

**IS II – Independent Study**

**A Critical Evaluation of "Federal Vision  
Theology" Arising in North American  
Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in  
the Last 30 Years**

*Stephen N. Dancer*

*2 May 2006*

# Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
THE AIMS OF THIS STUDY .....	3
THE STRUCTURE OF THIS WORK .....	4
<b>NORMAN SHEPHERD .....</b>	<b>5</b>
SHEPHERD AND WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY .....	5
SHEPHERD AND 'THE CALL OF GRACE' .....	8
<i>The Covenant</i> .....	9
<i>Covenant and The Great Commission</i> .....	10
<i>Covenant and Election</i> .....	11
<i>Covenant and Regeneration</i> .....	13
<i>The Issues Raised by Shepherd</i> .....	14
<b>THE FEDERAL VISION.....</b>	<b>16</b>
THE COVENANT.....	19
ELECTION.....	25
THE COVENANT OF WORKS AND JUSTIFICATION .....	26
ASSURANCE .....	28
PERSEVERANCE .....	29
SACRAMENTS .....	29
<b>RESPONSES TO THE FEDERAL VISION.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>35</b>
MAIN SOURCES .....	35
OTHER WORKS CONSULTED .....	37

## **Abstract**

This work reviews the controversy that has ensued around the "Federal Vision" theology promoted at the Auburn Avenue Pastors Conference of 2002 in Monroe, Louisiana. Significant pastoral and doctrinal questions were raised for the Reformed and Presbyterian community.

This work looks at some of the background to the views proposed. In particular, the views of Norman Shepherd have proven to be controversial and yet treated with approval by the Federal Vision advocates. Of most concern is Shepherd's view of justification. Shepherd argues that justification is based on a faith that is an obedient faith. He argues that repentance is the other side of the coin of faith and is indeed of its essence. Thereby 'new obedience' is introduced into justification. The reasons for this are found in his view of the covenant between God and man. Shepherd sees no difference in the nature of the covenant administrations before and after the fall. The Covenant of Works finds no place in his thinking. Shepherd believes the problem with both the Roman Catholic and Evangelical doctrines of justification is to do with the place merit is given in both.

The Federal Vision is found to agree with most of Shepherd, but has gone much further. It treats the covenant as more than simply an agreement or compact but the relationship itself. It goes on to describe relations within the Trinity as covenantal, characterised by self-giving love and faithfulness. The covenant with man, who is drawn into this Trinitarian relationship by grace, has no place for merit or a covenant of works.

This conception of covenant is found to cause a need to modify concepts of election,

justification, assurance, perseverance and the sacraments.

Though some of the questions raised by the Federal Vision are valid, it is found to cause serious harm to some of the doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

*Word Count: 310.*

## Introduction

In January 2002 pastors from various Reformed and Presbyterian denominations gathered for the Auburn Avenue Pastors Conference hosted by the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), in Monroe, Louisiana, USA. There were four speakers on the programme:

- Steven Wilkins, pastor of the host church
- Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho<sup>1</sup>
- Steve Schlissel, pastor of Messiah's Covenant Community Church, New York<sup>2</sup>
- John Barach, then pastor of Trinity Reformed Church in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada<sup>3</sup>

The conference was entitled "*The Federal Vision: An Examination of Reformed Covenantalism*"<sup>4</sup>. As the name may suggest, the purpose of the conference was to consider covenant theology and the nature of biblical covenants. On the face of it there was nothing unusual about this subject. Wilkins comments that

---

<sup>1</sup> Christ Church was a founding member of the Confederation of Reformed and Evangelical Churches (CREC). The denomination was formed in 1998 from three churches. It has since grown to 48 churches through a combination churches joining and the planting of new churches.

<sup>2</sup> An independent Reformed church.

<sup>3</sup> A congregation of the United Reformed Church in North America (URCNA).

<sup>4</sup> Recordings of the addresses can be found in the internet at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?sourceonly=true&currSection=sermonsource&keyword=schlissel&subsetcat=series&subsetitem=2002+Pastors%27+Conference>

There was nothing novel or particularly creative about the lectures given (most if not all the points made by the speakers had been made by numerous theologians at one time or another in the past), but the conference became a catalyst to provoke a great deal of discussion on the covenant and its practical outworkings.

Wilkins understates the result of the conference. Not only was a great deal of discussion provoked. A great deal of controversy ensued, resulting in the publication of statement by the Covenant Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the US (RPCUS) later that year entitled "*A Call to Repentance*"<sup>5</sup>. The view expressed of the presbytery was unequivocal, stating that the

teaching presented in the 2002 Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Pastors Conference, involves a fundamental denial of the essence of the Christian Gospel in the denial of justification by faith alone. ... *these teachings are heretical*. We call these men to repentance. [Emphasis mine]

No longer was this a "discussion on the covenant and its practical outworkings", as Wilkins described it, but it had become a debate about the orthodoxy of the views expressed in the original conference. Such is the seriousness of the allegations that increasing numbers of presbyteries and reformed denominations are being forced to consider the views promoted under the Federal Vision banner and determine whether disciplinary action should be taken. The dispute has not yet run its course.

The theology elaborated at the "Federal Vision" conference of 2002 and promoted through extensive use of the internet presents considerable challenges to reformed churches. In light of the debate of the last four years the proponents appear to redefine the meanings of some key doctrinal categories laid out in the reformed

---

<sup>5</sup> Found at the denominational website: <http://www.rpcus.com/Resolutions.pdf> (At the time of writing, this link was broken!)

confessional standards, perhaps the most significant being "covenant", "election" and "justification". Such categories go to the heart of what it means to be a Christian and therefore any reformulations of them raise important issues for pastoral ministry.

### ***The Aims of this Study***

The aims of this study are threefold:

- 1) Firstly, as far as possible, to characterise the doctrinal distinctives of the movement. There is some debate as to whether this is possible. The dispute not only centres around some important theological questions, but also whether it is legitimate to talk about a "Federal Vision" theology at all. There is no definitive written statement of it – merely a group of pastors, sympathetic to one another, discussing issues of reformed theology. Indeed all the participants would claim firm allegiance to one or other of the reformed confessional standards. But within the bounds of those standards, they say, there are differences between them. Nevertheless, the present writer believes that there are some core elements that can be identified.
- 2) Secondly, to plot the emergence of the movement. This can be done in two ways.
  - a) Firstly, historically: it is our aim understand who the main protagonists are, how has the movement developed, and how the ensuing controversy has unfolded.
  - b) Secondly, doctrinally: to understand what the main historically influences are what are the roots of the movement? What doctrinal weaknesses does it seek

to address?

- 3) Thirdly, to offer a critique from a reformed confessional perspective. It should be noted that this author is approaching the issue from the point of view of the Westminster standards.

### ***The Structure of this Work***

Norman Shepherd was to be one of the original "Federal Vision" speakers, but personal circumstances prevented his attendance. Shepherd is the senior figure amongst proponents of Federal Vision thinking and his work is received with approval by them. Therefore, the first main line of enquiry shall be into his work. Two controversial episodes in his career will serve as focal points to highlight the issues.

The second line of enquiry shall be into the views of the Federal Vision itself. A broad outline will be given.

Thirdly, the response of the denominations, presbyteries and other bodies will be examined in more detail.

Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

## **Norman Shepherd**

Shepherd was appointed Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, in 1963, succeeding John Murray. However, in 1975 significant controversy arose concerning his views on the doctrine of justification and ultimately he was dismissed from the staff of Westminster in January 1982. At that time Shepherd was also a pastor in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Later that year he transferred out of the OPC to the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) where he remained until his retirement in 1998.

Having spent 18 years in relative quiet after the Westminster storm, new controversy arose in 2000 over his book *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*. In this book it was clear that his views on justification had not changed. It was also clear that his views were grounded in a particular view of covenant theology.

In this section we shall consider the views proposed by Shepherd, focussing on these two occasions.

### ***Shepherd and Westminster Theological Seminary***

Norman Shepherd's views on the doctrine of justification came to light in 1975. Various church bodies, which were examining candidates for the ministry who had studied under Shepherd, had noted that some of these students were expressing the view that justification was through faith and works. Having come to the notice of the faculty, there then ensued a lengthy period of debate within the seminary.

In spite of a process of investigation of many steps and lasting seven years, the Board concluded that

After spending much time and effort in writing and speaking on these areas of theology, Mr. Shepherd has not been able to satisfy the Board and considerable portions of the Seminary constituency that the structure of his views and his distinctive formulations clearly present the affirmations by which our Standards guard the relation and place of faith and works with respect to salvation.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted here that Shepherd's views were not considered to be opposed to the Westminster standards. Rather, their concern was over the lack of clarity with which Shepherd presented his views, to the degree that they were unsure that in Shepherd's view works and faith were rightly related.

In its *Reason and Specifications* document, the Board presented a list of problem areas in Shepherd's theology which are rooted in his view of covenant:

1. Shepherd's formulation of a theology of the covenant allows him to join good works to faith under the complete and required response of obedience to the grace offered. Faith itself is seen as a good work. Christ himself showed this kind of covenantal faithfulness. Christ is the pattern for every Christian. When the Apostle Paul excluded works from justification, Shepherd claims that he was not excluding those good works of the obedience of faith. Rather he was excluding the works done in the flesh with a view to acquiring merit as a ground for justification. Shepherd affirmed that neither faith nor works were the ground for

---

<sup>6</sup> *Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd*. Approved by the Executive Committee of the Board, Westminster Theological Seminary, 26 February 1982, p2.

justification. However, in formulating things this way, works and faith appear to be co-instrumental in justification.

2. Shepherd believes that there is only one covenantal pattern in Scripture. The concept of the Covenant of Works found in the Westminster Confession<sup>7</sup> is notably absent from his formulation. This means that the pattern of the covenantal relationship between God and Adam is true for all covenants in Scripture. Adam's response to God's gracious promise was intended to be one of faithful obedience, with sanctions for breaking covenant. So also with all post-fall covenants. According to the Westminster Board, such a view did not do justice to the difference between the Adamic and New Covenants, or between Adam and the Second Adam, Christ. Shepherd appears to have no need for Christ's active obedience, which fulfilled all righteousness for us, and therefore could be imputed to our account. The idea of merit in Christ's work on our behalf, fulfilling the law for the elect, is absent from his formulations. Rather, in his view, the death and resurrection of Christ have merit in the sense that they make available for us the resources necessary for faithful obedience, resources that Adam never had. The corollary to this view is that just as for Adam, the Christian is under a covenant obligation to obedience to the law. The threats of the covenant remain in place. The distinctiveness of the Covenant of Grace, the its fullness in the New Covenant, and the primary function of faith is lost.
3. This covenantal dynamic changes the doctrine of assurance. Shepherd asserts that election can only be known through the covenant, not through the decree of God. Election is maintained by faithful covenant keeping. Therefore

---

<sup>7</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, 7.2 (hereafter referred to as 'WCF')

election can be lost through covenant breaking. This formulation seems to be at odds with the confession that sees the covenant of grace as being made with those elect in Christ by the eternal decree of God. Shepherd tries to get round the difficulty by seeing this not as mere information or fact, but a confession of faith. That is, it is as it is confessed and believed that a person gains assurance. This, believes Shepherd, gives the right impetus for perseverance in the faith since otherwise election can turn into reprobation through covenant breaking. The loss of the state of justification is implied.

As well as dismissal from Westminster Theological Seminary, Shepherd was also due to face charges brought by his presbytery of the OPC of failing to conform to the standards of the OPC. However, he transferred out of the denomination before they could be faced. The denomination that received him, the CRC, was not made aware of the charges of the OPC. Therefore the issue remained unresolved in any of the reformed churches at that time.

### ***Shepherd and 'The Call of Grace'***

Following his retirement from pastoral ministry, Shepherd devoted himself to lecturing and writing. In 2000, he published a small book (105 pages) entitled *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*. The book served to rekindled interest in the original controversy at Westminster Seminary. The contents of the book demonstrated that his views had not changed.

Shepherd sees that there has been a continual problem of resolving antinomianism and legalism in post-Reformation history. Shepherd makes a case for a view of the covenant which resolves these problems. Shepherd poses the questions he sees as the

unresolved legacy of the Reformation:

How do you preach *grace* without suggesting that it makes no difference what your lifestyle is like? In other words, how do you preach grace without being antinomian? On the other hand, how do you preach *repentance* without calling into question salvation by grace apart from works? How do you insist on obedience without being legalistic.<sup>8</sup>

For Shepherd only the biblical doctrine of the covenant satisfactorily answers this question. The first part of the book, then, consists of a review of the Covenant of Grace in its Abrahamic, Mosaic and New administrations. The second part deals with the implications for evangelism.

## **The Covenant**

In the first part, Shepherd's aim is to show the two parts of the covenant under each administration – those of promise and demand. Shepherd helpfully shows that it is incorrect to see the Abrahamic Covenant as one of grace, but the Mosaic Covenant as law, as many evangelicals believe. Both have promise and demand. In the New Covenant we are similarly offered promise along with obligation. The promise is found in Christ and the obligations on man are faith and repentance. Shepherd argues that faith and repentance are two side of the same coin and cannot be separated.

In this review, however, it becomes clear that Shepherd continues not to see works as meritorious, thus rehearsing his arguments of the Westminster controversy. The system of Law in the Mosaic covenant is not to be seen as a system of gaining merit. So, Shepherd sees Paul's contrast of law and faith in Romans 10:5,6 and Galatians

---

<sup>8</sup> Shepherd, N., *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (P & R, 2000), pp. 8, 9

3:12 as an *ad hominem* argument against Judaisers who misused the Mosaic Law as a system for merit-mongering. The reason the Mosaic Covenant fails, says Shepherd, is not because of inability of people to keep the commands, but simply because it no longer operates. The newness of the New Covenant does not lie in the idea that it is about grace and the gospel, whereas the Old (Mosaic) Covenant is about works and law. Rather it is 'new' because of the person of Christ. Through his death and resurrection he gives the power to obey the obligations.

Shepherd sees the idea of merit as the fundamental problem in both Roman Catholic and Evangelical theology<sup>9</sup>. Roman Catholicism is open about merit: believers can merit salvation through good works. Evangelicals, who oppose this view fundamentally, emphasizing grace alone in salvation, do not get away from an underlying concept of merit. Christ merits salvation for us by his work. Shepherd's view of the covenant gets rid of merit altogether.

### **Covenant and The Great Commission**

Having reviewed the covenants, Shepherd moves to part two of the book where he considers the implications for evangelism. He sees a problem with reformed evangelism, which has a strong note of particularism – the gospel is only for the elect, since only they can respond to it. Therefore there is a strong emphasis on faith at the expense of repentance. However, Shepherd sees the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 as the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 17. Only with

---

<sup>9</sup> Shepherd, N., *The Call of Grace* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2000) pp.59-63

the coming of Christ, the seed of Abraham<sup>10</sup>, can these promises be fulfilled. It teaches the responsibility of discipleship as faithful obedience to Christ's commands. "The gospel of the kingdom is the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>11</sup> The call to the world is that of covenant faithfulness. So, instead of this election/regeneration evangelism, the reformed pastor needs covenant-evangelism. Baptism replaces circumcision as the covenant sign.

## **Covenant and Election**

In considering the approach of Calvinistic evangelists, Shepherd asserts that often the application of the gospel message is made in the third person<sup>12</sup>. The message cannot be applied to "you" (second person) because the preacher does not know who the elect truly are. Therefore, the goodness of the message is muted to the hearer. The one element of the gospel presentation which he can freely apply to all hearers is that fact that all men and women are sinners before God. Hence reformed preaching gets the reputation of emphasising sin and seeming to be light on grace.

Shepherd argues that the answer to this apparent failing of reformed evangelism is a healthy understanding of the covenant. Election must be looked at from the perspective of covenant<sup>13</sup>, not from that of the eternal decree of God. Evangelism is therefore seen to be an address to people who are covenant breakers. The call is to

---

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 3:16

<sup>11</sup> Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. 76

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p.81.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p.83.

faithfulness with the assurance that Jesus receives those who call. In this way we can understand the gospel message as good news for all people<sup>14</sup>.

Treating those who are covenantally faithful as those who are elect has radical implications for certain Biblical passages. Ephesians 1:4,11 are well known verses that have been taken to speak of God's predestination of the elect in eternity.

However, Shepherd asks how the hearer is to identify the "us" of verse 4 or the "we" of verse 11<sup>15</sup>. Are they those who would be eternally elect? Does therefore Paul know that all the hearers are eternally elect? This seems unlikely. So are only the elect within the roll of the church in Ephesus being addressed? If so, how would they know whom exactly is being addressed?

Shepherd states that all on the roll are being addressed on the basis of their visible faith and sanctity. They are the elect. True, some will fall into apostasy and therefore there are warnings in scripture for them. They will be treated as non-elect and excommunicated.

A second passage which Shepherd treats is the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15:1-8. The vine, that is Christ, he says, feeds both the fruitful and unfruitful branches. The normal Calvinistic response to this parable is to say that the unproductive branches are not savingly connected. The productive ones, on the other hand, are connected savingly. This is often expressed as the distinction between being merely 'outwardly' united with Christ (but unfruitful) and 'inwardly' united to Christ

---

<sup>14</sup> This explains why the message of the angels are good news for all in Luke 2:10.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p.87.

(fruitful)<sup>16</sup>. The inward/outward distinction is taken to refer to that between the decretally elect and the reprobate. So, thereby John 15 is viewed from the point of view of election and not of covenant. Shepherd challenges this view by asking what the point of the warning then is. The elect are safe and do not need to be warned, but the reprobate will not respond to the warning and therefore it is wasted on them.

## **Covenant and Regeneration**

The corollary to evangelism that is oriented towards election is that it is oriented to regeneration. To rightly apply the message individually, he must make a personal judgment about the state of the person before him<sup>17</sup>, though this role rightly belongs in the hands of God, to apply the message. Once the evangelist makes the judgement he seeks to lead the person to the point of regeneration. He will do so by showing the impossibility of perfect obedience to the law. He will urge the person to cry out for a new heart to believe and repent. The problem with this method, in Shepherd's eyes, is that the pastor is encroaching on the work of the Spirit. It is difficult to see how a method which calls for a new heart and holds Christ at a distance can be good news when he is told that he cannot do anything.

As a solution, Shepherd argues that when evangelism viewed from the point of covenant, baptism becomes the point of conversion and salvation. Shepherd emphasizes that this is not the point of transition from death to life - that is a matter for the Spirit. However, the church hears a profession and sees a baptism and this is considered the point of union with Christ when seen covenantally.

---

<sup>16</sup> Paul uses these terms in Romans 2:28,29 in regard to inward and outward circumcision.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p.94.

Shepherd argues that this is supported by biblical evidence. Firstly, when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus the account does not record that he was regenerated - only that he was baptised. Secondly, in Romans 6:1-11, Paul refers the Romans to their baptism while urging obedience. Baptism has marked their transition from death to life. Thirdly, in Matthew and Luke, to the good news is added the call to repentance and obedience, not faith. Regeneration evangelism does not ask for this response. Rather it encourages pacifism as the hearer waits for regeneration.

### **The Issues Raised by Shepherd**

Shepherd raises a number of issues which seem to challenge reformed thought:

- The arguments presented by Shepherd are based upon a view of theological history where unresolved problems that remain. *The Call of Grace*, which is a book for popular consumption, does not adequately demonstrate this failure. A more thorough work would be required.
- The Westminster Confession speaks of a "covenant of works"<sup>18</sup> and then, in view of the fall in Eden, "the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace"<sup>19</sup>. This bi-covenantal view has characterized Presbyterian and puritan thought. It is notable therefore that in Shepherd's view the administrations of pre- and post-lapsarian covenants are almost identical. The fall itself appears to have no effect on the nature of God's

---

<sup>18</sup> WCF 7.2

<sup>19</sup> WCF 7.3

covenant with man. There is only one covenant. As for Adam, the receipt of the inheritance depends on faithful covenant-keeping in all administrations.

- Shepherd rejects the idea of 'merit' in works, even in the works of Christ and implies a revision of the reformed understanding of his role as mediator of the covenant.
- Shepherd's mono-covenantal view has implications for how we view the respective 'work' of Adam and Christ. He argues that merit has no place in the relationship between a father and child.
- There are significant concerns over Shepherd's doctrine of justification. Followers must be like Christ in obedience in order to inherit eternal life. Though Shepherd denies that works or repentance form the ground of a believer's justification, they are seen as co-instrumental in contradiction to the Westminster Confession's view of faith as the "alone instrument"<sup>20</sup> of justification.
- Shepherd maintains a view that all baptised believers and their children are elect by virtue of their covenant membership. However, they may lose their salvation and state of justification. Thus there is no ultimate assurance of salvation.

---

<sup>20</sup> WCF 11.2

## The Federal Vision

Much time has been spent on the views of Norman Shepherd simply because they are shared in much of Federal Vision thinking. The Federal Vision has become a collective term for the views of a group of people who were speakers at one conference. But it has become clear that many of the views expressed have been held much more widely. Supporters of the Federal Vision are quick to deny that there is a theological system. For example, in reply to the report of the Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA) Study Report<sup>21</sup> into a number of issues including the "Federal Vision", the Session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, of which Steve Wilkins is a teaching elder, writes,

The [Mississippi Valley Presbytery] "report" assumes that there is a well-defined movement labeled the "Federal Vision." This is highly debatable. The men who have been linked in various ways to the "Federal Vision" ... have a number of important differences amongst themselves. 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.<sup>22</sup>

Though it is undoubtedly true that there are "important differences" between the proponents, it is of great value to identify the "commonly held perspectives".

---

<sup>21</sup> *The Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA) "New Perspectives" Study Committee Report*, Adopted February 1, 2005, by *Mississippi Valley Presbytery*, found at <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/apologetics/PDFs/Public%20Miss%20Valley%20Pres%20AAP%20C2.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> *The Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA) "New Perspectives" Study Committee Report: A Reply from Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA)*, Adopted December 5, 2004, by the Session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, found at <http://www.auburnavenue.org/Official%20Positions%20and%20Statements/missvalleypres.htm>

Before we examine these, it might be asked at this point why such a thing as the "Federal Vision" has arisen at this period in history. Such movements in history arise in response to something – a perceived lack in the current situation.

Some have argued<sup>23</sup> that the movement is a reaction to the effects of revivalism in American evangelical Christianity that have come to full fruition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It exhibits strong tendencies towards individualism, subjectivism and antinomianism.

Individualism pervades evangelicalism. What matters for a Christian is his or her 'personal relationship with Jesus'. Federal Vision proponents would argue this downplays the place and value of corporate entities of church and the family.

Individualism has led to intense subjectivism, where spiritual experiences are sought as evidence of God's work. The experiences are taken as God's approval of individuals. Thus the relational bond is conceived of in experiential terms.

Much of evangelicalism is antinomian, in the name of grace treating lightly the moral law of the Decalogue. So, in practice evangelicalism's standards of morality are perceived to be little different from the world. Federal Vision proponents would see this as the church capitulating to the world rather than the church as an agent of redemption.

Put in these terms, the movement is considered as merely a reaction to modern trends, which are matters of genuine pastoral concern and indeed are shared by others not associated with the Federal Vision camp. However, Federal Vision proponents would

---

<sup>23</sup> Waters, Guy P., *Review & Critique of the Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue Theology*

argue that their concerns are wider than simply a reaction to current trends. Rather, they claim that they are also drawing from two important sources.

Firstly, they believe that Scripture speaks in more expansive ways than the confessions or systematic theology often allow. By this they mean that where systematic theology defines theological terms in precise ways for the sake of clarity, often Scripture uses those same terms but with a wider range of meanings. Their concern is that any attempt to systematise biblical data is bound to the modern scientific culture and has often led to a cold propositionalism that is out of accord with concerns of Scripture. They claim that they are returning to a more biblical use of Scripture. Indeed, it has been argued that the Federal Vision is really a "new way of seeing"<sup>24</sup> Scripture.

Secondly, Federal Vision advocates claim to be open to hearing a wider range of voices from church history than is true of some modern Reformed and Presbyterian churches. They see themselves speaking from within a reformed orthodoxy that has been wider than is commonly appreciated. In particular they are recovering an historic reformed tradition that has receded into the background (in American church history, at least) over the last two centuries with the dominance of the Puritan evangelical thought. Therefore there is much appeal to the works of John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, and Zacharias Ursinus and others of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, particularly with regard to the sacraments. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Philip Schaff and John Williamson Nevin, the Mercersburg theologians of the German Reformed Church, promoted a

---

<sup>24</sup> Schlissel S. M., "A New Way of Seeing?" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Knox Theological Seminary, 2004) pp. 18-39.

high-church form of Calvinism that has influenced some Federal Vision advocates.

Some have turned to more recent Dutch theologians such as Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper and Klaas Schilder.

Not only has the movement drawn from these sources, they have sought to build on them, seeing their work as continuing in the Reformation spirit of *semper reformanda*, resulting in, for example, new formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Thus the movement is not simply reactive but is proactive in its trajectory.

With this in view, it is no surprise that the doctrinal issues raised by the movement are spread across many areas of doctrine. The task of tackling the concerns is a mammoth one to look at every area in detail. However, in this study, some of the main areas will be highlighted.

## ***The Covenant***

It is important to begin with the doctrine of the covenant. Carl D. Robbins, one of the critics of the Federal Vision, wrote, "It has been *a* (if not *the*) central issue in the 'controversies' surrounding the Federal Vision."<sup>25</sup>

Providing a definition of 'covenant' is difficult. O. Palmer Robertson notes that,

Asking for a definition of 'covenant' is something like asking for a definition of 'mother'.

A mother may be defined as the person who brought you into the world. That definition may be correct formally. But who would be satisfied with such a definition?<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Robbins, C. D., "A Response to 'Covenant and Election'" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology*, p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> Robertson, O. P., *The Christ of the Covenants* (P & R, 1980), p.3.

However, covenant is a Biblical term and it is valuable to explore some definitions.

Shepherd's view may perhaps give us a starting point from which to work. Drawing from the Abrahamic and Mosaic uses, Shepherd says,

We can describe a covenant as a divinely established relationship of union and communion between God and his people in the bonds of mutual love and faithfulness.<sup>27</sup>

Steve Schlissel gives a more lengthy definition:

The covenant of Scripture is God's rescuing His people from that which would harm or destroy them; calling them and their children to live intimately with Him in faith, love, and obedience, fearful of displeasing Him, and lovingly with one another; distinct from, envied by, and as a witness to the world; in humble expectation of receiving from Him at His appointed time everything that He has promised, signed, and sealed in blood through His appointed Mediator.<sup>28</sup>

Schlissel's definition is described in terms of God's acting towards his people ('rescuing his people', 'calling them') and expecting a response from them. This is similar to Shepherd's view. The important point to note here is that the Federal Vision advocates tend to see the covenant as the *relationship itself* in which God is the initiator. With care one can see that this is a much more expansive definition than is commonly held in Reformed theology. For example, Richard Phillips, a critic of the movement quotes<sup>29</sup> another definition from Herman Witsius:

A covenant of God with man, is an agreement between God and man, about the way of obtaining consummate happiness;

---

<sup>27</sup> Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>28</sup> Schlissel, S. 'Covenant Reading', Lecture address at the Auburn Avenue Pastors Conference 2002, found at <http://www.messiahnyc.org/MediaView.asp?id=7> (last accessed 1 May 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Phillips, R. D., *Covenant Confusion*, Seminar Address for the Philadelphia Conference on Reformation Theology Phoenix/Indianapolis/Philadelphia, March-April 2004. [http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0..PTID307086%7CCCHID559376%7CCCHID1787572.00.html](http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0..PTID307086%7CCCHID559376%7CCCHID1787572.00.html)

including a commination of eternal destruction, with which the contemner of the happiness, offered in that way, is to be punished.<sup>30</sup>

Phillips is keen to emphasize that, in the classical understanding, a covenant is not the relationship itself, but that which defines the terms of the relationship – the *agreement*. Indeed, Witsius bears this out by going on to describe the covenant as comprising of a promise, a condition to be met and a penal sanction for failure to meet it<sup>31</sup>.

That this is a difficult distinction to make, and about which there is a diversity of view, is illustrated by the view of O. Palmer Robertson, a critic of Norman Shepherd's formulations in the original Westminster Seminary dispute. He defines a covenant as, "... a bond in blood sovereignly administered."<sup>32</sup> He then goes on to explain that the "bond" is a "relationship" and not an "obligation" or "commitment"<sup>33</sup>. This definition of a covenant is almost identical to that proposed by Douglas Wilson in his book *Reformed is Not Enough*<sup>34</sup>. In another place, Wilson also describes a covenant as "...a relationship between two parties... a relation between persons."<sup>35</sup> So we see that there is some overlap of view. Nevertheless it is clear that within the Federal Vision camp there is a tendency to formulate the concept of a covenant as the relationship itself. This view has some important consequences.

---

<sup>30</sup> Witsius, H.: *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Kingsburg, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990), I.1.9

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* I.1.10

<sup>32</sup> *The Christ of the Covenants* (P & R, 1980), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p.5 and footnote 4

<sup>34</sup> Wilson D., *"Reformed" is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant*, (Moscow:Canon Press, 2002) p. 63.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson D., "Thema: The Objectivity of the Covenant" in *Credenda/Agenda* Volume 15 Issue 1.

Traditionally the Covenant of Grace as found in history in its various administrations has been seen to be intimately related to the so-called Covenant of Redemption or *Pactum Salutis* found within the Trinity<sup>36</sup>. In this covenant the plan for the redemption of the elect is included under God's eternal decree, with the Son as mediator between God and Man. In this way the Covenant of Redemption is cast as an eternal agreement between the members of the Godhead.

Federal Vision proponents have gone further, saying that the relationship between the persons of the Trinity in its totality a covenant. For example, Wilkins describes it as follows:

Each of the Persons of the Godhead exists in sacrificial relations with the others. The glory of God then consists not in self-seeking, but in self-giving. Therefore, the fact that God is love in his relation to the creation and mankind is simply the consequence of the fact that God is love in Himself. What we see revealed in creation of the love of God is the manifestation in time of what is eternally true of God in himself. It is the outflowing of his fullness of grace and love which the Persons of the Godhead have for each other.

The covenant into which we are brought is this very same covenant that has always existed within the Godhead from eternity.<sup>37</sup>

While we see a helpful description of the relations between the persons of the Trinity, we are also seeing a development in the theology of the Trinity. Further, God's relationship to creation is covenantal. Finally, the covenant into which man is called and enters into through baptism is seen as an extension of that eternal intra-Trinitarian covenant characterised by faithfulness and self-giving love.

---

<sup>36</sup> Berkhof L., *Systematic Theology*, (Edinburgh:Banner of Truth, 1958) pp. 265ff

<sup>37</sup> Wilkins S., "Covenant, Baptism and Salvation" in *The Federal Vision*, pp. 50,51.

So, Federal Vision advocates say the covenant is a vital, living, personal relationship connecting believers to God. It is not merely a cold legal "arrangement", "commitment", "way" or "basis" of a relationship. Also, the Federal Vision proponents see the covenant in history as an objective reality. It is compared to a marriage relationship. It is there regardless of subjective feelings about the situation, or even when there is unfaithfulness on the part of the believer. All baptised members of the church are in this objective relationship.

This formulation presents two main problems for reformed orthodoxy. Firstly, the Westminster Confession makes a distinction between the visible and the invisible church. WCF 25.1 describes the invisible church:

The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.

WCF 25.2 describes the visible church:

The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children

The visible church and the invisible church do not necessarily consist of the same individuals. The former is made up of professors and their children, the latter of the eternally elect. The visible church consists of both a number of the elect and a

number of whose profession proves false. The former are in living vital union with Christ, the latter are not<sup>38</sup>. Paul makes this kind of distinction in Romans 2:28,29

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (NKJV)

Wilson attempts to avoid the distinction by equating the visible church with the historical church and the invisible church with the eschatological church<sup>39</sup>. He appeals to John 15 and the parable of the vine. The distinction, he says, is not between living branches in union with the vine and dead branches, but between fruit-bearing branches drawing from the sap of the vine and fruitless branches also drawing sap from the vine. Both are in vital union with Christ, he says.

However, there are two responses to this. First, one cannot get away from the simple correspondence that can be made between those elect individuals present with Christ on the Last Day, and those same individuals dwelling in history, some of them professing faith at a given time, some already dead, and some yet to profess. Equally, some non-elect individuals in the Last Day correspond to some professing individuals in the visible church. The second response is to Wilson's interpretation of John 15. It is a basic rule that a parable should not be pressed in every detail. 'Sap' is not mentioned in the parable at all so it cannot be taken as an essential element of the Jesus' teaching. The issue is focussed around the signs of union – fruitfulness. The fruitful are to be considered in vital union.

---

<sup>38</sup> See Westminster Larger Catechism 63 and 65. Those in the visible church do enjoy some benefits of the church, but not the vital union with Christ.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson D., *"Reformed" Is Not Enough*, pp. 69ff; "The Church: Visible or Invisible" in *The Federal Vision* pp. 263ff.

The second problem with the Federal Vision view of covenant is its tendency to downplay the legal and forensic aspects of the covenant in favour of the familial and relational aspects. However, one cannot read scripture without seeing the forensic, courtroom imagery in use in God's dealings with mankind.

## ***Election***

Related to the view of covenant is the Federal Vision's view of election. Since covenant is seen to be primary in defining relationships, election must be seen in the light of it, rather than in reverse. In desiring to speak of election as Scripture speaks of election, Federal Vision advocates will look to Israel as the model of election. Israel was called to be in covenant with God, and they must be considered elect. In the same way, in the New Covenant the church, whose members receive the covenant sign of baptism, must also be considered elect. Proponents will appeal to the arguments that Shepherd makes in regard to Ephesians 1. When Paul speaks of them as elect, does he not mean that every one of them is elect? They do not deny that there is an eternal decree, which will result in a chosen people on the last day, and that this group is not the same group as the baptised church. But for them, the Spirit works on the elect and reprobate alike and we cannot distinguish between them. All receive the same sap of the vine (following Wilson's argument). In other words, all partake of Christ. Yet in time some will apostatise and fall away.

It is true that Scripture speaks of 'election' or God's act of choosing in a less narrow way than is found in the confessions. Israel was chosen<sup>40</sup> to be a holy people for himself.

---

<sup>40</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6

Jesus chose Judas as one of the Twelve<sup>41</sup>. Yet Scripture also uses the term in a narrower sense. Paul uses the 'elect' in a restricted way in Romans 11:7 in direct contrast with the nation of Israel. This is the meaning as used in the confessions. The confession distinguishes between the saving operations of the Spirit upon the elect and his common operations in the visible church<sup>42</sup>. The Federal Vision does not allow for such distinctions.

### ***The Covenant of Works and Justification***

Shepherd's rejection of the Covenant of Works finds sympathy amongst Federal Vision proponents. They would argue that it does not fit with a concept of an objective, vital relationship between Adam and God which is fundamentally gracious. For example, James Jordan argues that the confessional description of the Covenant of Works lacks any description of Adam's faith and trust in God in keeping the requirements<sup>43</sup>. As such it strikes at the filial nature of covenant sonship<sup>44</sup> in which merit has no place.

Instead of a merit model, Jordan argues for a maturity model. Adam's sin was a failure of a test towards maturity and glory in his relationship to God. As a result, as representative of the whole human race, maturity is impossible for us. However, Jesus the Second Adam came as our redeemer and reached full maturity. Though sinless, Jesus came as sin-bearer for Adam and us. What we receive as saints is the Spirit,

---

<sup>41</sup> John 6:70

<sup>42</sup> WLC 68

<sup>43</sup> Jordan, J. B., "Merit Versus Maturity: What Did Jesus Do for Us" in *The Federal Vision*, p.154.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p.155. Here, Jordan quotes Richard Lusk.

...who comes from the glorified Jesus. It is not Jesus' earthly life and "works and merits" that are transferred to us, but his glorified and resurrected life in the Spirit that is transferred to us.<sup>45</sup>

There are two implications of this formulation. Firstly, there is fundamentally only one covenant between God and man. It is a gracious one, which Adam broke, but which Jesus kept. Because he kept it, we too can keep it in union with him. Secondly, this covenant has no place for "merit", with the implication that Jesus' earthly life of obedience (his active obedience) did not accrue "merit" on our behalf, which could then be imputed to us. Jordan and others do not deny imputation of Jesus' righteousness in general, but they do not accept a division between active and passive obedience

It is valid to question what is meant by "merit" in the confessional formulations. It is not a term found in Scripture, but appears in three places in the Westminster standards<sup>46</sup>. It seems unlikely that the Roman Catholic concept of condign merit was intended. It is possible that the word simply refers to the worthiness or appropriateness of the work of Christ. However, Morton H. Smith, a Federal Vision critic, defends a view<sup>47</sup> of "merit" arising as a matter of strict justice according to covenant stipulations. One can "merit" the blessings of the covenant as a reward for keeping the conditions. Therefore Smith has no problem stating that, "The active obedience [of Christ] positively *earned* the righteousness that Adam forfeited."<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p. 195

<sup>46</sup> WCF 17.2, WLC 55, WLC 174.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, M. H., "The Biblical Plan of Salvation" in *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons*, p.103

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p.109

Critics such as Smith argue that, with the rejection of the active obedience what is at stake in Federal Vision reformulations is how Christians are justified. The standards affirm that justification is a forensic act of God. But Federal Vision advocates say that this is not enough and speak of justification in transformational terms. Like Shepherd, faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin and a Christian must continue in them to maintain the state of justification. Yet it cannot be denied that in the standards works are excluded from justification, even if only as an instrument devoid of merit. They have value as evidence of saving faith.

### ***Assurance***

The nature of the covenant and election has implications for the doctrine of assurance. There is no need to look inwardly to the heart for the saving operations of the Spirit, which the Westminster standards state apply only to the decretally elect. Instead the sign of election is that of baptism. Look to this, say Federal Vision proponents in order to be assured of one's election.

There are two problems with this approach. The first is a confessional one. Assurance is founded upon the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of graces, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit with our spirits<sup>49</sup>. The second problem is the uncertainty created by the Federal Vision conception of election. It is clear that not all the baptised/elect will find themselves in the eschatological church. Some will apostatise. Therefore, what assurance can baptism really give?

---

<sup>49</sup> WCF 18.2

## ***Perseverance***

In Federal Vision thought, it is possible for an elect person to apostatise and fall away, becoming reprobate. This is not simply loss of opportunity or potential. He was truly united to Christ, drawing on the same sap of the vine, and enjoying Christ's redemptive benefits. Yet initial justification can be lost. Practically, this is indistinguishable from Arminian notions of perseverance.

## ***Sacraments***

In Federal Vision thought we enter into the full benefits of the covenant through baptism. This is more than simply a 'judgement of charity', which accepts that the elect cannot all be distinguished from the reprobate. Rather, recipients are truly united to Christ and draw all the benefits of this vital union. Referring to Galatians 3:27, they say that whoever is baptised has put on Christ. However the language used is confusing. At the same time, they will assert that the sacrament must be looked upon in faith, and that not all will persevere to the end, finding themselves non-elect. So one is left asking how is the sacramental union between the sacrament and the thing signified of WCF 27.2 is to be understood?

Traditionally, it has been understood that the sign and the thing signified are to be distinguished, but that often in Scripture the sign takes on the name and effects of the thing signified. So, for example, Paul's use of 'baptism' of Galatians 3:37 is a reference to Spirit baptism, not water baptism.

## Responses to the Federal Vision

As noted in the introduction, the Covenant Presbytery of the RPCUS, a small denomination of twelve churches, were the first ecclesiastical organisation to respond to the teaching of the *Federal Vision* conference. Their response was unequivocal.

The four speakers were denying the essentials of the gospel and teaching heresy. They issued a call for the four men to repent, much to their dismay. In 2005, the moderator of the presbytery John M. Otis published a lengthy justification<sup>50</sup> arguing that the Federal Vision is a hybrid form of Roman Catholicism.

In 2003 the next Auburn Avenue Pastors' conference revisited the theme of the 2002 conference, but this time some of the main critics of the movement were also asked to speak and address their concerns. However, it was clear that there was still a great divide.

One of those present was E. Calvin Beisner, associate professor of historical theology and social ethics at Knox Theological Seminary, Florida. Beisner believed that this may simply be a case of two sides misunderstanding one another. Therefore, he organized a colloquium in August 2003 for the two sides to present and discuss their views in closed, relaxed sessions. The discussions were published as a book<sup>51</sup>.

However, Beisner's hope of unity was not realized. While applauding the aims of the movement to oppose the antinomianism, individualism and introspection of modern evangelical culture, he came to the conclusion that

---

<sup>50</sup> Otis, J. M., *Danger in the Camp* (Corpus Christi:Triumphant, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Beisner, E. C., *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons*

... extensive study of their oral and written teachings on the special concerns of the Federal Vision convinces me that they have taught, alongside some wonderful truths, some serious errors about covenant theology and its implications for salvation, personal and corporate spirituality and piety, the use and understanding of the sacraments and the conduct of theology and biblical studies in general. Sadly, their mistakes undermine their very laudable goals.<sup>52</sup>

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church set up a committee to study the Federal Vision in 2004 and will report in the 2006 General Assembly. Impatient with the slow progress, a handful of churches have seceded to form a new denomination, describing the Federal Vision (along with Shepherism, and the New Perspectives on Paul) as a form of Neo-Liberalism<sup>53</sup> much like the theological liberalism opposed by J. Gresham Machen, who led the formation of the OPC originally.

The Presbyterian Church in America has yet to establish a study committee, yet this has not deterred presbyteries from doing so. The conclusions have been varied. Mississippi Valley presbytery fell short of declaring the views heretical, but reached the conclusion that "... many of the positions being advocated by proponents of the ... [Federal Vision] are confused and confusing, are unbiblical, are contra-confessional, and are ...'of a pernicious and fatal tendency.'"<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, the Louisiana Presbytery, of which Steve Wilkins is part, reached different conclusions. While recognising that some of the teachings of the Federal Vision differed from the Westminster Confession in the areas of justification,

---

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p. 306.

<sup>53</sup> Elliott, P. M., *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism*, (Unicoi: Trinity Foundation, 2005) gives an account of the reasons for secession, though not used by the present author for this work.

<sup>54</sup> Mississippi Valley Presbytery Study Committee Report, *op. cit.*

adoption and perseverance, the presbytery exonerated Wilkins and recommended that he be "declared to be faithful to the Confessional standards of the PCA."<sup>55</sup>

Other presbyteries have started to look at the issue and the PCA will be obliged to in the fullness of time.

## Conclusions

The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you." (1 Cor. 11:19)

Controversies are God-given stimuli to the church to examine the doctrines of Scripture once again. The controversy over the "Federal Vision" has stimulated both a revisiting of the scriptures and the confessional standards.

Some of the concerns of the movement are valid. It is true that evangelicalism has imbibed much of the thinking of modern culture at the expense of scriptural doctrine. I cannot but fail to influence those churches in the evangelical reformed traditions also. Federal Vision rightly challenges this cultural drift by emphasising corporate aspects of the faith, obedience to divine commands and to look away from the self more often to the objective truths of the faith.

There is a right concern to see Scripture in all its fullness and not to restrict the view to a range of proof-texts which serve to establish a set of tidy propositions.

---

<sup>55</sup> *LA Presbytery Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Vision Theology Final Report and Recommendations*, adopted by Louisiana Presbytery at its 80<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting in July 2005, found at [http://www.louisianapresbytery.com/AAT-FV\\_final.htm](http://www.louisianapresbytery.com/AAT-FV_final.htm) (last accessed 3 May 2006).

There is a right concern to recover some things from the Reformation (and earlier) that have been lost in the modern day which are of pastoral benefit. For example, one must see the sacraments genuinely as a means of grace and not simply as memorials.

However, the movement does raise some matters of serious concern.

- The renewed definition of a covenant has fundamental implications for many other doctrines. It amounts an almost complete reworking of the plan of salvation.
- The Covenant of Works and the concept of merit has come under attack. In the view of this author this is a valid area of enquiry and needs further work.
- However, the implications of the Federal Vision formulation of the doctrine of justification is deeply troubling. The confessions are clear that faith is the alone instrument of justification. Works have no place either as grounds or as instruments in justification. However, Federal Vision appears to want to smuggle them in a non-meritorious way. Their appeal to James 2:24 follows the same pattern as Roman Catholic apologetics.
- True assurance of salvation cannot come from purely objective signs such as baptism. Such a doctrine runs the risk of encouraging a respectable and upright kind of nominalism which lacks true spiritual vitality.
- The language used by the Federal Vision has a tendency to confuse. Part of the reason for this is that terms well understood in the confession are used in different ways by the proponents. This is a matter of pastoral concern since

church members have a right to expect pastors use terms according to recognised standards.

The Federal Vision controversy is relatively young. Descriptions of it as 'heresy' are premature. Much patience is required in order to rightly characterise the issues concerned. However, it is hoped that in the fullness of time Christ's church will find purity and peace in its deliberations.

*Word Count: 8169*

# Bibliography

## ***Main Sources***

Beisner, E C., ed. The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros & Cons: Debating the Federal Vision. Fort Lauderdale: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004.

Carruthers, S W., ed. The Westminster Confession of Faith. Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1978.

Otis, John M. Danger in the Camp: an Analysis and Refutation of the Heresies of the Federal Vision. Corpus Christi: Triumphant Publications, 2005.

Phillips, R. D., Covenant Confusion, Seminar Address for the Philadelphia Conference on Reformation Theology, Phoenix/Indianapolis/Philadelphia, March-April 2004.  
[http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0,,PTID307086%7CCHID559376%7CCIID1787572,00.html](http://www.alliancenet.org/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID307086%7CCHID559376%7CCIID1787572,00.html)

Robbins, John W., and Sean Gerety. Not Reformed At All. Unicoi: Trinity Foundation, 2004.

Robertson, O P. The Current Justification Controversy. Unicoi: The Trinity Foundation, 2003.

Shepherd, Norman. The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism. Phillipsberg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2000.

Waters, Guy P., Review & Critique of the Federal Vision/Auburn Avenue Theology lecture delivered to the Twin Lakes Fellowship Church Planting Conference.

Twin Lakes Conference Centre, Jackson, MS., April 2005.

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Guy%5EPrentiss%5EWaters> (last accessed 3 May 2006)

Wilkins, Steve, and Duane Garner, eds. The Federal Vision. Monroe: Athanasius P, 2004.

Wilson, Douglas J. "Reformed" is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant. Moscow: Canon Press, 2002.

Wilson D., "Thema: The Objectivity of the Covenant" in Credenda/Agenda Volume 15 Issue 1.

A Call to Repentance Letter from Covenant Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States, 22 June 2002

<http://www.rpcus.com/Resolutions.pdf>

Reason and Specifications Supporting the Action of the Board of Trustees in Removing Professor Shepherd. Approved by the Executive Committee of the Board, Westminster Theological Seminary, 26 February 1982.

LA Presbytery Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Vision Theology Final Report and Recommendations, adopted by Louisiana Presbytery at its 80<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting in July 2005, found at [http://www.louisianapresbytery.com/AAT-FV\\_final.htm](http://www.louisianapresbytery.com/AAT-FV_final.htm) (last accessed 3 May 2006).

The Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA) "New Perspectives" Study Committee Report, Adopted February 1, 2005, by Mississippi Valley Presbytery, found at <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resources/apologetics/PDFs/Public%20Miss%20>

[Valley%20Pres%20AAPC2.pdf](#)

The Mississippi Valley Presbytery (PCA) “New Perspectives” Study Committee

Report: A Reply from Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA), Adopted

December 5, 2004, by the Session of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church,

found at

<http://www.auburnavenue.org/Official%20Positions%20and%20Statements/missvalleypres.htm>

### ***Other Works Consulted***

Berkhof, Louis. Systematic Theology. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958.

Marcel, Pierre-Charles. The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2003.

Murray, John. Christian Baptism. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980.

Robertson, O P. The Christ of the Covenants. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980.

Schenck, Lewis B. The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1940.

Witsius, H.: The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man. Kingsburg, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1990.