

As a pastor in the Westminsterian tradition, I believe “All synods or councils since the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice” (WCF 31.4). I believe the 2007 PCA GA so erred in receiving the Federal Vision Report. The problems, substantive and procedural, with the Report have been well documented and I will not repeat them here (see, e.g., http://www.prpc-stl.org/auto_images/117880518730ReasonsFinal.pdf). I simply want to engage the Report in a conversation, examining what it says about my own views.

I appreciate that the Report judges “FV proponents in the PCA as brothers in Christ.” Presumably this brotherly judgment extends to so-called “FV proponents” outside of the PCA as well. Since I am not in the PCA, the Report does not have any direct bearing upon my status as a minister in Christ’s church. It might be the better part of wisdom to ignore it altogether. But because the Report could be read in such a way as to call into question my confessional commitments and integrity, I feel some need to respond in a public forum. I do so from the standpoint of someone who spent many wonderful years in the PCA, was ordained in the PCA, continues to have many friends in the PCA, appreciates the PCA, and hopes the best for the PCA. There is no animosity here; I am simply trying to provide some clarification.

I have pasted in the sections of the PCA Federal Vision Report that pertain directly to me. I am assuming that the Report selected quotations from my work that would serve as evidence that my views are not in conformity with the Westminster Standards. I have made some annotations to the Report, explaining where I think the Report is flawed in its assessment of my teaching. Because none of the committee members ever engaged me in any kind of dialogue, and because the committee failed to exegete any biblical texts, it is impossible for me to know how they arrived at their conclusions. But I hope this short rejoinder will explain more fully where I stand and why I am not persuaded of the Report’s conclusion that “FV proponents” cannot subscribe to the Westminster Standards in good faith.

There are two sections where the Report mentions me by name—in its discussion of the “Federal Vision” view of justification and in its section on the “Federal Vision” view of perseverance. Thus, I will look at each of these areas in turn. The text of the Report is in black; my annotations are in blue.

2. Rich Lusk

Another important discussion of issues related to justification can be found in Rich Lusk's response/essay in the Knox Seminary Symposium. Responding to Morton Smith's essay on the "biblical plan of salvation," Lusk suggests that "bi-covenantal federalism begins to look more and more like a theological grid imposed upon Scripture to satisfy the requirements of a dogmatic system rather than an organic outgrowth of biblical reflection and exegesis."

Note that in the essay being cited (from the colloquium volume, edited by Calvin Beisner), I had in view a *particular version* of "bi-covenantal federalism," namely the version that makes "merit" foundational to the Adamic "covenant of works." My target is a view of the covenant of works that assumes that Adam was to *earn* eschatological life and blessing by meritorious works, rather than *receive* them in the way of faithful obedience.

Needless to say, given the wide diversity on the question of merit in the Adamic covenant among renowned "fathers" in the Reformed church, it is a bit surprising to me that the PCA would codify the meritorious view in this document. Such standardizing is also out of character in the PCA, which has routinely allowed men to take exception to "covenant of works" terminology, and has not required an Adamic theology of merit as a test of orthodoxy.

My complaint that the meritorious covenant of works lacks exegetical support is hardly new with me. Indeed, many Reformed theologians have raised the same issue, as my paper demonstrated.

In particular, Lusk argues against any understanding of covenant theology that uses the category of merit to describe God's relationship with Adam or Jesus.[\[53\]](#)

Wrong. I have not opposed "*any* understanding of covenant theology that uses the category of merit." This claim betrays a basic lack of familiarity with my published works. In numerous places, I have said that certain definitions of merit are acceptable because they are so highly qualified and refined. My objection is specifically aimed at a strictly meritorious version of the covenant of works. I am happy to drop the term "merit" because I think it is confusing, but I have always had a much more nuanced view of the concept of merit than the Report attributes to me.

As I have indicated in other places, if the term “merit” simply refers to the infinite worth of Christ’s work, there is nothing problematic about it conceptually. But some Reformed theologians employ the category of Christ’s merit against the background of a meritorious covenant with Adam. I find that theological construct objectionable (as do many other Reformed theologians, as pointed out in my original paper).

For a larger discussion of merit, see my essay “Rome Won’t Have Me,” <http://www.hornes.org/theologia/rich-lusk/rome-wont-have-me>. There, I wrote:

That being said, one thing I’ve learned from this sordid affair now known as the “Auburn Avenue controversy” is that there are almost as many definitions of “merit” as there are theologians who want to talk about it. Reformed theologians have no agreed upon “merit theology”.... In interacting with other Reformed theologians over the issue of merit in the aftermath of the colloquium, I have found a wide variety of views on merit, some of which I could easily live with (I don’t just want to fight over words, after all). Some of the illustrations I’ve heard used to argue *for* “merit” as a valid theological concept are the very illustrations I’ve used at times to argue *against* it.... “Merit,” as a category, can be rescued, no doubt, but the project doesn’t seem to be worth the effort. I agree with Peter Wallace’s wise assessment, “Whether you wish to use the language of merit depends entirely on which of its many definitions you choose”

On this issue, the Report only quotes from my colloquium essay, which was published in 2004. It ignores a massive amount of further discussion, revision, and clarification that has taken place since then. The essay, “Rome Won’t Have Me,” also dates back to 2004, and responds to various criticisms of the colloquium essay. I have also dealt extensively with the issue of merit in Part 3 of my “Response to the OPC Report” (<http://www.trinity-pres.net/essays/opc-justification-reply-3.pdf>). A fair assessment of my views should take that later work into account.

While the Federal Vision understanding of “covenant” is treated elsewhere in this report, it is important to notice how Lusk’s reluctance to use the concept of merit affects his understanding of justification and, especially, the way imputation functions within the biblical doctrine of justification. First, Lusk argues that the purpose of law was to point the way to maturity, not to establish merit. He suggests that “the law did not require perfect obedience” and that Moses suggested that “the law was not too hard to keep, for it was a law of faith.” He also claimed that “the Torah was not a law code in any modern sense.” Rather, the law was intended to communicate “fatherly instruction,” wisdom and counsel to gain blessing from God, and served as “the Gospel in pre-Christian form,” giving the “blue print of the coming Gospel.”[\[54\]](#)

This is all true, but quite misleading. I am curious how the authors of the Report would exegete texts like Deuteronomy 30:11-20 and Luke 1:6, given their apparent denial that the law of Moses could be kept by the redeemed. I am also curious how they understand the law to be “a shadow of the good things to come” (Heb. 10:1) and a prophetic witness to God’s righteousness in Christ (Rom. 3:21), given that they seem to deny the law can be understood as a “blueprint of the coming Gospel.”

Again, in the essay “Rome Won’t Have Me,” I explain how I am using this terminology:

The problem here is partly terminological, partly theological, partly exegetical...[T]he terms “law” and “gospel” can be used in different ways. In some theological contexts, “law” and “gospel” refer to different ages within God’s program of redemptive history. On this scheme, the tension (or contrast) between law and gospel is eschatological; law and gospel are placed on a continuum as successive eras within history (Gal. 3:21). In other theological contexts, “law” means bare command (a “covenant of works”) and “gospel” means God’s free work of salvation in Christ. Law = imperatives; gospel = indicatives (for those in Christ). On this view, law and gospel are set side by side and represent two antithetical modes of salvation.

AAT [=Auburn Avenue Theology, another name for the “Federal Vision] advocates believe the former use of terms squares more accurately with biblical exegesis (that is to say, with the Bible’s own use of the terms and

concepts; cf. my colloquium essay, pages 127-135). Thus, AAT advocates are accused of denying the famed law/gospel antithesis. But of course, we concede in theory that *if* “law” means “bare command” rather than the “Mosaic covenant” as such (which is part of the covenant of grace, per WCF 7.5, 6; 19.3, 7), *then* there is an absolute law/gospel antithesis. If the law is taken out of the context of the covenant (e.g., Ex. 20:1-2), it becomes a moralistic program of self-salvation. But this is where we differ: We do not believe that God offered Israel a hypothetical program of works righteousness at Sinai. While some within the Reformed tradition have argued for a “works principle” within the Mosaic covenant, this has not been the only Reformed view or even the majority view (see, e.g., Samuel Bolton’s *True Bounds of Christian Liberty* and Ernest F. Kevan’s *The Grace of Law*). Our understanding of the Mosaic law as an administration of grace is well within the parameters of historic Reformed thought (see John Frame’s “Law and Gospel” for a contemporary expression, available at <http://www.chalcedon.edu/articles/0201/020104frame.shtml>).

The critique of the Report loses traction if these nuances are acknowledged. Given that the Westminster Confession says that the law of Moses was an administration of the covenant of *grace* (even if much of its *moral content* overlapped with the original covenant law given to Adam), I do not see how anything the Report quotes me as saying strikes at the vitals of the Reformed system of doctrine. If anything, treating the Mosaic covenant as a legalistic covenant of works would seem to strike at the heart of the system!

And so, while affirming that “the perfect obedience of Jesus played a vital role in his salvific work on our behalf,” Lusk elaborates on that claim by arguing that Christ’s active obedience was a “precondition of his saving work in his death and resurrection.” That is, Christ’s active obedience “is not saving in itself”; nor were these works that “would be credited to Jesus’ people”; nor did Christ “merit” anything for himself or his people that would be legally transferred to his people’s account. For Lusk, “justification requires no transfer or imputation of anything,” especially the “merits” of Jesus.^[55]

Again, “Rome Won’t Have Me” has a lengthy explanation of this. See the section “Do I Believe in the Imputation of Christ’s Active Obedience?”

In short, my point is that the verdict the Father passed over the Son in raising him from the dead becomes ours as we are united to the Son by faith. So, Christ *is* our righteousness – but that righteousness is not his law-keeping per se, but rather his resurrection status. Of course, as I have explained in a variety of places, to get the verdict is to get the obedience that secured the verdict as well, so one could argue that my view *implicitly* includes the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. Had the authors of the Report dealt with my position more carefully, they would have had to acknowledge this.

I admit that the Confession *typically* speaks of Christ’s “obedience and satisfaction,” whereas I *prefer* to speak of Christ’s “death and resurrection.” In light of Romans 4:25 and 8:34, I find it disappointing that the Westminster divines so marginalized the role of Christ’s resurrection in our justification. But I am certainly in agreement with the Confession that Christ’s person and work are the sole ground of our right-standing before the Father. I would argue that my view still seems to comport with the system of doctrine, especially in view of WCF 11.4, which speaks of Christ’s death and resurrection as the basis of our justification, proving this is an acceptable way to articulate the doctrine.

Further, the Westminster Standards do not define “imputation” as a *transfer*, but leave open the possibility of a *declarative* understanding. Again, my view of imputation as *declaration* rather than *transfer* may not be the most common view, but it is neither incompatible with nor contradictory of the Standards. It is consistent with the system of doctrine. Of course, the real issue here is Scripture’s use of imputation language, which is certainly not transitive. For a discussion, see Part 1 of my “Response to the OPC Report.”

Why didn’t the GA Report ever engage any of my arguments, whether exegetical or confessional? Where is proof that my view of justification as an imputed/shared verdict strikes at the heart of the Westminsterian system?

The PCA may *choose* to require explicit belief in “the imputation of Christ’s active obedience to the law,” but if the denomination does so, she will be tightening the meaning of the Confession’s original intent. Given that several

prominent divines at the Westminster Assembly did not believe in the imputation of Christ's active obedience, it is unthinkable that the Standards originally required such.

Rather, what is required for God to justify sinners is union with Christ. Following others who focus on this theological category, Lusk suggests, "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. With regards to justification, this means my right standing before the Father is grounded in Christ's own right standing before the Father." In fact, he states that "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."^[56]

Joel Garver gave a nice explanation of my "redundancy" remark here: <http://sacra doctrina.blogspot.com/2007/06/pca-report-on-nppfv-some-concerns-4.html>

Concerning the accuracy of the Report, there are two issues to note here:

[1] The redundancy statement was made in my essay in the colloquium book, edited by Cal Beisner. It was written when the so-called "Federal Vision" was just beginning to be controversial. However, *I retracted the redundancy comment before the PCA committee was even formed*. See Part 1 of my "Response to the OPC Report," <http://www.federal-vision.com/pdf/lusk1.pdf>, where my views on imputation are greatly clarified in light of ongoing discussion and objections. The "redundancy" statement proved to be confusing, and in any case, was not necessary to my argument. I think the PCA committee chose to use it in spite of my retraction simply because it was an easy target. But if they were really interested in dealing with the substantive issues, they would have honored my retraction and dealt with my actual position, instead of focusing on an infelicitous sound bite.

[2] It should be noted that to say that "imputation" is "redundant" in view of our union with Christ is actually an *affirmation*, not a *denial*, of imputation. Thus, in the colloquium essay from which the "redundancy" remark comes, I quoted *with approval* both John Calvin and Richard Gaffin using imputation language. Moreover, I said "Imputation is simply a corollary of our union with Christ. We may conceive of union with Christ imputatively if we wish, but the key is to affirm that if we are *in Christ* we share in his right standing before the Father" (page 143). In other words, we do not need to resolve all the current

debates over the meaning of “imputation” in order to agree on the heart of the gospel. At the same time, note that if imputation is a “corollary” of union, then imputation is integral to my own position. Earlier in that same essay (141), I wrote,

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 Rom. 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 . . . Christ shares his legal status in God’s court with as the One who propitiated God’s wrath on the cross and was resurrected into a vindicated, glorified form of life.

This “crediting” would seem to be very close to what the Report means by imputation. They mention this in a footnote, but don’t engage the arguments or look for common ground. It seems to me that on this particular issue, there are more points of contact between my view and that of the Report than the authors of the Report are willing to acknowledge.

Why did I make the redundancy comment in the first place? I was asking questions like these: If imputation is an independent piece of the *ordo salutis*, a distinct act in the order of salvation, does it come before or after we are united to Christ? Does it come before justification (serving as the ground of justification) or after justification (declaring that justification has happened)? I think questions like these show the problems we encounter in certain formulations of imputation.

I think it makes better sense to view imputation as basically synonymous with justification, coinciding with the inception of union with Christ. God justifies us = God declares us righteous = God imputes us as righteous. Romans 4:5 just restates Romans 3:28 in different terms. When God justifies us by faith apart from works of the law he is also imputing faith as righteousness. Imputed righteousness is not something other than or in addition to justification. Rather, it is another way of describing justification. (Obviously, I’m assuming that

“imputation” language is declarative, not transitive, a case I make at length in Part 1 of my Response to the OPC Report.)

The point of my argument is that if imputation is anything other than the forensic/judicial/declarative aspect of our union with Christ, it becomes problematic. For example, why would God transfer the righteousness of Christ to us *after* we already have Christ? If we already have Christ we do not need some *additional* transfer of righteousness. Or: If justification is based on a transfer of righteousness, what is that transfer based upon? You have an infinite regress.

Paul’s view is simple: Christ was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). When we are united to the risen Christ, there is no longer any condemnation hanging over us (Rom. 8:1). All that belongs to Christ – including his legal status – becomes ours, as we are joined to him by faith alone. As soon as that faith-union takes place, we are imputed as righteous by God.

In the colloquium essay, I argued that situating imputation/justification within union with Christ solves several theological dilemmas and fits more cleanly with the Pauline texts. Nothing in the Report convinces me that my basic understanding of these matters falls outside the systematic parameters of Westminster, even if some of my language and emphases are different.

The way of incorporation or union with Christ is by faith, sealed in baptism. In a separate essay, Lusk holds that “the Westminster standards teach that in baptism, the thing signified—which is nothing less than union with Christ, regeneration, and forgiveness—is truly sealed, conferred, applied, and communicated.”

I’m not sure if this supposed to be a self-evident critique, but all my language here (sealed, conferred, applied, communicated), as well as the “sacramental union,” is straight out of Westminster. What’s the problem? Baptism, according to Westminster, is NOT just the sign of water; it is the conjunction of the sign and the thing signified (cf. WCF 27.2). It makes me wonder: are the authors of the Report *really committed* to the teaching of the WSC that the sacraments are “effectual means of salvation”?

Hence, baptism unites the individual to Christ effectually and, at that moment, the individual is justified—the forensic verdict passed over Christ at the resurrection is passed over the individual at baptism. Or as Lusk puts it elsewhere, “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.”[\[57\]](#)

Yes, I said all those things. Of course, I say a lot of other things that unpack these assertions and qualify those statements in various ways. But this is just straight Westminster and Calvin.

Given that the discussion on the floor of the GA turned the issue into a debate over *sola fide*, I should point out here that *sola fide* is affirmed even in this portion of my writing that the Report quotes: “Faith is the instrument of justification.” No one associated with the so-called “Federal Vision” denies or even questions the truth of *sola fide*. Salvific blessings can only be received by faith – and by faith alone.

[53] Rich Lusk, “Response to ‘Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision*, ed. E. Calvin Beisner (Ft. Lauderdale: Knox Seminary, 2004), 145.

[54] Lusk, “Response to ‘Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” 128, 130. At one point, Lusk did claim that “God certainly did require perfect and perpetual obedience of Adam” (121); and yet later, he claimed that the law did not require perfect obedience. It would seem, then, that God required more of Adam in a gracious garden than he would of Israel in a fallen world.

This footnote is non-sense. God required *more* of unfallen Adam than fallen Israel? Yes, of course! For Adam to keep covenant, he had to obey (by faith) perfectly and perpetually since there were no provisions in the original covenant for forgiveness. For Israel to keep covenant, an imperfect obedience arising out of faith is sufficient because they do have the promise of forgiveness.

The odd thing here is that the Report accuses the “Federal Vision” of “monocovenantalism” (flattening out the various biblical covenants so they are all the same). But here *I* am the one acknowledging the difference between the Adamic and Mosaic covenants, and the authors of the Report are collapsing them.

[55] Lusk, “Response to ‘Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” 140, 142; see also 137. Lusk also observes that “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” (141).

Right – but why is this deficient? The Report never demonstrates this understanding is actually out of accord with the Confession’s *system* of doctrine. The Report teaches Christ’s obedience and death are imputed to us. I

teach Christ's resurrection status (resulting from his obedience and death) is shared with believers. In either case, justification is grounded solely in what Christ has done. The same basic truth is being articulated in distinct ways, but there is no contradiction.

“Righteousness” can either refer to one's status or to one's ethical behavior. In the case of Christ, he certainly has righteous status before the Father. Why? Because he lived an ethically righteous life, died for his people as the sinless sin-bearer, and was raised again in victory and vindication, entering into the status of eschatological righteousness. He is now called “the Just One” (Acts 3:14). This resurrection righteousness is now shared with those who trust in him.

Why is it insufficient, biblically or confessionally, to view our justification in terms of sharing in Christ's righteous status? This question still hasn't been answered. Everyone agrees Jesus [a] had to obey perfectly; [b] had to die under the curse; and [c] had to rise into a new, glorified status. If anything, claiming that we are justified by sharing in his resurrection righteousness seems to give us *more* rather than *less*!

[56] Lusk, “Response to ‘Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” 142. Lusk later uses Richard Gaffin's work to suggest that “imputation, as such, has no free standing structure of its own. It is simply a corollary of union with Christ” (143). Gaffin responds to Lusk's usage of his work and the suggestion that union with Christ makes imputation “redundant” in *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster, 2006), 44-52.

And I respond back to Gaffin in Part 1 of my Response to the OPC Report, already linked above.

[57] Lusk, “Response to the ‘Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” 134; Rich Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies,” in *The Federal Vision*, 98; Rich Lusk, “Faith, Baptism, and Justification,” http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/faith_baptism_and_justification.htm. Lusk argues similarly in “Baptismal Efficacy and Baptismal Latency: A Sacramental Dialogue,” *Presbyterion* 32 (2006): 18-37. He would go on to suggest that grace is truly offered and conferred in baptism, but it would be possible to apostatize and hence “fall from grace” (cf. Lusk, “Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy,” 103-4; Lusk, “New Life and Apostasy: Hebrews 6:4-6 as a Test Case,” in *The Federal Vision*, 271-99).

The Report re-states my position accurately enough, but there's no critique of my arguments. “Falling from grace” is biblical language, after all (cf. Gal. 5:4).

I affirm: [1] Baptism is God's gift. [2] Not all the baptized are finally saved because not all the baptized receive and use the gift of baptism in the proper way (that is, by faith).

Again, while the GA floor debate turned this into a controversy over *sola fide*, it should be noted that I do, and always have, affirmed *sola fide*. Even perseverance is a matter of persevering *in faith*.

1. *Perseverance*

FV proponents have demonstrated a great desire to assure all those who have been baptized and are in the visible church that they are part of the elect of God. In the context of Romans 8, one FV advocate concludes that “clearly, Paul is not stating promises that are true only for some unknown group called the ‘elect.’ Nor is he speaking only to a portion of the congregation whom he judges to be ‘regenerate.’ Rather, he is applying these promises to all the members of the Church who have been baptized and united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.”^[67] Behind this statement is the common assumption of FV proponents that when the apostles – especially Paul – addressed their readers as “elect,” they intended this to refer to all members present in the church.

Further, they state their conviction that some individuals are elected from eternity past. And yet, some also proclaim that both elect and non-elect in the local church receive qualitatively the same grace. As Rich Lusk observed, “We need to be willing to speak of the undifferentiated grace of God (or the generic, unspecified grace of God).”

This statement of mine (from the book *The Federal Vision*) is taken out of context. It comes in the course of an exegetical discussion of Hebrews 6:4-8. I think that passage is speaking of “common operations of the Spirit” (cf. WCF 10.4), shared by both elect and non-elect covenant members. But as that same essay argues, there is still a qualitative, decretal distinction to be made between those in the covenant who will persevere and those who will not. However, it would be impossible for that qualitative, decretal distinction to enter into the warning in Hebrews 6:4-8 because the human author was not certain if the individuals addressed were elected to perseverance or not (even though he *expects* them to persevere unto salvation – cf. 6:9). The grace they have received is *undifferentiated* in the author's eyes because it is possible that some of them will persevere while others will not. Thus, he states the warning in conditional terms: “*if they fall away*” – which means the covenant members addressed might *or might not* fall away. Because the benefits received are common to a group in which some will likely persevere and some won't, it

makes sense to speak of those benefits as “undifferentiated.” That is to say, *from a covenantal perspective*, the benefits described in 6:4-5 are sufficient to make perseverance possible, but not necessarily efficient to that end. The outcome is still undecided (from a human point of view).

Even after reading the GA Report over, I still don’t see anything unconfessional or problematic about my interpretation of the passage in Hebrews. I do not see how my category of “undifferentiated grace” is substantially different from the Confession’s concept of “common operations.” The only way the Report can refute my argument here is to actually engage in exegesis of the text of Hebrews 6 – but exegesis is something the authors chose not to do. And even if I have mis-exegesed the text, it still remains true that the Confession acknowledges both eternal election of a fixed number to salvation, as well as common operations that elect and non-elect persons within the covenant share.

In a similar fashion, other proponents view grace granted to biblical characters, such as Saul and David, as “the same initial covenantal grace”; interpret verses traditionally understood as referring to individual election in an undifferentiated fashion; and read statements from both the Gospels and epistles referring to the entire church’s salvation as a salvation that could be lost or the image of a branch that could be cut off.^[68]

All that may be so, but all the FV men in question affirm a traditional understanding of election unto final salvation, even if they reserve the right to use “election” terminology in broader ways (as Calvin did, following Scripture). The fact that we interpret some biblical passages in non-traditional ways does not have *any* bearing on our confessional fidelity since the Westminster Standards do not exegete particular texts, but rather summarize what the whole of the Bible has to say on particular topics. We could just as easily say that the FV critics interpret “baptism” texts in non-traditional ways, since they would say many of the prooftexts in the Westminster Standards for baptism are not actually about *water* baptism. The bottom line is that the prooftexts do not have the authority of the Standards; they are merely supplemental and suggestive.

As with Hebrews 6, the only way for the Report to refute my claim about Saul and David sharing “the same initial covenantal grace” would be to engage the text of Scripture and the details of my interpretation. An exegetical argument demands an exegetical reply. But the authors of the Report decided to not do any exegesis.

[68] Rich Lusk, “Covenant and Election FAQs (Version 6.4),” http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/covenant_election_faqs.htm; AAPC Session, “Summary Statement of AAPC’s Position on the Covenant, Baptism and Salvation (Revised),” item 10; Douglas Wilson, “The Objectivity of the Covenant,” *Credenda Agenda* 15:1:5, <http://www.credenda.org/pdf/15-1.pdf>; Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” *Auburn Avenue Theology*, 260-5.

[69] Barach, “Covenant and Election,” 150, 154; Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation,” *Auburn Avenue Theology*, 261, 266-7. Compare with Rich Lusk, *Baptismal Efficacy and the Reformed Tradition: Past, Present, and Future* (2002); http://www.hornes.org/theologia/content/rich_lusk/baptismal_efficacy_the_reformed_tradition_past_present_future.htm.

While I am disappointed with the way the entire process unfolded in the PCA – the selection of the committee, the task assigned to the committee, the Report of the committee, the floor “debate,” and the final vote – I do not think the issues are settled, in the PCA or in the Reformed church more broadly considered. It is obvious that the Report was premature. If even the committee failed to have a good grasp of the issues, how could the denomination as a whole understand the issues? The floor debate at GA revealed that many believed the crux of the matter was *sola fide*, and they voted for the Report as a way of affirming *sola fide*. That is a commendable action in itself. Three cheers for *sola fide*! But if the men critiqued in the Report *also* affirm *sola fide*, obviously, there has been some serious miscommunication or misunderstanding or misrepresentation. Thus, I do not expect the Report to finally satisfy, even though it passed overwhelmingly. Even after the 2007 GA, the “Federal Vision” issue remains unresolved in the PCA. Sadly the reputations of many (like myself) have been tarnished by the Report. But it may be that the mainstream of the PCA will not encounter the “real” “Federal Vision” until presbyteries handle judicial cases – which cases *should* require face-to-face interaction over open Bibles.

Certainly the PCA has the prerogative to reject the distinctives of the “Federal Vision.” As a self-governing denomination, she has the right to exclude “Federal Vision” men, even as she excludes Baptists and Lutherans. But I still don’t see what she will gain in peace and purity by doing so. And she will certainly lose a great deal in catholicity. The “Federal Vision” is an ongoing conversation over issues that have long been debated in Reformed circles. The

conversation is both *conservative*, harkening back to classical Reformed sources, and *cutting-edge*, interacting with the best biblical scholarship of our day. If the PCA follows through on the Report and enforces it judicially, she will be not only be cutting herself off from many good scholars, but also from many good churchmen. It seems much wiser to take a “Gamaliel” approach, and wait and see if the “Federal Vision” conversation matures or withers away. But as it stands right now, it would be a huge overreaction to think that the “Federal Vision” in any way, shape, or form threatens the theological purity of the denomination.

Standing on the outside of the PCA, occasionally peering in, I can see many, many good things happening. But this Report is certainly not one of them. Thankfully, though the church often errs, she is in God’s hands, and he will take care of her. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, the church will be filled with love and truth, peace and purity, in the end. May that day hasten.