

RATIONALE FOR LOUISIANA PRESBYTERY'S DECISION REGARDING THE VINDICATION OF TE STEVEN WILKINS

Louisiana Presbytery acknowledges that some of the teachings of TE Steve Wilkins have caused controversy in the PCA and in the larger Reformed community in recent years. We understand that many fine and faithful men believe that his views are out of accord with the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms. We have spent much time reading, thinking, discussing and praying about whether or not TE Wilkins has been teaching doctrines that contradict his ordination vow of fidelity to the Westminster Standards. We have desired to give TE Wilkins the benefit of the doubt and have repeatedly questioned him on these issues in an attempt to determine exactly what his views are. The process has been tedious and difficult, and we would like to express our appreciation first to TE Wilkins for his patient endurance of this labor-intensive process. He has always been kind and open, and though no man can perfectly mortify his irritation in such arduous circumstances, we have found no better example of Christian patience than TE Wilkins. We would also like to thank the many brethren who have sharpened us with their insights and objections and who, with genuine fervor to serve the Lord Christ and protect His Church, have helped press us all along in our efforts to resolve this conflict.

THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

At a called meeting in December 2006, Louisiana Presbytery thoroughly examined TE Wilkins on the issues raised by the Central Carolina Memorial (hereafter CCM). The examination has been widely published and is available for anyone to scrutinize. We began by questioning TE Wilkins as to whether or not his views had changed since his entry into the Presbytery. When queried, TE Wilkins took no exceptions other than that which he took upon his entrance into our presbytery. We asked him specifically if he considered his espoused views related to the so-called "Federal Vision" to be contradictory to the Standards. TE Wilkins is firm in his belief that his teaching that has been associated with the "Federal Vision" is not a violation of his ordination vows, and he maintained unequivocally that he remains committed to the doctrines articulated in the Westminster Standards.

In our thinking, this is a critical issue. Since there is no evidence that TE Wilkins is being deceptive when he claims that he still holds to the Westminster Standards (indeed, no one in Presbytery has even suggested that he is violating the 9th commandment with regard to this controversy), the validity of the accusations raised by the CCM depend on one's interpretation of the Confession and how one views the comprehensiveness of the Standards. Indeed, one of TE Wilkins' main assertions in his attempt to defend his teachings confessionally is that he views the points of doctrine in dispute as extra-confessional rather than non-confessional.

It is the view of the majority of Louisiana Presbytery that the burden of proof falls on those who would accuse TE Wilkins of doctrinal infidelity. Thus far, no one has brought forth evidence demonstrating that TE Wilkins has actively denied the system of doctrine contained in the Westminster Standards. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof, and we have not seen any convincing evidence that contradicts Wilkins statements that he remains committed to the Westminster Standards.

Thus, Louisiana Presbytery's main problem with the CCM is with regard to methodology. The sloppy methodology in the CCM can be summarized by the following observations:

1. It is both uncharitable and poor scholarship simply to quote a statement from TE Wilkins out of context and to compare it with a statement from the Standards. Several of the accusations raised in the CCM are self-refuting if one considers the context of Wilkins' quotes. Employing this type of slipshod methodology, it would be quite easy to pit the *Scriptures* against the Westminster Standards.
2. The CCM implies that when any preacher or teacher articulates theology *in a different manner* from that which is found in the Standards, he must automatically be *contradicting* the Standards. Applying such a rigorous canon would, by definition, render every faithful teacher of the Word of God out of accord with the Standards. The Standards do not even begin to exhaust the truths that are to be found in the whole counsel of God. By design, the Westminster Standards are a *summary* of Bible doctrine. Furthermore, no preacher is limited by the terminology that the Standards uses in cases where the Bible uses terminology differently. We believe that many of the CCM objections are nullified by this observation.
3. It is the firm belief of Louisiana Presbytery that while the Westminster Standards fit into the Bible, the entire Bible does not fit into the Westminster Standards. The purpose of a Confession is to *summarize* biblical doctrine, not to *exhaust* it. We do not find TE Wilkins to be anti-confessional merely because he teaches Biblical doctrine using language in a different manner from that of the WCF. We do not believe that TE Wilkins is being deceptive when he affirms his fidelity to the Confession. We believe that TE Wilkins is making a courageous effort to do justice to the way Scriptural uses language without departing from his Confessional moorings. After all, if being confessional means that we cannot use language the way Scripture uses it, something is terribly wrong.
4. We believe that the methodology employed in the CCM to refute TE Wilkins (by merely quoting the Confession) is itself, unconfessional. The Confession clearly affirms that the Supreme Judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined is the Holy Spirit speaking through *Scripture* (WCF I.10). In other words, the CCM is in violation of the Confession when it attempts to refute Wilkins' teaching by merely quoting the Confession without also demonstrating the flaws in Wilkins' exegesis of the texts in question.
5. The Standards, understood in their historical context, view theology almost exclusively from the perspective of God's decree. Although good and necessary, this perspective is not sufficient to plumb the depths of biblical truth. The Westminster Standards were heavily influenced by the historic context in which they were written. John Murray observes:

The creeds of the church have been framed in a particular historical situation to meet the need of the church in that context, and have been oriented to a considerable extent in both their negative and positive declarations to the refutation of the errors confronting the

church at that time. The creeds are therefore, historically complexioned in language and content and do not reflect the particular and distinguishing needs of subsequent generations." ("The Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith," *Collected Writings*, IV, p. 242). "There is the progressive understanding of the faith delivered to the saints. There is in the church the ceaseless activity of the Holy Spirit so that the church organically and corporately increases in knowledge unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ . . . the Westminster Confession . . . is the epitome of the most mature thought to which the church of Christ had been led up to the year 1646. But are we to suppose that this progression ceased with that date? To ask the question is to answer it. An affirmative is to impugn the continued grace of which the Westminster Confession is itself an example at the time of its writing. There is more light to break forth from the living and abiding Word of God." (*Ibid.* p. 242). "When any generation is content to rely upon its theological heritage and refuses to explore for itself the riches of divine revelation, then declension is already under way and heterodoxy will be the lot of the succeeding generation. . . . A theology that does not build on the past ignores our debt to history and naively overlooks the fact that the present is conditioned by history. A theology that relies on the past evades the demands of the present (*Ibid.* p. 248).

In other words, the Standards approach theology largely from the perspective of God's decree rather than from a Biblical-theological approach. We believe TE Wilkins is attempting to approach Scripture from a covenantal, Biblically-informed perspective that augments the Confession rather than denies the veracity or importance of it.

THE CENTRAL CAROLINA MEMORIAL

A. Regarding the Doctrine of Election:

Central Carolina Presbytery asserts in its January 28, 2006 memorial the following:

TE Wilkins publicly teaches a doctrine of election in flagrant contradiction to our Standards. Whereas the Confession teaches that "God hath appointed the elect unto glory" (WCF III.6), TE Wilkins states that the elect are appointed to a conditional relationship that they can lose through unbelief. He writes: "The elect are those who are faithful in Christ Jesus. If they later reject the Savior, they are no longer elect—they are cut off from the Elect One and thus, lose their elect standing" (The Federal Vision, p. 58).

Louisiana Presbytery finds TE Wilkins innocent of this charge. In the context of the quote, Wilkins defined the term “elect” consistent with the Confession’s use of the term. Furthermore, in his article in the Federal Vision (p. 56), Wilkins affirms the traditional, Confessional view:

It has been the common practice in Reformed circles to use the term “elect” to refer only to those who are predestined to eternal salvation. Since God has ordained all things “whatsoever comes to pass” (Eph. 1:11), He has certainly predestined the number of all who will be saved at the last day. This number is fixed and settled, not one of these will be lost. The Lord will accomplish all His holy will.

See also, “AAPC Session’s Response to Charges of Heterodoxy” (adopted June 8, 2006):

From before the foundation of the world, God has sovereignly chosen a multitude no man can number for salvation. The basis of His election was solely His grace and mercy and nothing in the creature. The number of the elect can neither increase nor diminish. All who were chosen by God from the beginning will be surely saved eternally. Not one will be lost.

The point Wilkins is making in his teaching is that the Bible uses “election” in different ways. This is hardly an innovative or controversial view.

The following verses illustrate this point. In these representative texts, the term “elect” refers to God's visible covenant people rather than to the unknowable company whom God has chosen for eternal salvation.

- “For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have called thee by name ... ” (Isa. 45:4).
- “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies ... ” (Col. 3:12).
- “The elder unto the elect lady ... ” (II John 1:1).
- “The children of thy elect sister greet thee” (II John 1:13).
- “Knowing, beloved brethren, your election of God” (I Thess. 1:4).
- “Make your calling and election sure” (II Pet. 1:10).

Furthermore, Israel, God's covenant nation, is described in Scripture as the chosen people (Deut. 7:6-8; Deut. 14:2; Ps. 33:12). Peter applies this “chosen nation” language to the New Covenant Church in I Peter 2:9,10.

Well-regarded Reformed theologians have acknowledged this difference in language and have acknowledged it in their writings. As an original Covenant Seminary professor observes:

... [L]anguage is not algebra. The word ‘election’ simply indicates a choosing, a selection, and appointment. The nature and the purpose of the election must be determined in every case by the context (J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, II, p.148).

Charles Hodge remarks:

Neither the members of the Church nor the elect can be saved unless they persevere in holiness; and they cannot persevere in holiness without continual watchfulness and effort (*Commentary on I and II Corinthians*, p. 181).

TE Wilkins affirms that he has taught and continues to teach the Confession's definition of election in his public ministry (See Transcript, pp. 41-44). Simply because TE Wilkins, at times, uses the term "election" differently from the way Confession uses it does not mean that he rejects the Confession nor that he contradicts the Confession any more than one could accuse the Bible of contradicting the Confession. The fact that the Bible uses the terminology of "election" in different ways is well established in historic Reformed Theology.

B. Regarding the Doctrine of the Church:

Central Carolina Presbytery asserts in its January 28, 2006 memorial the following:

TE Wilkins teaches a doctrine of the church in flagrant contradiction to that of our Standards, in that he denies the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. The Confession states that "The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect," whereas "The visible Church ... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and their children" (WCF XXV.1-2). The sum of TE Wilkins' erroneous view is to teach that all members of the church—without distinction to their actual faith and/or regeneration—partake of the saving benefits of Christ. Whereas the Standards state that the visible church enjoys "the ordinary means of salvation and offers of grace by Christ," they grant only to the invisible church that they "enjoy union and communion with [Christ]" (WLC 62-65). As such, TE Wilkins denies that there is any distinction between believing and unbelieving members of the visible church, insisting that all baptized church members enjoy the benefits of union with Christ, only conditionally. See *The Federal Vision*, pp. 57-62, including the following statements:

"If God is for us, who can be against us? Christ died, rose again, and makes intercession for us, who can separate us from the love of God? 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 (Rom. 6)." (*The Federal Vision*, p. 57).

"The reprobate may be in covenant with God. They may enjoy for a season the blessings of the covenant, including the forgiveness of sins, adoption, possession of the kingdom, sanctification, etc., and yet apostatize and fall short of the grace of God" (*The Federal Vision*, p. 62). Note that Wilkins here directly contradicts WLC 69, which ascribes these blessings only to the elect and denies them to the visible church."

We would first like to observe that this last assertion made by Central Carolina’s memorial illustrates a fundamental flaw in Central Carolina’s argument and methodology. WLC 69 denies nothing to the visible Church. The visible Church is not even mentioned in the answer to WLC 69. It may or may not be implied, but it is a logical fallacy to believe that when a statement says that “group A” receives blessings that it automatically means that “Group B” does not. The Central Carolina Memorial is wrong when it asserts that the Standards grant “only to the invisible Church union and communion with Christ.” In WLC 168, for example, we learn that in the Lord’s Supper (which is an ordinance of the visible Church) Christians have union and communion with Christ confirmed. Also, both the confession and catechisms teach that baptism is a sign and seal of a person’s ingrafting into Christ.

Upon examination, Louisiana Presbytery found that TE Wilkins does not deny the distinction between the Visible and Invisible Church. The Committee asked Rev. Wilkins: “Is it true that you deny the distinction between the visible and invisible church?”

His response:

Absolutely not. Indeed, the bare fact that I do not believe all members of the visible church will be infallibly saved proves that I do see a distinction between the “visible” Church (containing those who persevere in faith and those who don’t) and the “invisible” Church (which consists of the whole number of the redeemed, who persevere in faith so that not one is lost but all without exception attain eternal salvation). Contrary to the assertion of the memorial, I wholeheartedly affirm this distinction as the *Westminster Confession* defines the invisible church. The “invisible Church” is not a parallel entity that exists above or beyond the visible church but rather is the “whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof;”—in other words, the invisible Church does not yet exist though it is surely foreordained by God and will surely and certainly exist at the last day (but then of course, it will exist as a very *visible* body). It is only “invisible” in that we can’t see all the members of it now.

TE Wilkins appealed to WCF XXV.1 for his assertion that the invisible Church does not yet exist. This seems to be inconsistent with WLC 69, which speaks of the invisible Church as a present reality. Although it could be said that the Standards are inconsistent here, when pressed to reconcile WCF XXV.1 with WLC 69, Wilkins affirmed that it may be less confusing to state that that the Invisible Church does not “yet exist in its entirety” rather than “does not yet exist.” But the statement “we can’t see all the members of it now” indicates that TE Wilkins does believe the Invisible Church now exists. TE Wilkins does indeed distinguish between the visible and invisible Church in that he repeatedly insists that he affirms that there are members of the visible church who will not be in heaven. It is important to understand that even if one maintains the propriety of speaking of an “invisible” church here and now, the only place such an invisible church can be found is within the confines of the visible. TE Wilkins confirms this (See Transcript, p. 64).

Given the fact that there is only one Church of Jesus Christ, TE Wilkins questions the usefulness of the “visible/invisible” terminology and the wisdom of maintaining a sharp division between the “visible” and “invisible” Church. After all, no man knows the makeup of the invisible Church. Wilkins’ views on this subject are hardly innovative.

Note John Murray's observations on this topic:

It has been common to make a sharp distinction between the church visible and the church invisible and with this distinction to apply definitions by which the differentiation can be maintained. This position calls for examination in the light of Scripture.

It may not be improper to speak of the church as characterized by attributes that are invisible or, in other words, to say that the church has invisible aspects. Various considerations readily come to mind. Only God knows completely and infallibly who are his, those predestined to salvation and ultimately conformed to the image of His Son. The church cannot make a census of the elect nor of the regenerate. Again, the actions of God by which men are made members of the body of Christ are of such a character that they are imperceptible to men. The fruits are perceptible, but the actions are in the realm of the heart and spirit of man ...

A rapid survey of New Testament usage will show how frequently the term 'church' designates what is visible. The church is the assembly or fellowship of the people of God, constituted by the call of God, a people formed for Himself to show forth His praise and to bear witness to Him in the performance of prescribed functions. The two instances in which our Lord used this term (Matt. 16:18; 18:17) make this clear. When Christ said to Peter: 'Upon this rock I will build my church', the investiture of the succeeding verse shows that the church is something to be administered upon earth. It is not an invisible entity but one in which ministry is exercised. And when in the execution of discipline, Jesus says: 'Tell it to the church' (Matt. 18:17), the church must be conceived of as the congregation to which information is to be conveyed.

Murray continues:

Hence, even in those passages in which the concept of the 'church invisible' might appear to be present, the case is rather that there is no evidence for the notion of the church as an invisible entity distinct from the church visible. As noted earlier, there are those aspects pertaining to the church that may be characterized as invisible. But it is to 'the church' those aspects pertain, and 'the church' in the New Testament never appears as an invisible entity and therefore may never be defined in terms of invisibility (John Murray, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 1. "The Church: Its Definition in Terms of 'Visible' and 'Invisible' Invalid").

Louisiana Presbytery is not aware of anyone who questioned Professor Murray's commitment to the Standards.

It also must be noted that the Confession makes strong and robust statements about the blessings of being part of the Covenant Community, the visible Church. It is the visible church that is the body of Christ, or else the references in the New Testament to such a body have no meaning. This is exactly what the PCA Book of Church Order states in its Preliminary Principles. To assert that the "invisible" church is the only "true" church is to obviate and invalidate the meaning and importance of the institutional church. If it is true that the invisible Church is the only true church, no preacher could ever tell his congregation that they are the bride of Christ and members of His Body, for how could he know for sure? Let us be thankful that the writers of Scripture had no such qualms (Eph.

5:23-32). Scripture repeatedly addresses the visible covenant community as the “Church” with very little effort made to distinguish a “true” and “invisible” church within the larger community.

The confession affirms that the visible church is “the house and family of God out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” (WCF XXV.2). Consider the implications of the Confessional language “house and family of God.” This illustrates that the framers of the Confession were at least wrestling with the Scriptural truth that the objectively identified covenant people are described with the language of salvation (if one is in the family of God he must enjoy “adoption” in some manner) while recognizing that the decretively elect alone will enjoy eternal life.

It is the judgment of Louisiana Presbytery that the assertion of Central Carolina’s memorial that TE Wilkins denies the distinction between the Visible and Invisible Church is in error.

C. Regarding the Doctrine of Perseverance

Central Carolina Presbytery asserts in its January 28, 2006 memorial the following:

TE Wilkins’ teaching directly contradicts our doctrine of perseverance. The Confession teaches that “They, whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (WCF XVI.1*). But TE Wilkins teaches the opposite. See the above quote regarding the reprobate, who according to Wilkins were at one time forgiven, adopted, and sanctified. Wilkins adds, “The apostate doesn’t forfeit ‘apparent blessings’ that were never his in reality, but real blessings that were his in covenant with God” (The Federal Vision, p. 62). In Wilkins’ teaching, all church members share all the benefits of union with Christ, but only provisionally. He writes, “If they persevere in faith to the end, they enjoy these mercies eternally. If they fall away in unbelief, they lose these blessings and receive a greater condemnation than Sodom and Gomorrah ... If they do not persevere, they lose the blessings that were given to them” (The Federal Vision, pp. 60-61).

*Ed. Note: The CCM mistakenly attributes this quotation to WCF XVI.1. It is actually from WCF XVII.1, in the chapter entitled “Of the Perseverance of the Saints.”

TE Wilkins’ articulation of the doctrine of perseverance is perhaps the most controversial of his teachings and is the genesis of the most heated opposition. He has been accused of teaching that a person can lose his salvation.

It is the position of Louisiana Presbytery that these charges are unfounded. Although, on the surface, Wilkins articulates his views in a way most contemporary Reformed theologians are not used to hearing, upon detailed examination, we do not find him out of accord with the Standards.

Wilkins rightly points out that WCF XVII (“On Perseverance”) frames its arguments in terms of those who are “effectually called.” Wilkins unequivocally affirms his allegiance to the fact that those whom God has effectually called cannot lose their salvation. There is no compelling evidence to suggest that TE Wilkins is being dishonest when he affirms the teaching of the Confession here.

The questions raised by Wilkins’ teaching pertain to the doctrine of apostasy. That is, what do members of the covenant lose when they reject their glorious covenant standing? The Westminster Standards are largely silent on the doctrine of apostasy. They simply do not elucidate what apostates lose and what they do not lose. There is but one brief statement in WCF XVIII.1: “Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and estate of salvation (which hope of theirs shall perish): yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.”

This brings us back to the question of the comprehensiveness of the Standards. Since the Standards devote little attention to the question of apostasy, what is the proper way to exegete and interpret the many passages of Scripture that teach that apostasy is a real danger that Christians must be careful to avoid?

This is another area in which we find the CCM’s methodology specious and troubling. Using the methodology of the CCM, if a passage of Scripture cannot be fit into the Westminster Standards, we must either ignore the passage or contort it until it is unrecognizable so that it fits into the box of our system. The CCM is attempting to force every verse of the Bible to fit into the framework of the Standards rather than have the Standards fit into Scripture. This is, as they say, “putting the cart before the horse.” As pointed out above, this is not what Reformed theology is all about. Reformed theology is first and foremost about being biblical.

So, the question should rest on how Wilkins exegetes Scripture. What is the proper way to interpret the “apostasy” passages? Some critics of Wilkins maintain that apostates lose nothing because they never had anything in the first place. Such an idea should be rejected *prima facie*. The horror of apostasy lies in the fact that those who fall away from their lofty covenant position lose a precious gift. God is not bluffing in those apostasy passages. Covenant members can and do lose real blessings and benefits if they reject Jesus. The question is this: should that which apostates lose be referred to as “salvation”?

If salvation is defined as that state of grace that only the decretively elect enjoy, then it is clear that apostates cannot lose that, for they never possessed it. Wilkins wholeheartedly agrees with this. What Wilkins proposes, however, is the question of whether or not it is proper to consider members of the covenant “saved” (at least in some sense) until the time they manifest apostasy. As we demonstrated above, the Bible refers to covenant members as “elect.” Church members are certainly in the community of the saved. The Confession affirms they are in the “family of God.” Both testaments use all the language of salvation to describe covenant members.

Louisiana Presbytery believes that TE Wilkins is setting forth the fact that the Bible repeatedly speaks of a genuine covenantal union that can be lost. Many passages could be cited, but we mention only a few. In I Corinthians 10, in reference to the children of Israel

in the exodus, Paul writes that all were baptized in the cloud and in the sea and that all drank of Christ (vv. 2-4). Paul goes on to write that God was not pleased with many of them, and that their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Then Paul applies this principle to the New Covenant Church, when the apostle warns the Corinthian Church that those events were recorded “for our admonition (v. 11).

Perhaps the clearest passage that speaks of a covenantal union that can be lost is found in John 15. Verse 6 speaks of branches that are not abiding in Christ being cast forth and thrown into the fire. The text does not say these branches appeared to be in the vine: in fact, verse 2 makes it clear that the branches broken off were indeed in Christ. Paul teaches the same concept in Romans 11 in the analogy of the Olive tree.

Those whom God has ordained before the foundation of the world to enjoy eternal life cannot fall away (John 10:27, 28). But the sad fact is that there are people who, from a human perspective, are for a time faithful Christians, but who eventually turn their backs on the Lord. Jesus refers in Luke 8:13 to those “who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.” There is a kind of faith that some have that proves to be temporary. The Parable of the Sower teaches the same principle. In three out of the four soils, life sprang up. But in only one soil was there perseverance.

Understood from the perspective of the Covenant, apostates can be said to deny the Lord who bought them (II Peter 2:1). This does not mean that the saving benefits of Christ's death were ever effectually applied to these people. It does, however, mean that they rejected their membership in the visible Kingdom of Christ and in the community of the redeemed. Apostates were once professing Christians who belonged to the community of the saved and to the community of those cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Those in covenant who eventually prove themselves to be reprobate clearly do not partake of the blessings and benefits of the covenant in the same way or in the same measure as the elect, but it still remains true that they once enjoyed an objective standing as God's people and experienced genuine, if temporary, blessing.

TE Wilkins' views on this subject are not innovative.

John Murray observes:

This is to say that even the non-elect are embraced in the design of the atonement in respect of those blessings falling short of salvation which they enjoy in this life ... We have in the Scripture itself an indication of this kind of reference and of the sanctifying effect it involves in some cases. In Hebrews 10:29 we read: ‘Of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be accounted worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?’ The person in view we must regard as one who has abandoned his Christian profession and for whom ‘there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment’ (Heb. 10:26,27). It is the person described in Hebrews 6:4,5 in terms of the transforming effects experienced but who falls away and cannot be renewed unto repentance. In 2 Peter 2:20-22, the same person is described as having ‘escaped the defilements of the world’, as having ‘known the way of righteousness’, but as having turned back and returned as the dog to his vomit or the sow to wallowing in the mire. This is--terrible to contemplate!--the apostate. Our particular interest now is that he is represented as sanctified in the blood of Christ.

Whatever may be the particular complexion of the sanctification in view, there can be no question but that it is derived from the blood of Christ and, if so, it was designed to accrue from the blood of Christ. The benefit was only temporary and greater guilt devolves upon the person from the fact that he participated in it and then came to count the blood by which it was conveyed an unholy thing. But nevertheless, it was a benefit the blood of Christ procured, and procured for him (*The Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol.1, "The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel," pp. 64, 65).

Murray points out the fact that those who fall away from covenant membership enjoyed temporary blessings that fell short of eternal salvation. The biblical truth that people can and, sadly, often do, fall from this privileged and blessed position of covenant membership is critical for Christians to grasp. Understanding this covenant perspective protects our precious doctrine of eternal security. Arminians often accuse Reformed theologians of failing to take seriously the passages of Scripture that clearly teach that "Christians" fall away from something real. When understood from the objective reality of the covenant rather than from the perspective of God's decree, which no man knows, the many "apostasy" passages can be easily understood and proclaimed without embarrassment. Neither do they give the Arminian any biblical basis for his errors.

In another article, "Common Grace" in *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, Murray (commenting on Hebrews 6 and 10) writes:

We shudder at the terms in which the experience delineated is defined. Yet we cannot avoid its import, nor can we evade the acceptance of the inspired testimony that from such enlightenment, from such participation of the Holy Spirit and from the experience of the good word of God and the power of the age to come men may fall away, crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, put him to an open shame, tread the Son of God under foot, count the sanctifying blood of the covenant an unholy thing and do despite the Spirit of Grace. Here is apostasy from which there is no repentance and for which there is nought but a 'fearful looking of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.'

It is here that we find non-saving grace at its very apex. We cannot conceive of anything, that falls short of salvation, more exalted in its character. And we must not make void the reality of the blessing enjoyed and of the grace bestowed out of consideration for the awful doom resultant upon renunciation and apostasy. As was pointed out already in other respects, it is precisely the grace bestowed in all its rich connotation as manifestation of the lovingkindness and goodness of God that gives ground for, and meaning to, the direful judgment that despite rejection entail" (pp. 110,111).

There are few theologians more revered in Presbyterian and Reformed circles than John Murray. But Murray refused to allow his commitment to systematic theology (or to the Confession) to distort his understanding of the teaching of Scripture. To his credit, Murray did not try to "explain away" these texts or to distort them so that they would fit into the neat little constraints of his system, nor did he view them as inconsistent with the doctrines of definite atonement or eternal security.

Charles Hodge echoes the point:

It is also natural and according to experience, that the promise of the Gospel, and the exhibition of the plan of salvation, contained in the Scriptures, which commend

themselves to the enlightened conscience, should often appear not only as true but as suited to the condition of the awakened sinner. Hence he receives the Word with joy. He believes with a faith founded on this moral evidence of the truth. This faith continues as long as the state of mind by which it is produced continues. When that changes, and the sinner relapses into his wonted state of insensibility, his faith disappears. To this class of persons our Savior refers when He speaks of those who receive the Word in stony places or among thorns. Of such examples of temporary faith there are numerous instances given in the Scriptures, and they are constantly occurring within our daily observation.

Hodge continues:

No strictness of inward scrutiny, no microscopic examination or delicacy of analysis, can enable an observer, and rarely the man himself, to distinguish these religious exercises from those of the truly regenerated. The words by which they are described both in the Scriptures and in ordinary Christian discourse, are the same. Unrenewed men in the Bible are said to repent, to believe, to be partakers of the Holy Ghost, and to taste the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come. Human language is not adequate to express all the soul's experiences. The same word must always represent in one case, or in one man's experience, what it does not in the experience of another. That there is a specific difference between the exercises due to common grace, and those experienced by the true children of God, is certain. But that difference does not reveal itself to the consciousness, or at least, certainly, not to the eye of the observer" (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 672, 673).

An understanding of the objective nature of the covenant protects our precious doctrine of eternal security. Once one gains an understanding that there is a covenantal union which can be lost (which falls short of final eschatological union) many passages of Scripture make sense. Indeed, this interpretation protects Calvinism against Arminian claims that we simply dismiss passages that do not fit our system. Certainly, the "apostasy" passages in the Bible cannot simply be dismissed. These passages certainly teach that something is lost. They do not teach that one can lose eternal salvation, but they do teach that a person can lose the rich blessings of covenant standing.

Louisiana Presbytery does not believe either Murray or Hodge were teaching views contradictory to the Standards. Neither do we believe TE Wilkins to be guilty of such a charge.

Consider the question from the following perspective: what if a preacher challenged someone who was contemplating rejecting the Christian faith by saying to him, "If you fall away, you will deny the Lord who bought you." Would he be accused of denying the doctrine of definite atonement? Yet, this is the language we find in II Peter 2:1. Or, if a preacher says to those who turned their backs on Jesus that they "believed for a while" (Luke 8:13), is he guilty of denying the doctrine of eternal security? Would a presbytery question a pastor's commitment to the Standards if he confronts a Church member who repudiates his membership vows by telling him that he has "trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant herewith he was sanctified an unholy thing" when all he is doing is quoting Hebrews 10:29?

This illustrates the grave error of the CCM when it attempts to make the Westminster Standards accommodate the entire Word of God. The Westminster Confession was never designed to do that. That is not the purpose of any confession. The Westminster

Standards, accurate as they are, articulate theology in much more narrow parameters than does the whole of Scripture.

Louisiana Presbytery understands why some are troubled by the way Wilkins articulates the doctrine of perseverance and apostasy. The doctrine of eternal security is precious to Reformed Christians. We believe there is much room for disagreement with regard to the propriety of how TE Wilkins articulates those doctrines. But after careful analysis, we conclude that there is insufficient evidence to indicate that TE Wilkins' views are contrary to the Standards on the issue of perseverance.

D. Regarding the Doctrine of Assurance:

Central Carolina Presbytery asserts in its memorial the following:

TE Wilkins' teaching directly contradicts our doctrine of assurance. The Confession teaches that we may have a certain assurance of salvation based on inward evidences of faith and salvation (WCF XVI.1-2*). Wilkins directly contradicts this teaching, stating instead that "The questions of when a man is 'regenerated,' or given 'saving faith,' or 'truly converted,' are ultimately questions we cannot answer and, therefore, they cannot be the basis upon which we define the Church or identify God's people ... [The covenant perspective] enables us to assure Christians of their acceptance with God without needless [sic] undermining their confidence in God's promises (by forcing them to ask questions of themselves they cannot answer with certainty)." In a footnote defining the harmful questions, Wilkins specifies: "Questions like, 'Have you truly believed?'; 'Have you sincerely repented?'; 'Do you have a new heart?'; 'Have you been truly converted?'; etc." (The Federal Vision, 67, plus footnote 15, p. 69.) But these are questions the Confession views as pastorally helpful and productive of assurance, not despair.

*Ed. Note: Once again, the CCM mistakenly cites WCF XVI. Presumably the authors of the memorial had in mind WCF XVIII.1-2, part of the chapter entitled "Of Assurance of Grace and Salvation."

The CCM asserts that the Confession views the questions mentioned in the last statement above as helpful. Where are these questions found in the Westminster Standards? The answer is, they are not found in the Standards. Faithful men can disagree as to whether such questions are helpful, but the CCM is incorrect when it asserts that the Confession views those questions as productive of assurance.

TE Wilkins does not deny WCF XVIII. He affirms the inward work of the Holy Spirit with regard to assurance (See Transcript, pp. 87-95). In his teaching on assurance, TE Wilkins is attempting to make the point that the promises of God are surer than the subjective experiences of men. The great problem with asking God's people whether or not they have had legitimate subjective experiences is the question of what constitutes a genuine experience. While it is difficult for a person to measure his subjective experiences,

everyone can read that God in the Bible promises eternal life to those who have living faith in Jesus. This leads to another critical question that TE Wilkins is attempting to answer: how are Christians to discern whether or not they have “saving faith”? In WCF XIV.2, we are told the characteristics of saving faith: Saving faith believes to be true whatever is revealed in the Word and “acts” in accordance with what is revealed: “yielding obedience to the commands; trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come.” It is clear that the Confession here directs the Christian to the promises of God in Christ and to his obedience as ground for assurance. The marks of saving faith are not invisible but rather revealed in the life of the believer. Louisiana Presbytery believes it is much more confessional for a pastor to exhort his people to trust in the sure promises of God and to look for the fruit of obedience rather than to ask himself subjective questions which are impossible to answer and which represent the kind of thinking which pertains more to revivalism than to historic Reformed theology.

Louisiana Presbytery does not believe there is any convincing evidence that that TE Wilkins is out of accord with the Westminster Standards on the doctrine of assurance.

E. Regarding the Doctrine of Baptism

Central Carolina Presbytery asserts in its January 28, 2006 memorial the following:

TE Wilkins teaches a doctrine of baptism strikingly different from that of Standards. Wilkins states that “When someone is united to the Church by baptism, he is incorporated into Christ and into His body; he becomes bone of Christ’s bone and flesh of His flesh (Eph. 5:30). He becomes a member of the house, family, and kingdom of God’ (WCF XXV.2). Until and unless that person breaks covenant, he is to be reckoned among God’s elect and regenerate saints” (Summary Statement of AAPC’s Position on the Covenant, Baptism, and Salvation (Revised), par. 4).

But, while the Confession describes baptism as a sign and seal of Christ’s blessings—including regeneration (WCF XXVI.1*)—the Standards do not equate all baptized persons with the elect, nor do they equate baptism with regeneration.

Wilkins teaches that:

“If [someone] has been baptized, he is in covenant with God” (The Federal Vision, p. 67) ...“covenant is union with Christ” (p. 58) ... and “being in covenant gives all the blessings of being united to Christ” (p. 58), which blessings he enumerates by appeal to Eph. 1:3, stating, “those who are in covenant have all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places” (p. 58).

The doctrine found in these representative statements from TE Wilkins’ teaching can be none other than that to be baptized is to have all the eternal blessings of salvation and, by inference, he teaches that all persons baptized in water must be eternally saved, unless they apostatize. This is made explicit as TE Wilkins applies all the blessings

noted in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians to those who receive water baptism, including the salvific blessings of union with Christ to those who receive water baptism, reaching all the way back to election from before creation to final salvation at the end of history. Thus, in contrast to the Confession's teaching that water baptism is a sign and seal of these salvific blessings, Wilkins plainly teaches that water baptism grants actual possession of these salvific blessings.

*Ed. Note: The CCM again cites the wrong chapter in the Confession. WCF XXVIII.1 (in the chapter entitled "Of Baptism") speaks of baptism as a sign and seal of regeneration, not WCF XXVI.1.

Before we analyze TE Wilkins's views on the efficacy of baptism, Louisiana Presbytery would like to make a few observations.

1. Central Carolina's memorial seems to imply that when the Confession describes sacraments as *signs* and *seals* that the Westminster Divines believed that sacraments were empty rituals that possess no real substance and bring no blessing or change to the recipient. That is not the case biblically. A *sign* gives testimony to the world of a genuine relationship between the sign giver and the recipient of that sign. When God commanded Abraham to place the sign of circumcision on his children, it was a testimony of an **authentic** relationship of blessing between God and Abraham's descendents. God claimed Abraham's descendents as His own. A *seal* refers to the official signet of a king, marking a letter or document as *genuinely* from the king. In baptism, the King of the universe places His official mark on a person testifying to the world that the person baptized belongs to Him as a citizen of His kingdom. The seal of baptism is God's mark of ownership on that person baptized. Yes, baptism is both a sign and a seal **but biblically, signs and seals are powerful things**. It is God's *blessing* that baptism seals on an individual.
2. CCM seems to reflect what is known as a Zwinglian view of sacramentology rather than the Calvinistic view.
3. Astonishingly, the memorial seems to question whether or not baptized individuals are in covenant with God. While it is possible that we could be misunderstanding Central Carolina on this point, their statement appears consistent with Baptist ecclesiology. That fact that our children are baptized into the covenant is basic Presbyterian and Reformed theology. Our Standards are clear on this issue (See WSC 94; WLC 101, 162, 166; WCF VII and XXX.3). Note, for example, the answer to WLC 101: "Jehovah ... is a God in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all his people; who, as he brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so he delivers us from our spiritual thralldom ... and therefore we are bound to keep his commandments."

Central Carolina's assertion that TE Wilkins teaches: "that to be baptized is to have all the eternal blessings of salvation" is patently false. Note the AAPC revised summary statement on Baptism:

By baptism, one enters into covenantal union with Christ and is *offered* all his benefits (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:1ff; 2 Cor. 1:20). As *Westminster Shorter Catechism* #94 states, baptism signifies and seals “our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.” Baptism in itself does not, however, guarantee final salvation. What is offered in baptism may not be received because of unbelief. Or, it may only be embraced for a season and later rejected (Matt. 13:20-22; Luke 8:13-14). Those who “believe for a while” enjoy blessings and privileges of the covenant only for a time and only in part, since their temporary faith is not true to Christ, as evidenced by its eventual failure and lack of fruit (1 Cor. 10:1ff; Hebrews 6:4-6). By their unbelief they “trample underfoot the Son of God, count the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29) and thus bring greater condemnation upon themselves.

TE Wilkins has affirmed over and over again the necessity of faith for the baptized to receive the eternal benefits of baptism and he goes further to say that without faith; baptism makes a person’s condemnation greater.

It also must be pointed out that far from being bare and empty signs, our Standards teach that baptism accomplishes several objective things apart from the faith of the one baptized.

According to the Westminster Standards, baptism accomplishes the following objective things:

1. It puts a “visible difference between those that belong to the church and the rest of the world” (*WCF XXVII.1*);
2. It “solemnly engages them to the service of God in Christ” (*WCF XXVII.1*).
3. Baptism “admits the party baptized into the visible Church” and is “a sign and seal of *his ingrafting* into Christ” (*WCF XXVIII.1*).
4. *WLC 167* lists objective duties those who are baptized are obligated to perform and warns against walking contrary to the “grace of baptism.”

Likewise, the Westminster Directory of Worship lists several things that baptism does apart from faith. “That the Son of God admitted little children into his presence, embracing and blessing them, saying, For of such is the kingdom of God; that children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh; that they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized ...”

Thus, the Director of Worship lists objective realities brought about by baptism. Baptism can also be compared to a marriage ceremony. After the wedding ceremony, (a “mere” reciting of words), the man and the woman are irrevocably changed. Their covenant status is different from what it was the moment prior to the ceremony. Before the ceremony, they were unmarried persons. Afterward, they are married. Marriage gives them objective privileges and responsibilities. They have a duty to God to be faithful to those responsibilities. If a man is unfaithful to his duties as a husband, he is no less a husband. He is an unfaithful husband. He must repent of his sins and be faithful. Likewise, baptism

irrevocably changes the person baptized. He will never again be an “unbaptized” person. He will either be faithful or unfaithful to his baptism.

It is true, however, that there are no eternal saving benefits of baptism apart from faith. Faith is required for anyone to receive the saving benefits of baptism (WSC 92). Receiving baptism makes one more responsible to repent, believe, and be faithful.

Sacraments are one of the means by which God bestows His grace upon the elect (WSC 91):

Q. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

It is interesting to note that this catechism question does not ask whether or not the sacraments are effectual means of salvation but rather how they are effectual means of salvation. Baptism is one of the means a sovereign God has chosen to communicate the benefits of redemption. Note WSC 88:

Q. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

Consider also the words of WCF XXVIII.6: “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.”

It is thus clearly taught by our Standards that baptism is more than an empty sign. Baptism is a means of salvation. Sacraments do more than merely point to God's gracious blessings, as implied by the CCM.

The point that our Standards fail to bring out is that baptism curses if not “improved” by faith. Covenant relationship brings both blessings and curses. Baptism is thus always efficacious. It will either be efficacious to one's salvation or else to one's damnation. Regarding the question of baptismal regeneration, it is interesting to note that some theologians have asserted that the Westminster Confession does indeed teach “baptismal regeneration.” Reformed Scholar David Wright, author of the article “Baptism at the Westminster Assembly” published in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, Volume 1, edited by Ligon Duncan. Commenting on chapters XXVII and XXVIII of the WCF, he writes: “The Westminster divines viewed baptism as the instrument and occasion of regeneration by the Spirit, of the remission of sins, of ingrafting into Christ. The Confession teaches baptismal regeneration.”

It is also interesting to note that one of the Westminster Divines, Cornelius Burgess, who had a significant hand in writing WCF XXVII, authored a book entitled: *The Baptismal Regeneration of Elect Infants*. While it is true that associating baptism with regeneration today is considered “Romanism”, that has not always been the case.

TE Wilkins confirmed that he does not hold to the position of baptismal regeneration when regeneration is defined as the invisible work of the Holy Spirit where He transforms a dead sinner into a living Saint. TE Wilkins does question whether Scripture uses the term “regeneration” in the way it is often defined today.

But it must be pointed out that both the Westminster Confession (XXVIII.1) as well as the Heidelberg Catechism cite Titus 3:5 (“washing of regeneration”) as a reference to water baptism.

God saves sinners by His sovereign grace. Period. But God uses means (Word, sacraments, prayer) to communicate His saving grace. This is exactly what the Westminster Standards teach. Our Standards teach that sacraments are effectual means of salvation (see WSC 88, 91, 92; WLC 155, 161).

There is nothing unbiblical (or unconfessional) about the statement “baptism unites with Christ.” WLC 167 speaks of “Christ, into whom we are baptized.” Some Reformed theologians speak of baptism uniting to Christ; others argue for infant baptism because our children are in union with Christ from the womb. Calvin taught both. In *Tracts III*; p. 275 Calvin writes: “The offspring of believers is born holy, because their children, while yet in the womb ... are included in the covenant of eternal life ... nor are they admitted to the Church by baptism on any other ground than that they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born.” But in the *Institutes 4-16-22*, Calvin writes: “From his (Paul’s) statement elsewhere that we have been engrafted into the body of Christ through baptism (I Cor. 12:13), we in the same way conclude that infants, whom he counts as his members, must be baptized, that they may not be sundered from His body.”

It is both biblical and confessional to say that there is a covenantal union between Christ and his (visible) people that is sealed by baptism. This is the teaching of Scripture. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (I Cor. 12:13).

What does this passage mean (and there are others) if it is not describing a union between God and the baptized? WCF XXV.2 tells us that the visible Church is the house and family of God. Is there no union between the children and the Father?

In defense of infant baptism, John Murray writes:

If little children belong to the Kingdom of God, if they belong to Christ, if they are to be received possessing the qualities and rights that constitute them members of the kingdom of God and of the Church, is there any reason why they should not receive the sign of that membership? (*Christian Baptism*, p. 63).

Murray continues:

It is necessary, therefore, to understand that the children are reckoned as saints in terms of the salutation in both epistles and that they are not regarded as belonging to any different category in respect of the Saviourhood and Lordship of Christ. Everything points to the conclusion that children, equally with parents and servants and masters, *belong to the body of Christ* and are fully embraced in the fellowship of the saints (*Christian Baptism*, p. 64).

The Westminster Larger Catechism, in the answer to question 167, spells out how baptism is supposed to be regarded by all who have received the sacrament:

The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long . . . by serious and *thankful* consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits *conferred and sealed thereby*, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the *grace of baptism*, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, ***into whom we are baptized***, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as *being baptized by the same Spirit into one body* (emphasis added).

Louisiana Presbytery would like to highlight some of the teachings of WLC 167:

1. All baptized people have the responsibility to *improve* their baptism. That is, be faithful to what baptism represents.
2. Baptism confers and seals benefits.
3. It is possible to walk contrary to the *grace* of baptism.
4. Baptism unites us to Christ (at least in some way): **“Christ, into whom we are baptized.”**
5. Baptism brings us into the Body of Christ.

TE Wilkins’ position on this issue is hardly innovative.

Louisiana Presbytery, after reading TE Wilkins’ answers in the written response and oral examination, concludes that he is not out of accord with the Standards with regard to baptism. It seems that TE Wilkins’ views on baptismal efficacy are much more faithful to the Standards than the view reflected in the CCM.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Louisiana Presbytery recognizes that Teaching Elders have a great responsibility to be clear as they teach theology to the people of God (James 3:1).

Louisiana Presbytery acknowledges that TE Wilkins’ teachings have caused confusion and controversy, and that he has approached certain doctrines from a perspective many in the PCA are not used to.

Louisiana Presbytery acknowledges that TE Wilkins has not always been careful to be clear and perhaps at times has failed to qualify his teaching properly, especially given the fact that he

sometimes articulates theology and defines terms in ways unusual in Reformed circles today. For example, TE Wilkins teaches that, in some sense, “salvation can be lost”, that baptism “saves”, and that there is a covenantal union with Christ brought by baptism that may fall short of final eschatological union with Christ. Given the way the Reformed faith has defined these terms, it is doubly important that a teaching elder properly clarify and qualify his meaning so that the flock of God not misunderstand. *But being unclear is not grounds to condemn a man.* If that were the case, all Teaching Elders would be subject to discipline. Also, while it may not be wise to define terms differently from the current norm, it is hardly fair to condemn a man for attempting to define terms biblically.

Extraordinary charges require extraordinary evidence. A man is innocent until proven guilty. This is not simply American jurisprudence: it is articulated in WLC 145. Louisiana Presbytery sees no convincing evidence that TE Wilkins is out of accord with the system of doctrine taught in the Standards. Lack of clarity is not the same as lack of conformity. Every Teaching Elder could be accused of causing confusion at times.

When a Bible teacher uses terminology *different* from the Standards, it does not necessarily follow that he is teaching that which is *contrary* to the Standards. If it were a chargeable offense for a minister to use theological language *differently* from the Confession, every Teaching Elder would be deposed.

Some wording in the Standards represents compromise language written in order to achieve agreement. There was not unanimity among the Westminster Divines in every formulation in the Confession. Thus some of the wording is intentionally ambiguous. Also, the case could be made that points made in one part of the Standards are apparently inconsistent with points made at others. Some statements in the Confession are ambiguous and open to differing interpretations.

Much of this “Federal Vision” controversy stems from a failure to understand that the Bible teaches the doctrine of salvation from two perspectives: the covenant (Biblical Theology) and the decree (Systematic Theology). These two perspectives are different but not inconsistent with each other.

The Bible, in both Testaments, *describes* the visible covenant community with all the language of salvation. (See Isa. 43:1-4 and I Cor. 6:11-20 as representative examples). When addressing the covenant people, the Bible never addresses one group within the covenant community as “truly” saved and another group within the covenant community as not saved. Instead, the Bible addresses the covenant people as a saved community and exhorts them to be faithful. That many within the covenant community will not be in heaven is certain. But men are not given the prerogative to peer into the secrets of God’s decree. As ministers and elders, we must deal with people on the basis of the objective reality of the covenant. As long as they are being faithful, we do not question their salvation. It is the Presbytery’s view that TE Wilkins is seeking to accentuate this truth when he teaches on covenant issues. But just as we believe that the Confession is not inconsistent with Scripture, we also believe TE Wilkins is not inconsistent with the Standards.

Although some members of Presbytery disagree with the way TE Wilkins interprets some passages of Scripture and some portions of the Confession, and while it is certainly fair to question whether or not TE Wilkins teaches Bible doctrine with the same *emphasis* found in the Westminster Standards, Louisiana Presbytery finds that the views of TE Wilkins are well within historic Reformed theology and are not inconsistent with Westminster.

TE Wilkins vehemently denies the assertions made against him in the Central Carolina Memorial. After a thorough examination of Rev. Wilkins, the Louisiana Presbytery finds no legitimate reason to sustain any of the allegations raised in the memorial. After carefully

weighing the issues raised by the Central Carolina Memorial and the responses of TE Wilkins during five hours of questioning, the Louisiana Presbytery does not believe that TE Wilkins is in violation of ordination vow No. 2: that is, we judge his views to be within the “fundamentals of the system of doctrine” taught in the Westminster Standards.

It is incumbent upon Christian gentlemen always to represent fairly those people with whom we may disagree. We find that the memorial from Central Carolina unfairly misrepresents many of the views held by TE Wilkins. We exhort Central Carolina Presbytery to consider their duty as per *WLC* 144 and 145.