectionism can produce no assurance"), so too they operate with a straw-man Reformed doctrine of perseverance ("the warnings don't mean anything to the elect who, once they discover that they are elect, may rest on their laurels"). This neglects the Westminster

Standards' teaching that no one may attain to an assurance of his election in the absence of his sincere obedience to the gospel (WCF 3.8), and that assurance of one's election affords him "diligence," not sloth or carelessness (WCF 3.8).

(2) We have observed a frequent reliance upon an exegesis of John 15:1-8 that denies a distinction among the branches according to outward and inward categories. We have seen similar treatments of Hebrews 6:4-8. The particularly objectionable component of this exegesis of John 15:1-8 is its understanding of branches related to the vine in an undifferentiated way. We have observed an argument from John 15:1-8 that apostates had been in vital ("sap") union with the vine. But such an argument means that the difference between the grace experienced by apostates and that experienced by nonapostates is ultimately one of duration and not of kind. This is counter to the Larger Catechism's explanation of the difference between the elect and the nonelect (LC 68).

To affirm that a believer may genuinely possess Christ and his benefits and yet lose them raises a host of theological problems. A reconciled believer is now unreconciled. A justified be liever is now condemned. A sanctified believer is again under the dominion of sin. An adopted believer is again a child of the devil. God has withdrawn his everlasting love to this sinner and has severed a believer from vital union with Jesus Christ.

(3) The doctrine of distinguishing nonapostate from apostate by recourse to perseverance effectively reduces assurance to perseverance. This is counter to the Larger Catechism, which states that one objective of assurance is "that they are in the state of grace and shall persevere therein unto salvation" (LC 80). Assurance is unto perseverance, but assurance is not to be resolved into perseverance.

Chapter 6

Covenant and the Sacraments: Leithart's Views

In the first chapter, we began our study of the theology of the FV with a consideration of the definition of a covenant and FV understandings of the way in which covenant relates to the doctrine of the Trinity. We then pursued two parallel trajectories: (1) in chapters 2 and 3, we considered how this conception of covenant relates both to the covenants of biblical history and to the doctrine of justification. (2) In chapters 4 and 5, we considered the way in which this conception of covenant relates to the doctrine of election and to the doctrines of assurance and perseverance.

We now turn in this chapter and the next to a topic that has been surfacing in each of our studies-the sacraments. We have found that the doctrine of covenantal objectivity was grounded, in part, on an understanding of the sacrament of baptism as admitting all baptized congregants to precisely the same covenantal blessings and benefits. We have found at least one FV proponent, Rich Lusk, contending for the sacrament of baptism as an "instrument" of justification, along with faith and good works. We have found many FV proponents, following Norman Shepherd, not only subordinating election to covenant but also pointing to baptism as the sign that one has made the transition from death to life. Baptism is the way one knows that he or she is covenantally elect. FV proponents, furthermore, frequently appeal to baptism as an objective ground of assurance. Baptism, however, does not guarantee to the recipient what is sometimes called the gift of perseverance.

In one important sense, then, the doctrine of sacramental efficacy, particularly the doctrine of baptism, is one that occupies a tremendously important role in what has emerged as the system of the Federal Vision. To that end, our study will take the following path. We will study in separate treatments

(where possible) the doctrines of sacramental efficacy and baptism among FV proponents. We will begin with a "Tale of Two Cities": Moscow, Idaho (Peter Leithart and Douglas Wilson), and Monroe, Louisiana (Steve Wilkins and Rich Lusk). We will conclude with a study of two more PCA officers who have written in this vein, namely, S. Joel Garver and Mark Horne. This chapter will focus exclusively on the writings of Peter Leithart, owing not only to the extent of his output but also to the influence that he has had on other FV proponents.

A Caution

One of the most prolific and formidable FV proponents regarding the doctrine of the sacraments is Peter Leithart. Not only has he been reflecting on these issues in print for some time,' but his basic understanding of the nature and role of the sacraments in the life of the church has been in place since at least the mid 1990s. Leithart therefore offers the reader some of the most probing and extensive reflections on the sacraments available among FV proponents.

A study of Leithart's sacramentology quickly shows the impossibility of reading many of his statements in a straightforward way. Many Reformed readers understand, for example, the language of sacramental efficacy against the backdrop of the historic sacramental controversies both between Protestantism and Rome, and among various Protestant groups. But if one does not take care to read the way that Leithart defines and uses terms, to see that he is attempting to step outside that historic discussion, his arguments can be misconstrued. To say this is not to approve either his method or his conclusions (as the reader will see below), but it is a reminder that extreme caution must be exercised in reading, interpreting, and assessing his arguments. To a lesser extent this same caution will apply to other FV proponents' sacramentology.

The Backdrop for Leithart's Views

Evangelical Aversion to Sacraments

Against what background does Leithart frame his sacramental theology? In short, he contends that the modern evangelical church has fallen captive to modernity, which is a "revolt against ritual.'" There are, Leithart continues, six features inherent to evangelicalism that render it peculiarly hostile to the sacraments. (1) There is a "spiritualizing reading of redemptive history," which

sees "the move from Old to New" as a "move from ritual to non-ritual, from physical to less physical forms of worship."' Evangelicalism fails to see that the movement from old to new is rather "from rituals and signs of distance and exclusion" to "signs and rituals of inclusion and incorporation. "4 (2) Some see Old Testament prophecy as "condemn[ing] form and ritual as such." (3) There is the Reformation's prioritization of Word over sacrament. (4) Evangelicalism understands the "individual person and his experience of the world" to be the "frame of reference for ... worship and sacraments." This causes us to "wonder why we need these objects and substances to communicate these benefits" of grace. (5) Evangelicalism entertains a belief that since "grace is invisible ... visible substances to receive grace" are unnecessary. This corresponds to a belief that "what matters is the `me' lurking behind the roles I play and the things I do." (6) There is an adoption of "privatization," which makes "religion [to be] a matter of belief and personal devotion."5 It is against each of these perceived errors or deviations that one may read Leithart's sacramental theology.

Trinitarian Personalism

We have been tracing throughout this study Leithart's attempt to rethink the theological project in terms of what we have termed a doctrine of Trinitarian personalism.

Taking his cue from Van Til's doctrine of Absolute Person, Leithart argued for a doctrine of the Trinity that conceived the divine unity in fundamentally relational terms. We have seen in our chapter on justification how Leithart applied this concern to his understanding of the application of redemption to the believer. Redemption was seen as something fundamentally dynamic and relational. In conjunction with this definition a caution was raised against the so-called reification of grace, that is, conceiving grace as a "substance." Grace is, rather, "shorthand for describing the Triune God's personal kindness to human beings and the gifts, especially the self-gift of the Spirit, that flow from that kindness."6

Leithart has also stressed that soteriology and ecclesiology are "two sides of the same coin, not sharply distinct loci."' Consequently, "entry into the church is always a soteriological fact for the person who enters."8 Leithart qualifies this latter point by stating that "not . . . everyone who enters the church participates in the salvation of humanity in the same manner." Some will apostatize.

Nevertheless, "just as it is not true to say that the couple that ultimately divorces was never `really' married, so it is not true to say that the man whose body is left rotting at the foot of Sinai was never `really' saved from Egypt.'" Leithart stresses that when we speak of the church as "the saved society, then membership in the church necessarily means participation in the saved society."" Leithart contends, however, that "this is not a merely external or sociological reality. In fact, there is no such thing as a `merely' sociological reality."11

Leithart expressly applies these concerns to the sacraments, specifically his understanding of sacramental efficacy.

> If baptism initiates into the church, the question about baptismal efficacy is not what power is in water, but what the church iswhat is this community into which baptism inducts me? If, as I have argued above, the church is the saved community and the people in fellowship with the Father through the Son in the Spirit, then baptism, as the entry rite into this community, must give the baptized a share in this community and this fellowship. If the church is the family of God the Father, baptism, by inducting people into the church, makes them children of their heavenly Father. If the church is the body of Christ, then baptism makes the baptized a member of the body and a branch of the vine. If the church is the temple of the Spirit, then baptism makes the baptized a pillar or stone of that temple and himself a temple indwelt by the Spirit.'

Leithart provocatively states the same point by referring to some of these above-mentioned privileges as "the `new life' effected by the `waters of regeneration,'" matters that are not "merely social."""" Elsewhere he speaks of sacraments as the "means of salvation in this social dimension. 1114

Leithart hastens to add that "none of this means that every one of the baptized will necessarily be part of the saved community forever." Only "those who trust in their loving Father, abide in Christ, and keep in step with the Spirit-those who by pure grace endure to the end improving on their baptisms-they will be eternally saved."" We have then a doctrine of perseverance and apostasy akin to what we observed in several other FV proponents in our previous chapter.

The Sacraments and Sacramental Efficacy

With this in mind, let us turn our attention to what Leithart has affirmed of sacramental efficacy (generally) before we direct our focus upon his statements of baptismal efficacy (particularly).

Leithart has recently argued that our sacramental theology must stem directly from our Trinitarian theology, our understanding of the Trinity in the personalistic terms that he has proposed.16 He suggests that Western theology is tinctured with "implicit Unitarianism" as well as "Zwinglian anti -sacramental ism."" We have, as moderns, a "tendency to disrupt symbol and reality and to collapse the Trinity into unity."" He discusses Colin Gunton's critique of Augustine's formulation of a "psychological" rather than a "sociological" model for the Trinity wherein "the persons are analogous to functions of the human mind." This, to Gunton, "suggests that the persons are only formally distinct."" Such a model, moreover, relegates "person and hence community" to a "secondary and even epiphenomenal level, both in the nature of God and even in the history of salvation."20 Locating the "primary divine-human encounter in the human mind," as Augustine does, creates unsolvable problems for the role and func tion of the sacraments in one's theology.' While Leithart raises doubts concerning the accuracy of Gunton's critique of Augustine, he does recognize that Gunton has isolated genuine problems within Western theology.

We need, Leithart argues, a "fully trinitarian doctrine of God" that can be related integrally to a "sacramental theology."" This is all the more urgent because "Reformed theology has never been able to fit sacramental theology convincingly into its overall system," in part because of a deficient understanding of who God is.23 Citing Warfield's Plan of Salvation as an example, Leithart says of the work that "it is not clear how the sacraments, church, or even the 'external' preaching of the gospel can fit into this scheme." "Sacramental mediation" is "in spite of the overall thrust of soteriology."24 Warfield's "antithesis between sacerdotal and evangelical is a false one that a trinitarian account of the sacraments (and salvation) will help us to escape.""

Positively, Leithart appeals to Rahner's theology of symbol and Zizioulas's doctrine of "being-as-communion" as efforts that, in his judgment, permit one successfully to bridge trinitarianism and sacramentology.

Karl Rahner. Leithart appears to cite approvingly the broad outlines of Rahner's understanding of being as symbol. He summarizes Rahner as claiming

that symbol is essential not only to one's knowledge of being but also to the nature of being itself.26 Consequently, whether we speak of God or of men made after the image of God, we cannot do so without symbol.27 Such a doctrine renders symbol not peripheral to but essential of God, man, and divine-human interactions.

Zizioulas. As with Rahner, Leithart's appropriation of Zizioulas is not uncritical.28 Nevertheless, Leithart is drawn to Zizioulas's hesitation regarding formulations of the Trinity that employ ontological language.

Leithart's appropriation of Zizioulas's trinitarianism directly applies to our understanding of the sacraments. One thing this trinitarianism does is reshape our conceptions of sacramental efficacy. Questions about what baptism does to me personally, for example, "assume that `I' am separable from the communities of which I am a member and the roles I have been commissioned to play." When we consider that "redemption is the remaking of man, and therefore the remaking of man in his relationships," and that "salvation is necessarily social salvation," then we may make "a strong affirmation of baptismal efficacy" that is nonsacerdotal. Such a conception of the sacramental act remakes "the `real me"' as "social self. "29

In a statement summarizing his reflections on Rahner and Zizioulas, Leithart observes that just as "sin violates community," so "redemption necessarily involves God's gathering of a people, the restoration not only of individuals in their unique integrity, but of relationships and the institutional structures that give form to relationships."" Since, given our understanding of the Trinity and of man made after God's image, relationships can "exist only through the use and exchange of symbols," we may say that "sacraments are necessary to the achievement of salvation.""

Sacramental Terminology

In arguing from the Trinity for a distinct sacramentology, Leithart is consciously departing from traditional Western ways of conceiving of the sacraments' nature and office in salvation. One of these differences concerns sacramental efficacy. One way that Leithart tackles the question of sacramental efficacy is to cite problems in conceptions or terminologies traditionally used to describe what may or may not transpire through or in the sacrament.

In an early article published in the Westminster Theological journal," Leithart argues that both Aquinas and Luther conceived of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper in terms of "Aristotelian philosophy."" Calvin, however, broke from Aristotelian categories and assumptions. He saw the "Eucharist" as "both symbol and reality" but not in such a way as to divorce them, as in prior sacramental discussions.34 While using the language of "sign," Calvin "insisted at the same time that in the presentation of the symbol the reality is also offered and received."" Calvin, Leithart insists, would not "speculate philosophically about the Eucharistic presence"; rather, he used "Christological and eschatological boundaries.""

Leithart contrasts Calvin's view with his own understanding of Dabney's position-that believers participate "in the `benefits' or 'operations' of Christ," that is, "receive benefits without union with the benefactor."" Such an understanding of sacramental efficacy as Dabney's, however, forces us "back into a pre-Reformation deadlock."38 Calvin, we are assured, points us in the direction of a "genuine ecumenical orthodoxy on the doctrine of the real presence,"39 an ecumenism that appears to embrace not only intra-Protestant divisions but also the Roman Catholic-Protestant divide.

Theology of Ritual

In further attempting to construct a theology of the sacraments, Leithart also developed early what he terms a "theology of ritual."40 He argues that in Scripture, "ritual" is "at least a matter of communication," a "way of `saying' or perhaps better, of `showing' something to God."" It is not, therefore, a bare rite, nor is it something that has no significance before God.

Later, Leithart contends that there is a great "need for a Reformed, Vantillian theology of ritual," specifically a "positive biblical assessment of the place of ritual in the Christian worldview and in the practice of the church."" What necessitates such a project? The Reformed have allowed "election," and evangelicals have allowed "personal experience of regenerating grace," to "cancel out the covenant, the church, and the sacraments.""

The sacraments are "dynamic rites" (Leithart already in 1994 prefers this term to the term sign-"'sign' connotes something altogether too static"44). We should therefore make our starting point in our sacramental reflections the "texts

that deal directly with rituals, which are found mainly in Exodus-Deuteronomy." One way in which we can do so is to look at the "New Testament images associated with baptism." These, Leithart argues, "hearken back to the rite of priestly ordination. 5545

Ritual and Sacrament

We may examine three articles in which Leithart applies this theology of ritual to the question of sacramental efficacy: "Sacramental Efficacy" (1995); "The Way Things Really Ought to Be: Eucharist, Eschatology, and Culture" (1997); and "Conjugating the Rites: Old and New in Augustine's Theory of Signs" (1999). In these articles we see the far-reaching implications of Leithart's ritual theory for the doctrine of the sacraments.

"Sacramental Efficacy." Although marriage and ordination "have an `automatic' effect," acting in an "ex opere operato" sense, we may not speak of the sacraments in this way. That is because they deal with "heavenly realities" and not strictly "earthly realities. "46 For this reason, we need to speak of "various kinds of efficacy that have to do with multiple uses, ends, or intentions. "47 In this respect, although "in terms of individual salvation [the sacraments] cannot be said to operate `automatically,'" we may speak of efficacy in terms of other ends "for which the sacraments were instituted."" Such ends include the demonstration of ecclesiastical unity, the church's entry into the "new Covenant Sabbath," and the manifestation of "the festival form of the new heavens and the new earth."49

"The Way Things Really Ought to Be: Eucharist, Eschatology, and Culture." After criticizing Western theology for its conceiving the sacraments in terms of two questions ("What does or does not happen to the bread and wine [in the sacrament]? And, what benefit does participation in the Eucharist bring to the individual participant?") Leithart concludes that the West has too long been "guided by a metaphorical equation of `seeing' and `knowing,' " that is, of "'visible' words."50 It is this latter way of approaching the sacraments, Leithart reiterates, that can "tilt sacramental theology toward the worst abuses of medieval theory and practice. "51

Ritual theory, a "sounder metaphorical apparatus" than that which has produced the "debates about the metaphysics of the bread and wine," assists us

because it puts the sacraments in their proper context, namely, ecclesiology.52 It emphasizes not "sign"(in the traditional sense) but "performance."53 Ritual theory allows us to see the sacraments as "express[ing the church's] understanding of reality and her place in it" and as "challeng[ing] the world's conceptions of her and of itself."" Furthermore, since the kingdom "takes the specific form of a feast," what is crucial to the sacrament of the Lord's Sup per is "the whole action of the common meal" not questions of "substantial transformation" of the elements or even of the "believer's individual communion."55 This, Leithart says, shifts the significance of the sacrament from "metaphysical reality" to a more "phenomenological" one.56 When we "eat bread and drink wine together," we are in the realm of "a eucharistic sociology, which is to say, an ecclesiology. "57 In this sense, we may even speak of the Supper as a "sacrificial meal"-not in the sense that Rome intends it, but as we "eat the flesh of a substitutionary victim" by way of commemoration and manifest the unity of the church, presumably in a self-sacrificial way.58

"Conjugating the Rites: Old and New in Augustine's Theory of Signs." Leithart suggests that post-Augustinian sacramental reflection has baptized the "quasi-Marcionite idea that the transition from old to new in the history of salvation is a transition from a more sociological form of religion to a more spiritual one."" We in the West, Leithart continues, have inherited from Augustine an understanding of signum and res in sacramental discussions that has posed a "gap ... bridged by the mind," an understanding that transpires in "an essentially individualistic framework.""

Leithart claims, however, to have found in Augustine a "sociological" model of the sacraments-one that can displace the above problematic model.61 When we do so, we find that the old covenant is a necessary "first movement of [a] two-part symphony," which can't be "dispense[d] without vitiating the beauty of the whole."62 There is no "discontinuity of the operation, importance, or function of signs" in moving from old to new. "Sacraments have the same communal function throughout redemptive history."63 In this view "rites and sacraments are not a grudging concession to the weakness of the flesh"; rather, signs are "enmeshed in the life of a community. 1164

To adopt such a theory of signs, Leithart continues, is immediately to call into question two "dualisms of traditional sacramental theology."65 It first calls into question the dualism of signum and res. On the sociological model, "what is

sensibly apparent in the Eucharist is what is brought to mind, and this, in turn, is what is accomplished-the unity of the body." Further, "contemplating the sacrament (assuming that contemplation is what one is supposed to do with it) does not bring something else to mind."66

Leithart's theory of signs also calls into question the dualism of "outward sign and inward grace." He explains:

> If ... human sickness consists in strife, violence, and disruptions of community-in a refusal to sit at a common table in the presence of the one God-as well as in the sins of the heart, and if salvation consists in the gathering of all nations into one body, then the form of the sacrament is simply indistinguishable from the grace. The answer to the question: "What are you trying to accomplish by gathering these people for this meal" is, "To gather these people for this meal."67

Notable in this explanation is Leithart's conception of sin in fundamentally social and nonmoral categories. The moral dimension of sin is not denied. It is, however, marginalized. The chief import of the sacrament is to restore, unify, and give expression to the unity of the community.

Sacramental Terminology (Again)

Leithart's reflections occasion his objections to categories traditionally employed by Protestants in speaking of the sacraments.

Sacramental union. Leithart argues that "Christians have all been united to Christ in His death and resurrection because they have all been baptized (Rom. 6)."6S Why do many miss the obvious meaning of Romans 6?

> Many preachers cannot take Paul at his word. "Baptism" doesn't refer to the "sign" of water but to the "thing" that the water symbolizes. Paul wasn't referring to the baptismal rite itself. He wasn't telling the Romans that they were dead and risen with Christ by baptism, but by what to which baptism points.69

This latter explanation, Leithart continues, often stems from a conventional doctrine of a "sacramental union between sign and thing." But such an

understanding can mean that "any passage about sacra ments can be turned into a passage that is not about sacraments." This can leave our interpretation, for example, of 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, "Zwinglian." But "this is hopeless," for it leaves us "with no sacramental theology and perhaps with no sacraments. "70

In this vein, Leithart dismisses John Murray's attempts to argue that the "baptism" of Romans 6 does not refer primarily to water baptism. Such attempts, Leithart contends, are "assertion" and not "argument."" Back of such conclusions as Murray's are the faulty assumptions that "there is such a thing as a `sacrament in itself' and that some things (though not sacraments) do have "efficacy in themselves."" In reply to these assumptions, Leithart states that "baptismal water," after all, is "the authorized entry rite into discipleship (Mt. 28:18-20)" The latter assumption in particular, Leithart contends, suggests "autonomy" of the creation-something no one ought to affirm.73

Means of grace. In a recent article, Leithart has argued that the phrase "means of grace" in describing the sacraments carries certain fatal liabilities.74 To speak this way, for example, "tends to mechanize" the sacraments, "turning [them] into machines that deliver grace." Such "mechanistic metaphors obscure the fact that sacraments are moments of personal encounter with the living God." To speak of sacraments as "means" "undercut[s]" the " `personalism' of ... covenant theology."75 To speak of "means of grace" can also treat "grace as a kind of `created thing,' `force,' or `energy' communicated through the sacraments." But the " `force' that acts on us, whether in sacraments or in ordinary food or washing, is God himself." We ought not speak of "God, grace, sacraments (as `means' or `channels' of grace), church"; but "God (who is favorably disposed to us), sacraments, and the church. "76 We should prefer, rather, to speak of sacraments not as "means of grace, but themselves graces, gifts of a gracious God. "77

Signs. Leithart argues that one of the evidences of Reformed "rationalism" is a tendency to "reduce baptism and the Supper to a means for communicating information," making them "disguised sermons. "78 Leithart stresses that while he affirms the traditional un derstanding of sacraments as "signs" wherein "sacraments do communicate ... mean something, bring something to mind, are intended to teach," they mean much more. The sacraments are "actions performed at God's commands by the church"; and "as signs ... are mighty acts of God for the redemption of His people and the world."" He clarifies his

meaning in another article.

> If sacraments are signs and symbols in the sense suggested here [i.e. in this article], then they are (with the Word and through the Spirit) the matrix of personal communion with the Triune God. The symbolism involved in sacraments is the symbolism of action, less like the symbolism of a painting or a metaphor than the symbolism of a handshake or a wave or a kiss. They are symbols by and through and in which personal, covenantal relationships are forged and maintained. Sacraments are not "signs of an invisible relationship with Christ." Rather, the intricate fabric of exchanged language, gesture, symbol, and action is our personal relationship with God.S°

Or, as Leithart puts it elsewhere, "Baptism and the Supper do have cognitive and didactic content, ritually retelling the story of the world's redemption. Yet sacraments, as visible words, do not have an exclusively didactic function. Insofar as they are like speech, the sacraments form or continue personal communion.""

In summary, Leithart is willing to retain, at least in principle, what the tradition has maintained about sacraments as signs. He wishes, he claims, to add to an understanding of sacrament as sign a performative or active dimension to the sacramental ritual. In speaking this way, we may note, Leithart is consciously drawing from studies in the philosophy of language. We say that "sacraments as visible words actually do things" in the sense that words generally are spoken of as "performative. "82 "Whatever power they have is the kind of power that symbols have, not the kind of power that a combustion engine or a nuclear power plant has."83

Summary

In conjunction with this broadened conception of the sacrament (broadened, at least, with respect to the way in which many Protestants conventionally conceive the sacrament) is a more comprehensive attempt to explain the significance and role of the sacraments for believers today. Leithart, in an article devoted to this question," offers three theological reasons that lie behind this broadened conception.

First, he argues that "the Persons of the Divine Trinity perform rites of homage in relation to each other"; man was therefore created after God's image as "a creature of ritual"; we expect, then, that the church, the "beginning of a new human race.... should have ritual forms in the new covenant."" Second, because man is created soul and body, "the purpose of rites is not simply to bring to mind certain ideas through symbols but also to cause our bodies (with our minds) repeatedly to perform certain actions, including acts of speech." "The rites of the church ... inscribe through repetition the mental-physical habits appropriate to life in the body of Christ-habits of thanksgiving, of sharing, of communion."86 Third, "rites are necessary to the body of Christ as a visible, public body. 1117

In summary, then, Leithart grounds his particular understanding of the sacraments as shaped by a theory of ritual in the triune nature of God, in anthropology, and in ecclesiology. Fundamental to Leithart's sacramental project is his doctrine of Trinitarian personalism.

Critique

(1) We need to underscore that the foundation of Leithart's reflections on the sacraments is his doctrine of Trinitarian personalism. We have reflected critically on this in a previous chapter. We may remind ourselves that this doctrine carries certain liabilities, not least of which is its embrace of a philosophical skepticism toward the nature of being and a preference in expression for the relations or activities of that being.

If we cannot substantiate this doctrine, however, whatever rests upon it as a foundation is necessarily weakened. The doctrines of a social anthropology, social soteriology and ecclesiology, and a social sacramentology are, as Leithart himself portrays them, conjoined as links in a chain. If God is not personal in the way that Leithart conceives God, then the anthropological conclusions do not follow. But if these conclusions do not follow, then neither soteriology nor the sacraments are fundamentally social, at least in the way that Leithart has articulated. In other words, Leithart's sacramentology is as vulnerable as the theological structure that undergirds it. More to the point, a questionable philosophical judgment undergirds Leithart's sacramentology. This, again, is the philosophical tail wagging the theological dog.

(2) A corollary of the preceding is Leithart's understanding of grace. For Leithart, grace is no substance, but it is a relationship between God and man. This, however, raises a certain problem: How then are we to conceive of communication of grace, whether sacramentally or in some other setting? Is it God's self-communication to the sinner? Is it simply God's favor displayed in a nonontological sense?

The way in which we answer these questions has implications for our doctrines of regeneration and of sanctification. Is the grace of regeneration the infusion of a habitus, as Reformed theology has often argued?88 If not, how are we to defend regeneration against the twin charges (a) that it is a moral and not a physical change (b) that it properly and truly consists of divine possession, a la demon possession. Furthermore, how are the good works of a renewed believer that are done under the power of the Holy Spirit said properly to be his own? How do we preserve the biblical synergism of sanctification?

(3) Leithart consciously recognizes that his understanding of sacramental efficacy is informed by contemporary studies in the philosophy of language. In doing so, he displaces much of Western theological reflection upon the doctrine of the sacraments, owing as it does, he claims, to Aristotelian philosophy. Leithart, however, does not engage Aristotle in an extended critique, particularly on the most significant point under dispute: ontology and the sacraments. He appears to dismiss Aristotle rather hastily.

This raises some further concerns. One may not be at all surprised that a devoted student of Van Til should follow his teacher in dismissing Aristotelian philosophy, especially as that philosophy has been placed in the service of Christian theology. One may be surprised, however, to see Leithart replacing Aristotle with a more contemporary system of philosophy. To do so surely requires some sort of defense on his part, a defense warranting what has proven to be a fairly radical reworking of theological terminology (e.g., sacramental efficacy) in view of prior philosophical conclusions. We are rarely, if ever, offered such a defense.

The preceding comments are not a rejection of the proper place for philosophical judgments in theological reflection. I am in favor of giving philosophy its place in theological discussion, particularly in the doctrine of the sacraments. This is why, for instance, the Standards rightly speak of

transubstantiation as "repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense, and reason" (WCF 29.6). In this statement, we see the judgment of the Divines (one unique neither to them nor to the seventeenth century) that transubstantiation is not only biblically but also philosophically objectionable. The philosophical objection, however, is pointedly ontological. Transubstantiation, Protestants have argued, requires us to believe that what appears to our senses to be bread and wine is substantially the body and blood of Christ.

We might also observe that many of the philosophers from whom Leithart is drawing are contemporary. Few would argue that their distinctive insights predate the modern era. This raises the question of whether Leithart's argument is at all historically plausible. Would the biblical writers be sharing these modern conclusions from the philosophy of language? To raise this question is to suggest that Leithart's reflections, whatever merit they may possess in themselves, are anachronistic.

(4) Leithart's refashioning sacramental theology around contemporary philosophy yields a different system than that represented in the Westminster Standards. He recognizes this when he argues, for instance, that he accepts the traditional understanding of a sacrament as a sign but wishes to supplement that understanding. It is not at all clear, however, that these two distinct approaches are as compatible as Leithart presents them. Let us cite four examples.

First, Leithart uses the term efficacy idiosyncratically. The term has often meant, in classical theology, that the administration of the sacrament conveys or is at least attended by communication of grace to the recipient. It is surely in this sense that the Larger Catechism asks and answers the question, "How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?" (LC 161). Leithart's reworked understanding of efficacy, however, hinges on his appropriation of ritual theory and his understanding of the nature of human identity. In other words, efficacy is employed in distinctively sociological categories. Leithart can consequently speak of sacramental "efficacy" in the strongest of terms. He frequently states that the sacramental act does, performs, accomplishes something. But given the pedigree of the term efficacy within the church, we may question whether this is a responsible use of language. One conceivable problem is the inevitable tendency to prompt believers to think of redemption in sacerdotal terms.

Second, Leithart appears to believe that his theory of signs transcends the traditional categories of sign and thing signified. At points, he states that he intends his theory of sign to supplement the traditional conception of sign. At other points, however, he suggests that this offers us a breakthrough for helping to overcome an impasse that has historically divided the church.

Third, Leithart's sociological reconstruction of the sacraments renders, by his own admission, the classical language of "means of grace" and "sacramental union" obsolete.

The question that must be raised is whether dispensing this language leaves Westminster's doctrine of the sacraments untouched. It does not. To dispense with these distinctions paves the way for just the crassest kind of mechanical sacramental efficacy that has surfaced in the church. Leithart responds that he is defining such terms as efficacy and grace differently than the tradition has. But this is virtually to concede that not only the classical sacramental distinctions but also the sacramental doctrines themselves, as traditionally formulated, are illegitimate.

Fourth, back of these is a more fundamental issue. Leithart is most comfortable when he speaks of sin and redemption in terms of the fragmentation and restoration of relationships, of community. He is most comfortable in speaking of the sacraments as emblems of social restoration and of actually effecting social restoration. And yet, Leithart is unwilling to deny that sin, redemption, and the sacraments have a decidedly moral dimension. He is likely unwilling to deny these things because of his professed commitments to the Reformed faith and to the Scripture. To borrow words that Warfield used of Lewis Sperry Chafer, Leithart "is in the unfortunate and, one would think, very uncomfortable condition of having two inconsistent systems of religion struggling together in his mind."89 He would do well to choose one and set the other free.

(5) We need to stress that Leithart is arguing, at least with respect to the sociological dimensions of the sacraments, for nothing that is not already substantially in the Westminster Standards. Both sacraments are intended to "testify and cherish [believers'] love and communion one with another" and to "distinguish them from those that are without" (LC 162). The Standards recognize, then, that there are genuine "sociological" ends to baptism and the

Lord's Supper.

It is baptism wherein believers have "given up their names to Christ," and it is baptism that engages them "to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body" (LC 167). In other words, baptism very much touches believers' identity and very much binds us to love our brothers in Christ-they with whom we are one body.

The Lord's Supper, furthermore, is a sacrament wherein believers "testify and renew ... their mutual love and fellowship each with the other, as members of the same mystical body" (LC 168). In the sacrament, itself, then, believers actually express their unity, love, and fellowship in Christ. Many of these items Leithart suggests are absent from contemporary Reformed and evangelical piety. This is certainly true in some settings. Our response to this imbalance, however, ought not to be to refashion our theology completely. It ought rather to be to study the Scriptures more diligently with the assistance of our subordinate standards. When we do so, we will achieve what neither some evangelicals nor Leithart's doctrine offer ussolid biblical balance.

The Doctrine of Baptism

With Leithart's doctrine of sacramental efficacy in view, we may more briefly consider a narrower question: What in particular does baptism effect or accomplish? We may also bring to consideration of this question an unresolved tension that we observed in the prior discussion of Leithart's doctrine: How are the sociological and soteriological dimensions of baptism to be reconciled? Can they be reconciled?

Leithart has given a helpful summary of his view of baptism in a recent posting, which we will intersperse with commentary and summarization."

> First, it is crucial ... to think about baptism in terms of the OT categories that we examined in an earlier lecture.91
>
> Second, it is evident that the NT teaches that baptism is a saving ordinance, that it brings the baptized into union with Christ in His death and resurrection. Nearly every passage on baptism in the NT treats it as an ordinance that gives grace (Rom 6; 1 Cor 10; 12:12-13; Gal 3; Col 2;

Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3; Heb 10).92

Up to this point, then, Leithart stresses that Old Testament categories determine our understanding of New Testament baptism. He also stresses an efficacy regarding baptism that goes beyond the sociological. He speaks of a salvific or soteriological efficacy ("brings the baptized into union . . ."; "an ordinance that gives grace") that is true of "nearly every" New Testament passage on baptism.

Leithart continues with his summary.

> Third, how can we affirm what the NT says without falling into the errors of a) believing that the rite as a human act saves people or b) believing that everyone who is baptized is "in" without any further demands being placed upon them. Three axioms guide our understanding of the theology of baptism:
>
> 1. "Baptism" in the NT texts refers to the rite of water baptism. There are a few exceptions, but they are fairly obvious (Jesus talking about His death as a baptism, for instance). Note that the word "baptism" does not refer merely to the physical action of pouring, sprinkling, or immersion; it refers to the performance of a rite authorized by Jesus Christ, to which is attached the promise of God.
>
> 2. The body of Christ is the body of Christ. That is, the phrase "body of Christ" in the NT refers to the church, and this church is not a mere sociological reality, but is the children of the Father, united to Christ by the Spirit. Baptism engrafts a person into the body of Christ-meaning, into the church and also into the fellowship of the Trinity (since that's what the church is).
>
> 3. Apostasy is possible. It is possible to be united to Jesus Christ, receive His Spirit, and then fall from that gracious condition and back into the world (John 15; 1 Cor 10; Heb 6; 2 Pet 2).93

We must avoid, Leithart says, saying that "the rite as a human act saves people" or that baptism places no "demands" on the baptized. Even so, he does not back down from his high statements of baptismal efficacy. The way we appear to avoid this error is by conceding that "apostasy is possible." One may be "united

to Jesus Christ, receive His Spirit" and yet fall away totally and finally. In speaking of baptismal efficacy in this way, Leithart admittedly is speaking in more than sociological terms. What is left unclear is the definition of such phrases as "united to Jesus Christ; receive His Spirit."

Leithart clarifies this concern in an earlier article on "Baptism and the Spirit. "94 There he contends that "the pattern of [the Spirit's] working in the Old Covenant provides the framework for understanding His working now."95 Specifically, the Old Testament teaches us that "we should understand too that the Spirit is not a guaranteed endowment, if that is taken to mean that we cannot lose the Spirit no matter how we live."" We are not in a position to explain Saul's temporary possession of the Spirit as something owing to his "official" capacity. It rather speaks also to his "personal transformation." Consequently, "the Spirit both gives us new hearts and equips us for ministry, but if we, like Saul, grieve the Spirit with our impenitence and ingratitude, He will leave us (1 Sam. 16:14; cf. Eph. 4:30).""

Leithart continues by relating the Spirit and baptism.

> If the Spirit has promised that He will be present and active at the water of baptism, then we can be certain that He, the Spirit of truth, will be there. And there is indeed a promise of the Spirit's presence with the water: Peter promised on Pentecost that those who were baptized would receive the Spirit (Acts 2:38); Paul says that we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13); by God's grace He saved us by the "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). As G. R. Beasley-Murray puts it, for the New Testament "baptism is the supreme moment of the impartation of the Spirit and of the work of the Spirit in the believer."98

We may, then, speak of the baptized person's reception of the Spirit in an apparently unqualified way. Reception of the Spirit at baptism, however, does not guarantee permanent possession of the Spirit.99 "Impenitence and ingratitude" may cause the Spirit to leave permanently.

What does baptism specifically mean? In his recent work Against Christianity, Leithart, in fairly brief compass, offers descriptions of what baptism means, reminding the reader that the "opposition of symbol and reality is a false

antithesis. "100

> What is baptism? Not water only, not only water poured. Baptism is water poured on a person in obedience to Christ and by His authorization....
>
> Baptism is not a "symbol" of someone becoming a disciple. Because Jesus designated it as such, this symbol is his "becoming-adisciple." It is not a picture of a man being joined in covenant to Christ; it is a man being joined in covenant to Christ.10'
>
> Baptism forms as well as symbolizes the new city of God. Through baptism, all sorts and conditions of men are made members of one body and become citizens of a single community.
>
> Symbol or reality? It is a false question.l"z
>
> Many Christians say we cannot be sure that anything has changed once someone is baptized. What are we saying?
>
> In baptism, God marks me as His own, with His name. God makes me a member of His household, the Church. If we say nothing important has happened we are suggesting that we have some identity that is more fundamental than God's name for us, some self that is beyond God's capacity to claim and name.
>
> "Of course," we object, "God says I am in His family, a son, but I'm really something else." That is a most egregious claim to autonomy: I yam who I yam regardless of who God says I yam.
>
> It may turn out, of course, that God's final name for a baptized person is "prodigal son." 103

Leithart insists, then, that in baptism something happens. We may speak of an efficacy to the act. Nevertheless, it is also clear that Leithart speaks of this efficacy in sociological terms. The question that remains open, with such formulations as these, is whether this sociological change is the only change of which we may speak. It seems from his summary statement, quoted above, that this is not the only change of which we may speak.

The question of how we are to relate the soteriological and sociological remains, in our discussion, as yet unanswered. Leithart attempts to bridge these two dimensions of baptism. We need to observe first that he specifically applies to baptism his skepticism toward the confessional distinction between the sign and the thing signified.

> In 27.2, the Westminster Confession says that because of the "spiritual relation" between sacraments and the things they represent, "the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other." Applied to baptism, this means that when the Bible says that we are baptized into Christ (Rom. 6), it doesn't necessarily mean that the rite of water baptism engrafts us to Christ but rather means that the "thing" that the sacrament signifies joins us to Christ. Peter doesn't really mean that "baptism now saves you" (1 Pet. 3:21), but that the spiritual reality of baptism saves.
>
> This idea seems perfectly natural, but a moment's reflection shows how arbitrary the whole procedure is. No matter what the Bible says about baptism, you can always trot out the idea of "spiritual relation" to show that the Bible is speaking "sacramentally," and doesn't mean what it seems to say. But you can only do this if you know already-before actually looking at the Bible-what a rite like baptism can and cannot do. If we want to develop a biblical understanding of baptism, we need to begin with what the Scriptures say, no matter how unusual or unbelievable, rather than try to fit the biblical statements into some preconceived notions.'"

Biblical language causes problems for us, Leithart continues, only if we bring an "individualistic modern focus" to the sacrament. When we understand that "water is applied to this person by the church and to join him to the church," we look beyond the "context of individual salvation."105 Consequently, Paul can "attribute justification and sanctification to baptism" because "being joined to the church also means being joined to Christ." Leithart elaborates this point: "Christ is the holy one, and His Body is the holy people, the `saints' ('holy ones') claimed as God's peculiar possession. By His resurrection, the Father vindicated or justified the Son (Rom. 4:25), and by union with the body of the Justified Christ, we are justified (i.e., counted as covenant-keepers)."106

In a more recent article, Leithart has explored the soteriological import of

texts that he regards to be baptismal.'" (1) Of Acts 2:38 and 22:16, he claims that "the link between baptism and forgiveness of sins is not merely sequential. According to Peter, the repentant are to be baptized unto (Greek, eis) the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Spirit follows on that baptismal cleansing (cf. Ezekiel 36:25-27)." He favorably cites Beasley-Murray's gloss of the latter verse, "his sins will be washed away in his baptism accompanied by prayer."""

(2) Of Romans 6:3-4, Leithart contends that baptism not only is "evidence that the Romans have been joined to Jesus' death and resurrection," but may even be spoken of in an "instrumental" way: "We are buried in baptism so that we may also participate in the new life in Christ."""

(3) Of 1 Corinthians 6:11, Leitharttakes "washing" to be a "baptismal reference." Consequently, he argues, we have a baptismal "link" with "justification and sanctification." First Corinthians 12:13 is likewise a strong Pauline affirmation of "baptismal efficacy."""

(4) Of 1 Peter 3:21, Leithart argues that Peter's qualification ("not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience") should not "diminish the efficacy that he attributes to baptism." A common Reformed reading of 1 Peter 3:21 (seeing this qualification as Peter's reminding his audience that he is not affirming baptismal regeneration) would make Peter to say "baptism now saves you" and then "but baptism doesn't really save you." Peter rather introduces a contrast between the "cleansing rites of the Old Covenant" (indicated by the word "filthy") and new covenant baptism, which "penetrates beyond flesh and its defilements to cleanse the conscience."""

Leithart also maintains that baptism neither confers nor guarantees the grace of perseverance.

> Baptism to priesthood... does not guarantee an eternal standing among the people of God, for priests may be removed from the house and cut off from the table. Yet, baptism is not irrelevant to eternal salvation; though baptism "by itself" does not guarantee a standing, baptism never is "by itself" but always a step on a pathway. Perseverance to the end of the pathway, the mark of eschatologically saving faith, is, as Augustine insisted, a gift of grace, which, being grace, is gratuitously distributed as God pleases. God determines which priests stand or fall and brings this

> about through a variety of specific instruments.... What we bring under the heading of "the grace of perseverance" are the concrete ways God holds close and brings nearer, baptism among them.113
>
> If grace is the favor of God manifested in the bestowal of favors, then baptism is and confers grace: the grace of a standing in the house of God, the grace of membership in the community of the reconciled, the grace of immersion in the history of the bride of Christ, the grace of God's favorable regard upon us. It would be churlish to complain that it does not also guarantee perseverance...'

While, then, we may include baptism "under the heading of the `grace of perseverance,'" we must also insist that baptism does not "guarantee perseverance." We may also note that in these statements Leithart speaks of grace ontologically. This puts Leithart in conflict with statements of his elsewhere that insist that grace should be exclusively addressed in relational terms. This conflict highlights the sheer difficulty of attempting to speak of grace as restrictively as Leithart proposes.

Leithart's position seems to be that the sociological significance of baptism consists chiefly or essentially in being incorporated into the church, the body of Christ. Such incorporation permits us to speak of soteriological benefits that accrue to the believer by virtue of his union with Christ. Nevertheless, Leithart claims that "none of this means that baptism guarantees eternal salvation."" While he continues by saying that "one can be cut off from the people whom the Lord regards as covenant-keepers," and that those who "live out of their baptism, faithful to the Lord in His body, may be assured that they are sanctified and justified,"116 Leithart's overall formulations suggest that it is genuinely possessed benefits that are lost.

Critique

(1) Leithart has consciously departed from the confessional manner of relating the sign and the thing signified (27.2). He dismisses this reading of debatably baptismal texts as "arbitrary" and suggests that the Reformed have not taken these texts seriously. We may agree with Leithart in this: that if we dispose of this traditional distinction between sign and thing signified, then Leithart's conclusions follow.

He seems to be saying that if we do not interpret passages in their immediate "prima facie" sense, then we have misinterpreted them. This, however, is precisely the hermeneutic that scandalized the Jews of Jesus' day, who, Scripture is clear to point out, misunderstood Jesus' discourse on the bread from heaven as it is recorded in John 6 (John 6:52: "The Jews therefore began to argue with one another, saying, `How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"').

Such a hermeneutic causes problems in other areas as well. What if we applied it to passages that speak of God's relenting or changing his mind? Or to passages that speak of God's having bodily limbs or emotions that suddenly "flare up"? What if we applied this hermeneutic to the words of institution? What prevents us from affirming transubstantiation? Except for Leithart's philosophical scruples regarding being, it would not be at all implausible to see him gravitate toward this doctrine. And what if we applied this hermeneutic to certain passages from the Gospels that are cited by critics as examples of contradictions? Such a hermeneutic, then, presses us to concede not only vital theological doctrines but also our doctrine of Scripture.

We may respond that such an attempt to read these passages is not at all "arbitrary" in nature. The reason it is not arbitrary is that our interpretation of these passages must not violate biblical teaching elsewhere. Scripture interprets Scripture.

Leithart's doctrine commits us to a mechanistic doctrine of sacramental efficacy that counters the Scripture's teaching on the sovereignty of the Spirit (John 3:8) and the sovereignty of divine grace (John 1:14-18) and that counters biblical explanations of covenantal membership (1 Peter 5:13) and of those who fall away from the faith (1 John 2:19).

(2) Leithart's argument that Old Testament discussions of the Spirit (e.g., the case of Saul) must determine New Testament discus sions of the Spirit is mistaken. Leithart has not disproven that Saul possessed the Spirit only officially and externally. He has not adequately weighed the theological implications of his position that a believer may be united to Christ by the Spirit and thereupon divorced from Christ. He has not sufficiently distanced himself from the Arminian doctrine that saving grace truly bestowed by God and possessed by man may be totally and finally lost.

(3) Leithart misreads many of the New Testament texts that he claims underlie his doctrine." (a) He claims that in Acts 2:38 ("Peter said to them, `Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'") we have a "promise of the Spirit's presence with the water." But this is not what Peter says. Luke tells us that "those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). In other words, there is a priority of faith to baptism. Baptism, in this particular instance, is a sign and a seal of the grace of the "forgiveness of sins." It is not to be identified with those graces, nor is it the instrument or mechanism by which those graces come to the believer. The Greek preposition eis may simply express reference ("with reference to").18 The context of the passage, as we have argued, militates against understanding this preposition in terms of purpose or result.

Similarly, Acts 22:16 ("Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.") does not support Leithart's quoted gloss, "his sins will be washed away in his baptism accompanied by prayer." No instrumental or causal connection between baptism and the washing away of sins is either implied or established in this passage. An instrumental connection is established, however, between "calling on His name" and the washing away of sins.19 Furthermore, as J. A. Alexander has rightly observed, "calling on His name" is "an indispensable prerequisite of baptism. 11121

Is there, then, any relation between baptism and the washing of sins in this verse? J. A. Alexander answers this question in the affirmative.

> As his body was to be baptized by man, so his sins were to be washed away by God. The identity, or even the inseparable union, of the two effects, is so far from being here affirmed, that they are rather held apart, as things connected by the natural relation of a type and antitype, yet perfectly distinguishable in themselves and easily separable in experience."

Baptism is therefore an outward sign and seal of an inward and spiritual grace, the forgiveness of sins. This grace comes to the sinner through his calling upon God.

(b) Leithart also affirms that in 1 Peter 3:21 ("Corresponding to that,

baptism now saves you-not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience-through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ...") we have a contrast between the "cleansing rites of the Old Covenant" (indicated by the word "filthy") and new covenant baptism, which "penetrates beyond flesh and its defilements to cleanse the conscience." Peter, however, is not claiming in this verse that baptism cleanses the conscience. Peter speaks rather of an "appeal to God for a good conscience." Baptism in its fullest sense, the apostle says, requires an "inward and spiritual" reality-the (here, adult) person in this ordinance must present to God a "good conscience" (i.e., a "blood-sprinkled" conscience, Heb. 10:22, one purged from dead works to serve the living God, Heb. 9:14).'22 "When such a soul," John Lillie has rightly said,

> comes to the baptismal font, it comes not in hesitancy or doubt, or in search of an unknown God, but solemnly to ratify in the appointed way its own previous act of self-surrender. It enters within the sacred munitions of the everlasting covenant, and, laying hold of the promises, engages the Divine grace for its defence and guidance. The transaction is one wholly between it and God, and, on the part of the soul, could not be better described than as its "answer" to the overtures and commands of the Gospel.... Of such baptism certainly we need not fear to say, that it saves us.'z3

(c) Leithart is assuming one critical and yet faulty point when he references 1 Corinthians 12:13 ("For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.") and Titus 3:5 ("He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."), as well as Romans 6:3-4 ("Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.") and 1 Corinthians 6:11 ("Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."). He is assuming that every reference to baptism in these passages is primarily a reference to the sacramental rite of water baptism. But this would require that the Spirit inevitably attends water baptism.

We may note three problems with such a position. First, if the Spirit inevitably attends water baptism, as Leithart suggests that 1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches, then how are we to explain the case of Simon Magus? Simon received water baptism (Acts 8:13) and yet was declared to be "in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity" (Acts 8:23). It is exceedingly unlikely that Simon apostatized in the very short span of time that elapsed between what is recorded in Acts 8:13 and what is recorded in Acts 8:23. The likeliest explanation is that Peter's verdict of Acts 8:23 reflects the state of Simon's heart at the time that he received the sacrament. The Spirit, then, was not communicated to Simon through or with water baptism.

We also have in the old covenant a similar problem but one in which the stakes are considerably higher: how are we to explain Ishmael and Esau-recipients of the covenant sign and yet clearly not at all recipients of the covenant promise? While Ishmael would receive blessing (Gen. 17:20) it is not the blessing that God had covenanted to Abram (17:21: "But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year."). It is in the very next verses that we read that Abraham will apply circumcision to Ishmael (17:23, 25). The point is not that Ishmael received the sign (and thereby the promise) and subsequently forfeited the promise. God never intended for him to receive the promise. It was never in his possession. The sign did not automatically convey the Abrahamic promises to Ishmael or Esau (or to anyone else for that matter).

Second, if the Spirit does not inexorably attend water baptism, then we have in place the biblical distinction between the means of grace and the Spirit's activity by and through those means. In other words, the Spirit exercises sovereignty over the means of divine appointment. This doctrine is evident from John 1:13, where the new birth is said to be a consequence not of physical descent or the human will but of God's free grace. The Spirit blows where he wills (John 3:8). This truth is also evident from 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."

If God is sovereign over these means-whether to bless or notthen we have no expectation that he must, and in all circumstances will, bestow grace to those who sit under those means.

Third, if the Spirit does not inexorably attend water baptism, then we also

have in place the biblical distinction between the visible and invisible church. Throughout Leithart's discussions on the sacraments and on baptism in particular is a failure to recognize the distinction between the church visible and invisible. He appears to share a doctrine, common among FV proponents, of undifferentiated covenant membership.

In this sense, baptism's efficacy must be spoken of identically for all its recipients. Acknowledging that some of the baptized in fact do fall away, Leithart must construct a doctrine of apostasy to explain how it is that not all who are baptized finally and permanently possess what is conveyed to them in baptism. If, however, we operate in keeping with this distinction between the visible and invisible church, not only do we keep the Reformed doctrines of grace intact, but we also have no trouble interpreting a passage like Titus 3:5. Paul is speaking to the visible church according to their profession. He can therefore speak to them of their regeneration in the sense that he charitably judges the congregation to be who they profess to be.

In this connection, it is doubtful that the primary reference of "washing" in passages like Titus 3:5 pertains to the sacrament of baptism. Again, the distinction between sign and thing signified (a distinction to which Leithart objects) assists us. This distinction, we may note, is required by such passages as Genesis 17:10, which identifies the Abrahamic covenant with circumcision. The Abrahamic covenant was instituted long before the sacrament of circumcision was instituted-the narrative of Genesis makes this clear enough. What is meant here? Simply that "the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other" (WCF 27.2). Consequently, we may point to water baptism as that which points to the grace of regeneration. This is the way we ought to explain Titus 3:5 (as did the Westminster Divines, LC 165 and proofs). It is also the way, following the Westminster Divines, we ought to understand Galatians 3:27 (see LC 165 and proofs).

(4) In summary, we must stress that what Leithart is offering us is not a refinement of certain Reformed doctrines. Nor is he effectively supplementing a soteriological understanding of the sacraments with a sociological one. What Leithart offers us is, in this sense, both revolutionary and internally coherent. In another sense, this system is not revolutionary. It offers us many of the same problematic affirmations of sacramental efficacy that we have encountered in the history of the church. In neither sense, however, is Leithart's doctrine compatible

with the sacramental theology of the Westminster Standards.

Chapter 7

Covenant and the Sacraments, Others' Views

In the preceding chapter, we considered Peter Leithart's doctrine of sacramental efficacy and baptism. We turn now to consider six further FV proponents' considerations of the same doctrines: Douglas Wilson, Rich Lusk, Steve Wilkins, the session of AAPC, Joel Garver, and Mark Horne.

Douglas Wilson

The Sacraments and Sacramental Efficacy

B. B. Warfield. Wilson has authored at least two recent pieces that treat the question of sacramental efficacy.' He identifies in B. B. Warfield's The Plan of Salvation what he terms "the clear tendency of the rationalist system ... to disparage the means of grace."' Wilson concludes from a quoted excerpt from Warfield the latter's judgment that "any view that says God uses any means to accomplish His purposes in salvation is a corrupted or impure supernaturalism."' He elaborates his criticism.

> What Warfield thought of as "pure supernaturalism" is actually closer to a refried gnosticism, an invisible conduit from God to man, with no contact made with contaminating earthly, incarna- tional influences. It is telling that in Warfield's famous table illustrating all this, he has the sacerdotalists affirming their views concerning the Church and the "consistent" Calvinists affirming things about the elect.
>
> I quote Warfield at this point knowing that as a confessional Presbyterian he had to (and did) acknowledge that God established and used means of grace within the Church. I do not want to misrepresent him

> as overtly denying that there are means of grace. But I do want to argue that Warfield was being inconsistent here. I take his insistence that God works "directly" on the human soul as a claim that God is working "apart from means." But elsewhere Warfield acknowledges that God uses such means of grace. But how is this not God working "indirectly."4

Wilson goes on to say that Westminster Confession of Faith 7.6 counters Warfield's doctrine. Warfield would say of this paragraph that "to have the covenant dispensed in ordinances and to have them be spiritually efficacious, is sacerdotalism. "5

Before we proceed, we should note that Wilson has misread Warfield's statement. Warfield's objection against sacerdotalism, as the quoted material in Wilson's book shows, is that, on this view, God "has ... suspended ... man's salvation upon the faithlessness or caprice of his fellows."6 It is this concern that warrants Warfield's protest that sacerdotalism sees God "working salvation [not] upon the human soul directly but indirectly. "' Warfield's zeal to guard the "pure supernaturalism of salvation" is prompted by a desire to guard the divine sovereignty of grace from clerical attempts to control and channel it.'

The Westminster Standards. This defense of Warfield aside, we may note that Wilson perceives a skittishness in the Reformed tradition toward a doctrine of the means of grace. Wilson proceeds to mount a case that the Westminster Standards argue for a high doctrine of sacramental efficacy, or, to use a form of a term he uses elsewhere, "covenantal efficacy."9 We may summarize and respond to six arguments that Wilson attempts to draw from the Standards.

First, quoting WCF 28.5 ("Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated."), Wilson argues that "the Westminster Confession assumes that grace and salvation are ordinarily annexed to water baptism," though not "inseparably annexed."10 While "baptism and salvation are not mechanically or magically linked," "in the ordinary course of life, they are linked, and we are to speak of them as though they are."" In response, we may note that this conclusion is an unwarranted inference from WCF 28.5. The paragraph says nothing about who among the baptized will be saved. This concern is reserved for the discussion in 28.6, which explains that grace comes

to "such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time." We are told simply that only the elect are they to whom the graces promised in baptism are "offered ... really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost" (28.6). Wilson appears to infer "ordinarily" from the word "inseparably" in 28.5. All that is meant by "inseparably," as the context shows, is "mechanically" or "automatically."

Second, WCF 27.1 ("Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace . . .") states plainly, according to Wilson, that "a sacrament is a sign, and a sign that seals what it signifies. This is not a front operation."12 In saying this, Wilson does not qualify here the objects of the redemptive sealing of the sacrament as those who have saving faith. It may be that he understands the redemptive sealing operation of the Spirit in the sacraments to transpire, at least sometimes, in the absence of faith. This suspicion is heightened when, in concluding his discussion of sacramental efficacy (for believer and nonbeliever alike), he states that "arid rationalism ... detaches all of our actions from what they are meant to seal for us."13

Third, regarding WCF 27.2 ("There is in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union ..."), Wilson pointedly says that traditional explanations of this passage have misread it.

> There is something we understand quite well in other realms, and it is not hard to master. "With this ring, I thee wed." Really? The water cleanses us and washes our sins away. But only a doofus would think that water all by itself would wash away sins. Moderns who are stuck with the language of Westminster want to say that we actually have to understand this as a sacramental union, with the word sacramental being understood as some sort of diluting agent. But I want to say that it is a sacramental union, with union meaning union.14

This comment prepares us for Wilson's doctrine of sacramental objectivity, which we will examine at length below. Wilson appeals to this doctrine to allow him to speak in strong terms of sacramental efficacy: "Ananias told Paul to wash his sins away in the waters of baptism. Peter told the crowd at Pentecost to be baptized for the remission of sins. And we continue to do this same thing as historic Protestants because the Westminster Confession does, rightly calling it sacramental language."15 We are warranted therefore in saying "that baptism is

the laver of regeneration (Titus 3:5). Baptism now saves us (1 Peter 3:20-21). In baptism we call upon the Lord, washing our sins away (Acts 22:16). I believe in one baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)."16

Fourth, regarding WCF 27.3 ("The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them . . ."), Wilson argues that this paragraph teaches that "the applications of the sacraments are objective, meaning that the Spirit is at work in the words of institution. This is what brings about the resultant blessings (or curses), as covenant members are faithful or faithless. "17 Interestingly, this paragraph of the Confession speaks of "a promise of benefit to worthy receivers," but is silent regarding Wilson's doctrine of sacramental curses.

Fifth, Wilson conflates Westminster Larger Catechism 161 and WCF 27.3 to read as follows: "Worthy receivers of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are effectually saved by these sacramental means through the working of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of Christ."" This, however, is what neither statement affirms. The Standards are careful to say that the sacraments are "effectual means of salvation," but this is a far cry from saying that "worthy receivers ... are effectually saved by these sacramental means." Wilson's latter statement places a far greater emphasis on the necessity and importance of the sacraments to one's salvation than the Standards' statements do. His statement further leaves open the possibility that this salvation may be ini tiated by the sacraments (rather than ordinarily by the preaching of the Word), something the Standards do not affirm (WCF 14.1).

Sixth, Wilson takes Westminster Shorter Catechism 92 ("wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers") to mean that "the benefit of justification and the benefit of regeneration (both being benefits of the new covenant) are applied to a man through the sacraments when that man has faith."" Wilson certainly intends to be provocative by this statement (Warfield, he assures us, would consider it "sacerdotalism"), but it is difficult to know what Wilson means by it.

Is he saying that baptism and the Lord's Supper are instruments of justification? If so, then he most certainly would be out of accord with the Standards. Is he saying that a believer's sense of his justification may be built up by improvement of baptism and by a right use of the Supper? If so, Wilson is

saying nothing new.

Is he saying that one is regenerated by or through baptism? (One may doubt that he is.) This would certainly go beyond our Standards. Is he saying that a believer may grow in grace by improvement of his baptism and through a right use of the Supper? If so, he again is saying nothing new.

Wilson says shortly after the comment quoted above that the "benefits of Christ's mediation come to be signified, sealed and exhibited ... applied and conferred ... to me sacramentally. "20 Again, we must ask what he means by such a statement.

The doctrine of sacramental efficacy. Wilson argues positively and thoroughly for a doctrine of sacramental efficacy. We may begin this discussion by observing his indebtedness to Peter Leithart in at least three ways.

Nonontological conception of grace. Wilson, with Leithart, argues that we need to conceive of grace (especially grace communicated in the sacraments) in a decidedly nonontological manner.

> Rather than seeing the question of the sacraments as this kind of an ontological and metaphysical question, we have to see it as a covenantal and relational question. We are persons and we are communing with God, who is tri-personal, and we do so in the sacraments. They are therefore performative acts. A man might say the words "I do" a million times during the course of his life, but when he says them in a church in front of witnesses with his bride across from him, the words are a performative act, and they change everything.21

This means, among other things, that we need to see grace "not [as] a fluid that can fill up a reservoir" but as "a covenantal relationship between persons,"22 or a "covenant relationship between persons for blessing. "23 Grace, then, is relational, not ontological. To believe otherwise, Wilson avers, is to be "in the grip of individualism. "24

The sacrament as performative act. With Leithart, Wilson argues that "all our sacramental acts are performative acts."25 Wilson means by this that "God has established the meaning of these acts, and so that is what the action in

context means. This is different from saying that the sacraments mean something the way a detached label means something else. The baptismal water is simply water-until it is applied in such a way that makes the action a performative, covenantal act. "26

A sociological reading of the sacrament. With Leithart, Wilson argues that the sacrament brings recipients, regardless of their subjective condition, "into the same relation." Again, quoting Leithart, "Objectively, baptism makes me a member of Christ's body, and this becomes an episode in the story of who I am." Wilson comments, "It is an episode in the story of who I am regardless of my faith or lack of it. "27

This notion of the objective meaning of baptism launches Wilson into reflecting upon the efficacy of baptism. Wilson offers two anecdotal accounts of this point-one pertaining to a believer, the other to an unbeliever. First, in speaking of a "nominal Presbyterian, baptized in infancy" and a "Hindu"-both of whom come to be converted, Wilson argues that "something different was happening with the Presbyterian. He got saved because the grace of his baptism was finally kicking in. "28 We may say that the Presbyterian had a "head start" and that his baptism was not "fundamentally superfluous (when it came to the matter of his salvation)."29 Wilson presses the question, "Do you agree that, when a baptized person is effectually called at some point after his baptism, the Holy Spirit is conferring the saving grace of his baptism upon him?""

Second, using a characteristic metaphor, Wilson argues that we may no more speak of a "merely nominal Christian" than we may a "nominal husband." Such a person's problem is that he does "not believe what God said at [his] baptism."" In this sense, we must speak of something genuinely transpiring at an unbeliever's experience of the sacrament. "What we need to say is that the nonelect do not receive what the sacraments signify for blessing. They do taste and participate, and they taste Christ as their covenant Lord and Judge. They do come in contact with the blood of the covenant, but this happens because they have trampled it."32 We may, then, even speak of the unbeliever, through the sacrament, as "tast[ing] Christ"-not, to be sure, in the same sense as a believer. We have then two clear understandings of sacramental efficacy that can operate in the absence of faithone in the life of an unbeliever, and one in the life of a believer.

Critique

(1) Although Wilson examines certain passages that the Divines list as prooftexts of their doctrine of sacramental efficacy (LC 161; e.g., 1 Peter 3:21, Acts 8:13, 23)33 he does not appear to recognize the problems that these passages pose for this thesis. We have examined them in the previous chapter. In view of those conclusions, we are warranted in saying that they militate against the tight relationship that Wilson forges between the sacramental act and the benefits of redemption.

(2) In this context, we may also observe that our objections against Leithart's doctrine of redemptive sacramental efficacy apply to Wilson's doctrine-to the degree that Wilson has appropriated Leithart's views.

(3) Wilson's doctrine of sacramental efficacy is intriguing in that it conceives of redemptive sacramental efficacy in the case of an unconverted recipient (the "nominal Presbyterian, baptized in infancy"). As SC 92 and many other passages state, however, the Westminster Standards conceive of redemptive sacramental efficacy in the presence of a faith that embraces what the sacrament holds forth to it. Further, his formulations seem to run counter to WCF 14.1, which states that "the grace of faith ... is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word" and "is increased and strengthened" "by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer." Wilson appears to be saying that the benefits of saving grace can begin in and through the administration of the sacrament, as for instance in the case of a presently unconverted person for whom those benefits are delayed.

(4) In related fashion, we must also object to Wilson's speaking of an unbeliever "tasting the Lord" in judgment in the sacrament. We may affirm that baptism places the recipient under certain inexorable obligations and privileges. But one need not say with Wilson that an unbeliever "tastes the Lord" in the sacrament to affirm Wilson's underlying concern that that individual's baptism will add to his judgment at the last day.

(5) One final criticism that we have not yet broached is Wilson's apparent belief that the doctrine of the sacramental union (which he admits) thereby permits believers to use unqualified language drawn from passages such as Titus 3:5 and 1 Peter 3:21. Is Wilson's approach problematic because he is using

biblical language? By no means! It is problematic because his language is not biblical enough. To say, with Wilson, "that baptism is the laver of regeneration (Titus 3:5). Baptism now saves us (1 Peter 3:20-21). In baptism we call upon the Lord, washing our sins away (Acts 22:16). I believe in one baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)"34 ignores the vital and necessary biblical qualifications that the inspired writers have placed within and alongside such formulations. Peter goes on to qualify his statement "baptism now saves us," for example, with some crucial statements in 3:21, statements we examined in the previous chapter.

More fundamentally, to speak this way bypasses the qualifications that the whole teaching of Scripture places upon such statements-that forgiveness of sins does not come strictly speaking through the administration of the sacrament. Circumcision and baptism, for instance, are the "sign and seal" of our justification (Rom. 4:11) and many other graces, but they are not the graces themselves. Wilson offers us, therefore, theological regress, not theological progress, in his choice of speech.

Baptism and Baptismal Efficacy

Let us now turn from a consideration of Wilson's understanding of sacramental efficacy to his doctrine of baptism in particular, with attention to questions of the efficacy of baptism in his writings. In keeping with his above reflections on sacramental efficacy, Wilson argues that "baptism in water is objective, and it establishes an objective covenant relationship with the Lord of the covenant, Jesus Christ."35 He reminds us that he is not claiming any "ex opere operato efficacy to the waters of baptism," but at the same time he is not arguing for what he terms a "modern Protestant reductionism."" We may speak of an efficacy even if not an ex opere operato efficacy.37 He cautions us that "this is a matter of covenant relationship and not a matter of priestcraft. We do as we are told and do not try to peer into the secret things (Deut. 29:29).""

The exegetical argument. Wilson begins his discussion of baptismal efficacy in "Reformed" Is Not Enough with a consideration of several passages-many of which we observed Leithart interpret in our previous chapter. Wilson follows Leithart's interpretation of many of these passages as well.

First, he considers 1 Peter 3:21.

> Water baptism now saves us. Peter tells us that baptism saves, and his subsequent qualifier does not mean that baptism does not save. He is not taking away with one hand what he has given with the other. It means that baptism saves in this fashion, but not in that fashion.
>
> Baptism does not save by means of the water (not putting away physical dirt), but baptism does save by the resurrection of Jesus Christ accompanied by the answer of a good conscience.39

Peter's concern for specifying how baptism does not save, Wilson continues, is the apostle's way of saying that "Christian baptism does more fully and efficaciously what the ordinances of Old Covenant washing also did in a limited way.""

Wilson also points us to Peter's admonition in Acts 2:38, and Ananias's admonition to Paul (as recorded in Acts 22:16), of which Wilson says, "In blunt language, Ananias told Saul to come to the baptismal font in order to wash away his sins."" Wilson then points to Titus 3:5 to which Ephesians 5:26 is parallel. In both instances, Wilson argues, "Paul speaks of the font of regeneration. "42 Finally Wilson argues that the textually debated Mark 16:16 shows us that baptism is "the response" needed for the gospel.43 The reason, we are reminded, that such passages as these make many uncomfortable is because they are more "heirs of the radical Anabaptist reformation" than "of the magisterial Reformation. "44

The theological argument (again). Wilson comments that our discomfort with such expressions comes as a result of our neglect of the doctrine of sacramental union, preserved in WCF 27.2. He concludes that "this sacramental union is so tight that it is fully appropriate to refer to one reality in terms of the other." This is akin, after all, to the statement, "With this ring I thee wed. "45

In other words, "there is in performative acts a covenant union between the two. This means that, and, in a real covenantal sense, this is that."" We may note parenthetically that here, as elsewhere, Wilson appears to use the terms "sacramental union" and "covenantal union" interchangeably.47 If we don't speak this way, Wilson says, then this is to be "wiser in ... speech than God has chosen to be in His holy Word." It is to "divorce ... sign and thing signified." It is, Wilson reminds us, "sacramental maturity" to be able to speak in this way.4S

The confessional argument. Wilson then offers us a reading of the Confession's exposition of baptism, chapter 28. He introduces WCF 28.1 with the provocative but not immediately explained exclamation, "Raise your hand if you knew that the Westminster Confession taught baptismal regeneration. "49 He attempts instead to explain the language of "sign and seal" in WCF 28.1.

> Baptism is given in order to be to the one baptized "a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins." A sacerdotalist understanding of this would require Arminianism-true conversion followed by true apostasy. On the other hand, reductionist rationalism has to reject this portion of the Confession or pretend that it is not there.
>
> Of course there are baptized covenant members who are not individually regenerate. They are the ones who reject what God is offering to them in their baptism. They therefore fall away from the covenant and not from election."

Wilson appears to understand the language of redemptive sign and seal to refer to all recipients of baptism. Presumably, he understands someone to have been regenerated in baptism in a covenantal sense, although not necessarily in a decretal sense. This seems to be the likeliest sense in which Wilson can mean that WCF 28.1 teaches baptismal regeneration.

Reiterating a point that we observed Wilson make in our discussion of his views of sacramental efficacy, he argues from WCF 28.5 that "while we do not take the connection between water baptism and grace and salvation as an absolute, we do take it as the norm."" Commenting on WCF 28.6, he elaborates: "By means of baptism, this efficacious grace is conferred on the elect at the appropriate time, the time of conversion, and it is the applied grace of their baptism. "52 We may speak, then, of redemptive baptismal efficacy quite apart from the subjective condition of the recipient.

Such statements as these parallel other statements where Wilson stresses that the sacrament bears a testimony independent of the subjective condition of the recipient. He affirms that "even if [a man who is baptized] is unregenerate, he remains a professing Christian. Regardless of what he might say or do, until he is excommunicated or God removes him through death, he is part of the

visible Church. The profession made through baptism is Christ's profession, the mark of Christ.""

Wilson voices similar observations regarding the circumcision of Esau, suggesting that the sacrament's testimony is redemptive in nature.

> Considered from another angle, the circumcision of Esau and the circumcision of Jacob meant exactly the same thing. Both pointed to a coming redemption, and a righteousness that was by faith alone. But Esau, a profane man, refused to confirm what his circumcision declared. He contradicted a true witness. Jacob, a righteous man through faith, made his declaration which lined up faithfully with the testimony of his circumcision.
>
> Thus we see that membership in the covenant community is objective."

Just as unfaithful husbands are in one sense "very much ... real hus- band[s]," so too "hypocrites remain under the obligations of the covenant, and so ... they are real Christians."55

Peter Leithart (again). Wilson expresses one final point of affinity with Leithart by favorably referencing the latter's argument from Hebrews 10:19-22 that "baptism confers priestly privileges. "56 Thus, says Wilson, "the fact that the new covenant is a spiritual covenant does not mean that it is an ethereal covenant." In summary, "this consecration really happens. God really does it. His people are genuinely set apart; a visible difference is placed between them and the world. By means of baptism, baptism with water, grace and salvation are conferred on the elect.""

Summary. So how then does baptism work according to Wilson? In his "Credos: On Baptism" he offers a synthetic overview of his position. First, Wilson stresses the importance of baptism to one's ecclesiology.

> I believe that the real culprit in baptismal controversy is a disparagement of the biblical doctrine of the Church. We rush to discuss the role of water baptism in the connection of individuals to Christ, failing to recognize that in Scripture we are connected to Christ and to the Church together. I

> believe that baptism in water establishes the one baptized as a member of the Church, and the Church is one with Jesus Christ, bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh.58

What is the nature of this union with Christ and with his church? Is it permanent, temporary; conditional, unconditional? Wilson explains:

> Baptism is covenantally efficacious. It brings every person baptized into an objective and living covenant relationship with Christ, whether the baptized person is elect or reprobate. Baptism is always to be taken by the one baptized as a sign and seal of his ingrafting into Christ. If the person is reprobate, he will be cut out of the vine, and if he is elect, he cannot be cut out. An unbelieving covenant member incurs all the curses of the covenant, while the believer appropriates all its blessings by faith alone.59

Baptism, then, brings one into "an objective and living covenant relationship with Christ" regardless of the individual's subjective condition. Following Wilson's statements elsewhere, we may affirm of this individual all that may be affirmed of those who are said to be covenantally elect. And yet, the possibility of "curse" and apostasy is real.

Critique. Many of our criticisms that we raised against Wilson's doctrine of sacramental efficacy (generally) apply to his doctrine of baptism (particularly). We may raise three further ones.

(1) We may dissent from Wilson's claim that it is "mature" to speak in the manner that he does. We have seen that he isolates statements of Scripture from their broader exegetical and theological context in ways that can (and do) mislead popular audiences to hear him speaking in a crassly sacerdotal way.

(2) Wilson's doctrine of baptismal efficacy (an objective redemptive efficacy apart from the subjective condition of the sinner) runs counter to our Standards, which teach that the sacraments "seal" redemptively only the worthy, believing recipient.

(3) This having been said, we must register a concern that Wilson's understanding of precisely what is conveyed to the recipient in baptism is not at

all clear. He often appears to qualify this transaction with the term "covenantal" [in distinction from the terms "election" or "decree"]. This, however, lends not clarity but confusion to the matter. This manner of speaking, we may recall from our discussion in chapter 5, is parallel to Wilson's (at best) unclear statements regarding the similarities and differences between apostates and nonapostates.

Rich Lusk

We now turn our attention to two important FV proponents associated with the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church. We shall first consider the work of Rich Lusk. By way of preface, we may note that Lusk's argument is filled with quotations from Calvin, other sixteenthcentury Reformers, and certain seventeenth-century divines. He points to these quotations as evidence that his position has some pedigree and precedent in the Reformed tradition. To engage each of these quotes seriatim would distract us from our primary concern: to offer an exposition and a biblical, theological, and confessional critique of the distinguishing doctrines of the FV. But we may make a couple of general observations regarding the way in which this historical material is used.

First, we are frequently given little or no context for the quotation. We rarely are told at what point in the argument of the given source the quotation comes. But it is just such information that we need to frame the statement aright, to avoid a "prooftexting" approach to the source's author, and to read that statement in a contextually sensitive way. The quoted material, furthermore, is often not introduced by statements regarding the nature of its source. This information, however, can be valuable. From what stage of the author's life and thought does the quotation come? To what controversy or controversies was the source directed? Have these controversies rhetorically shaped the statement in question?

Second, we may grant that at times the statement, on a prima facie reading, supports Lusk's point. But even here we must issue some cautions. It must be established that the author of the quotation in question has advanced that statement in service of the same theological ends for which Lusk has adduced it. Lusk, however, fails to demonstrate satisfactorily that his overall sacramental theology finds a genuine parallel in that of any sixteenth- or seventeenth-century writer in question. Furthermore, Lusk's quoted statements frequently could

support his point, but they could support other and contrary points as well. In other words, the quotations are often ambiguously worded, at least with respect to their probative value for the question under consideration.

In relation to this above point, Lusk's prooftexting of Calvin and other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestants, his collating individual statements from several different works or several portions of a single work, raises the question of whether vital qualifying and balancing statements or arguments have been neglected. In other words, has Lusk inadvertently presented us a portrait of Calvin's doctrine of baptism that is unbalanced and selective?

To return to our main point, we have bypassed these quotations and have restricted ourselves to a single argument, the argument from the Westminster Standards. Our interest is in establishing whether Lusk's views are in accord with the teaching of the Standards. Since it is this theological document to which ministers, elders, and members of a number of Reformed and Presbyterian confessional denominations subscribe, this document is most vital for providing a benchmark of comparison-not debatable quotations from Calvin or later writers.

Sacramental Efficacy

Lusk has prepared a series of "proposals" in which he attempts to outline his understanding of sacramental efficacy.60 He argues that "preaching makes us desire what God offers in the sacraments. "61 Citing Peter's sermon in Acts 2, Lusk comments on the hearers' question at 2:37 ("Men and brethren, what shall we do?").

> At this point, the Word has done its work. The hearers have been aroused and convicted. But apparently, they still aren't saved. Preaching alone is insufficient to make them participants in Christ's work of redemption. Thus Peter tells them what they must do [a citation of Acts 2:38 follows]. They must respond to the preached word with repentance and be baptized to enter into the way of salvation. Baptism, not preaching per se, is linked with forgiveness and the reception of the Spirit. Clearly, Peter believes God will give them something in baptism that they have not received through preaching alone. Baptism will consummate the process of

regeneration begun by the Word preached.62

This dynamic of preaching + repentance + baptism, Lusk continues, is a "pattern [that] holds true throughout Acts, though with qualifi- cations."63 This is a pattern, Lusk will say in summary, wherein the "blessings" of "new creation life and forgiveness" are "described in preaching and offered in baptism."" The conversion of the eunuch as described in Acts 8, and the conversion of Saul as described in Acts 9 (cf. 22:16) give us the same pattern. As Lusk says of the latter, "Con frontation with the Word of Christ began [Paul's] conversion process, but it was not complete until he received the sacrament of initiation. "65 Lusk comments that the accounts of the Samaritans (Acts 8) and of Cornelius (Acts 10) are really exceptions that prove the rule. The anomalies from the above pattern were intended to teach the apostles and Peter, respectively, certain truths that they needed to learn.

Lusk follows up his previous set of observations with a second observation: "Preaching communicates truth, the sacraments communicate life. "66

> Indeed there is a kind of equal ultimacy between these means [Word and sacraments]. Christ designed Word and Sacrament to work together, not to stand alone, in the application of redemption. However we construct our ordo salutis, each means of grace must be given its full due. We need truth and life, instruction and renewal, and so both preaching and the sacraments are essential to a biblically shaped Christian life.67

Arguing that the fundamentalist/liberal controversy divorced this pairing of truth and life, Lusk contends that this pattern offers a third, more balanced way.68

Third, Lusk in turn argues that "the sacraments constitute the people of God in a way that mere preaching cannot. "69 He explains in a comment on 1 Corinthians 1:14.

> Clearly, in Paul's mind it is baptism that forms individual believers into a community. Baptism marks out the church in a way that preaching cannot. It sets the church apart as a distinct culture within the cultures of the world. Preaching alone, apart from the ritual of initiation, cannot create this kind of communal body. Simply having Christian ideas floating around in one's head does not make one a Christian; it is submission to

baptism that actually joins one to the body of Christ.`

Lusk sees the alternative to bare preaching to be baptism, not, as we might expect a Reformed minister to say, the efficacious work of the Spirit working by and with the preached Word. He points rather to baptism. He reminds us at this point that he wishes neither to privilege sacraments over the Word nor to place the Word over the sacraments. Rather, "they complement and complete one another."" We may speak, then, of their equal ultimacy, notwithstanding Lusk's interest in assigning to the Word the sacraments' "warrant and meaning.""

Fourth, Lusk continues by stating that "the various means all offer a singular grace because they all offer Christ."" And yet "each offers Christ in a peculiar way," a dynamic of "one-and-manyness, or unity-in-diversity [that] is a basic feature of the [sic] Christianity's Trinitarian worldview. "74

Fifth, regarding sacramental efficacy proper, Lusk claims that "the efficacy of the means of grace derives from Christ and the Spirit."75 Hence, the "extraordinary powers" of the baptismal water "when used sacramentally are not inherent in the element in any metaphysical or mechanical sense.""

What do we mean, however, by "grace"? Lusk maintains, with other FV proponents we have examined, that grace "offered and received in the means of grace is relational, not substantial."" On these points, Lusk contends, we must question the phraseology of WCF 28.5: "Grace is conferred in the sacrament," he asserts.78 The reason this needs to be pressed, Lusk argues, is that "the patristics traded in a Hebraic, relational understanding of grace for a Hellenistic, substantial understanding of grace," a "quasi-physical substance that was `poured into' or `infused into' sinners.""

Grace, rather, should be seen as "favor." "Grace is not something detachable from God; rather grace is precisely God himself in the person of his incarnate Son. God gives grace to us by giving us Christ-that is, by uniting us to the Son through the Holy Spirit."" Consequently, to the Reformers, "sacraments were not `channels' through which the substance of grace flowed into us; rather they were personal encounters with the gracious God himself. They were all about union and communion with Christ, rather than some static, impersonal substance."" These "symbols," moreover, do not " `get in the way' of a closer, more immediate relationship with God; in fact, apart from them, there is no

relationship with God at all," for "God deals with us through these symbols."82

This parallels the very nature of "salvation," which is not "a new infusion or conferral of anything" but "a matter of a new relationship with God.""

Many of our previously registered objections apply to the doctrines set forth in our survey of Lusk's writings. We may add a few more. First, while Lusk wishes to assign "equal ultimacy" to the Word, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, some problems remain. Absent from his discussion is the Confession's category of prayer as a means of grace. Lusk also does not consider whether the Divines may have admitted the existence of other means of grace without elevating them to confessional status. This confounds his attempt to relate Word and sacrament in a Trinitarian relationship. To say, furthermore, that preaching delivers truth but the sacraments deliver life, and to speak of baptism as completing the "process of regeneration" begun by the Word, seem to go far beyond a model of "equal ultimacy." It appears that the sacraments are given a functional or practical priority over the Word concerning the way in which one enters into life.

Second, the way in which Lusk relates preaching and baptism is problematic. He seems to say that preaching offers the hearer what baptism in fact gives the hearer. He cites this as the pattern of preaching in Acts and as Paul's teaching at 1 Corinthians 1:14. Lusk, however, at times appears to reduce preaching to its barest form-the propagation of ideas. But this is not biblical preaching in its fullest sense, the Spirit sovereignly blessing the preached word unto the saving renewal of the hearer.

Further, Lusk attributes to baptism what Scripture attributes to preaching. We see that in Acts 2 the respondents believe the Word preached to them. Only then are they baptized. This baptism, we have argued earlier, must be a sign and seal of the graces received through the preached Word. Paul in 1 Corinthians does not point to baptism as that which is used instrumentally in conversion. He says rather that "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1:21). Paul's "message and ... preaching were ... in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (2:4-5). Throughout this argument, Paul looks to the Word preached and the accompanying Spirit as the instrumental and efficient causes of the Corinthians' conversion.

Third, to speak of grace solely in the manner in which Lusk does (nonontologically), poses grave problems for a biblical doctrine of regeneration and sanctification. Such a formulation, by Lusk's own admission, puts him outside the pale of the wording of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It also puts him outside a conventional way of referring to grace among the seventeenth-century Puritans, who provide for us the theological context for our Standards. The difference, however, is more than terminological. We have earlier considered that to reject ontological grace leaves one with something akin to demon possession or with a doctrine of moral suasion, but not physical regeneration.

Baptism and Baptismal Efficacy

We may consider Lusk's conception of baptism by attempting to summarize various statements he has produced concerning the sacrament.84

Union with Christ. Lusk argues that "baptism unites us to Christ."" What does this mean? "At the very least ... baptism puts the one baptized into a state of salvation. It grafts us into Christ's body that we may share in his life."" Lusk terms baptism the "instrumental means of union with Christ.""

Lusk cites Romans 6:1f., Ephesians 5:25-33 (KJv), Romans 11:20-22, and John 15:1f. as proof of this point. With Leithart, he contends that all references to "baptism" in relation to "union with Christ" refer to the "watery rite ... not a mere metaphor."88 Further, Lusk says that whenever Paul "uses `in Christ' or `with Christ' language, baptism looms large in the background." On this reading, he continues, "references to baptism" in the New Testament "become fairly ubiquitous. The New Testament writers are always swimming in the waters of baptismal theology. "89

If then the believer is united to Christ by baptism and if unionwith-Christ language is inherently baptismal, then what benefits accrue to the believer thereby?

We may speak of baptism as "the instrument of forgiveness and regeneration (Acts 2:38, 22:16; Tit. 3:5)," which are "the chief blessings of union with Christ; they are offered in baptism and received by faith."90

Lusk enumerates what happens in baptism.

> We are united (or married) to the crucified, buried, and risen Christ (Rom. 6:1ff), though we can be cut off (or divorced) from him if we are unfaithful (Rom. 11:17ff; cf. Jn. 15:1ff); [w]e are forgiven (Acts 2:38, 22:16 ...); [w]e receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38); [w]e are cleansed (Eph. 5:26); we are regenerated and renewed (Titus 3:5); [w]e are buried and resurrected with Christ (Col. 2:11-12); [w]e are circumcised in heart (Col. 2:11-12); [w]e are joined to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13); [w]e are clothed with Christ (Gal. 3:27); [w]e are justified and sanctified (1 Cor. 6:11); [w]e are saved (1 Pt. 3:20-21); [w]e are ordained as priests with access to the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 10:19-22).91

In short, "I do not doubt the whole Christian life may be considered a footnote to one's baptism. "92

This raises the question of whether baptism benefits all or simply some of its recipients in this way. Lusk is clear that "there is no question everyone in the church has received grace and is in some kind of relationship with the Triune God."" But if, as we have seen Lusk argue above, grace is essentially relational, then this statement need only mean that all in the church are in relationship with God. While this "receipt of past grace" is not "call[ed] into question" by the apostle Paul, what is uncertain is believers' "perseverance by faith into future grace.""

Water baptism? Yes, water baptism. Lusk fields an objection to a pivotal point: Is Scripture really speaking of water baptism when it uses baptismal language? He argues that the Reformed tendency to see the passages cited in the previous section as "an unmediated `spiritual' baptism that takes place apart from any outward rite or ceremony" is "special pleading."" This is so because "the Bible says there is one baptism (Eph. 4:5), so splitting baptism up into a physical baptism and a spiritual baptism is illegitimate." Further, the Standards cite the above passages as "prooftexts" in contexts of "water baptism.""

Sign and thing signified. Given Lusk's affirmations concerning what is conveyed in baptism, we might ask whether and how he observes the traditional distinction between sign and thing signified. We have seen that it is a distinction that Leithart has questioned.

Lusk first defines what he means by the term sign. Arguing against G. I. Williamson, Lusk contends that an equation of "sign" and "picture" is mistaken.97 To speak of baptism as a "sign" in the biblical sense is to speak of it, following Leithart, in terms of a "performative speech act."" Sacraments, so defined, "change one's standing, identity, privileges, and responsibilities, not only in the gaze of men, as it has been said, but also in the gaze of God."" Lusk more tentatively suggests that sacramental signs may be "signs" in the sense of "powerful, transformative, saving actions of God," as we see them in Exodus and John.'°° In either case, we do not have "an ineffectual picture or symbol" or a situation in which "the efficacy attributed to baptism may take place before or after the administration of the rite itself."10' This latter observation, we might note, stands counter to the doctrine of WCF 28.6.

In view of this definition, how do a sign and a thing signified relate? In short, Lusk argues that there is "a basic, fundamental unity" between the two. 112 Citing WCF 27.2-3, Lusk argues that the signs are "signs conjoined with the gracious work of Christ and the Spirit."" He calls this view "sacramental causality," which is, in fact, "instrumental efficacy."104

Consequently, all that is signified in baptism ("nothing less than union with Christ, regeneration, and forgiveness") "is truly sealed (WCF 28.1), conferred (WCF 28.5), applied (WSC 92) and communicated (WSC 88)." We may not say, then, that baptism is "a mere picture of something received in another way" or that baptism "is merely a strengthening and assuring ordinance, rather than a saving ordinance."105 In short, "there is no such thing as a baptism that does not confer grace, just as there is no such thing as a salvific `spiritual baptism' that takes place apart from the physical sign of water."" "Insofar as baptism is a sacramental act/event, every baptism includes both the outward sign and the thing signified. There's no such thing as a Spirit baptism without water, or a water baptism without the Spirit. Baptism = water + Spirit, by definition."107

To deny this conception of baptismal objectivity is to deny Paul's principle of "one baptism" (Eph. 4:8). Consequently, "whatever baptism confers upon adults, in principle, it confers upon infants as well"; and "elect and non-elect persons receive the same baptism." We have "one baptism, with two divergent responses (faith and unbelief). The elect person will `improve' his baptism and persevere to the end. The non-elect person will fall from grace, and lose the benefits set before him in baptism."" This is also bound up in the very nature of

a sacrament: "A sacrament, by definition, includes the bestowal of the thing signified."" To "separate the sacrament from Christ's power and presence is to fall into a kind of sacramental Nestorianism." 0 This is what we do when we see "baptism as a picture or symbol of grace that is actually received in some other, non-sacramental fashion. 55'11

We have then, in summary, a doctrine wherein the sacrament is said to be salvifically efficacious upon each and every administration of it.

> Baptism is an action of God in the church in which union with Christ and all the blessings of the new covenant are conferred and applied (cf. WLC 162-163). It is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, through which we admitted [sic] to the church and through which salvation is effectually bestowed upon believers (WSC 91-94). Christ is present in the sacrament by his Word and Spirit to communicate the benefits of redemption to worthy receivers (WCF 28).112

Baptism and faith. Lusk, wishing to avoid a mechanical doctrine of sacramental efficacy, contends that faith is a requirement for one to be saved: "We must combine the waters of baptism with a living faith. 11113 How do we balance this doctrine of efficacy with the need for a subjective response from the recipient?

> [Baptism's] efficacy is inherent and objective, yet conditional. It is always a blessing to receive God's heavenly rain (cf. Heb. 6:7-8). But if the one baptized rejects what God offers and gives in baptismnamely, Christ himself-then those waters of life become waters of drowning and judgment. Baptism is what it is, even apart from our response, just as in the case of preaching. A sermon doesn't become false simply because it isn't believed. It does not stop being the Word of God. Similarly, a baptism doesn't cease to be a means of real grace just because the one baptized doesn't exercise faith.114

> How will you receive your baptism? Will it be a means of rich, salvific blessing? Or will it only make hell that much hotter for you? Will you continue in the grace of baptism or fall from it? ... But note that Scripture consistently attributes apostasy not to the withholding of grace on God's part (as though some baptisms didn't "take"), but the abuse of grace on

man's part.'"

We may speak of a universal sacramental efficacy, but we must also speak of the necessity of subjective appropriation of the "blessings delivered over to us in baptism."

This arm of subjective appropriation is "faith": "Baptism is the way God gives us Christ; faith is the human instrument that receives Christ through the physical means. 11116

Baptism, faith, and conversion. In his essay, "Paedobaptism," Lusk raises the question of infants. Infants, he argues, are "betrothed to the Lord from conception onwards. But the marriage-that is, the actual covenant bonding-takes place at baptism. Or, to put it in more theological terms, God is already in the process of drawing the child to himself from the moment of conception. The examples of David (Ps. 22:9-10) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:41) show God's in utero, presacramental work. But this work isn't complete until the child receives the sign of initiation. The child remains in a liminal, transitional state until then. The threshold into union with Christ, new life in the Spirit, and covenant membership in the family of God is actually crossed when the child is baptized. From baptism forward, the child is expected to grow in faith and repentance unto maturity as he is nurtured in the Church and in the home. "117

This produces a certain understanding of Christian nurture: "We are not to try to convert our baptized children, as though their spiritual experience had to fit the revivalistic paradigm; rather, we teach them to persevere in the faith and grace that they have already received in baptism."" "Counting and treating our baptized children as Christians is not a matter of pretending or presuming. It is more than a `judgment of charity.' When we tell our children that God is their Father and that Jesus is their Savior, we are telling them something true and helping them internalize their covenant identity .....

Baptismal regeneration? Back of the questions of the relationship of baptism to faith and conversion is the all-important question of the relationship of baptism to regeneration.

Lusk argues that if we take the term regeneration in its "Protestant scholastic sense," then baptismal regeneration is patently "absurd. "120 Assessing a

definition of baptismal regeneration supplied by Charles Hodge, Lusk categorically denies that he holds to the doctrine so defined.121

Lusk appeals, however, to uses of the term in the Bible, in Calvin, and in recent Reformed theology that differ from this narrow, technical sense.122 We may speak of "baptismal regeneration" provided that our terms are properly defined. Lusk offers two crucial qualifications to his use of this phrase.

First, we may speak of baptismal regeneration provided we define the term regeneration "in an objective sense," meaning the "new life situation entered into in baptism," by which Lusk means "not so much a matter of ontology or subjectivity .... as ... a matter of new relationships, privileges, and responsibilities." This sense, Lusk stresses, "is not strictly limited to the elect. "123 The reason he cites for not using baptismal regeneration in its traditional "subjective" sense is that "such an inner transformation is a secret of the heart and God's decree and cannot be known with absolute certainty by us. "124 Citing as examples Saul (1 Sam. 10), professing Christians as temples of God (1 Cor. 6) who may yet apostatize (1 Cor. 10), and the seed sown upon thorny soil (Mark 4), Lusk argues that "in some sense surely we can refer to them as regenerate," that is, in "some general sense. "125 Understanding that Lusk does not appear to use the word regenerate in its conventional sense, Lusk makes room for an alternative definition that conceivably permits one to affirm baptismal regeneration of individuals within the covenant of grace.

Second, elsewhere Lusk says that we may understand regeneration in a "covenantal" sense (he cites Matt. 13:21-22; Heb. 6:7-8), wherein "something living" appears that "was not before" but is "no guarantee of a good crop. That new life may bear great fruit, unto blessing, or thorns and thistles, unto cursing. "126 In short, "God blesses us in baptism with new life, though baptism does not guarantee perseverance. Thus we must combine the waters of baptism with enduring faith (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-12).»127

In support of such a formulation, Lusk appeals to Norman Shepherd's "covenantal form of baptismal regeneration,"128 and to formu lations by Joel Garver and Peter Leithart that Lusk terms "baptismal regeneration." These latter two, Lusk insists, appropriate "narrative theology, semiotics, ritual theory, and theological sociology" to "overhaul ... our biblical theology of baptism and its relationship to sal- vation."129 Several block quotes from Leithart's work on

baptism follow this statement.

In neither instance, then, do we have baptismal regeneration articulated in its narrow and classical theological sense. While the phrase, so defined, is said to be appropriate to use ("following our Reformed forefathers," Lusk insists), Lusk concedes that "without proper qualification and explanation" it "is bound to cause confusion. "130 He does not appear, however, to regard the potential damage caused by use of this phrase to be so great that he will categorically refrain from employing it. To the contrary, he suggests that "our use of [baptismal regeneration] could make us more `catholic' in the best sense of the term" since the phrase baptismal regeneration "is so widely employed in Christendom. 11131

Baptism and the nonelect. What benefits accrue to a baptized person who is nonelect? Lusk argues that "objectively his status is changed," in that "he becomes a member of the kingdom, house, and family of God."132 The nonelect comes into possession of these "covenantal blessings" as they are the fruit of the Spirit's "common operations," which Lusk defines as "blessings and benefits that both elect and non-elect covenant members receive within the communion of the church" (he cites Matt. 18:32; Heb. 6:4-8; 2 Peter 1:9; 2:1). Hence, "future reprobates can possess" "temporary forgiveness, enlightenment and knowledge of the truth" whereas the elect can "possess these same blessings" albeit in an "irreversible, irrevocable way."133 Consequently, when we speak of the elect "truly" coming to Christ (WCF 10:4), the word " `truly' must at the very least include perseveringly to distinguish it from the way in which the non-elect covenant member can come to Christ. "134

Westminster Standards. Lusk argues that his view is the view taught by the Westminster Standards. He argues for this by means of a two-step process. First, he claims, citing Douglas Wilson, that "cer tain epistemological developments since the Enlightenment have caused many modern conservative Calvinists to read their confession in a spirit alien to that which produced them. 1113' Lusk suggests the culprits who he suspects lie behind this skewed reading when he states that "a major goal of the present work is to learn to read the classic Reformed confessions as if Revivalism and the Enlightenment never happened."'" Lusk also points his finger at "Protestant scholasticism."'" Consequently, he attributes many of his disagreements with contemporary critics

to this problem: they are reading the Standards in a manner foreign to the Divines' intent.

Second, Lusk argues that his compilation of quotations from Calvin, other sixteenth-century Reformers, and two scholars of seventeenth-century Puritanism helps to provide the needed context for Westminster's statements. Such a study allows us to conclude, Lusk states, that "the Reformed tradition, in its pristine form, linked baptism instrumentally to regeneration and justification, and thus, to the beginnings of salvation."""

The ultimate proof of Lusk's primitivist critique of conventional readings of Westminster is whether his own readings are themselves plausible and satisfactory. How does Lusk argue his views from the Standards?

The standards and baptismal regeneration. Lusk argues that "most Presbyterians today focus on the qualifiers on baptismal efficacy in the Confession rather than its central affirmation."""" What "central affirmation" does Lusk have in mind?

> The Standards teach that the sacraments "confer" grace (WCF 27.3, 28.6), that they are "effectual means of salvation" (WSC 91), and that they are required if we are to (ordinarily) escape God's wrath and curse due to us for sin (WSC 85). Puritan expert David F. Wright summarizes, "What then about the efficacy of baptism according to the Westminster Confession? Its central affirmation seems clear: ,the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost' (28.6). It is true that a variety of qualifications to this assertion are entered.... But these qualifications serve in fact only to highlight the clarity of the core declaration, which is set forth as follows in the preceding chapter on sacraments in general.... The Westminster divines viewed baptism as the instrument and occasion of regeneration by the Spirit, of the remission of sins, of ingrafting into Christ (cf. 28.1). The Confession teaches baptismal regeneration."""

Seen in this light, we ought not to take the "qualifiers ... as negating [the Standards'] plain statements. "141 Still, he says, "it would be going too far to say the Confession necessitates belief in baptismal regeneration," although "such a view of baptismal efficacy is included in its parameters, if determined by

original authorial intent. "142

In a more recent piece, however, Lusk insists that the Standards not only teach but "bind" the believer to a form of baptismal regeneration.

> The Reformed confessions do bind us to believe in a certain limited version of ex opera [sic] operato: Everyone baptized, no matter their subjective heart condition, is joined to the "visible church" at the time of their baptism-automatically and without exception, right then and there, you might say (cf. WCF 28.1).141

Consequently, we may say that "some functions of baptism happen `automatically.' "144 One of these automatic functions is that

> every baptized person joins the visible church-the kingdom, house, and family of God (WCF 25.2). In other words, the Confession implicitly views baptism as an adoption ritual, as the one baptized is inserted into the family of God. All baptized persons receive, objectively, the same promised inheritance and privileges. Some form of the gift of the Spirit must be implicitly conferred, since the house of God-the temple-is indwelt by the Spirit.... Even some kind of baptismal regeneration doctrine can be derived from this view of the visible church, since only those born again enter into the kingdom. Baptism marks the transition into a new life in the kingdom.141

For Lusk, then, each of these confessional images of the visible church (kingdom, house, and family) supports his doctrine of baptismal objectivity. He notes parenthetically that WCF 25.2 bolsters his doctrine of apostasy. Just as those who are baptized are brought into the family, kingdom, and house of God, so too "these blessings were genuinely possessed by the church member, and were actually lost when he apostatized." This means that "these `common operations of the Spirit' (WCF 10.4) ... are undifferentiated within the covenant community. These things belong (however contingently) to all baptized persons, though they can be forfeited by unbelief. "146

The Standards, baptism, and faith. In this same article, Lusk elaborates his appeal to the Westminster Standards as undergirding his own doctrines. He points to the language of WCF 28.1 ("sealed"), 28.5 ("exhibited," "conferred"),

and SC 91 ("applied," "communicated"), insisting that the role of the qualifications elsewhere in the Standards is to prevent us from "fall[ing] into bare formalism or antinomianism."

For Lusk, there are two components to Westminster's doctrine: baptismal efficacy and subjective appropriation. He argues that the Standards affirm a strong doctrine of baptismal efficacy.

> [One's] baptism is "unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his engrafting into Christ, or regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Christ Jesus, to walk in newness of life" (28.1). The Confession is very clear: every baptized person should regard himself as a member of the covenant of grace and united to Christ.... Note that the benefits listed in 28.1 are spoken of in reference to the administration of baptism and the covenant, not to eternal election, which remains secret to us (cf. Dt. 29:29). In other words, they are objective and applicable, in principle, to every baptized person. The blessings belong to the one baptized, regarded as a member of the visible church, not as someone who is "secretly elect" or "genuinely regenerate. ,141

Thus, the "central affirmation" of the Standards (i.e., of baptismal efficacy) must be true of every recipient of baptism. We may speak this way ("objectively") because baptism in the Westminster Standards pertains to the covenant and not to election, or the decree. It is, as Lusk states, "just another way of `viewing election through the lens of the covenant,' as Norm Shepherd was apt to put it. 11141

Lusk anticipates an objection: Does not the confessional language of "sign and seal" militate against such an understanding of baptismal efficacy? He argues that we have two "strands" in the Confession: the "effectual means" and the "sign and seal" "language."149 The former must shape and determine the latter. Consequently, "sign" is not "an empty rite, a mere picture," but is "more like an effective speech act." "As a seal, it functionally applies the benefits of Christ and the covenant." This means that "'sign and seal' language ... emphasizes the objectivity of the sacraments. 11151

Notwithstanding these strong statements of baptismal efficacy, the Standards, Lusk recognizes, also speak of subjective appropriation. "The

promise only holds good for `worthy receivers' (27.3), that is, believers. The objective blessings are only realized by faith." He also says that the sacraments "confer Christ upon those who receive the sacrament in faith."151 He therefore frames Westminster's doctrine in terms of a "paradox": "Baptism saves, but not all the baptized are saved."152 In other words, "The objective meaning of baptism is not softened, but our subjective response determines what we actually get from the sacrament. And that response is subject to God's foreordination. Baptism is the offer; faith is the receptor."""

Lusk summarizes his position.

> The Westminster divines have given us a strong doctrine of the instrumental efficacy of baptism. Baptism is not in competition with faith because baptism is what God does, while faith is what we do. Baptism is God's instrument in giving new life and forgiveness; faith is the instrument on our side for receiving these things.154

In speaking this way, Lusk assures us, the office of faith in justification and salvation is not at all jeopardized. Faith and baptism are instrumental in different ways.

Summary. We may summarize Lusk's position using his own words.

> In baptism we are brought covenantally and publicly out of union with Adam and into union with Christ. When this occurs, one is "born again," not in the sense we have come to speak of regeneration as an irresistible, irreversible change of heart, but in the covenantal sense of being brought out of Adam's family into God's family. In baptism, we are united to Christ by faith, and therefore to the Tri une God. Having been admitted to the fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit, this new relationship, like any other relationship requires fidelity and love. This doesn't mean we maintain our end of the covenant in our own strength; God provides that as well. But it does mean that there is such a thing as covenant keeping and covenant breaking. All covenant members are encouraged to rely on God's promises and trust him for the gift of perseverance.
>
> In this relationship, one has, in principle, all the blessings and benefits in the heavenly places delivered over to him as he is "in Christ." We've

> already noted that baptism is like an adoption ceremony. The adopted child is brought into a new relationship, given a new name, new blessings, a new future, new opportunities, a new inheritance-in short, a new life. And yet these blessings, considered from the standpoint of the covenant rather than the eternal decree, are mutable. The child is a full member of the family and has everything that comes with sonship. But, if he grows up and rejects his Father and Mother (God and the church), if he refuses to repent and return home when warned and threatened, then he loses all the blessings that were his. It would not be accurate to say that he never had these things; he did possess them, even though he never experienced or enjoyed some of them.15'

Critique

(1) Lusk's discussion of baptism presents us with an example of a functional absence of necessary theological distinctions, of a misleading use of a theological term, and of anachronism.

(a) We see a functional absence of necessary theological distinctions when he discusses union with Christ. When he speaks of the baptized recipient being united to Christ, we immediately inquire, what does this mean? Given that theologians, reflecting upon biblical testimony, have spoken of union with Christ in not fewer than nine distinct senses,'" we need clarification. The sense that he uses will determine the nature of his doctrine of baptism.

(b) Lusk not only uses the term regeneration in at least two (and perhaps three) senses but defends his preferred uses as in keeping with biblical terminology and the purported usage of the early Reformers. Such usage, however, is irresponsible. It unnecessarily invites confusion by rejecting long-standing and conventional uses of a theological term (regeneration). It redefines and uses terms and phrases in ways that are bound to generate confusion within the contemporary church (baptismal regeneration).

(c) Lusk anachronistically redefines the term sign as a "performative speech act." In other words, the term comes to be invested with what contemporary language theory means by that term. While Lusk, to be sure, attempts to defend such a usage from the Scripture, it is exceedingly unlikely that such a definition-one that has received its specialized sense from contemporary philosophical

discussions-has displaced the common sense meaning of the term sign as the customary meaning of the term in the Bible. Given that the Bible is not a philosophical textbook, we would not expect the sign to be used in any other way than according to its commonsense meaning.

(2) In related fashion, Lusk departs from the biblical and confessional language of sealing. He appears to understand seal to refer to a certain application of the redemptive benefits held forth in the sacrament of baptism to each and every recipient. The recipient then may (or may not) appropriate those benefits by faith. Neither Scripture nor our Standards, however, speak of redemptive "sealing" in the absence of faith. In other words, the sacraments represent graces as signs and seals to the faith of the worthy recipient. This is made clear at WCF 27.3, where the "promise of benefit" is said to be only for "worthy receivers."

(3) Lusk also diverges from the Standards' doctrine of the sacramental union. The Standards are simply concerned to explain a phenomenon in Scripture: that the name and effects of the thing signified are sometimes denominated by the sign and vice versa (WCF 27.2). Lusk, however, argues that the sign and thing signified must inevitably accompany one another at each administration of the sacrament.

This is precisely what our Standards do not affirm: the "names and the effects of the one are attributed to the other." The practical effect of the sacramental union is linguistic in nature. It is not that the thing signified inevitably accompanies the sign in the administration of the sacrament. Recall our example from Genesis 17:10 (a prooftext at WCF 27.2), where circumcision is called God's "covenant" between God and Abraham. It is clear that the union between "covenant" and "circumcision" in view in this verse assumes the temporal distinction between them, the temporal distinction drawn by Moses throughout the Abraham narrative. Or, to take another prooftext, Matthew 26:28, "This is My blood of the covenant"-the sign and the thing signified (the shed blood of Christ-not to occur historically until the following day) are again temporally distinguished.

(4) Lusk insists that there is an inevitable connection between spiritual baptism and water baptism such that every reference to "baptism" in the New Testament must be a reference to water baptism. This in part is connected to his

doctrine that the "in Christ" language of the New Testament is infused with baptismal imagery. It is connected to his doctrine that baptism and faith are co-instrumental in salvation: baptism being God's holding out and bestowing the benefits of redemption upon the recipient; faith being the human arm that receives these benefits.

Lusk himself concedes that water baptism is not so necessary that an elect infant, for instance, will perish in the absence of its administration. This raises two problems for his doctrine. First, there is an inherent tension in his view. Lusk's real doctrine must insist on an absolute necessity of baptism. Practically, however, he recognizes that such a necessity is impossible. The problem case is unbaptized or prebaptized covenant children in utero. Lusk tries to free himself from this difficulty by saying that "the unbaptized child of the covenant is betrothed to the Lord from conception onwards." He has "a promise from God even though the covenantal blessings have not yet been bestowed upon him." It is, rather, the "marriage-that is, the actual covenant bonding-[that] takes place at baptism." Even so, "this work isn't complete until the child receives the sign of initiation. The child remains in a liminal, transitional state until then. The threshold into union with Christ, new life in the Spirit, and covenantal membership in the family of God is actually crossed when the child is baptized."""

The above discussion is revealing. Lusk manifests what a dilemma he has created for himself. He is unable to extract himself from it. To affirm that absolute necessity of baptism for receiving the benefits of salvation is necessarily to exclude nonbaptized or prebaptized infants who may be regenerate. On the other hand, to allow some nonbaptized or prebaptized infants to possess the benefits of salvation means, in one sense, that their baptism is a sign (traditionally speaking) of what they already possess. Their baptism, then, puts them in possession of nothing salvific.

Second, Lusk also seems to concede, in making this exception for unbaptized or prebaptized children in utero, that one may receive the things signified prior to or even apart from the application of the sign. In other words, we have a practical distinction between what Lusk terms spiritual baptism and water baptism. It seems that Lusk retreats from his position that every instance of "baptism" in the New Testament must be a reference to water baptism.

(5) We have above referenced the example of Ishmael (to which we may add the example of Esau-whose reprobation was certain before he was born or had done anything good or bad, Rom. 9:6-13) as one who received the covenant sign and yet most certainly did not and would not receive the thing signified. Lusk's doctrine of baptismal efficacy, however, is that grace (so defined) was objectively given to recipients of the sacrament. If recipients end up not possessing grace in the end, it is because they have forfeited it.

Such a doctrine prompts Lusk to speculate that "some commentators have made a case that, despite their typological functions in the New Testament, we should be open to the possibility that Ishmael was saved, in light of Gen. 21, and that Esau repented, in light of Gen. 33, even though both were excluded from the messianic seed line."158 Exegetically and theologically (cf. Rom 9:4-5), neither option is likely or even plausible. We can see, however, how Lusk is theologically pressed to consider seriously such exegetically dubious arguments.

(6) Lusk misunderstands the Standards' doctrine of "common operations of the Spirit." Lusk's doctrine, we may recall, allows him to explain how nonelect baptized persons may receive and yet forfeit genuinely possessed spiritual blessings through baptism. He appears to understand the common operations of the Spirit to be shared by both elect and nonelect covenant members. What distinguishes the two is not ontological but temporal. The elect persevere in what they possess, but the nonelect apostatize and thereby forfeit what they possess.

The Larger Catechism, however, distinguishes common from saving operations of the Spirit ontologically. All the elect and only the elect are "effectually called"; though others may be "outwardly called by the ministry of the word" (LC 68). The latter may possess "some common operations of the Spirit." The catechism, we may note, ties possession of these common operations to this outward call (not the effectual call). They are uniquely the possession of the nonelect. Further, the common operations come to individuals who "for their willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ."

Lusk, we have seen, takes "truly" at WCF 10.4 to mean that "they did not persevere." The Larger Catechism, however, makes clear that the individuals in view never closed with Jesus Christ at all ("being justly left in their unbelief"). They are rather those who have refused the "grace offered to them" in the

"outward call."

(7) Lusk's hermeneutic of the Westminster Standards is doubtful.

(a) His strategy seems at times to be one of "divide and conquer." Rather than taking statements as mutually qualifying one another, he understands there to be two distinct strands (the "efficacy" strand and the "sign and seal" strand). He privileges the "efficacy" strand and thereby redefines the confessional "sign and seal" statements in terms of his doctrine of baptismal efficacy. To privilege the so-called "efficacy" strand, however, is arbitrary.

(b) This approach ties into a deeper and related problem: Lusk claims that the various statements of the Standards exist in "paradox," a term, we have seen, that he uses to describe the Standards' baptismal doctrine. Perhaps a more apt word to describe Lusk's understanding of the relationship of these statements is dialectical or contradictory. Consequently, Lusk will not attempt to read the Standards' various statements and qualifications in a logically harmonious way. Rather, one strand becomes privileged, and one strand becomes attenuated or redefined.

(c) In a most remarkable inversion of the Standards' teaching, Lusk, citing the authority of David F. Wright, argues that the Standards teach a doctrine of baptismal regeneration. He does this by isolating such terms as confer, sign, seal, and exhibit from their confessional qualifications. This of course runs counter to the Standards' statement denying "that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated" (WCF 28.5). However one defines the term regeneration, one may not appeal to the Standards to support a doctrine of baptismal regeneration (in any form).

Steve Wilkins

Sacramental Efficacy and Baptism

Steve Wilkins, who serves the same congregation as Rich Lusk once served, has a very similar doctrine of sacramental efficacy and baptism as Lusk. We have, in earlier chapters, observed Wilkins's understanding of covenant in terms of a vital relationship, of baptism as the primary ground of the believer's assurance of grace and salvation, and of perseverance as a gift neither bestowed

nor guaranteed by baptism. We turn now to consider the two questions that have occupied us in these last two chapters: sacramental efficacy and the significance of baptism as such.

Baptism and union with Christ. Wilkins claims that baptism is a sign and seal of the believer's covenant union with Christ.159 Wilkins also insists that we speak of baptism as that which effects the believer's union with Christ.

> The Bible teaches us that baptism unites us to Christ and ... to his body by the power of the Spirit. By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, we've all been made to drink of one Spirit.16o

> To be baptized is to be covenantally joined to Christ. Not that baptism justifies, but it inaugurates covenant union with Christ just as circumcision did.161

We may note not only that Wilkins interprets such passages as Galatians 3:27 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 as passages that refer to water baptism, but also that he refers to the union effected as "covenant union." He also states that a child's having received baptism is no sure sign that he is "elect" or "regenerate." Rather, we "know that God includes them in the covenant. "162

What is the nature of this covenant union? Wilkins states that "at baptism you are clothed with Christ [Gal. 3:27 cited]. Union with Christ is a real, vital blessed union. "163 What comes with this union? "With our union with Christ, we have all spiritual blessings." And yet, Wilkins states that "apart from real union with [Christ], there is no salvation because salvation is rooted and grounded in him."'" It may be that Wilkins distinguishes covenantal from real union, but he himself does not elaborate the distinction. Even so, Wilkins can still say, "We belong to Christ. Baptism is the infallible sign and seal of this, and now we must learn to live faithfully and never depart from him. "165

Baptismal efficacy. What does baptism do? Wilkins fears that the church can see baptism as "a meaningless ritual or merely a symbolic dedication." Rather, "it is always efficacious and powerful."166 He elaborates his statement that "baptism is always efficacious."

> It will either confirm our salvation or our damnation. Baptism is not "meaningless" even for the one who never comes to saving faith. To the contrary, it condemns him as a covenant-breaker. "For the unrepentant, reprobate covenant child who has been given the sign and seal of the covenant, or for the adult who has later apostatized, baptism remains extremely powerful and significant. Over each reprobate head baptism seals and signifies the covenant of grace. But it is the negative aspects of the covenant with which the sinner has to do. These are powerfully sworn into the individual as curses. His baptism testifies against him in the covenant lawsuit. He is sealed into Christ's death in a negative sense. Christ's death is not merely of no saving significance; it utterly condemns him and heaps upon him divine vengeance, for he has profaned the death of Christ before God the Father."""

We may speak then of an objective efficacy of baptism. Baptism does something regardless of whether the recipient proves to be elect or reprobate.

> This, Wilkins contends, is true even of Ishmael and Esau.
>
> In both cases, the parents had direct, divine revelation that their sons would be reprobate. Yet, in both cases, the parents were commanded to give to their sons the sign of God's covenant mercy (circumcision). In both cases, the covenant sign was efficaciousto condemn. Baptism (as circumcision) is always efficacious and powerful. It is always significant. It is significant of salvation, however, only to those who believe.16S

We may note, before we proceed, that Wilkins's conclusion is speculative. Genesis does not specifically speak of the circumcision of Ishmael and Esau as "efficacious to condemn." It simply independently records the facts that both men were condemned and that both men received the covenant sign. No connection is established or necessarily implied.

Wilkins will speak of baptismal efficacy in terms of baptism's effecting a relationship between the baptized and the covenant. Baptism "brings about entrance into the covenant with all the requirements and promises that entails. The covenant is no longer some sort of vague theological concept. It is a concrete substantial reality that establishes a real objective relationship with Christ and His people."" "Baptized children do not have to `join the church,'

they are members of the church by their baptism."170 Wilkins will at times appeal to the language of "seal" in order to warrant speaking this way of baptismal efficacy.

> Baptism is the seal of union with Christ, membership in His body, the Church. It is not an exercise in wishful thinking or merely symbolic dedication of the child to God. It is significant of a glorious reality. It confirms what is actually true of this child (or man)-He is joined to Christ and is now solemnly obligated ... by his baptism to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh. He no longer belongs to the world of unbelief but now is a member of the household of faith and bound to honor the gracious God who has claimed him for himself.
>
> The kingdom of heaven belongs to him really and truly.... He is a recipient of all the promises of salvation and covenant blessing that God gives His people and this is actually real! It is not a mere symbolic ceremony of what can become true if the child has an emotional experience later in life-it is true now. This is true because God says so.""

Wilkins, then, appears to use the language of seal in connection with all the salvific blessings and benefits that certainly come to each recipient by virtue of his baptism.

Baptismal regeneration. In view of Wilkins's comments regarding the relationship of baptism and union with Christ and baptismal efficacy, we may ask whether he espouses any form of baptismal regeneration. Wilkins affirms that he does.

> Reading the Bible this way and in this sense we can speak of baptismal regeneration in this sense, not in the sense that there is some mystical power in the water of baptism that automatically transforms men if the water has been sufficiently sanctified. But, nor is it saying that God is bound to the water of baptism, that God, somehow, his blessing is always bound to that and can't come apart from that.
>
> What we, what I mean by this is we can speak of it in the sense that by the blessing of the Spirit, baptism unites us to Christ and his church and thus in him gives us new life [Rom. 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:17 cited]. By our

> baptism we have been reborn, in this sense, having died with Christ, we have been raised with him....172

The significance of Christ's own baptism, he continues, "is true for all who are baptized. You die to the old covenant relationship to the world, you are resurrected to a new covenant relationship with the Savior and henceforth are required to walk in newness of life."""

In terms that echo Shepherd's formulation that baptism marks the transition from death to life, Wilkins lends some qualifications to his doctrine.

> Baptism is the point at which one is publicly joined to Christ and thus is covenantally transposed from death to life. Now, hear me carefully, this is not to say that baptism accomplishes the transition from death to life or that baptism causes a person to be regenerated. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration has been rightly rejected by the Reformed church. Clearly, the Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit is not bound by the sign. He works like the wind, when, where, and how he pleases. But baptism is the visible sign and seal of union with Christ [Gal. 3:27 cited]. To be baptized is to be covenantally joined to Christ. Not that baptism justifies, but it inaugurates covenant union with Christ just as circumcision did.174

Even with these qualifications, Wilkins will cite Galatians 3 as evidence that "when you've been baptized and put on Christ, at baptism all the promises and blessings of the covenant are delivered over to you, and God calls you then to embrace them by faith and persevere in the grace of God that has been given to you."175 We find a dynamic similar to that observed in Lusk's doctrine. In baptism, all the blessings of the covenant are said to be delivered over to the recipient. The baptized, however, may (or may not) receive by faith what is conferred in baptism.

Biblical arguments for baptismal regeneration. Wilkins cites Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus in John 3 to show that "Jesus connects the new birth with baptism."

> Unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot see the kingdom of heaven. Now what would Nicodemus think when he says, water and Spirit? He is thinking of what water always, what baptism always

> signified in the Old Testament. You cannot see the kingdom unless water and the spirit comes. So that the water of baptism and the work of the Spirit are combined by our Saviour.176

The "same thing," Wilkins contends, is accomplished by Paul at Titus 3:5, where "the work of the Spirit is connected with baptism," and by Peter at 1 Peter 3:21 ("baptism now saves you").

In what way does the baptized person, by virtue of baptism, come to share in the benefits of redemption?

> Baptism, then, is the sign and seal of this reality [i.e., union with Christ in his death, burial, resurrection; our partaking of the Holy Spirit]. In baptism, we are transferred by the power of the spirit, from the old Adam, and the wrath and curse of God which rested upon the old man, into the new man, which is Christ Jesus. We are made new creatures in that sense, by the power of the Spirit, being restored to living communion with God.177

> By baptism the Spirit joins us to Christ since he is the elect one and the Church is the elect people, we are joined to his body. We therefore are elect. Since he is the justified one, we are justified in him. Since he is the beloved one, we are beloved in him.178

> The blessings of salvation are not abstractions that are apart from Christ. They are blessings that are found in union with him, it is because he has all these things, and we are swept up in communion and union with him, that we have-we share in all these things. We are given these things in him. We come into the world dead in sin, cut off from communion with God, which is what being dead in sin means, not welcome in his presence, and our transition from this condition of deadness into the condition of living fellowship with God, occurs, being brought from death to life, occurs formally, that is it's publicly signified and sealed, at baptism.19

Similar to arguments that we encountered in our survey of FV discussions of imputation and justification, the benefits of redemption accrue to the baptized person by virtue of union with Christ. All that has been affirmed of Christ is affirmed of the one united to him by baptism. This is comprehensible in light of

Wilkins's affirmation, with other FV proponents, that the grace of God is not "that blue Pepsi, Gatorade stuff that really juices up your system, it's favor-it means being in a favorable, and receiving the favor of God, and that is only found in Christ. He was the one whom God favored, he is the Beloved of the Father, and it is in him that we are granted that favor as well."180 This may also explain how Wilkins can argue from 1 Corinthians 6:11 that believers "have been washed, or baptized, and that has brought about sanctification and justification in the name of Christ, by the Spirit of God ."181

Biblical arguments for baptism as the sign of transition from death to life. Following Shepherd, Wilkins argues that "baptism (not regeneration)" is "the time of transition from unbelief to faith, from death to life, from the world to the kingdom of heaven. "182 In Acts 2:41, we read that "baptism (which we can see) rather than regeneration or election (which we cannot see) is the sign of transition from alienation to union and reconciliation with God." In Acts 16:33, the Philippian jailer and "his household are not said to have been regenerated or converted but baptized." Saul's "sight was [not] restored" and he was not "filled with the Spirit" until his baptism (Acts 9:17-18), as Paul likewise later testified (Acts 22:12-16).183 At Titus 3:5, where Paul speaks of "baptism as that laver of regeneration," "it may be that [Paul] is referring to Matt 19:28, or the idea of being ushered into the new creation in Christ Jesus. "184

Pastorally, the apostle Paul "exhorts the Romans to fidelity" not by having them "recall their regeneration (which of course they cannot know) but their baptism" (Rom. 6:1-11).185 Again of Romans 6 Wilkins affirms "what has happened for us in the death and resurrection of Christ has happened to us in baptism, obligating us to die to ourselves and live to God, and this dying and raising again is a result of the work of Christ in us."'" This is because baptism "signifies the application of Christ's work to us" (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50).18'

Baptism and children. Wilkins argues that this doctrine of objective, efficacious baptism affects children in the same way as it does adults. "Children are joined to Christ by their baptisms and must be viewed and treated in the light of this reality."'" This means that we are not to conceive our children as "somehow only externally joined to the church, but somehow not truly members of Christ." For, "when God says, `I will be a God to you and to your children after you,' is He speaking of a reality or merely a potential[?]."189 Further, to require that a child "show that spiritual qualification-a new heart" in order to the

church's "recogniz[ing] the majority of its minor citizens," as Dabney argues, is, Wilkins says, to "fall ... to the temptation of playing God and that must end."

The virtue of Wilkins's doctrine, he claims, is that "it takes seriously Dent 29:29. We cannot operate by assuming that we can discern the `secret things' of God. We must live on the basis of those things that can be known for certain and act in terms of those things." "0 This shapes a doctrine of covenantal nurture. They "don't need any more experiences." Rather, they need to be taught to believe and to persevere. This entails that "the reality of apostasy ... be set before the children." Should a child (or any believer) prove to apostatize, we may still say that the "relationship" they possessed was "real"; the problem was they "were unfaithful and ... lost what [they] had.""

Critique

(1) Wilkins claims that the baptized recipient is, in and by baptism, united to Christ and thereby shares in all his benefits: "all the promises and blessings of the covenant are delivered over to you." It is not just that some of the promises and blessings of the covenant come to each baptized person-all of them do. It is not just that these promises and blessings are merely represented to each baptized person-they are delivered over to him.

We may state four criticisms. First, Wilkins claims that the sacrament of baptism inaugurates covenantal union with Christ. We are said in baptism to be united "to His body by the power of the Spirit." Baptism is affirmed to be "always efficacious and powerful." Such affirmations counter WCF 28.6 ("The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered. . . "). Second, Wilkins does insist that faith is necessary to receive what is delivered through baptism. This qualification, however, is insufficient to render his doctrine confessional. WCF 28.6 states that "the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred . . . " But it goes on to say ". . . to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time." For Wilkins, baptism extends redemptive benefits to all. For the Westminster Confession of Faith, baptism extends these benefits only to some.

Third, as we have seen in our discussion in chapter 5, Wilkins claims that baptism does not guarantee perseverance. Perseverance thus is not, according to

Wilkins, among "all the promises and blessings of the covenant." This furthermore entails that perseverance is supplied by the believer independently of Christ and the benefits of the covenant of grace. Wilkins's doctrine compromises, then, solo Christo (salvation by Christ alone).

Fourth, it would seem for another reason that Wilkins cannot have a Calvinistic doctrine of perseverance and apostasy. According to Wilkins, the apostate was truly renewed and in full possession of Christ and all his benefits. His apostasy consists of his total and final forfeiture of these gifts. To argue this is to affirm the Arminian doctrine that one may have the reality of redemptive grace and yet truly lose it.

(2) Wilkins appears to take many "baptism" passages to refer immediately to water baptism. This, as we have argued, is dubious.

(3) Wilkins's nonontological definition of grace may entail a radical redefinition of such traditional soteriological terms as justification and sanctification. In his available writings, however, he does not develop at length what such redefinitions look like.

While we assume that he means by these terms what the Standards to which he has subscribed mean by those terms, it may be that he is using them equivocally. This uncertainty signals the degree to which Wilkins has not in print thoroughly worked out the implications of his system.

AAPC

Sacramental efficacy and baptism. Since the 2002 AAPC Summary Statement was adopted by the session on which Wilkins serves and represents the mind of the session of the congregation that Lusk previously served, we expect to find marked similarity between the views of Wilkins and Lusk, surveyed above, and the Statement. We find just such similarity.

In one paragraph in the 2002 Statement we find an affirmation encapsulating Wilkins's and Lusk's doctrines of baptismal efficacy.

> By baptism one is joined to Christ's body, united to Him covenantally, and given all the blessings and benefits of His work (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff;

> WSC #94). This does not, however, grant to the baptized final salvation; rather, it obligates him to fulfill the terms of the covenant (embracing these blessings by faith, repenting of sins, and persevering in faithful obedience to God). One can only fulfill the terms of the covenant by faith, not by works. And even this faith is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast.192

We have stated, then, a doctrine of covenantal union and an affirmation that in baptism one is "given all the blessings and benefits of [Christ's] work," excepting, apparently, the gift of perseverance (cf. Summary Statement 55, 10).193 We have, therefore, a form of baptismal regeneration affirmed in this document.

In speaking of what is received in baptism, the document references Saul's having received "initial covenant grace." It also states, however, that "he did not receive the gift of perseverance."" It may be, then, that "initial covenant grace" is what is transmitted in baptism. This, however, would require reconciliation with the prior statement that "all the blessings and benefits of [Christ's] work" come to the baptized person in and by his baptism.

In speaking of what is lost in apostasy, the document states that "it may not be wise to call this `losing one's salvation,' but it seems contrary to Scripture to say that nothing at all is lost. To draw such a conclusion appears to deny the reality of the covenant and the blessedness that is said to belong even to those who ultimately prove themselves reprobate (Heb. 10:26ff)."195

Critique. There is little to add to what we have observed above. The document appears to crystallize many of the views of Lusk and Wilkins. What is significant about this document, unlike their writings, is that it represents the action of a church court. Not only is it to be read with more seriousness, but its departures from the confessional standards of the church are thereby that much more pronounced.

S. Joel Garver

Sacramental efficacy. We turn now to consider two PCA men who neither are nor have been institutionally connected either with Moscow, Idaho, or with Monroe, Louisiana: Joel Garver and Mark Horne. We will examine first Joel

Garver.

Garver has argued that "a strong doctrine of sacramental efficacy is necessary to uphold and defend the Reformation solas. "196 Because "Christ is to be found in the places in which he has promised to be: in his Word and in his Sacraments," then the "objective presence of Christ in his Word and Sacraments, received by faith, gives us a sure place to rest our faith, not dependent upon our own inventions and experience."197 To turn from this sacramental efficacy is to turn God's people again "to the quicksand of subjectivity" that marred the medieval church, particularly, "experiences of conversion, feelings of spirituality, good works, holy living, an internal sense of forgiveness, signs and traces of some immediate work of the Spirit in our souls, and so on." This, Garver claims, compromises the gospel and the imputed righteousness of Christ.19' Hence the "Reformation solas ... positively require that baptism saves because the Christ who is offered to us in the Gospel has graciously promised to be found and received in baptism only by faith unto the remission of sins."199

In response to Garver's comments, we may note that not even Garver's doctrine of baptism can entirely avoid the subjectivity that he fears. Water baptism, he would grant, is not a guarantee of one's perseverance and final salvation. This being the case, baptism offers no truly objective assurance of salvation. Garver's formulations, furthermore, obscure a vital confessional doctrine-that faith, while "increased and strengthened" by the "administration of the sacraments, and prayer," is nevertheless "ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word" (WCF 14.1). It is the unique office of preaching to be an instrument of men's conversion (Rom. 10:14,17). To say, with Garver and without qualification, that "baptism saves" is not at all required by the Reformational solas and is likely counter to them.

Baptism. Garver has argued that one "enter[s] into [the] covenant in Christ" by "baptism, a sign and seal of faith."200 This baptism is grounded in Jesus' own baptism, which "marked out Jesus as the Elect One of God, the faithful remnant" and "summarized all of God's promises to his people through the centuries. "201 Garver draws two related observations. First, Jesus' baptism becomes determinative of baptisms in the church. Consequently, in the latter's baptisms, "the actions of John and Jesus in some sense continued, constituting YHWH's eschatological people. "202 Second, "by baptism, everything that belongs to Christ and to his Church in him, is ours-we are recipients of God's promises in

Christ, having God's own faithfulness proclaimed to us personally and individually, being incorporated into the very faithfulness of Christ and into the faith of his Church. "203 For example, "all who share Jesus' baptism also share in his vindication, if they continue to live in accordance with that baptismal sign. 55204

To "enter ... into this covenant," then, "accomplish[es] for us ... salvation," that is, "being part of the new-creation people of God: those who in Christ are adopted, vindicated, set apart as holy, and so on, if by faith we live in God's promise already applied to us." This "baptism into Messiah" consists of "renewed life in the Spirit, forgiveness of sins, adoption as God's children, and vindication (justification) before God."205 Our "covenant status as baptized Christians," furthermore, does "imply our election." This is so because "election is only revealed in and through the covenant." Baptism is "the sovereign manifestation of God's eternal will for that person to be part of his elect people in the Elect One, Christ. "206 We may say, then, that "if someone is in Christ by baptism-united to the Head as a member of the Body-then, that person is elect." But "if that person apostatizes and no longer abides in Christ (like the branches in John 15), he is no longer elect in Christ. "207

Garver also attempts to relate baptism to regeneration.

> We do not baptize because the one to be baptized is already regenerate. Rather we baptize in order that the one who is baptized be made regenerate. By baptism the Spirit regenerates since baptism turns us away from the old Adam and inserts us into the covenant, identifying us with Christ-the One born from above, raised from death, renewed in the Spirit, in whom is new creation-and identifying us with his covenant people-the new-creation people, born from above on Pentecost.201

Garver does not define in this quotation his use of the term "regeneration," although he does appear to affirm a form of a baptismal regeneration ("by baptism the Spirit regenerates"). This baptismal regeneration consists at the very least of being brought into the covenant and united with Christ. Again, however, Garver does not define here the nature of this union.209

When asked whether baptism "create[s] faith in the child," Garver responds that "faith isn't a thing to be created. It doesn't come in discrete amounts to be

divvied out or as a substance to be infused. Faith is a relationship of trust. "210 This nonontological definition of a grace of salvation raises the question that we have posed above: Precisely what is transmitted to recipients in the sacrament of baptism?

Garver also suggests that being baptized and "reared in unfaithful churches and families" is more than an empty ceremony. He comments that he is "sure our Father will sort things out in his mercy with regard to all his baptized children." Others have an "obligation to call upon them to improve their baptisms, to live out the grace already bestowed upon them in Christ. "Zl' If Garver is using the term "grace" in its customary, redemptive sense, then Garver may understand baptism, notwithstanding an "unfaithful" church and family setting, to secure an individual's salvation.

We may make two comments by way of criticism. First, along with other FV proponents, Garver is skeptical that grace should be described in ontological categories. He prefers relational categories. This raises questions about what such terms as "regeneration" and "grace" precisely mean to Garver at any given point in his argument. In many instances the reader is unable to discern in what sense a crucial term is being used.

There are times, however, when Garver appears to be clear. This raises a second point of criticism. When Garver says in his prerevised statement that "by baptism, everything that belongs to Christ and to his Church in him, is ours," it is difficult to escape a doctrine of baptismal regeneration in its traditional sense. It is also difficult to escape the charge that Garver's doctrine of perseverance and apostasy must thereby be Arminian, that is, that one possesses the reality of redemptive grace and then loses it. This concern is heightened when we considered that it is Christ's "faithfulness" into which we are said to be incorporated by baptism. This being the case, it seems that there ought to be no such phenomenon as apostasy. But apostasy does happen, and, on Garver's terms, it must be because of some defect in the capacity of Christ's faithfulness to sustain and preserve the baptized person.

In fairness we should note that Garver's revised edition of "A Brief Catechesis on Covenant and Baptism" introduces a number of qualifications to and revisions of (recorded in the footnotes) many of the preceding statements in question. When viewed against their original statements, many of these

qualifications and revisions, however, do not sufficiently clarify the statements in question in such a way as to ensure certainty regarding their confessional orthodoxy.

Baptism and the Westminster Standards. Garver has argued that WCF 28.6 teaches a doctrine of baptismal regeneration, or at least that the teaching of the Confession is "more ambiguous than many seem to allow. "212 In attempting to explicate the phrase "to whom that grace belongeth unto," Garver argues that, if we read this in the "context of WCF 28.4," then we must conclude that "the grace of baptism, in some sense, belongs to those individuals," namely, "those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents. "213

Garver concludes, then, that "the Confession ... makes no particular statement regarding how the grace of `regeneration' in par ticular is or is not related to the moment of administration, what precisely the grace of `regeneration' consists in, and which recipients of baptism do or do not enjoy that grace." Hence, an adherent of the Confession may hold "to baptismal regeneration in some form or another. "214 One is even free to say that "all who receive baptism as professing Christians or their children (as those to whom `that grace belongeth unto') enjoy the grace of regeneration at the time of administration (as God's `appointed time'), even if that grace must be lived out and improved subsequently to baptism in order to be fully enjoyed."215

The affirmation of WCF 28.5 ("... grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto [baptism], as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.") means that "baptism can be said to be ordinarily necessary for regeneration and salvation" and that "all that are baptized are to be considered regenerate, that ordinarily those who are baptized are regenerate. "216

Further, the "initial statement in CF 28.6 (that baptism's efficacy is `not tied to that moment of administration') ... is therefore to be taken primarily as an affirmation of the relevancy and effectiveness of baptism to the whole Christian life and not just its inception. It cannot be construed as a denial of baptismal regeneration. 11217

By way of response to Garver's claims, we may make four observations.

First, Garver's argument that the class of persons mentioned at WCF 28.4 must determine the scope of the phrase "as that grace belongeth unto" (28.6) only holds if one has already concluded that grace is spiritually conferred (cf. 28.6) to all those who receive the sacrament of baptism.

In other words, the argument assumes the very conclusion it sets out to prove. A more satisfying reading of that phrase is that it has reference to the elect-the only ones, in the Standards' teaching, to whom the graces set forth in that sacrament genuinely come.

Second, Garver also argues that the Confession does not specify of what the grace of regeneration consists. It is difficult, however, to imagine the Westminster Divines confessionally defining regeneration in any other terms than the spiritual renewal that accompanies effectual calling. Nor does it seem likely that the Di vines have intentionally left this term undefined in order to provide the theological latitude for which Garver is pleading.

Third, Garver argues that the Confession leaves open how regeneration is or is not tied to the moment of administration. If, however, by "the efficacy of baptism" the Divines mean what follows in WCF 28.6-the grace extended to the elect and to them alone-then it is clear that regeneration is "not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered"; in other words, baptismal regeneration is thereby excluded.

Fourth, we have above observed Wilson make the argument that WCF 28.5 assumes that ordinarily persons are regenerated in baptism. Garver advances the same claim. This is yet another inversion of the Standards' teaching. We must remember that the Divines have, in WCF 28, excluded the possibility of baptismal regeneration. If that is the case, then what is the concern and what is being affirmed here?

In the first part of the clause ("Although it be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that the person can be regenerated, or saved, without it ..."), the Divines are responding to a question like the following: If someone who appears to be a true believer should, through no contempt of the ordinance, die without having received baptism, does this mean that he could not be among the elect? The Divines respond in the negative, and this question and answer help to

explain the use of the word so in WCF 28.5. It means simply that one may possess saving grace without having received the sacrament.

In the second part of the clause ("that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated"), the Divines are addressing the opposite question: Is baptism a sure sign that one has been regenerated? To this, the Divines answer no. Who, then, may one anticipate to be regenerated? The answer of the Standards is not "most baptized people," but "the elect," or "the invisible church." Again, whom may one judge in charity to be regenerated? The answer of the Standards is not "most baptized people," but those who evidence the gracious and saving operations of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Mark Horne

Sacramental efficacy

The quest for a converting ordinance. While he insists that he does not wish to "denigrate the need for the preaching of the Word or its role in converting and sanctifying sinners," Horne doubts whether "there can be any such thing as a `converting ordinance.' 11211

> An unbeliever is often converted not by one ordinance, but by many instances of confrontation with the New Creation that is Jesus Christ made manifest in the Church. The preached word is one part of a package of things involved in encountering Christian society, including hospitality, an example of good works .... and a harmonious community.... How often does the preached Word convert if stripped of that context?219

To see conversion as the result of "one `ordinance,' " Horne claims, is "terribly reductionistic." Further, many individuals will never set foot in a worship service. This means that the issue, from the standpoint of evangelism, is "about whole-life conversion about people who have little to no context for understanding much of what might be said from the pulpit. We're not in the colonies anymore and there are no ruby slippers to take us back. "22°

Horne proposes a "model for conversion" that "needs to be based on words like `recruitment,' `induction,' or-dare I say it?`discipleship.' " The need of the hour is that "people . . . be confronted with an entirely new life and community."

This means that people, "confronted with a summary challenge to repent and believe in Christ," should "agree immediately [to] submit to baptism," and "then [be] taught and trained in the church.... They do not have to be catechized first or to prove themselves `true believers.' If they will confess that Jesus is Lord, with the understanding that Christ was exalted by God in his resurrection, then they are to be baptized as brothers and sisters in the family of God, with their children." Baptism, on this reading, is a "transitional rite that marks the difference between autonomy and discipleship to Christ."""

Sacramental efficacy, proper. Horne has argued in a 1997 article that certain Reformed theologians "present a doctrine of the sacraments fundamentally empty of the content which was once held by virtually all Reformed confessions and formulations. 11222 He says, in a more recent article, that "Peter and Paul say remarkable things about what baptism accomplishes and many modern Protestants attempt to claim that `faith alone' entails that these passages must not mean what they say. We are told that the `baptism' in these passages is actually the unmediated work of the Holy Spirit being described metaphorically. "223

Surveying WCF 27, SC 92, and LC 161-62, 176, Horne in 1997 concluded that "in the sacraments Christ Himself is effectually communicated, represented, signified, sealed, conferred, and applied by the working of the Holy Spirit to those who receive Him by faith. Thus the sacraments are `effectual means of salvation' (LC, p. 161). "224 This definition is promising in the sense that Horne qualifies the recipients of sacramental benefits to be "those who receive Him by faith." We find, however, that Horne's conception of sacramental efficacy appears to be broader than the confessional boundaries when he addresses the question of baptismal efficacy.

> Here [WCF 28.6] we seem to have a problem: The Divines wanted to affirm that baptism was efficacious, but not for everybody. Obviously, only the elect are finally saved and thus only the elect can be said to receive these things in baptism. But if that is the case, then how a person [sic] have his faith confirmed and strengthened by baptism? How can he trust a promise that might or [might] not be made to him, depending on God's secret counsel?
>
> I'm not sure why the Divines did not directly address this question. However they did write out how one should regard his baptism as an

> objective revelation of the Grace of God. The Larger Catechism, in the answer to question 167, spells out how baptism is supposed to be regarded by all who have been subjected to the rite [LC 167 follows]. Here we see that baptism marks the objective starting point of the Christian life. There is no question that baptism has "conferred and sealed" grace. But that grace must be received by 225 faith, and by continuing in the Faith.

In this statement, Horne's formulations appear to be consistent with some sacramental doctrines articulated by other FV proponents. While he does argue that faith is necessary to receive what is extended in baptism, nevertheless, Horne claims that baptism is "an objective revelation" of God's grace and that LC 167 is indiscriminately applicable to all recipients of the sacrament. Baptism, in fact, is said to confer and seal grace. It confers, he states in his essay just after the portion quoted above, "objective grace."226

This is necessary, Horne insists even further down in the same essay, because "if the sacraments did not include the promised presence of Christ Himself, than [sic] there would be nothing for believers to receive; their faith would be in vain.... The sacraments are not empty signs, but are joined to the reality which they represent."""

Baptism

Baptismal efficacy. Horne offers a recent treatment of the efficacy of baptism in particular.228 He argues that we fail to take seriously the teaching of such passages as 1 Peter 3:21, Galatians 3:27-28, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 6:3-4, and Colossians 3:11-12. We have already observed a number of FV writings citing some of these passages in support of their doctrine.

Horne argues that these passages refer to "water baptism" not a "dry `spiritual' baptism." In support of this argument, he appeals to Acts 2:38, where "there is no question that normal water baptism is intended.... On what basis do we claim that the Epistles must not be speaking of water baptism? "229 New Testament instances of "baptism," then, should be taken to mean "water baptism."

What then does baptism do? Baptism is no "guarantee [that] one will inherit

eternal life" and "some do not persevere in what they have been given." Not all church members "will take advantage of ... forgiveness, the Spirit, and many other benefits. "230 The emphasis, in speaking of baptismal efficacy, should not be placed exclusively on "special grace" ("This is great for the elect, but it makes it hard for me to see how sacraments can confirm our faith if we have to know if we're elect in order to believe they are effective.") but on "common grace," that is, seeing baptism "as an admission into the institutional Church and the seal of a conditional promise." The "condition would be that the baptized person perseveres in the covenant rather than departing from it in unbelief. "231

Baptismal regeneration? In a recent article, Horne has attempted to address the question of whether "baptismal regeneration" is a fair description of the theology of the speakers of the 2002 AAPCPC and of other FV proponents.232 He cites several paragraphs from WCF 28, implying that to read them at the baptismal service of an infant would cause great scandal or embarrassment to the officiating minister.233 Citing SC 91-92, Horne comments, "It would be interesting especially to see how this went over at the baptism of an adult convert as everyone hears that he is to believingly expect the working of the Spirit so that he receives the application of Christ and his benefits." LC 167, Horne tells us, is "directly applicable to every baptized believer in the congregation who is witnessing the baptism."

While Horne states that "we subscribe to seventeenth-century Reformed and Protestant doctrinal standards which are part of a developing history to that point, not to published thoughts of these [i.e., Charles Hodge, Dabney, Thornwell] later luminaries," he is "not interested in purging the denomination [i.e., the PCA] of the majority concensus [sic]." Rather, "I'm happy in the big tent."234

Mark Horne versus Samuel Miller. In a recent article, Horne argues that Samuel Miller, professor of ecclesiastical history and church government at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1813 to 1849, was mistaken in his critique of baptismal regeneration.235 Horne insists that Miller misunderstood his confessional standards, the Westminster Standards. That claim aside, Horne's interaction with Miller offers us a rare glance into the ways in which a FV articulation of baptism differs from that of our Presbyterian forefathers, as Miller characteristically summarizes their doctrine.

Horne especially opposes Miller's objections to a form of baptismal regeneration. Horne quotes Miller's summary of this doctrine as well as Miller's objections to that doctrine.

> But there is another view of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which is sometimes taken, and which, though less pernicious than that which has been examined, is still, I apprehend, fitted to mislead, and, of course, to do essential mischief. It is this: that baptism is that rite which marks and ratifies the introduction of its subject into the visible kingdom of Christ; that in this ordinance the baptized person is brought into a new state or relation to Christ, and his sacred family; and that this new state or relation is designated in the scripture by the term regeneration, being intended to express an ecclesiastical birth, that is, being "born" into the visible kingdom of the Redeemer. Those who entertain this opinion do not deny that there is a great moral change, wrought by the Spirit of God, which must pass upon every one, before he can be in a state of salvation. This they call conversion, renovation, etc.; but they tell us that the term "regeneration" ought not to be applied to this spiritual change; that it ought to be confined to that change of state and of relation to the visible kingdom of Christ which is constituted by baptism; so that a person, according to them, may be regenerated, that is, regularly introduced into the visible church, without being really born of the Spirit. This theory, though by no means so fatal in its tendency as the preceding, still appears to me liable to the following serious objections.236

Miller offers several arguments in response to this doctrine, something "very like" what "is embodied in the baptismal service of that denomination [the Church of England, the Protestant Episcopal church] on both sides of the Atlantic."" "This language," Miller reminds us, "is differently interpreted, by the Episcopal ministers who employ it, according to the opinion which they adopt with regard to baptism.""

The first critical argument that Miller advances is that "it makes an unauthorized use of an important theological term."239 Horne calls this claim "entirely bogus for people outside his own theo-linguistic tradition."" It is "based on nothing more than his own desire to use the terminology differently than others. . . . None of Miller's statements here are at all plausible to anyone who does not already agree with his hermeneutic. "241

Horne argues that whether one looks at the term "regeneration" or the cluster of biblical terms referring to the new birth, one cannot help but dissent from Miller, for "the word `regeneration' only occurs twice in Scripture," one of which is "in reference to baptism." Even the reference to believers being "born again through the Word of God (1.23)," Horne suggests, is "simply a metaphor for hearing the Gospel message and being brought into a new family through baptism."" Horne would "very much like to see a non-circular argument that these [terms: "born from above," "born again," "reborn"] refer to an interior transformation worked directly by the Spirit which irreversibly guarantees persevering faith. "243

Horne, we may note, has missed the point of Miller's argument, which is this: "Names are so closely connected with things, that it is of the utmost importance to preserve the nomenclature of theology from perversion and abuse."" In other words, Miller was arguing that theological nomenclature that has gained well-established usage among Protestants is not plastic. Great mischief is done, Miller continues, when terms used in one way by "common consent" are thus redefined, "making some of them unmeaning[ful], and others ridiculous; and render[ing] unintelligible, and in a great measure useless, if not delusive, nine-tenths of the best works on the subject of practical religion that have ever been written."245 Not only does Horne not interact with Miller's criticism, but he appears to embrace uncritically the very approach that falls under Miller's criticism.

The second criticism that Miller raises and that Horne critiques is as follows.

> If men be told that every one who is baptized, is thereby regenerated, "born of God," "born of the Spirit," made a "new creature in Christ," will not the mass of mankind, in spite of every precaution and explanation that can be employed, be likely to mistake on a fundamental point; to imagine that the disease of our nature is trivial, and that a trivial remedy for it will answer; to lay more stress than they ought upon an external rite; and to make a much lower estimate than they ought of the nature and necessity of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord?246

This critique, Horne says, "is, on the face of it, an attack on the New Testament"

(he cites Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-3; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13, 27; Gal. 3:27-29; Col. 2:8-14; Titus 3:5-7; 1 Peter 3:18-22) and even falls short of the Westminster Standards, which sees all these passages as "references to water baptism. "247

Horne triumphs in Miller's recognition that some of the early Fathers spoke of baptism in terms very similar to the view that Miller criticizes above. Horne, however, misses the crucial qualification that Miller offers in the passage that Horne quotes: "By a common figure of speech, they called the sign by the name of the thing signified. In the truly primitive times this language was harmless, and well understood; but as superstition increased, it gradually led to mischievous error, and became the parent of complicated and deplorable delusions."'" In other words, the Fathers' choice of words was, at that time, "harmless" because "well understood." When, however, "superstition" increased, such expressions became unacceptable because they could be placed in the service of those superstitions. What may have been permissible to the Fathers, therefore, is not permissible to us today because of what has since transpired in the history of doctrine.

Horne concludes his study with a concern. Miller not only misses the import of LC 167 and such paragraphs as WCF 28.1, but also compromises the teaching of WCF 27.1 regarding "baptism as a seal to the baptized person `to confirm our interest in him.' 11249 This compromise deprives the believer of being able to "trust God for our salvation." "How," Horne asks, "can these demands [i.e., those listed in LC 167] be made if the benefits are not assured? "250

In response to Horne's criticisms on this second point, we may note that Horne functionally neglects the many necessary qualifications that the Standards employ within its discussions of sacramental and baptismal efficacy. This permits Horne to miss, for example, the import of the baptismal prooftexts cited by the Westminster Divines. Horne's failure to appropriate these categories also occasions his confusion of the sacramental doctrine of the Standards with that promoted by some early-nineteenth-century-evangelical Anglicans and Episcopalians.

We might briefly survey and underscore some of these crucial qualifications from many of the confessional chapters and catechetical questions that Horne cites.

- SC 91: "The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

- WCF 27.3: ". . . a promise of benefit to worthy receivers."

- WCF 28.1: ". . . but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration ..."

- WCF 28.5: "... yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it: or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated."

- WCF 28.6: "The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time."

With these distinctions and qualifications in view, Horne's arguments that baptism confers certain benefits to recipients objectively or in an undifferentiated manner, that LC 167 and WCF 27.1 assume such a doctrine, that the quoted instances of "baptism" refer only to water baptism-all of them fall to the ground.

We may also note that Horne misses Miller's concern that such a sacramental doctrine will tend toward externalism and a trivialization of both the problem of sin and its cure. Horne evidences this failure when he replies that Augustine appealed to the "universal and historic Church practice of baptizing infants"-proving to Horne that "Miller's fears [are] hard to understand." This reply to Miller compares apples and oranges. It is not infant baptism as such to which Miller objects, but the understanding of baptism in terms of regeneration.

We can think of no better way to close our discussion of Horne than to excerpt Miller's statement of the Presbyterian doctrine of baptismal efficacy-a statement that concluded Miller's discussion of baptismal regeneration in his

book, Infant Baptism....

> But it may be asked, what kind or degree of efficacy do Presbyterians consider as connected with baptism? Do they suppose that there is any beneficial influence, physical or moral, in all cases, connected with the due administration of this sacrament? I answer, none at all. They suppose that the washing with water in this ordinance is an emblem and a sign of precious benefits; that it holds forth certain great truths, which are the glory of the Christian covenant, and the joy of the Christian's heart; that it is a seal affixed by God to his covenant with his people, whereby he certifies his purposes of grace, and pledges his blessing to all who receive it with a living faith; nay, that it is the seal of valuable outward privileges, even to those who are not then, or at any other time, "born of the Spirit"; that, as a solemn rite appointed by Christ, it is adapted to make a solemn impression on the serious mind; but that when it is administered to the persons, or the offspring of those who are entirely destitute of faith, there is no pledge or certainty that it will be accompanied with any blessing. They receive the water, but not the Spirit. They are engrafted into the visible church, but not into the spiritual body of Christ, and are, after baptism, just as they were before, like Simon the Sorcerer, "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."21'

To conclude with Miller: baptismal regeneration "ought to be regarded" among Protestants, with respect to their "general principles," as a "poisonous exotic."252

Conclusions

In view of the quantity of material that we have studied in these last two chapters, let us consider now some conclusions of a general nature.

(1) We have seen a general tendency, among those FV proponents concerned to identify their doctrine with the Westminster Standards, to adopt an objectionable hermeneutic posture of isolating statements of sacramental or baptismal efficacy from their necessary qualifiers. We are then offered competing and dialectical strands of confessional teaching on sacramental efficacy.

The doctrine of the Standards, however, does not compete with itself and is not dialectical. It can be easily reconciled into a logical whole. We have listed representative confessional qualifiers above in our discussion of Horne's doctrine of baptism. They may be found at SC 92; WCF 27.1, 28.1, 28.5, 28.6. The sacramental doctrines propounded by FV proponents, we have argued, are not those of our confessional standards. Horne's sacramental doctrine, we have just observed, is much closer to home in an Episcopalian setting than it is in a historic Presbyterian setting.

(2) This objectionable hermeneutic of the Standards has accompanied objectionable arguments for the confessional meaning of the term sign and of the doctrine of the sacramental union of the sign and of the thing signified.

(3) We have observed that crucial theological terms are redefined and are used equivocally. We have seen this concerning the terms grace, sign, and regeneration.

(4) Back of this is a tendency to conceive baptismal efficacy in sociologically performative terms. A number of FV proponents employ this doctrine in order to speak of sacramental efficacy in the strongest of terms. This is an inherently confusing way to speak, and it is not always clear where the lines between sociology and soteriology are to be drawn. That is especially evident in discussions of what it is that apostates lose. We have observed affirmations that apostates, having been united with Christ, and having genuinely possessed all the blessings and benefits of Christ, have genuinely forfeited them.

(5) We have observed certain exegetically objectionable conclusions, such as that all the "baptism" passages of the New Testament have primary, perhaps exclusive, reference to the rite of water baptism; and that we may affirm from the Scripture sacramental efficacy of the circumcisions of Ishmael and Esau.

(6) We have also observed efforts, in the name of using biblical language biblically, to sloganize certain portions of Scripture 1 Peter 3:21 ("baptism saves you") and Acts 2:38, 22:16, for example. To speak in this way is not to speak biblically. It ignores the necessary qualifications found within the immediate context of these statements and fails to account for the systematic-theological unity of Scripture as a whole.

(7) We are offered a doctrine of baptism that effectively denigrates the preaching of the Word, particularly as an ordinance by which men are brought from death to life. At points, baptism appears to be a necessary attendant of or a necessary means of individual soteriological regeneration.

Chapter 8

Sources of the Federal Vision

Up to this point, we have been considering the Federal Vision in a predominantly theological fashion. In other words, we have been pursuing those characteristic doctrines for which the FV has come to be known, and we have been weighing those doctrines against the Scriptures and the Westminster Standards. We have been tracing a pattern of deviation from the testimony of those confessional standards and, as they bear witness to them, the Scriptures.

Unity and Diversity

In doing so, we have certainly observed some measure of diversity or difference among recognized proponents of the Federal Vision. This is important to recognize in view of repeated FV protests that there is no such thing-theologically, at least-as the Federal Vision. We have seen, for instance, rhetorical diversity. Some proponents such as Steve Schlissel prefer to frame their views provocatively. Others such as Douglas Wilson evidence more concern for the sensibilities of individuals accustomed to certain traditional uses of theological terms. There is also diversity with respect to emphasis. Certain writers have concentrated, at least in their public addresses and essays, on particular doctrines. Barach, we have seen, concentrates especially upon covenant and election; Steve Wilkins, upon baptism. Such concentration does not necessarily mean, of course, that there is disinterest in or disagreement with what other FV proponents are advocating.

Is there, however, theological diversity? To some degree, yes. We have observed Schlissel's difference with many other FV proponents regarding the doctrine of paedocommunion. Paedocommunion, then, could not be a defining

element of the FV. We consequently are not warranted in automatically imputing the views of one FV proponent (or the manner of expression of those views) to another FV proponent.

The portrait that has emerged in this study, however, is one of a theological system. As with most theological systems, there is diversity of both emphasis and belief. We have observed evidence of internal inconsistencies within this system. Nevertheless, in our compiled study of various FV proponents' writings, we have witnessed certain core concerns emerge under each doctrine in review. That is, there is a theological center to this movement-one that embraces each of the doctrinal areas that we have surveyed. This theological core, of course, is not necessarily to be identified with the matrix of any single proponent's views. It is, rather, what emerges from a compiled study of several recognized proponents' writings.

Is this a fair approach, one may ask? We may answer in the affirmative. FV proponents have publicly and collectively identified themselves in several ways. They have sponsored, participated in, and promoted pastoral conferences whose intention was to disseminate many of the doctrines that occasioned subsequent controversy within the church. They consistently speak well of one another's writings on precisely these points. It is exceedingly rare to witness one FV proponent publicly criticizing the views of another FV proponent. Not only have they posted one another's essays and writings on one another's Web sites but many have published a collection of their essays under the title The Federal Vision. Both sociologically and theologically, then, the public face of the FV has been one of solidarity and common vision. In view of this evidence, one could hardly be faulted for pursuing a theological center of what is to all outward appearances a focused theological enterprise.

We turn now to a related but different project: the sources of the Federal Vision. We want to offer some analysis of why the theology of the Federal Vision has come together in the manner that it has. We want to specify certain fundamental assumptions and conclusions that have led to the rise of the Federal Vision. This effort at analysis will both synthesize and cut across our individual doctrinal studies-it will attempt to explain the variety of hermeneutical, exegetical, and theological approaches and decisions that we have witnessed FV proponents employ in their theological reasoning and argument.

We will look at the following five areas: (1) the misuse of language within the FV; (2) the misuse of logic within the FV; (3) that to which FV proponents are reacting or responding; (4) the hermeneutic of the FV, specifically the way in which the Old and New Testaments are related to one another; and (5) what we have termed the "triumph of the external" in the FV.

The Misuse of Language within the FV

One observation that we have often made is that the FV has adopted an unconventional approach to theological language.' We may review by citing examples of use of theological language under two heads: theological redefinition and the equivocal use of language. We will then consider one FV proponent's defense of this use of language.

Theological Redefinition

On the one hand, we have seen FV proponents arguing for multiple senses or redefined senses of traditionally defined theological terms. We should reiterate that the traditional definitions of these terms are not unique to the PCA or to Presbyterianism. Rather, these definitions have long enjoyed sanction among Protestants since the Reformation, particularly among laypeople. Let us examine ten examples.

(1) We inaugurated our study by a survey of FV understandings of covenant and of the Trinity. We examined especially the trinitarianism of both Ralph Smith and Peter Leithart. We have observed efforts to rethink the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of Van Til's doctrine of Absolute Person, or "one person, three persons." This is tied, we may recall, to a hesitation to speak of the unity of the Godhead in ontological terms. The unity of the Godhead, rather, should be expressed in relational terms.

(2) We have seen an effort to redefine the term righteousness in connection with the law. Rich Lusk argues that traditional concepts of righteousness have been defined according to Roman or Stoic standards. What is needed is a Hebraic concept of righteousness.' The former involves conceiving of the law in terms of "abstract justice"; the latter, in terms of "personalized covenant loyalty."3

(3) We have seen multiple attempts to redefine the terms grace and salvation in pointedly nonontological terms. Peter Leithart has argued that "salvation is no more a thing than grace is." It rather "indicates the condition of creation and especially of persons" as they are "united to Christ and the life they live in fellowship with the Triune God and with one another, or, more broadly, the creation insofar as it participates in the `already' of the eschaton."^ Similarly, to Leithart, grace is not a "substance" but "a shorthand for describing the Triune God's personal kindness to human beings and the gifts, especially the self-gift of the Spirit, that flow from that kindness."' Parallel statements have been observed in the writings of Wilson, Lusk, Wilkins, and Garver.

(4) We have seen attempts to redefine the traditional doctrine of "imputation." Rich Lusk argues strenuously that it is not the active obedience of Christ that is imputed to believers. It is rather Christ's "status" that is imputed to believers. We concluded that Lusk's difference with Westminster's doctrine of imputation is not formal but material. He is using the term in a substantially redefined way. We have observed a parallel use of this term in Ralph Smith.

(5) There are several efforts to broaden the traditional doctrine of justification. First, we observed what Douglas Wilson has termed "corporate justification."6 This doctrine, we may recall, appears to take its starting point from a purported "justification" of Jesus, for which doctrine Romans 4:25 and 1 Timothy 3:16 are cited in support. This doctrine, as Wilson argues, overlaps the traditional doctrine of (individual) justification.

Second, Peter Leithart has argued that Protestants have unfairly privileged the courtroom metaphor of the doctrine of justification. While justification "has a `forensic' cast to it.... biblically speaking `forensic' covers what I have called `covenantal,' `militorensic,"foren- storational,' and `liberonsic' situations."' These terms reflect Leithart's efforts to incorporate into the traditional doctrine what he understands to be the biblical background of restoration and deliverance.

Third, in dividing justification into two stages: present justification and future justification, Rich Lusk produces what we argued is a recasting of the Protestant doctrine. Justification is now formulated in terms that suggest justification to be a process wherein the believer's covenantal faithfulness becomes the effective or practical ground of that verdict.

Fourth, traditionally Protestants have spoken only of a single instrument of justification: faith. We have seen one FV proponent argue for not fewer than three instruments of justification, purportedly operating in different senses: faith, faithfulness, and baptism. Rich Lusk speaks of the believer's covenantal faithfulness instrumentally in the believer's justification. Why can James, at James 2:24, not be "referring to a demonstration of justification"? It is because "James has in view the same kind of justification as Paul-forensic, soteric justification." Hence, "in some sense, James is speaking of a justification in which faith and works combine together to justify."8 Lusk defends speaking of faith and baptism as instruments of justification as not compromising sola fide, the doctrine that faith is the sole instrument of justification. This is so because "faith is the instrument of justification on our end, while baptism is the instrument on God's side.'"

(6) Leithart, Horne, and Lusk have all spoken approvingly of Shepherd's writings. We have witnessed a general appreciation for Shepherd's doctrine that election must be understood through the lens of the covenant. This produces a doctrine of "covenantal election"one, we have seen, that exists uneasily alongside election according to the decree. As professed Calvinists, FV proponents argue that only the elect are decretally elect, but they proceed to say that all those who are baptized are covenantally elect.

This permits the preacher, Barach has argued, to address every individual within the covenant in an identical manner-to tell them that they are elect, justified, adopted, and to tell them that this is true of them by virtue of their covenantal membership. And yet, FV proponents concede, not all who are covenantally elect will prove to be decretally elect.

(7) We have seen that Douglas Wilson formally accepts the distinction between the church visible and invisible, but that he uses these particular terms in a radically redefined sense-the church as part of it is visible to me, and the church as part of it is literally invisible to me.10 He proceeds to substitute the terms "historical" and "eschatological" church, arguing that they accomplish the same thing that the traditional visible and invisible church distinction was intended to accomplish. We have expressed disagreement concerning these two terminological sets' interchangeability.

(8) In the 2002 and 2005 AAPC statements, we have seen perseverance

redefined in terms of a "gift" that is not bestowed in baptism (which communicates to all recipients all the blessings and benefits of Christ's work). This gift is given to the decretally elect but not to those among the corporately elect who are not decretally elect.

(9) We have seen the whole concept of sacramental efficacy overhauled in sociological terms. Sociology, ritual theory, and linguistics have joined forces in the writings of Leithart and other FV proponents in such a way as to permit them to speak in the strongest terms of what the sacraments "do." In speaking this way, however, they use the traditional language of efficacy (the sacraments' accomplishing something) but in pointedly nontraditional ways. This recasting has impacted the way that Leithart has conceived the term sign, it has affected the relationship between signum and res, and it has posed problems in (if not rejected) the language of the means of grace.

(10) We have seen the term regeneration defined by Rich Lusk in two or three senses: an objective sense (the "new life situation entered into at baptism");" a subjective-covenantal sense (in the sense that Lusk claims that Heb. 6:7-8 speaks of the new life that belongs to all who are within the covenant, whether they are elect or non- elect);12 and a subjective-decretal sense (the way in which the term has historically been used).

Equivocal Use of Language

On the other hand, we have observed a countertendency. FV proponents often use theological language equivocally or without expressed distinctions that are admitted by FV proponents to be valid." This is all the more remarkable given the proliferation of the new distinctions and new terminology that we above observed. We may note four examples that we have encountered in our study.

(1) We have seen equivocation in discussions of covenantal membership. Most FV writers recognize that within the covenant community there are individuals who are elect and individuals who are not elect; individuals who are regenerate and individuals who are not regenerate. This recognition notwithstanding, preachers are instructed not to speak to the church in those terms. We have seen that covenantal membership is undifferentiated in the public teaching of the church.

(2) We have witnessed equivocation in the doctrine of justification. In his essay "Judge Me, 0 God" Leithart argues that the term justification is employed in Scripture in many diverse instances: a "strictly judicial" context; a situation of "military or personal conflict, or oppression by an overlord"; and the corporate "deliverance" or "justif[ication]" of the church.14 He states that "God's public `vindications' of His faithful people" can include "any deliverance from persecutors, dangers, sickness and death."" Nevertheless, Leithart does not propose that we adopt distinct theological terms to refer to what are said to be different uses of the biblical term. Rather, he uses the term justification to speak of them all. This is deliberate.

> I find it difficult to ignore those passages that use "justification" in what Turretin calls an "improper sense," or to treat them as irrelevancies in our formulation of the doctrine of justification. My argument in this paper is that by ignoring the "improper uses" of justification and by failing to take into account the larger biblical theology of justification that these uses imply, the Reformation doctrine of justification has illegitimately narrowed and to some extent distorted the biblical doctrine.16

Assuming, then, that theological language should be as broadly employed as biblical terminology of the same name, Leithart justifies the equivocal use of this term in theological discourse.'7

(3) We have also seen equivocation with regard to election. While most FV proponents maintain a distinction between covenantal election and decretal election, they in practice use the term elect without the necessary qualification. This has prompted E. Calvin Beisner's ob servation that in John Barach's 2003 AAPCPC lecture "Covenant and Election," Barach often fails to specify in which sense he is using the term election. The result, as Beisner rightly comments, is "equivocation" that "vitiates the whole of Barach's treatment of the relationship between covenant and election.""

It is precisely such a use of the term election that permits many FV proponents to speak of baptism in the strongest of terms, namely, its soteriological efficacy for all recipients.

(4) We have seen equivocation in FV discussions of baptismal efficacy. An example is the frequent defense of using such language as "baptism saves you"

liturgically on the basis of 1 Peter 3:21. FV proponents speak this way even though they all recognize that baptism does not issue in the final salvation of every baptized recipient. They argue, however, that it is appropriate to speak as they do without the above qualifications because Scripture is said to use such language in this way.

In summary, we find that the use of theological terms among FV proponents is unpredictable and sometimes unstable. Often, however, FV proponents will defend their use of theological languagewhether its redefinition or its equivocal use of terms-from what they claim is the Scripture's own use. To this we may respond that FV proponents appear to interpret Scripture in a "prooftexting" manner. They frequently isolate a given passage from the teaching of the Scripture as a whole. This approach is not in keeping with interpreting Scripture according to the biblical hermeneutical principle of the analogy of faith.

Are the apostles rhetorically constrained to preface their every address to the church by saying in effect, "Now, I am speaking, of course, only to those of you who profess the faith in sincerity, and not at all to those of you who prove not to be true believers"? No, they are not. Does this mean that it is wrong to apply such distinctions to instances where, for example, the apostle Paul calls a given congregation "elect"? Not at all. The reason we apply such distinctions is because Scripture teaches that these distinctions exist within the church. We therefore rightly and necessarily apply these distinctions to the forms of address in question.

A FV Defense of the FV Use of Language

We observed that there is a common and characteristic approach to theological language among FV proponents. We have observed a multiplication of distinctions, unconventional or redefined uses of traditional terms, and a tendency toward equivocal use of theological language. Let us consider Rich Lusk's defense of aspects of this FV approach to theological terminology.

The context of this defense is Lusk's response to charges that he and other FV proponents "have adopted a `novel terminology.' "19 He first argues that "the Standards use a fairly technical vocabulary that does not match the Bible's vocabulary in a one-for-one fashion," nor even Calvin's or other Reformed confessions' own uses of terms. Consequently, "if I limited myself to

Westminster's terminology, I could quote neither Calvin nor the Bible! "20

Lusk insists that "orthodoxy is not reducible to a particular form of words. God's truth is so rich and varied and multi-faceted, there are numerous ways to say the truth."2' To contend for precise defini- tionism is "scholastic methodology" and produces "inevitable miscommunication with other Christians who have not been enculturated into our precise theological vocabulary, or who have chosen (for whatever reason) to use a different vocabulary."22

What's worse, "fixed vocabulary ... can even act as a blinder of sorts when it comes to reading the Bible, since the Bible does not use a technical vocabulary, and, in fact, uses terms in ways quite distinct from the Catechism itself." To long for a "timeless creed" that will "end all creeds" is to "idolize ... a human interpretation of divine revelation."23 We should recognize that "orthodoxy can be expressed in more than one way. Different terminological systems may in fact be fully compatible at a deeper level. Because all of our theological language can at best approximate the truth, orthodoxy is a circle rather than a pinpoint." It is perhaps not even "possible" to achieve "agree[ment] to a fixed set of terms and definitions." We have no "inspired lexicon of theological terms for us to adhere to. There's no firmly agreed upon terminology, even in the Reformed confessions. "24

Two comments by way of response are in order. First, Lusk has argued that to insist upon the Standards' definition of regeneration, election, or justification is to preclude the possibility of theological discourse with non-Reformed communities. Lusk, we should note, does not produce specific examples-writings, individuals, or communities-evidencing wherein such confusion could or would take place. In fact, for all the differences that exist among the various denominations that have surfaced in the history of the church, Lusk has not established that there is significant diversity on what is meant by the theological terms regeneration, election, and justification-at least sufficient to confuse laypersons who attempt to converse about these terms with friends or relatives in other denominations.

We may remember Samuel Miller's affirmation in 1835 that to use the term regeneration equivocally (in the way that some evangelical Episcopalians and Anglicans did) would "render unintelligible, and in a great measure useless, if not delusive, nine-tenths of the best works on the subject of practical religion

that have ever been written. "ZS In other words, Miller assumed an understanding of what was meant by the term regeneration, an understanding that was common to the best practical Christian literature circulating among evangelical Protestants in the first half of the nineteenth century. Few, I suspect, would sense a compulsion to revise this judgment in speaking of evangelical Christians at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Lusk's historical argument relativizes the pedigree of a longestablished and cross-denominational theological use of a term by appealing to what amounts to historical curiosities-specialized uses of a term in sixteenth-century writers or confessional statements, uses that have not enjoyed widespread sanction in the Protestant churches. In other words, just because a theological term has been used in a certain way does not mean that it now should be used in that way or that it should rival long-standing uses of that term.

Second, Lusk seems to argue that because theologians define their terms differently from how those same terms are sometimes used in Scripture, this precludes the church from insisting that terms be defined and used consistently. He at points argues that the church's systematic-theological definition of a term ought to be expanded to embrace biblical uses of that term that fall outside that systematic-theological definition.

> Paul wrote in 1 Tim. 3:16 that Jesus was "justified in the Spirit"but surely Jesus did not need to have his sins forgiven! But, then we should turn around and ask ourselves, "Why has our doctrine of justification left 1 Tim. 3:16 on the cutting room floor?" If we really want to do justice [pun intended] to the Bible's teaching on justification, perhaps we need to make room for this text within our doctrinal formulation instead of leaving it out. We need to expand our doctrinal category to include more of what the Bible itself puts under the rubric "justification."26

This argument, however, assumes that the Bible is a systematic-theological textbook, and that such biblical terms as election and justification were used on each occasion with the same technical specificity that systematic theologians intend for these terms in their theological writings.

That, of course, is not the case. Lusk, in fact, has argued (as we have seen) that the Bible is not to be treated as a systematic theology. His hermeneutic,

however, approaches the Bible in just that way. If the Bible and systematic theology ought not to be expected to define and use terms in identical ways, then one should not plead for the redefinition of theological terms by appealing to biblical uses of those terms.

Let us also guard against a misconception. We are not arguing that there is no connection between biblical uses of such terms as justification and election and their systematic theological equivalents. There clearly is, and the overlap among them is great. We are arguing against forging a strict identity between them.

The Misuse of Logic within the FV

Some FV proponents would likely object to the responses that we have posed above. They might argue that in so doing we have compromised the biblical way of speaking and have strained biblical speech through a logical or systematic-theological grid. This raises the question of the role and use of logic in reading and interpreting Scripture within the FV.

Two Examples: Wilson and Wilkins

We may offer two examples of this phenomenon. First, in a previous chapter we have observed Douglas Wilson argue: "Branches can lose their position on the tree. You can be on the tree, someone can be on the tree right next to you and he is as much on the tree as you are, he's as much a partaker of Christ as you are, he is as much a member of Christ as you are. "27 He responds to a criticism that says, "Well, Say! I can't reconcile this with election."

> Well, first it is reconcilable, that is the first thing. Secondly, if you can't reconcile it, it's not your problem. What does the Bible say? Just take the Bible at face value. Resolve beforehand to have no problem passages. The elect always bear fruit and the fruit remains, yet some false professors with a genuine historical connection to the tree, never bear fruit and consequently fall under the judgment of God.28

In fairness to Wilson, he believes that his doctrines of election and apostasy can be reconciled. He argues, however, that there is no burden on the interpreter to reconcile what he perceives the Bible to teach. We are "just [to] take the Bible at

face value." Logical reconciliation is not necessary for the student of the Bible.

Second, we have observed that Steve Wilkins presses for a strong doctrine of baptismal efficacy, on the basis of such passages as Titus 3:5 and 1 Peter 3:20-21. In one place where he advances his argument from these texts, Wilkins anticipates an objection. Don't such interpretations of these passages conflict with our systematictheological conclusions?

> Now, you see, if our system can't accommodate biblical language, we don't throw out the Bible, we change our system, we have to modify the system. We don't have to embrace Romanism. In fact, I hope you never will. It's a heresy, wrong, they are mistaken. But you have to embrace the Bible. You have to ask the question, all right, what does Peter mean?29

Wilkins appears reticent to say that our theology has a right to inform our interpretation of passages. To do so is to allow our theology to interfere with the statements of Scripture. We need to take the statements of Scripture at face value, come what may to our theology. For Wilkins, this means that our theology needs to be revised or corrected on the point of sacramental efficacy.

The Logic of Lusk

An extended effort to reflect on the office of logic in biblical exegesis and theology is seen in the writings of Rich Lusk.3o

Hebrews 6:4-8 and the two ways of doing theology. Lusk summarizes his interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-8. This passage speaks of the "real blessings that every covenant member receives. Some persevere in those blessings by grace through faith and enter into final salvation. Others do not and perish. The blessings listed in 6:4-5 can be applied both to those who will persevere and those who will fall away.""

Lusk responds to a theological objection to his interpretation. This objection says that "not every member of the covenant community is really a recipient of grace," that "the elect are a subset within the covenant community," and that the denomination of the "covenant community as a whole as `elect' or `united to Christ'" is a "judgment of charity, not describing what is in fact the actual case of every baptized person, head for head. "32

Lusk concedes that this view has "logic on [its] side, at least in some sense." He understands that such folk "will also usually make a case against the efficacy of the sacraments from logic."" He, however, is not persuaded by such attempts to explain the Scripture.

> But there is a problem here. The problem is not so much with the application of logic or the theological formulations. The problem is the way Scripture is being read and applied. The Bible is not a revealed "system" of truth from which conclusions are to be deduced. Rather, it is a pastoral/liturgical/covenantal book. It is a literary work, full of poetry and stories. It is the narrative record (and prophecy) of God's great acts from creation to consummation. The Bible was not given as grist for the systematic mill. It was intended to function first and foremost in the community of faith, not in academic or philosophical settings. It was given to provide the covenant people with encouragement, comfort, and direction. We must beware of drawing illegitimate deductions from Scriptural premises. We must learn to bend our logic to the Bible, rather than the reverse. We must learn to reign [sic] in our logical extensions at

Lusk argues that "if we cannot figure out precisely how the pieces of the theological puzzle fit together (in this case, promises of perseverance addressed to the community as a whole vis-a-vis the threats of apostasy), so be it." Further, "if we cannot find a way to cleanly reconcile the Bible's robust teaching on sacramental efficacy with the indisputable reality of apostasy, we dare not deny one or the other of these facts."

The solution is not "laser-sharp theological categories," but "learn[ing] to live with fuzzy-edged mystery." Scripture's warnings are not to be "worked into a dogmatic system" but "heeded and observed, lest we perish."35

Lusk, in summarizing the differences between proponents of the FV and their critics, comments that "there are significantly different approaches to the texts of Scripture" represented by each. He asks, "Are we willing to think `outside the box' of methodological scholasticism? Do we live by faith or by logic? Do we treat the promises of God as premises to be fed into syllogisms or as nourishment to feed our faith?" He continues, "One side in the controversy sees a theological problem that must be solved in order to save the coherency of the system, the other side sees inscrutable mystery and lives with it by faith."36

One side, to summarize, sees the Bible "as a `promise book,' " a "Father's love letter," whereas the other sees it as a " `theology' textbook," or "a professor's lecture notes to his students.""

Mind of God, mind of man. In a qualifying footnote to the above discussion, Lusk claims that he does affirm the project of systematic theology, for "behind Scripture stands the mind of God, which is perfectly consistent."38 Nevertheless, Lusk continues, this is different from saying "that we can actually reproduce the system of Scripture in our theology textbooks," for "there is no doctrine that does not terminate in mystery for finite (and now fallen) minds." Citing the authority of Van Til, Lusk pleads for an " `openended' systematics.""

Lusk, then, appears to intimate some kind of difference between the mind of God (as it has been reflected on the pages of Scripture) and the mind of man such that the human capacity to understand propositionally what has been written on the pages of Scripture has been compromised. This difference means that all biblical doctrines will "terminate in mystery" for the human reader.

Lusk even raises questions about the propriety of logic in biblical interpretation. He concedes that WCF 1.6 "acknowledges the use of logic as a hermeneutical tool," but he adds, "Scripture itself, not autonomous reason, is the `supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined' (WCF 1.10). In other words, Scripture itself controls our application of logic to Scripture. "40 Even logic, then, has its limitations. It is governed by Scripture, whose doctrines, Lusk has just argued, "terminate in mystery." In summary, sinful human interpreters should not expect to achieve a completely logically satisfactory reading of Scripture.

Critique. In response, we may observe that Lusk justifies his "fuzzy" approach to theology and theological terms by appealing to "mystery" and the Creator/creature distinction. Now, we want to be the last to deny that there is much about God and his ways that we do not know, that there are some matters taught in Scripture that are less clear to us than other matters taught in Scripture. The problem with the approach of Lusk (and reflected to some extent in the comments of Wilson and Wilkins quoted above) is that we have an expressed vote of "no confidence" in logic as a means of assessing and attaining to the truth. To argue this way, however, undercuts the whole purpose of revelation, which is to reveal and not to conceal or to cloak.

It has been said that God has come to man along the avenue of speech. This means that, like all human speech, God's Word is propositional and therefore subject to the laws of logic, those principles whereby valid arguments are distinguished from invalid arguments. To appeal to "mystery" and to issue disclaimers about logic undercuts our knowledge of the Scripture and our knowledge of anything at all. Such an approach presses us toward dialecticism and away from classical formulations of inerrancy. It states that God's speech in revelation need not be subject to the laws of logic, for example, the law of noncontradiction. Consequently, individuals will hold statements regarding baptismal efficacy and apostasy in tension, recognizing their tension, and will appeal to the fact that this is "God's speech" in order to conclude any controversy about the tension. This hermeneutic, however, places us straightaway in the lap of Karl Barth and other dialectical theologians.

The Theology of the Straw Man

It is clear from even a casual reading of FV writings that FV proponents are reacting against something. It is also clear that they perceive this something to represent a "main-line" understanding of theology and practice in the Reformed churches. Notwithstanding the fact that FV proponents come from a variety of ecclesiastical backgrounds within the Reformed world (Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, Independent), they are often united in that against which they are reacting.

When we consider this something, however, we find that it is a straw man. To be sure, it is not a straw man in the sense that the doctrines and practices against which they react are not perceived to be alive and well within the Reformed church today. It is not a straw man in the sense that these men may very well have encountered these teachings in the course of their ministries. It is a straw man in the sense that these doctrines and practices do not reflect the best of the Reformed church: what she has taught in her confessions and catechisms, what her best theological professors have inculcated from the lectern, what her best ministers and elders have taught and modeled in the local church. Let us look at several representative examples of these straw men and weigh them against the teaching of the Reformed Standards.

Law/Gospel Distinction

We find a concern among FV proponents that the traditional law/gospel distinction implies a dispensational or classical Lutheran understanding of the Mosaic law and of the role and authority of the Mosaic law in the life of the contemporary believer. Douglas Wilson precludes either understanding by reworking the law/gospel distinction to refer to a subjective or hermeneutical distinction: "law" is the way an unbeliever reads Scripture; "gospel" is the way a believer reads Scripture. Thus, the "contrast in the New Testament is not between Old and New; the contrast is between Old distorted and New fulfilled."41 In so doing, Wilson responds to "many modern Christians[']agree[ment] with the Pharisees that their understanding of `the law' accurately represents the Old Testament," which, these Christians believe, Jesus subsequently abrogates.42

Rich Lusk has expressed the concern that to argue for the Mosaic law as a "'republication' of the original covenant of works" is to introduce a "strict (Lutheran) law/gospel dichotomy."43 Steve Schlissel has argued plainly that "this law/Gospel dichotomy is a false one. It is unbiblical." His concern is that "we actually have people who divide the Bible into discreet verses, every one of which is regarded as a proposition or demand for law or Gospel. Everything in the Bible is either law or Gospel. "44

In response, we may express a shared concern that the law/gospel distinction can be and has been put to mischievous uses, such as denying the evangelical nature of the Mosaic administration or relegating the prescriptive commandments of the moral law to a "law" that does not normatively regulate the life of the believer. As is well known, however, the law/gospel distinction, when properly defined, has a long-standing pedigree in the Reformed tradition. To affirm the distinction is not necessarily to sanction Lutheran uses of it. Nor is it necessarily to sanction the distinction as the organizing principle of one's theology.

The Westminster Larger Catechism, for instance, can speak of the use of the law in awakening and condemning sinners, but speaks in equally strong terms of the necessity of the law as the rule of obedience to the reasonable creature, believers included (LC 91-99). The distinction is used in a confessional statement that is ordered according to covenant theology, not according to law and gospel.

Justification

We find a number of concerns expressed regarding the doctrine of justification. In many respects, this concern relates to the preceding. There is a reticence on the part of some to affirm the historical "works of the law/faith" dichotomy with respect to justification. Schlissel states outright that justification is not a matter of contrasting "faith versus obedience." It is rather a contrast of "Jewish exclusivism" and the eschatological inclusion of the Gentiles.45 Lusk has argued that in Galatians the "works of the law" are not "meritorious attempts to earn divine favor and salvation." Paul's concern is to contrast "the universality of grace" with "Jewishness" not "the sovereign nature of grace" and "works-righteousness.""

A common thread running through these arguments is that the believer's covenantal obedience not be removed from the basis of the verdict of justification. Again, we may ask the question, what is the concern back of this insistence? There appears to be a concern that the Reformed can conceive and have conceived "justification by faith alone" practically to mean "justification by a faith that is alone." In other words, there is concern that the Protestant doctrine of justification warrants "easy believism."

This is a concern expressed by Norman Shepherd, a theologian widely appreciated among FV proponents. It is also a concern evidenced by FV proponents. Steve Schlissel has argued that faith and obedience are never set in contrast by Paul when he outlines the doctrine of justification. We have observed Schlissel arguing from Romans 2:13 that justification embraces one's faith-prompted, nonmeritorious obedience to a law that can be kept. Schlissel's formulations appear concerned to guard the doctrine from antinomianism.

It is evident from Douglas Wilson's numerous Credos "On Faith and Fidelity" that he is concerned to preclude the notion of a faith that justifies but does not necessarily yield obedience.47 He states pithily: "The just shall live by faith, not start out by faith. This obliterates all carping about faith and works. Faith swallows up life."" Wilson's doctrine is not necessarily erroneous, but it is imprecise. Historically Protestants have emphasized faith's receptivity in justification. Wilson's emphasis upon the obedience of justifying faith apparently reflects a concern that some have placed the doctrine in service of antinomianism. This concern, of course, is not a chimerical one-it is one that can

be found within many Reformed churches today.

The concern for "easy believism" is also evident from the way in which one FV proponent has conceived what is termed "final justification." Rich Lusk has argued that one's covenantal obedience may properly be said to be a nonmeritorious "cause" of our final justification and salvation.49 We have observed in Lusk an interchangeability of "final justification" and "salvation." His for mutations of justification, we have observed, yield a doctrine wherein justification appears to be a process and not a definitive act. Lusk's doctrine precludes the idea that a "presently justified" person could, by failing to live a life of covenantal faithfulness, attain to "final justification." In other words, Lusk's doctrine effectively combats an easy-believism that claims justification as an excuse or license to sin.

We may affirm FV proponents' legitimate concern that some have abused the doctrine of justification as a license to sin. The apostle Paul was accused of this very thing in his own day (Rom. 6:1-2: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"). Here, however, is where we may be in a position to appreciate the balance of the Westminster Standards as they summarize the teaching of Scripture. They are adamant that faith is the sole instrument of justification and that faith's office in justification is an exclusively receptive one. They are also adamant that the same faith that justifies is the faith outlined at WCF 14.2, a faith that necessarily "yield[s] obedience to the commands, [and] trembl[es] at the threatenings" of Scripture. This does not, of course, describe faith's activity in justification, but it does describe what that same faith is and what it does generally. The response, then, to "easy-believism," is to recapture the balance of our Reformed standards, not to redefine the doctrine of justification and thereby forfeit precious biblical teaching in the process.

Assurance

We find a twofold concern expressed in relation to certain understandings of the doctrine of assurance. On the one hand, assurance is said to lead to morbid introspectionism. On the other hand, assurance is said to lead one to presumption and carnal security.

Morbid introspectionism. FV proponents are responding to a certain

understanding of assurance that is so excessively introspective as to prevent the believer from attaining what he most desires: assurance of grace and salvation. The FV proponents' remedy, we have seen, is to promote a doctrine of assurance that is fun damentally objective and nonsubjective in nature. Their concern for subjectivism occasions their practical excision of subjectivity from considerations of assurance.

Schlissel states that doctrines of assurance that emphasize as a ground of assurance the believer's good works portray God as one "who is manifestly reluctant to save and is looking for excuses to forbid entrance into His kingdom." That approach to assurance implies "salvation ... based upon internal works."" Barach has argued that a view of assurance circulates within the Reformed church that makes it virtually unattainable: "anyone can have assurance provided he continues in godliness for a certain space of time. How long? Five minutes? Good. Does it have to be ten? Does it have to be a year or two of godliness before you can have any assurance?"51

Horne cautions us against a doctrine of assurance that "pops up in Presbyterian history from time to time" and that "stress[es] that faith and assurance are so distinct ... that a person can be saved and yet be in complete uncertainty whether or not he is headed toward eternal glory or eternal condemnation."" Wilkins asks, "How many of us have been confounded when we were told to examine our hearts to see if we see the marks of a new heart there. Was our repentance genuine? Have we truly believed in the Lord Jesus or have we deceived ourselves?"53 Wilkins warns against a conventional view of assurance that "clearly implies a god who is very, very careful in dispensing mercy and not very free in it at all.""

We may grant that these observations are plausible and perhaps real expressions of a circulating doctrine of subjectively grounded assurance. We should note, however, that this doctrine is also precluded by our Standards. The believer may and can attain an "infallible" assurance, and our Larger Catechism points him to three grounds thereof (LC 80). None of these grounds (God's promises, Spirit-enabled discernment of inward graces, witness of the Spirit) implies salvation by works. The Larger Catechism, following Scripture's teaching, states that true believers, for manifold reasons, "may wait long before they obtain [assurance]; and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted" (LC 81). And yet, the catechism continues, "they are never left

without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God as keeps them from sinking into utter despair" (LC 81). Again, the solution to a genuine pastoral problem is to pursue the biblical balance achieved by the Standards, not to reject subjectively grounded assurance for a ground of assurance (baptism) that proves in fact to be no certain ground at all.

Presumption. On the other hand, FV proponents are also responding to a doctrine of assurance that permits one to be indifferent toward the necessity of persevering in obedience. Tied to this notion is an understanding of election that militates against the application of the biblical warnings to those who have judged themselves to be elect. That this concern is in view is evident from FV comments on a presumptuous understanding of decretal election-that if one learns he is elect, then he has no incentive to obey or persevere. The warnings of Scripture are, to such an individual, strictly hypothetical.

In discussing the warnings of Scripture, Wilson raises this very issue.

> The Reformed have their own set of problems here. One such problem is to assume that all such warnings are hypothetical. In other words, God warns His elect away from something that cannot happen to them-something like erecting a giant "BEWARE OF THE CLIFF" sign in the middle of Kansas. The fundamental problem with treating the passages as hypothetical is that the reality of the warning is often assumed in the warning. Demas really did fall away. Unbelieving Jews were really cut out of the olive tree and the Gentiles were warned that the same thing could happen to them. Judas fell away. These are not hypothetical warnings.55

Lusk raises this issue in connection with the doctrine of election.

> Paul can assuringly call his readers elect ([Rom.] 8:31ff.) and then warn them about being cut off a few chapters later (11:20ff.). This explodes ordinary Calvinistic logic. In modern Calvinistic parlance, if someone is elect, they cannot fall away. But Paul is viewing election through the lens of the covenant, so he can give, in very direct language, both promises and threats.56

In other words, many Calvinists ("ordinary Calvinistic logic"), Lusk argues,

understand one's sense of his election to be an as surance that he will never fall away. Elsewhere, Lusk argues that this concern is a vital one within his overall theology.

> My project is twofold:... Second, to make the threats of apostasy real to us. We cannot hide behind the doctrine of election, or the "invisible church," and say these warnings are for other people, but not for us. They do apply to us, and we need to heed them. They do not undermine a properly grounded assurance, but they do keep us on our toes, spiritually speaking. There is no place for presumption or complacency, lest "the confidence of the flesh creep in and replace the assurance of faith" (Calvin).57

In other words, Lusk fears that the Reformed doctrine of election has been placed in the service of a view that says that believers who judge themselves to be elect do not need to heed the warnings of Scripture.

We may again grant that Wilson and Lusk are responding to genuine views that they have encountered in the Reformed church, and that some point to the doctrine of election as practically immunizing them from the force of the biblical warnings and from the obligation to persevere in obedience. The question, however, is whether this is what the Reformed doctrine teaches. If it is not, then there is no need to revise the doctrine.

When we examine the teaching of the Westminster Standards concerning election, we find that the very concerns that have occasioned the reflections of Wilson and Lusk (cited above) are precluded. We see this in Westminster's insistence that none may come to a knowledge of their election apart from a life of obedience to the Word of God: "The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in His word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election" (WCF 3.8, emphasis added). We also see this in Westminster's insistence that none may continue in the knowledge of their election apart from a life of holiness and obedience to the Word of God: "So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel" (WCF 3.8, emphasis added). In other words, in the absence of a life of sincere obedience to

the Word of God, no one (regardless of any past experiences or judgments about his spiritual state) has any right to regard himself to be elect.

It is precisely to this condition that many warnings of Scripture are directed, as the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 11:19-22.

> You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

Consequently, the apostle Paul can say of himself, "I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27). The corrective, then, to perversions of the Reformed doctrine of election is not an overhaul of the doctrine but a proper understanding of what the doctrine in fact teaches.

Sacraments

FV proponents also appear to be responding to a minimalist understanding of the sacraments. Wilkins argues that his view permits him to avoid a "rationalistic nominalism, which makes the sacraments bare and naked signs and symbols."5S

We may explore some representative examples within FV writings of what this minimalist understanding of the sacraments is thought to include, and offer a response to each.

FV proponents criticize what they view as a diminishment if not an elimination of the sacraments as "means of grace." This, we may recall, was the target of Wilson's criticism against Warfield, whose argument for supernatural immediacy Wilson regarded as precluding God's use of means in communicating grace. But that, we may also recall, was not what Warfield was saying. We may recognize, however, that the view that Wilson engages (a view that functionally eliminates an understanding of the means of grace) is alive and well-even within

the Reformed community.

Yet we may also note, as all FV proponents recognize, that the Westminster Standards understand the application of redemption in terms of the "means of grace." As we have argued in our discussions of baptism, however, one need not affirm FV views concerning sacramental and baptismal efficacy in order to give the Standards' doctrine of the means of grace its due. FV doctrines may be seen not only as other than what the Standards teach, but also as overreactions to the minimalistic doctrine that can circulate within the Reformed churches.

FV proponents criticize a doctrine that regards the unbelieving and apostate recipient of baptism to be under no greater condemnation for his having received the sacrament than if he had not received it. This appears to be a concern of Wilson's.

> When we do this [i.e., excommunicate] in the case of covenant breakers, we are treating their baptisms with greater respect than they do. The typical evangelical response to "nominal" Christians, however, allows the covenant breaker to feel some sense of moral superior- ity-"How can you say my baptism is worthless? I may not be a very good Roman Catholic, but at least . . . " But we are saying that baptism provides the faithful covenant member with means to exhort disobedient Christians in terms of their baptism: "Why do you despise your baptism the way you do?""

In other words, the "typical evangelical response to `nominal' Christians" is that these nominal Christians' baptism was a ceremony that proved to be theologically and spiritually meaningless.

Lusk expresses the same concern in reference to covenant children who leave the church.

> True, baptized children can renounce their Father and become prodigals; they can reject Jesus as their Husband and become adulterers. But having once passed through the waters of baptism, however unfaithful their actions are to that newly granted baptismal identity, they are still the actions of baptized persons. They have been sanctified by the blood of the covenant, even if they later choose to reject that blood and covenant (Heb. 10:29). Baptism is an act with eternal consequences for the faithful and

> the unfaithful. Covenant members who fall from grace can only expect God's harshest judgment. Just as the promises of salvation are for us and for our children, so the warnings of apostasy are for us and for our children as well.60

Lusk, then, is concerned that children who depart the church be understood to be thereby under a greater severity of judgment. He pins this especially upon the fact of their baptism.

We may affirm with FV proponents that those who sin against greater light will be held to greater accountability and will suffer a severer judgment: "to whom much is given, much is expected." One need not, however, hold to FV understandings of sacramental and baptismal efficacy in order to affirm this point. One need not affirm that something salvific was accomplished in the apostate's baptism in order to ground his accountability, as an apostate, to divine justice.

FV proponents criticize what they perceive as a tendency within the church to regard covenant children, having received the sacrament of baptism, as practically indistinct from children outside the covenant. A special target of attack is a view termed by Wilkins as the "Southern Presbyterian" view. Wilkins speaks, for instance, of "the dominant view in the Southern Presbyterian Church in the nineteenth century which was argued for by our heroes, and I mean that, I love those men, Thornwell and Dabney, but they were arguing for this position and basically made baptism nothing more than a dedication. And then didn't want it to be much of a dedication at that."" What in particular is this view? It is that baptism is "nothing more than a wet dedication service," that is, "it did nothing more than bring the child into what they called an ecclesiastical covenant which was merely symbolic and actually accomplished nothing."62

Wilkins further has argued that children "are joined to Christ by their baptisms and must be viewed and treated in the light of this re- ality."63 They are not "somehow only externally joined to the church" but are "truly members of Christ."" Hence, to require that a child "show that spiritual qualification-a new heart" in order to the church's "recogniz[ing] the majority of its minor citizens," as Dabney argues, is to "fall ... to the temptation of playing God and that must end."65

We may observe that Wilkins's objection to what he claims is the Southern Presbyterian view of baptism is inseparable from his ob jection to their denial of a doctrine of undifferentiated membership within the church, predicated as that objection is on Wilkins's doctrine of undifferentiated covenant membership. In fact, Wilkins suggests that baptism as "a wet dedication service" is a direct consequence of the distinction between communicant and noncommunicant membership. This is a dubious claim. What is it, however, to which Wilkins is responding?

He seems to be responding to a view, held within the contemporary church, that there is no practical distinction between the church's obligations toward children of believers and children who are outside the visible church. This latter view is undoubtedly embraced in practice by some professing Christian parents and by some evangelical pastors and elders.

This, however, was not the view of Thornwell, Dabney, or any noted American Presbyterian theologian of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding their differences on the question of the church's obligation of discipline to children of the covenant. Wilkins may identify current practice with certain specimens of nineteenth-century theory, but the latter does not necessarily give birth to the former. Wilkins, however, unfortunately appears to have laid the blame of a genuine concern at the feet of Southern Presbyterianism and to have dismissed a tradition that could have satisfactorily redressed the problems presented by that concern.66

Summary

In summary, we may concur with Federal Vision proponents that there are genuine abuses of and deviations from Reformed doctrine circulating cross-denominationally within the Reformed church. At the same time, we must dissent from their responses to these abuses and deviations. Rather than equating certain instances of practice with the long-standing Reformed doctrine, and thereby revising the doctrine in question, we ought to learn and to embrace what the Reformed have historically taught in their confessional standards and theologies, as that teaching conforms to the doctrine of Scripture. We have attempted to argue that a careful and faithful reading of the Westminster Standards not only offers us a faithful summary of biblical teaching but also shows the way to step forward when a church has fallen below her confessional

standard. That way is not by forsaking that standard but by conforming her faith and practice to it.

From Old to Old: The Hermeneutics of the Federal Vision

Every system of theology inherently carries within it a distinctive way of reading Scripture, not simply in the exegesis of certain passages but also in the interpretative posture toward the Scripture, particularly in relating the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Reformed-against Lutheran and dispensationalist systems that stress the discontinuity of the Testaments-have argued for a relationship of essential continuity. This relationship between the Testaments has been preserved, of course, in the covenant theology of the Westminster Standards. They understand the Mosaic covenant to be one administration of the covenant of grace, a covenant that extends from the garden to the present day.

Each of the FV proponents that we have studied self-consciously thinks and operates within the context of the Reformed church. In other words, each is disposed, with all Reformed interpreters, to interpret the Bible with an understanding of continuity between the Testaments. These proponents, however, have overemphasized this continuity. The result has been a flat hermeneutic, one that strains the New Testament through the Old Testament. We may point to four examples of this. Two examples we have already witnessed. The other two we have not yet examined, but we will give them some attention here.

Election

We may remember that, following Norman Shepherd, FV proponents have a distinctive view of the doctrine of election. We are to read election through the eyes of the covenant, they argue, not vice versa. An argument that we observed in support of this doctrine is that our understanding of election in the New Testament must be shaped by Old Testament discussions of God's election of Israel. We have seen an appeal to 1 Peter 2:9 and following as evidencing that the New Testament conceives of election in the same terms as these Old Testament passages are said to do so. John Barach actually charges some Reformed "popular treatments of election" with presenting "the doctrine of election unto salvation [as] something that is revealed only in the New

Testament.""

Consequently, FV proponents argue that a doctrine of corporate election must shape our understanding of individual election. This warrants, we have seen, FV affirmations that election is a process: one may become elect, reprobate, and then elect (again)-along the lines that Israel as a whole was said to have become elect, reprobate, and then elect (again). Passages that have traditionally been taken to speak of individual election according to the decree, such as Ephesians 1:4-11, are now said to speak of election in covenantal terms, that is, in corporate terms inherited from the Old Testament.

We earlier criticized this doctrine of covenant election. We mention it here to illustrate how the doctrine of election has been constructed: Old Testament teaching about God's choice of Israel is normative and determinative for New Testament teaching about God's election of the believer.

Covenantal Curse

We have witnessed another example in Douglas Wilson's doctrine of the covenantal curse. Recall Wilson's insistence that the new covenant comes to the individual believer not simply with blessing but with curse. Wilson insists that the nonelect person can in the sacrament "taste the Lord" unto curse and destruction in the sacrament. Exegetically, he appeals to 1 Corinthians 10:1-14: just as the covenant curses fell upon the Old Testament church who had been baptized, so too the curses of the covenant may fall upon the New Testament church.

As Wilson acknowledges, he is not unique in holding to this doctrine. He appeals to the well-known Reformed theonomist Greg Bahnsen and offers the following statements from Bahnsen in support of his position:

> So, those who are in the Church, but not elect, are nevertheless within the Covenant of Grace, but under its curse. The Covenant of Grace curses people who have the privilege of being among God's people on earth distinguished from the world and yet don't live up to what He teaches. That's why the Church sometimes has to intervene, lest the Church profane God's covenant and its seals. My only point is that you couldn't write that unless you believed that the non-elect, who were being

disciplined, are in the covenant.6S

> To be covenantally united with God, although intended by God to bring favor and blessing to His chosen people, carries as well the threat of judgment and curse. God's covenants involve blessing and cursing, depending upon whether one is a covenant-keeper or a covenant-breaker.69

We have above raised certain exegetical and theological concerns about Wilson's doctrine of (New Testament) covenant curses. Observe now the interpretative assumption behind Wilson's argument. It is that the national blessings and curses that pertained to Israel under the old covenant now pertain to the church under the new covenant. This speaks a much stronger conception of covenantal continuity than most nontheonomic Reformed interpreters have allowed.

Worship and Liturgy

One example that we have not pursued in this study is the intense interest in liturgy that circulates among FV proponents. One FV proponent who has given concerted attention to a theological defense of liturgy is Peter Leithart.70 He has defended liturgy for several reasons. He has argued that for the church to be liturgical is for the church to be "counter-cultural."" He has also argued for liturgy in that it "honors the wisdom of ancients" and in that it "trains us in mature habits and responses.""

In connection with the concerns that we have been investigating in this study, Leithart defends liturgy by appealing to what he understands to be a biblical doctrine of ritual as a communicative act. In explaining and defending this notion of ritual, Leithart appeals especially to the Old Testament sacrificial system.73 This means, among other things, that "the biblical understanding of rituals and hence of sacraments would emerge most clearly from texts that deal directly with rituals, which are mainly found in Exodus-Deuteronomy. The meaning and efficacy of the sacraments, then, need to be understood according to the categories and patterns of the Levitical system.""

It is this observation that prompts Leithart to comment that the New Testament doctrine of baptism is rooted in "the rite of priestly ordination," a point that he later develops in The Priesthood of the Plebs." He also points to the

"washing ceremonies of the Levitical laws of cleanliness (e.g., Lev 15; Num 19)" as providing "the background to baptism."" More generally, Leithart argues that we must "tak[e] the [Old Testament] temple as our model for worship." This is the "only possible way to arrive at a biblical view of worship."77 In support of this claim, Leithart points to New Testament descriptions of believer's worship as "sacrifice" (Heb. 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5) and of "believer and Church [as] the temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 12:22-24; 1 Pet. 2:1-10)."78

For Leithart, the New Testament's teaching of worship and sacramental efficacy is drawn from the old covenant ceremonial system, preeminently the temple. In other words, these Old Testament passages become determinative of the way in which the New Testament church is to worship (generally) and to conceive the significance of the sacraments (particularly). This is not to say that this is the only place to which Leithart will appeal in support of this theory of ritual. He appeals to the Trinity and to God's act of creation as well.79 It is to say, however, that Leithart is operating with a distinctive hermeneutic. The old covenant categories and patterns of worship (and the sacraments) are said to be determinative of new covenant categories and patterns of worship (and the sacraments).

Paedocommunion

One final area in which this hermeneutic becomes evident is in FV defenses of paedocommunion. FV proponents of paedocommunion include Peter Leithart, Douglas Wilson, Steve Wilkins, Rich Lusk, and Mark Horne. Many FV proponents, we have seen, contend for a doctrine of undifferentiated covenant membership. Many point to covenantal membership and covenantal privilege in a primarily and even (practically) exclusively "objective" sense. This affords the doctrinal foundation to argue that all covenant members (regardless of age or their profession) are entitled to a place at the Lord's Table. Peter Leithart, for example, explicitly argues this way.

> All members of Christ are welcomed to the table-that is the point. The point of the Supper is to overturn all other sorts and conditions of table fellowship, all table fellowship that would exclude the lowly or puff up the high and mighty. And in overturning such table fellowship, the gospel overturns all such social orders and establishes the Church's own order as

> the true social order."

What warrants a person's entry to the table? It is that he is a "member of Christ." How is he constituted a member of Christ? That, Leithart (with other FV proponents) has argued, occurs at his baptism.

> The real question before us is this: Does baptism initiate the baptized to the Lord's table, so that all who are baptized have a right to the meal? Paedocommunion advocates, for all their differences, will answer in the affirmative. Nothing more than the rite of water baptism is required for access to the Lord's table."

In other words, the fact of one's baptism-whether applied to a covenant child or to a professing adult-is sufficient to admit that individual to the Lord's Table.'2

Our concern, at this point, is to examine FV arguments for paedocommunion as relying upon precisely the hermeneutic we have been examining-that of determining New Testament doctrine and practice by a straightforward appeal to Old Testament forms, ceremonies, and practices. Let us consider three examples: Peter Leithart, Steve Wilkins, and Mark Horne.

Peter Leithart. Leithart explicitly grounds his argument for paedocommunion in the continuity of the Old Testament feasts with the New Testament Lord's Supper, at least with respect to the terms of admission.

> Paedocommunion ritually announces that the church is continuous with Israel. All paedobaptists agree that the church is the new Israel, formed as the body of the Risen Christ. But paedocommunion reinforces this point dramatically, for it insists that the admission requirements to the church's meal are exactly the same as the admission requirements to Israel's meals.83

Children were likely included in the Passover meal, Leithart argues, and were certainly included in the Feasts of Pentecost and Booths. In short, "all Israelites were permitted to eat at all the feasts of Israel's liturgical calendar."" Further, although there were certain meals that were open only to the priests and their families, since the new covenant has "breached . . . the distinction between the priesthood of Aaron and the priesthood of Israel .... these regulations are no

longer directly relevant to the question of admission to the Lord's Supper."85

Consequently, Leithart asks, "What is it about the character of the New Covenant people of God that excludes children? What is the difference between new Israel and the Old that warrants this change?"" We may refer the reader to Jonathan Edwards's Qualifications for Communion for a helpful Reformed reflection on the terms of admission to the Lord's Supper and to the Passover ordinance.87 For the present, we may simply draw a hermeneutical observation. Leithart grounds his argument for paedocommunion in observations concerning who was admitted to the Israelite feasts (generally). Leithart places the burden of proof on those who would argue for different terms of admission under the new covenant. This is an aggressive argument for continuity.

On the surface, such an argument may seem to be the flip side of the coin of the paedobaptist argument. Such an argument, however, goes even beyond the continuity affirmed by the paedobaptist argument. Under the new covenant, after all, women (as well as men) are admitted to the sacrament of baptism.

Steve Wilkins. Wilkins argues at length that "children were admitted to the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant on the basis of their membership in the covenant congregation."88 Put negatively, "if children are not to be allowed to the Lord's Supper, we should expect them to be excluded from the Passover. "S9 Wilkins is also insistent that "the children of believers were admitted to the first Passover (if they were physically capable of eating solid food) by virtue of their covenant membership." "The only prerequisites for participation [in the Passover meal and the Lord's Supper] are membership in the covenant and the ability to eat."" The grounds of their participation, then, did not include "their understanding and discernment.""

The pattern evident at the Passover, as recorded in Exodus 12, Wilkins argues, comports with the "normal way of observing the sacrificial meals. "92 Consequently, "if covenant children were admitted to the Passover and the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant, they should be admitted to the Lord's table. If it is wrong to admit undiscerning, baptized children to the Table under the New Covenant, it was wrong to allow undiscerning, circumcised children to the meals of the Old Covenant. "93

Wilkins elaborates this point:

> The rule we follow in seeking to determine whether an Old Covenant practice is carried over into the New Covenant is to see if that practice is changed in the New in one of three ways: 1) by explicit command of God, 2) by necessary inference from that which God has commanded, or 3) by apostolic example. Where there is no explicit exclusion of children from the covenant (and consequent covenant privileges) they should continue to enjoy the same privileges they enjoyed under the Old Covenant.94

Wilkins's principle requires either an explicit command (or necessary inference therefrom) or an apostolic example for an old covenant practice to be repealed. When coupled with his arguments that the Old Testament feasts were open to all covenant members indiscriminately, that the distinction between a noncommuning member and a communicant member is an unbiblical one, and that 1 Corinthians 11 does not forbid children of the covenant to come to the table, this particular continuity principle permits Wilkins to argue for paedocommunion. At bottom, Wilkins's argument rest on a straightforward appeal to an Old Testament ceremonial practice in order to warrant New Testament practice. This is a far stronger principle of covenantal continuity than has been admitted within the historical mainstream of Reformed interpreters.

Mark Home. Mark Horne grounds his argument for paedocommunion in the fact that "children were also included in the feasts of Israel, as well as the fasts. "95 He cites the Passover of Exodus 12, the priestly meals of Leviticus 10, the Feast of Weeks and of Booths (Ex. 12:3; Dent. 16:11, 14; 1 Sam. 1:4), and the peace or fellowship offerings (Deut. 12:6-7,11-12,17-18).16 What is the ground of children's admission to these Old Testament feasts? Horne contends that it is "because God promised that the children of believers belong to the Lord just as their parents do.... Our children are clearly promised eternal salvation. They are declared to be Christians, nothing less. "97 The ground, then, does not consist, in whole or in part, of some intellectual prerequisite or spiritual qualification to come to the table. It is their covenantal membership, the fruit of divine promise.

Does the New Testament sanction this practice? Horne states that Jesus, at Mark 10:13-16, "amply confirmed the Old Testament testimony regarding children." Here, Horne argues, our Lord teaches that "children are the standard by which adults are to be judged."98 In other words, Jesus placed his seal of approval upon the whole of Old Testament practice concerning children, the feasts included. Presumably an explicit New Testament command or example

would be required to repeal it. Furthermore, the apostle Paul, at 1 Corinthians 10:16-18, links the Lord's Supper to "all the peace offerings, the Priest's portions, and the three festivals of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths-for all of these involved eating from the altar."99 Children therefore may partake of the Lord's Supper.

Horne's argument follows a very similar path to that taken by Leithart and Wilkins. A principle of continuity is affirmed such that the terms of admission to the Old Testament festival practice are said to be normative of the terms of admission to the Lord's Supper. The result is that covenantal membership simpliciter becomes the ground for admission to the table.

Summary

In each of these four case studies we have observed examples of what we have termed a flat hermeneutic-an approach to biblical interpretation that so stresses continuity between the Testaments that the teaching of Scripture becomes distorted.

We are offered what amounts to a doctrine of conditional election; an unbiblical doctrine of sacramental efficacy; an approach to worship (the Old Testament Temple as normative of new covenant worship) that is much closer to Rome than it is to Geneva; and the admission of infants to the Lord's Supper.

When we inquire what was the breeding ground of this hermeneutic, we need look no further than theonomy, to which Peter Leithart, Douglas Wilson, and Steve Wilkins have subscribed. The theonomic hermeneutic, with its strong emphasis on the continuity of the Testaments, makes possible the phenomena observed in these case studies.

The Triumph of the External in the Federal Vision

The specter of theonomy brings us to our final consideration. There is clearly an external cast to and a decided anti-experientialism within the writings of FV proponents. To reference a point that we have made above, we might instance this as yet one more example of FV responses to a legitimate concern-the unwholesomely subjective character of contemporary American evangelical faith and practice.

FV proponents, however, are not simply responding to an excess in American Christianity. Their entire system is constructed around this concern. We find, on the one hand, an exaltation of the external; on the other hand, a minimization of the internal. We may point to a couple of examples of each.

Exaltation of the External

(1) The FV concern to promote what has been termed the objectivity of the covenant, or what we have termed undifferentiated covenantal membership, evidences an exaltation of the external. The covenant comes to be defined in terms of one's membership therein. One becomes a member of the covenant by the administration of the sacrament of water baptism. Further, such a conception of covenantal membership is not accompanied by a doctrine of noncommuning and communicant membership within the visible church. Individuals are brought into and are said to be members of the covenant in the same way.

When distinctions are drawn within the covenant community, they tend to be along the lines of Wilson's distinction between covenant keepers and covenant breakers. What constitutes covenant breaking? We have seen comparatively few discussions of this question, but Rich Lusk explicitly states that, under the law (and presumably into the present day), one may not be regarded a covenant breaker until and unless one has apostatized.100 We have also seen Wilson's concern that we not preach in a differentiated manner to the covenant community. We are to preach the promises and the warnings of the covenant and presume that most hypocrites, not tolerating such preaching, will leave the church.

This means, however, that virtually all baptized and nonexcommunicated persons within the covenant community are officially regarded and pastorally addressed in an identical fashion, especially from the pulpit. Such an approach has been framed in a conscious effort to purge subjective distinctions-distinctions drawn from the doctrines of regeneration and conversion-from practical, if not theoretical, use in the life of the church. We would not be surprised if the inner life of meditation, prayer, and self-examination not only waned and withered but perished under the heat of efforts to exalt the objective at their expense.

(2) FV formulations concerning the sacraments are a complementary way of

exalting the external. One example is the high premium that is placed upon baptism. It is baptism to which FV proponents point as that which confers upon all recipients Christ and his benefits. Lusk has argued from Acts 2:38 that "baptism, not preaching per se, is linked with forgiveness and the reception of the Spirit. Clearly, Peter believes God will give them something in baptism that they have not received through preaching alone. Baptism will consummate the process of regeneration begun by the Word preached."'" While, then, preaching may begin one's regeneration, a person's regeneration is not consummated until baptism, which bestows grace (forgiveness, reception of the Spirit) that preaching cannot or does not bestow. Lusk looks to baptism to explain and to effect the transition of the sinner from death to life. We have even seen an argument claiming that baptism may be seen as an instrument of the sinner's justification.

Wilson stresses, we have seen, that a converted man who happens to have been baptized as an infant "got saved because the grace of his baptism was finally kicking in." He had a "head start" and his baptism was not "fundamentally superfluous (when it came to the matter of his salvation). "102 It is, we may note, to this man's baptism that Wilson will ultimately attribute the man's conversion, whatever proximate causes and means may have intervened between his baptism and his conversion. In view of Lusk's and Wilson's understandings of baptism, we cannot expect that the doctrine of saving faith, in all its offices, will fare well. It is already being outshone by baptism.l03

A second example of a sacramental exaltation of the external comes in the doctrine of paedocommunion advocated by many (but not all) FV proponents. We have above observed that for many FV proponents, the sole ground of admission to the Lord's Table is entrance into the covenant by way of baptism. In this sense, infants and adults alike may be admitted to the Supper. There is, in other words, no necessary subjective qualification in order to approach the table. The sole qualification is outward and external. One need not profess saving faith in Jesus Christ in order to partake of the elements. One need not profess to have been inwardly renewed by the Holy Spirit in order to approach an ordinance that, on all sides, is regarded as an occasion for communion with Christ.

When we examine certain FV readings of 1 Corinthians 11, we find that the qualification of discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:29) is understood not in terms of an intellectual and spiritual self-appraisal. It is, rather, understood in

terms of "understand[ing] the glorious significance" of the church as the "body of Christ. "104 We violate this apostolic command "if we deny the sacrament to some members of the Body of Christ."" To insist, as requisite for admission to the table, on the intellectual capacity to examine oneself in the traditional sense is, in Horne's words, an "[un]justifiable ... double standard."106

Again, a qualification that is historically understood to be subjective is inverted. It is now a consideration of whether we are promoting the corporate identity and unity of God's people. It is an essentially outward and objective qualification.

Minimization of the Internal

Corresponding with an exaltation of the external, we may note a minimization of the internal, that is, of the place and role of the graces, inwardly wrought by the Holy Spirit, in the Christian life. We have observed a fairly consistent effort to diminish the doctrine of regeneration. We have observed this in three ways.

First, this is seen in FV discussions of assurance, in comments to the effect that the marks of regeneration cannot be discerned with any practical certainty. Were this uncertainty attributed merely to the church's capacity to discern the regeneration of a congregant, then we would agree. We have observed, however, FV statements that despair of the individual believer's attaining anything like "infallible assurance" based upon his subjective or inward marks of regeneration.

Second, we have seen frequent comments that grace is not a substance. Instead, grace is to be understood solely in terms of the establishment and maintenance of a relationship. This permits formulations that grant undifferentiated grace to the covenant community. We have observed the AAPC contention that the traditional distinction between common and saving operations of the Spirit is, at best, practically insignificant.l0' Horne has argued for the same point.108 In other words, the working distinction between elect and nonelect is temporal and not qualitative. What practically distinguishes elect and nonelect is their perseverance.

Third, we may finally observe that at least one FV proponent, James Jordan, has officially and unmistakably called into question the traditional doctrine of

regeneration.

> The Bible does not teach that some people receive incorruptible new hearts, i.e., that some people are as individuals "regenerated."""
>
> My thesis is that there is no such thing as "regeneration" in the sense in which Reformed theology since Dort has spoken of it. The Bible says nothing about a permanent change in the hearts of those elected to heaven.110
>
> My position: everyone who is baptized has been given the same thing. No one has been given a permanently changed "regenerated heart."""

Such comments are significant for at least two reasons.

First, Jordan, as we observed in our study of FV understandings of the nature of and relationship among the biblical covenants, wields tremendous influence among FV proponents. Second, Jordan likely represents the theological vanguard of the FV. He rightly perceives that the doctrine of individual regeneration is properly extraneous to the core concerns of FV views. Jordan will likely not be the sole FV proponent who grasps this point. We may anticipate that others will follow.

The FV and the Reconstruction of Reconstructionism

What explanations may we offer for this decidedly external cast to the theology of the FV? To answer this question is also to offer an explanation for why the FV has gained the momentum that it has in the previous few years.

We may first observe that the FV has largely risen in theonomic circles."' We have seen that the hermeneutic employed by many FV proponents resonates with theonomic conceptions of covenantal continuity. For all of theonomy's care to emphasize its espousal of the necessity of personal regeneration, of biblical preaching, and of personal piety, the published writings of theonomist writers have generally emphasized the outward, the external, and the corporate. It is this emphasis that has occasioned FV proponents' recasting of biblical religion along predominantly outward, external, and corporate lines.

We must immediately point out, however, that not all theono- mists have

supported the FV. In fact, some of the most vehement opponents of the FV have been theonomists. What this highlights for us is that the FV represents an intramural debate within theonomic Reformed circles. What, then, has prompted the FV to emerge at this point in time?

There are hints among those sympathetic to the FV that their views accompany a discontent with the success of the theonomic project. In other words, thirty or forty years of theonomic reconstructionism have failed to accomplish their desired end, whether in the church or in the culture at large. The FV, then, represents a chastened theonomy, an attempt to reconstruct the project of theonomy to accommodate its greater goal of cultural transformation. An example of this effort is an article penned by P. Andrew Sandlin.

Sandlin argues for what he has termed a "catholic Calvinism."[114] He divides the Reformed world into three parts: the Truly Reformed, the Barely Reformed, and the Catholic Reformed. He comments that the Truly Reformed are "fervently committed to the scholastic, Reformed orthodoxy of the 16th and 17th centuries." To them, Sandlin contends, "the great crisis of the modern church [is] a deviation from this formulation of doctrine or theology." They are "particularly sus picious of any [theological] development within the last hundred years," a suspicion that Sandlin contends extends to virtually anything theological "later than the seventeenth century."[114]

Who are the Catholic Reformed? Sandlin attempts to chart a via media between what he conceives to be the doctrinally rigid TRs and the evangelistically but pragmatically minded BRs. He cites, as representative among the Catholic Reformed, a concern regarding "incessant dispute over comparatively secondary doctrines to the exclusion of the energetic preaching of the gospel." It holds a suspicion of "Protestant scholastic confessionalism" as an optimal solution to contemporary theological challenges, and argues for a resurgence of the "great gains of ... the patristic and medieval eras." It is the "scholastic formulations" of many Reformed doctrines, Sandlin argues, that have contributed to "the general lack of acknowledgement of the broad, orthodox, catholic tradition. "115

Sandlin also argues that the Catholic Reformed desire a "holistic faith"- "Christ-centered rather than theology-centered Faith, though we fully recognize that there can be no legitimate Christcenteredness without accurate theology"; a

"fervent charity"; a "fullorbed gospel" that "requires repentance and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and which seeks to bring all areas of life and culture under His authority ."16 To this end, Sandlin embraces what he terms "the broadness of the orthodox Christian tradition itself "; he maintains that "the early ecumenical orthodoxy of the undivided church as set forth principally in the Apostles [sic], Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian Creeds" must "underlie the more narrow (though also more specific) Reformed dogma." This means, furthermore, that the Catholic Reformed are "willing to explore the entire orthodox Christian tradition for Biblical truth that can be legitimately and effectively employed in today's world."'" Such a posture will promote both "catholic intensity," that is, "work[ing] with ['other Christians who don't agree with us on all points'] in whatever ways we can"; and "catholic extensity," that is, a "commit[ment] to Christianity as a means of transforming culture."'"

Sandlin's analysis is telling. He concedes that conventional theonomy has failed. He pinpoints the cause. It is its undue dependence upon what he terms "Protestant scholastic confessionalism." This perceived parochialism has prompted Sandlin to pursue avenues of truth in the pre-Reformational church, Western and Eastern. The catholicity and ecumenicity of such an approach, Sandlin hopes, will enable theono- mists to link arms with branches of the Christian tradition with whom they had not hitherto sought to make common cause.

Why is this common cause so important? It is to present a united front of "Christianity" that will "transform culture." In other words, Reformed doctrine, as it has been traditionally framed and expressed, has subverted the greater theonomic goal of cultural transformation. While not claiming to forsake Reformed theology (only the way in which it is articulated), Sandlin extends warm overtures of theological appreciation toward non-Reformed communions in order to come closer to accomplishing this goal of cultural transformation.

While Sandlin does not necessarily speak for all FV proponents, he does capture an impulse among these theologians that ought not to be ignored. Whether it is Peter Leithart's attempts to conceive the Trinity, grace, and the sacraments in terms of contemporary Eastern Orthodox theology, or Douglas Wilson's call for a "medieval Protestantism" as a way out of "modernism [that] has an even tighter and more invisible grip on contemporary, orthodox evangelicalism" than it does on "postmodernists"19-there is a theological interest

in nonProtestant or pre-Protestant traditions that attends a keen FV interest in the transformation of culture.

Wilson, understanding the first Christendom as "a motley collection of nations which together, with varying degrees of success, acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus Christ over them," anticipates in positive terms the rise of "a second Christendom" and perhaps even "a third. 1112' Leithart's theological project is intimately tied to his call to the church to "embrac[e] Christendom," 12' a Christendom, to be sure, that does not entirely align with conventional conceptions of the term, but that appears to envision room for a "Christian civilization and a Christian political order. "122

The doctrinal concerns of the FV are therefore closely allied with a broader project of cultural transformation, for the failure of which at least one FV sympathizer will blame classical Reformed theology. It is not that FV proponents are theologically indifferent. They are not. It seems, rather, that they are realigning their theology in keep ing with their cultural project.123 This explains, at least for some, the purgation of the inward, subjective, and contemplative and the exaltation of the outward, objective, and active.

Conclusions

The Federal Vision is not fundamentally a movement, although it shares the characteristics of a movement. It is first and foremost a theological system. This is not to say that every proponent would embrace every proposition uttered by every other FV proponent. In view of the fact, however, that we have observed no repudiations of one FV proponent's doctrine by another FV proponent and that many doctrines (argued by different men on different occasions) are interlocking pieces, we are warranted to conclude that the FV is a theological system.

Our concern in this study has been chiefly to offer an exposition of the FV and to weigh the claims of the FV against the teaching of Scripture and of the Westminster Standards. We have ventured to offer some fundamental or underlying theological explanations for the system that has emerged. We are now prepared to draw some final conclusions.

How may we assess the significance of what we have observed? First, we

may assess the FV as we have in these chapters: doctrine by doctrine. When viewed in this light, we have raised a number of concerns about explicitly articulated FV statements (the covenant of works, imputation, justification, assurance, sacramental efficacy) as well as concerns about certain implications of FV statements for other doctrines (election, regeneration). On this analysis, it is impossible to reconcile a number of FV statements with Reformed theology as summarized in the Westminster Standards. On a comparative reading both of these FV statements and of the Standards, FV views are out of accord with those Standards.

Second, we may also assess the FV in terms of its systemic qualities, that is, its nature and tendencies as a system. We have witnessed that the system promotes decreased confidence in the Spirit's working by and with the Word to regenerate the sinner. The FV system promotes increased confidence in the salvific value of one's covenantal membership and of the sacrament of baptism. It promotes an increased and unwholesome confidence in one's covenantal faithfulness. It undercuts and diminishes the believer's trust in Scripture as propositional revelation.

Seen in this light, the FV is most properly seen not as a series of refinements of or deviations from classical Reformed theological formulations. It is, properly, a different system altogether. For any number of reasons, however, most FV proponents have not institutionally broken from the Reformed faith. A number vehemently believe their views to be the most consistent expression of the Reformed faith formulated in the church's history.

We do no better in closing than to recall Warfield's judgment of Lewis Sperry Chafer: that "Mr. Chafer is in the unfortunate and, one would think, very uncomfortable condition of having two inconsistent systems of religion struggling together in his mind." As with Chafer's Southern Presbyterianism and his Higher Life Christianity, the evangelical and the sacerdotal, the monergistic and synergistic, the rational and the dialectical doctrinal sympathies of FV writers are, to borrow again Warfield's words, "quite incompatible.... The two can unite as little as fire and water."[""] It is my sincere hope that FV proponents will recognize this discord and return to their first love. Barring that, may the souls of believers be spared, to borrow Samuel Miller's phrase, from the "poisonous exotic" that the FV offers to the Reformed church.

Notes

Foreword

1. The facts that not all FV proponents affirm monocovenantalism and that even those who have argued against a covenant of works have more recently hedged their bets on that point illustrate both how loose knit and how fluid the movement is theologically.

2. Narrowly speaking, the "Auburn Avenue Four" are John Barach, Steve Schlissel, Steve Wilkins, and Douglas Wilson. Slightly more broadly, proponents include three who joined in defense of their ideas at a colloquium sponsored by Knox Theological Seminary in August 2003: Peter Leithart, Rich Lusk, and Tom Trouw- borst, to whom surely should be added James Jordan, originally scheduled to join them there but providentially prevented. More broadly still, one would have to number among them several (print- and cyber-) writers and speakers who frequently propound the same ideas and move in the same circles, such as Jeffrey Meyers, Mark Horne, and Joel Garver. One would also have to identify Norman Shepherd as a fountainhead of the central teachings of the Federal Vision. Many others are less prominent tributaries to the stream and appear in the source notes of this book.

3. The Federal Visionists' position and supporting arguments on this closely resemble those of N. T. Wright in his commentary on Rom. 2:13, where he writes, for example, that "justification, at the last, will be on the basis of performance, not possession" (N. T. Wright, Romans, in New Interpreter's Bible: Acts-First Corinthians, vol. 10, ed. Leander E. Keck [Nashville: Abingdon, 2002], 440). For critical interaction with Wright's view, see Guy Prentiss Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004), 132-33, 176-77, and, demonstrating the similarity with Federal Visionists' treatment of the verse, 209-10.

4. It should be noted that ex opere operato does not mean, in Roman Catholic theology, that the sacraments are effective by the performance of them, that is, of the sacraments, but that they are effective because of the work already performed, that is, the work performed by Christ that they signify, seal, and, for

Rome, infallibly convey. What divides Rome from Protestantism is not a question of whether the sacraments are effective simply because of their performance (which not even Rome affirms) but whether they are effective regardless of whether the recipient believes. Rome says yes, Protestantism no.

5. The Westminster Standards present the sacraments solely as means of sanctifying grace, not as means of converting grace.

6. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 254-69, at 267 and 262.

7. Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 146-47.

Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Federal Vision

1. See the June 22, 2002, Resolutions of the RPCUS, "With Reference to the `New Perspective on Paul' Movement," and "A Call to Repentance."

2. Editor's Note to Mark D. Anthony Sr., "Is Baptismal Regeneration Being Taught in the Reformed Community," The Counsel of Chalcedon (July/ August 2002): 29; cf. Jerrold Lewis, "Thinking Inside the Box: An Old Perspective on the New Perspective on Paul," The Blue Banner (July/September 2003), 19-26.

3. The document, "A Call to Repentance," referencing the 2002 AAPCPC Lectures delivered by Douglas Wilson, Steve Schlissel, John Barach, and Steve Wilkins, speaks, for example, of "the introduction of an illegitimate post-exilic Jewish mindset as an interpretative scheme." While this latter observation is true, in some respects, of many NPP proponents, it is not necessarily representative of the views of each of these four speakers.

4. For an exposition and critique, see Stephen Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); and Guy Prentiss Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R

Publishing, 2004).

5. As, for example, E. Calvin Beisner, ed., The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004).

6. The most celebrated AAPC conferences have been in 2002 and 2003. Wilkins's lectures at the 2001 conference ("The Covenant and Apostasy," "Apostasy and the Covenant"), however, represent an earlier effort to articulate the views that would come to be incorporated within the FV.

7. "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," September 26, 2002. See also the "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation (Revised)," April 3, 2005.

8. Athanasius Press, publisher of Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, eds., The Federal Vision (Monroe, La.: Athanasius, 2004). The volume is a collection of essays by Wilkins, Douglas Wilson, Rich Lusk, Mark Horne, James Jordan, Peter Leithart, John Barach, and Steve Schlissel, some of which are revised and documented editions of their AAPCPC lectures. A second volume is anticipated (The Federal Vision, 13).

9. "I am not a paedo-communionist.... It has not been our custom, it's not been our practice...." ("What Does the Lord Require?" 2003 AAPCPC lecture).

10. For which, see the discussion below in chapter 7.

11. As the title of his edited volume, The Federal Vision, suggests.

12. Douglas Wilson, "Union with Christ: Broad Concerns of the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 1-8.

13. Joseph A. Pipa, "Federal Vision Theology: An Overview of Critics' Concerns," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 2. Interestingly, the table of contents lists the title of this chapter as "Auburn Avenue Theology: An Overview of Critics' Concerns." For use of this term see too Richard D. Phillips, "Covenant and Salvation, or What Is a `Christian'?" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 77; and R. Fowler White, "Covenant and Apostasy," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 206.

14. "There is no `Federal Vision Theology,' no `blueprint,' no `system.' There is a `conversation,' and only that" (James B. Jordan, "A Response to `The Federal Vision and the Covenant of Works,' A Lecture by Dr. J. V. Fesko"). "The [Mississippi Valley Presbytery] `report' [of November 2004] assumes that there is a well-defined movement labeled the `Federal Vision.' This is highly debatable.... There is no organized movement, formal or informal. Though there are some commonly held perspectives, there are quite a few differences when it comes to specifics and therefore there is no consistent system of theology which can be labeled 'Federal Vision' theology" ("The Mississippi Valley Presbytery [PCA] `New Perspectives' Study Committee Report: A Reply from Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church [PCA]").

15. Transcriptions from the 2002 AAPCPC have been prepared by Mary Francis and Jeff Black. Transcriptions from the 2003 AAPCPC (with the exception of John Barach, "Covenant and Election"; and R. C. Sproul Jr., "Response to Steve Schlissel," which have been anonymously transcribed) have been prepared by Todd Pedlar and Jo Loomis. Where appropriate, I have made minor typographical corrections to these transcriptions.

16. Representative examples include Mark Horne (www.hornes.org/theologia), who has posted several dozen contributions authored not only by himself but also by Rich Lusk and Peter Leithart; Peter Leithart (www.leithart.com); Ralph Smith (www.berith.org/essays); Steve Schlissel (www.messiahnyc.org); Steve Wilkins and Rich Lusk (www.auburnavenue.org); and Joel Garver (www.joelgarver.com).

17. In articles accessed from the Internet edition of Credenda/Agenda, page numbers, in particular, are unavailable. Otherwise, the page numbers of citations from that publication are provided.

18. See especially P. Richard Flinn, "Baptism, Redemptive History, and Eschatology: The Parameters of Debate," in James B. Jordan, ed., Christianity and Civilization I: Symposium on the Failure of the American Baptist Culture (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Divinity School, 1982),111-51; James B. Jordan, The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Ministries, 1986), 1-123.

19. Notably Peter J. Leithart, "Sacramental Efficacy" (January 1995), "Why Sacraments?" (March 1995), "Baptism and the Spirit" (May 1996), and "The Way Things Really Ought to Be: Eucharist, Eschatology, and Culture," Westminster Theological journal 59 (1997): 159-76.

20. Steve Schlissel, "More than Before: The Necessity of Covenant Consciousness," address at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario, 2001; emphasis original.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. "We need to have more balance by the Word of God itself, which is obviously more Jewish, which means more covenantal" (ibid.).

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. "What does God require? Nothing different than He's always required: believe in Him, and to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself" (ibid.).

29. Ibid.

30. Initial responses include" Christ Church Public Response to the `Call to Repentance' of Covenant Presbytery, RPCUS of June 22, 2002" (July 4, 2002); "Messiah's Reply to the RPCUS" (July 5, 2002); and "AAPC's Response to the RPCUS' Charges" (July 18, 2002). To these followed a brief reply by the RPCUS, John Otis, "Message from the Moderator Regarding the Auburn Avenue Controversy" (September 5, 2002).

31. These are referenced in the document, "The Ongoing Discussion between the Reformed Presbyterian Church of the United States and Christ Church of

Moscow, Idaho," available at www.christkirk.com/DiscussionWithRPCUS/RPCUSDiscussion.asp.

32. Douglas Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002).

33. Ibid., 8.

34. Leithart has collaborated with Jordan in several self-published endeavors dating back to at least 1985, as, for example, "Revivalism and American Protestantism," in James B. Jordan, ed., The Reconstruction of the Church (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Ministries, 1985), 46-84.

35. The thesis for which has been published as Peter J. Leithart, The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

36. See James B. Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity? What Did Jesus Do for Us?" in The Federal Vision, 151-200. Jordan would not now identify himself with theonomy.

37. On which see, Ralph Smith, "Interpreting the Covenant of Works," and "Trinity and Covenant: The Christian Worldview" (1997), especially "III. A Covenantal Map: the Covenantal Outline."

38. Most recently, Ralph Smith, Paradox and Truth: Rethinking Van Til on the Trinity, 2nd ed. (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002); Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003). See also the critical response of Richard D. Phillips, "Covenantal Confusion" (2004), with Smith's counter response, "Covenantal Confusion? An Attempt to Understand the Confused and the Confusion."

39. Frequently, FV proponents speak in terms of "the covenant" without further specification (T. David Gordon, "Reflections on the Auburn Theology" [2005]). The reader should note that I will speak in terms of "a covenant" or "covenant" in order to help safeguard appropriate biblical distinctions among the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace.

40. Phillips, "Covenant Confusion."

41. Steve Schlissel, "Covenant of Peace, Part 1." Compare also his 2002 AAPCPC lecture "Covenant Thinking": "The covenant is God's relationship that He has entered into with us in which our sins are forgiven...."

42. John Barach, "Covenant and History" (2002 AAPCPC sermon). Barach states in this same sermon that his definition of covenant is "somewhat different" from Schlissel's "but complementary." Later in this same sermon, he defines covenant as "the free bond of union, communion and love between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, into which God sovereignly and graciously brings believers and their children to live with Him in mutual love and faithfulness."

43. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 254.

44. Douglas Wilson, "The Objectivity of the Covenant," Credenda/Agenda 15/1: 4. Compare another definition of Wilson's: "Covenants among men are solemn bonds, sovereignly administered, with attendant blessings and curses" (Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 63; emphasis removed). Compare the nearly identical definition in Federal Husband (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 1999), 13, and Future Men (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 1999), 36.

45. James B. Jordan, The Law of the Covenant (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), 4, cited in Smith, Eternal Covenant, 51-52.

46. Ralph Smith, "Defining the Covenant: What Consensus?"

47. Barach, "Covenant and History."

48. Smith, The Eternal Covenant, 51.

49. Wilson, "The Objectivity of the Covenant," 4.

50. Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 262; emphasis removed. In the following pages, Wilkins enumerates what may be said of such individuals.

51. Phillips, "Covenant Confusion."

52. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

53. See here the helpful discussion in J. V. Fesko, "The Federal Vision and the Covenant of Works," 9-10.

54. To this end, see especially the remarks of Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 33-40, 125-130.

55. Barach, "Covenant and History."

56. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 66; emphasis removed.

57. Ibid., 130.

58. Phillips, "Covenant Confusion."

59. Barach, "Covenant and History."

60. "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," endnote 1. In the revised edition, this section reads: "In their reading of Heb. 6:4-5, some theologians try to draw subtle distinctions to make highly refined psychological differences between blessings that do not secure eternal salvation and true regeneration, which does. For at least two reasons, it is highly unlikely the writer had such distinctions in mind. First, it is by no means certain that those who have received the blessings listed in 6:4-5 will fall away. The writer merely holds it out as a possibility, a danger of which they must beware. In fact, he expects these people to persevere (6:9). If, however, the blessings catalogued imply something less than regeneration, and these people might persevere after all, we are put in the awkward position of saying that non-regenerate persons persevered to the end (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1)! Second, the illustration immediately following the warning in 6:7-8 indicates these people have received some kind of new life. Otherwise, the plant metaphor makes no sense. The question raised does not concern the nature of the grace received in the past (i.e., real regeneration versus merely common operations of the Spirit), but whether or not the one who has received this grace will persevere.

"Thus, Hebrews 6 does not call upon us to develop two psychologies of conversion and faith, one for the `truly regenerate' and one for the temporary believer destined to apostatize. Nor does it call upon sinners to discern their own deceitful and inconstant hearts, for even the elect would fall away were it not for

the continued grace of God (cf. Canons of Dort, 5th Head, Articles 3 and 8; cf. WCF 17.2). Rather, Hebrews calls upon us to turn from ourselves and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1ff). Such a faith perseveres and bears fruit in keeping with repentance."

61. Rich Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4-8 as Test Case," in The Federal Vision," 272. For an earlier and unpublished edition of this essay, see "Hebrews 6:4-8: New Life and Apostasy."

62. Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy," 272.

63. Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism." Compare Wilkins's discussion in "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 260-66.

64. Barach, "Covenant and History."

65. Steve Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

66. "Summary Statement," S3. This statement is unchanged in the 2005 revision.

67. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 193.

68. Ibid., 34.

69. For a statement similar to Wilson's, see Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs Version 6.4."

70. On this and the following verse, we are indebted to the helpful discussions of Brian Schwertley, "A Defense of Reformed Orthodoxy against the Romanizing Doctrines of the New Auburn Theology."

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," 257.

77. Ibid.

78. Peter J. Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Recasting of Reformed Theology," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 58-71.

79. Ibid., 59, citing Karl Rahner, The Trinity, 16-17. Leithart questions whether this view is truly Augustinian, but does seem to believe that it is a challenge that Western theology must address (59n3).

80. Ibid., 63.

81. Ibid., 63-64.

82. Ibid., 64.

83. Van Til, A Survey of Christian Epistemology, 78-79, cited in Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology," 64.

84. Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology," 65.

85. Ibid., 65.

86. Leithart neglects the fact that traditional formulations distinguish attributes and being, but do not separate them.

87. Ralph Smith, Paradox and Truth, 13 et passim. In this discussion, I have been helped by the work of Richard D. Phillips, "Covenant Confusion."

88. Ibid., 39, citing William J. Hill, The Three Personed God: The Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation, 218. In this excerpt Hill is criticizing the trinitarianism of William Hasker, whose doctrine Smith sees as "quite similar to Plantinga's," Paradox and Truth, 39.

89. Ralph Smith, Paradox and Truth, 40.

90. Ibid., citing Van Til, An Introduction to Systematic Theology, 229.

91. Ralph Smith, Paradox and Truth, 44-51.

92. Ibid., 57.

93. Ibid., 73. This doctrine, Smith observes, has precedent in the writings of Abraham Kuyper (ibid., 74).

94. Ibid., 73.

95. Ibid., 111.

96. Ibid., 75.

97. Ibid., 82, 83.

98. Ibid., 83.

99. Ibid., 84.

100. Ibid., 85. For the discussion of these attributes, see 85-98.

101. Ibid., 98.

102. Ibid., 99, 100.

103. I am not prepared, however, to term this a "tacit tri-theism," as one FV critic has argued.

104. Smith, Paradox and Truth, 111.

105. Smith's unpublished "Trinity and Covenant: The Christian Worldview" (1997) is an important precursor to his 2003 effort.

106. Smith, Eternal Covenant, 12.

107. Ibid., 11.

108. Ibid., 13.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid., 30.

111. On which, see ibid., 35n62.

112. Ibid., 35.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid., 36.

116. Ibid., 37.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid., 40.

120. These passages include John 4:34; 5:36; 14:31; 15:10;17:4, 24 and are discussed at Eternal Covenant, 39-40.

121. Phillips, "Covenant Confusion."

122. Ibid., 41.

123. "The question is not why we should read the passage covenantally, but how we could possibly read it any other way" (ibid., 41-42).

124. Ibid., 42.

125. Ibid.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid., 43.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid.

130. Smith points to the tabernacle/temple for the former and such passages as 1 Cor. 15:20-28, 35-50 for the latter.

131. Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965),263, quoted in Joseph A. Pipa, "A Response to `Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 271.

Chapter 2: Covenant and Biblical History

1. Referring to what follows the dealings of God with Adam in Gen. 2, Wilson comments that "the subsequent redemptive covenant was equally grounded in history" (Douglas Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough [Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002], 64).

2. "Hosea tells us that Adam sinned against God covenantally"; "They were like Adam who had also been covenantally faithless" (Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 64).

3. "The power and ability that Adam had to keep the covenant of works was a gracious gift of God"; "Communion with God was the grace that Adam fell from when he broke the covenant of works" (Douglas Wilson, "Are You Truly Reformed? A True/False Quiz from the Westminster Confession of Faith.")

4. Douglas Wilson, "Beyond the Five Solas," CredendalAgenda 16/2: 15.

5. Douglas Wilson, "A Collection of Short Credos: On Justification," CredendalAgenda 15/5: 22.

6. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 65.

7. Ibid.

8. Wilson warns, for instance, of "troublesome law/gospel distinctions," in

ibid., 166.

9. Ibid., 65.

10. Ibid., 66.

11. Douglas Wilson, "A Short Credo on Law and Gospel."

12. The Larger Catechism affirms that the "general uses" of the law "common" to believers "with all men" are still in force (LC 97). Among these general uses of the law are to "convinc[e] them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives: to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery, and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and of the perfection of his obedience" (LC 95).

13. Ralph Smith, Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003), 11.

14. Ibid. Smith concedes, though, that "most writers acknowledge the goodness of God in the covenant arrangement."

15. Ibid., 12-13.

16. Ibid., 62.

17. Ibid.

18. "Redefining Merit: An Examination of Medieval Presuppositions in Covenant Theology," Creator, Redeemer, Consummator: A Festschrift for Meredith G. Kline, ed. Howard Griffith and John R. Muether (Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press).

19. Smith, Eternal Covenant, 63.

20. Ibid., 64.

21. Ibid., 63.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 65.

24. Ibid., 69.

25. Ibid., 67-68.

26. Robert L. Dabney, Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, 51 ed. (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1927), 303.

27. Smith, Eternal Covenant, 69-70.

28. Ibid., 72.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 73, 74.

31. Ibid., 74.

32. Ibid. Smith's understanding of the Adamic covenant in terms of "maturity" is indebted to James Jordan. See James Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do for Us?" in The Federal Vision, 151-200. Among Smith's many endorsements of Jordan's doctrine, see Eternal Covenant, 80-81.

33. Smith, Eternal Covenant, 74.

34. Ibid., 75.

35. Ibid., 76. Smith cites, as representative examples, Bavinck, A. A. Hodge, and Dabney (77-79).

36. Smith, Eternal Covenant, 80.

37. Ibid., 81.

38. Ibid., 82.

39. Ibid., 83.

40. "There is no `merit' theology in the Bible. There is no `covenant of works.' Good works, `merits,' only have meaning within a given covenant, as part of the process of maturation. They have nothing to do with transitions to new covenants, which are free gifts from the Gifting God. If the term `covenant of works' has any meaning, it applies only to the cultural mandate side of life. It is not good works but maturation in awareness of weakness that fits us for a new covenant. God is the Gift-giver. He has little interest in paying people what they have earned. Adam was not supposed to merit anything, but to prepare himself through faithfulness to receive God's new gift, and patiently to wait for it. That is what Jesus did. That is what we, in union with Him by the Spirit, are called to do" (Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity," 195).

41. Ibid., 194-95.

42. Smith, Eternal Covenant, 83.

43. Rich Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 118-48.

44. Ibid., 118-20.

45. Ibid., 121.

46. Ibid., 122.

47. Quoted in ibid., 121.

48. Ibid., 120. "The Westminster Standards do not teach a strictly meritorious covenant of works in any sense" (ibid., 120n10).

49. Ibid., 122.

50. Ibid., 121.

51. Ibid., 123.

52. Ibid., 123, 124.

53. Ibid., 123.

54. Ibid., 124.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 125.

57. See, for example, Francis Turretin, Institutes of Elenctic Theology, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1992), 1:571-73 (8.2).

58. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 125.

59. Ibid., 126.

60. Ibid., 127. Similar arguments may be found at Rich Lusk, "The Problem with Moses (It's Not What You Think!)."

61. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 128.

62. For an exposition of the Reformed doctrine of evangelical perfection, see Thomas Manton, "What Kind of Perfection Is Attainable in This Life?" in The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D. D., 22 vols. (London: J. Nisbet, 1870-75), 2:56-67.

63. Rich Lusk, "Blurring the `Federal Vision': A Reply to Michael Horton."

64. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 130.

65. Ibid., 130n35.

66. Ibid., 130.

67. Ibid., 131.

68. Ibid., 131-32.

69. Ibid., 132.

70. As evidence that the Westminster Divines understood Moses to contain in

some sense the covenant of works, see the uses of Lev. 18:5 (Rom. 10:5) as prooftext at WCF 7.2, 19.1; LC 20, 92, 93; SC 40; and Lev. 18:5 (Gal. 3:12) as prooftext at WCF 7.2, 19.1; LC 20, 30, 93; SC 12.

71. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 132.

72. Ibid., 132-33.

73. Guy Prentiss Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004), 168-70.

74. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 137.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 137, 138.

77. Ibid., 138n37.

78. Ibid., 139.

79. Ibid., 140. Lusk cites at 140n59 the relevant portions from Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity," that we have cited above.

80. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 140n60, 141.

81. Ibid.

82. "But Jesus teaches us that the relationship between the persons in the [sic] is also covenantal. I'm not speaking here as what is sometimes referred to in theology is [sic] the pactum salutis" (John Barach, "Covenant and History," 2002 AAPCPC sermon).

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid. Barach may not entirely exclude considerations of the covenant as contractual. In the sentence preceding, he says that "we shouldn't think of [the covenant] simply as a contract."

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid. Barach appears palpably more tentative about espousing other elements of Jordan's exegesis of the Adamic covenant.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid. Barach has in mind the arguments of Mark Karlberg, a noted disciple of Meredith G. Kline.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

93. Steve Schlissel, "Covenant Reading," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Steve Schlissel, "What Does the Lord Require?" 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

98. Ibid.

99. Steve Schlissel, "Straight Talk on the `Covenant of Works'"; "Covenant of Life or Covenant of Works?"

100. Steve Schlissel, "A New Way of Seeing?" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 25-36.

101. Schlissel, "Covenant Reading."

102. Schlissel, "What Does the Lord Require?"

103. Joel Garver, "The Covenant of Works in the Reformed Tradition."

104. Ibid. Garver summarizes Turretin's understanding of the term merit in the covenant of works as "broad and improper." Garver's two references to Norman Shepherd in this essay are both negative. It is unclear, however, whether Garver approves or disapproves of Shepherd's wholesale disavowal of merit from covenantal reflection. 105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Concerning the covenant of works, Garver will affirm that "the grace involved is that initial grace shown to innocent creatures in bringing them into existence with their gifts and abilities and a promise of reward"; concerning the covenant of grace, "the grace involved is that superabundant grace upon grace shown to miserable sinners in rescuing them from corruption and death and bringing them to glory" (ibid.). In the context of the current theological climate, one might wish for a clearer statement of the differences in view.

108. Garver lists eight points of agreement and difference at the conclusion of "The Covenant of Works in the Reformed Tradition." He recognizes a difference between the offices of faith and obedience in the two covenants (point 7), and stresses that "the covenant of works was promised to humanity's own faithful obedience in virtue of the sufficient graces given to human nature, while the covenant of grace was promised to Christ and his faithful obedience on behalf of his people and received by them through faith" (point 5) (ibid.).

109. Mark Horne, "Correcting Two Mistakes of the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic: Trying to Deal Honestly with Luke 10.25-37; 18.18-30; and Parallels"; "Did Jesus Preach Gospel or Law to the Rich Young Ruler?"; "Mixing `Law' and Gospel in the Abrahamic Promise: A Response to Michael Horton." Horton, we might add, is sympathetic to Meredith Kline's understanding of the covenants.

110. Mark Horne, "A Brief and Blunt Note about the Grace of God apart from Sin"; "Covenant of Works?"; "The God of Grace."

111. Horne, "The God of Grace"; emphasis mine.

112. Horne, "A Brief and Blunt Note."

113. "If this brief essay were to follow the sort of strategy that Shepherd's critics like to use, I would now claim as absolute fact that they all believe that Jesus was actually a sinner like us. After all, they claim that grace is only for sinners, and Jesus received grace (Luke 2.40) so they all must believe that Jesus was merely a sinner as we are" (ibid.).

114. Ibid.; author's emphasis, changed from bold to italicized characters.

115. Horne, "Correcting Two Mistakes of the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic."

116. Horne, "Mixing `Law' and Gospel."

117. Ibid.

118. Mark Horne, "Law and Gospel in Presbyterianism."

119. Ibid. See also Mark Horne, "The Covenant of Works, the Mosaic Covenant and the Necessity of Obedience for Salvation in the Day of judgment."

120. Home, "Law and Gospel in Presbyterianism."

121. Horne, "Covenant of Works?"

122. Ibid.

123. "Exodus in Romans 5-8" (April 17, 2004), "Salvation from Wrath" (May 2, 2004), "Sin and Death, Death and Sin" (May 15, 2004), "Imputation of Sin, Rom 5:13" (May 23, 2004), "Kline on Covenant of Works" (June 22, 2004), "Ward on Covenant of Works" (June 22, 2004), "More from Ward" (June 23, 2004), "Imputation of Sin" (July 4, 2004), "Another Stab at Rom 5" (July 9, 2004).

124. Leithart, "Imputation of Sin."

125. Ibid.

126. Ibid.

127. Ibid.; emphasis mine.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid.

130. Leithart, "Ward on Covenant of Works."

131. Leithart, "More from Ward."

132. Leithart, "Another Stab at Rom 5."

133. Tim Gallant, "Monocovenantalism? Multiple Covenants, No Adamic Merit."

Chapter 3: Covenant and justification

1. Peter Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Re-casting of Reformed Theology," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 66.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 67.

5. Leithart references Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993) at "Trinitarian Anthropology," 66n27.

6. Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology," 66, 67.

7. Ibid., 67.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 67, 68.

11. Ibid., 70.

12. Ibid., 68.

13. Ibid., 65.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 68-69.

17. For more detailed treatment of the background to the NPP, see Guy Prentiss Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004), chapters 1-3.

18. The name derives from a landmark essay, J. D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 65 (1983): 95-122. Reprinted in Karl Donfried, ed., The Romans Debate, rev. and enl. ed., ed. K. Donfried (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 299-308. Also reprinted in James D. G. Dunn, Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 183-214.

19. E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

20. Representative of Wright's publications on Pauline soteriology is N. T. Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). His most extensive interaction with the text of Paul may be found at N. T. Wright, Romans, in New Interpreter's Bible: ActsFirst Corinthians, vol. 10, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002).

21. For elaboration and documentation of each of these points, see Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul, chapter 7. See also Peter T. O'Brien, "Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?" in Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark Seifrid (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 249-

96; and Robert Smith, "Justification in `the New Perspective on Paul,'" Reformed Theological Review 58 (1999): 16-30; "A Critique of the `New Perspective' on justification," Reformed Theological Review 58 (1999): 98-113.

22. On this point, see O'Brien, "Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?" 292-93.

23. Mark Horne, "Getting Some Perspective on the `New Perspective': What's at Stake (or Not!) for Reformed Pastors regarding the Contemporary Discussion of Paul and `the Works of the Law'?"

24. Mark Horne, "Covenantal Nomism."

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Mark Horne, "A Quickie Evangelical Introduction to the So-called `New Perspective on Paul.' "

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid. Although Paul does not use the term works at 4:10, Horne sees 4:10 as illustrative of "works of the law" in Galatians.

35. Mark Home, "Are Wright's Critics Misreading Him?"; "N. T. Wright on the Atonement: A Brief Statement"; and "Getting Some Perspective on the `New Perspective.'"

36. Horne, "N.T. Wright on the Atonement."

37. Horne, "Are Wright's Critics Misreading Him?" For these men's Internet critiques of Wright, see J. Ligon Duncan, "More Concerns about N. T. Wright and the New Perspective(s)"; Douglas Kelly, "New Approaches of Biblical Theology to Justification"; and Richard D. Phillips, "Honest Questions for the New Perspective." These articles were posted at www.pcanews.com (now www.byfaithonline.com).

38. Horne, "Are Wright's Critics Misreading Him?"

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid. Horne appears to be referring to N. T. Wright, What Saint Paul Really Said, 48.

42. Horne, "Getting Some Perspective on the `New Perspective.'"

43. Ibid.

44. See Rich Lusk, "A Short Note on N. T. Wright and His Reformed Critics"; "The PCA and the NPP: Why a Denomination with Southern Presbyterian Roots Should Carefully Consider the `New Perspective on Paul'"; "Some Random Thoughts on N. T. Wright's Romans Commentary"; "Jonah, Judaizers, and the Gospel"; "The Galatian Heresy: Why We Need to Get It Right"; "Putting the New Perspective into Perspective: Some Thoughts on Second Temple Judaism"; and "Gentile God Fearers and the Jewish Rejection of the Gospel."

45. Lusk, "A Short Note."

46. Lusk, "Putting the New Perspective."

47. Ibid.

48. Lusk, "Some Random Thoughts on N. T. Wright's Romans Commentary."

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Lusk, "A Short Note."

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid. Lusk believes that John Calvin and Richard B. Gaffin have reasoned in the same way as Wright.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Cited in ibid.

63. Lusk, "The Galatian Heresy."

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. Lusk, "Putting the New Perspective."

70. Lusk, "The Galatian Heresy."

71. Lusk, "The PCA and the NPP."

72. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

73. Ibid.

74. Waters, Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul, esp. 158-81.

75. See for instance the studies and conclusions of D. A. Carson, ed., Justification and Variegated Nomism, Vol. 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

76. Douglas Wilson, "A Pauline Take on the New Perspective," Credenda/Agenda 15/5. See also Wilson's appendix ("The New Perspective on Paul") to "Reformed" Is Not Enough (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002), 199-204.

77. Michael Thompson, The New Perspective on Paul (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002).

78. "What Princeton, Harvard, Duke and all the theological schools in Germany really need to hear is the horse laugh of all Christendom. I mentioned earlier that proud flesh bonds to many strange things indeed, and I forgot to mention scholarship and footnotes. To steal a thought from Kierkegaard, many scholars line their britches with journal articles festooned with footnotes in order to keep the Scriptures from spanking their academically-respectable pink little bottoms" (Wilson, "A Pauline Take," 17).

79. Ibid., 18.

80. Ibid., 18, 19.

81. See, for example, Wilson's articles posted under the heading "N. T. Wrights and Wrongs," www.dougwils.com.

82. Wilson, "A Pauline Take," 5.

83. Ibid., 11.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 12.

87. Ibid., 13.

88. Ibid., 15.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid., 17.

91. Steve Schlissel, "What Does the Lord Require?" 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Steve Schlissel, "Justification and the Gentiles," in The Federal Vision, ed. Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, La.: Athanasius Press, 2004), 237-61.

95. Ibid., 242.

96. Ibid., 256-57.

97. Ibid., 243.

98. Ibid., 255.

99. Ibid., 260, 261.

100. Peter Leithart, Blessed Are the Hungry: Meditations on the Lord's Supper (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003), 142-43.

101. Ibid., 143.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., 144.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid., 147-48.

106. Ibid., 149.

107. Ibid., 150.

108. Rich Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 140.

109. Ibid., 142.

110. Ibid., 141.

111. Ibid., 142. Compare the similar comments at Rich Lusk, "Rome Won't Have Me."

112. Lusk, "Rome Won't Have Me."

113. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 142.

114. Ibid.

115. Rich Lusk, "Justification: Ecclesial, Cosmic, and Divine: Rounding Out the Traditional Doctrine of justification."

116. Ibid.

117. Rich Lusk, "Future justification to the Doers of the Law," footnote 1. I am grateful to Christopher A. Hutchinson for this reference.

118. Compare the similar animadversion of Wright at What Saint Paul Really Said, 98.

119. Ralph Smith, Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003), 75.

120. Ibid., 82.

121. Ibid., 83.

122. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 45. Compare the first paragraph of "On Justification," in "A Collection of Short Credos," CredendalAgenda 15/2: 22.

123. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 45, 47.

124. Ibid., 174. In the next sentence Wilson cites, in support of this claim, Peter Leithart, "`Judge Me, 0 God': Biblical Perspectives on justification," in The Federal Vision.

125. Ibid.

126. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 175.

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid., quoting Randy Booth, "Covenantal Antithesis," in The Standard Bearer: A Festschrift for Greg Bahnsen, ed. Steve Schlissel (Nagadoches, Tex.: Covenant Media Foundation, 2002), 52.

129. Contrast the testimony of the Westminster Larger Catechism 71, "imputing his righteousness to them"; LC 72, "received and rested upon Christ and his righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation"; LC 73, "receiveth and ap- plieth Christ and his righteousness."

130. Leithart, "`Judge Me, 0 God': Biblical Perspectives on justification," 203-35.

131. Among them being Douglas Wilson, Rich Lusk, and Mark Horne.

132. Leithart, "`Judge Me, 0 God.'" See especially Leithart's comments at note 10. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this essay have been taken from Leithart's 2004 Internet edition of his essay.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid.

135. Ibid.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

141. Ibid.

142. Leithart, Blessed Are the Hungry, 143-44.

143. Peter Leithart, "Response to Mississippi Valley Report," 18 March 2005.

144. Ibid.; emphasis changed from capital letters (in the original) to italics. In this statement, Leithart points to comments that he makes shortly after the quoted excerpt in question: "Here were Gentiles who believed in Jesus. By Paul's gospel, they were part of God's covenant people, since all who have faith in Jesus are justified and should be treated as covenant-keepers and table fellows. For Paul, what marked the boundaries of table fellowship was the same thing that marked out the justified, and that was and could only be, faith in Jesus" (Blessed Are The Hungry, 144).

145. Leithart, "'Judge Me, 0 God.'"

146. Ibid.

147. Mark Horne, "God's Righteousness and Our justification."

148. Ibid.

149. Mark Horne, "Some Thoughts on Wright, Righteousness, and Covenant

Status."

150. Mark Horne, "Righteousness from God." Horne here comments on Isa. 48:18-19.

151. Ibid.

152. Schlissel, "Justification," 243.

153. Ibid., 258.

154. Ibid., 260.

155. Ibid.

156. Schlissel, "What Does the Lord Require?" R. C. Sproul Jr. hears Schlissel saying in this address, "A part of the ground of our justification, is our own faithfulness and obedience" ("Response to Steve Schlissel," 2003 AAPCPC lecture).

157. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 128; "Future justification."

158. Lusk argues this position in two articles, "The Tenses of Justification," and "Future justification."

159. Lusk, "The Tenses of justification."

160. Ibid.

161. Ibid.

162. See especially theses 20-23 in Norman Shepherd, "Thirty Four Theses on Justification in Relation to Faith, Repentance, and Good Works Presented to the Presbytery of Philadelphia of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" (n.p., November 18, 1978).

163. "This is why judgment according to works is not something that undermines Christian confidence. We can have assurance because we are in

Christ, and the Father will not evaluate us apart from him. Union with Christ and familial love form the lens through which the Father looks upon us and our works. We are appraised as sons and daughters, not as servants or slaves" (Lusk, "Future justification").

164. Ibid. In a note to this excerpt, Lusk says, "granted, in James 2:18-21, he speaks of the evidential value of works-they show or prove the reality of our faith. But when James actually speaks of justification, he has persons in view (e.g. Abraham, Rahab), not their faith."

165. Ibid.

166. Ibid.

167. Lusk, "Rome Won't Have Me."

168. Ibid.

169. Rich Lusk, "Faith, Baptism, and justification."

170. Although he does not relate them in the manner that Lusk does, Peter Leithart has argued for a strong connection between baptism and justification ("Baptism and justification").

171. Lusk, "Faith, Baptism, and justification."

172. Ibid.

173. Michael Horton, "Deja Vu All over Again," Modern Reformation (July/ August 2004); Rich Lusk, "Blurring the Federal Vision: A Reply to Michael Horton."

Chapter 4: Covenant and Election

1. Peter Leithart, The Kingdom and the Power (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1993), 237n2; Mark Horne, "Book Review: The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism, by Norman Shepherd"; Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs Version 6.4."

2. See Barach's several addresses relating covenant and election, listed below. See also Douglas Wilson, "Covenant Kindness," Credenda/Agenda 13/2.

3. What follows is taken from my unpublished manuscript, "The Theology of Norman Shepherd."

4. Norman Shepherd, "The Covenant Context for Evangelism," in The New Testament Student and Theology, vol. 3 of The New Testament Student, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 60-61; emphasis removed.

5. Ibid., 54; emphasis removed.

6. Ibid., 61.

7. Ibid.

8. Shepherd addresses such a charge against the Reformed doctrine of election in his review of James Daane, The Freedom of God (Westminster Theological Journal36 [1974]: 305-33). Similar polemic concerns, specifically a concerted movement within the Christian Reformed Church away from the doctrine of reprobation, animate Shepherd's "Reprobation in Covenant Perspective: The Biblical Doctrine" (n.p., June 1978).

9. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 61.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 61, 62.

13. Norman Shepherd, "The Biblical Doctrine of Reprobation," The Outlook, March 28, 1980, 18.

14. Shepherd, "Reprobation in Covenant Perspective," 8.

15. Shepherd, "Biblical Doctrine of Reprobation," 18.

16. Norman Shepherd, "More on Covenant Evangelism," The Banner of Truth 170 (November 1978): 22.

17. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 62-63 (also, The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism [Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2000], 86-88); "Biblical Doctrine of Reprobation," 18.

18. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 63.

19. Shepherd, "Biblical Doctrine of Reprobation," 18.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 19.

22. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 64-65.

23. Ibid., 64.

24. Shepherd, "Reprobation in Covenant Perspective," 8.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 9.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 13.

29. Ibid., 12.

30. Ibid., 9.

31. Ibid., 13.

32. J. S. Wiskerke, Volk van Gods Keuze, cited in Shepherd, "Reprobation in Covenant Perspective," 16.

33. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 65.

34. For the reasons, see my unpublished "The Theology of Norman Shepherd."

35. Norman Shepherd, "The Resurrections of Revelation 20," Westminster Theological journal 37 (1974): 34-43.

36. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 66.

37. "I now sincerely regret that the antithetical way in which I stated my third thesis ... gave reasonable grounds for the criticism that on the one hand baptism was isolated from faith and conversion, and on the other the sign and the thing signified were confused with each other" (Shepherd, "More on Covenant Evangelism," 25).

38. Ibid.

39. Shepherd, The Call of Grace, 94.

40. Shepherd, "Covenant Context," 72.

41. Ibid., 71-73.

42. Ibid., 73.

43. Ibid., 66-67.

44. Ibid., 74-75.

45. Douglas Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002), 61-121; Douglas Wilson, "The Objectivity of the Covenant," CredendalAgenda 15/1: 4-5; Steve Schlissel and John Barach, "Baptism and Election"; Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs"; John Barach, "Covenant and Election," 2002 AAPCPC lecture, hereafter, "Covenant and Election" (2002); John Barach, "Covenant and Election," 2003 AAPCPC lecture, hereafter, "Covenant and Election" (2003); John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 149-56, hereafter, "Covenant and Election" (2004a); John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in The Federal Vision, ed. Steve

Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, La.: Athanasius Press, 2004), 15-44, hereafter, "Covenant and Election" (2004b)-note that Barach 2004b appears to be a substantial revision of Barach 2003 and 2004a; Mark Horne, "Election: Corporate and Individual"; Horne, "Review: The Call of Grace"; Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 254-69; "Covenant, Baptism and Salvation," in The Federal Vision, 47-69.

46. Waters, "The Theology of Norman Shepherd."

47. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002); cf. "Covenant and Election" (2003).

48. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002).

49. Ibid. Punctuation follows the original transcript.

50. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004a), 150.

51. Horne, "Election: Corporate and Individual."

52. Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs."

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002).

56. Ibid.

57. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2003).

58. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004a), 149n1.

59. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002).

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid. The transcript appeared to be defective and therefore is slightly reconstructed here.

62. In addition to Horne, Barach, and Lusk, see Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC lecture; Joel Garver, "A Brief Catechesis on Covenant and Baptism."

63. Carl D. Robbins has also helpfully tied Barach's view in particular to the doctrine of the Liberated Reformed Churches ("A Response to `Covenant and Election,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 157-58.

64. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004b), 31-32.

65. As both Carl D. Robbins and E. Calvin Beisner rightly query (Robbins, "A Response to `Covenant and Election,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 158-59; Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 310-12).

66. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004b), 34.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

69. John Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004b), 43n10.

70. "When I say to the righteous, he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. But when I say to the wicked, "You will surely die," and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes of life [NASB margin] without committing iniquity, he will surely live; he shall not die. None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he will surely live" (Ezek. 33:13-16, as quoted in Barach, "Covenant and Election" [2004b], 34-35).

71. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004b), 35.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid., 34.

74. R. Fowler White, "Covenant and Apostasy," in the Auburn Avenue Theology, 218.

75. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002).

76. Ibid.

77. Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs."

78. Ibid.

79. Horne, "Election: Corporate and Individual"; emphasis changed from bold (in the original) to italics.

80. Ibid.; emphasis changed from bold (in the original) to italics.

81. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002).

82. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2003).

83. Ibid., 151.

84. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004b), 24-26.

85. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2003).

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004b), 26.

89. Ibid., 27.

90. Ibid., 29.

91. Ibid., 30.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid., 30, 31.

94. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002).

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid. Punctuation original to the transcript.

97. See Douglas Wilson, "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited," 2002 AAPCPC lecture; Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 69-78; Douglas Wilson, "The Visible/Invisible Church Distinction," 2003 AAPCPC lecture; "The Church: Visible or Invisible," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 263-69.

98. Wilson, "Visible and Invisible."

99. Ibid.

100. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 70.

101. Ibid., 74.

102. Ibid., 71. Of the former, Wilson cites the "heavenly Church," as well as "the church in China" (71n1).

103. Wilson, "The Church: Visible or Invisible," 265.

104. Ibid.

105. Wilson, "The Visible/Invisible Distinction."

106. Wilson, "The Church: Visible or Invisible," 267.

107. Wilson, "Visible and Invisible."

108. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 74.

109. Ibid., 70.

110. Wilson, "The Church: Visible or Invisible," 267.

111. Ibid., 268.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. On this point see Morton Smith, "Response to Douglas Wilson's `The Visible/Invisible Church Distinction,'" 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

115. Ibid.

Chapter 5: Covenant and Assurance, Perseverance, and Apostasy

1. For a treatment of seventeenth-century Reformed discussions concerning the nature and role of the Spirit's testimony in the believer's assurance, see Joel Beeke, The Quest for Full Assurance (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001).

2. Steve Schlissel, "Covenant Hearing," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., referencing Beeke, The Quest for Full Assurance, 1.

6. Schlissel, "Covenant Hearing."

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid. Schlissel later speaks of the "invent[ion of] a vocabulary of assurance."

13. Cited in ibid.

14. I have adapted this illustration from E. Calvin Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 310.

15. Cited in Mark Horne, "Whose Legalism? Which Works-Righteousness? The 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's [sic] Conference and the Assurance of Grace."

16. John Barach, "Covenant and Election," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 153.

17. John Barach, "Covenant and Election," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

18. Ibid., as quoted by E. Calvin Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 308-9.

19. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2002), as quoted by Beisner, "Concluding Comments," 311.

20. John Barach, "Baptism and Election" (August 21, 2002), Barach's response to a question posed to Schlissel. Accessed at the Messiah's Congregation (New York City) Web site.

21. Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004a), in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 154.

22. John Barach, "Covenant and History" (2002), as quoted in Beisner, "Concluding Comments," 309.

23. John Barach, "Covenant and Election" (2004b), in The Federal Vision, ed. Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, La.: Athanasius Press, 2004), 38.

24. Barach does not claim originality for his understanding of the divine promise. He cites Cornelis Trimp, "Preaching as the Public Means of Divine Redemption," trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman, Mid-America Journal of Theology

10 (1999): 39-75; and Cornelis Trimp, "The Promise of the Covenant: Some Observations," in Unity and Diversity: Studies Presented to Dr. Jelle Faber on the Occasion of His Retirement, ed. Riemer Faber (Hamilton, Ont.: Senate of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1989), 71-77. Barach cites these works in "Covenant and Election" (2004a), in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 153n9.

25. As rightly Beisner, "Concluding Comments," 310.

26. Ibid., 311.

27. Ibid., 317-19.

28. Steve Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)," 2001 AAPCPC lecture.

29. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

30. Steve Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

35. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant."

36. Ibid.

37. Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism."

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," summary.

41. The Revised Statement reads: "By looking to Christ alone, the preeminently elect One, the One who kept covenant to the end and is the Author and Finisher of the faith of God's people, they may find infallible assurance (WCF 18.1-2). Those who take their eyes off Christ in unbelief, who desert the Church where His presence is found, will find that their false hopes and carnal presumptions have perished (WCF 18.1), having made a shipwreck of their faith and proven themselves to have received the grace of God in vain."

42. "Summary Statement," §10.

43. Douglas Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002), 125.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 126-29.

46. Ibid., 130.

47. Douglas Wilson, "The Curses of the New Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

48. Mark Horne, "Standing on the Promises: Faith and Assurance in the Bible."

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Mark Horne, "Election: Corporate and Individual," 5 10.

52. Horne, "Whose Legalism?"

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 34.

58. Ibid., 152.

59. Ibid., 21.

60. Ibid., 142. Wilson has elsewhere stated this concern more provocatively: "When we first start ta[l]king about the objectivity of the covenant and it starts to sink in what we are saying (sic). You mean that you are saying that lesbian Eskimo bishop's lady is a Christian? Is that what you are trying to tell me? And I am saying, yes, in the New Testament sense, she is a Christian. She is not a Buddhist, she is not a Muslim, yes, in the New Testament sense, she is a New Testament Christian" ("The Curses of the New Covenant").

61. Douglas Wilson, "Heretics and the Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

62. Wilson, "The Curses of the New Covenant."

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 153.

69. Wilson, "The Curses of the New Covenant."

70. Ibid.

71. Each of these is discussed in "The Curses of the New Covenant." There is a fourth passage discussed (Heb. 3:7-12), but the transcript in my possession is incomplete at this point of Wilson's lecture. The incompleteness appears to have been due to the changing of the sides of the tape upon which the lecture was recorded.

72. Wilson, "The Curses of the New Covenant."

73. Wilson, who believes Hebrews to have been authored by Paul, states that the letter "was written in the mid to late sixties" (ibid.).

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 132.

81. Douglas Wilson, "The Objectivity of the Covenant," Credenda/Agenda 15/1:5; "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited," 2002 AAPCPC lecture. I owe these references to Beisner, "Concluding Comments," 313n19.

82. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 133.

83. Ibid., 134.

84. Wilson, "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited."

85. Joel Garver, "A Brief Catechesis on Covenant and Baptism," quoted in Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 139; Wilson's emphasis removed.

86. In this discussion on apostasy, Wilson again quotes Garver approvingly: "Thus the Scriptures sometimes speak of these nonelect in terms that, strictly and properly speaking, characterize a true and full state of salvation. In his eternal purposes in election, however, God does not grant these individuals to partake of the fullness of salvation in Christ-if they were to do so, they would not fall away" ("Scriptural Indications," quoted in "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 140; Wilson's emphasis removed).

87. Wilson refers to Carl Robbins, "The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 162-86.

88. Douglas Wilson, "A Response to `Covenant and Apostasy," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 226.

89. James Jordan is a possible exception. See his "Thoughts on Sovereign Grace and Regeneration: Some Tentative Explorations," Occasional Paper No. 32 (Niceville, Fla.: Biblical Horizons, 2003). This paper is discussed in Robbins, "Reformed Doctrine," 163-64.

90. Beisner, "Concluding Comments," 313.

91. "The Bible ordinarily (though not always) views election through the lens of the covenant. This is why covenant members are addressed consistently as God's elect, even though some of those covenant members may apostatize, proving themselves to be non-elect in the decretal/eternal sense.

"We cannot separate covenant and election, but, to do full justice to the Biblical teaching, we must distinguish them. Following the Biblical model, it seems that we must view fellow church members as elect and regenerate and, at the same time, hold before them the dangers of falling away. This does not contradict the decretal/eternal perspective, because our knowledge of God's decree is only creaturely. We can never, in this life, know with absolute certainty who are elect unto final salvation. For this reason, we have to make judgments and declarations in terms of what has been revealed, namely, the covenant (Dt. 29:29). The covenant is the visible, historical context in which the eternal decree of election comes to eventual fruition" ("Summary Statement," 53).

The Revised Statement reads: "The Bible ordinarily (though not always) views election through the lens of the covenant. This is why covenant members are addressed consistently as God's elect, even though some of those covenant members may apostatize, proving themselves in the end not to have been among the number of those whom God decreed to eternal salvation from before the foundation of the world. Thus, the basis for calling them God's `elect' was their standing as members of the Church (which is the body of Christ) and not some knowledge of God's secret decree. The visible Church is the place where the

saints are `gathered and perfected' by means of `the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God' (WCF 25.3).

"We cannot separate covenant and election, but, to do full justice to the Biblical teaching, we must distinguish them. Following the Biblical model, it seems that we must view fellow church members as elect and regenerate and, at the same time, hold before them the dangers of falling away. This does not contradict the decretal/eternal perspective, because our knowledge of God's decree is only creaturely. We can never, in this life, know with absolute certainty who are elect unto final salvation. For this reason, we have to make judgments and declarations in terms of what has been revealed, namely, the covenant (Dt. 29:29). The covenant is the visible, historical context in which the eternal decree of election comes to eventual fruition."

92. The conventional Reformed language of an inward and vital relationship with Christ and an outwardly federal relationship with Christ is absent in the document's discussions of covenant membership.

93. "Summary Statement," 54. The Revised Statement states: "[This covenant] is publicly manifested in the Church, the body of Christ to which we are solemnly admitted by means of baptism (WCF 28.1)."

94. "Summary Statement," 54. The Revised Statement reads: "When someone is united to the Church by baptism, he is incorporated into Christ and into His body; he becomes bone of Christ's bone and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30). He becomes a member of `the house, family, and kingdom of God' (WCF 25.2). Until and unless that person breaks covenant, he is to be reckoned among God's elect and regenerate saints."

95. "Summary Statement," §7. The Revised Statement states: "By baptism, one enters into covenantal union with Christ and is offered all his benefits (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff; 2 Cor. 1:20). As Westminster Shorter Catechism #94 states, baptism signifies and seals `our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.' Baptism in itself does not, however, guarantee final salvation. What is offered in baptism may not be received because of unbelief. Or, it may only be embraced for a season and later rejected (Matt. 13:20-22; Luke 8:13-14). Those who `believe for a while' enjoy blessings and privileges of the covenant only for a time and only in part, since their temporary

faith is not true to Christ, as evidenced by its eventual failure and lack of fruit (1 Cor. 10:1ff; Hebrews 6:4-6). By their unbelief they `trample underfoot the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of grace' (Heb. 10:29) and thus bring greater condemnation upon themselves."

96. "Summary Statement," summary. The Revised Statement reads: "God, however, mysteriously has chosen to draw some into the covenant community who are not elect unto eternal salvation. These non-elect covenant members are truly brought to Christ, united to Him in the Church by baptism and receive various gracious operations of the Holy Spirit. Corporately, they are part of the chosen, redeemed, Spiritindwelt people. Sooner or later, however, in the wise counsel of God, these fail to bear fruit and fall away. In some sense, they were really joined to the elect people, really sanctified by Christ's blood, really recipients of new life given by the Holy Spirit. God, however, has chosen not to uphold them in the faith, and all is lost. They break the gracious new covenant they entered into at baptism."

97. "Summary Statement," endnote 1. The Revised Statement reads: "We recognize, as the Canons of Dort point out, that the difference between those who are predestined to eternal life and those who `believe for a while' is not merely one of duration. God does work `effectually' in those whom He has predestined to eternal life so that they do not fall away in unbelief. In this sense, we may say that there are things which are true of the `elect' which are never true of the reprobate. But these distinctions normally manifest themselves over time and, thus, are impossible to recognize at the beginnings of one's Christian experience within the visible Church. As they manifest themselves over time, they certainly become a matter for concern and pastoral care, exhortation, and intervention, as we continually call people to faith and repentance. But it is only in the face of final apostasy that we can know with certainty who was and was not `effectually called.'

"In their reading of Heb. 6:4-5, some theologians try to draw subtle distinctions to make highly refined psychological differences between blessings that do not secure eternal salvation and true regeneration, which does. For at least two reasons, it is highly unlikely the writer had such distinctions in mind. First, it is by no means certain that those who have received the blessings listed in 6:4-5 will fall away. The writer merely holds it out as a possibility, a danger of

which they must beware. In fact, he expects these people to persevere (6:9). If, however, the blessings catalogued imply something less than regeneration, and these people might persevere after all, we are put in the awkward position of saying that non-regenerate persons persevered to the end (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1)! Second, the illustration immediately following the warn ing in 6:7-8 indicates these people have received some kind of new life. Otherwise, the plant metaphor makes no sense. The question raised does not concern the nature of the grace received in the past (i.e., real regeneration versus merely common operations of the Spirit), but whether or not the one who has received this grace will persevere.

"Thus, Hebrews 6 does not call upon us to develop two psychologies of conversion and faith, one for the `truly regenerate' and one for the temporary believer destined to apostatize. Nor does it call upon sinners to discern their own deceitful and inconstant hearts, for even the elect would fall away were it not for the continued grace of God (cf. Canons of Dort, 5th Head, Articles 3 and 8; cf WCF 17.2). Rather, Hebrews calls upon us to turn from ourselves and to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1ff). Such a faith perseveres and bears fruit in keeping with repentance."

98. "Summary Statement," 510. This sentence is unchanged in the Revised Statement.

99. "Summary Statement," 510, summary, cf. 55. For changes in the 2005 Revised Statement, see our note below.

100. Ibid.

101. "Summary Statement," 59. This sentence is unchanged in the Revised Statement.

102. "Summary Statement," §7. For changes in the 2005 Revised Statement, see our note below.

103. I am indebted to E. Calvin Beisner for this argument.

104. We may say a few words parenthetically of the 2005 Revised Statement with respect to the preceding criticisms. The 2005 Statement has revised the phrase "given all the blessings and benefits of His work" to read "is offered all

his benefits." This is a welcome revision. It is not clear, however, that this revision effectively alters the theology of the 2002 Statement. It permits the possibility, allowable in the 2002 Statement, and suggested in the 2005 Statement ("What is offered in baptism may not be received because of unbelief," §7), that one's unbelief may effectively refuse the grace that is inexorably conveyed through the sacrament of baptism to each recipient of that sacrament. When we turn in chapter 7 to our consideration of Wilkins's doctrine of baptismal efficacy, we will find warrant for the possibility of this reading of both statements.

Further, the 2002 phrase "gift of perseverance" was struck from § 10 of the 2005 Statement. A form of it, however, has been retained at §5. The adjusted phrase at S10 ("he did not persevere in that grace"), moreover, does not appear materially to alter the theology of the 2002 Statement at the point in question.

105. Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs Version 6.4"; "Hebrews 6:4-8: New Life and Apostasy"; "New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4-8 as Test Case," in The Federal Vision, ed. Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, La.: Athanasius Press, 2004, 271-99.

106. Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs."

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid.

109. Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy," 275.

110. Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs."

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid.

120. Ibid.

121. Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy," 271.

122. Ibid., 272, citing John Owen, Nature and Causes of Apostasy from the Gospel in Works of John Owen (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 7:24.

123. Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy," 272.

124. Ibid., 272-73, 272.

125. Ibid., 273.

126. Ibid., 274, 275.

127. Ibid., 276.

128. Wayne Grudem, "Perseverance of the Saints: A Case Study from the Warning Passages in Hebrews," in Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995, 2000), 154-57. For Owen's exposition of these verses, see John Owen, The Works of John Owen, 23 vols. (Edinburgh, 1855; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 21:91-143.

129. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism and Salvation," in The Federal Vision, 60-61.

130. Ibid., 60, 59. Compare the similar list in Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 262-63.

131. Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism and Salvation," in The Federal Vision, 62.

132. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

133. Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism and Salvation," 61.

134. Steve Wilkins, "The Covenant and Apostasy (I)," 2001 AAPCPC lecture.

135. Ibid.

136. Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism and Salvation," 63.

137. Ibid.; Wilkins, "The Covenant and Apostasy (I)."

138. Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism and Salvation," 63.

139. Ibid., 64.

140. I say "dimly" because the FV doctrine of assurance described above would not be representative of all or even most historic Continental Reformed theology.

Chapter 6: Covenant and the Sacraments: Leithart's Views

1. Baptism and the Lord's Supper play a central and defining role in Leithart's ecclesiology and soteriology in his The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1993).

2. Peter Leithart, Against Christianity (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003), 71.

3. Ibid., 75.

4. Ibid., 80.

S. Ibid., 75-76.

6. Peter Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Re-casting of Reformed Theology," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 65.

7. Ibid., 68.

8. Ibid., 69.

9. Ibid., 70.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid. See also Peter Leithart, "Modernity and the `Merely Social': Toward a Socio-Theological Account of Baptismal Regeneration," Pro Ecclesia 9/3 (2000).

12. Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology," 70-71.

13. Leithart, "Modernity and the `Merely Social,'" quoted in "Trinitarian Anthropology," 71.

14. Peter Leithart, "Why Sacraments?" Studies in Worship 44 (March 1995).

15. Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology," 71.

16. Peter Leithart, "'Framing' Sacramental Theology: Trinity and Symbol," Westminster Theological journal 62 (2000): 1-16.

17. Ibid., 3.

18. Ibid., 16.

19. Ibid., 3.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 4.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 4-5.

24. Ibid., 4n12.

25. Ibid., 5n12.

26. Ibid., 6.

27. Ibid., 7-10.

28. Ibid., 11-12. Leithart specifically dissents from Zizioulas's doctrine of redemption as freedom from creaturehood, and his Trinitarian subordinationism.

29. Ibid., 15.

30. Ibid., 16.

31. Ibid.

32. Peter Leithart, "What's Wrong with Transubstantiation? An Evaluation of Theological Models," Westminster Theological journal 53 (1991): 295-324.

33. Ibid., 296-314.

34. Ibid., 322.

35. Ibid., 315.

36. Ibid., 321.

37. Ibid., 323.

38. Ibid., 324.

39. Ibid.

40. Peter Leithart, "A Theology of Ritual: Mapping the Territory," Rite Reasons Newsletter 32 (n.d., but presumably early 1994).

41. Peter Leithart, "Cult and Communication," Rite Reasons Newsletter 30 (December 1993).

42. Leithart, "A Theology of Ritual."

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid. Leithart would subsequently develop this point in his book-length study, The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

46. Peter Leithart, "Sacramental Efficacy," Studies in Worship 43 (January 1995).

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Peter Leithart, "The Way Things Really Ought to Be: Eucharist, Eschatology, and Culture," Westminster Theological journal 59 (1997): 159.

51. Ibid., 163.

52. Ibid., 161, 160, 162.

53. Ibid., 176.

54. Ibid., 164.

55. Ibid., 165, 166.

56. Ibid., 166.

57. Ibid., 171.

58. Ibid., 173, 174.

59. Peter Leithart, "Conjugating the Rites: Old and New in Augustine's Theory of Signs," Calvin Theological journal 34 (1999): 136.

60. Ibid., 140.

61. Ibid., 146.

62. Ibid., 145.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., 145, 146.

65. Ibid., 147.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Peter Leithart, "Starting Before the Beginning," Credenda/Agenda 14/6.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Peter Leithart, "Why Sacraments Are Not Means of Grace," Credenda/Agenda 15/1.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Leithart, Against Christianity, 77.

79. Peter Leithart, "Why Sacraments Are Not Signs," Credenda/Agenda 15/2.

80. Peter Leithart, "More on Signs and Symbols," Credenda/Agenda 15/3.

81. Peter Leithart, "Visible Words," Credenda/Agenda 15/4.

82. Ibid.

83. Leithart, Against Christianity, 85.

84. Leithart, "Why Sacraments?"

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. On this point, see John H. Gerstner's discussion of Jonathan Edwards's doctrine of regeneration, The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards, 3 vols. (Powhatan, Va.: Berea; Orlando, Fla.: Ligonier, 1993), 3:137-90, esp. 152-53, 161.

89. B. B. Warfield, "A Review of Lewis Sperry Chafer, He That Is Spiritual," Princeton Theological Review 17 (1919): 322.

90. Peter Leithart, "Infant Baptism," August 6, 2004.

91. One can find Leithart's elaboration of this statement in Priesthood of the Plebs.

92. Leithart, "Infant Baptism."

93. Ibid.

94. Peter Leithart, "Baptism and the Spirit," Biblical Horizons 85 (May, 1996).

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid. Leithart cites Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 275.

99. "As in the Old Covenant, then, the endowment with the Spirit at baptism does not guarantee His permanent presence" (Leithart, "Baptism and the Spirit").

100. Leithart, Against Christianity, 85. Compare the similar and earlier comments in Leithart's 1995 "Sacramental Efficacy."

101. Leithart, Against Christianity, 85-86.

102. Ibid., 91.

103. Ibid., 91-92.

104. Peter Leithart, "Baptism and the Church."

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Peter Leithart, "Baptism Now Saves You," CredendalAgenda 16/2: 23.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.

112. "Baptism to priesthood," in the context of Leithart's dissertation, from which this paragraph is drawn, applies to the baptism of all believers.

113. Leithart, The Priesthood of the Plebs, 173.

114. Ibid., 183.

115. Leithart, "Baptism and the Church."

116. Ibid.; emphasis mine.

117. I am particularly indebted to E. Calvin Beisner's reflections on the following two passages.

118. As J. A. Alexander, A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (1857; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1963), 1:85.

119. See here Melanchton W. Jacobus, Notes, Critical and Explanatory, On The Acts of the Apostles (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1867), 349.

120. J. A. Alexander, Acts, 2:302.

121. Ibid.

122. John Lillie, Lectures on the First and Second Epistles of Peter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1869), 254-55.

123. Ibid., 255-56.

Chapter 7: Covenant and the Sacraments, Others' Views

1. Douglas Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 233-44; "Reformed" Is Not Enough (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002), 85-97.

2. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 85.

3. Ibid., 86.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 88.

6. Warfield, quoted in ibid., 85-86.

7. Warfield, quoted in ibid.

8. Warfield, quoted in ibid.; emphasis removed.

9. Douglas Wilson, "Credos: On Baptism," 56, Credenda/Agenda 15/5: 24.

10. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 87.

11. Ibid. Compare the same argument in Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy," 239.

12. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 88.

13. Ibid., 97. Wilson qualifies this statement. He states that "sacraments [should be] thought of as covenant actions between persons, rather than as static, ontological realities contained within the font or resting on the Table" (ibid.). It is not evident that this statement necessarily precludes a specifically redemptive sacramental sealing.

14. Ibid., 89.

15. Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy," 236-37.

16. Ibid., 243.

17. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 90.

18. Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy," 236. Wilson understands these "worthy receivers" to be "the elect" (ibid.).

19. Ibid., 240.

20. Ibid.

21. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 91.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., 95.

24. Ibid., 92.

25. Ibid., 95.

26. Ibid., 95-96.

27. Ibid., 96. The Leithart quote is from "Modernity and the `Merely Social,'" Pro Ecclesia 9/3: 323.

28. Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy," 238, 239.

29. Ibid., 238.

30. Ibid., 241.

31. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 96-97.

32. Ibid., 97.

33. Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy," 236-37.

34. Ibid., 243.

35. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 99.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 106.

39. Ibid., 100.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 101.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., 102.

46. Ibid.

47. "In the sacrament we have a covenantal union between the sign and the thing signified.... In [the modern evangelical] position, the sign is a mere memorial of that to which it points, and thus there can be no sacramental union between the two" (Douglas Wilson, Mother Kirk: Essays and Forays in Practical Ecclesiology [Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2001], 93).

48. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 102, 103.

49. Ibid., 103.

50. Ibid., 104.

51. Ibid., 105.

52. Ibid.

53. Wilson, Mother Kirk, 95.

54. Ibid., 95-96.

55. Ibid., 97.

56. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 107, citing Peter Leithart, "Womb of the World: Baptism and Priesthood of the New Testament in Hebrews 10:19-22," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 78 (2000).

57. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 107.

58. Wilson, "Credos: On Baptism," §8.

59. Ibid., S6.

60. Rich Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace: A Few Proposals."

61. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.; emphasis removed. Lusk draws this distinction from Walter E. Krebs, "The Word and the Sacraments," Mercersburg Review (July 1867), 366-83.

67. Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace."

68. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid. Elsewhere in the essay Lusk says that "Word, baptism, and Supper all interpenetrate and indwell one another, analogous to the interpersonal relations within the Trinity."

75. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid. Lusk cites T. F. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers as his authority.

80. Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace." 81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.; "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition: Past, Present, and Future"; "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies," in The Federal Vision, 71-125; "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

85. Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace"; emphasis removed.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid. Consult Lusk's examples of what he terms an "entire network of typological precursors to baptism" ("Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 106-7).

90. Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace."

91. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

92. Ibid.

93. Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace."

94. Ibid.

95. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 102.

100. Ibid.

101. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

102. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 97.

103. Ibid., 98.

104. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid., 99.

107. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

108. Ibid.

109. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 100.

110. Ibid., 99.

111. Ibid., 100. Lusk references Kuyper's doctrine of Schijndoop as an example of this tendency to divorce sign and thing signified. He will also cite Kuyper's doctrine of presumptive regeneration (that children of the covenant are presumed to be regenerate) as one that falls short of the "comfort" required for parents grieving the loss of an infant, or the "duties" required of parents for covenantal nurture. "Only if we can have confidence that all the baptized have received the favor of God can we have the assurance and gratitude we need to do what we've been called to do" (ibid., 102).

112. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

113. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 103.

114. Ibid., 103-4.

115. Ibid., 104.

116. Ibid., 105.

117. Ibid., 108-9; emphasis removed.

118. Ibid., 111.

119. Ibid., 112.

120. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

121. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

122. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

123. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

124. Ibid.

125. Ibid.

126. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid. Lusk cites and references at this point The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2000).

129. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

130. Ibid.

131. Ibid.

132. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?" appendix 3.

133. Ibid.

134. Ibid.

135. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 118n28, citing Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 7-8.

136. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 118n28.

137. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

138. Ibid.

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid. Lusk cites David F. Wright, "Baptism at the Westminster Assembly," in Calvin Studies 80; the emphasis in Wright's quote is Lusk's.

141. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition."

142. Ibid.

143. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 103.

144. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

145. Ibid.

146. Ibid.

147. Ibid.

148. Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition"; "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

149. Rich Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

150. Ibid.

151. Ibid.

152. Ibid.

153. Ibid.

154. Ibid.

155. Ibid.

156. On which, see A. W. Pink, Spiritual Union and Communion (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971).

157. Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," 108-9.

158. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

159. Steve Wilkins, "Baptism and Our Children."

160. Steve Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Halfway Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

161. Wilkins, "Baptism and Our Children."

162. Ibid.

163. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Halfway Covenant."

164. Ibid.; emphasis mine.

165. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

166. Steve Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)"; cf. "Baptism and Our Children."

167. Wilkins, "Baptism and Our Children." Wilkins quotes Richard Flinn, "Baptism, Redemptive History, and Eschatology: The Parameters of Debate," in Christianity and Civilization I: Symposium on the Failure of American Baptist Culture, ed. James B. Jordan (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Divinity School, 1982), 121.

168. Wilkins, "Baptism and Our Children."

169. Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)."

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid.

172. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Halfway Covenant."

173. Ibid.

174. Ibid.

175. Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism."

176. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Halfway Covenant."

177. Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism."

178. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Halfway Covenant."

179. Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism."

180. Ibid.

181. Ibid.

182. Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)."

183. Ibid.

184. Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism."

185. Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)."

186. Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism."

187. Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)."

188. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Halfway Covenant."

189. Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)."

190. Ibid.

191. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Halfway Covenant."

192. Summary Statement, 57. The Revised Statement reads: "By baptism, one enters into covenantal union with Christ and is offered all his benefits (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff; 2 Cor. 1:20). As Westminster Shorter Catechism #94 states, baptism signifies and seals `our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.' Baptism in itself does not, however, guarantee final salvation. What is offered in baptism may not be received because of unbelief. Or, it may only be embraced for a season and later rejected (Matt. 13:20-22; Luke 8:13-14). Those who `believe for a while' enjoy blessings and privileges of the covenant only for a time and only in part, since their temporary faith is not true to Christ, as evidenced by its eventual failure and lack of fruit (1 Cor. 10:1ff; Hebrews 6:4-6). By their unbelief they `trample underfoot the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of grace' (Heb. 10:29) and thus bring greater condemnation upon themselves."

193. See the footnote to my discussion of the AAPC Statements in chapter 5 for comments on the change to the phrases "given all the blessings and benefits of [Christ's] work" and "gift of perseverance" in the 2005 Revised Statement.

194. Summary Statement, S10. The Revised Statement at this point continues to speak of "initial covenantal grace" but revises "gift of perseverance" to read "but he did not persevere in that grace."

195. Summary Statement, 512. The Revised Statement reads: "It is probably unwise and pastorally inept, especially for tender consciences, to speak of this in terms of `losing one's salvation,' but it seems contrary to Scripture to say that nothing at all is lost. To draw such a conclusion appears to deny the reality of the covenant and the blessedness that is said to belong even to those who ultimately prove themselves reprobate (Heb. 10:26ff)."

196. S. Joel Garver, "Sacraments and the Solas."

197. Ibid.

198. Ibid.

199. Ibid.

200. S. Joel Garver, "A Brief Catechesis on Covenant and Baptism." For an elaboration of Garver's views of Jesus' baptism, see his "Baptism in Matthew and Mark." The revised edition of "A Brief Catechesis" reads: "We are solemnly admitted to the covenant through baptism, a sign and seal of faith."

201. Garver, "A Brief Catechesis."

202. Garver, "Baptism in Matthew and Mark."

203. Garver, "A Brief Catechesis." The revised edition of "A Brief Catechesis" reads: "Therefore, by baptism, everything that belongs to Christ and to his Church in him, is held out and offered to us-we are recipients of God's promises in Christ, having God's own faithfulness proclaimed to us personally and individually, being incorporated into the very faithfulness of Christ and into the faith of his Church."

204. Garver, "Baptism in Matthew and Mark."

205. Garver, "A Brief Catechesis"; "Baptism in Matthew and Mark." The revised edition of "A Brief Catechesis" reads: "What does entering into this covenant accomplish for us? Ultimately, salvation as part of the new-creation people of God. If by faith we live in God's promises already offered to us in baptism, then we will truly be those who enter into union with Christ, within his Church, and are thereby called, adopted, vindicated, and set apart as holy, unto salvation. The life of God's people together in Christ with God as their Father and filled with the Spirit isn't simply the means of salvation or a benefit of salvation, but is the very goal of salvation. In the Church, constituted by baptism, salvation has already begun, though only by anticipation."

206. Garver, "A Brief Catechesis." The revised edition of this latter sentence reads: "As for election, baptism is related to election, first of all, in that baptism is the sovereign manifestation of God's eternal will for that person to be part of his visible chosen people. Secondly, for all who receive baptism, looking to Christ in faith as he is offered in the sacrament, baptism then also serves as one part of the assurance of our election in Christ, into whom we are baptized."

207. Ibid. The revised edition of "A Brief Catechesis" reads: "If someone enters the visible body of Christ by baptism-united in some manner to the Head as a member of the Body-then, that person is, in that sense, `elect in Christ.' If that person apostatizes and no longer abides in Christ (like the branches in John 15), he is no longer elect in Christ, but is reprobate, should he never repent and return. Whatever time we abide in Christ is a manifestation of God's sovereign love for us, his offers of grace, and his faithfulness to us."

208. Ibid. The revised edition of the first two sentences reads: "Moreover, we do not baptize because the one to be baptized is necessarily already regenerate. Rather we baptize in order that the one who is baptized be made regenerate or might grow in his regeneration." For the revision of the next sentence, see the following note.

209. For the various senses in which Garver believes the term regeneration may be used, see his essay, "On Regeneration, Baptism and the Reformed Tradition." In a revision of "A Brief Catechesis," Garver elaborates what he means by "the Spirit regenerates through baptism": "First, baptism sacramentally turns us away from the old Adam and inserts us into the covenant, identifying us with Christ-the One born from above, raised from death, renewed in the Spirit, in whom is new creation-and identifying us with his covenant people-the new-creation people, born from above on Pentecost. Thus all that is meant by `regeneration' is offered and sealed to us in baptism so that, sacramentally and conditionally, we can be said to be `regenerate.' Second, for those who receive Christ in faith as he is offered to us in baptism, the sacrament is a means by which the Spirit communicates and augments regenerating grace in order that we might more and more die unto sin and live in newness of life, and so, by faith, coming to embody our identity in Christ as dead to sin, renewed in the Spirit, and living among the new-creation people of God."

210. Garver, "A Brief Catechesis."

211. Ibid. The revised edition of "A Brief Catechesis" reads, "... an obligation to call upon them to improve their baptisms, to live out the grace already offered and promised to them in Christ."

212. S. Joel Garver, "Baptismal Regeneration and the Westminster Confession 28.6." Garver has prepared a revision of this essay containing substantial

additions. The following assertion, however, remains unchanged: "The Confession, therefore, makes no explicit statement regarding how the grace of `regeneration' in particular is or is not related to the moment of administration, what precisely the grace of 'regeneration' consists in, and which recipients of baptism do or do not enjoy that grace. Thus someone holding to the Confession as his or her doctrinal standard is certainly free to hold to baptismal regeneration in some form or another."

213. Ibid. The revision reads, "The grace of baptism, in some sense, belongs to those individuals, at least in terms of its offer and sealing unto them."

214. Ibid.

215. Ibid. The revision reads, "As far as the teaching of the WCF is concerned, it may well be, for instance, that elect covenant infants who receive baptism (as those to whom `that grace belongeth unto') enjoy the grace of regeneration at the time of administration (as God's `appointed time'), at least in its seed and root and even if that grace must later come to fruition in effectual calling through the word, the exercise of actual faith, and then lived out and improved."

216. Ibid. The revision reads, "All who are baptized [are] to be [considered] regenerate (apart from clear evidence to the contrary), that ordinarily those who are baptized are regenerate, but that sometimes such judgments are mistaken (and so open to doubt) and, in those cases, the baptized remain unregenerate."

217. Ibid. The revision reads, "... should primarily be understood as an affirmation of the relevancy and effectiveness of baptism to the whole Christian life and not just its inception, which also entails that the regenerating grace offered in baptism may, in some cases, await a later time until it becomes savingly effectual. It cannot be construed as a denial or ruling out of baptismal regeneration as that has been outlined above, in keeping with the Reformed tradition."

218. Mark Horne, "Baptism, Evangelism, and the Quest for a Converting Ordinance."

219. Ibid.

220. Ibid.

221. Ibid.

222. Mark Horne, "The Westminster Standards and Sacramental Efficacy." In his 2005 revision of this essay, Home replaces "I keep reading Reformed theologians who present ..." with "I keep reading explanations of doctrine [sic] of sacraments ..."

223. Mark Horne, "Baptism, Symbols, and Faith."

224. Horne, "The Westminster Standards."

225. Ibid.

226. Ibid.

227. Ibid. Horne's 2005 revision reads, "... nothing for believers to receive in partaking of them."

228. Mark Horne, "Can Baptism Do Anything?"

229. Ibid.

230. Ibid.

231. Horne, "Baptism, Evangelism." In this excerpt, Horne is quoting from his own untitled review of Preston Graham, A Baptism That Saves.

232. Mark Horne, "Trying to Be Objective: A Short Test for Those Concerned about an Alleged `Baptismal Regeneration' Teaching."

233. Ibid.

234. Ibid.

235. Mark Horne, "Samuel Miller, Baptism, and Covenant Theology." Horne does not cite a printed edition, but he appears to be quoting from Samuel Miller, Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable: and Baptism by Sprinkling or Affusion the Most Suitable and Edifying Mode: In Four Discourses. I will be

quoting from the 1835 Philadelphia edition.

236. Samuel Miller, as quoted in Horne, "Samuel Miller." The excerpt has been drawn from Miller, Infant Baptism, 132.

237. Miller, Infant Baptism, 133.

238. Ibid., 134. Miller cites the following examples: "Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits, and with one accord make our prayers unto him, that this child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning"; "We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant by thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy church, &c." (ibid., 133, 134).

239. Horne, "Samuel Miller," quoting ibid., 133.

240. Horne, "Samuel Miller."

241. Ibid.

242. Ibid.

243. Ibid.

244. Miller, Infant Baptism, 133.

245. Ibid.

246. Ibid., as quoted in Horne, "Samuel Miller."

247. Horne, "Samuel Miller."

248. Miller, Infant Baptism, quoted in ibid.

249. Horne, "Samuel Miller."

250. Ibid.

251. Miller, Infant Baptism, 136.

252. Ibid., 126.

Chapter 8: Sources of the Federal Vision

1. One critic who has raised concerns regarding FV uses of language is Joseph A. Pipa, "Response to Steve Wilkins' `Covenant and Baptism,' " 2003 AAPCPC lecture. For this concern and the following concern (misuse of logic), see E. Calvin Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 307, 319.

2. Rich Lusk," A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation"' in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 130.

3. Ibid., 130n35.

4. Peter Leithart, "Trinitarian Anthropology," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 68.

5. Ibid., 65.

6. Douglas Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002), 45, 47.

7. Peter Leithart, "'Judge Me, 0 God': Biblical Perspectives on justification," in The Federal Vision, ed. Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, La.: Athanasius Press, 2004), 230.

8. Rich Lusk, "Future justification to the Doers of the Law."

9. Rich Lusk, "Faith, Baptism, and justification."

10. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 71n1, 74.

11. Rich Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

12. Rich Lusk, "Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition." This sense may overlap with or be identical to the former sense.

13. I owe this observation to my colleague, W. Wynn Kenyon.

14. Leithart, "'Judge Me, 0 God,'" 230, 231.

15. Ibid., 231.

16. Ibid., 209.

17. Ibid., 233n11.

18. E. Calvin Beisner, "Concluding Comments on the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 318.

19. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?" appendix 1. Lusk has in mind the criticism of Beisner, "Concluding Comments," 306-7.

20. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?"

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Samuel Miller, Infant Baptism Scriptural and Reasonable: and Baptism by Sprinkling or Affusion the Most Suitable and Edifying Mode: In Four Discourses (Philadelphia: Joseph Whetham, 1835), 133.

26. Lusk, "Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?" appendix 1.

27. Douglas Wilson, "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

28. Ibid.

29. Steve Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant."

30. Rich Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4-8 as Test Case," in The Federal Vision, 277-90.

31. Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy," 277.

32. Ibid., 278.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 279.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 280.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 293n16.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., 294n17.

41. Douglas Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 65.

42. Ibid.

43. Lusk, "A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" 127.

44. Steve Schlissel, "Covenant Reading," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

45. Steve Schlissel, "Justification and the Gentiles," in The Federal Vision, 260, 261.

46. Rich Lusk, "The Galatian Heresy: Why We Need to Get It Right."

47. Douglas Wilson, "Credos: On Faith and Fidelity," Credenda/Agenda 15/5:23.

48. Douglas Wilson, "Beyond the Five Solas," Credenda/Agenda 16/2: 15.

49. Rich Lusk, "The Tenses of justification."

50. Steve Schlissel, "Covenant Hearing," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

51. John Barach, cited in Mark Horne, "Whose Legalism? Which SelfRighteousness? The 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's [sic] Conference and Assurance of Grace."

52. Mark Horne, "Standing on the Promises: Faith and Assurance in the Bible."

53. Steve Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)," 2001 AAPCPC lecture.

54. Steve Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

55. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 132.

56. Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy," 277.

57. Rich Lusk, "Covenant and Election FAQs Version 6.4"; emphasis removed.

58. Steve Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

59. Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 106-7.

60. Rich Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy," in The Federal Vision, 112.

61. Wilkins, "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant."

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Wilkins, "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)."

65. Ibid. The statements of Dabney referenced by Wilkins may be found at Robert L. Dabney, Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology Taught in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, 5th ed. (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1927), 794.

66. Having said this, we may recognize Wilkins's embrace of paedocommunion and that doctrine's consequent practical denial of the distinction between communicant and noncommunicant members of the church. It is not, therefore, simply that Wilkins has misunderstood an aspect of the Southern Presbyterian tradition. He has a significant and principled disagreement with it as well.

67. John Barach, "Covenant and Election," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

68. Greg Bahnsen, quoted in Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 160; emphasis Wilson's. Wilson in turn has drawn this quotation from Randy Booth, "Covenantal Antithesis," in The Standard Bearer: A Festschrift for Greg Bahnsen, ed. Steve Schlissel (Nagadoches, Tex.: Covenant Media Press, 2002), 52.

69. Greg Bahnsen, quoted in Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough, 160. Wilson in turn has drawn this quotation from Booth, "Covenantal Antithesis," 53.

70. One may also consider the massive literature generated on this subject by James Jordan, another FV proponent.

71. Peter Leithart, "Liturgy and the Counter-Cultural Church," Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship 21 (June 1992).

72. Ibid. For Leithart's other reasons, see ibid.

73. Peter Leithart, "Cult and Communication," Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship 30 (December 1993).

74. Peter Leithart, "A Theology of Ritual: Mapping Out the Territory," Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship 32 (February 1994[?]).

75. Ibid.

76. Peter Leithart, "Old and New in Sacramental Theology," August 5, 2004.

77. Peter Leithart, "Synagogue or Temple?" CredendalAgenda 13/1.

78. Ibid.

79. Peter Leithart, "Why Sacraments?" Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship 44 (March 1995).

80. Peter Leithart, Against Christianity (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003), 93-94.

81. Peter Leithart, "A Response to `1 Corinthians 11:17-34: The Lord's Supper"' in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 298.

82. Compare also Douglas Wilson, "Union With Christ: An Overview of the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 3-4.

83. Peter Leithart, "A Response to `1 Corinthians 11:17-34,"' 299.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 301.

87. Jonathan Edwards, An Humble Inquiry into ... Qualifications for Communion in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, ed. E. Hickman, 2 vols. (London, 1834) 1:464-66.

88. Steve Wilkins, "The Lord's Supper and Our Children (I)"; emphasis removed.

89. Ibid.; emphasis removed.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Steve Wilkins, "The Lord's Supper and Our Children (II)." Wilkins cites Deut. 16:11, 14; 12:4-7, 11-14; 14:22-26; 15:19-20; Lev 22:12-13.

93. Ibid.

94. Steve Wilkins, "The Lord's Supper and Our Children (III)."

95. Mark Horne, "You and Your Son and Daughter: Christ's Communion with Young Children."

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid. Horne cites Gen. 17:7; Ps. 103:17; Isa. 59:21 in support of this point.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. "If one sinned, one did not automatically become a `law breaker,' except in a highly technical sense. After all, the Torah made provision for sin in the sacrificial system. Law keeping included rituals for law breaking. If one repented by performing the proper offering, one maintained his status as a covenant keeper. Only apostasy itself constituted covenant breaking. All other sins could be dealt with within the confines of the covenant relationship" (Lusk, "Future justification to the Doers of the Law").

101. Rich Lusk, "Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace: A Few Proposals."

102. Douglas Wilson, "Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 239, 238.

103. See here Richard D. Phillips's comments on Wilson's doctrine, "A Response to `Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 252.

104. Wilkins, "The Lord's Supper and Our Children (III)."

105. Horne, "You and Your Son and Daughter." Horne's phrase precedes his critical reflections upon traditional readings of 1 Cor. 11:27-31.

106. Ibid.

107. "Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," note 1.

108. Speaking about Heb. 3-4, Horne states, "Furthermore, while I certainly think the author of Hebrews believed in a qualitative difference between the faith of those whose faith was predestined to endure and the faith of those who were going to fall away, he doesn't seem to think it is worth mentioning" ("Why Baptize Babies?").

109. James Jordan, "Thoughts on Sovereign Grace and Regeneration: Some Tentative Explorations," Occasional Paper No. 32 (Niceville, Fla.: Biblical Horizons, 2003), 1, as summarized by Carl D. Robbins, "The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 164.

110. Jordan, "Thoughts on Sovereign Grace and Regeneration," 7, as quoted by Robbins, "The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration," 164.

111. Ibid.

112. Compare the observation of Morton Smith, "Response to Douglas Wilson's `The Visible/Invisible Church Distinction,'" 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

113. P. Andrew Sandlin, "Toward a Catholic Calvinism" (July 17, 2002).

114. Ibid.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Douglas Wilson, Angels in the Architecture (Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 1998), 213.

120. Ibid., 203, 204.

121. Leithart, Against Christianity, 124.

122. Ibid., 137.

123. Christopher A. Hutchinson, "A Response to `A New Way of Seeing,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology.

124. B. B. Warfield, "A Review of Lewis Sperry Chafer, He That Is Spiritual," Princeton Theological Review 17 (1919): 322.

Select and Annotated

Bibliography

The following is a bibliographical introduction to the most important writings of FV proponents and their critics. First, are useful introductions to or overviews of the discussions and issues in dispute. Second, are representative writings of recognized FV proponents. Essays drafted by more prolific authors have been grouped topically under each author's name. Third, are some writings that have been critical of FV positions and writings. I will not give separate notice to many of the fine criticisms that surfaced in the 2003 AAPCPC Lectures and the Knox Colloquium.

Overviews

Beisner, E. Calvin, ed. The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision: The Knox Theological Seminary Colloquium on the Federal Vision. Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004.

This volume is a collection of papers delivered at the Knox Colloquium on the Federal Vision in August 2003. Participants in this colloquium were either recognized FV proponents or individuals critical of the FV. Participants included John Barach, E. Calvin Beisner, Christopher A. Hutchinson, George W. Knight III, Peter J. Leithart, Rich Lusk, Richard D. Phillips, Joseph A. Pipa Jr., Carl Robbins, Steve M. Schlissel, Morton H. Smith, Tom Trouwborst, R. Fowler White, Steve Wilkins, and Douglas Wilson. The papers in this book give the reader a solid, if incomplete, overview of the issues at stake. Beisner offers an especially helpful concluding chapter.

The 2002 Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church Pastors' Conference.

This conference marked the public debut of what has come to be known as the Federal Vision. The speakers included Steve Wilkins (the host pastor),

"The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant"; John Barach, "Covenant and History," "Covenant and Evangelism," "Covenant and Election"; Steve Schlissel, "Covenant Reading," "Covenant Thinking," "Covenant Hearing"; and Douglas Wilson, "The Curses of the New Covenant," "Heretics and the Covenant," "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited." Two question-and-answer sessions were also recorded. Both audio files and transcripts of the conference lectures are available.

The 2003 Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church Pastors' Conference.

Partially in response to the outcry occasioned by the lectures delivered at the 2002 conference, this conference featured not only the four 2002 speakers, who presented papers, but also four critics, who presented rebuttals. The speakers and the titles of their lectures are Steve Wilkins, "Covenant and Baptism"; Douglas Wilson, "The Visible/Invisible Church Distinction"; John Barach, "Covenant and Election"; and Steve Schlissel, "What Does the Lord Require?" The respondents were Joseph A. Pipa Jr., "Response to Steve Wilkins's Covenant and Baptism"; Morton Smith, "Response to Douglas Wilson's The Visible/Invisible Church Distinction"; Carl Robbins, "Response to John Barach"; and R. C. Sproul Jr., "Response to Steve Schlissel." Both audio files and transcripts of the conference lectures are available.

Wilkins, Steve, and Duane Garner, eds. The Federal Vision. Monroe, La.: Athanasius Press, 2004.

This collection of essays is important in at least two regards. First, it evidences a professed fraternal and theological affinity among recognized FV proponents. It also indicates these writers' approbation of the title "The Federal Vision" as descriptive of their broader theological project. Second, it offers the reader a comparatively rare opportunity to study FV proponents' reflections that have been prepared for the press. Contributions include, John Barach, "Covenant and Election"; Steve Wilkins, "Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation"; Rich Lusk, "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies"; Mark Horne, "What's for Dinner? Calvin's Continuity with the Bible's and the Ancient Church's Eucharistic Faith"; James B. Jordan, "Merit versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do for Us?"; Peter J. Leithart, "'Judge Me, 0 God': Biblical Perspectives on

Justification"; Steve Schlissel, "Justification and the Gentiles"; Douglas Wilson, "The Church: Visible and Invisible"; and Rich Lusk, "New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4-8 as Test Case."

FV Proponents

Steve Wilkins

"Baptism and Our Children."

An essay in which Wilkins attempts to explore the significance of the sacrament of infant baptism for infant and child recipients. In this essay, Wilkins sets forth in relatively brief compass his understanding of baptism as "objective[ly] significan[t]."

. "The Covenant and Apostasy (I)"; "Apostasy and the Covenant (II)," 2001 AAPCPC lectures.

These two lectures were delivered at the 2001 AAPC Pastors' conference. In reading Wilkins's explanation for apostasy within the bounds of the covenant, one is struck by the characteristic absence of the distinction of communicant/noncommunicant membership. Telling is Wilkins's interpretation of John 15:1-8, in which he declares "the common Calvinistic way of interpreting [this] text" to be "completely unwarranted," and in which he follows Norman Shepherd's controversial reading of this passage.

"Covenant and Baptism," 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

One of the most expansive treatments of baptism that Wilkins has penned. He alludes to a number of biblical passages in support of his thesis. He faults Reformed theology for capitulating, under the twin influences of "revivalism, and the Puritan and Reformed scholasticism that grew up in the 17th through the 19th centuries," to "decretal theology." He understands his essay to be part of an effort to "speak like Paul spoke to the church in the Scriptures."

"Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 254-59.

Wilkins's 2003 contribution to the Knox Colloquium (to which Joseph A. Pipa Jr. supplied a rejoinder in the same volume). This essay affords the reader the opportunity to see how Wilkins conceives his doctrine of baptism to stem from his doctrine of the covenant. Readers will also find helpful listings of what Wilkins believes to be true of those who are in covenant with God (pp. 262-63), and of what may be affirmed of apostates (p. 264).

"Covenant, Baptism and Salvation," in The Federal Vision, 47-69.

This contribution appears to be a modest revision of the preceding essay. The "Addendum" responding to Pipa's 2003 critique of Wilkins's above essay has not been included.

---. "The Legacy of the Half-Way Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

In this lecture, delivered before the 2002 AAPC Pastors' conference, Wilkins attempts to pin the origins of what he perceives to be the contemporary Reformed neglect of baptism upon New England Puritanism and the (first) Great Awakening. After concluding that "they completely ignored the significance of baptism and consequently misunderstood the nature of salvation," Wilkins proceeds to outline what he understands the Scripture to teach regarding baptism and the application of redemption.

. "The Lord's Supper and Our Children (I, II, III, IV)."

In these four essays, Wilkins sets forth his doctrine of paedocommunion. To this doctrine are tied two crucial positions that have been adopted by FV proponents: (1) an effective and practical nullification of the distinction between communicant and noncommunicant church membership, and (2) a flat hermeneutic that unwarrantedly strains new covenant belief and practice through old covenant forms and institutions.

"Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation," September 26, 2002.

Though a document of session, this statement reflects many sentiments circulated elsewhere by this congregation's pastor, Steve Wilkins, and former assistant pastor, Rich Lusk. The document reflects a number of FV

distinctive articulations of doctrine that have since occasioned controversy: sacramental efficacy, covenantal election, and perseverance and apostasy.

"Summary Statement of AAPC's Position on Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation (Revised)," April 3, 2005.

A revision of the preceding. At the time of its adoption, Rich Lusk no longer served this congregation. A comparison of both documents indicates that this latter revision effectively evades criticism rather than responds to it. Many of the most damning sentences in the 2002 Statement have been removed or qualified. It is not clear, however, that the theology of the 2002 Statement has been revised.

Rich Lusk

The Decree and Covenant

"Covenant and Election FAQs Version 6.4," 2002.

In this article, Lusk adopts, expounds, and applies Norman Shepherd's doctrine of covenantal election, or viewing election through the lens of the covenant. Lusk also attempts to handle objections to this doctrine. It is in this essay that Lusk pointedly states his understanding of the significance of his overall theological project: "American Reformed theology is like a bad cassette recording of the real thing. I'm simply trying to recover nuances that were originally in the tradition, but have been lost."

"A Response to `The Biblical Plan of Salvation,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 118-56.

Ostensibly a response to Morton Smith's essay in the Knox Colloquium, Lusk's piece sets forth a comprehensive overview of the covenants in the history of redemption. "Merit" within covenant, the covenant of works, the covenant of grace (including the nature of the Mosaic covenant), imputation, justification, and the New Perspective on Paul are all addressed in this essay. Morton Smith's brief but useful rejoinder to this work may be found in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 116-17.

"Rome Won't Have Me," 2004.

> In this extended essay, Lusk responds to charges that his theology is a Roman Catholic wolf in a Protestant sheep's clothing. Lusk, in a manner reminiscent of Norman Shepherd, argues that since he has expunged "merit" from theological consideration, he is thereby immune to the charge of Catholicism. Lusk also defends his denial of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ, and responds to criticisms of his views on sacramental efficacy.

"Blurring the `Federal Vision': A Reply to Michael Horton," 2004.

> A reply to Horton, "Deja Vu All over Again," Modern Reformation, July/August 2004: 23-30. Lusk believes that Horton has badly misrepresented him, and in this essay Lusk attempts to set the record straight. In particular, he responds (unsuccessfully) to Horton's observation that, although Lusk has shed the term merit from theological reflection, the concept is alive and well in quarters of Lusk's thought where it ought not to dwell.

> Justification

"Faith, Baptism, and justification," 2003.

> "Baptism is the instrument through which Christ is applied to us unto justification. Thus we can say that faith is the instrument of justification on our end, while baptism is the instrument on God's side." Lusk's argument places him in clear sympathy with Roman Catholic formulations of justification. It also commits him, in his public writings, to not fewer than three instruments of justification: faith, works, and baptism.

"Future Justification to the Doers of the Law," 2003.

> Lusk, in this essay, advances his controversial reading of James 2. He concludes that in this passage "'justification' cannot be referring to a demonstration of justification, e.g., justification does [not] and cannot mean something like `show to be justified.' Rather, James has in view the same kind of justification as Paul-forensic, soteric justification." He also

anticipates and responds to charges that he has compromised a biblically monergistic soteriology.

"The Galatian Heresy: Why We Need to Get It Right," 2003.

Many in the contemporary Reformed community, Lusk argues, have misunderstood the problem that Paul was facing in the Galatian churches. The epistle to the Galatians, he continues, is not a "tract about individual soteriology." The "real tragedy in the text" is "the division of the church.... The issue is not merit, it's the divided table."

"Gentile God Fearers and the Jewish Rejection of the Gospel," 2003.

In this short piece, Lusk argues that "the main issue on the table in the NT is the status of the old Israel in light of God's new work among the Gentiles," while he recognizes that the gospel "in some cases ... may have also offended [the Jews'] commitment to some kind of `merit' theology."

"Jonah, Judaizers, and the Gospel," 2003.

Jonah's sin, which Lusk takes to be not "works-righteousness per se in the Pelagian sense, but ... want[ing] God to be stingy with his grace, respecting ethnic boundaries," is what Paul is combating in Galatians.

"Justification: Ecclesial, Cosmic, and Divine: Rounding Out the Traditional Doctrine of justification," 2004.

The traditional doctrine of justification, Lusk claims, is true but inadequate; "not wrong," but "merely too `thin.'" He appreciates the ecclesiological thrust of N. T. Wright. "The traditional Protestant doctrine of justification fails to fully hold together the soteriological (forgiveness of sins) and the ecclesiological (covenant membership)." He also embraces the "restorative" thrust of Peter Leithart, "Justification includes what John Murray called definitive sanctification. It includes our deliverance from sin." He finally embraces what he terms "cosmic justification," which appears to "include the restoration of creation and the vindication of God's purposes."

N. T. Wright and Reformed Theology: Friends or Foes?" Reformation and Revival journal 11/2 (2002): 35-52.

In this article, Lusk strives to "show why [Reformed] critics have, in several key ways, misread and mischaracterized Wright's theology." He contends that "what justification does in older Reformed systematics, Wright accomplishes with his corporate Christology and covenanthistorical reading of Scripture. His work should be considered an expansion and development of Reformed theology, not its undoing."

The PCA and the NPP: Why a Denomination with Southern Presbyterian Roots Should Carefully Consider the `New Perspective on Paul,'" 2003.

Contending that "justification functions as part of an anti-racist, antiethnocentric polemic in the NT," Lusk maintains that the PCA would do well "to take the NPP seriously because it gives us something we've missed in our tradition." Specifically, it reminds us that "if the group that defines your deepest personal identity is marked out by something other than baptism/faith.... it is a denial of the gospel" (emphasis original).

"Putting the New Perspective into Perspective: Some Thoughts on Second Temple Judaism," 2003.

While brief, this piece evidences both Lusk's embrace of and apprehensions concerning the NPP's claims concerning the Judaism contemporary to first-century Christianity.

"A Short Note on N. T. Wright and His Reformed Critics," 2002.

An attempt to define Wright's doctrine of justification in view of Reformed critics who, in Lusk's terms, "misread and mischaracterize Wright's theology ... in several key ways." See also Lusk's 2002 contribution to the Reformation and Revival Journal.

"Some Random Thoughts on N. T. Wright's Romans Commentary," 2003.

A glowing review of the conservative Anglican bishop's lengthy exposition of Paul's letter to the Romans. Though not without his criticisms, Lusk believes that the work evidences "Wright's explicit commitment to sola fide and sola gratia," as well as his "primary commitment to Scripture and his secondary commitment to the Reformed faith."

The Tenses of Justification," 2003.

This brief essay defends a particular application of the "already/notyet" scheme to the doctrine of justification. While claiming that "works of faith-filled obedience, in a secondary way, cause our final justification and salvation," Lusk nevertheless professes that justification "is always a forensic act, a momentary declaration" and not "a process of moral transformation." He does not satisfactorily reconcile this inconsistency in this essay or in any other of his public writings.

Perseverance and Apostasy

"New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4-8 as Test Case," in The Federal Vision," 271-99.

Lusk at length dissents from the Puritan theologian John Owen's explanation of Hebrews 6:4-8, that "the package of blessings in Hebrews 6:4-5 is less than full regeneration." Lusk's own explanation evidences his doctrine of covenantal election and the corresponding doctrine of undifferentiated covenantal membership. It also unfolds his doctrine of perseverance and apostasy-one that is practically indistinguishable from an Arminian doctrine. He concludes his essay with some reflections on the project of systematic theology.

The Sacraments (Baptism)

"Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition: Past, Present, and Future," 2002.

Arguing that the Reformed tradition, under the pressure of "Protestant scholasticism," has lost its doctrine of baptismal efficacy, Lusk attempts to offer examples of this in the contemporary Reformed world. He contends that the distinction between a physical baptism and a spiritual baptism (to explain passages such as Gal. 3:27) is an invalid one. He also claims, interacting with common Reformed explanations of baptism as "sign," that "baptism does not merely picture something, it accomplishes something." Lusk also cautiously advances a qualified form of the phrase "baptismal

regeneration."

Some Thoughts on the Means of Grace: A Few Proposals," 2003.

A comprehensive effort to discuss the nature and efficacy of the means of grace. Lusk attempts, furthermore, to relate the relative efficacies of each means of grace. Baptism emerges as a privileged means: it "unites us to Christ" ("No other means is said to have this function; it is the peculiar grace attached to baptism"), "will consummate the process of regeneration begun by the word preached," and, with the Lord's Supper, "communicate[s] life," whereas "preaching communicates truth."

"Do I Believe in Baptismal Regeneration?" 2004.

Lusk reiterates his claim that his understanding of "baptismal regeneration" is not the one to which the Reformed have historically plied their criticisms. He then defends his doctrine by quoting extracts from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers and confessional documents. The remainder of the essay is devoted to Lusk's positive exposition of the nature and efficacy of baptism, and is accompanied by appendices responding to further criticisms and addressing certain points of practical interest. This long essay is by far Lusk's most comprehensive treatment of baptism to date.

. "Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies," in The Federal Vision, 71-125.

Citing "Enlightenment Rationalism" and "Revivalism" as causes, Lusk traces what he perceives to be the declension of Reformed thought and practice in the last few centuries. His debts to the Mercersburg writers and to Anglo-Catholicism surface at points in the course of his narrative. Lusk then addresses three theological issues: "the relationship between the sign and the thing signified in the sacrament of baptism"; "the relationship of baptismal efficacy to faith"; and the "relationship of paedobaptism to conversion." In view of his conclusions, Lusk proposes that we "begin ... the Reformed discussion anew."

Douglas Wilson

General or Comprehensive Statements

. "Reformed" Is Not Enough. Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002. Wilson describes this work as "part of the provocation [leading to the 2002 RPCUS charges] and something of a response" (p. 7). He treats the doctrines of the covenant, justification, the sacraments, perseverance, apostasy, and assurance. As J. Ligon Duncan has rightly observed, "This book, far from clarifying the issues and settling the growing concerns of the larger Reformed community, succeeded in merely heightening the controversy." The mediating posture that Wilson attempts to adopt in this work will likely not satisfy readers with theological concerns regarding the Federal Vision.

"Union with Christ: Broad Concerns of the Federal Vision," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 1-8.

In this inaugural essay in the Knox Colloquium, Wilson attempts to introduce representative concerns of the Federal Vision. This contribution highlights the degree to which the place and nurture of the children of believers has shaped, if not determined, much that has come under the theological banner of the FV.

The Covenants

"A Collection of Short Credos: On Law and Gospel," Credenda/Agenda 15/5: 22.

Four brief statements in which Wilson outlines his idiosyncratic construction of the law/gospel distinction.

"Covenant Kindness," Credenda/Agenda 13/2.

In this article, Wilson articulates his understanding of the relationship between covenant and election. In so doing, he evidences affinity with Norman Shepherd's formulation of that relationship.

The Curses of the New Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

Wilson insists that, as with Israel under the old covenant, believers today are subject to "curses" under the new covenant. Such a doctrine, Wilson claims,

delivers us both from the "Reformed Baptist assumption ... that those who fall away from the covenant were never really members of it," and from the Arminian doctrine that "you can lose your salvation outside of God's control." One can see, then, the way in which Wilson has tied his understanding of the covenantal "curse" to his doctrines of covenantal objectivity and of apostasy.

"Heretics and the Covenant," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

Wilson calls for a "covenantal approach to heresy," one that recognizes the "objective ... covenantal obligations" of the heretic, who, if "lawfully baptized," must be "receive[d] ... as a fellow Christian." Such an individual must then be treated as a covenant breaker. This lecture well illustrates the overwhelmingly external cast of Wilson's ecclesiology.

. "The Objectivity of the Covenant," Credenda/Agenda 15/1: 4-5.

A brief exposition of Wilson's doctrine of covenantal objectivity. In this article, Wilson explicitly ties his doctrine to "covenantal election" (as distinguished from "decretal election"), thereby suggesting a debt to Norman Shepherd's reflections on election and the covenant.

"A Response to `Covenant and Apostasy,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 224-32.

Wilson's response to one of Fowler White's essays ("Covenant and Apostasy") in the Knox Colloquium. Wilson's doctrines of undifferentiated covenant membership and covenantal (or "national") election surface as he endeavors to explain apostasy.

The Doctrines of Grace

. "Beyond the Five Solas," Credenda/Agenda 16/2: 15.

From concern that the Reformation solas have been put into the service of "Enlightenment individualism, pietism, revivalism, sentimentalism ..... Wilson posits their redefinition into five totas (totus, Latin, "all"). Wilson's totus Christus ("The entire body of Christ is invited to the Table and this includes our children"), for example, is an unapologetic affirmation of

paedocommunion. These affirmations evidence the degree to which Wilson conceives of his labors as contributing to a perfecting of the doctrines of the Reformation.

. "A Collection of Short Credos: On Justification," Credenda/Agenda 15/5: 22-23.

Although these statements are entitled "On justification," they also provide Wilson's understanding of the nature and order of the biblical covenants. He argues that what he terms Christ's "justification" (appealing to Rom. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16) is imputed to the believer for his justification, as well as "Christ's active and passive obedience, and all His other perfections." Such a statement reflects a mediating posture (between FV formulations and conventional Reformed formulations) frequently adopted by Wilson.

"A Collection of Short Credos: On Faith and Fidelity," Credenda/Agenda 15/5: 23.

Wilson is particularly concerned in these statements to stress that saving faith necessarily yields obedience to the law of God. One witnesses, however, a troublesome silence concerning the sole receptivity of faith in justification.

"A Pauline Take on the New Perspective," Credenda/Agenda 15/5: 5-20.

Wilson's admittedly derivative and modestly critical assessment of the New Perspective(s) on Paul. The essay becomes a platform to respond to the 2002 RPCUS charges, and so does not limit itself strictly to the issues occasioned by the NPP.

Ecclesiology, or the Church

. Mother Kirk: Essays and Forays in Practical Ecclesiology. Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2001.

Offers a concise introduction to Wilson's understanding of the nature and efficacy of the sacraments (chap. 5) as well as a defense of his peculiar understanding of the visible/invisible church distinction (chap. 1).

"Visible and Invisible Church Revisited," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

> In this address, Wilson proposes that we conceive the visible/invisible church distinction along the lines of the "historical" and "eschatological" church, respectively. To speak this way reflects, to Wilson, "a more Hebraic biblical way of thinking" and avoids "the Hellenistic ontological division between the invisible and visible." Wilson's formulations, however, are unable to sustain what the visible/invisible categories seek to preserve and to distinguish.

"The Visible/Invisible Church Distinction," 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

> Wilson's subsequent explanation and defense of the distinction set forth in the 2002 "Visible and Invisible Church Revisited." Wilson defends his understanding of this distinction as embodied in the Westminster Confession. He claims that many, under the influence of "a Hellenistic worldview" and the "Enlightenment," have misread the Confession on this point.

. "The Church: Visible or Invisible," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 263-69.

> A concise statement of Wilson's adoption of the "historical"/"eschatological" church distinction.

> The Sacraments

"A Short Collection of Credos: On Baptism," Credenda/Agenda 15/5: 23-24.

> A series of short statements outlining Wilson's understanding of baptism. In them, he affirms that "baptism is covenantally efficacious" and "brings every person baptized into an objective and living covenant relationship with Christ, whether the baptized person is elect or reprobate." Further, Wilson claims "that water baptism is the laver of regeneration (Tit. 3:5). Baptism now saves us (1 Pet. 3:20-21). In baptism we call upon the Lord, washing our sins away (Acts 22:16). I believe in one baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)."

"Sacramental Efficacy in the Westminster Standards," in The Auburn Avenue

Theology, 233-44.

Wilson charges the modern Reformed church with compromising the "sacramental theology found in the Westminster Standards," and proceeds to elaborate precisely what he understands that sacramental theology to mean. In so doing, he advances a doctrine of baptismal efficacy that neglects needed confessional qualifications. He thereby transgresses the very Confession that he professes to espouse.

Peter Leithart

General or Comprehensive Statements

Against Christianity. Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003.

In this provocative book Leithart addresses what he perceives to be weaknesses and problems in the contemporary church. In the chapter pertaining to the sacraments, he presses his understanding of ritual in service of a strong doctrine of sacramental efficacy. One also sees the importance of Leithart's sacramental theology within his theological thought as a whole.

"Trinitarian Anthropology: Toward a Trinitarian Re-casting of Reformed Theology," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 58-71.

An essay that should be read by every individual interested in grasping the comprehensive character of Leithart's theological vision. Advancing a doctrine of Trinitarian personalism, Leithart proposes a consequent reconsideration of Reformed anthropology, ecclesiology, and soteriology.

The Covenant of Works

(a) Exegetical Reflections

"Exodus in Romans 5-8," April 17, 2004.

Leithart summarizes with approbation N. T. Wright's reading of Romans 5-8. Wright sees these chapters as Paul's running commentary on the experiences of national Israel within the narrative of Exodus. Wright's

reading of Romans 5 speaks little, if at all, to the covenant of works.

"Sin and Death, Death and Sin," May 15, 2004.

Leithart approvingly discusses Thomas Schreiner's translation of Romans 5:12b, "death spread to all men, with the result that all sinned." Leithart summarizes, "The contagion of death spreads and reigns over men with the result that all sin. Adam's sin brought death; death brings sin." Leithart's reading departs from a conventional understanding of Romans 5:12 that exegetically undergirds the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity.

"Imputation of Sin, Rom 5:13," May 23, 2004.

Leithart here dissents from John Murray's interpretation of Romans 5:13 ("sin is not imputed when there is no law"). In so doing, Leithart again, without professing to deny Adamic imputation, departs from a conventional understanding of Romans 5:13 that exegetically undergirds the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity.

"Imputation of Sin," July 4, 2004.

Leithart's reading of Romans 5:12-14, which seems unable to sustain the Reformed doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity.

"Another Stab at Rom 5," July 9, 2004.

A more comprehensive reading of Romans 5:12-20 in which Leithart suggests that while "Adam's sin brought death into the world (v 12), and sin was in the world before the law (v 13) and death reigned before the law (v 14)," nevertheless, "what was lacking before the law was a mechanism of imputation" (v 13). This "perhaps suggests that Paul does not see Jesus as fulfilling a `covenant of works,'" since "Jesus does not come into the world under the covenant of works; [but is] born `under the law' (Gal 4:4). Jesus fulfills Torah and THEREBY reverses the sin of Adam. This could not have been done, however, without the system that Torah set up." Leithart, then, renders null much of the pertinence of Romans 5:12-20 for the Reformed doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, and for the necessary relationship between the work of Christ and the covenant of

works.

(b) Theological and Historical Reflections

"Ward on Covenant of Works," June 22, 2004.

After reflecting on Rowland Ward, God and Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant, Leithart concludes from Ward's discussion that "many Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century ... did not see a covenant of works as being essential to the formulation of the gospel."

"More from Ward," June 23, 2004.

In these further reflections on Ward's book (cited above), Leithart asks, "Is there another way that Christ's active obedience could `come into its own' without positing the imputation of Christ's active obedience? It would seem so.... In raising Jesus, the Father was saying, `I judge My Son to be the one who has obeyed perfectly even unto death; by union with Christ, that verdict is also passed on to us. In this construction, there is no `independent' imputation of the active obedience of Christ, nor even of the passive obedience for that matter; we are regarded as righteous, and Christ's righteousness is reckoned as ours, because of our union with Him in His resurrection. What is imputed is the verdict, not the actions of Jesus, and this is possible and just because Christ is our covenant head acting on our behalf."

Justification

. " `Judge Me, 0 God': Biblical Perspectives on justification," in The Federal Vision, 203-35.

Possibly Leithart's fullest statement on the doctrine of justification. Evident throughout this essay is Leithart's discontent with definitions of justification that restrict that grace to a forensic act. He argues that our understanding of justification ought to be expanded to include transformational grace. In so doing, his proposal effectively conflates the doctrines of justification and sanctification.

"Baptism and Justification," April 20, 2005.

Leithart concludes, in this essay, "It appears to me that justification by faith and forensic justification are difficult to maintain apart from a strong view of baptismal efficacy, without saying that in baptism God Himself says something about me in particular."

The Sacraments

(a) Sacramental Theology

"Conjugating the Rites: Old and New in Augustine's Theory of Signs," Calvin Theological journal 34 (1999): 136.

A self-described effort "to rehabilitate Augustine's sociological model of the sacraments" coupled with "Old Testament ritual patterns." Leithart believes that post-Augustinian sacramental reflection suffers from "questionable dualisms" and "categories ... borrowed from Aristotle rather than from Leviticus."

"Cult and Communication," Rite Reasons Newsletter 30 (December 1993).

An essay in which Leithart attempts to apply the insights of ritual theory to biblical worship. One may trace here the seeds of Leithart's distinctive understanding of sacramental efficacy.

',Framing' Sacramental Theology: Trinity and Symbol," Westminster Theological journal 62 (2000): 1-16.

An exploration and application of the theological writings of Karl Rahner and John Zizioulas to the nature and role of the sacraments within the church. When seen in this light, the sacraments, Leithart concludes, may be affirmed to be "essential to the achievement of salvation."

"More on Signs and Symbols," CredendalAgenda 15/3.

Leithart contends that the sacraments are "symbols by and through and in which personal, covenantal relationships are forged and maintained. Sacraments are not `signs of an invisible relationship with Christ.' Rather the intricate fabric of exchanged language, gesture, symbol, and action is

our personal relationship with God."

"Old and New in Sacramental Theology," August 5, 2004.

Argues that questions of sacramental efficacy in the present must be framed and resolved by such Old Testament rites and laws as the "laws of cleanliness," the "rules for priestly meals," and the "OT theology of the memorial."

"Sacramental Efficacy," Studies in Worship 43 (January 1995).

A theological proposal that Leithart believes allows one to affirm the sacraments to be "efficacious" and "to work ex opere operato."

. "A Theology of Ritual: Mapping the Territory," Rite Reasons Newsletter 32 (April 1994).

A call for "a Reformed, Vantillian theology of ritual," that is, "a positive biblical assessment of the place of ritual in the Christian worldview and in practice of the church." Leithart argues that such an approach would be fruitful in perfecting a Reformed sacramental theology and must emerge "from the perspective of the [Old Testament] sacrificial system."

"Visible Words," CredendalAgenda 15/4.

Challenges what is said to be a post-Augustinian emphasis upon the `visibility' of the sacraments." Rather, "just as words are 'performative,' so the sacraments as visible words actually do things," including "confirm, sustain, and nourish our relationship with the Triune God."

. "Why Sacraments Are Not Means of Grace," Credenda/Agenda 15/1.

Arguing that the language of "means" "tends to mechanize [the sacraments], turning [them] into machines that deliver grace," Leithart contends that we should affirm that the sacraments "are not means of grace, but themselves graces, gifts of a gracious God."

"Why Sacraments?" Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship 44 (March 1995).

Attempts to answer the question, "Why it is fitting for the Church to observe sacraments in the new covenant." Sketching an argument that he will develop more fully elsewhere, Leithart points to the trinity, biblical anthropology, and ecclesiology in order to warrant the sacraments.

"Why Sacraments Are Not Signs," Credenda/Agenda 15/2.

While not absolutely rejecting the language of "sign," Leithart disputes "the tendency to treat signs rationalistically, purely as means of communicating ideas from one mind to another mind." Rather, as signs, "sacraments do communicate, they mean something, bring something to mind, are intended to teach; ... sacraments are actions performed at God's command by the church; ... sacraments are mighty acts of God for the redemption of His people and the world."

(b) Baptism

"Baptism and the Church," 1998.

In this article, Leithart claims that the Westminster Confession of Faith's doctrine of the sacramental union (27.2) proves "arbitrary": "No matter what the Bible says about baptism, you can always trot out the idea of `spiritual relation' to show that the Bible is speaking `sacramentally,' and doesn't mean what it seems to say." Rather, "we need to begin with what the Scriptures say, no matter how unusual or unbelievable, rather than try to fit the biblical statements into some preconceived notions."

"Baptism Now Saves You," Credenda/Agenda 16/2: 23.

Claims that "over and over again, NT passages about Christian baptism teach that baptism accomplishes things that we can't believe baptism could accomplish." In conclusion, Leithart attempts to qualify this assertion by noting "the efficacy of baptism is a ritual efficacy."

"Baptism and the Spirit," Biblical Horizons 85 (May 1996).

Asserting that "there is indeed a promise of the Spirit's presence with the water [of baptism]," and appealing to the Old Testament record of Saul, Leithart contends that "the Spirit's continuing presence in and with us is

conditional ... on our response of faithfulness (which is, in turn, dependent on the Spirit's gift of persevering faith)." In short, "the endowment with the Spirit at baptism does not guarantee His permanent presence." It is exceedingly difficult to reconcile these statements with a confessional doctrine of baptism and of the perseverance of the saints.

"Infant Baptism," August 6, 2004.

A concise overview of Leithart's "theology of baptism." He proposes "three axioms [to] guide our understanding of the theology of baptism." (1) " `Baptism' in the NT texts refers to the rite of water baptism." (2) "The body of Christ is the body of Christ," hence, "baptism engrafts a person into the body of Christ-meaning, into the church and also into the fellowship of the Trinity (since that's what the church is)." (3) "Apostasy is possible. It is possible to be united to Jesus Christ, receive His spirit, and then fall from that gracious condition and back into the world." Compare Leithart, "Baptism is Baptism, Part 1," CredendalAgenda 16/2: 25.

. The Priesthood of the Plebs: A Theology of Baptism. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2003.

A revision of Leithart's Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation. This work provides, to date, Leithart's most extensive argument that the New Testament's theology of baptism is comprehensible against the background of the Old Testament priesthood.

(c) Lord's Supper

. Blessed Are the Hungry: Meditations on the Lord's Supper. Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003.

A collection of reflections on the nature and significance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Noteworthy is Leithart's meditation on justification (pp. 141-46).

"A Response to `1 Corinthians 11:17-34: The Lord's Supper,'" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 297-304.

A response to George Knight's exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 in the

Knox Colloquium. Leithart's essay is a defense of paedocommunion and evidences an embrace of a doctrine of undifferentiated membership within the visible church.

The Way Things Really Ought to Be: Eucharist, Eschatology, and Culture," Westminster Theological journal 59 (1997): 159-76.

Ritual theory and ecclesiology figure prominently in this positive discussion of sacramental efficacy (with particular reference to the Lord's Supper).

"What's Wrong with Transubstantiation? An Evaluation of Theological Models," Westminster Theological journal 53 (1991): 295-324.

Condemns Aquinas's and Luther's discussions of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as unwholesomely indebted to Aristotelian philosophy. Leithart believes that Calvin avoids such philosophical pitfalls and prefers "Christological and eschatological boundaries." This article shows how Leithart attempts to pursue sacramental theology without reference to ontological philosophical categories and discussions.

James Jordan

"Merit versus Maturity? What Did Jesus Do for Us?," in The Federal Vision, 151-200.

An influential article wherein Jordan questions conventional Reformed formulations of the covenant of works, as well as the imputation of the active and passive obedience of Christ to the believer for his justification.

. The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction. Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Ministries, 1986.

An early and important collection of essays in which Jordan reflects extensively on contemporary American evangelicalism. Jordan's ecclesiological discussions and his efforts to relate the old and the new covenants in particular anticipate concerns later broached by FV proponents.

"Thoughts on Sovereign Grace and Regeneration: Some Tentative Explorations,"

Occasional Paper No. 32. Niceville, Fla.: Biblical Horizons, 2003.

A paper in which Jordan has pointedly and unambiguously called into question whether individual regeneration is a biblical doctrine.

Steve Schlissel

"Covenant of Peace, Part 1" 2001

Schlissel here defines covenant as "relationship." He further maintains that "Covenant is basic to understanding anything and I maintain that we must understand the Covenant as the organizing principle of absolutely everything in God's creation. Everything under God must be covenantally understood."

"Covenant Reading," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

In this address, Schlissel provocatively claims, "The question today is commonly What must I do to be saved? But that is the wrong question. The biblical question is What does the Lord require?"

"Covenant Thinking," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

Schlissel here develops what he perceives to be the "difference between Hebrew and Greek thinking."

"Covenant Hearing," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

A self-described call to the church to recover "covenant consciousness." Schlissel in particular faults experimental theology and piety within the Reformed church for the alleged loss of this "consciousness."

"Covenant State of Mind," 2001.

Schlissel's conception of the way in which covenant should shape the church's thinking and life. This essay is a specimen of the "covenantal objectivism" that one finds circulating within FV writings.

"Justification and the Gentiles," in The Federal Vision, 237-61.

A crisp summary of many concerns that Schlissel has earlier expressed in lectures and articles. He poses his question of "Covenant Reading" less antithetically, claiming that "the latter (What does God require?) includes the former (What must I do to be saved?)." Schlissel expresses his concerns for what he terms "law/gospel-dichotomist confusion."

"More than Before: The Necessity of Covenant Consciousness," 2001.

Schlissel's 2001 Redeemer College (Ancaster, Ontario) address that, in some respects, inaugurated the FV controversy. In this address, he argues that the Reformed, in the train of Luther, have succumbed to "fundamentalistic" and "baptistic" theologies. He further argues that the Reformed have unwittingly adopted a "Greek," at the expense of a "Hebrew," epistemology.

"A New Way of Seeing?" in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 18-39.

In this essay, Schlissel claims that the 2002 AAPCPC speakers "affirm the Reformed Standards," but "accuse the Reformed churches of straying, decisively, from their own alleged precepts." Schlissel argues for a reading of the Scripture that prizes "story" rather than "systematic theology, abstract or otherwise." On this reading, "legal justification, far from being `the heart of the Gospel,' let alone identical with it, is hardly ever in view when Paul speaks of justification. Paul's concern is the status of the Gentiles as Israelites indeed, through faith, not through ritual circumcision or the various identity markers uniquely connected with it."

"On Hearing the Word(s): The Bible Way versus the Greek Way," 2002.

An extended meditation on what Schlissel perceives to be the difference between the "Greek mind" and the "Hebrew or Biblical mind."

"What Does the Lord Require?" 2003 AAPCPC lecture.

Schlissel claims in this essay, among other things, that "God is a person and not a proposition"; and that the newness of the new covenant consists in "incorporation of the Gentiles apart from their needing to be Jewish" (which is "shorthand" for justification by faith).

John Barach

"Baptism and Election," August 21, 2002.

A pastoral effort to ground Christian assurance in one's (covenantal) election and baptism. "At baptism, God promises that you're really one of His elect.... And God never hands out counterfeit promises.... God's Word is true and you must trust Him. Doubting your election when God has promised it to you is sin."

"Covenant and Election," 2002 AAPCPC lecture; "Covenant and Election," 2003 AAPCPC lecture; "Covenant and Election," in The Auburn Avenue Theology, 149-61; "Covenant and Election," in The Federal Vision, 15-44.

While these treatments are not altogether identical, they share the same title, were published or delivered in relatively quick succession, and sufficiently overlap that we might consider them as a group. In these articles, one will find Barach's exposition of a doctrine of covenantal election resembling that of Norman Shepherd. One will also see Barach's exposition and defense of his own understanding both of baptism as a means of assurance and of his doctrine of apostasy.

"Covenant and History," 2002 AAPCPC lecture.

Barach defines covenant ("a relationship") and then attempts to summarize the nature and progression of the biblical covenants of the Old and New Testaments. He defends a doctrine of "covenantal unity" in speaking of the Godhead, and echoes Jordan's "immaturity to maturity" thesis in explaining the covenant of works.

Mark Horne

The New Perspective(s) on Paul

"Are Wright's Critics Misreading Him?" 2003.

Horne believes that Reformed critics of Wright have failed to see that Wright is "add[ing] to the traditional picture of Paul, without taking away what is affirmed." In particular, Horne appears satisfied that Wright's

statements on the atonement do not merit criticisms that have been directed against them.

"Getting Some Perspective on the `New Perspective': What's at Stake (or Not!) for Reformed Pastors Regarding the Contemporary Discussion of Paul and `the Works of the Law'?" 2002.

Horne concludes, "NP is not self-consciously opposed to Reformed Theology. Reformed Theology is not dependent upon the traditional interpretation of Galatians and/or Romans. An absence of merit-legalists among Paul's adversaries does not mean that he never taught the doctrines of the Reformation. NP is not entirely unprecedented with the Reformers. Finally, NP does not entail a denial of forensic justification and one notable NP author vigorously affirms such a doctrine as being what the Apostle Paul believed and taught." Horne's assessment of the NPP raises questions about how adequately he has grasped the differences between traditional and NPP readings of Paul.

N. T. Wright on the Atonement: A Brief Statement," 2003.

Horne believes that Wright does not, as "a general theological claim," deny "the imputation of Christ's work to his people" notwithstanding "certain exegetical statements to the contrary." Wright is said to disagree "with the Westminster Assembly's prooftexts, not its actual doctrine." Horne appears, however, to have invested into Wright's doctrine more than is warranted.

"A Quickie Evangelical Introduction to the So-called `New Perspective on Paul.'" 2003.

Less useful as an introduction to the issues surrounding the NPP than as a specimen of Horne's repeated affirmations of the NPP's compatibility with Reformed theology.

Some Thoughts on Wright, Righteousness, and Covenant Status," 2004.

A continued defense of Wright's doctrine of justification as compatible with Reformed theology (Wright "never threatened the normal use of the word in Reformed dogmatics," but "there is ... more to be said regarding the

meaning of righteousness or justification in relation to covenant status or membership."). Horne claims that "Wright's idea that justification declares believers to be members of God's covenant through Christ is not far-fetched. Indeed it is impossible to escape. To be given, by declaration, right standing with God, is inherently to be given covenant status with him." We ought "to think of theological justification as being declared in right relation to God and thus a member of his covenant." Whether what Horne proposes is "more" or, in effect, "other" than what the Reformed doctrine has taught is left open to question.

Justification

"God's Righteousness and Our justification," 2003.

Argues from Romans 1:16-18, 3:1-6, and 3:21-26 that "'the righteousness of God' is his own character, his faithfulness, demonstrated in his work of salvation for his people-displaying Christ publicly as a propitiation in his blood." It is "violently discontextual to claim that ,the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ' [Rom. 3:22] refers to imputed righteousness." Horne states that he is "not denying that Jesus' righteous status is shared with His people. It most certainly is. I am simply denying that Paul is speaking of such imputation in these particular passages."

"Righteousness from God," 2003.

A brief article in which Horne appears to commend Wright's definition of righteousness ("the status which results, for either party [defendant or plaintiff], if the court finds in his favor").

Covenant and Election

"Book Review: The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism, by Norman Shepherd," 2002.

A glowing review of a work that has proven influential among FV proponents. Horne pronounces this book "an excellent manual to put into the hands of laymen...." Horne commends Shepherd's strictures against the way Shepherd perceives regeneration to be understood and taught within the

Reformed church. Horne also defends Shepherd's statements on baptism.

"Election: Corporate and Individual," 2003.

In this "handout for a Sunday school class [Horne] ha[s] taught recently," he argues for a doctrine of "corporate election," claiming that "the results of individual election are ordinarily found in the context of corporate election." In discussing election in this fashion, Horne manifests certain affinities with Shepherd's characteristic of election.

The Covenants: Law and Gospel

"A Brief and Blunt Note about the Grace of God apart from Sin," 2002.

Briefly defends the proposition that "grace has real meaning apart from the forgiveness of sins." In the course of this defense, Horne claims, "God's relationship with Adam was not that of an employer with an employee, but that of a parent and child. As Norman Shepherd has argued so well, the covenant of works with Adam was not a `labor contract,' but rather a familial one."

"Covenant of Works?" 2002.

It is "appropriate to describe God's covenant with Adam as a covenant of works." While Horne does not accept "merit" within the first covenant, he also claims, "Nor does denying merit to Adam deny it also to Christ." Even so, "it needs to be pointed out that Jesus' consciousness was centered on trusting his Father, not earning merits."

"The Covenant of Works, the Mosaic Covenant and the Necessity of Obedience for Salvation in the Day of judgment," 2005.

Claims that the Mosaic covenant is in no sense to be conceived in terms of the covenant of works.

The God of Grace," 2004.

Horne's response to a certain conception of the covenant of works that entertains Adam's obedience as meritorious.

"Correcting Two Mistakes of the Law-Gospel Hermeneutic: Trying to Deal Honestly with Luke 10.25-37; 18.18-30; and Parallels," 2001.

Argues that a conventional "'Law-Gospel' interpretation of these two passages is in error," that is, "Jesus advocated some form of worksrighteousness, only to rescue the doctrine of justification by faith by positing that Jesus was not really intending for anyone to try to be justified by works." Rather, Jesus "simply call[s] people to repentance and faith. Because faith involves trusting God's promises, it involves concrete actions. Nonetheless, such works are not meritorious nor an attempt to earn God's favor."

"Did Jesus Preach Gospel or Law to the Rich Young Ruler?" 2002.

Horne claims that Jesus' telling "the man to do things in order to inherit eternal life" was not Jesus' "preach[ing] `Law' in order to make him realize he could never be good enough to merit eternal life." Rather, "how can we claim that Jesus' command to the Rich Young Ruler involves something other than the Gospel?"

. "Law and Gospel in Presbyterianism: The Reformed Doctrine Stated and Briefly Vindicated from Scripture," 2004.

Positively, "the difference between Law and Gospel ... is that of promise and fulfillment, type and substance, and partial and completeness." It is "also that between ethnic exclusiveness and cosmopolitan inclusiveness, or between sectionalism and catholicity." In the Westminster Confession of Faith, "the difference between Law and Gospel is never portrayed as the difference between works and grace-between earning salvation and being given salvation."

"Mixing `Law' and Gospel in the Abrahamic Promise: A Response to Michael Horton," 2004.

A lengthy response to Michael Horton's exposition of the Abrahamic promise that occasions Horne's reflections on "law" and "gospel" globally.

Assurance of Grace and Salvation

"Standing on the Promises: Faith and Assurance in the Bible," 2002.

Evidences certain affinities with other FV treatments of the question of assurance of grace and salvation.

"Whose Legalism? Which Works-Righteousness? The 2002 Auburn Avenue Pastor's [sic] Conference and the Assurance of Grace," 2003.

A defense of the content of the lectures of the four speakers at the 2002 AAPCPC. Horne quotes liberally from the speakers, in part to show that the speakers "explicitly affirmed Reformed doctrine at the conference" and "targeted what they viewed as legalism and advocated a higher view of the grace as the only antidote." In defending these speakers, Horne aligns himself with many of their criticisms of contemporary Reformed theology and practice.

The Sacraments

"The Westminster Standards and Sacramental Efficacy," 1997, revised 2005.

After citing WCF 28.6, Horne states: "Here we seem to have a problem: The Divines wanted to affirm that baptism was efficacious, but not for everybody.... But if that is the case, then how can a person have his faith confirmed and strengthened by baptism? How can he trust a promise that might or might not be made to him, depending on God's secret counsel?" The Westminster Divines "did not directly address this question," but they did author LC 167, "spell[ing] out how baptism is supposed to be regarded by all who have been subjected to the rite."

"Baptism, Evangelism, and the Quest for a `Converting Ordinance,' " 2004.

A call for an approach to "whole-life conversion" that does not privilege the preached Word, but stresses baptism and discipleship.

Can Baptism Do Anything?" 2002.

Claims that many "conservative Protestants" have compromised the biblical testimony concerning baptism, particularly by appeal to a distinction between a "'spiritual' baptism" and "water baptism" in such passages as 1

Peter 3:21, Galatians 3:27-28, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 6:3-4, and Colossians 3:11-12. Horne, then, shares with other FV proponents an inordinately strong understanding of baptismal efficacy.

"Trying to Be Objective: A Short Test for Those Concerned about an Alleged `Baptismal Regeneration' Teaching," 2004.

Argues that many elders and congregants within the PCA would be embarrassed or scandalized by the reading of certain confessional statements at the administration of the sacrament of baptism.

"Sacramental Assurance and the Reformed Faith: The Biblical Perspective of the Westminster Standards," 2004.

Horne articulates a doctrine of "sacramental assurance" that he believes to be taught by the Westminster Standards. He claims that "sacraments can only assure people of their salvation if they can be expected to effect it." Further, he states that "the function of Word and Sacrament is to tell the participants that they are elect."

. "Samuel Miller, Baptism, and Covenant Theology," 2004.

Horne seriously contends that Samuel Miller, professor of ecclesiastical government and church history at Princeton Theological Seminary (18 13-49), did not adequately understand the Westminster Standards' doctrine of baptism. In this article, Horne evidences his sympathies for an evangelical-Anglican doctrine of baptismal efficacy.

"You and Your Son and Daughter: Christ's Communion with Young Children," 1997.

A defense of the doctrine of paedocommunion, a doctrine espoused by many FV proponents.

Joel Garver

"Baptismal Regeneration and the Westminster Confession 28.6."

An argument that "it is ... easily shown that baptismal regeneration falls

well within the bounds of the [Westminster] Confession [of Faith]." Garver has issued an expanded and revised edition of this essay.

"A Brief Catechesis on Covenant and Baptism."

In question and answer format, Garver addresses issues pertaining to covenant membership, election, and baptismal efficacy. He affirms that "election is only revealed in and through the covenant." In a revised version of this essay, Garver pleads for a heavily qualified form of baptismal regeneration.

On Regeneration, Baptism and the Reformed Tradition."

This essay explores the ways in which, for Garver, one may (and may not) affirm baptismal regeneration.

"Sacraments and the Solas."

Claims that "a strong doctrine of sacramental efficacy is necessary in order to uphold and defend the Reformation solas."

Ralph Smith

"Covenant Confusion? An Attempt to Understand the Confused and the Confusion," 2004.

An essay drafted in response to Richard D. Phillips, "Covenant Confusion" (see below). Smith responds to Phillips's concerns regarding Smith's Trinitarian theology and Smith's definition of covenant as relationship. He also acknowledges his theological debt to Abraham Kuyper, Cornelius Van Til, John Murray, James Jordan, Jeff Meyers, and Peter Leithart.

The Covenant of Works: A Litmus Test for Reformed Theology?" n.d., but after Fall 2002.

Smith, who does not embrace the conventional Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works, argues that the doctrine is "essential [neither] to the Reformed faith and its confession of God's saving grace" nor to "a genuinely Reformed view of justification by faith."

"Defining the Covenant: What Consensus?" 2004.

> Another essay drafted in response to Richard D. Phillips, "Covenant Confusion." Smith argues that contemporary Reformed theology is sufficiently diverse to embrace his own definition of covenant.

. Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology. Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2003.

> In this book, Smith ventures a definition of covenant and an argument for a covenant among the divine persons. In applying these reflections, he rejects the conventional doctrine of the covenant of works and develops what he terms "covenantal worship" and "covenantal worldview."

"Interpreting the Covenant of Works," n.d., but after 2002.

> Smith traces the differences between Meredith G. Kline's and John Murray's formulations of the covenant of works. He argues that, in some respects, James Jordan has combined the best of Kline's and Murray's concerns in his own formulation of this covenant, a formulation that "denies the notion of two contrasting covenants."

. Paradox and Truth: Rethinking Van Til on the Trinity. 2d ed. Moscow, Ida.: Canon, 2002.

> After critiquing Cornelius Plantinga's doctrine of the Trinity, Smith advances Van Til's formulation of the doctrine, supplementing that formulation with Abraham Kuyper's covenantal trinitarianism. Smith hopes such a doctrine will promote "a real formation of evangelicalism in the direction of a fully trinitarian worldview."

"Peter Leithart on Trinity and Sacrament."

> A brief summary and appreciation of Leithart's application of his own Trinitarian theology to the doctrine of the sacraments.

"Trinity and Covenant: The Christian Worldview," 1997.

> An earlier work treating the doctrine of the Trinity and the covenants. This

work in particular evidences Smith's debt to the writing and thought of James Jordan.

Critical Responses to the FV

Chapell, Bryan. "An Explanation of the New Perspective on Paul for Friends of Covenant Theological Seminary," 2005.

In addition to addressing the NPP, Chapell addresses at some length certain theological concerns occasioned by the Federal Vision. Chapell offers irenic and thoughtful criticisms of FV sacramental theology in particular.

Dallison, Anthony R. "Debating the Federal Vision," 2004.

Posted on the Web site of the Banner of Truth, this review of the Knox Colloquium documents, perceptively and briefly, both the "react[ive]" character of the FV and its theological deviancy from the Westminster Standards.

Duncan, J. Ligon. "A Review of The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision." Confessional Presbyterian 1 (2005): 161-63, 183.

This review of the Knox Colloquium is particularly helpful in offering the reader historical background and context to the rise and progress of the controversy surrounding the FV. Duncan's overviews and assessments of the individual contributions to this colloquium are crisp, insightful, and well-digested.

Fesko, John V. Review of Douglas Wilson, "Reformed" Is Not Enough. New Southern Presbyterian Review (Fall 2002): 131-36.

A competent theological analysis of Wilson's most substantial contribution, to date, to the FV discussion. Fesko's critical interactions with Wilson's ecclesiology merit attention.

Fesko, John V. "The Federal Vision and the Covenant of Works," 2004.

A concerted engagement of Rich Lusk's and James Jordan's strictures concerning the classical Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works. Fesko also details and responds to Lusk's and Jordan's positive constructions of the first covenant, and ponders their constructions' implications for the atonement and justification. For a response to Fesko's paper, see James B. Jordan, "A Response to `The Federal Vision and the Covenant of Works,' A Lecture by Dr. J. V. Fesko."

Gordon, T. David. "Reflections on the Auburn Theology," 2005.

A privately circulated paper whose author professes, in different re spects, "sympathies with both the Pros and the Cons" of the debate, as represented in the Knox Colloquium. Gordon identifies the central theological points of difference, and helpfully sets and frames the FV debate in the context of developments within twentieth-century Reformed theology. Gordon's critical probe of a proposed relationship between the FV and the covenantal theology of John Murray will be of interest to the reader.

Horton, Michael S. "Deja Vu All over Again," Modern Reformation 13/4 (2004), 23-30.

An interaction with Rich Lusk's understanding of the covenant of works, imputation, and the work of grace. Horton points out that Lusk not only flattens the differences between the covenant of works and covenant of grace but also produces a theology that echoes that of the formulations promulgated at the Council of Trent.

Phillips, Richard D. "Covenant Confusion," 2004.

A helpful overview of the pertinent issues by a participant in the 2003 Knox Colloquium. Phillips summarizes and interacts critically with FV reflections on the Trinity, covenant (generally), the covenant of works, the place of the children of believers within the covenant of grace, and justification.

Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley (PCA). "Study Report on the New Perspective(s) on Paul; the Theology of Norman Shepherd; and the Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue Theology," 2005.

This report, as adopted by the Presbytery of the Mississippi Valley in February 2005, contains a pastoral letter; a precis of the New Perspective(s) on Paul, of the theology of N. T. Wright, of the theology of Norman Shepherd, and of the theology of the Federal Vision, and an overview of the Summary Statement of the AAPC (2002); a select bibliography; and sample questions for the benefit of its credentials committee. Since I was a contributor to the report, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on its worth or usefulness.

Substantive criticisms of the report include Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, "The Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA) `New Perspectives' Study Committee Report: A Reply from Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA)"; S. Joel Garver, "The MVP Precis on the `Federal Vision': A Response to Its Referencing My Writings"; Garver, "The MVP Report: Some Initial Reflections"; Mark Horne, "Instead of a Reply: A Quick Survey of MVP's Accusations against Me"; Peter Leithart, "Response to Mississippi Valley Report"; Paul Owen, "A Layman's Response to the MVP Report."

Westminster Seminary California. "Our Testimony on Justification," 2004.

A concise and well-drafted statement by the faculty of Westminster Seminary California. This statement reaffirms, from the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, man's depravity, the active and passive obedience of Christ as that which is imputed to believers for their justification, the meritorious character of the work of Christ, the office of faith in justification, the relationship of the graces of justification and sanctification, the necessity and imperfection of the believer's sanctification, and the finality and perfection of justification. The statement appears to be responding to at least some FV proponents' distinctive and questionable doctrines.

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