

Knox Presbytery Committee Report  
 Advising Trinity Reformed Church  
 on the Doctrinal and Polity Questions Related to  
 Pastor Douglas Jones Asked at the 2013 Annual Meeting

*Adopted by Knox Presbytery at the annual meeting, October 2014*

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## Introduction

Knox Presbytery voted unanimously at the 2013 annual meeting to “study the doctrinal and polity questions related to Pastor Douglas Jones and formally advise Trinity Reformed Church as to his standing as pastor in the CREC.”<sup>1</sup> Trinity Reformed Church (TRC) brought these two matters--a doctrinal question and a polity question--to presbytery with Doug Jones's consent and approval. To this end, the Presiding Minister of Knox Presbytery, Terrance Tollefson, appointed Kenton Spratt, a pastor at Christ Church in Spokane, to chair a committee “charged to present their findings and recommendations at the 2014 meeting of Knox Presbytery.”<sup>2</sup> Kenton chose another pastor of Knox Presbytery, Alan Burrow, as a committee member, as well as pastoral representatives from three other presbyteries: Garry Vanderveen (Anselm); Gregg Strawbridge (Augustine); and Steven Wedgeworth (Athanasius).

The doctrinal question was “whether Pastor Jones' views on penal substitutionary atonement and related issues fall within the confessional parameters of the CREC.”<sup>3</sup> This question was accompanied by an “Appendix A: Background on the Doctrinal Question.” Doug Jones confirmed to the committee that he could see no inaccuracies in Appendix A and thought it a “fair summary.”<sup>4</sup> He also confirmed that the quotes from his writings accurately reflect his current views regarding penal atonement, and that chapter 12 of his book *Dismissing Jesus* did the same.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Jones stated that while he did not share “every argument or specific,” he was “in general agreement with [Darrin W. Snyder] Belousek’s Section II, “Christ Died for Us,” The Cross, Atonement, and Substitution (pp. 83-365).”<sup>6</sup> The committee used these two sources, as well as Jones’ statements in the Appendix A background material, as their primary means of

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the annual meeting of Knox Presbytery of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, 13/10/16:2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13/10/16:2 reflecting the amendment in 13/10/16:3.

<sup>4</sup> Jones's Answers to Committee Questions, May 16, 2014, Q. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Q. 3, Q. 4. Douglas M. Jones, *Dismissing Jesus: How We Evade the Way of the Cross* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Q. 5. Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace: The Message of the Cross and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2011).

understanding Jones's views. The Committee also asked a series of written clarifying questions to which Jones responded. Finally, the committee had access to correspondence between Trinity Reformed Church and Doug Jones in which he replied to questions from them, and to a catechism written by him and supplied to us for the purpose of further shedding light on his views.<sup>7</sup> The committee makes its findings to the doctrinal question on the basis of these written sources.

The polity question sought "clarity on how the CREC treats ministers in our midst who are without a call generally, and how TRC should understand Pastor Jones's situation in particular."<sup>8</sup> It was accompanied by an "Appendix B: Background on the Polity Question." This question was not asked to resolve any sort of dispute. It was asked merely as a means of obtaining guidance and clarity on this specific situation as well as similar situations where a pastor is without call.

## Doctrinal Question

### Summary

Pastor Doug Jones has formally declared to the committee his exceptions to paragraphs VIII.5 and XI.3 of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), which provide as follows:

The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him (WCF VIII.5).

Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both freely, not for anything in them; their

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<sup>7</sup> The first document was Doug Jones's August 1, 2014 reply to the July 30, 2014 letter from Trinity Reformed Church. The catechism supplied by Doug Jones was titled "A Following-Jesus Catechism." It contained no date or revision information.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the annual meeting of Knox Presbytery of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, 13/10/16:2.

justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God, might be glorified in the justification of sinners (WCF XI.3).

These paragraphs most explicitly teach the doctrine of penal atonement, which Doug Jones entirely rejects.<sup>9</sup>

The committee also believes that Jones's theology contradicts the Westminster Confession on several other significant points of doctrine when read as a unified whole within the system of doctrine, as commonly understood within the CREC. We believe that he should have taken further exceptions to the WCF which are described in the body of the report.

The committee finds that penal atonement and its related doctrines are critical to the CREC's Reformed and Evangelical identity and that they are essential for the CREC to continue to function as a gathering within the "broader church, in order to work together effectively for reformation."<sup>10</sup>

The committee therefore finds that Doug Jones's doctrinal views on penal substitutionary atonement and related matters significantly deviate from the Reformed and Evangelical system of doctrine embraced by the CREC. His views also deviate from the specific standards adopted by Trinity Reformed Church, including the Westminster Confession of Faith, to which Jones as a minister is required to declare his exceptions. The committee believes that these doctrinal deviations would significantly affect any pastoral or teaching ministry Jones could come to exercise within the CREC.

On the basis of his registered exceptions to the penal atonement teaching of WCF VIII.5 and XI.3, the committee recommends that Trinity Reformed Church request that Doug Jones demit his office, and if he refuses, that he through due process be deposed from office. The

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<sup>9</sup> Jones's Answers to Committee Questions, July 13, 2014, Q. 3. With regard to WCF XI.3 he clarified "I take exception only to the penal elements."

<sup>10</sup> Preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches [Revised October 2011].

Committee further recommends that Trinity Reformed Church request that Doug Jones be removed from the list of recognized ministers in the CREC, and that no CREC church consider him for a teaching office. Finally, we recommend to Trinity Reformed Church and other churches whose members may be influenced by Doug’s teaching, that they should take care to warn and instruct the saints as needed.

## Report

### Doctrinal Standards

The task given by Presbytery to this committee requires that we compare Doug Jones’s views with the “confessional parameters of the CREC.”<sup>11</sup> The CREC is not merely a Christian communion, but is a Reformed and Evangelical communion established within the “broader church, in order to work together effectively for reformation.”<sup>12</sup> For this reason, our Constitution requires each church to adopt one of the approved Reformational Confessions in addition to the Ecumenical Creeds. The belief underpinning this practice is that there is a shared “system of doctrine reflected in the great creeds, catechisms, and confessions of the Reformation.”<sup>13</sup>

The CREC Constitution states that “Elders of CREC member churches must declare their honest subscription to the confessions adopted by their church.”<sup>14</sup> Honest subscription is a “*moral* obligation to remain faithful to the spirit and letter” of a confession.<sup>15</sup> If an elder cannot do that with regard to any part of the confession, he must in good conscience take an exception.

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<sup>11</sup> Minutes, 13/10/16:2.

<sup>12</sup> Preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches [Revised October 2011].

<sup>13</sup> Article VII.B., Constitution.

<sup>14</sup> Constitution and By-Laws of The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches [Revised October 2011], 7.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Mother Kirk*, (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 200. The moral obligation is made abundantly clear in the CREC Constitution: “[I]n the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we charge you, the generations who will follow us in this confederation, to submit to the Scriptures with sincere and honest hearts, and to the standards of this confederation as consistent with the teaching of Scripture. When a portion of our order and confession is found to be out of conformity to Scripture, we charge you to amend it honestly, openly, and constitutionally, as men who must give an account to the God who searches the hearts of men.” Constitution, 3.

When it comes to interpreting a confession, it is the considered understanding of the broader assemblies (presbyteries and Council) that controls.<sup>16</sup> When an exception is declared, it falls to the local church, presbytery, and, if necessary, Council to determine its significance. Not all exceptions are equally significant, and exceptions are regularly taken in the CREC (not to mention the PCA, OPC, and other Reformed and Evangelical bodies).

At Trinity Reformed Church, the elders are required to subscribe to and register their exceptions to the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).<sup>17</sup> In addition to the WCF, Trinity Reformed Church has also formally adopted the following Reformational and Post-Reformational standards for “liturgy and for instruction and accountability”<sup>18</sup>:

1. Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion
2. Belgic Confession
3. Heidelberg Catechism
4. Canons of Dort
5. Westminster Shorter Catechism

Trinity’s instructions are that “[These confessions] should be construed to harmonize wherever possible, but in areas where they cannot be harmonized we defer to language of the Westminster Confession of Faith.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “We charge you in the name of the Lord to abhor all forms of ignoring our intentions in what we have set down through dissembling, reinterpretation, dishonesty, relativism, pretended explanations, presumed spiritual maturity, assumed scholarly sophistication, or outright lying, so that the living God will not strike you and your children with a curse.” *Ibid.* Italics added. See also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (A Theology of Lordship)*; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987), 309, and Charles Hodge, “What is Meant by Adopting the Westminster Confession” in A. A. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith*. (London: T. Nelson & Sons, Paternoster Row, 1870) Appendix II, 420-426.

<sup>17</sup> Trinity has registered approved exceptions to the WCF, none of which bear upon the task before the committee.

<sup>18</sup> Preface to Trinity Moscow Confessions.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

## Jones's Declared Exceptions

On August 16, 2013, Jones wrote Trinity's session and registered the following exception to the Westminster Confession of Faith: "[I]f the WCF assumes what is sometimes called the penal atonement view of Christ's work (perhaps in XI), then I would differ with it there."<sup>20</sup> Upon later questioning by the committee, Jones clarified that he used "if" "to allow for someone with more detailed historical knowledge to make a case that it [WCF] didn't [teach penal substitution]."<sup>21</sup> In fact, Jones believes that "the WCF clearly does teach penal atonement."<sup>22</sup>

When the committee asked Jones to clarify his exception to the WCF, he stated that he would have WCF VIII.5 and XI.3 "struck and replaced with more biblical language and categories."<sup>23</sup>

In taking these exceptions, Doug Jones is not merely dissenting from the popular, and sometimes substandard, presentations of the doctrine of penal atonement. Rather, he rejects all views of penal atonement which contain the idea that Christ's death turned away the wrath of the Father. He was very clear on this point in our discussions with him: "I would encourage us to reject all versions of penal atonement that involve God needing blood sacrifice of an innocent person to satisfy His justice and wrath. That seems clearly unbiblical."<sup>24</sup>

## Unregistered Exceptions and Overarching Concerns

Doug Jones does not think he needs to take any other exceptions to the Westminster Confession of Faith besides those already stated.<sup>25</sup> This was puzzling to the committee, given the centrality of Jones's exceptions, as well as his acknowledgment of their connection to the WCF's system of doctrine, and his clear and vehement opposition elsewhere to important

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<sup>20</sup> From Jones's August 16, 2013 letter to the TRC Session as supplied in "Appendix A: Background on the Doctrinal Question.

<sup>21</sup> Jones's Answers to Committee Questions, July 13, 2014, Q. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Q. 3. With reference to WCF XI.3 he clarified that "I've included all of XI,3 here, but I take exception only to penal elements. I certainly embrace the notion in the latter part of XI,3 that "their justification is only of free grace."

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Q. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Q. 3.

Reformed and Evangelical doctrines which historically have gone together with penal substitutionary atonement.<sup>26</sup>

After careful consideration of Jones's teaching, the committee is convinced that it is at odds with other significant parts of the WCF, and that he, in good conscience, should take exceptions to them as well. In short, we believe that the differences between Jones's teaching and the doctrinal standards of Trinity Reformed Church, as well as those of the CREC as a whole, are real and substantial.

Having said that, it must be noted that Jones's exceptions, both the ones he has taken and the ones we think he should take, do not arise out of simple exegetical disagreements. We will elaborate on this in more detail in Appendix A. We elected to put that discussion in an appendix because it involves much more than a simple assessment of whether Jones's views fall "within the confessional parameters of the CREC." At the same time, we felt it necessary to include a broader discussion of the underpinnings and trajectory of Jones's beliefs in order provide important context within which Jones's language and views should be understood and assessed.

The difference between Jones and the committee regarding his need to take further exceptions to the WCF cannot be understood apart from grasping how Jones reads his understanding of biblical terms into the theological terms of the WCF. For Jones, words like "wrath" and "justice," as used in the WCF, present "part of the biblical use but not the richness of the biblical whole."<sup>27</sup> This is doubtlessly true in many cases. But when Jones fills in what he sees as the missing "richness of the biblical whole," he tends not to enhance the teaching of the WCF, but rather to undermine it. Jones argues that the confessions "present an intro into a biblical subject, and [that] teachers fill it out with more context."<sup>28</sup> This is true within limits. The assumption of the

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<sup>26</sup> Jones acknowledged in his answers to the committee that penal atonement does not stand alone, but "is part of the WCF system of doctrine," and that "other parts of the WCF seem to rest upon a view of penal atonement." *Ibid.*, Q. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Jones's Answers to Committee Questions, September 6, 2014, Q. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*



CREC Constitution is that when CREC elders “fill out” confessional doctrines with “more context,” it will have the effect of enhancing those doctrines, not undermining them. Further, when it comes to confessional subscription, Jones’s beliefs must be compared to the system of doctrine actually contained within the WCF. The expectation for subscription is that any missing details, definitions, hermeneutical approaches, or unstated assumptions must be supplied by the WCF itself and the other standards of Trinity Reformed Church, or at least be consistent with the system of doctrine contained therein, as commonly understood by the governing bodies within the CREC. Anything outside of that should prompt an open and straightforward exception to the WCF. This is what Jones refuses to do. *The result is not a filling out of the Confession, but a radical modification of the system of doctrine contained in it.*

What follows, then, is not an attempt to be exhaustive, but rather to substantiate our judgment that Jones in good conscience ought to take a number of other significant exceptions to the WCF. We believe, at a minimum, that Jones should take the additional exceptions related to:

1. WCF I.9; VII.5; VIII.6; XI.6 pertaining to the unity of Scripture, the covenant, redemption, and justification.
2. WCF IV.2; VI.2, 3, 6; XV.2; XXXIII.1, 2 pertaining to God’s holiness, justice, and wrath.
3. WCF IX.3, 4; X.1, 2, 4 pertaining to human goodness, depravity, and effectual calling.
4. WCF XI.1, 2 pertaining to justification by faith alone.

#### 1. Unity of Scripture, Covenant, Redemption, and Justification

The Westminster Standards assert the rational unity of the Biblical teaching and the unity of Christ’s mediation in the Old and New Covenants.<sup>29</sup> But Doug Jones resists the systematization of diverse biblical texts, and in an effort to honor the inherent tension of those texts, he denies the traditional unity of the covenants and especially the unity of the mediation of Christ, as well as significant content in key theological terms used by the Confession.

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<sup>29</sup> WCF I.9; VII.5; VIII.6; XI.6.

For example, when the committee asked Doug Jones if any man can “please God apart from and outside of Christ?” He answered: “Yes,” citing the examples of Noah, Daniel, and Job, and asserting that they “were not in Christ, yet they pleased God.”<sup>30</sup> But the Confession clearly affirms that we are to read the Bible in such a way as to understand that they were, in fact, in Christ: “Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof, were communicated unto the elect in all ages...”<sup>31</sup> Jones can affirm that there were those who pleased God apart from or outside of Christ, or he can affirm the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter VIII, paragraph 6, but it is the committee’s judgment that he cannot affirm both.

Likewise, when the committee asked Doug Jones if God can “ultimately forgive without the shedding of Jesus’ blood?,” he resisted the word “ultimately,” and asserted that the “Scripture is full of instances and promises of God forgiving without the shedding of any blood.”<sup>32</sup> He went on to give multiple Scriptural examples of how forgiveness was effected by other means. But in doing this he is not merely supplying Biblical evidence, he is also refusing to read those texts in the way that the Confession demands, which is to say that Jones does not allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. In fact, Jones argued against doing so, stating: “I understand we often read the future cross into these texts, but that seems more an example of our theory forcing passages to fit.”<sup>33</sup> As such, Jones puts forward arguments that effectively oppose the way the Westminster Confession of Faith says one ought to harmonize the Scriptures overall, and particularly in their explanation of the unity of the covenants and the mediation of Christ throughout redemptive history. In the committee’s mind, Jones is taking exception without taking an exception, and this should not be permitted.

A similar practice is followed by Jones when using theological terms found in the Confession. His method does not follow the Confession’s instruction to ascertain “the true and full sense of

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<sup>30</sup> Jones's Answers to Committee Questions, August 9, 2014, Q. 3.

<sup>31</sup> WCF VIII.6.

<sup>32</sup> Jones's Answers, August 9, 2014, Q. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

any Scripture” or to take a controverted passage to “other places that speak more clearly.”<sup>34</sup> Rather than seeking to summarize the whole of Scripture, as the Confession both teaches and models, Jones uses collected biblical passages to draw a variety of differing conclusions. So when asked about God’s wrath, Jones thought that Belousek seemed “to provide a good argument that would apply even ultimately for the claim that there is ‘no necessary linkage between sin (provocation) and and punishment (satisfaction)’ [p. 213]”<sup>35</sup> How did Belousek arrive at that conclusion? By collecting Biblical data and refusing to synthesize it: “God’s personal wrath eludes human domestication by logical formulas and resists a rational reconstruction under the law of retribution....This should warn us against making any generalizations concerning God’s wrath.”<sup>36</sup> God’s wrath, Belousek affirms, “is beyond rational explanation.”<sup>37</sup> Again, Jones is taking exception without taking an exception--in this case to WCF I.9.

## 2. God’s Holiness, Justice, and Wrath

Doug Jones strongly objects to certain significant aspects of the character of the God taught and assumed throughout the Reformed Confessions. In *Dismissing Jesus* he quotes from the Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 10 and 11, which explain the Reformed understanding of God’s justice. Essentially, when the confessions and catechisms speak of God’s justice, they conceive of it as “God’s retributive hostility to what is bad.”<sup>38</sup> Against this understanding Jones pronounces that we have “transformed God into the giant Pharisee in the sky.”<sup>39</sup> He characterizes such a view of God’s justice as confusing “the Father and Satan,” being guilty of “blaspheming,” and committing a “theological crime.”<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that Jones is attacking catechism questions, by name, that are used “for accountability” for leadership at Trinity Reformed Church. And Jones is not quibbling here with the inadequate wording of the doctrine contained in an isolated catechism question or two. Jones is fundamentally opposed to

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<sup>34</sup> WCF 1.9.

<sup>35</sup> Jones’s Answers to Committee Questions, July 27, 2014, Q. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Belousek, *Atonement*, 213.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> J.I. Packer, Class Notes, Systematic Theology II, “Notes on the Notion of God,” 6. VIII.

<sup>39</sup> *Dismissing Jesus*, 162.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

the confessional and doctrinal definition of the justice of God. When Jones was asked if the view of God he critiqued in the Heidelberg Catechism presented a different view of God than the Westminster Confession of Faith, he replied that they “appear to be very similar views.”<sup>41</sup> Jones does not share the Confessional understanding of God’s justice because in wholly rejecting penal atonement, he rejects “God’s retributive hostility.”

It is also important to understand, with relation to God’s justice, that Jones has redefined sin; he has redefined “what is bad” with man. We argue for this in the following section, but it is important to see how deep and wide Jones’s departures from the Confession are. In Jones’s teaching, the justice of God has been redefined in two ways, first in its nature, by eliminating the idea of retribution, and second in its object, by redefining what is actually being opposed by God.

This radically modified understanding of God’s justice leads Jones to believe that it would be “in keeping” with the character of God to “be able to overlook minor sins ultimately.”<sup>42</sup> But this is not in keeping with the character of God as confessed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the God who hates “all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.”<sup>43</sup> God’s holiness and justice have been redefined by Jones, and thus God’s complete opposition to all sin as presented in the Confessions and Catechisms is consequently condemned by Jones as a hideous, even satanic, misrepresentation of God’s character. Given the most reasonable contextual interpretation of the Confession, we believe that Jones should also take an exception to Westminster Confession of Faith II.1.

And there is more. Whereas the Confessions and Catechisms both assert and assume throughout that God’s justice and love are both essential to God---not only compatible but inseparable---Jones views God’s love as somehow more foundational.<sup>44</sup> The Westminster

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<sup>41</sup> Jones’s Answers to Committee Questions, September 6, 2014, Q. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Jones’s Answers to Committee Questions, July 27, 2014, Q. 2. Jones is not absolutely sure that God actually does this, but he is sure that it is in keeping with His character.

<sup>43</sup> WCF II.1.

<sup>44</sup> The notion that one of God’s attributes can be more foundational than another is completely at odds with the Reformed understanding. On this important point, see Richard A. Muller’s discussion on divine

Confession of Faith affirms a God who is “infinite in being and perfection” and “without parts” who is both “most loving” and “most just and terrible in His judgments.”<sup>45</sup> When the committee asked Jones a question about whether justice and love are both equally essential to God, Jones said that he is “not inclined to comment” because those “don’t sound like biblical categories.”<sup>46</sup> This is in keeping with his hermeneutic. But note that he’s not inclined to comment on something the Confessions and Catechisms everywhere affirm. “God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable”, says the Shorter Catechism, “in His ... holiness, justice, goodness ....”<sup>47</sup>

Although, “not inclined to comment,” Jones was willing to state that: “Scripture does say that God is love, but it nowhere says that God is justice in the same way. Is that essentiality? I have no idea.”<sup>48</sup> But the Catechism says God is infinite in His justice. For Jones, mercy triumphs over judgment by downplaying both God’s holiness and His unyielding retributive hostility to all sins as taught in the Confessions and Catechisms. Jones objects to their portrayal of the holiness of God, because “the too-holy assumption undermines the centrality of love ....”<sup>49</sup> And so whatever Jones means by God being “most holy,” “most loving,” “most just,” and “most terrible in His judgments,” it is not what the Confession means. The Committee believes that Jones ought to also take an exception to Westminster Confession of Faith II.1 on this basis as well.

### 3. Human Goodness, Depravity, and Effectual Calling

Jones’s modified view of God’s holiness, justice, and wrath inescapably shapes his view of human goodness, depravity, and effectual calling. If God is not holy and just, in the sense understood by the confessions, then it follows that neither is man as bad as the confessions teach.

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simplicity, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy; Volume 3: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 271-98.

<sup>45</sup> WCF, II.1.

<sup>46</sup> Jones’s Answers to Committee Questions, July 27, 2014, Q. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Jones’s Answers, July 27, 2014, Q. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, *Dismissing Jesus*, 165.

It is with regard to these issues of human goodness and depravity that Jones cites negatively both the Heidelberg Catechism, questions 5-10, as well as the Westminster Confession of Faith VI.4.<sup>50</sup> These affirm, in context, a personal, universal depravity, and an inability to please God outside of Christ. But Jones states that “Paul, like the Old Testament, wasn’t ever teaching personal, universal depravity. He believed in people like Cornelius too.”<sup>51</sup> Regarding Cornelius, Jones does not believe that he was a Gentile god-fearer and enabled by God’s saving grace, as is commonly understood, but rather that he “was a good and virtuous and praiseworthy pagan who explicitly lacked both Christ and the Holy Spirit... .”<sup>52</sup> Jones affirms “a personal and universal sinfulness of man,” but this “sinfulness” is not the depravity of the confessions.<sup>53</sup> It is not the kind of sinfulness that hinders someone outside of Christ, someone without the Spirit, from pleasing God.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, the Westminster Standards teach that man is incapable of pleasing God prior to being effectually called by the Holy Spirit and having the benefits of Christ’s atonement applied unto him.<sup>55</sup>

Closely related to Jones’s view of Cornelius is the fact that he sees the universal sin problem as something primarily external to ourselves and not an internal disposition of the will. He writes, “The good Gentiles that Paul spoke of in Romans 2 needed deliverance more from the principalities and powers than from any innate wickedness in themselves. Yes, Death reigned over them, but that didn’t rule them out as genuinely decent people, just as Paul and Peter said.”

<sup>56</sup> The problem, then, is not so much a covetousness which is idolatry--the radical defect of every human heart--but “a whole social system.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>53</sup> Jones's Answers to Committee Questions, August 9, 2014, Q. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., Q. 3.

<sup>55</sup> WCF, VI.4, X.1. The Heidelberg Catechism question #8 states this very succinctly: “Q. Are we then so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness? A. Indeed we are, except we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.”

<sup>56</sup> *Dismissing Jesus*, 145.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 36.

For Jones, personal sins are in a different category, and what is fundamentally bad in God's eyes is the whole social system of "Mammon." "Mammon" is the "sole, serious competitor to the Trinity."<sup>58</sup> Mammon is not merely a species of sin, but "the most fundamental distinction in all of life and history."<sup>59</sup> "Mammon is another name for Satan himself," the "fundamental divide," the "central opponent," the unique "direct competitor to God" in a way that, say, sexual sin or unbelief isn't.<sup>60</sup> For Jones, Mammon is a system involving corporate sins which are not directly or necessarily tied to personal sins.<sup>61</sup> "The key is," writes Jones, "that a person can be trapped under the corporate domination of sin without each person needing to be utterly depraved. One can be under the domination of the spiritual principalities and powers, under the curse and judgment of God culturally, without being a wicked sinner."<sup>62</sup> This corporate sin idea is not merely an extension of personal sin, but an alternative and competing focus in his view.<sup>63</sup> He says, "Perhaps we need to deal with communal sin first, or at least at the same time."<sup>64</sup> What follows is that primarily the "middle class" and the "rich" are unrighteous; the "poor" by definition are good and to be identified with on that basis alone. No distinctions about how one got to be poor or how they conduct themselves as poor are deemed especially relevant.<sup>65</sup> What we find in

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 117-121, 144-146.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>63</sup> Jones writes, "Individual needs are important. The Father knows we have these needs. But Jesus directed us to the way of counter-intuition: don't start with the individual, start with the communal, the kingdom. 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.' Communal first, individual second. Sure, that looks wrong, especially to radically individualistic Westerners. But the way of the cross never looks right at first." Ibid., 117. He later asks "Why does it [personal sin] get all the attention? Perhaps we've got it all backward. Perhaps we need to deal with communal sin first, or at least at the same time." Ibid., 140.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 141. On this same page Jones argues that it is wrong to focus on abortion or homosexuality before we first denounce corporate devotion to Mammon. He states that abortion and homosexuality are "individualistic actions" and "not sins of social structure of whole communities." This is a puzzling claim, since one could easily connect both abortion and homosexuality to a certain devotion to Mammon-- the prioritization of self-interest, maximal consumptive potential, and sameness-- to socio-economic burdens, possible ostracization, and difference, yet Jones declines to examine such a possibility. He then suggests that "Protestantism" has "privileged medieval nominalism and individualism from the start." Ibid., 141. Such a claim has been recently fashionable among certain academics, especially of the school of Radical Orthodoxy, but it is already becoming discredited as it is unable to withstand any concrete historical scrutiny. It should be more than obvious that men like Bucer, Calvin, Rutherford, and, much later, Kuyper were keenly interested in societal-structure and corporate policy.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 30.

Jones's teaching is not merely a filling out of the Reformed understanding, but rather a presentation of a competing understanding. We agree with Jones here: "[I]t's the difference between two worlds."<sup>66</sup>

Jones assesses the human problem and need in a radically different manner than the Reformation confessions and catechisms. Sin is not fundamentally defined with reference to God's holy nature, and righteous law of God, as it is in the Westminster Confession or any of the Reformed standards.<sup>67</sup> And while he often uses standard confessional terminology like "sinfulness," the content of that terminology is significantly altered by his hermeneutical foundation, and consequent understanding of God. The Committee believes that Jones ought to also take exception to the relevant portions of the Confession, as his terms seem to be defined in an obviously stipulated manner.

#### 4. Justification by Faith Alone

In an interview with Doug Jones, the Committee presented him with an initial draft of our theological findings, and he questioned our presentation of his teaching on justification by faith alone. Jones argued that he had not addressed the doctrine of justification by faith alone directly and did not intend to deny it. In a series of written follow-up questions Jones gave succinct, yet qualified answers which would affirm a qualified justification-by-faith-alone view:

*5. What is the ground of our initial justification before God?*

In the Christus Victor view, given that Christ is our breach intercessor, the ground of our initial justification could only be the righteousness of Christ alone.

*6. What is the ground of our final justification before God at the final judgment?*

In the Christus Victor view, given that Christ is our breach intercessor, the ground of our final justification could only be the righteousness of Christ alone.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>67</sup> For example, WCF XV.2 refers to sin as that which is "contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God...."

<sup>68</sup> Jones, written answers to committee questions #6, September 6, 2014.



Nevertheless, the committee maintains that given the implications of the qualifications--“Christus Victor” and “breach intercessor” as understood in opposition to vicarious penal satisfaction-- and the other arguments set forth in *Dismissing Jesus*, the doctrine of justification by faith alone as confessionally understood still stands in contradiction to Jones’s theological proposal.

To better understand this, it should be noted that Jones uses “Christus Victor” interchangeably with “restorative substitution.”<sup>69</sup> He does not himself explain this concept of “restorative substitution” in detail, but Jones does cite the work of Derek Flood for support.<sup>70</sup> For his part, Flood does give a clear articulation of the theological principles of “restorative substitution”:

The question we need to ask is: what is the reality that is being addressed here? What we ultimately have in Athanasius is an understanding of salvation that involves a real and profound change in who we are, and one that addresses evil, suffering, and injustice on an ultimate level. It is an understanding of salvation which involves our *healing* by way of Christ ‘abolishing’ the very system of death through his death and resurrection. In other words, substitutionary atonement understood within the conceptual framework of what we might term *restorative justice*. It is restorative in the sense that salvation is focused on our healing and re-birth (restoring us), and restorative in that it seeks to overturn the system of death (restoring God’s reign). This represents a paradigm of justice not based on a punitive model, but one focused on setting us right by transforming us, and setting the world right by overthrowing ‘the law of sin and death’ (Ro 8:2). In this later sense it reflects a model of justice that is in fact the opposite of retributive justice, because it seeks ultimately to abolish retribution, not to appease it.<sup>71</sup>

Flood later concludes that “in a restorative model it is through God’s action to transform and heal our sin that our relationship with God is set right, rather than through retribution. A real change in us, effected by God, effects a real change in our relationship with God.”<sup>72</sup> That justice is preserved, not by retribution against evil, but by a restoration--both of the external conditions afflicting humanity and its internal condition--is fundamental to understanding justification itself. God does not pronounce “just” over the guilty party but over one who has been restored from the

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<sup>69</sup> *Dismissing Jesus*, 159.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid; Jones cites Derek Flood’s “Substitutionary Atonement and the Church Fathers: A Reply to the Authors of *Pierced for Our Transgressions*” in *Evangelical Quarterly* 82.2 ((2010)), 142-159.

<sup>71</sup> Flood, 149.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, 158.

guilty powers which once afflicted him. There is a transformation of the sinner, but there is no prior forensic imputation as understood by the confessions.

Belousek also promotes this view of “restorative” justice as understood in opposition to “retributive justice,”<sup>73</sup> and Jones then takes it up to articulate his own position:

In other words, God can forgive without blood. God doesn't need a tabernacle, Temple, or any sacrificial system at all to appease him... Instead of God needing blood, we can think of God mercifully using the sacrifices to clean us. God becomes the subject cleaning rather than the object appeased. On this view, the sacrifices don't calm God's burning anger; they act as God's gracious detergent to cleanse all our impurities, sinful and not. Overall, the sacrificial system seemed more concerned with controlling the pollution of death than sin. Sin seems more of a consequence of death but not the main issue in the sacrifices. The 'life is in the blood' (Lev 17:11), and sacrifices release that blood-life to clean away all the death oppressing God's people. Jesus's blood would do this even more, at a cosmic level. As Belousek notes, “In atoning sacrifice, God is the primary actor, not humans' sacrifice atones, not because it 'satisfies' God, but because God acts through it to make atonement... God acts to cleanse and forgive sinners by removing sin and pollution through sacrifice, thereby restoring covenant fellowship. Divine justice is done here, but it is restorative justice, not retributive justice.”<sup>74</sup>

It should be observed without dispute that Jones denies that the sacrifice appeases God. Instead God demonstrates His grace, not in accepting the sacrifice in place of the sinner, but in applying

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<sup>73</sup> Belousek, 171-191, especially 188-191. For instance: “The evidence of Scripture suggests instead that sacrificial atonement deals with uncleanness--generated through sin, guilt, or contracted impurity--that threatens to pollute the holy place, things, and people of God. Rather than propitiation of God's wrath or payment of penalty to God, atoning sacrifice was the God-provided means by which God-self acted to remove sin, guilt, and impurity and so cleanse pollution from the holy place, things, and people that are consecrated to God's service” (189) and, “In atoning sacrifice, God is the primary actor, not humans' sacrifice atones, not because it 'satisfies' God, but because God acts through it to make atonement... god acts to cleanse and forgive sinners by removing sin and pollution through sacrifice, thereby restoring covenant fellowship. Divine justice is done here, but it is restorative justice, not retributive justice” (191). Notably, Belousek rejects any attempt to “[speculate] how the sacrificial rituals 'work' to effect purification, or by what 'mechanism' uncleanness is expiated and sins are forgiven” (191). And again, “By distinguishing between *what* atoning sacrifice *does*, which is revealed, and *how* atoning sacrifice *works*, which is left mysterious, we recall Moses' final address to Israel: 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever' (Deut 29:29)” (191). Any attempt to ground the problem of impurity and uncleanness in the forensic curse of the Fall is simply deemed off-limits. Belousek does not, however, remain content to give no explanation of how God's wrath is averted, but instead offers up a competing theory that he calls “Standing in the Breach intercession” (see 220-221). Jones makes use of this “standing in the breach” notion in order to ground his theology of atonement and justification, as we will explain below.

<sup>74</sup> Jones, *Dismissing Jesus*, 169.

the blood of the sacrifice as a sort of “detergent” to cleanse the sinner. It is not functioning, even as united to Christ’s sacrifice, as a ground of forgiveness. Instead it is a tool to remove external obstacles. Also important is Jones’s statement that “sin seems more of a consequence of death” than vice versa. Thus, if the problem of death can be solved, then the sin problem will follow.

Paired with this doctrine of “restorative substitution” is a particular understanding of how God’s wrath is turned away, what we traditionally call intercession or propitiation. Under a theory which Jones, following Belousek, calls “breach intercession,” God’s wrath is not actually *satisfied* but is rather voluntarily turned away in response to a good work (reparative justice) done by a sort of representative figure. This is how the theory can still be described as substitutionary or vicarious substitution, but the logic is actually quite opposed to penal substitution or the forensic imputation of righteousness as articulated by the Reformation confessions and catechisms. Instead of the good work being itself credited to the sinner (imputation), the good work is accepted *instead of* a satisfaction of justice being required. It is understood as a sort of reparation. Ironically, this begins to approach the older “Anselmic” notion of satisfaction,<sup>75</sup> though it is being explained in more contemporary legal terminology and distinguishes itself by universally rejecting the thought that God’s wrath is satisfied. Belousek explains:

God’s wrath is poured out when God sees unrighteousness and injustice in the community but there is “no intercessor” to intervene, to end injustice and put things right (cf. Ezekiel 13; Isa 59:15b-19). God’s wrath is turned away when God finds the one who will intercede “on behalf of the land,” who will “repair the wall” of righteousness and “stand in the breach” of justice. What saves the land and people from destruction, therefore, is not that someone bears God’s wrath in place of others, but that someone does reparative

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<sup>75</sup> While Anselm’s doctrine is sometimes disputed, the most rigorous theological explanation can be found in Robert Strimple, “St Anselm’s *Cur deus homo* and John Calvin’s doctrine of the atonement,” in *Anselm: Aosta, Bec and Canterbury* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 348-360. Strimple shows that Anselm’s view has no issue with wrath as such but rather finds the satisfaction of wrath in the penitential gift rather than punishment, strictly understood. Whatever degree of difference of affinity there may be between Anselm’s views and the Reformation views is ultimately irrelevant to this report, as Jones is not attempting to make Anselm’s argument.

justice on behalf of the covenant community. Indeed, the one who removes oppression and restores justice is called “the repairer of the breach” (Isa 58:9b-12).<sup>76</sup>

Notice that the intercessor is not bearing wrath but instead removing external obstacles and oppression which are afflicting the covenant community. When combined with the earlier explanation of restorative justice, we can form a more or less coherent argument. Jesus Christ, as our breach intercessor, takes away the pollution of death, the oppression coming from evil and powerful men, and the accusations of the Devil. Additionally, Christ “cleanses” and “restores” us, and we are then accepted by God. This is how Jones can say that “the righteousness of Christ alone” is the ground of our justification, but it doesn’t at all seem to be what the Westminster standards mean by such an expression, especially WCF XI.3 and Shorter Catechism 33. Both statements appear to the committee to be obviously intended to be understood as consistently related to Christ’s mediation (WCF VIII.4-5) and execution of the office of priest (WSC 25).

In addition to this problematic atonement framework, Jones goes on to advocate a provocative approach to other aspects of the doctrine of justification. Beginning on pg. 150 of *Dismissing Jesus*, Jones introduces the question of judgment by works. This gives him occasion to offer a stipulated definition of saving faith and a narrativial framework for understanding justification itself. This exploration leads into the subsequent chapter on atonement and directly relates to it in theologically necessary ways. We will list some of the key portions of *Dismissing Jesus* in Appendix B to illustrate our concern.

What we see in Jones’s teaching on faith is a reframing of the concept of justification as a whole, along with some redefinition of terms. Justification is identified with the exodus from Egypt as well as the wandering through the desert and entry into Canaan,<sup>77</sup> and thus “faith” means not

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<sup>76</sup> Belousek, 221.

<sup>77</sup> Jones, *Dismissing Jesus*, 152.

merely belief nor the instrument which receives the promise of God's forgiveness and deliverance, but, in fact a moral and spiritual discipline, the way of the cross itself:

[Faith is] to walk just as he walked... Faith is a gracious gift from God, but, in the end, if he can't see it, then it's not there. Without the way of the cross, we remain outside the kingdom of heaven.<sup>78</sup>

Faith, while affirmed as a gift, nevertheless must become visible and be judged by its works, and it is clearly mutable. One could perhaps, at least in theory, explain this all by way of an absolute monergism, a species of very strict Calvinism whereby all secondary causes are flattened as divine "grace" and taken as automatic. But this is not the direction Jones goes. Instead he is fully comfortable presenting a God who reacts to human activity:

Yes, God's long-suffering sometimes comes to an end, especially for leaders, and he pours out his wrath. But for the most part, 'mercy triumphs over judgment,' and the Prodigal's father embraces the wayward son without any perfectionism or hostility. God pities us, lost in our sin, but he isn't normally hostile to sinners. No mystery needed.<sup>79</sup>

The qualifiers in this section are, frankly, unsettling. "For the most part" God shows mercy and "isn't normally hostile to sinners," but "sometimes" He decides to cease being merciful and to pour out his wrath. The committee believes that Jones has proposed a redefinition of God's act of justification, as well as the way in which divine righteousness is received by and applied to believers and that this is in contradiction to the doctrine of justification taught by the Westminster Standards. We likewise believe that this is a fundamental matter of doctrine directly united to the larger consideration of penal atonement.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 166.

## The Significance of Jones's Exceptions

Jones believes that his exceptions to the Westminster Confession of Faith “seem larger than incidental,” but less than “fundamental” to its system of doctrine.<sup>80</sup> This despite the fact that Jones acknowledges that penal atonement “is part of the WCF system of doctrine,”<sup>81</sup> and that “other parts of the WCF seem to rest upon a view of penal atonement.”<sup>82</sup> The committee is convinced that Jones’s exceptions are in fact fundamental to the system of doctrine of the WCF and of Trinity’s other standards, as well as to the Reformed and Evangelical identity of the CREC.

First, it is widely acknowledged that the Reformation Confessions and Catechisms consistently affirm penal atonement. None of the Reformation documents subscribed to by the CREC contradicts this doctrine, and all of them which speak to the nature of Christ’s satisfaction use the categories and concepts of penal substitutionary atonement. Jones acknowledges this fact: “Reformed teaching has long emphasized the need to appease the Father’s just wrath by the death of the innocent Son.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, penal atonement is an integral part of the CREC’s Reformed identity.

Second, and relatedly, it is widely acknowledged that penal atonement is “a distinguishing mark of the world-wide evangelical fraternity.”<sup>84</sup> As John Stott observes, penal atonement is simply what “evangelical Christians believe.”<sup>85</sup> It is, according to Thomas Schreiner, “the heart and soul of an evangelical view of the atonement.”<sup>86</sup> Even Darrin Belousek, who wants to identify himself

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<sup>80</sup> Jones's Answers, July 27, 2014, Q. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Jones's Answers, July 13, 2014, Q. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Q.3.

<sup>83</sup> Jones's Answers to Committee Questions, July 17, 2014, Q. 3.

<sup>84</sup> Packer, “The Logic of Penal Substitution,” *TynBul* 25 (1974): 3.

<sup>85</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ* 7.

<sup>86</sup> Schreiner, “Penal Substitution View” in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 67.

as an evangelical while rejecting penal atonement, declines to argue the point; he simply recognizes that penal atonement is the common understanding of evangelicals and moves on.<sup>87</sup> Because the CREC identifies itself as Evangelical, it would be difficult to deny that this doctrine forms a significant part of our identity.

Third, penal atonement is not an incidental issue in the Westminster Confession of Faith nor the rest of Trinity Reformed Church's standards, when read "in harmony" according to the doctrinal directions of both Trinity and the CREC. The two paragraphs most clearly affirming penal substitution that Doug Jones takes exception to cannot be lifted from the WCF (or the other reformed confessions) without ripping the whole doctrinal fabric. The Westminster Standards employ penal substitutionary atonement as a fundamental theological motif essential to understanding the unity of the Biblical narrative, covenant theology, and the redemption of sinners. As previously stated, we believe Jones has implicitly subverted, and therefore ought in good conscience to take exception to, the following sections of the WCF:

1. WCF I.9; VII.5; VIII.6; XI.6 pertaining to the unity of Scripture, the covenant, redemption, and justification.
2. WCF IV.2; VI.2, 3, 6; XV.2; XXXIII.1, 2 pertaining to God's holiness, justice, and wrath.
3. WCF IX.3, 4; X.1, 2, 4 pertaining to human goodness, depravity, and effectual calling.
4. WCF XI.1, 2 pertaining to justification by faith alone.

Finally, Jones's denial of penal atonement and related doctrines affect a host of practical pastoral matters. One can hardly imagine any teaching or counseling ministry that would not be significantly affected in one way or another. Jones seems to recognize this. In his book he

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<sup>87</sup> Belousek, *Atonement, Justice, and Peace* 83, 84.

affirms that the “consequences are huge.”<sup>88</sup> He acknowledges that the shift in his thinking “has proven deeper than anticipated,”<sup>89</sup> and that it “has turned all [his] practical priorities upside down.”<sup>90</sup> The result is a “deep and wide divergence” with his previous vision.<sup>91</sup> We believe that Jones denial of penal substitution is such that it will always and necessarily produce “practical, day-to-day obstacles” not only for serving at Christ Church, where he was ordained, or Trinity Reformed Church, where he is currently a member, but also for serving as a pastor, elder, or teacher in any CREC setting.<sup>92</sup>

To allow Jones’s exceptions to the WCF would (1) contradict our identity as a Reformed and Evangelical communion within the broader church; (2) disregard and undermine a host of other important confessional statements that we believe Jones fundamentally opposes; (3) permit a theology that is alien to the Confessions to operate in our midst; and (4) create a situation where Jones's practical day-to-day pastoral activities would place him at odds with the rest of our Communion.

### **Recommendations to Trinity Reformed Church**

This committee does not make these recommendations lightly. We recognize our responsibility before God and to Christ’s church, to the CREC, to Trinity Reformed Church, to the congregations we serve, and to Doug Jones himself. We recognize the debt that many owe to Doug Jones for his past labors, and his continuing influence on many. We also recognize and acknowledge that some of what he sees and points out is valid and worth emphasizing. We also

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<sup>88</sup> Dismissing Jesus, 159.

<sup>89</sup> Doug Jones, June 1, 2009 Christ Church Resignation Statement as found in “Appendix A: Background on the Doctrinal Question.”

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.



believe, however, that Doug Jones's doctrinal shift is so significant and his trajectory so altered, that he is no longer able to work together effectively for reformation as a pastor within the CREC.

As stated earlier, the CREC is not merely a Christian communion, but is a Reformed and Evangelical communion established within the "broader church, in order to work together effectively for reformation."<sup>93</sup> For this reason, our Constitution requires each church to adopt one of the approved Reformational Confessions in addition to the Ecumenical Creeds. The belief underpinning this practice is that there is a shared "system of doctrine reflected in the great creeds, catechisms, and confessions of the Reformation."<sup>94</sup>

On the basis of Doug Jones's exceptions to the penal teaching of WCF VIII.5 and XI.3, his reasons for those exceptions, and all the theological and practical ramifications that follow, the committee recommends that Trinity Reformed Church request that Doug Jones demit his office, and if he refuses, that he through due process be deposed from office. The Committee further recommends that Trinity request that Doug Jones be removed from the list of recognized ministers in the CREC, and that no church consider him for any office in the CREC while he maintains his current views. Removing Doug Jones's ministerial credentials is not to be understood as excommunication or loss of membership in the congregation.

Further, for the sake of the flock, the elders of Trinity Reformed Church, and other churches whose members may be influenced by Doug Jones's teaching, should take care to instruct and warn the saints as appropriate. This should be done without alarmism, but with great patience and care. We believe Jones's errors to be real and serious, even while some of his insights remain valid. It should be emphasized to the saints that Doug Jones's primary errors lie not in what he affirms, but in what he denies and in what he implicitly assumes. Doug Jones's primary

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<sup>93</sup> Preamble to the Constitution and By-Laws of The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches [Revised October 2011].

<sup>94</sup> Article VII.B., Constitution.

error is the unnecessary and dangerous wedges that he drives between matters which the Bible holds together.

There is no need to choose between penal atonement and Christus Victor; between Christ taking our penalty and Christ defeating death and Satan. These are both affirmed by the Scriptures, our confessions, and all the ablest defenders of penal atonement.<sup>95</sup> There is no contradiction between God's people's lives between being spared from His wrath by His provision of the shed blood of the passover lamb and Pharaoh's overthrow and defeat. There is no inherent contradiction at all. There is no need to deny one for the sake of the other. These views only "face different directions and seem to produce two different faiths" when one aspect of Christ's work is denied.<sup>96</sup> The issue is not found in any denial of Christus Victor or unwillingness to discuss relative emphases upon the CREC's part. The issue is Doug Jones's emphatic denial of penal atonement playing any role in Christ's work at all.

Neither is there a need to choose between being saved from God's wrath (note, by God himself!) and from Satan's accusations. Not only are these both affirmed by the Scriptures and the confessions, but it is only God's righteousness which gives any force to Satan's accusations at all. God's righteousness is Satan's only real leverage. It is confusion in the extreme to associate the judgments of God, which are rooted entirely in His goodness, righteousness, and holy opposition to sin, with the accusations of Satan which are rooted in his hatred, malice, and opposition to God and His people. We should have no trouble distinguishing between the actions of a good and faithful Judge pursuing justice and a wicked and malicious accuser seeking the destruction of the accused. Is there any logical or biblical reason why we can't be saved from both God's just judgement and Satan's work and accusations-- when that is exactly what the Scriptures and the confessions affirm? The issue again is one of denial. Jones's error is that he

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<sup>95</sup> See J.I. Packer, "The Logic of Penal Substitution," *TynBul* 25 (1974). Even Michael Bird, who advances the Christus Victor model, recognizes that we cannot, indeed, must not eliminate penal substitution from our understanding of the atonement. See *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 402-420.

<sup>96</sup> Jones, *Dismissing Jesus*, 160.

denies that we are saved from God's wrath-- God's just judgment--in the sense in which the Reformational Creeds and Confessions affirm it.

Closely related to this is the need to keep both the justice and love of God together. There must be no wedge driven between God's justice and his love. God is as essentially just as he is love. The Scriptures and the confessions affirm both truths. John affirms what all of Scripture affirms, that "God is light" and "God is love." Paul tells us to consider "the goodness and severity of God." There is no problem biblically affirming that the Lord is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness" and that He also is a God who will "by no means" clear the guilty (Exo 34:6, 7 NKJV). Scripture wants us to hold these things together. Doug Jones prefers to avoid the discussion of the fundamental character of God and in practice downplays God's holiness and justice for God's love. Ultimately this must serve not only to diminish God's justice, but also to diminish and trivialize the love of God.

In all these things we encourage the elders of TRC and other CREC churches who are faced with pastorally helping saints through these issues, to encourage them to hear from the whole counsel of God and to be discerning. If, as Jesus affirmed, "the Scripture cannot be broken," then we must seek to believe and obey all that God has revealed in His word. Assigning a few select words of Jesus a place of priority over all else that Jesus said and affirmed may not have one following Jesus more fully at all. Certainly advocating some clear biblical truths at the expense of others is not the way to greater faithfulness. If a canoe is leaning too far to one side, balance is restored by leaning an appropriate amount in the opposite direction. But to cast the offending weight overboard while you throw your weight in the opposite direction is a recipe for capsizing. And while it is possible to profit from "a slow, receptive engagement" with Doug Jones's book but remain unpersuaded of several of the central arguments, for many saints without the biblical maturity to rightly sift through Jones's rhetoric, his book and teaching may prove to be unsettling in significantly wrong ways too. Serious discernment is required.

Doug Jones has departed quite far from his Reformed and Evangelical roots to something he himself said he would have denounced as “Marxist crap masquerading as Christian faith, completely hopeless and dangerous, lying about the whole gospel.”<sup>97</sup> We are praying that God may use this report, Trinity Reformed Church, and the response of the CREC to call him back from his errors.

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

# Polity Question Findings

## Summary

The committee has recommended changes to the Knox Presbytery Book of Procedures which are designed to provide clear guidelines of accountability for those who have pastoral credentials, but who do not currently have a call. We believe that these changes to the Book of Procedures will provide clearer guidance for future situations. We are suggesting that these current procedures be adopted by the presbytery and be considered at Council.

## Explanation

The rationale for the proposed changes to the BOP follows from the task of the Committee to address polity considerations for a minister/pastor without call in the CREC. As a result of reviewing relevant constitutional and procedural documents, we found the need to more fully express the relationships between the minister/pastor without call, the church of which he is a member, the Presbytery, and how the minister's credentials are handled. The Committee reasoned that since ministerial membership in the CREC is reckoned only by congregational membership (contra PCA and OPC, etc.), then accepting, disposing, and if need be, removing the minister's credentials, rest foundationally with the congregation of which he is a member (section 4 below). Thus, a minister without call is under the authority of the elders of the church of which he is a member in respect to any ministerial activities he is requested to perform (e.g., 4.a.ii.2. below). It is noted that our polity includes the recognition of ordained ministers at the presbytery level. Hence, we believe that more explanation is in order for the BOP Article XII.

## Report

On the polity question, the committee has recommended a revision to the CREC Book of Procedures Article XII "Recognition of Ordained Ministers." The suggested revision to the article is as follows:

## BOOK OF PROCEDURES

### Article XII Recognition of Ordained Ministers

1. Each Presiding Minister of Presbytery shall establish and maintain a list of the CREC ministers (pastors) in their presbytery.
2. The purpose of the lists of CREC ministers is simply to clarify who is formally recognized as a lawfully ordained minister of the gospel in the CREC. It does not mean that the man is a member of presbytery or council, or a delegate to presbytery or council. Removing a man's credentials from such a register is not equivalent to defrocking, which can only be done in the CREC at the local church level.
3. The lists shall consist of the names of: (a) ordained pastors recorded in the church reports adopted by presbytery, (b) other ministerial changes that take place at presbytery, and (c) any changes of pastoral status registered in writing with the Presiding Minister between the annual presbytery meetings. To this end:
  - a. Each church shall provide a written report to presbytery at the appointed yearly meeting which includes the names of each of the ordained pastors, as well as any ordained pastor without call that is recognized by that church.
  - b. The Presiding Minister of presbytery shall automatically add or remove from the list of recognized ordained men those changes which take place at presbytery. This includes but is not limited to:
    - i. a previously ordained man, who has had his ordination formally recognized by presbytery upon entering the CREC along with his church.
    - ii. any church removed from the CREC will have the names of their ordained officers removed from the list.
  - c. A church shall register all changes of pastoral status between presbytery meetings with the Presiding Minister of the presbytery. This includes but is not limited to:
    - i. any man who sat for a CREC ordination exam and was recommended by the examination committee, ordained by his local CREC church, and installed as a minister.
    - ii. any previously ordained man who was called by a CREC member church to be her minister and is duly installed.
    - iii. any minister who was defrocked.

- iv. any minister without call who is a member of a local CREC church that the local church wants to recognize as a lawfully ordained minister.
- 4. Ministers without call whose ordinations are maintained by the CREC must be members of a CREC church.
  - a. A church, before receiving an ordained (but uninstalled) minister into membership, is under obligation to either approve or not approve the minister's credentials. The normal expectation is that a church will approve of a minister's credentials.
    - i. In the case that a minister's credentials are not approved the minister may:
      - 1. pursue membership in another local church, or
      - 2. submit to membership and so be released from his ministerial status by demitting (resigning) his office.
    - ii. If a minister's credentials are approved the local church must:
      - 1. indicate the minister's status to the Minister of Presbytery,
      - 2. approve or not approve any ministerial activity (e.g., performing baptisms, marriages, publishing, etc.), and
      - 3. take initiative in any proceedings of discipline leading to restoration or defrocking if the minister's doctrine or life is reproachable.
  - b. If a CREC minister does not receive a call within three years of having his "minister without call" status first recognized, he shall be declared released from his ministerial status by the church that holds his credentials, unless specific permission is requested by the church and received from presbytery. This permission must be sought and granted on an annual basis.
- 5. Ministers under the authority of another church or presbytery who are without call and desire to become members of a CREC church while remaining concurrently under the authority of another body, must obtain approval by presbytery according the procedure of the Constitution II.B.
- 6. Ministers who are at least 50 years old and who have served in one or more CREC churches for at least 10 years are eligible to retire as a minister. The provisions of paragraph 4 apply to retired ministers, except that, once their retired status is reported and approved by presbytery via adoption, a failure to subsequently report and approve their retired status shall not result in a loss of their retired ministerial status. The provisions of subparagraph 4. b. do not apply to retired ministers.

7. Upon request, the Presiding Minister may issue a letter to an inquiring body stating that the minister in question has been formally recognized by the CREC as a lawfully ordained minister of the gospel.



## Appendix A- Concerns Regarding Jones’s Methodology

The committee’s concerns go beyond specific confessional exceptions taken by Doug Jones, or that we believe should have been taken by him. Some of the most distressing matters in Jones’s writings are his controlling themes and axiomatic assumptions. Our concern here is less the specific contradictions and tensions with the Confessional statements, and more how these themes and assumptions serve as pre-confessional--indeed pre-exegetical--influences, and are given logical priority in Jones’s discourse. The issue is “hermeneutics” in its broadest significance. It includes how Jones views the nature of reason itself and its role in persuasion, as well as the way his theological “master narrative” functions. These issues are tied into the more familiar theological issues like the nature of biblical theology and its relationship to systematic theology, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, the nature of Christ’s mission, and the nature and mission of the church. The assumptions at this level drive all Jones’s other arguments. It would take the committee beyond the scope of its task to investigate these in any significant detail, but we wish to especially identify some key architectonic hermeneutical assumptions and warn against them.

The most basic of these concerns reason itself. *Dismissing Jesus* is a relatively short book considering the massive span of doctrines and applications it seeks to address. Instead of being persuaded by detailed citations, close historico-grammatical or canonical readings of Scripture (or later theological writers), or even critical examinations of key terms and founding concepts, the reader is instead wooed by various tropes, aphorisms, and appeals to the passions. While we believe that Jones has done some good work in the past leaning against certain forms of rationalism and scholasticism that locate the power of persuasion solely in the intellect, when it comes to the very important topic of defining justice, the absence of arguments grounded in Scriptural reflection on ethics and jurisprudence leaves the reader only with appeals to aesthetics and psychology. Retributive justice is not really criticized for being unscriptural, but rather for being selfish or harsh and, most of all, for “block[ing] us from the way of the cross.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> See for instance *Dismissing Jesus* 159-163.

This methodology is quite intentional. Dismissing Jesus begins with a “Preface on Persuasion” where Jones explains his belief that persuasion is not fundamentally a rational endeavor:

Persuasion is a terribly strange thing. It has to overcome our personality types, our histories, our ages, all our past friends and safe influences, and our willingness to reconsider. We dismiss books and authors for lacking the right feel or for not sounding like our friends. It’s an impossible task. Persuasion is magic or more like an unbelievable accident...<sup>99</sup>

There is more here than literary flourish. This philosophy of persuasion is at work throughout Jones’s recent writings, and it makes sense of his methodology and style of argumentation. One does not find traditional exegetical or theological arguments nearly as much as appeals to imaginative paradigms, moral motivations, and political and economic interests. General references are made regarding what Jesus or the Bible are “interested in,” and a doctrine will be said to not do much “heavy lifting,” but strict arguments about contradictions or textual impossibilities are not typically made. It is not the presence of appeals to paradigms or other legitimate human interests per se that is concerning, but the absence, or implied relative unimportance, of rational argumentation from the Scriptures as an unified word.

We see a similar method at work in Darrin Belousek, a key source for Jones. Belousek admits that his interest in atonement theology was itself an effect of his own changing views on the morality of capital punishment.<sup>100</sup> He states that his reading of John 8:2-11 lead him to reject capital punishment, but after inquiring as to why so many other Christians did not make such a connection, one which the reader is left to suppose as obvious, Belousek came to the conclusion that the doctrine of “retaliatory justice” was the cause for this “circumven[ting]” of Jesus’s clear teaching.<sup>101</sup> This caused what he calls “a ‘gestalt shift’ in perspective” which would go on to motivate and inspire everything else in his theological investigation.<sup>102</sup> After having this gestalt shift, Belousek became quite confident in the ability for certain doctrines, paradigms, and

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>100</sup> *Atonement, Justice, and Peace*, 8.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 9, 10.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 10.

worldviews to effect an impressive variety of applications and social and political platforms. He thus believes that if he can cause a similar “paradigm shift” in others on the definition of justice, then they too will adopt his understanding of the peace mission of Christ. To do this he presents what he calls the “cruciform paradigm”:

This book, then, is effectively about achieving a change in worldview—or, if you will, a paradigm shift, a “Copernican Revolution” of sorts: rather than seeing the cross in terms of an assumed understanding of justice and peace, we seek to understand justice and peace from the perspective of the cross.<sup>103</sup>

Notice the logical order of the argument. If we interpret the concepts of “justice and peace” in light of our prior understanding of the nature of Christ’s death, we will arrive at a proper definition of justice and peace. This claim goes further than simply saying the gospels clarify or most fully explain the rest of revelation. It says that the teachings of Christ actually redefine previously-held beliefs and ideals. This is how his exegetical arguments will proceed. An explanatory grid is present, because of his perspective of the cross, prior to historical or grammatical readings of other texts as such. But how then is one to first understand the nature of Christ’s death, is it not, in this case, precisely the matter under dispute? For the cross to truly come “first” in the order of knowledge, it would need to be either self-evident and in no need of support or the product of a kind of immediate spiritual encounter. Of course the nature of Christ’s death is debated across historical and theological lines, hence the need even for Belousek’s book, and so it cannot be taken as obvious or said to be axiomatic. Additionally, any book which relied exclusively on theological enthusiasm would be a short and puzzling read. Thus neither extreme is actually at work in Belousek’s argument, despite some of the rhetoric. Instead what Belousek offers is the thesis that certain parts of the Bible present a key “paradigm” or “model,” one composed of specific theological commitments (opposition to retribution), which interprets all of the other teachings of the Bible. What was previously mysterious or even incorrect (for instance, the *lex talionis*) is made clear or in fact corrected by a certain alternative “model” which serves as a master interpreter. Importantly, this model is not itself subjected to being critically examined but

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 3.

is instead the necessary standard by which examination can occur. Thus we are told that the explanation is “the Cross.”

On the one hand, we recognize that paradigms, assumptions, and presuppositions are inescapable. Everyone necessarily employs interpretive grids as they evaluate texts, doctrines, and arguments. On the other hand, the inescapability of this reality does not render rational argumentation worthless. Rather, the Bible assumes that truthful testimony, faithful witnesses, and biblical coherence are all important parts of interpretation, argument, understanding, and faith. And so the interpretive grid itself should arise from and be corrected by the Scripture itself.

Jones’s intensely philosophical use of selective biblical language leads to the next overarching concern. Theological nomenclature is affixed to the methodology of “paradigm shifts” in order to suggest that the doctrine and the paradigm stand or fall together. For Jones’s part, we can demonstrate this sort of methodology at work. For instance, he uses theological terms like “Trinity” to mean, not the basic confession of three hypostases equally sharing one ousia, but a particular social and economic philosophy:

Jesus introduced a vision of a whole city on a hill growing out of self-denial. But the craziness of genuine self-denial, the giddy giving up of power, wealth, and prestige, to serve one another wasn’t new. It was just the Trinity, again. It was making Trinity on earth. Since all eternity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have denied their interests to raise up each other. They have each denied themselves to ensure the mission of the other. The Trinity has always been foolish in this way. The Trinity has always lived the way of faith.<sup>104</sup>

Whereas one ought to naturally question whether the Trinity is properly analogous to a city, whether there really are three wills in the Trinity (classical Nicene theology affirms but one), or if the “way of faith” lived by humans is the same as that said to be lived by the Trinity, all of this would miss Jones’s basic intent. Those claims are not what Jones is hoping will convince the reader. The point is rather to be moved by the picture itself.

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<sup>104</sup> Jones, *Dismissing Jesus*, 113.

Elsewhere Jones also makes the statement “the church is the Trinity on earth ....”<sup>105</sup> We understand that he does not intend to make a strictly ontological claim, that the divine ousia is literally exhaustively synonymous with the church, and we believe we can safely assume that he does not believe that the church ought to be the object of worship. Instead he believes that the theological expression “the Trinity” necessarily implies a specific sort of political and economic strategy which “the church” ought to also employ. In this we see how the theological passions are meant to bring about the persuasion. The reader’s attention is moved away from questioning the validity of the implication itself to instead revering a more foundational and time-honored doctrine. Thus the persuasion is actually achieved, not by demonstrating a causal link between the two, but by making a rhetorical association between the controversial application and the unquestionable doctrine. While making rhetorical associations may be an acceptable form of persuasion, failure to address the rational causal link between premise and conclusion, text and doctrine, at some point can only be seen as reckless.

Following from this approach is the difficulty of dealing with theological “models” and composite doctrines under simple names, as if they were self-contained or hermetically sealed units. “Atonement” is itself a case in point. The term does not actually appear in the Westminster Confession of Faith or Shorter Catechism, and it would not have even been available to the Continental Reformers as it was something of an English neologism at the time. Instead, the confessional documents speak of the mediation of Christ and the nature of his satisfaction of divine justice. “Penal Substitution” is not presented as a unified and coherent model which stands in contradiction to “Christus Victor” or some other set of options. Instead, simpler affirmations of justice, wrath, and the means of applying Christ’s benefits are affirmed.

The same sort of difficulty arises with the expression “total depravity” which Jones critiques repeatedly and associates with systemic colonialism and racism.<sup>106</sup> He does not examine in any detail the various affirmations and denials related to the composite theological concept which is

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 145.

identified as “total depravity.” Instead he addresses it as a singular thing (usually wrongly characterizing it as an inability to do even civic good) and critiques its perceived motivations and historical political repercussions. Thus the reader is left with lots of theological labels, some of which are clearly very good and some others of which are clearly very bad, but the theological logic as such is not as easy to discern. Generalizations and composite theological concepts can be useful tools in conversation and argument, but only in so far as they can be demonstrated to be true and not merely asserted.

Taken together, these various techniques create not merely a set of ideas in the form of affirmations and denials but a revolutionary intellectual disposition. The hermeneutic is one of urgency and combustion, insisting on antithesis but with undefined terms in order to excite the imagination, effect revolution, and then bring about a kind of performative theology which can only be known by example and illustration and not through propositions. Example, illustration, narrative, and paradigm all play important theological roles, but it is disconcerting when propositional doctrine is summarily dismissed in their name. This is illustrated when rebuttals are headed off as wearing “blindness” and being unable or unwilling to understand. And this, in effect, insulates against all possible criticism. In so doing, however, it also prevents rational and responsible communication from taking place. As such, the committee believes that the methodology itself is unsound and liable to a myriad of possible other theological deviations over time.

## Appendix B- Quotations From Jones on Justification by Faith

*Our modern, anemic understanding of faith as a mere intellectual, rather commonsensical act produces the following sort of paltry language: 'By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word.' (WCF XIV, 2) That's it? Faith helps us believe ideas in scripture? No, this Confession also says it enables us to act differently, tremble, embrace promises, and accept Christ. Intellectual assent can't really be expected to do much more than that. Faith is no deep perception, contrary-to-sight grasp of God's ways, strong enough to 'subdue kingdoms.' It's just flat. It didn't hear Hebrews. All it hears is the presumed difference between faith and works and stops. (Notice, the Confession above is so fearful of acknowledging even this believing is an actual work that it tries to cover it with numerous passive verbs and participles--'accepting, receiving, and resting.' Why is Hebrews not constrained by that sort of fear?)<sup>107</sup>*

*If faith alone is invisible, then we can see that, though the Westminster Confession (and almost all other Protestant/evangelical expressions) is on the right track, it unnecessarily complicates things. Listen to this confession with Abraham's sacrifice and the later Exodus in mind: 'Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.' First, this would be like saying God delivered or vindicated the Israelites because of the instrument of invisible faith in their hearts. Nothing of the sort happened. He justified/delivered Israel from Pharaoh on his own. No need to go toward soft Pelagianism. Second, even once they were delivered and then obligated to follow his way, it seems to suggest that God looked into their hearts and saw faith and works, and though faith was side by side with works, God only saw faith, somehow a nonwork. The larger point is that scripture teaches that such faith is invisible. God can not or will not see it ... The Confession seems to get closer to the truth when it explains under the chapter on good works that, 'These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and*

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<sup>107</sup> Jones, *Dismissing Jesus*, 104.

*evidences of a true and lively faith.’ ...Apart from still misplacing the whole faith-works discussion into the Exodus itself, instead of the promised land, this version of the story still assumes that faith could be visible by itself. The relationship of tree-and-fruit is still too far apart. It doesn’t fit the passages on works above. It’s a way to fudge the passage a bit to force our understanding. We can get closer to the biblical language on faith and works if we remember that works are the incarnation of faith. They are not two different things, though they are distinct. Faith is not a tree and then this other thing comes out, the fruit, the good works. Works are faith made visible (keep in mind the distinction between Exodus and the promised land). Neither faith nor works got the Israelites out of Egypt, but both kept them in the promised land.<sup>108</sup>*

*On the last day, we will not be judged by some hidden faith. There is no such thing that counts. We will be judged by our incarnations. Saved by the Incarnation, judged by our incarnations ... Invisible faith is not faith. God refuses to count it until we lift the knife ... God will only judge incarnations.<sup>109</sup>*

*Could it really be that we’ll be judged on the way of the cross? That the faith incarnated would be taking up our crosses in those specific ways? Will our faith be judged by how we shared, delivered, loved our enemies, and showed mercy to the poor? How can we miss it? That’s exactly the point of the final judgment in Matthew 25, which we’ve seen as the summary of the way of the cross. Note, Matthew 25 is a judgment like Abraham’s, a judgment on incarnated faith. And the incarnations are all expressions of the way of the cross...<sup>110</sup>*

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 153-154.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 155.



## Appendix C - The Reformed Confessions and Penal Substitution

What follows is a collection of quotations, without comment, that contain the doctrine of penal atonement as found in standards adopted by Trinity Reformed Church.

### Penal Substitution in the Westminster Documents

#### Westminster Confession of Faith

##### Chapter 6

II. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion, with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body.

III. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.

VI. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, does in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

##### Chapter 8

IV. This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake; which that He might discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfil it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered, with which also he ascended into heaven, and

there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.

V. The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him.

## Chapter 11

I. Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.

III. Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real and full satisfaction to His Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as He was given by the Father for them; and His obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for any thing in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

## Chapter 19

VI. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life

informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourages to the one and deters from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law: and not under grace.

## Chapter 33

II. The end of God's appointing this day is for the manifestation of the glory of His mercy, in the eternal salvation of the elect; and of His justice, in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient. For then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.

## Shorter Catechism

Q. 19. What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

Q. 25. How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

Q. 27. Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

A. Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.

Q. 33. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

## **Penal Substitution In the Three Forms of Unity**

### **Belgic Confession**

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We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent his Son to assume that nature, in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same, and to bear the punishment of sin by his most bitter passion and death. God therefore manifested his justice against his Son, when he laid our iniquities upon him; and poured forth his mercy and goodness on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation, out of mere and perfect love, giving his Son unto death for us, and raising him for our justification, that through him we might obtain immortality and life eternal.

We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High Priest, after the order of Melchisedec; and that he has presented himself in our behalf before the Father, to appease his wrath by his full satisfaction, by offering himself on the tree of the cross, and pouring out his precious blood to purge away our sins; as the prophets had foretold. For it is written: He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and numbered with the transgressors, and condemned by Pontius Pilate as a malefactor, though he had first declared him innocent. Therefore: he restored that which he took not away, and suffered, the just for the unjust, as well in his body as in his soul, feeling the terrible punishment which our sins had merited; insomuch that his sweat became like unto drops of blood falling on the ground. He called out, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? and has suffered all this for the remission of our sins. Wherefore we justly say with the apostle Paul: that we know nothing, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; we count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, in whose wounds we find all manner of consolation. Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God, than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever. This is also the reason why he was called by the angel of God, Jesus, that is to say, Saviour, because he should save his people from their sins.

We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied: as David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works. And the same apostle says, that we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ. And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are,

without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours, when we believe in him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approving to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig-leaves. And verily if we should appear before God, relying on ourselves, or on any other creature, though ever so little, we should, alas! be consumed. And therefore every one must pray with David: O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

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We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law, has made an end, by the shedding of his blood, of all other sheddings of blood which men could or would make as a propitiation or satisfaction for sin and that he, having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, has instituted the sacrament of baptism instead thereof; by which we are received into the Church of God, and separated from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to him, whose ensign and banner we bear: and which serves as a testimony to us, that he will forever be our gracious God and Father...

## Heidelberg Catechism

1 He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil.

10. Q. Will God allow such disobedience and apostasy to go unpunished?

A. Certainly not. He is terribly displeased with our original sin as well as our actual sins. Therefore He will punish them by a just judgment both now and eternally,[1] as He has declared:[2] Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them (Galatians 3:10).

11. Q. But is God not also merciful?

A. God is indeed merciful,[1] but He is also just.[2] His justice requires that sin committed against the most high majesty of God also be punished with the most severe, that is, with everlasting, punishment of body and soul.

12. Q. Since, according to God's righteous judgment we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, how can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?

A. God demands that His justice be satisfied.[1] Therefore full payment must be made either by ourselves or by another.

13. Q. Can we ourselves make this payment?

A. Certainly not. On the contrary, we daily increase our debt.

14. Q. Can any mere creature pay for us?

A. No. In the first place, God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed.[1] Furthermore, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.[2]

15. Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?

A. One who is a true[1] and righteous[2] man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.[3]

16. Q. Why must He be a true and righteous man?

A. He must be a true man because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin.[1] He must be a righteous man because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others.[2]

17. Q. Why must He at the same time be true God?

A. He must be true God so that by the power of His divine nature[1] He might bear in His human nature the burden of God's wrath,[2] and might obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life.

18. Q. But who is that Mediator who at the same time is true God and a true and righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ,[1] whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (I Corinthians 1:30).

34. Q. Why do you call Him our Lord?

A. Because He has ransomed us, body and soul,[1] from all our sins, not with silver or gold but with His precious blood,[2] and has freed us from all the power of the devil to make us His own possession.

36. Q. What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?

A. He is our Mediator,[1] and with His innocence and perfect holiness covers, in the sight of God, my sin, in which I was conceived and born.

37. Q. What do you confess when you say that He suffered?

A. During all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end, Christ bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.[1] Thus, by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice,[2] He has redeemed our body and soul from everlasting damnation,[3] and obtained for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.

38. Q. Why did He suffer under Pontius Pilate as judge?

A. Though innocent, Christ was condemned by an earthly judge,[1] and so He freed us from the severe judgment of God that was to fall on us.

39. Q. Does it have a special meaning that Christ was crucified and did not die in a different way? A. Yes. Thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay on me, for a crucified one was cursed by God.

40. Q. Why was it necessary for Christ to humble Himself even unto death?

A. Because of the justice and truth of God[1] satisfaction for our sins could be made in no other way than by the death of the Son of God.[2]

43. Q. What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?

A. Through Christ's death our old nature is crucified, put to death, and buried with Him,[1] so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer reign in us,[2] but that we may offer ourselves to Him as a sacrifice of thankfulness.

44. Q. Why is there added: He descended into hell?

A. In my greatest sorrows and temptations I may be assured and comforted that my Lord Jesus Christ, by His unspeakable anguish, pain, terror, and agony, which He endured throughout all His sufferings[1] but especially on the cross, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.

56. Q. What do you believe concerning the forgiveness of sins?

A. I believe that God, because of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins,[1] nor my sinful nature, against which I have to struggle all my life,[2] but He will graciously grant me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never come into condemnation.

60. Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.[1] Although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments, have never kept any of them,[2] and am still inclined to all evil,[3] yet God, without any merit of my own,[4] out of mere grace,[5] imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.[6] He grants these to me as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and as if I myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me,[7] if only I accept this gift with a believing heart.[8]

69. Q. How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?



A. In this way: Christ instituted this outward washing[1] and with it gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly His blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of my soul, that is, all my sins.

70. Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means to receive forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, because of Christ's blood, poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross.[1] To be washed with His Spirit means to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ, so that more and more we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life.[2]

72. Q. Does this outward washing with water itself wash away sins?

A. No, only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins

76. Q. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink His shed blood?

A. First, to accept with a believing heart all the suffering and the death of Christ, and so receive forgiveness of sins and life eternal.[1] Second, to be united more and more to His sacred body through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us.[2] Therefore, although Christ is in heaven[3] and we are on earth, yet we are flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones,[4] and we forever live and are governed by one Spirit, as the members of our body are by one soul.

79. Q. Why then does Christ call the bread His body and the cup His blood, or the new covenant in His blood, and why does Paul speak of a participation in the body and blood of Christ?

A. Christ speaks in this way for a good reason: He wants to teach us by His supper that as bread and wine sustain us in this temporal life, so His crucified body and shed blood are true food and drink for our souls to eternal life.[1] But, even more important, He wants to assure us by this visible sign and pledge, first, that through the working of the Holy Spirit we share in His true body and blood as surely as we receive with our mouth these holy signs in remembrance of Him,[2] and, second, that all His suffering and obedience are as certainly ours as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins.[3]

80. Q. What difference is there between the Lord's supper and the papal mass?

A. The Lord's supper testifies to us, first, that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself accomplished on the cross once for all;[1] and, second, that through the Holy Spirit we are grafted into Christ,[2] who with His true body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father,[3] and this is where He wants to be worshipped.

126. Q. What is the fifth petition?

A. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. That is: For the sake of Christ's blood, do not impute to us, wretched sinners; any of our transgressions, nor the evil which still clings to us,[1] as we also find this evidence of Thy grace in us that we are fully

determined wholeheartedly to forgive our neighbor.[2]

## Canons of Dort

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 1. As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin, according to the words of the apostle: "that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." (Rom 3:19). And: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Rom 3:23). And: "For the wages of sin is death." (Rom 6:23).

FIRST HEAD: ARTICLE 4. The wrath of God abides upon those who believe not this gospel. But such as receive it and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith are by Him delivered from the wrath of God and from destruction, and have the gift of eternal life conferred upon them.

SECOND HEAD: ARTICLE 1. God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. And His justice requires (as He has revealed Himself in His Word) that our sins committed against His infinite majesty should be punished, not only with temporal but with eternal punishments, both in body and soul; which we cannot escape, unless satisfaction be made to the justice of God.

SECOND HEAD: ARTICLE 2. Since, therefore, we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons, or to deliver ourselves from the wrath of God, He has been pleased of His infinite mercy to give His only begotten Son for our Surety, who was made sin, and became a curse for us and in our stead, that He might make satisfaction to divine justice on our behalf.

SECOND HEAD: ARTICLE 3. The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.

SECOND HEAD: ARTICLE 4. This death is of such infinite value and dignity because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only-begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit, which qualifications were necessary to constitute Him a Savior for us; and, moreover, because it was attended with a sense of the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin.

SECOND HEAD: ARTICLE 7. But as many as truly believe, and are delivered and saved from sin and destruction through the death of Christ, are indebted for this benefit solely to the grace of God given them in Christ from everlasting, and not to any merit of their own.

SECOND HEAD: ARTICLE 8. For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of

His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them, free from every spot and blemish, to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.

#### Second Head Rejection of Errors

SECOND HEAD: PARAGRAPH 2. Who teach: That it was not the purpose of the death of Christ that He should confirm the new covenant of grace through His blood, but only that He should acquire for the Father the mere right to establish with man such a covenant as He might please, whether of grace or of works.

For this is repugnant to Scripture which teaches that "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant, that is, a new covenant ..." and that "it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. (Heb 7:22; 9:15, 17)."

SECOND HEAD: PARAGRAPH 3. Who teach: That Christ by His satisfaction merited neither salvation itself for any one, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that He merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as He might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.

For these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, in no wise acknowledge that most important fruit or benefit thereby gained and bring again out of the hell the Pelagian error.

SECOND HEAD: PARAGRAPH 4. Who teach: That the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, in as much as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of faith, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.

For these contradict the Scriptures, being: "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood (Rom 3:24-25)." And these proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole Church.

SECOND HEAD: PARAGRAPH 5. Who teach: That all men have been accepted unto the state of reconciliation and unto the grace of the covenant, so that no one is worthy of condemnation on

account of original sin, and that no one shall be condemned because of it, but that all are free from the guilt of original sin.

For this opinion is repugnant to Scripture which teaches that we are by nature children of wrath (Eph 2:3).