

**Westminster Theological  
Seminary Theological Statements**  
*Adopted by  
the Board of Trustees*

*Revised March 7, 2025*

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## **Introduction: Role and Functions of Theological Statements**

At various times throughout its history, the Board of Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary, in consultation with the Seminary's Faculty, has adopted theological statements setting forth the Seminary's religious beliefs on selected matters. Those theological statements are set forth below. The Board of Trustees is the final authority in the articulation, interpretation, and application of the Seminary's religious beliefs. These statements are not comprehensive of all the Seminary's religious beliefs, but rather reflect the Seminary's religious beliefs on the matters addressed therein.

## ***Purpose of Theological Statements***

The purpose of these statements is for the Board to formally adopt a written articulation of the Seminary's religious beliefs on specific matters as the Board deems appropriate. For example, the Board may adopt such a statement in response to cultural issues or theological controversies or for other reasons. However, the Board affirms that these statements are subordinate, first and foremost, to the Holy Scriptures and then to the Westminster Standards.

## ***Clarifications Regarding Theological Statements***

### **History**

- 1) The historic theological statements, as compiled by Lee Augsburger in 2022, represent a rich history of WTS engagement for addressing the pressing issues of the day in view of our historic creedal and confessional commitments.
- 2) Each theological statement surfaced in response to questions pressing in on the seminary at a particular moment—either from within or from without.
- 3) As manifest in the statements themselves, not all of the statements bear the same depth and scope, nor do they warrant equal priority.
- 4) Most of these statements rightly serve as an *interpretive grid* for Faculty's *ex animo* commitment to the Westminster Standards, as they clarify what the Board of Trustees and Faculty understand the Standards to mean.

## Role and Function

The ongoing role and function of each historical theological statement depends on its history, substance, and intent. Each statement falls in one of the following categories:

1) **Contractually Binding Statements.**

The “Doctrines and Beliefs of Westminster Theological Seminary,” for legal reasons, is already a requirement for faculty to agree to annually. Faculty sign-off on this statement occurs at the time of contract renewal.

2) **Clarifying and Evaluative Statements Regarding Faculty Views.**

These statements serve as tools in the hands of the board in assessing the fittingness of prospective faculty to join our voting faculty community and in terms of evaluating current faculty:

- a) “Justification by Faith Alone”
- b) “Biblical Inerrancy”
- c) “Statement on the Days of Genesis”
- d) “Affirmations and Denials Regarding Recent Issues” (related to Scripture and hermeneutics)
- e) Westminster Seminary Distinctives

3) **Occasional and Non-Binding Statements.** These statements, which addressed issues in the life of seminary, should be recognized for their historical significance. While the statements are occasional in nature, the principles underlying these particular statements possess enduring value.

- a) “Co-Belligerency”
- b) “Ordination of Women to Offices of the Church.” *N.B., While the faculty should be evaluated on their view of ordination, because of its argumentation from case law and stare decisis rather than biblical and theological authority, this statement should not serve as the only, or even primary, basis for doing so.*
- c) “Group Health Insurance Providing Abortifacients”

### **An Opening Statement from the Board:**

- 1) The President and CAO is to continue to use the “Doctrines and Beliefs” statement in annual contractual renewal.
- 2) The Board of Trustees will utilize the statements classified as “Clarifying and Evaluative Regarding Faculty Views” for interviewing the fitness of prospective faculty and, when/if appropriate, for reviews of current faculty.
- 3) The Board directs the President to memorialize these statements—in both print and digitally.

# **Contractually Binding Statements**

## ***The Doctrines & Beliefs of Westminster Theological Seminary***

*Adopted October 22, 2021 by its Board of Trustees*

### ***I. STATEMENT OF FAITH***

#### **CONFESSION OF FAITH & CATECHISMS**

From its beginning in 1929, Westminster Theological Seminary first and foremost has confessed that we believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and, as recorded in the Faculty Manual (July 2021), each faculty member and board member solemnly and ex animo adopt, receive, and subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (also called the Westminster Standards) in the form in which they were adopted by the Seminary in 1936, as the confession of our faith or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief, which is contained in Holy Scripture. For reference, the full faculty vow is included here:

*I do solemnly declare, in the presence of God, and of the Trustees and Faculty of this Seminary, that (1) I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and (2) I do solemnly and ex animo adopt, receive, and subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms in the form in which they were adopted by this Seminary in the year of our Lord 1936, as the confession of my faith, or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief, which is contained in Holy Scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation; and I do solemnly, ex animo, profess to receive the fundamental principles of the Presbyterian form of church government, as agreeable to the inspired oracles. And I do solemnly promise and engage not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any element in that system of doctrine, nor to oppose any of the fundamental principles of that form of church government, while I continue as a member of the Faculty in this Seminary.*

*I do further solemnly declare that, being convinced of my sin and misery and of my inability to rescue myself from my lost condition, not only have I assented to the truth of the promises of the Gospel, but also I have received and rest upon Christ and His righteousness for pardon of my sin and for my acceptance as righteous in the sight of God.*

*And I do further promise that if at any time I find myself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, I will on my own initiative, make known to the Faculty of this institution and, where applicable, my judicatory, the change which has taken place in my views since the assumption of the vow.*

These confessional commitments are required of us for faithfulness to the Scriptures.

### ***II. DOCTRINAL CLARIFICATION & DISTINCTIVES***

In keeping with our biblical and confessional commitments, this document assumes throughout that because God is the Creator and Ruler of all things, he alone has the right and authority to determine what is good and bad, right and wrong. His good and perfect will is preserved for us in the Holy

Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (see WCF 1.1–10). Affirming God’s Word as our final authority, our Lord Jesus has said, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,” Deuteronomy 8.3; Matthew 4.4; 2 Timothy 3.16–17; 2 Peter 1.19–21. For this reason, we provide biblical references as well as confessional references in support of our beliefs stated below.

The increasingly ubiquitous cultural advance of assorted commitments at odds with the theological convictions of the Seminary, along with the growing confusion in the church around the world about these subjects, has compelled the Board of Trustees to reaffirm our continued commitment to the Westminster Standards, and to explicate further the nature of our commitment. We see the explanations of our beliefs and doctrines below, which both affirm biblical truth and reject error, not as an addition to our historic subscription, but as reaffirmations of the implications of our continued subscription. These explanations are not in any way exhaustive. Rather, they are to be seen as selective, and as addressing only some of the matters implied in confessional subscription. The complete affirmation to which voting faculty members are bound is the faculty pledge, as quoted above and set out in the Bylaws of the Seminary.

## ***1. STATEMENT ON HUMAN SEXUALITY***

### **A. Human Sexuality: Creation**

God created man, body and soul, male and female, in his own image and likeness. These two, male and female, are the only two sexes and are each equally and distinctly created in God’s image. The male is fully God’s image. And the female is fully God’s image, Genesis 1.26–27; 9.6; Matthew 19.4; Mark 10.6; James 3.9; WCF 4.2; WLC 17; WSC 10; 71. This equality of being is not an undifferentiated sameness. God created man (male) first, and from the man created the woman (female) as a suitable helper. Together, within marriage, they were, among other privileges and responsibilities, to fulfill God’s commission to be fruitful and multiply, Genesis 1.26–31; 2.18–25; Malachi 2.16; Matthew 19.3–6.<sup>1</sup>

God also saw fit to assign different roles to man and woman since man was created first, and woman was created from man as a suitable helper. In the family, God assigns loving leadership roles to husbands and roles of submission and support to wives. In the church, God assigns loving leadership roles to men who are ordained officers and the role of submission and support to all members of the church, Genesis 2.18–25; Proverbs 31.10–31; Corinthians 11.3–16; Ephesians 5.22–30; Colossians 3.18–19; 1 Timothy 2.12–14; Hebrews 13.17; 1 Peter 3.1–7; WLC Q.A. 127, 129.

### **B. Human Sexuality: Fall**

With Adam’s Fall, all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, male and female, incurred the guilt and punishment of Adam’s sin, and from conception are depraved in the entirety of his or her being (desire, thought, will) and utterly indisposed to all that is spiritually good, and is wholly and continually inclined to evil which is commonly called original sin. This estate of original sin affects each and every person born by natural generation. From original sin flows every actual sin resulting in many evils, such as a blindness of mind, strong delusions, hardness of heart, and vile affections, Genesis 6.5; Psalms 14.1–4; 51.4–5; Jeremiah 17.9; Matthew 15.19; Mark 7.21–23; Romans 1.18–32; 3.9–18; 1 Corinthians 6.9–10; Ephesians 2.1–3; 4.17–19; WCF 6.2–6; WLC 22–25, 28–29; 139; WSC 16–18; 72.

Sexuality: According to Scripture, one’s sex (male or female) exclusively anchors one’s gender. With the introduction of sin into the world, mankind became disordered and sinful in desire (concupiscence), thought, word and action with respect to God, the world, and self, including our

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<sup>1</sup> See Statement on Marriage below.

understanding of human sexuality, Genesis 6.5; Jeremiah 17.9; Romans 1.21–27; 3.10–18; 5.12, 16, 18–19; Eph 2.1–3; WCF 6.1–6.

One consequence of original sin is that fallen mankind calls evil good and good evil, Isaiah 5.20. Casting off the Creator and worshiping created things, many assert and approve of sexual desires and acts outside the bounds prescribed in the Bible. Scripture forbids all illicit sexual desire (concupiscence) and expression.<sup>2</sup> Whether one's sexual desires are for illicit relations with the opposite sex (natural lust, Roman 1.24), or whether one's sexual desires are for the same sex (unnatural lust, Romans 1.26–27), all forms of illicit sexual desires and expressions are out of accord with God's will and thus sinful, Romans 1.23–32; 1 Corinthians 6.9–10; Ephesians 2.1–3; 4.17–19; 5.3–14; 1 Thessalonians 4.1–8; 1 Timothy 1.10; 1 Peter 4.3–4; WCF 6.2–6; WLC 138–139; WSC 70–72.

Thus, all attempts to challenge, dispute, or even physically change, or alter, God's created order of binary sexes, either male or female, is contrary to God's word. Moreover, any rejection of one's biological sex, is sinful and rebellious against God's wise order. It is against Scripture to claim to be neither male nor female, or to claim to be both male and female, or to claim to be a mixture of the two, or for someone whom God made biologically female to claim to be male, or for someone whom God made biologically male to claim to be female. All these are inconsistent with biblical teaching. This reality falls within Scripture's declaration that God gives man over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done, Genesis 1.26–28; 2.18–24; Leviticus 18, 20; Romans 1.25–32; 1 Corinthians 6.9–10.

However, we also recognize that there are physical and psychological issues arising from Adam's Fall that brought mankind not only into an estate of sin but also of misery, suffering, sickness, disorder and death, Genesis 3.16–19; Romans 8.20; WCF 6.6; WLC 23, 27–28. There are those who are born with a physical malformation, respecting his or her sex. These are called intersex.<sup>3</sup> Such physical conditions are part of human suffering consequent to Adam's Fall and are not sinful in and of themselves, Matthew 19.12. Yet, such intersex conditions ought not be wrongly construed as support for those who assert there are multiple genders any more than a congenital or genetic malady should be called just another form of health. Instead, for all who sin and suffer the miseries of sin, Christ, gentle and lowly, calls out to all with the life-changing message of the gospel that alone renews the whole person after the likeness of Christ, Matthew 11.28–30; Romans 3.9–26; 6.1–25; 12.1–2; 2 Corinthians 10.3–5; Ephesians 2.1–10; 4.17–5.2.

### **C. Human Sexuality: Redemption**

As in Adam's Fall sin is universal in affecting human sexuality, so in Jesus Christ, the Second Man, the Last Adam, God redeems from the human race people in all conditions. This redemption includes the redemption of human sexuality as one aspect of the whole person, Rom 5.14–19; 1 Cor 15.45–48.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, Matthew 11.28–30; John 3.16; 5.24; 8.34–36; Acts 3.19–21; Romans 3.23; 6.23; 10.9–10; 1 Corinthians 6.9–11; Ephesians 2.1–10; Colossians 3.1–17; Hebrews 2.17–18; 4.14–16; 1 John 1.8–2.2.

We believe that every person, believer and unbeliever, must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity Mark 12.28–31; Luke 6.31. Yet, believers who are tempted with sexual desires for either the same-sex (unnatural lust) or for illicit relations with the opposite sex (natural lust)

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<sup>2</sup> This would include what some call "sexual orientation."

<sup>3</sup> The term "intersex" is here used to denote physical anomalies by which persons are born with gender-atypical anatomy or even ambiguous genitalia, such as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) and Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS).

are encouraged and expected to fight against indwelling sin through God's given means of grace (Word, sacraments, discipline, prayer) in the context of Christ's church, with the hope that through faith and repentance in Jesus Christ, they may more and more put off evil and put on righteousness, Romans 7.14–25–8.12; Galatians 5.16; 1 Corinthians 6.9–11; Colossians 3.5–10; 1 Thessalonians 4.1–8.

Hence, those who through their attitudes or actions seek to affirm people to remain in their sin and sexual immorality, instead of calling them to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ are depriving those suffering and struggling in this context of the union of truth, love, healing and grace through the Gospel's blessing of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 5.3–5; 6.9–11; 10.13; 2 Thessalonians 3.14; Jude 22–23; Revelation 22.14–17.

## ***2. STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE***

### **A. Marriage: Creation**

God designed the covenant of marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with his bride, the church, Ephesians 5.22–33; Revelation 19.7. God designed this covenant of marriage to be a permanent, exclusive, conjugal one-flesh complementary union between one man (male) and one woman (female), intrinsically ordered to procreation, and to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to nurture children in the Lord, and to give strength and cohesiveness to the family and society in general, Genesis 2.18–24; Malachi 2.15–16, Ephesians 5.22–6.4; see WCF 24.2–6.

Thus, in accord with God's Word, marriage as a covenant designed and governed by God's authority is the uniting of one man (male) and one woman (female) in a single, exclusive, life-long union, as delineated in Scripture, Genesis 1.26–28; 2.18–25; Malachi 2.15; Matthew 19.4–6; Mark 10.7–9; WCF, 24.1–2.

We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other, 1 Corinthians 6.18; 7.2–5; Hebrews 13.4. We believe that God commands that no sexual activity be engaged in outside of the bonds of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman, Exodus 20.14; Leviticus 18; 20; Deuteronomy 5.18; Matthew 5.27–30; 15.18–20; Romans 1.24–27; 1 Corinthians 6.9–10; Galatians 5.19–21; Ephesians 5.3–5; Colossians 3.5–6; WCF 24.5–6; WLC Q.A. 137–139; WSC Q.A. 70–72.

### **B. Marriage: Fall**

With Adam's Fall, man became totally depraved meaning there is no aspect of human nature left unaffected by sin and rendered unacceptable to God's holy nature. Consequently mankind has perverted marriage in many ways, particularly through sexual infidelity and immorality, such as: lust (concupiscence), adultery, polygamy, so-called "same-sex marriage" or "sologamy" (the practice of marrying one's self which according to Scripture is not marriage) as well as fornication, incest, bestiality, pornography, prostitution, pedophilia, sodomy, or same-sex desires or acts, and abusive treatment of one's spouse and/or children, Exodus 20.14, Leviticus 18.7–23; 20.10–21, Deuteronomy 5.18; Matthew 15.19; Matthew 5.21–22, 27–28; 15.19, Romans 1.22–27; 1 Corinthians 5.1–13; 6.9–13; 1 Thessalonians 4.3; Hebrews 13.4; Galatians 5.19; Ephesians 4.17–19; Colossians 3.5; Hebrews 13.5; 1 John 3.15.



### **C. Marriage: Redemption**

Due to Adam's fall, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression, Genesis 3.1–19; Romans 5.12–19; WCF 6; WLC QA 25–26.

So, in Jesus Christ, the Second Man, the Last Adam, God redeems from the human race people in all conditions. This redemption includes the redemption of human sexuality as one aspect of the whole person. Indeed, the Church is called the Bride of Christ and looks forward to her eschatological union in marriage with Christ her bridegroom. We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, Matthew 11.28–30; John 3.16; 5.24; 8.34–36; Acts 3.19–21; Romans 3.23; 6.23; 10.9–10; 1 Corinthians 5.6.9–11; Ephesians 2.1–10; Colossians 3.1–17; Hebrews 2.17–18; 4.14–16; 1 John 1.8–2.2.

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity, Mark 12.28–31; Luke 6.31. And, in conformity to Scripture, we regard those who through their attitudes or actions seek to affirm people to remain in their sin, instead of calling them to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ, as acting inconsistent with these great virtues, 1 Corinthians 5.3–5; 6.9–11; 10.13; 2 Thessalonians 3.14; Jude 22–23; Revelation 22.14–17.

### ***3. STATEMENT ON THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE***

Because God created man, male and female, in his own image and likeness, all human life has special status in God's sight, and is to be protected according to God's authority, expressed in his law, Genesis 1.26–27; 9.6; Psalms 139.15–16; Jeremiah 1.5; James 3.9; WCF 4.2. This protection of human life extends from the moment of conception through natural death, including every stage and condition, such as the pre-born child, the newly born, the physically or mentally challenged, the sick, weak, infirmed, and the aged. We are therefore called and committed to defend, protect, and value all human life, Exodus 4.11; 20.13; Leviticus 19.14, 32–33; Deuteronomy 5.17; 27.18; Matthew 9.12–13; WLC 134, 135.

Consequently, excepting cases of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense (Num 35.31, 33; Rom 13.4; Exod 22.2), we reject as immoral and a violation of the sixth commandment every taking away of the life of others without just cause. Examples of such violations of the sixth commandment are elective abortion,<sup>4</sup> infanticide, euthanasia, or the withholding of reasonable medical care to the physically or mentally challenged, the sick, weak, infirmed, and the elderly, Genesis 9.5–6; Exodus 20.13; 21.18–36; Deuteronomy 5.17; Leviticus 19.32–33; Romans 13.9; WLC 134–136; WSC 67–69.

## **Clarifying and Evaluative Statements Regarding Faculty Views**

### **Justification by Faith Alone**

(Adopted by the Board of Trustees, May 27, 1980, supplemented December 11, 2010, with Faculty response November 14, 2011)

RESOLVED,

That the Westminster Statement on Justification (see attachment) is adopted as amended by the recommendations received from the faculty, with the exception of the additional sentence recommended for Part VI, paragraph 1, line 3.

That the affirmations and denials presented by the Committee on Justification are adopted as amended by the recommendations received from the faculty with the exception of the proposed amendment of Part II:5 (page 3). In place of the faculty recommendation for lines 2 and 3 the Board amends line the 3 to read: “that is acceptable to God; and.” (May 27, 1980)

RESOLVED,

That the Board request the Faculty to bring our statement on justification up to date and present this to the Board. (December 11, 2010)

#### *Response approved by the Faculty:*

From time to time the faculty has produced clarifying statements in light of certain, particular controversies that are, in some way, affecting WTS. Statements such as the “Westminster Statement of Justification,” the “Creation” statement and the recent “Affirmations and Denials” are produced in order to address concerns of a particular moment. They are, therefore, “occasional” statements. In that light, the faculty affirms the merits of the “Westminster Statement on Justification.”

The faculty also recognizes that our faculty vow includes (1) that we subscribe ex animo, to WCF 11, WLC, 70-73 and WSC 32-33, and (2) that we solemnly promise not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any element in those standards.

# WESTMINSTER STATEMENT ON JUSTIFICATION

The following statement on the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith has been approved by the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary and by the Board in its meeting of May 27, 1980.

## Preface

Since its founding in 1929, Westminster Theological Seminary has grounded its teaching in the Bible as God's infallible Word. We subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith as a summary of Biblical teaching setting forth the system of truth revealed in the Bible. This pattern of teaching is often called the Reformed faith because the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century recovered its Biblical outlines. The Reformed faith proclaims the Scriptural emphasis on God's sovereign grace; it teaches that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God alone.

Some critics of this Calvinistic theology argue that its teachings are more systematic than the Bible itself. They accuse us of subordinating the witness of Scripture to the logical consistency of our system. We believe, to the contrary, that the Reformed faith rightly perceives the God-centered theme of Scripture, that "salvation is of the Lord." We believe, too, that the Westminster Confession of Faith is unsurpassed among creedal documents in the fullness and balance of its statements of Scriptural doctrine. We do not put the Confession on the level of inspired Scripture, and we recognize the historical influences that affected its formulations, yet we can and do subscribe to its system of teaching as Scriptural and therefore applicable to our time no less than to the time of its writing.

We further affirm that adherence to the Westminster Standards does not stultify theological research and investigation. Rather, we find that because the Standards reflect the fundamental emphases as well as the major teachings of the bible, they are reliable guides for further study of the Scripture. Our own experience has been that further research in Biblical and theological study gives us deeper appreciation of the fundamental character of those doctrines taught in the Westminster Standards.

Yet it is not unexpected that there should be times when questions arise. As we discover and seek to formulate in a Reformed perspective the rich complexity of Scriptural teaching, it is inevitable that the question should sometimes arise: "Does this further formulation of Biblical doctrine represent enrichment of our theological heritage or does it mark a departure from it?"

Indeed, if this issue never arose, one might well suspect that the critics were right. If our intensive study of the Scripture never causes us to look again at our doctrinal formulations, we may well be accused of traditional creedalism rather confessing Biblical theology in creedal form.

For several years now we have been discussing the doctrine of justification by faith. The

discussion arose when one of our professors became convinced that renewed emphasis was necessary on the relation of our new obedience to justifying faith. He has sought to develop his views in harmony with the Confession, and to take fuller account of those passages of Scripture that relate faith to works and to God's judgment in the last day. The faculty as a whole has expressed appreciation of his concerns, but has found some of his formulations to be confusing or misleading. Some faculty members have concluded that the problem is deeper than terminological; they have judged that the new approach is mistaken and out of harmony with the doctrine of justification by faith expressed in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. In the discussions that have followed, the professor concerned has developed his approach further and has modified some of his earlier expressions. We have all come to appreciate better the richness of Scriptural teaching and the continued history of Reformed thinking about this doctrine.

The following statement and the affirmations and denials that follow have been prepared by a joint board-faculty committee (and approved by both the faculty and the board). Its purpose is not to replace or to supplement the Westminster Standards as the creedal basis of the Seminary's program. Rather the statement is issued to make clear and public the Seminary's continued enthusiastic adherence to our creedal standards and, specifically, to the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone. We also hope that this agreed statement will serve to reconcile differences of viewpoint that have arisen among us so that the Seminary may give a united witness to the central verities of the gospel.

## **Introduction**

In the Bible God has revealed to us his plan for saving lost sinners through Jesus Christ his Son. The Word of God teaches that salvation is of the Lord, and that God has designed the plan of salvation and accomplished the work of salvation all to his praise, and all through Jesus Christ the only Saviour.

Because salvation is God's will and God's work, its wonders surpass our comprehension. We are called to affirm with full assurance the revealed truth of the gospel; but we must also confess that these holy mysteries are received by faith. Much as we may rejoice in perceiving the pattern of God's truth, we know that his thoughts are high above ours and that there is always danger in speculating about questions that God has not answered in his Word.

As we believe, confess, and teach the revealed mysteries of God's salvation we must not only interpret Scripture by Scripture and correct our own formulations from Scripture, we must also reflect as fully as we can the emphases of Scripture and beware of suppressing Scriptural teaching on points that appear to present difficulties for our structures of interpretation.

## **I. The importance of the doctrine of justification**

Justification is named by the Apostle Paul as one in a series of divine acts by which God accomplishes his saving purpose (Rom. 8:29-30). It may be defined therefore as a distinct act in the revealed pattern of his saving work. When this act of God is misunderstood or misrepresented the result may be “a different gospel which is not another” (Gal. 1:6,7).

The Protestant Reformation sought to deliver the church from the bane of a different gospel by recovering the Biblical doctrine of justification.

## **II. How God justifies**

God’s verdict of justification pardons sinners for all their sin and declares them to be righteous, the heirs of eternal life. God can justly pronounce this verdict only because he provides and accepts Christ’s full satisfaction to atone for sin and Christ’s perfect righteousness to give title to life. Justification therefore manifests both the justice and grace of God. His grace provides what his justice demands. Since he grants Christ’s justifying benefits to those whom he accepts, he requires for their justification nothing but faith, which is itself his gift.

## **III. Faith and justification**

Faith is the sole instrument of justification because it is the unique function of faith to receive and rest upon Christ in whom alone believers are justified. The peculiar relation of faith to grace lies not in the fact that faith is received as a gift, for other graces are also gifts, but that faith receives a gift: the gift of Christ and of justification in union with him.

Faith is never alone in the person justified. True faith cannot be a dead faith, and a living faith works through love. Love is joined with faith as the sinner embraces the Saviour who died for him. Yet what cannot be separated must be distinguished. It is not the presence of love or any other accompanying grace that gives faith the power to justify. Faith justifies not because it produces the fruit of love for Christ, but because it receives the fruit of Christ’s love.

## **IV. Works and justification**

The works of love done in faith are pleasing to God and necessary as the fruit of faith. Yet they cannot be included in the reckoning by which God’s verdict of justification is pronounced. Christ’s perfect sacrifice and obedience need no supplementation. Not our flawed works, but only his righteousness, whole and entire, can justify us before God.

The Bible teaches that God requires good works of those who enter into eternal life; at the last judgment complete and searching justice will be rendered according to men’s works. Yet the themes of judgment of works and justification by faith are not seen as contradictory in the New Testament. In the same passages descriptions of the judgment are joined with the strongest

affirmations of the deliverance and justification of believers (Jn. 5:24, cf. V. 29; Rev. 22:11-12, cf. vv. 14, 17; Rom. 2:6-16, cf. 3:24-26; Acts 10:42, cf. v. 43; II Cor. 5:10, cf. vv. 19, 21; I Pet. 4:19, cf. 2:23).

God's final judgment is committed to Christ; the justifying verdict then pronounced will be an open acquittal and a public acknowledgement of the final salvation of his own. They enter into life whose names are in the Lamb's book and whose robes are washed in his blood. God's requirement of good works of believers in the day of judgment has the purpose of manifesting openly, to the glory of God, faith that is true, though tried by fire (I Peter 1:6,7).

Because we are accepted in the Beloved, God accepts also our obedience and graciously rewards our service, imperfect though it is. Because our obedience is a genuine fruit of Christ's saving work for us and in us, it can be recognized as appropriate to justification and admittance to eternal life. But it cannot be the true cause, ground, or means of our justification; that remains the imputed satisfaction and righteousness of Christ. When the Apostle Paul tells us that God, in rendering to every man according to his works, welcomes into eternal life those that by patience in well-doing seek for glory, honor, and incorruption (Rom. 2:6,7), the Apostle is not contradicting his teaching that we are justified by faith, apart from the works of the law (Rom.3:28; Gal. 2:16). Those who are circumcised in heart keep the law in the obedience of faith, fulfilling the law by the Spirit (Rom. 2:27-29; 8:4). Faith does not make void God's law, it establishes it in obedience. God recognizes the new obedience of the believer as the evidence of his true faith in Christ. He is welcomed into heaven, not because his obedience has earned heaven, but because his obedience marks him as one who has become obedient to the truth (cf. Rom.2:28), that is, a believer. The secrets of men will be judged, Paul says, by Jesus Christ "according to my gospel" (Rom. 2:16).

The good works that God requires in the day of judgment are daily required of the Christian. James says, "I by my works will show thee my faith" (2:18). When James speaks of being justified by works, he too is viewing works as the evidence of a living faith. Like Paul he quotes Genesis 15:6 "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness" (2:23). But since Abraham's faith was shown in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, James concludes that justifying faith must be made manifest in deeds of obedience. When James works, and not only faith, for justification, he does not set works done without faith over against true faith, rather he contrasts the empty shell of faith, such as demons may possess, with the commitment of true faith evident in Abraham's deed of obedience. James teaches that works are necessary for justification in the sense that works are the necessary product of a living faith. A dead and empty faith cannot justify, not because it lacks works as a supplement but because it lacks the trust from which works must flow.

## **V. Repentance and faith**

Repentance in one sense is the underside of faith, the turning away from sin that is a necessary aspect of turning to Christ. Without repentance there cannot be pardon, for repentance is necessary to true faith. Repentance has been distinguished from both faith and good works (W.C. XV); in that case, it must like faith be deemed necessary for pardon, and like works be the fruit of justifying faith.

When the Westminster Confession of Faith distinguishes repentance from both faith and works, it is repentance in an inclusive sense that is in view: that is, the repentance that is always presupposed in faith as well as the repentance that is the fruit of faith. The repentance that is presupposed in faith is the turning from sin by which faith lays hold on Christ. Such repentance is not so much a grace accompanying faith as an aspect of faith itself. Commitment to Christ is in itself forsaking sin; there can be no cleaving to Christ that does not leave our idols. The repentance that is the fruit of faith includes the endeavor to walk in new obedience (W.C. XV:2). Just as faith works through love, so the repentance of faith issues in amendment of life; repentance in the narrower sense issues in works of repentance.

It would be mistaken to isolate repentance from faith and to view repentance as a work, pleasing to God, that could precede faith in the experience of a sinner. True repentance, unlike remorse, can arise only when it is a turning to Christ.

It would also be mistaken to regard the works of repentance as instrumental to justification, reasoning that since faith includes repentance, or that since faith and repentance are together necessary for pardon, therefore the works of repentance are instrumental to justification. Only when repentance is viewed as one aspect of saving faith can it be properly understood as instrumental to pardon. Repentance of course cannot make satisfaction for sin nor can it be the ground of God's pardon.

## **VI. When are we justified?**

The moment of our justification is the moment when the Holy Spirit applies to us the benefits of Christ's redemption (Col. 1:21, 22; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:4-7). Since our justification has been purposed by God who chose his elect before the foundation of the world, we may also speak of God's eternal decree to justify the elect (Gal. 3:8; I Pet. 1:2, 19, 20; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:5). Further, since Christ, in the fullness of time, died for our sins and rose for our justification, there is a sense in which our justification was accomplished in Christ's finished work (Gal. 4:4,5; I Tim. 2:6; Rom. 4:25; 5:9; 6:6,7; II Cor. 5:19; Isa. 53:11).

The Spirit joins us to Christ in efficacious calling, persuading and enabling us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel. It may be supposed that in the sight of God the sinner must already be united to Christ (and therefore justified) in order to be granted the gift of faith. Surely we must respect the mysteries of God's sovereign working, evident, for example, in his uniting to Christ infants and others incapable of faith. But we, nevertheless, must hold fast to the Scriptural emphasis that faith is unto justification. Faith does not turn in on itself to find evidence that we are already justified; faith looks away to Jesus "that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 2:16).

Those who are justified by faith are also guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (I Pet. 1:5).

At the last judgment God's justifying verdict is publicly declared. The righteous are divided from the wicked; God's persecuted saints are vindicated (II Thess. 1:6-9; Rev. 6:10, 16). Judgment brings them joy and salvation (II Thess. 1:10; I Thess. 5:9). This deliverance and vindication recognizes the genuine piety of the saints; God displays the fruit of his saving work, and vindicates his own name as well as that of his people. Yet God exhibits the righteous deeds

of believers as a manifestation of their faith tried through fire (I Pet. 1:7; 2:12). They are justified in Christ; their judgment is already sealed in him, and they do not therefore come into judgment as do those who have not faith (Jn. 5:24, cf. v. 29).

The New Testament teaches that good works are required of believers in the day of God's just judgment (Jn. 5:29; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:11,12). As Calvin explains, our good works may be spoken of as causes of our inheriting eternal life, because God who has chosen life in Christ leads us to it by preparing us in the performance of good works (*Institutes*, Book III, 14:21). Those whom God accepts in that day are those in whom his sanctifying grace has been at work. Yet, as Calvin makes clear, our good works can never be true causes of our justification. The same passages that speak of God's requiring good works also affirm the deliverance and justification of believers through Christ (Jn. 5:25, II Cor. 5:19, 21; Rev. 22:14, 17). Since we know that God judges according to each man's work, we pass the time of our sojourning in fear (I Pet. 1:17), but we know that we are redeemed, not by any effort or price of our own, but by the precious blood of Christ (I Pet. 1:18). Our good works bring glory to God's name and are required as the evidence of our true faith, but only Christ's justifying verdict as initially pronounced or as reiterated in open acquittal on the day of judgment.

## **VII. Justification and the Covenant of Grace**

The term "covenant" (one of the most common Biblical terms for describing God's relation to man) is used to present both the justice and mercy of God. Christ's blood shed for sinners is the blood of the new covenant (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25; Heb. 10:29); the Scriptural teaching about justification is set in the framework of God's covenant.

Although the word "covenant" is not used in Genesis to describe God's dealings with Adam and Even in the garden, the term may be applied to those dealings in accord with its Biblical usage (W.C. VII:I; cf. Hos. 6:7). Included in the covenantal pattern is the concept of representative headship. God's covenant is made with Noah and his descendants, with Abraham and his seed, with the families of Israel and their future generations. Paul compares the headship of Adam with the Headship of Christ. Adam failed to yield the obedience God's covenant demanded; in his sin all his posterity by natural generation are included. But Christ, the second Adam, kept that covenant.

That covenant has been called the covenant of works. God promised eternal blessedness upon condition of a limited period of obedience; he threatened death for disobedience. Although God's gracious goodness can be seen in the disproportion between the limited requirement and the eternal reward, the covenant required the obedience of faith as its condition. By that obedience the promised reward could be claimed as merit.

After the fall Adam could no longer fulfill the terms of that covenant. His sin deserved God's wrath, and as a sinner he was unable to serve God with the obedience God required.

Only Christ, the second Adam, could atone for sin by the sacrifice of himself and merit the covenant reward. Christ's fulfillment of the covenant, however, did not immediately follow the fall. Rather, God's redemption led the way through a series of covenants or dispensations called the covenant of grace. The New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ is so called, not in contrast to the covenant of works made with Adam, but to the covenants of grace made with



Abraham and Israel.

Since obedience to the Lord is required in all the administrations of the covenant of grace, the theology of the covenants requires an understanding of the relation of covenantal obedience to the justifying verdict of God.

All of God's covenantal dealings after the fall are administrations of God's one master-plan of grace. There is therefore continuity in their succession (W.C. VII:v). Yet they differ in form. The promise orientation of the covenant with Abraham differs from the emphasis on law obedience in the subordinate covenant with Israel at Sinai (Gal. 3:17, 22). Paul writes that the demand of the law that he who does the commandments will live in them is not of faith but of works (Gal. 3:11, 12; Rom. 10:5; Lev. 18:5). No sinner can be justified by that law, for no sinner can keep it. The law is good: it states what is pleasing to God and marks the path of life. Yet it can only condemn and not justify the sinner.

The law given at Sinai does not cancel out the promises, however. It was given not only to reveal sin, but to be sought and heeded by those who would live by faith, as did Abraham. Those who walked by faith realized that they could not keep the law and trusted in the forgiveness of sins through the blood of the covenant provided on God's altar; they looked for the promise of righteousness from "the Lord our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6).

Jesus Christ has fulfilled all the obedience required in the covenant of works. As the seed of Abraham he is the minister of the circumcision to confirm the promises and to receive the Spirit promised (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:14); as the true Israel, God's covenant Servant, he has borne the curse of the law and fulfilled and transformed in Jesus Christ. The liberty of the Spirit enjoyed by those who are in Christ as believers under the New Covenant therefore opens a new way of life, foreseen and promised under the Old Covenant, but realized only by Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and Pentecostal advent.

While it is true, therefore, that Abraham and David were justified by faith and that the justification of believers under the Old Testament was the same justification that believers enjoy under the New Testament (W.C. XI:vi), nevertheless the preaching and teaching of the gospel must reflect the sharp New Testament distinction between the principles of law and grace lest the function that the inspired apostle attributes to the law be set aside or ignored and obedience to the law be presented as a necessary means for the justification of the believer. The way of covenant fulfillment by Jesus Christ secures for us the inheritance promised; the way in which we walk is the path of new obedience, but our obedience cannot satisfy the commandment whether given in Eden or from Sinai.

## **VIII. The distinction between justification and other aspects of God's salvation**

### **A. Justification and sanctification**

God justifies his elect only for the full satisfaction of their sins rendered by Christ on the cross and for the perfect righteousness of Christ. The righteousness that God takes account of in his justifying verdict is therefore not our own. It is not infused or wrought within us nor is it anything achieved or performed by us. This is true even though Christ who is the Surety of our justification is also the Source of our sanctification.

The efficacious calling of God that enables us to embrace Christ in saving faith renews our nature, creating a new heart in us. By the Holy Spirit Christians are then sanctified progressively, being conformed to the image of Christ. God's calling has sanctification as its purpose, and both the individual Christian and the church as the body and bride of Christ are being transformed in holiness for presentation before the Lord (II Cor. 11:2; Col. 1:29; II Cor. 7:21; I Th. 3:13).

We receive the blessings of justification and sanctification when we are united to Christ. Both blessings will also be evident at the last day. God's judgment will be publicly manifested both with respect to the imputation of Christ's righteousness and with respect to the vindication of his sanctifying work in us. God will require the fruits of his sanctifying work in the day of judgment; without personal holiness no man will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Nevertheless this holiness and the good works that have been wrought by it are not the ground or cause of our acceptance by God or of our inheritance of eternal life. They are a condition only because they manifest the reality and fullness of God's salvation and because they are "the proof of your faith being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire" all to the praise, glory and honor of God (I Pet. 1:7).

#### B. Justification and perseverance

God's justification of the believer marks the transition from God's wrath to his favor, from death to life, from the dominion of Satan to the kingdom of God's Son. Since that justifying verdict cannot be repealed any more than union with Christ can be dissolved, or his sheep perish, we may properly speak of a state of justification which cannot be lost.

Nevertheless Scripture characteristically speaks not only of our position in union with Christ, but also of our walk in the way of the Lord, warning us that only he who perseveres to the end will be saved. If our faith were to fail and we were to trample under foot the blood of Christ we could not claim God's justification by pretending that we had once had true faith. Faith must continue to the end, and by God's grace, through the intercession of our High Priest, our faith will not fail. God's initial declaration of our justification by faith takes full account of the fact that he who has given that faith will sustain it.

Since the perseverance of the saints is sustained through the Spirit's use of the means of grace, the warnings of Scripture must be boldly preached: the message of justification by faith and the warning that if we turn back God has no pleasure in us are joined in Scripture and should be joined in our preaching.

#### C. Justification and assurance

The Biblical doctrine of justification provides an anchor for the assurance of faith, an assurance that is founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, together with the inward testimony of the Spirit of adoption who bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. The understanding that justification is found in Christ's finished work and that faith is not an achievement but an abandonment to the mercies of Christ, this understanding delivers us from basing our assurance on the quality or certainty of our first response of faith; it

also delivers us from the uncertainty with which we evaluate the inward or outward evidence of the graces that manifest God's sanctifying work in our hearts.

## AFFIRMATIONS AND DENIALS

### *I. CONCERNING THE NATURE OF JUSTIFICATION*

1. We affirm that justification is altogether a legal, declarative act on God's part as the Supreme Judge of all men; and

We deny that justification in any sense is a moral transformation or inner renewal of the ungodly sinner.

2. We affirm that in justification God legally declares the sinner, who in himself is still guilty and still polluted, to be righteous in Christ; and

We deny that the transformation of regeneration which logically precedes justification removes guilt or ends all pollution in the sinner.

3. We affirm that justification as one aspect of the total salvation of the sinner involves only the legal imputation or legal accounting of the perfect satisfaction and righteousness of Christ to the sinner; and

We deny that any righteousness in the sinner, even the in-wrought righteousness of Jesus Christ, can ever be the righteousness legally imputed to him for justification.

4. We affirm that the benefits of God's justification of the ungodly proceed from God's reckoning of all of the sins of the believer, past, present, and future, to Christ in His state of humiliation, without Christ's having committed the least sin; and

We deny that upon God's actual justification of the believing sinner, any sin remains which has not been reckoned legally as though it were Christ's.

5. We affirm that in God's justification of the ungodly all the perfections of the righteousness of Jesus Christ are reckoned legally to the account of the believing sinner; and

We deny that any part of the righteousness of justification is the righteousness produced by the transformational process of sanctification.

6. We affirm that God's justification of the believing sinner is pronounced with eschatological finality in this life, so that none will be openly acquitted in the last judgment who have not already in this life had imputed to their account the full righteousness of Christ; and

We deny that the sinner must await God's judgment at the last day for his definitive justification.

7. We affirm that only God can justify the sinner, and that, in the judicial framework of the covenant God's justification of the ungodly is once-for all and absolutely irreversible; and

We deny that in the legal context of the covenant any justification of the sinner occurs which ever has the potential of being reversed.

8. We affirm that the only judicial righteousness of the sinner for justification continues forever and remains exclusively the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is only reckoned legally to be the sinner's; that God continues to reconfirm His irreversible reckoning of Christ's righteousness to the sinner throughout this life, and that this definitive justification in time shall be openly acknowledged at the judgment of the last day; and

We deny that at any point any personal righteousness is accounted in the legal ordering of the covenant to the sinner for his justification.

## *II. CONCERNING FAITH AND GOOD WORKS IN RELATION TO JUSTIFICATION*

1. We affirm that faith alone, considered judicially from any works that faith produces is the only instrument of justification; and

We deny that the good works of the believing sinner may be regarded as the instrument of or the way to justification.

2. We affirm that justifying faith is never alone in the person who is justified, but that true and justifying faith from its inception always is accompanied by all other saving graces; and

We deny that justifying faith ever exists without the accompanying graces of the Spirit in the regenerated person.

3. We affirm that justifying faith in its essence is an embracing of Christ alone for salvation in distinction from the new obedience that it produces; and

We deny that justifying faith can be defined properly so that it virtually includes in its essence the new obedience which faith inevitably produces.

4. We affirm that the “faith alone” by which the sinner is justified, is “faith working through love” (Gal.5:6), as its “evidence” or “fruit.” We affirm that justifying faith and love (new obedience) must be distinguished from each other, but that they are organically inseparable, since faith is always accompanied by either the disposition toward or the actuality of new obedience; and

We deny that love is the “form” of justifying faith or that faith is constituted by new obedience, or that love and new obedience in any way replace or supplement the imputed righteousness of Christ as the ground or cause of justification.

5. We affirm the necessary causal priority of God’s justification of the sinner to the existence in him of any new obedience that is acceptable to God; and

We deny that any new obedience of the regenerate man is accepted by God for his justification.

6. We affirm that while faith is not temporally prior to justification it alone among all saving graces is instrumentally prior to justification, since as Scripture declares, every sinner must believe rather than perform various deeds of obedience or manifest various graces in order to be moved from a non-justified to

a justified status; and

We deny that in the application of redemption justification occurs apart from faith or from the regeneration that inevitably produces justifying faith.

7. We affirm that God justifies the sinner instantly and with irreversible finality on the event of faith; and

We deny that this justifying verdict awaits the performance of deeds of repentance or good works.

8. We affirm the necessity or indispensability of new obedience in relation to justification, only as the necessary fruit or evidence of a justifying faith; and

We deny that the good works of the believer in any way contribute to justification, whether as ground or as an instrument for received it or continuing in it.

9. We affirm that faith alone in the righteousness of Christ alone and not faith together with its fruits are required as the only instrument of justification; and

We deny that God at any time requires for justification personal godliness as a correlative instrument joined to faith in its laying hold of the righteousness of Christ.

10. We affirm that justifying faith includes in itself a turning to Christ that rests in Him alone for salvation; this turning of faith is one sense in which repentance is spoken of in Scripture (Luke 3:3; 24:47)

We deny that the repentance which is the fruit of faith and which endeavors after new obedience shares the instrumental role of faith in relation to god's justification of the sinner.

11. We affirm that acts of repentance and new obedience may and must be distinguished from justifying faith, since faith which is believing rather than doing functions as the exclusive instrument of justification; and

We deny that justifying faith as an act of obedience can be imputed to sinners for righteousness. Faith as a work cannot justify, but only as it rests in Christ.

12. We affirm that the sinner's justification is by faith alone rather than by his doing God's law; and

We deny that justification is by a grace given at conversion which enables sinners to do the law unto their justification.

13. We affirm that Scripture excludes the good works of the believer from functioning as the ground or instrument of his justification (cf. Rom.3:28; Eph. 2:8,9; Tit.3:5; Phil.3:9; Gal.2:16); and

We deny that Scripture excludes only the works of the unbeliever or works done in self-righteousness by the believer from functioning as the ground or instrument of his justification.

14. We affirm that in that aspect of the gospel's call which is specifically for justification the sinner must be called to believe in Christ; this call may be expressed in a summons to follow Christ, but only when that following is presented as evidence and fruit of faith; and

We deny that the summons to believe specifically for justification and the summons to follow Christ in faith, repentance and new obedience are ultimately the same thing.

15. We affirm that for believers the final judgment is not only a matter of assigning relative degrees of blessing or reward, but, with a view to the ultimate outcome of eternal life or eternal destruction, is an open acquittal or final reconfirmation of their justification, and that this open acquittal is "according to works" (Rom.2:6,7), understood as the fruit and criterion of a true, living faith; and

We deny that the open acquittal at the day of judgment has any other ground than the imputed righteousness of Christ or any other instrument than faith, or that the good works of the believer in any way contribute to it.

16. We affirm that the solemn warnings against rebellion and apostasy in Scripture are directed to all believers, not merely hypocrites, because the once-for-all forgiveness of sins and imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification are only granted to and received by a faith which, working by love, perseveres to the end; and

We deny that those who, by faith, have been united to Christ and therefore justified can ever fall away.



**Biblical Inerrancy**  
**(Adopted by the Board of Trustees, November 17, 1987)**

The Board of Trustees of Westminster Theological Seminary, in view of the widespread irresponsible public criticism of the Seminary during the past several months, makes the following affirmations to clarify our continuing commitment to the original founding purposes of the Seminary:

- 1) The creedal subscription required of every voting member of the Board and every voting member of the Faculty is public knowledge and appears in full in every issue of the Seminary catalogue. If the Faculty or Board learns that any member of the Faculty or Board has become out of accord with this subscription, appropriate steps will be taken to terminate that individual's service at the Seminary.
- 2) We operate according to the biblical principle in human relations that a person is considered innocent of a specific sin or error until proven otherwise (Matthew 18:15-20, I Corinthians 13:4-8). In light of the subscription vows taken by both Board and Faculty members, we therefore affirm our confidence in and support of those members unless and until they admit or are shown to have violated that subscription oath. We therefore consider it unconscionable for anyone to accuse any member of the Faculty or Board of deviation from the Confessional Standards of the Seminary without a responsible investigation of and interaction with that individual under the constraints of biblical principles and Christian love.

In light of these affirmations, the Board of Trustees, at its meeting on November 17, 1987, reasserts the following:

- 1) Westminster Theological Seminary remains fully committed to the inerrancy of Scripture.
- 2) All members of the Board and Faculty must and do share this commitment.
- 3) Any Faculty or Board member who is judged to have abandoned this commitment will not be allowed to continue at the Seminary.
- 4) Procedurally, until such determination of departure from this historic commitment is made, the Board of Trustees will vigorously support and uphold other members of the Board and the Faculty against unwarranted criticism in this area.

## **Statement on the Days of Genesis**

(Approved by the Board of Trustees May 28, 1999 and  
supplemented December 1, 1999)

RESOLVED,

That, in its judgment, the statement entitled “Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation,” as adopted by the Faculty on March 1, 1999, is an accurate description of the continuity between the Seminary’s present position on the days of creation and historic Reformed teaching on this subject.

Supplement of December 1, 1999

RESOLVED,

That the Board commend the Faculty for its statement regarding the days of creation and urge the Administration to provide a copy of this statement to anyone who specifically inquires about the Seminary’s position on this subject.

# Westminster Theological Seminary and the Days of Creation

## A Brief Statement

The Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) voted on March 1, 1999 to affirm that the Faculty understands the following to be an accurate description of the continuity between the Seminary's present position on the days of creation and historic Reformed teaching on this subject.

As in the past, in recent years it has been claimed that, in expounding the biblical teaching on creation, to hold anything other than that God created the world in six days, each of 24 hours duration, is (a) to depart from theological orthodoxy and (b) to interpret Scripture in the light of secular science in general and evolutionistic philosophy in particular.

With the founders of the institution, faculty members at Westminster Seminary pledge:

(1) I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and (2) I do solemnly and ex animo adopt, receive, and subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms... as the confession of my faith, or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief which is contained in Holy Scripture... and promise and engage not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any element in that system of doctrine ....

Committed, as the Seminary is, to the inerrancy of Scripture and standing in the Augustinian and Reformed theological tradition, the precise chronological duration of the six days of creation has never been regarded by the Seminary's Board or Faculty as a matter on which the Scriptures themselves speak with decisive clarity. The Seminary has always held that an exegetical judgement on this precise issue has never of itself been regarded as a test of Christian orthodoxy or confessional fidelity until some have sought to make it such in the modern period.

In effect, to hold such a position would be to disenfranchise from Augustinian and Reformed orthodoxy some who have, in fact, by God's grace, served as its greatest defenders and pillars.

**Augustine**, himself, as is well known, states in connection with the days of Genesis 1, "What kind of days these were it is extremely difficult, *or perhaps impossible* for us to conceive." (*The City of God*, Book 11, chap. 7, emphasis added.)

**Anselm** may be read to follow this lead in his supposition that "the 'days' of Moses' account ... are not to be equaled with the days in which we live." (*Cur Deus Homo*, 18).

The **Reformers**, it is true, seem to have generally interpreted the days as "ordinary" days of 24 hours in duration. (Cf. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, on 1:14). Yet this position, consciously distanced, as we will see, from Augustine's and Anselm's view of instantaneous creation, never seems to have been regarded as a test of orthodoxy in the reformed churches.

A striking illustration of the way in which biblical scholars wrestled with this issue is found in the work of **John Colet**, who, at the end of the 15th century, held to a position approximating to a day-age or even framework interpretation of the days of Genesis.

Interestingly, he held that Genesis 1 was written in “the manner of a popular poet” [*more poetae alicuius popularis*]. In the Augustinian tradition, Colet views the precise meaning of the days of Genesis 1 as so difficult to untangle that he writes (tongue in cheek): “nothing could be more like night than these Mosaic days.” (See F. Seebohm, *The Oxford Reformers* (London, 1887), pp. 4660 for a detailed account, including citations.) In addition, he argued that the function of Genesis 1 is precisely not scientific but intended to portray the mystery of creation to the children of Israel in the days of Moses.

In the current debate among Presbyterians subscribing to the **Westminster Standards** attention has focused especially on the phrase, “... (with)in the space of six days ...” (Confession of Faith, 4:1; Larger Catechism, 15; Shorter Catechism, 9). Some insist that its inclusion is manifestly intended to exclude anything but the six 24 hour day view. Others maintain that at this point the Standards are simply paraphrasing the language of Scripture, and do not address the question of the length of the days. Although the latter view is closer to the truth, as will be shown presently, both need to be called into question, in light of the likely background of the phrase.

The paraphrase view is doubtful because if the Standards had intended simply to utilize biblical language, ‘in six days’ would have sufficed and been a more natural choice. The words “the space of,” as the other view above recognizes, seem deliberately chosen as an interpretive or clarifying addition that functions both to affirm and to exclude or negate.

But what is the affirmation/exclusion in view? That question is crucial for the current debate, and the answer is surely the affirmation that the work of creation involved duration, to the specific exclusion of the view, going back at least to Augustine, that it was instantaneous. (Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Book 4, chaps. 20, 26-27, 33-34.)

A clear antecedent to the language of the Standards is present in Calvin's comments on the reference to the first day in Genesis 1:5. “Here ‘the error of those is manifestly refuted, who maintain that the world was made in a moment. For it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction.” “Let us rather conclude,” he continues, “that God himself took the space of six days [*sex dierum spatium*], for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men.” Our capacity is in fact our incapacity, “our excessive dullness” and “the vanity of our minds” that renders us inattentive to “the infinite glory of God” and “his greatness” as the creator. “For the correction of this fault, God applied the most suitable remedy when he distributed the creation of the world into successive portions [*in certos gradus*], that he might fix our attention, and compel us, as if he had laid his hand upon us, to pause and reflect .” (Commentary on the Book of Genesis, p. 78, emphasis added; Latin: *Calvin Opera*, 23:18.)

To cite another example, quite similar in effect and virtually contemporary to the time the Standards were written, in his *Medulla theologiae* **William Ames** asserts in proposition 28 of

the chapter on creation: “But the Creation of these parts of the world, was not altogether and in one moment but it was finished by parts succeeding one another, in the space of six days [*sex dierum interstitiis*].” (1642 ed., p. 34, emphasis added; Latin: 1628 ed., p. 35.)

In view of such examples it seems fair to maintain that the phrase in question in the Standards functions to oppose the error, longstanding at that time, of instantaneous creation. Though the framers of the Standards for the most part held personally to the 24 hour day view, that view, to the exclusion of all others, is not the point of their confessional affirmation. That affirmation, as particularly the inclusion of “the space of” shows, intends not somehow to *limit* but rather, over against the instantaneous creation view, to *emphasize* the duration of the creation days.

Even though Calvin, Ames, and the authors of the Westminster Standards, with few exceptions, if any, undoubtedly understood the days to be ordinary days, there is no ground for supposing that they intended to exclude any and all other views, in particular the view that the days may be longer. Such views are outside their purview; their concern, in fact, moves in the opposite direction, against the instantaneous view that denies any length.

This point bears emphasizing within the context of the current debate about the days of Genesis. To establish that the Standards mandate the six 24 hour days view requires more than demonstrating that the Divines, perhaps, even to a man, held that the days were ordinary days. To demonstrate that of itself establishes nothing. What needs also to be shown, which we believe cannot be shown, is that they intended to exclude the views that the days are longer in some respect or that they represent a literary framework.

It is perfectly appropriate to suppose that, transposed into the setting of subsequent debates about the length of the days, the framers would be the first to insist upon settling that question by the exegesis of Genesis 1 and other biblical passages. Their confession requires that of all who embrace it as their own (see Confession of Faith, 1:10).

Within churches subscribing to the Standards today, therefore, the phrase in question does not foreclose discussion of the nature and length of the Genesis days and related issues, but leaves those open questions to be settled, if possible, by what Scripture teaches.

**The 19th century Princetonians**, who regarded themselves as upholders of Reformed orthodoxy and of the Westminster Standards, expressed broad views of Genesis 1 which have frequently been discussed. In particular, neither Charles Hodge, nor his son, A. A. Hodge, nor B. B. Warfield regarded the six 24 hour day view of creation as exegetically required by a careful reading of Genesis 1. The Princeton tradition refrained from dogmatic insistence on a single necessary meaning for “day” (*yom*) in Genesis 1.

**Westminster Seminary** has always seen itself as continuing to honor the Princeton legacy. This was confirmed by the founder of the institution, **Dr. J. Gresham Machen**, when he stated in connection with the days of Genesis 1: “It is certainly not necessary to think that the six days spoken of in that first chapter of the Bible are intended to be six days of twenty four hours each. We may think of them rather as very long periods of time.” (The Christian View of Man,

(1937; Eerdmans reprint; Grand Rapids, 1947), p.131.)

**Professor Edward J. Young**, often regarded as the epitome of conservative exegetical orthodoxy in this matter, while holding that a chronological sequence is taught by Genesis 1, nevertheless made abundantly clear that chronological sequence should not be equated with or confused with chronological *duration*:

But then there arises the question as to the length of these days. That is a question which is difficult to answer. Indications are not lacking that they may have been longer than the days we now know, but the Scripture itself does not speak as clearly as one might like. (Encyclopedia of Christianity, vol. 3 (ed. P.E. Hughes; Wilmington, DE, 1972), p. 242).

In adopting this view, Young followed his own teacher, **O. T. Allis**.

The current faculty of Westminster Seminary is profoundly conscious of the inroads of secularism and of the endemic influence of evolutionism. It is conscious, too, of the perennial dangers of regarding the current opinions of secular science as canonical for Christian belief. But to assume that Scripture yields more clearly-defined information with respect to creation than its exegesis may allow, or worse, to demand that it does, is to mold Scripture to our own concerns and fears rather than to come to it as our “guide and teacher” (Calvin). (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:6, title.)

The Westminster Confession's doctrine of the clarity of Scripture (1:7) goes hand in hand with its inspiration, infallibility, and authority. Yet it implies that not all parts of the Scriptures are equally clear or full. Here we must follow Calvin's great motto that where God makes an end of teaching, we should make an end of trying to be wise. (*Institutes* 3:21:3.) With Augustine and E. J. Young, the revered teacher of our senior faculty members, we recognize that the exegetical question of the length of the days of Genesis 1 may be an issue which cannot be, and therefore is not intended by God to be, answered in dogmatic terms. To insist that it must comes dangerously close to demanding from God revelation which he has not been pleased to bestow upon us, and responding to a threat to the biblical world view with weapons that are not crafted from the words which have proceeded out of the mouth of God.

In this context the members of the Faculty of Westminster Seminary remain committed to the pursuit of the most accurate understanding of the text of Holy Scripture and the confessional standards of the institution, as they also remain committed to the utter trustworthiness of every word of God the Creator and Redeemer.

## **Affirmations and Denials Regarding Recent Issues**

(Adopted by the Board of Trustees, December 1, 2008)

### **RESOLVED,**

That the Board directs that the Affirmations and Denials adopted at its special September 2008 Meeting and perfected at its regular December 2008 Meeting be utilized by the Seminary as important clarifications of doctrine and practice for all who take the Westminster Faculty and Board vows, such that it is understood that they present the Board's understanding of critical aspects of the Bible's doctrine of Scripture (the superior standard and only infallible rule of faith and practice) as well as the Westminster Standards' (the inferior secondary standards to the Scriptures) doctrine of Scripture, as well as critical clarifications of the hermeneutical method that the Scriptures and the Subordinate Standards teach.

And thus while they are neither amendments to the Standards, nor confessional documents in and of themselves, the Board finds them to serve as defining statements and clarifications of the Seminary's core beliefs in the following ways:

- They clarify theological and hermeneutical misunderstandings that have occurred in the recent theological controversies that have impacted the Seminary; and
- They refine core commitments of the Seminary by clarifying foundational theological boundaries established by Scripture and the Standards for the teaching of our faculty and potential faculty hires in these controverted matters.

And to that end, the Board instructs the President to:

- Request that all current faculty discuss with the President and the Vice President for academic affairs and the moderator of the faculty their commitment to and exceptions to these statements by April 1, 2009;
- Report of these interviews and exceptions to the Board by April 25<sup>th</sup> for its May 2009 meeting in order that the Board may review these statements and exceptions to assure the theological integrity of the Seminary;
- To see that the Vice President of Academic Affairs provide all candidates for faculty positions with copies of these statements of clarification prior to their interviews so that they may ascertain their Scriptural and Confessional qualifications to teach at the Seminary;
- To prepare along with the publication of these Affirmations and Denials a collection of the Seminary's previous statements of theological clarifications inclusive of but not necessarily limited to:
  - Justification
  - The Seminary's statement on Women in ordained office o
  - The Days of Creation; and
- To publish this collection in print and if appropriate on the Seminary's website.
- Moreover, that the students, alumni and other constituents of the Seminary either be notified of the availability of these published clarifications, or if funds should be available, that they be provided with copies of the same;
- And finally, that when from time to time the Seminary creates other needed statements of theological clarification that these be added to this collection of statements of clarification to ensure that they are readily accessible, as well as consistently consulted, taught, developed and defended for the good order of the Seminary.



## **Affirmations and Denials Regarding Recent Issues**

Provisionally Adopted by the Board of  
Trustees Westminster Theological  
Seminary Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
September 24, 2008

### Introduction

Westminster Theological Seminary is a Reformed seminary that is committed to the infallibility of Scripture and has a well-defined doctrinal basis in the subordinate standards of the Westminster tradition. Each voting faculty member and each member of the Board of the Seminary is required to subscribe to the Westminster Standards, that is, the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), and the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC). Each voting faculty member is required to make the following pledge:

I do solemnly declare, in the presence of God, and of the Trustees and Faculty of this Seminary, that (1) I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and (2) I do solemnly and ex animo adopt, receive, and subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms in the form in which they were adopted by this Seminary in the year of our Lord 1936, as the confession of my faith, or as a summary and just exhibition of that system of doctrine and religious belief, which is contained in Holy Scripture, and therein revealed by God to man for his salvation; and I do solemnly, ex animo, profess to receive the fundamental principles of the Presbyterian form of church government, as agreeable to the inspired oracles. And I do solemnly promise and engage not to inculcate, teach, or insinuate anything which shall appear to me to contradict or contravene, either directly or impliedly, any element in that system of doctrine, nor to oppose any of the fundamental principles of that form of church government, while I continue a member of the Faculty in this Seminary. I do further solemnly declare that, being convinced of my sin and misery and of my inability to rescue myself from my lost condition, not only have I assented to the truth of the promises of the Gospel, but also I have received and rest upon Christ and His righteousness for pardon of my sin and for my acceptance as righteous in the sight of God and I do further promise that if at any time I find myself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, I will on my own initiative, make known to the Faculty of this institution and, where applicable, my judicatory, the change which has taken place in my views since the assumption of the vow.

Each member of the Board of Trustees subscribes to a similar pledge:

I hereby solemnly declare in the presence of God and this Board (1) that I believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, (2) that I sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Presbyterian Church in America in the form which They possessed in 1936, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, (3) that, approving the Charter of Westminster Theological Seminary, I will faithfully endeavor to carry into effect the articles and provisions of said Charter and to promote the great design of the Seminary. I do further solemnly declare that, being convinced of my sin and misery and of my inability to rescue myself from my lost condition not only have I assented to the truth of the promises of the Gospel, but also I have received and rest upon Christ and His righteousness for pardon of my sin and for my acceptance as righteous in the sight of God.

We continue to embrace the Westminster Standards. We remain convinced that they are a sound and valuable confessional basis for the work and instruction in the Seminary.

Theological discussion at Westminster Theological Seminary has revealed several areas where it may be appropriate for the Board of the Seminary to reaffirm our continued commitment to the Westminster Standards and to presbyterian government, and to restate the nature of our commitment. We see the affirmations and denials below not as an addition to our historic subscription, but as reaffirmations and clarifications of the implications of our continued subscription.

These affirmations and denials are not in any way exhaustive. Rather, they are to be seen as selective, and as addressing only some of the matters implied in confessional subscription. The complete affirmation to which voting faculty members are bound is the faculty pledge, as quoted above and set out in the Constitution of the Seminary.

## **Affirmations and Denials**

### **I. Confessional Subscription**

#### **A. Basic character of subscription**

We affirm that the Standards are secondary standards. The Scripture itself is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. (See the faculty pledge; WCF 1.2; 1.10; WLC 3; WSC 2.)

We deny that the primacy of Scripture makes confessional subscription unimportant or dispensable or superfluous. (WCF 22.)

We affirm that our subscription to the Standards includes a cordial and full affirmation that the Standards are a just exhibition of the system of doctrine and religious belief, which is contained in Holy Scripture. (See faculty pledge.)

We deny that our subscription merely requires that a faculty member is only broadly instructed or guided by the Standards.

We affirm that the Westminster Standards are fallible and therefore may have errors which may be refined, corrected or revised upon appeal to a proper understanding of our primary standard, the Scripture. (WCF 31.4)

We deny that the Westminster Standards are infallible.

#### **B. Progress in understanding Scripture**

We affirm that Scripture contains truths not included in the Westminster Standards. (WCF 1.6.)

We deny that there are truths found in Scripture but not in the Standards that overthrow or undermine any element in the system of doctrine expounded in the Standards.

We affirm that God himself enjoins us to seek an ever deeper and more comprehensive understanding of his word. (WLC 157.)

We deny that we cannot improve upon or clarify the understanding of God's word expressed in the Standards.

#### **C. Specific obligations implied by the pledge**

We affirm that a voting faculty member is not permitted to teach or insinuate something contrary to any element in the system of doctrine, even if the faculty member judges that what he is going to teach is based on Scripture. (Faculty pledge.)

We deny that an alleged Scriptural basis for a teaching eliminates the obligation imposed by the faculty pledge.

We affirm that a faculty member may present to the faculty or the Board an idea that might later be judged out of accord with the system of doctrine, in order to have that idea tested and sifted.

We deny that the confidential presentation of ideas to the faculty or Board for the purpose of testing and evaluation is in itself out of accord with the faculty pledge.

We affirm that individual faculty members may take exception to or express a scruple about a particular item or wording within the Standards.

We deny that taking an exception to a particular item necessarily diminishes in any way the full integrity of the expectation requiring upholding the faculty pledge, or is necessarily inconsistent with the faculty pledge.

#### **D. Judgments about subscription**

We affirm that, with regard to any exception or scruple, or any other views of a faculty member, the Board and the faculty have a responsibility, both at the time of initial appointment and at all subsequent times, to make a theological judgment as to whether such an exception or such a view undermines the intent of the Seminary's subscription pledge.

We deny that Board and faculty judgments about compatibility with the Standards constitute an illegitimate interference with an individual's conscience or an illegitimate abridgment of academic freedom.

We affirm that, in the context of subscription, the meaning of any particular teaching in the Standards is determined by the Board, by referring to the historical record of orthodox Reformed tradition, and is not determined by the private interpretation of any one individual faculty member.

We deny that an individual faculty member has the right to import a private meaning into the Standards when he subscribes, thereby avoiding the meaning commonly understood in Reformed tradition.

## **II. Confession and Mission**

#### **A. Universality of truth**

We affirm that the truths affirmed in the Standards are true for all times, all places, all languages, and all cultures. (WCF 1.1, 6, 8.)

We deny that the truths affirmed in the Standards are true only for their seventeenth century situation or

only for some cultures or circumstances.

We affirm that a person's agreement with the content of the Standards includes agreement with all its affirmations as perennially normative, not merely agreement that they were an appropriate response to the theological, ecclesiastical, and pastoral needs of the seventeenth century.

We deny that a person's agreement with the Standards is adequate if, at any point, it merely means agreeing pragmatically with the way in which the Standards addressed the needs of their situation.

We affirm that the Standards have instructional value for all times and all cultures.

We deny that the Standards have instructional value only in certain cultures and/or certain times.

#### **B. The legitimacy of pedagogical adaptation**

We affirm that teaching of the Standards in a particular language or culture can and should take into account the existing previous theological education, crucial theological and pastoral issues in the circumstances, and problems and opportunities arising in the church and in the surrounding culture. (WLC 159.)

We deny that theological teaching need not attend to circumstances.

We affirm that theological teaching can legitimately adjust in teaching style, phraseology, selection of content, use of illustrations, and many other ways that prove significant in facilitating the communication and grasp of truth in the target language and culture. (WLC 159.)

We deny that adjustments in pedagogy and communicative strategy imply compromise of the truths affirmed in the Standards or should be seen as a license to unilaterally modify the truths affirmed in the Standards.

### **III. Scripture**

#### **A. The nature of Scripture**

We affirm that the Holy Scripture is to be believed and obeyed, because it is the word of God. (WCF 1.4; WLC 157, 160.)

We deny that the Holy Scripture is to be believed or obeyed merely because it contains the word of God, or merely because it conveys the word of God, or merely because the Holy Spirit uses it to effect a personal encounter with God.

We affirm that what Scripture says, God says. (WCF 1.4; 1.10; 14.2.)

We deny that what Scripture says is only sometimes or only partly what God says, or that Scripture only

becomes what God says in the act of communication to some person.

We affirm that in causing his word to be written down in the Bible, God, the primary author, used human writers, the secondary authors, often employing them in the full range of their personalities and existing gifts and abilities, with the exception that he kept them from error. (WCF 1.2, 4 prooftexts.)

We deny that God used no human writers in producing the Scripture.

We affirm that God remains true, good, pure, righteous, all-knowing, and immutable when he delivers Scripture to us, and what Scripture says--both in each detail and as a whole--is always consistent with and manifests the perfections of his character. (WCF 1.4, 2.1.)

We deny that the presence of human agents in the writing of Scripture, or any other use of means, or any relation to cultural or historical circumstances in the writing, allow the interpreter to dismiss or cease to reckon with the fact that God's character is always consistent with what he says in Scripture.

#### B. The interpretation of Scripture

We affirm that each verse and passage belongs to a larger context of other Scripture, to which God expects us to attend. (WCF 1.2, 1.9; WLC 157.)

We deny that any verse or passage can be fully interpreted by taking it in isolation from its immediate context the book to which it belongs, or from the Scripture as a whole.

We affirm that we can understand passages of Scripture more deeply when we take into account the historical and cultural circumstances that they addressed. (WLC 157.)

We deny that historical and cultural circumstances are irrelevant to understanding Scriptural passages.

We affirm that Scripture makes known clearly those things necessary to be believed and observed for salvation, so that even the unlearned may come to sufficient understanding through due use of ordinary means. (WCF 1.7.)

We deny that extra-biblical knowledge of ancient customs or circumstances is necessary to understand the message of salvation in Scripture.

#### C. The pertinence of ancient contexts

We affirm that God in his wisdom addressed Scripture to his people of long ago in a manner that takes into account their historical setting and their previous knowledge. (WCF 7.5, 2.1.)

We deny that Scripture fails to take into account the setting of its ancient addressees, or that it fails adequately to address ancient people.

We affirm that what Scripture affirms to its ancient audience is always true. (WCF 2.1.)

We deny that limitations in ancient addressees and their setting may ever allow the inclusion of untruths as a part of what Scripture affirms or what it implies.

We affirm that God in producing the canon of Scripture addresses peoples of all subsequent times, places, and cultures. (WCF 1.1; 1.8; WLC 155, 156.)

We deny that God addresses only the people who lived at the time that a book was written.

We affirm that what the Scripture affirms is to be believed and obeyed by people in all places and cultures. (WCF 1.4; 14.2; WLC 156.)

We deny that what Scripture affirms lays obligations of belief and obedience only on the original recipients, or only on some cultures.

We affirm that some earlier commands of Scripture have meaning such that their application to our present circumstances must reckon with the changed redemptive conditions in which God addresses us. For example, animal sacrifices that were prescribed in the Old Testament are no longer necessary now, because Christ has offered the final sacrifice. (WCF 19.3, 4.)

We deny that there are no commands whose application varies with redemptive context.

#### D. The truthfulness of Scripture

We affirm that the Holy Scripture contains a system of doctrine. (Faculty pledge.)

We deny that the Holy Scripture lacks doctrinal unity on any point of doctrine, or that it does not always agree with itself.

We affirm that the Holy Scripture is harmonious in all its teaching. (WCF 1.9.) We deny that there are real contradictions in Scripture.

We affirm that Scripture is truthful and without error in what it affirms. (WCF 1.4; 2.1.) We deny that Scripture affirms anything that is factually erroneous or is incorrect.

We affirm that Scripture can quote from, allude to, or otherwise represent, in a manner distinct from its own affirmations, the fallible speech and thought deriving from fallible, sinful human beings. ("The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God,'" Ps. 14:1.)

We deny that Scripture's quotation or representation of fallible thought implies Scripture's own fallibility.

#### E. The role of the Holy Spirit

We affirm that the work of the Holy Spirit in a person is necessary for that person properly and savingly to understand the Scripture and that full acceptance and a willingness to submit unconditionally to its teaching is essential to such proper understanding. (WCF 10.1; 14:2; WLC 104; 155; 157; WSC 89.)

We deny that exercise of the rational powers of fallen man is sufficient for a right understanding of Scripture.

We affirm that God's truthfulness and self-consistency belong to what the Scripture says, not merely to what the Holy Spirit may be later alleged to show us through the Scripture. (WCF 1.4.)

We deny that God's authority belongs only to the Spirit's teaching from the Scripture, rather than to the Scripture itself as well.

#### **IV. Special Areas of Interest**

##### **A. Special Area: Harmony of Scripture**

We affirm that some things in Scripture are difficult to understand, and that we may not always be able easily to explain apparent contradictions. (WCF 1.7.)

We deny that all parts of Scripture are easy to understand.

We affirm that, through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we can rightly become convinced from Scripture itself that it is the word of God, even when we do not have an explanation for some of the apparent discrepancies in Scripture. (WCF 1.5.)

We deny that we must find explanations for each apparent discrepancy before accepting the divine authority of Scripture and submitting to its teaching.

We affirm that each individual passage of Scripture is consistent in its affirmations with every other passage. (WCF 1.9.)

We deny that passages may contradict one another.

We affirm that when interpreting any passage, the true meaning must be found by comparing the one passage with the rest of Scripture (WCF 1.9.)

We deny that it is legitimate to give an interpretation of a passage that is not in harmony with what is affirmed in another passage or passages.

We affirm doctrinal unity and coherence in a given passage between the meaning of God, as its primary author, and the meaning of the human author, however limited may have been the understanding of the latter of what he wrote. (WCF 1.4, 5)

We deny that in a given passage the intentions of God and the human writer are doctrinally divergent or discordant.

B. Special Area: Implications of Details in Scripture, Including NT Use of the OT

We affirm that we must submit to all that Scripture affirms, not merely to its main points. (WCF 1.4; WLC 157, 160.)

We deny that the divine authority of Scripture belongs only to its main purpose or only to the main points of its various passages.

We affirm that we must submit to the New Testament affirmations concerning the Old Testament, and not merely to the conclusions that the New Testament draws from them.

We deny that it is ever allowable to submit to the conclusions but not to the other affirmations in the Scripture.

We affirm that the reasoning that Scripture uses in traveling towards its conclusions is valid. We deny that any Scripture uses invalid reasoning to draw valid conclusions.

C. Special Area: Old Testament Teaching

We affirm that in the Old Testament God spoke to his people in a way that took into account their lack of detailed knowledge of the coming salvation to be revealed in the New Testament. (WCF 7.5.) We deny that the Old Testament shows no differences in content from the New Testament.

We affirm that what God said in the Old Testament is always in harmony with the later teaching in the New Testament, though it may not always be as full or explicit. (WCF 7.)

We deny that the New Testament shows any contradiction to what is in the Old Testament.

We affirm that we understand passages in the Old Testament more deeply in the light of the later revelation that God has given us in Christ. (WCF 7.5.)

We deny that we can never have more understanding of an Old Testament passage than what was available to people when it was first given.

We affirm that God's intention with respect to an Old Testament passage is consistent with his later reference to or allusion to that passage in the New Testament. (WCF 1.9.)

We deny that God's intentions at two different points in time, or in two different texts, are ever in disharmony.

We affirm doctrinal continuity and harmony between the original historical and human meaning of an Old Testament text and the meaning a New Testament writer attributes to that text. (WCF 1.5; 1.9.)

We deny that there is any doctrinal divergence or disparity between the original historical and human meaning of an Old Testament text and its use in the New Testament.



D. Special Area: Old Testament History

We affirm that Adam and Eve were real flesh-and-blood individual human beings. (WCF 6.1; 7.2; WLC 17.)

We deny that the narrative in Genesis 3 is merely symbolic for what is true of mankind in general.

We affirm that God's acts of creation, as listed in each of the six days of Genesis 1, really happened in space and time. (WCF 4.1; WLC 15.)

We deny that Genesis 1 merely teaches that God made everything.

We affirm that in Genesis 1 God communicated to ancient people in a manner intelligible to them. (WCF 1.7.)

We deny that Genesis 1 requires special modern knowledge or scientific knowledge for it to be understood.

We affirm that in the Scripture God does not endorse at any point a faulty worldview or cosmology or a faulty aspect thereof. (WCF 1.4; 2.1.)

We deny that Scripture at any point affirms a faulty cosmology.

We affirm that Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were real people who went through the experiences that Genesis describes them as going through. (WCF 1.4; 2.1; 14.2; WLC 160.)

We deny that the narratives in Genesis about the patriarchs are merely legendary, or that only some smaller core of events really happened.

## **Westminster Seminary Distinctives**

Westminster Theological Seminary defines its distinctive role most basically by its confessional commitment to the Westminster Standards. But we also value the insights that have grown up at Westminster over the decades as the faculty have continued to reflect on the Bible within the doctrinal framework provided by the Standards. We affirm the value of biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos, of presuppositional apologetics in the tradition of Cornelius Van Til, of biblical counseling in the tradition of Jay Adams, of systematic theology in the tradition of John Murray, and of Reformed missiology in the tradition of Harvie Conn. When rightly done, these programs of investigation and practice build on the truths articulated in the Westminster Standards. The Standards guide us in these disciplines by giving them a sound doctrinal basis. The disciplines show the fruit of the truths of Scripture by applying them to new areas of reflection.

Each of the disciplines employs the entire system of doctrine expounded in the Standards.

But there are distinctive emphases. Biblical theology builds on the harmonious character of Scripture (WCF 1.9) and on the Standards' teaching on the progressive character of revelation and of the history of redemption (WCF 7.5-6; 8.4-8; WLC 34-37, 42-58). Presuppositional apologetics builds on the sovereignty of the triune God as well as on the doctrine of human depravity and the necessity of regeneration (WCF 6.4-5; 9.3-4). Biblical counseling builds on the sufficiency of Scripture (WCF 1.1, 6, 8; WLC 155-160). Reformed missiology builds on the worldwide scope of the gospel (WCF 1.1; 8.1; WLC 60, 95).

We therefore offer the following brief affirmations and denials. In contrast to the earlier affirmations and denials, we do not see these as direct implications of the Standards themselves and the subscription pledge. But we do see them as fully compatible with our Standards.

We affirm the value of the disciplines of biblical theology, presuppositional apologetics, biblical counseling, systematic theology, and Reformed missiology as these have been practiced at Westminster Seminary.

We deny that these disciplines, when rightly understood and practiced, are in tension with our confessional Standards.

We affirm the importance of conducting these disciplines in conformity with the Standards and the faculty pledge.

We deny that the disciplines need freedom to reach conclusions that may prove to be contrary to the Standards.

We affirm that these disciplines can offer fruitful service both for the church and for growth in understanding of the doctrines of the Standards.

We deny that we have nothing to learn from the disciplines that could deepen or improve our understanding of doctrine.

We affirm that biblical theology (attention to the text in its redemptive-historical context) is the indispensable servant of systematic theology—indispensable because it is essential for the sound exegesis on which systematic theology depends, a servant because it contributes to the presentation, under appropriate topics, of the teaching of Scripture as a whole and in its overall unity that systematic theology is concerned to provide for the life of the church and its mission in

the world.

We deny that biblical theology and systematic theology, properly understood, are in conflict or are alternative approaches to Scripture independent of each other, or that either is dispensable.

We affirm that the teachings of Scripture concerning God, Christ, man, sin, salvation, and other topics, as those teachings are summarized in systematic theology, offer a sound framework in which to conduct the work of exegesis and biblical theology.

We deny that exegesis or biblical theology can be properly conducted without submission to or in tension with the teaching of Scripture as a whole.

## **Historical Statements**

### **Co-Belligerency**

**(Adopted by the Board of Trustees, May 26, 1994)**

Dr. Logan RECOMMENDED that the Board adopt the following statement: The Board of Trustees of WTS wished to express its conviction that: 1) it is crucial in our cultural crisis for those who share convictions on cultural issues to stand together as co-belligerents and yet, 2) it is equally crucial that such co-belligerency not be allowed to obscure theological precision on such fundamental issues as justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

On motion the statement was adopted.

## **Ordination of Women to Offices of the Church**

(Adopted by the Board of Trustees, May 27, 2009)

RESOLVED, That the Board go on record recognizing that the case law and stare decisis is that the practice and therefore instruction of the Seminary is that only qualified men are able to serve in the ordained offices of the church.

## **Group Health Insurance Providing Abortifacients**

(Adopted by the Board of Trustees, December 1, 2012)

RESOLVED, That the Board is opposed, on biblical and First Amendment grounds, to the requirement that abortifacients be covered by the group insurance policy provided to WTS's employees ... (further resolution authorized specific action by Seminary counsel).