

1 **Primary Brief of Complainant in Standing Judicial Case 2012-05,**
2 **RE Gerald Hedman versus Pacific Northwest Presbytery**

3
4 **I. Summary of the Facts**
5

- 6 1. January 9, 1999- TE Peter Leithart is received into PNWP by transfer from Evangel Presbytery (PCA).
7 2. January 9, 2004- Leithart approved to labor oob as pastor of Trinity Reformed Church (CREC) in Moscow, Idaho.
8 3. June 13, 2007- GA of the PCA adopts the nine declarations concerning the NPP/ Federal Vision.
9 4. June 14, 2007- TE Leithart sends letter to clerk of PNWP expressing his dissent to the ‘Nine Declarations’.
10 5. October 4, 2007- PNWP appoints a committee to study Leithart’s views at the request of Leithart and Stellman.
11 6. October 3, 2008- PNWP judges Leithart’s views “to be not out of accord with the fundamentals of our system.”
12 7. October 21, 2008- Complaint of Bordwine, Stellman and Rogland assigned to the SJC of PNWP.
13 8. November 20, 2008- the SJC of PNWP voted unanimously to recommend the denial of the complaint.
14 9. April 24, 2009- PNWP adopts the recommendation of its SJC and denies the complaint.
15 10. May 18, 2009- Bordwine and Stellman file a complaint with the Stated Clerk of the PCA, SJC Case 2009-6.
16 11. November 19, 2009- Panel hearing for SJC Case 2009-6 is conducted in Atlanta, GA.
17 12. December 9, 2009- SJC Panel unanimously recommends sustaining complaint and PNWP indicting TE Leithart.
18 13. March 10, 2010- full SJC determines the views of TE Leithart “constitute error that is injurious to the peace and
19 purity of the church.” The SJC recommended that PNWP counsel Leithart to recant of his views or transfer to
20 another denomination. If he does neither, PNWP should comply with BCO 31-2 by the 2010 Fall Stated Meeting.
21 14. April 23, 2010- PNWP recommends to TE Leithart to consider the SJC’s first recommendation.
22 15. October 8, 2010- TE Leithart refuses to either recant or transfer. PNWP appoints a prosecutor for trial.
23 16. January 17, 2011- the Prosecutor, TE Jason Stellman, gives the Defense five charges against TE Leithart.
24 17. January 31, 2011- TE Leithart pleads not guilty to all charges in conference call between the SJC and parties.
25 18. June 3-4, 2011- PNWP’s SJC conducts the trial of Leithart, finds him not guilty, seals decision until 10/7/2011..
26 19. October 18, 2011- RE Wesley Witt complains against the decision of PNWP in the trial of TE Leithart.
27 20. April 27, 2012- PNWP denies the Witt complaint per the recommendation of its SJC.
28 21. May 14, 2012- RE Gerald Hedman and TE Sy Nease file complaint to the Stated Clerk of the PCA.
29

30 **II. Summary of the Proceedings of the Lower Court**
31

- 32 1. October 4, 2007- PNWP appoints a committee to study Leithart’s views at the request of Leithart and Stellman.
33 2. October 3, 2008- PNWP judges Leithart’s views “to be not out of accord with the fundamentals of our system.”
34 3. October 21, 2008- Complaint filed by TE Bordwine, TE Stellman and RE Rogland assigned to the SJC of PNWP.
35 4. November 20, 2008- the SJC of PNWP voted unanimously to recommend the denial of the complaint.
36 5. April 24, 2009- PNWP adopts the recommendation of its SJC and denies the complaint.
37 6. April 23, 2010- PNWP recommends to Leithart to consider recanting or transferring his membership.
38 7. October 8, 2010- TE Leithart refuses to either recant or transfer. PNWP appoints a prosecutor for trial.
39 8. January 17, 2011- the Prosecutor, TE Jason Stellman, gives the Defense five charges against TE Leithart.
40 9. January 31, 2011- TE Leithart pleads not guilty to all charges during conference call between the SJC and parties
41 10. June 3-4, 2011- PNWP’s SJC conducts the trial of Leithart, finds him not guilty, seals decision until 10/7/2011..
42 11. October 18, 2011- RE Wesley Witt complains against the decision of PNWP in the trial of TE Leithart.
43 12. April 27, 2012- PNWP denies the Witt complaint per the recommendation of its SJC.
44

45 **III. Statement of the Issues**
46

47 A. Are the views of Teaching Elder Peter Leithart out of accord with the Westminster Standards?
48

49 B. Did Pacific Northwest Presbytery act contrary to the constitution of the PCA when it determined following his
50 trial that the views of TE Leithart were within the bounds of the Westminster Standards?
51

52 **IV. Proposed Judgment and Relief**
53

54 A. Yes. TE Leithart’s views are both out of accord with “the fundamentals of this system of doctrine” in the
55 Westminster Standards and hostile to them

1 B. Yes. Pacific Northwest Presbytery acted contrary to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America
2 when the court upheld TE Leithart's views as being consistent with the Westminster Standards. Therefore, the S JC
3 should advise the lower court to depose TE Peter Leithart from his ministerial credentials in the PCA.
4

5 **V. Argument in Support of Judgment and Relief** 6

7 The issue in this case is the purity of the Scriptural doctrine of the Gospel as expounded in the Westminster
8 Standards. No Presbyterian and Reformed creeds, confessions, or catechisms explicitly or implicitly teach Leithart's
9 baptismal efficacy views, but Papist and Orthodox symbols do. Reformed creeds referenced in support Leithart's
10 position are misread. The Defense's body of anecdotal "evidence" in the ROC is an apparent effort to bootstrap
11 Leithart's views to them. Some items prove nothing; other items are actually harmful to their position wherein one
12 part qualifies another in a sense contrary to what the Defense tries to prove (Cf. #'s 328 and 329 of Calvin's
13 Catechism; #'s IX and XII of the Consensus Tigurinus; etc.); none of the items prove Leithart's innocence of the
14 charges against him. For instance, Charles Hodge's understanding of the Consensus Tigurinus, as well as all the
15 other Reformed symbols, is exactly opposite the interpretation the Defense wrongly attaches to them.¹
16

17 The appeal by the Defense to Lutheranism and Anglicanism for support that Leithart's views are broadly
18 Reformed is a non-starter. Lutheranism and Anglicanism were partial reformations. They reformed in soteriology,
19 but not completely in sacramentology. The views of Anglicanism and Lutheranism on the sacraments are watered-
20 down Catholicism. William Cunningham described the work of our adversary, the devil, in opposing the evangelical
21 doctrines in the Church of England by making use of the 'sacramental principle' of Catholicism in effecting his
22 design. Then, Cunningham commented: "If Popery be Satan's masterpiece, the theory and practice of the sacraments
23 may perhaps be regarded as the most finished and perfect department in this great work of his."²
24

25 There are sufficient facts in the ROC to prove Leithart's views contradict the Westminster Standards. Thus, the
26 Defense's appeal to anecdotal evidence to clear Leithart of those charges proves the weakness of a case lacking
27 constitutional support. This case is swollen greatly in size because the Defense could not appeal directly to the
28 teachings of the Westminster Standards which are against their case. This case is about the Westminster Standards-
29 not anecdotal evidence.
30

31 Leithart's views are closer to Pelagianism and Catholicism than the Westminster Standards. The Complainant
32 does not allege that Leithart's system agrees in every respect with those heresies because heresies mutate from one
33 generation to another. As Archibald Alexander Hodge wrote: "There are, in fact, as we might have anticipated, but
34 two complete self-consistent systems of Christian theology possible. 1st. On the right hand, Augustinianism
35 completed in Calvinism. 2nd. On the left hand, Pelagianism completed in Socinianism."³ Arminianism and
36 semipelagianism are systems of compromise and, therefore, are not complete and self-consistent. In this brief, the
37 Complainant will show the fraternal relationship between the views of Leithart and Pelagianism in its various forms.
38 The Complainant agrees with most of the quotes of the Defense on pages 110 to 118 of the ROC which assert rightly
39 that adoption of the system of doctrine of the Westminster Standards requires a renunciation of the errors of
40 Pelagianism, Semipelagianism, Socinianism, Arminianism, Amyraldianism, etc. As Samuel Miller stated, "As long
41 as one does not embrace any of these errors, 'we judge that they may adopt it without any breach of good faith.'"⁴
42 Leithart's embracement of some of those errors means he cannot sincerely adopt the Westminster Standards.
43

44 J. I. Packer wrote concerning those errors: "The Puritans saw that trio of theological relatives, Pelagianism,
45 Arminianism, and Counter-reformation Romanism, as the bastard off-spring of natural religion fertilized by the
46 gospel. So (to take one for many) Traill writes: "The principles of Arminianism are the natural dictates of a carnal
47 mind, which is enmity both to the law of God, and to the gospel of Christ; and, next to the dead sea of Popery (into
48 which this stream runs), have, since Pelagius to this day, been the greatest plague of the Church of Christ..."⁵

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Volume III (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 501, 580-581.

² William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, Volume II (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 141.

³ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 96.

⁴ ROC, p. 114.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1990), 151.

1 A reading of the Westminster Standards, the Council of Trent (Catholic), the Confession of Dosithesus
2 (Orthodox), and Leithart's views in parallel columns should convince any SJC member that Leithart's views on
3 soteriology and sacramentology are not Reformed, but are similar to Catholicism and Orthodoxy.
4

5 Preliminarily, two of the expert witnesses for the Defense, Dr. William Barker and Dr. Robert Letham, would be
6 disqualified in a federal court case (and should be disqualified in this hearing) as expert witnesses according to Rule
7 702 (b) of the Federal Rules of Evidence which requires expert witness testimony to be "based on sufficient facts or
8 data" which both men lack concerning Leithart's views by their own admission.
9

10 **1. The Efficacy of Baptism and the Saving Benefits of Christ**

11
12 The heart of TE Leithart's views is his teaching on the benefits of Christ's redemption which he contends are
13 conferred by water baptism. In his trial before Pacific Northwest Presbytery, TE Leithart was quoted as saying:
14

15 The baptized is made a member of the family of the Father ... [and] branded as a sheep of Christ's
16 flock. All that is gift. All this the baptized is not only offered, but receives. All this he receives simply
17 by virtue of being baptized.⁶

18 Through baptism we enter into the new life of the Spirit, receive a grant of divine power, are
19 incorporated into Christ's body, and die and rise again with Christ. In the purification of baptism, we are
20 cleansed of our 'former sins' and begin to participate in the divine nature and the power of Jesus'
21 resurrection, being made "new creations in the deepest possible sense," being "born again as a 'son of the
22 house."⁷

23 "Far from being reductionist, this typology and the framework extrapolated from it permits a richer and
24 stronger affirmation of the objectivity of baptismal grace than found in traditional sacramental theology,
25 which has hesitated to affirm that baptism confers grace *ex opere operato*....If grace is the favor of God
26 manifested in the bestowal of favors, then baptism is and confers grace: the grace of a standing in the house
27 of God, the grace of membership in the community of the reconciled, the grace of immersion in the history
28 of the bride of Christ, the grace of God's favorable regard upon us. It would be churlish to complain that it
29 does not also guarantee perseverance."⁸
30

31 The benefits of redemption conferred in baptism, according to Leithart, include: new life, the divine power, union
32 with Christ, crucifixion and resurrection with Christ, spiritual cleansing, but not perseverance. Leithart's view of the
33 benefits bestowed in baptism is essentially the view of Roman Catholicism, which says: "Grace is a participation in
34 the life of God. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the
35 grace of Christ, the Head of his Body. As an 'adopted son' he can henceforth call God 'Father,' in union with the
36 only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church."⁹
37

38 Another part of the Catholic Catechism teaches that the rite of baptism conveys forgiveness of sins, the new birth
39 in the Spirit, purification from sin, adoption as a son of God, participation in the divine nature, and membership in
40 the body of Christ.¹⁰ Catholicism, in their rejection of Augustinianism and the Reformation, was heavily influenced
41 by Pelagianism. The Reformers accused the Church of Rome of being tainted with Pelagianism. Calvin said: "Now
42 let us hear Augustine speaking in his own words, lest the Pelagians of our own age, that is the Sophists of the
43 Sorbonne¹¹, according to their custom, charge that all antiquity is against us."¹²
44

45 Martin Luther, in his *Bondage of the Will*, which was known as the 'manifesto of the Reformation', accuses
46 Erasmus and the Roman Catholic Church of being even lower than the Pelagians: "This hypocrisy of theirs results in
47 their valuing the grace of God at a much cheaper rate than the Pelagians. The latter assert that it is not by a feeble

⁶ ROC, pp. 507-508.

⁷ ROC, pp. 503-504.

⁸ ROC, p. 288.

⁹ Number 1997 of the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁰ Ibid., numbers 1262-1274

¹¹ This phrase, 'Sophists of the Sorbonne', refers to the faculty of the University of Paris. Calvin was familiar with this institution and singled them out as Papist examples of Pelagianism.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume One (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 307.

1 something within us that we obtain grace, but by efforts and works that are complete, entire, perfect, many and
2 mighty; but our friends here tell us that it is something very small, almost nothing, that we merit grace.”¹³
3

4 The views of Leithart on baptismal efficacy are similar to both Roman Catholicism and Pelagianism (condemned
5 as heresy by the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D). Consider these quotes from Pelagius’ commentary on Romans:
6

- 7 (1). Romans 1:5. **Grace in baptism**; apostleship when he was directed by the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 13:2).
- 8 (2). Romans 3:24. Without the works of the law, **through baptism**, whereby he has **freely forgiven** the
9 sins of all, though they are undeserving.
- 10 (3). Romans 3:28. Some misuse this verse to do away with works of righteousness, asserting that faith by
11 itself can suffice [**for one who has been baptized**]... But by adding ‘the works of the law’ he indicates
12 **there is [also] a [work] of grace [which those who have been baptized ought to perform]**.
- 13 (4). Romans 4:8. But others say that when **sins have been forgiven in baptism**, love for God is increased,
14 which covers a multitude of sins [and] finally keeps them from being counted against one as long as daily
15 good works surpass past misdeeds (cf. 1 Pet. 4:8).
- 16 (5). Romans 5:17. By which he has forgiven many sins; and an abundance of the gift of the Holy Spirit,
17 because there are many gifts and also **righteousness is given through baptism**.
- 18 (6). Romans 6:6. Understand that **through baptism you... were crucified with Christ** (cf. Eph. 5:30).
- 19 (7). Romans 6:22. This itself is already a benefit, that, having been **sanctified by baptism**, you are alive.
- 20 (8). Romans 8:30. Therefore, they are called to believe through the preaching, and are **justified through**
21 **baptism** when they believe.
- 22 (9). He shows that **we were baptized in this manner** so that through the mystery **we are buried with**
23 **Christ, dying to our offences and renouncing our former life**.¹⁴
24

25 Between the time of Pelagius and the Papacy at the time of the Reformation, the Schoolmen took up Pelagius’
26 heretical views on the sacraments. As Calvin wrote: “The schools of the Sophists have taught with remarkable
27 agreement that the sacraments of the new law (those now used in the Christian church) justify and confer grace,
28 provided we do not set up a barrier of mortal sin. How deadly and pestilential this notion is cannot be expressed- and
29 the more so because for many centuries it has been a current claim in a good part of the world, to the great loss of
30 the Church.”¹⁵
31

32 One of the Sophists to whom Calvin was referring was Thomas Aquinas (quoted by Leithart on his doctrine of
33 the sacraments¹⁶). Aquinas said baptism confers forgiveness of sins, justification, incorporation into the Passion and
34 death of Christ, the washing of guilt, the crucifixion of the old man, the grace of the Holy Spirit, the fullness of
35 virtue, a new birth into a spiritual life, inward enlightenment by God, good works and sanctification, and newness of
36 life¹⁷. Yet, Aquinas, like Leithart, said baptism is ultimately effectual only for those who respond with sincerity
37 which left open the possibility of a baptized person falling from his state of grace by insincerity. Calvin completely
38 repudiated Aquinas’ view of sacramental efficacy. His comments show how dangerous he considered such a view:
39

40 Of a certainty it is diabolical. For in promising a righteousness apart from faith, it hurls the soul headlong to
41 destruction. Secondly, because it draws the cause of righteousness from the sacraments, it binds men’s
42 pitiable minds (of themselves more than enough inclined to earth) in this superstition, so that they repose in
43 the appearance of a physical thing rather than in God Himself.¹⁸
44

45 Leithart would deny he teaches “a righteousness apart from faith”, but he teaches baptism confers the benefits of
46 Christ’s redemption to infants before they believe or “apart from faith” and makes infant baptism the model for all
47 baptism. Against Leithart’s view of the efficacy of baptism, the WCF 28.6 states: “The efficacy of Baptism is not
48 tied to the moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of the ordinance, the

¹³ Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1957), 293-294.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 96. Theodore De Bruyn, Translator, *Pelagius’ Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1993), 60, 81, 83, 85, 95, 97, 100, 113, 96.

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Volume Two, Book Four, Chapter 14, section 14, p. 1289.

¹⁶ ROC, p. 187.

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Volume II (New York: Benzinger Bros., Inc., 1947), 2408-2416.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, Volume Two, Book Four, Cf. what Calvin says on pages 1290, 1293, 1303, et. al.

1 grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age
2 or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will.”
3

4 These are two very different views of the order of salvation. Leithart, the Papacy, Aquinas, and Pelagius, hold
5 that all the benefits of Christ, except perseverance, are conveyed to everyone who is baptized. The Westminster
6 Standards teach that the Holy Spirit confers saving grace, including perseverance, according to the counsel of God's
7 will to those to whom it belongs which infallibly results in eternal salvation.
8

9 Pelagius denied that the baptism of children is for the remission of sins and he devised another purpose for the
10 sacrament. His solution was that baptism prepares children for the kingdom of heaven by giving them all the graces
11 they need for eternity. It is mistakenly thought by many people that the doctrine of “baptismal regeneration” confers
12 a regeneration which cannot be lost. A. A. Hodge gives the proper definition: “The Protestant advocates of
13 Baptismal Regeneration... hold that baptism is God's ordained instrument of communicating the benefits of
14 redemption in the first instance. That by baptism the guilt of original sin is removed, and the Holy Ghost is given,
15 whose effects remain like a seed in the soul, to be actualized by the free-will of the subject, or neglected and hence
16 rendered abortive. Every infant is regenerated when baptized. If he dies in infancy the seed is actualized in heaven.
17 If he lives to adult age, its result depends upon his use of it.”¹⁹
18

19 Leithart's views are to baptism what transubstantiation is to the Lord's Supper. Either both “sacraments are holy
20 signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits” (WCF
21 27.1); or, both sacraments have power to efficaciously convey real grace to those who participate in them. Leithart
22 asserts that baptism conveys a real relationship with Christ to everyone who is baptized.²⁰ The Church of Rome
23 contends that the Mass efficaciously conveys the real presence of Christ in the elements. One error necessarily leads
24 to the other. Calvin refuted transubstantiation by a comparison to what does *not* happen at baptism:
25

26 But this principle was hidden from them, that the bread is a sacrament only to persons to whom the word is
27 directed; just as the water of baptism is not changed in itself.²¹
28

29 Likewise, Thomas Cranmer said about the Papist doctrine of the “real presence” of Christ in the Lord's Supper:
30 “No more truly is Christ corporally or really present in the due ministration of the Lord's Supper than He is in the
31 due ministration of baptism.”²²
32

33 In a passage from the *Institutes* quoted by Leithart for his defense, Calvin says concerning temporary benefits:
34 “Besides, the reprobate have only a confused perception of grace, so that they embrace the shadow rather than the
35 substance; because the Spirit properly seals remission of sins in the elect alone, and they apply it by a special faith to
36 their own benefit.”²³
37

38 Perhaps, Leithart's fundamental error concerning baptism is making infant baptism the paradigm for his thinking.
39 Infant baptism can never be the Biblical paradigm for baptism. There are no Scriptures which describe what happens
40 in infant baptism. The Biblical paradigm for baptism is adult or believer's baptism. All the statements concerning
41 baptism in the Westminster Standards and other Reformed creeds must be understood in light of this doctrinal
42 position of the Protestant faith concerning the sacraments. As Cunningham notes:
43

44 It becomes practically, as well as theoretically, important to remember, that we ought to form our primary
45 and fundamental conceptions of baptism from the baptism of adults, in which it must be, *in every instance*,
46 according to the general doctrine of Protestants, *either* the sign and seal of a faith and regeneration
47 *previously existing*- already effected by God's grace- or else a hypocritical profession of a state of mind
48 and feeling which has no existence.²⁴

¹⁹ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 627.

²⁰ ROC, pp. 190 and 487.

²¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Volume Two, Book Four, p. 1377.

²² John Edmund Cox, editor, *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1844), 3.

²³ ROC, p. 191.

²⁴ Cunningham, *op.cit.*, 126.

1
2 **2. Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace**
3

4 Leithart denies the bi-covenantal view of Scripture taught in the WCF 19.1 and 7.2,3:
5

6 God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to
7 personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death
8 upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.²⁵

9 The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in
10 him to all his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience Man, by his fall, having made
11 himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called
12 the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring
13 of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto
14 eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.
15

16 Yet, Leithart says: “That the differences between Adamic and post-lapsarian covenants are not at a
17 “soteriological” level, but at the level of covenant administration.²⁶ And, yes, covenant faithfulness is the way of
18 salvation, for the ‘doers of the law will be justified’ at the final judgment.”²⁷
19

20 The Westminster Standards teach that the difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is
21 at the soteriological level. The basic problem in denying the distinction between the covenant of works and the
22 covenant of grace is that justification is then based on covenant faithfulness, which the Westminster Standards say is
23 impossible. Leithart conflates covenant faithfulness with saving faith. Augustine quotes the Pelagians as follows:
24

25 But we do praise God as the Author of our righteousness, in that He gave us the law, by the teaching of
26 which we have learned how we ought to live.²⁸

27 We confess that even the old law, according to the apostle, is holy and just and good, and that this could
28 confer eternal life on those that kept its commandments, and lived righteously by faith, like the prophets
29 and patriarchs, and all the saints.²⁹
30

31 This last statement of the Pelagians sounds almost identical to Leithart’s quote in the complaint. The Pelagians
32 taught that covenant faithfulness (“lived righteously by faith”) is the way of salvation. In point of fact, Pelagius
33 taught that the law and the gospel have essentially the same effect in leading us to heaven. In Pelagius’ mind, there
34 was no antithesis between law and gospel, such as the covenant of works/ covenant of grace distinction. For
35 Pelagius, grace is law; the New Testament is law.³⁰ Christ is not the Savior for Pelagius, but an example to be
36 followed. The law is an example of God’s will for our lives and the law requires obedience, as Pelagius says:
37

38 First, then, get to know God’s will, as contained in his law, so that you may be able to do it, since you can
39 be certain you are a Christian only when you have taken the trouble to keep all God’s commandments.³¹
40

41 Leithart’s views are eerily similar to the above quotes from Pelagius. They fail to take serious account of the
42 strict and perpetual requirement of the law which condemns us all (for example, Galatians 3:10).
43

44 The defense quotes Richard Baxter in support of Leithart’s positions. Baxter and his followers were known as
45 Neonomians. Their covenantal nomism undermined the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Dr. John MacLeod,
46 former principal of the Free Church College in Edinburgh, Scotland wrote concerning Baxter’s views “This name
47 they got from their type of teaching which at this point was of a generally Arminian character. They spoke of a new

²⁵ Cf. also WCF19:2, 6; Larger Catechism #’s 92-97; 149-153; Shorter Catechism #’s 40; 82-85.

²⁶ ROC, p. 78.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Philip Schaff, editor, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Father*, Volume V, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), 88.

²⁹ Ibid., 420.

³⁰ Robert F. Evans, *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 106.

³¹ B. R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and His Followers* (Rochester, New York: Boydell Press, 1991), 160.

1 law of works, compliance with whose demand was held graciously to be a righteousness that won life for the
2 Christian. The Gospel that calls for faith was to them such a new law as called for faith and sincere obedience.”³²
3

4 J. I. Packer said concerning Baxter: “As a theologian he was, though brilliant, something of a disaster;”³³ and he
5 further assessed the damage done by Baxter’s theology: “Thus, Baxter, by the initial rationalism of his ‘political
6 method’, which forced Scripture into an *a priori* mould, actually sowed the seeds of *moralism* with regard to sin,
7 *Arianism* with regard to Christ, *legalism* with regard to faith and salvation, and *liberalism* with regard to God.”³⁴
8

9 **3. The Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness**

10
11 Leithart denies the imputation of either the active or passive obedience: “There is no “independent” imputation of
12 the active obedience of Christ, nor even of the passive obedience for that matter; we are regarded as righteous, and
13 Christ’s righteousness is reckoned as ours, because of our union with Him in His resurrection. What is imputed is
14 the verdict, *not the actions of Jesus*.”³⁵ The New School Presbyterian theologians, Albert Barnes and Charles
15 Finney, made the same distinction about imputation, to which Archibald Alexander replied as follows:
16

17 Some have attempted to evade the doctrine [of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness], by alleging that
18 not the righteousness of Christ, but its effects are imputed to us. They who talk thus do not seem to
19 understand what they say. It must be by the imputation of the righteousness that the good effects are
20 derived to us; but the imputation of the effects cannot be. What we are inquiring after is the reason why
21 these blessings become ours. It cannot be on account of our own righteousness; it must be on account of the
22 righteousness of Christ. How does this righteousness avail to obtain for us pardon and justification and
23 peace with God? The answer is by imputation; that is, it is set down to our credit. God accepts it on our
24 behalf; yea, he bestows it upon us. If there is any such thing as imputation, it must be of the
25 righteousness of Christ itself, and the benefits connected with salvation flow from this imputation. The
26 righteousness of Christ can only justify us, by being imputed to us.”³⁶
27

28 The Westminster Standards (WCF 11:1; LCQ #70; SCQ # 33) teach that there are two parts of justification;
29 pardon and acceptance. Leithart reduces justification to pardon for sin and a future verdict that their lives have been
30 righteous. He leaves out our acceptance in Christ by saying: “Justification is, you’re justified from sin. Sin is being
31 pictured as an external enslaving power. And that’s what we’re delivered from.”³⁷ In fact, his theory of “final
32 justification” would be unnecessary if justification also includes our acceptance in Christ. As Jonathan Edwards
33 said: “God doth in the sentence of justification pronounce a sinner perfectly righteous, or else he would need a
34 further justification after he is justified.”³⁸
35

36 Albert Barnes, who was convicted of heresy in 1837 by the Presbyterian Church, reduced justification to pardon
37 and dismissed acceptance through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness: “It is not that *his* righteousness becomes
38 ours. This is not true; and there is no intelligible sense in which that can be understood. But it is God’s plan for
39 *pardon*ing sin, and for *treating* us as if we had not committed it.”³⁹
40

41 John Owen said that the Papists taught an infused righteousness, but the Socinians denied such imputation: “The
42 Socinians, who expressly oppose the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, plead for a participation of its effects
43 or benefits only.”⁴⁰
44

45 Under direct examination, Leithart further summarized his position concerning Jesus’ obedience: “What I’ve
46 described - - what I’ve described as the prosecution has quoted is based on Romans 4:25 that **Jesus’ resurrection is**

³² John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 139.

³³ Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 159.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

³⁵ ROC, p. 79.

³⁶ James Wood, *Old and New Theology* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1845), 152-153.

³⁷ ROC, p. 520.

³⁸ Wood, *op. cit.*, 149.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

1 **his own justification before the Father.** Jesus is raised from the dead as a declaration to the world that this is the
2 righteous son of the Father.”⁴¹ Yet, Romans 4:25 says: “He was delivered over because of our transgressions, and
3 was raised because of our justification.” Jesus was raised for our justification- not for His justification. Further,
4 Leithart says that Jesus was responsible to obey the law for Himself just as other men: “Yes, we do have the same
5 obligation that Adam (and Abraham, and Moses, and David and Jesus) had, namely the obedience of faith.”⁴²
6

7 C. G. Finney also denied the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and said Jesus was obligated to obey the law:
8 “Jesus Christ was bound to obey the law for himself and could no more perform works of supererogation or obey on
9 our account than anybody else.”⁴³
10

11 The Scripture is clear that Jesus voluntarily obeyed the law for us and laid down His life for us. (Cf. John 10:18;
12 Psalm 40:6-8). If Jesus was “obligated” to obey the law, then He did not do it willingly, voluntarily and with
13 authority over his death. As David Dickson says: “The Son of God incarnate becomes voluntarily, a very capable,
14 discreet, ready, and obedient servant to the Father for us.”⁴⁴
15

16 A. A. Hodge wrote concerning the voluntary nature of Christ’s atonement: “Christ, although a man, was a divine
17 person, and therefore never personally subject to the Adamic covenant of works. He was essentially righteous, but
18 he was *made under the law* as our representative, and his obedience under the *voluntarily assumed conditions of his*
19 *earthly life* was purely vicarious.”⁴⁵
20

21 This same position was held by Faustus Socinius, and the Socinians, as John Owen writes: “He [Socinius]
22 supposeth, that if all he did in a way of obedience, was due from himself on his own account, and was only the duty
23 which he owed unto God for himself in his station and circumstances, as a man in this world, it cannot be
24 meritorious for us, nor any way imputed to us.”⁴⁶
25

26 Socinius used this false principle to deny the divinity of Christ. Owen proved Christ could not have been ‘under
27 the law’ to obey it for Himself, since He is both God and man.⁴⁷ Christ assumed human nature for His people; not
28 for Himself. He obeyed the law for His people; not for Himself. Nonetheless, the Socinians twisted Scriptural terms
29 to their own sense. As James Buchanan says: “While they hold a sinner’s justification to be his own personal
30 repentance and reformation, they taught, nevertheless, that, in their own sense of the terms, he is ‘justified freely by
31 grace,’--- that he is ‘justified by faith,’--- that he is justified by means ‘of the death of Christ,’--- and that his faith,
32 repentance, and obedience are not the meritorious or procuring causes of his pardon and acceptance, but simply the
33 conditions on which the enjoyment of these blessings depends.”⁴⁸
34

35 Leithart denies the imputation of Christ’s righteousness while contending that a sinner is justified by grace or
36 through faith. The only basis for gratuitous salvation is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness which Leithart
37 denies. WCF 11.1 says God justifies sinners “by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them” when
38 they receive and rest “on Him and His righteousness by faith.”⁴⁹
39

40 **4. Justification and Sanctification**

41

42 TE Leithart teaches here are three different times when God justifies a person. First, at baptism. Second, any
43 person who believes (even temporarily) in Jesus is justified. Third, a baptized person who perseveres unto the end
44 will receive “final justification”. Leithart stated at his trial that he believed that justification is a once-for-all judicial
45 act. It is very clear that neither of the first two “justifications”, under Leithart’s order of salvation, can be a once-for-

⁴¹ ROC, pp. 478-479.

⁴² ROC, pp. 78-79.

⁴³ Lewis Cheeseman, *Differences between Old School and New School Presbyterians* (Rochester, New York: Erastus Darrow, 1848), 57.

⁴⁴ David Dickson, *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 223.

⁴⁵ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 415.

⁴⁶ Wood, 137.

⁴⁷ W. H. Goold, editor, *The Works of John Owen*, Volume V (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 253-257.

⁴⁸ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 177.

⁴⁹ Cf. Also, Larger Catechism #’s 72 and 73; Shorter Catechism #33.

1 all justification. Thus, ‘final justification’ is the only once-for-all justification possible under his soteriology.
2 Pelagius held to essentially the same views on justification, though he did not call it ‘final justification’. Pelagius
3 made the following comments on Romans 4:5, 6: “When an ungodly person converts, God justifies him by faith
4 alone, not for the good works he did not have. One’s initial faith is credited as righteousness to the end that one may
5 be absolved of the past, **justified for the present**, and readied for the future works of faith.”⁵⁰
6

7 Leithart’s views on justification sound almost identical to this quote from Pelagius: “In all of this, it is crucial to
8 remember continually that justification, however defined, is by faith. And in part that means that our
9 justification/vindication is not completely and fully revealed before the Last Judgment. We are **justified in the**
10 **present**, but in another sense we await final public vindication.”⁵¹
11

12 Pelagius, like Leithart, teaches a threefold justification: at baptism, at conversion through faith, and at the
13 judgment. Pelagius uses the phrase, ‘at the present’, several times in his Romans commentary to limit justification.
14 Justification is not once-for-all, according to Pelagius, but simply ‘for the present.’ Pelagius teaches elsewhere that
15 those who are baptized and believe must persevere in order to be saved. If they do so, they will be finally justified as
16 long as “daily good works surpass past misdeeds.”⁵² Final justification is a decidedly non-evangelical viewpoint. As
17 Cornelis Venema says in his work, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ*, the Roman Catholic Church objected
18 to the doctrine of justification by faith alone because it left no place for “a works based final acquittal before God.”⁵³
19 The Reformers and the Reformed confessions have unanimously declared that there is a final judgment, but not “a
20 final phase or step in an unfinished process of justification.”⁵⁴
21

22 Thus, Westminster Confession of Faith 16.6 says: “Notwithstanding, the persons of believers being accepted
23 through Christ, their good works are also accepted in him, not as though they were in this life wholly unblameable
24 and unreprouvable in God’s sight; but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that
25 which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections.” The WCF teaches that the good
26 works of believers are only accepted by God because of Christ and that justification precedes sanctification.
27 Pelagius, Rome, and Leithart reverse this order through their doctrine of “final justification.”
28

29 **5. Apostasy and Perseverance**

30
31 Contrary to the Westminster Standards, Leithart says about perseverance: “I do believe that some are united to
32 Christ yet do not persevere (John 15). During the time they are branches in the vine, they do receive benefits from
33 Christ through the Spirit and may enjoy real, personal, and deep communion with Jesus for a time. Yet, their
34 relationship with Christ is not identical to the relationship of the elect. Put it this way: Some are united to Christ as
35 members of the bride but are headed for divorce; others are united and headed for consummation. Marriages that end
36 in divorce are not the same as marriages that end happily.”⁵⁵ And again, he says: “All of these passages describe a
37 real, although temporary, experience of favor, fellowship, and knowledge of God. These reprobates really were
38 joined to Christ, really were enlightened and fed, really shared in the Spirit, and yet did not persevere and lost what
39 they had been given.... The New Testament says pretty plainly that they have lost something real, which includes a
40 relationship with the Spirit, union with Christ, and knowledge of the Savior.”⁵⁶ Leithart once taught that baptism
41 conveyed all the benefits of Christ, including perseverance, but retracted it: “I retracted that because there were, as
42 was pointed out by the study committee and others, that there’s obvious gifts that the elect receive that, from Christ,
43 that gifts that Christ has to offer that don’t go to every baptized person. Perseverance was the obvious one.”⁵⁷
44

45 The Scriptures and the Westminster Standards both teach that certain perseverance is infallibly granted by God to
46 all the elect, and only the elect. The temporary gifts given to apostates fall short of the better things which infallibly
47 accompany true salvation (cf. Hebrews 6:1-12). WCF 17.1 says: “They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved,

⁵⁰ DeBruyn, 85.

⁵¹ ROC, SJC Case 2009-6, p. 24.

⁵² DeBruyn, 85.

⁵³ Cornelis P. Venema, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 259.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁵⁵ ROC, p. 63.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ ROC, p. 545. .

1 effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally, nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but
2 **shall certainly persevere** therein to the end, and be eternally saved.” SCQ #36 says: “The benefits which in this life
3 do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of
4 conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and **perseverance therein to the end.**” (See also SCQ #79).
5 LCQ #69 says: “All the elect, and they only, are effectually called, although others may, and often are, outwardly
6 called by the ministry of the word, and have some common operations of the Spirit; who, for their wilful neglect and
7 contempt of the grace offered to them, **being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.**”
8

9 The Scriptures, likewise, make it clear that perseverance is a grace or benefit of Christ which is always given to
10 true believers. Hebrews 3:14 says: “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our
11 assurance firm until the end.” The verb tense which is translated, *we have become partakers*, is in the perfect tense
12 which, according to Machen, “denotes the present state resultant upon a past action.”⁵⁸ All believers partook of
13 Christ in the past and persevere unto the end. As Calvin said, perseverance is a grace God gives to all the elect:
14

15 Paul adds the condition, *if thou continue in his goodness*, because he is not arguing about individuals who
16 are elected, but about the whole body. I grant that as soon as any one abuses the goodness of God, he
17 deserves to be deprived of the grace which is offered to him. It would, however, be improper to say in
18 particular of any of the godly that God had mercy on him when he chose him, on condition that he should
19 continue in his mercy. The perseverance of faith, which perfects the effect of God’s grace in us, flows
20 from election itself.⁵⁹
21

22 In Romans 5:2-5, there are several benefits of Christ which are mentioned- faith, grace, hope, perseverance,
23 proven character, hope again, and the love of God poured out through the Holy Spirit. Separating perseverance from
24 the other benefits of Christ makes it a work of man and, therefore, opens the door for a Pelagian scheme of
25 salvation. Perseverance according to the Bible and the Westminster Standards is always certain for the elect.
26

27 **Conclusion:**

28
29 Leithart’s scheme of covenantal nomism is almost identical to Pelagius’ views on baptismal efficacy; final
30 justification; the conflation of justification and sanctification; law and grace; and perseverance. Covenantal nomism
31 necessarily shrinks the Gospel according to Herman Bavinck:
32

33 Nomism (Pelagianism in its various forms and degrees) not only collides with the decrees of God, but also
34 fails to do justice to the person and work of Christ. To the degree that in the acquisition of salvation it
35 expands the activity of humans, it shrinks that of Christ. It is clear, certainly, that if faith, repentance, and
36 perseverance are in whole or in part within the powers of human beings and their work; if the decision
37 concerning one’s actual salvation ultimately, when it comes to the crunch, lies in human hands, then Christ
38 can at most have acquired the *possibility* of our being saved.⁶⁰
39

40 The Church has spoken against these views many times already in her history, including in 2007 by the General
41 Assembly of the PCA and by the SJC in Case 2009-6 against the views of Leithart. Pelagianism, in whatever form,
42 is heresy. It exalts man at the expense of the atonement of Christ. It makes salvation possible and dependent on man.
43 Such views are hostile to the Westminster Standards because they deny God’s efficacious grace. Leithart substitutes
44 water baptism for the work of the Holy Spirit through whom the Westminster Standards teach the redemption
45 purchased by Christ is applied to those who are effectually called. His is an heretical position.
46

47 A denial of this complaint by the Standing Judicial Commission would be an action against all three marks of the
48 church. First, it would be a refusal by the highest judicatory of the PCA to discipline heresy. Second, it would be
49 granting permission to administer the sacraments according to heretical views. And, third, it would be granting
50 permission to preach “another gospel” within this denomination. Such a decision would have dire consequences for
51 the peace, purity, and well-being of the PCA. This complaint must be sustained.

⁵⁸ J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 187.

⁵⁹ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 252-253.

⁶⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Volume 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 566.