While Scripture forbids us to venerate any mere mortal (Rev 19:10), Paul in Rom 12:7 declares, “Pay to all what is owed to them . . . respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” There are many reasons that warrant a tribute to the Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., in 2011, the seventy-fifth year of his fruitful life. These reasons include his godly and gentlemanly character, his extensive academic contributions, his faithful and scholarly churchmanship, and his gracious humility that permeates his productive writing. Here we honor Dr. Gaffin in the spirit of Heb 13:7, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

I. Summary of the Impact of the Ministry of Dr. Gaffin

The ministry of Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., is interwoven with Westminster Theological Seminary1 and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.2 Indeed, 2011 is the seventy-fifth birthday of both the OPC and Dr. Gaffin. Further, 1965 is the year of Dr. Gaffin’s ordination in the OPC as well as his first teaching year at Westminster. And January 1, 2012, is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the death of J. Gresham Machen,3 the founder of Westminster4 and the moving

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1 For a brief survey of the history of Westminster Theological Seminary, see The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1936–1986 (Philadelphia: Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 321-24.
2 For a summary of the history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church see ibid., 7-16.
3 Marsden writes, “Machen died of pneumonia in the winter of 1937 while singlehandedly attempting to rally handfuls of supporters in the Dakotas—an ironic end to a life dedicated to bringing Christianity to the centers of culture” (George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980], 192).
4 Machen’s entry into theological conflict with “liberalism” or “modern theology” began with his address on Nov. 3, 1921, to the Ruling Elders’ Association of Chester Presbytery which was published as “Liberalism or Christianity,” The Princeton Theological Review 20 (1922): 93-117. Machen explains in his preface to his subsequent book, Christianity and Liberalism, “The interest with which the published address was received has encouraged the author to undertake a more extensive
force for the establishment of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.\(^5\)

Dr. Gaffin was born in 1936 in Peiping, China, modern-day Beijing, to parents serving as missionaries with the Independent Board of Foreign Missions and soon thereafter until their retirement with the Committee on Foreign Missions of the newly formed Orthodox Presbyterian Church.\(^6\) His father-in-law was the accomplished Westminster Old Testament professor, Dr. E. J. Young.\(^7\) As a Westminster Seminary student and the twenty-second professor to have signed the Faculty Book at Westminster, he knew five of the original faculty: Van Til, Kuiper, Stonehouse, Woolley, and Murray.\(^8\) Wilson and Machen had died; MacRae and Allis had resigned. Gaffin knew Kuiper when he was a student at Calvin College, when Kuiper was President of Calvin Seminary. The young Richard Gaffin also encountered Westminster’s other early faculty members who preceded him (Young, Skilton, Kline, Clowney, Knudsen, Shepherd, Adams, Davis, Sloat). Beyond these, he has known all of the fifty-four professors whose signatures follow his.\(^9\)

His focus on biblical theology has enabled him to excel in New Testament biblical exegesis as well as systematic theology. He occupied the Charles Krahe Chair of Biblical and Systematic Theology until his retirement. His forty-five years of teaching at Westminster have impacted some 3,000 students. He has been honored as an Emeritus Professor by the Richard B. Gaffin Lectures on Theology,

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7 “Dr. E. J. Young [was] professor of Old Testament from 1936 until his death in 1968. He had a command of more than thirty languages and wrote a three-volume commentary on Isaiah. His *Thy Word Is Truth* (1957) was perhaps the most significant book upholding the inerrancy of Scripture to that date because he insisted that Scripture define its own character. He believed we have in the Bible a history of the work of redemption, a single, ever-unfolding story, and all passages in all books of the Bible must be understood in light of this fact.” From *Westminster Theological Seminary: The Whole Counsel of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Seminary Press, 2006), xii.

8 For the beginnings of Westminster Seminary, see Stonehouse, *Machen*, 446-68.

9 The Westminster Seminary Faculty Signature Book is signed by each new faculty member at the board of trustees meeting at which the member is elected to the faculty. A facsimile was recently printed for seminary use. For an introduction to some of the early faculty of WTS, see *Westminster Theological Seminary: The Whole Counsel of God*. While many faculty members of Westminster are named in this article, it is not possible to include them all. No slight is intended thereby.
Culture and Missions, which have been endowed in perpetuity. His teaching has taken him around the globe to numerous academic institutions and missionary centers. His students, friends, and colleagues have honored his vast and important contributions to their lives and to Reformed theology with the publication of a festschrift, *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*.  

His service as presbyter in the OPC has been faithful, extensive, and marked by high standards of quality, setting a record in length of committee service that will not soon be matched. He was elected as moderator of the fifty-first General Assembly of the OPC in 1984 and has served well over twenty times as a commissioner. He has been a longstanding member of both the OPC’s Committee on Foreign Missions and its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations. 

Dr. Gaffin has written over 100 published articles and written or edited ten books. His teaching and writing have been marked by an extensive integration of orthodoxy and Reformed confessionalism with a thoroughgoing biblical theology and rigorous exegesis. His appreciation for the importance of historical theology is seen in his studies of Calvin and the Dutch theologians Kuyper, Bavinck, Ridderbos, and Vos. He has been a perceptive critic of liberal theology in the arenas of hermeneutics, Gospels and Paul studies, systematic theology, biblical theology, and New Testament introduction. His theological contributions have touched a wide range of theological concerns including union with Christ, justification, the Holy Spirit, the Sabbath, resurrection, and eschatology. He has sought to apply biblical theology and Reformed theology to the Christian life, to the church, and to missions. He has been a vigorous participant in the theological debates that have impacted Westminster including the controversies over the doctrine of justification, theonomy, and the doctrine of Scripture.

II. The Ministry of Dr. Gaffin in the Context of Westminster Seminary

There are ten distinct phases of Dr. Gaffin’s career at Westminster Theological Seminary from his student days to his retirement. Each of these will be briefly considered.

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12 For a comprehensive bibliography of Dr. Gaffin’s writings, see ibid., 577-86. Included in this count is the forthcoming book co-edited by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., and Peter A. Lillback, *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Westminster Seminary’s Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Context*, to be published by Presbyterian & Reformed. Derek W. H. Thomas’s endorsement of the festschrift for Dr. Gaffin is relevant here. He writes, “These chapters reveal the esteem with which Dr. Gaffin is held. Those of us in the Reformed community, particularly ‘professional’ theologians like myself, are indebted to Dr. Gaffin in ways that would probably embarrass him. It hasn’t been his written output so much (though crucial and indispensable, this has been relatively small); rather, it has been his quiet, resolute defense of orthodoxy rooted in enviable exegetical skills that continues to challenge us. He is a quiet giant in a theologically Lilliputian world to whom we owe an immense amount of gratitude and respect. Without him we would be immeasurably the poorer.” This article and its listing of the many writings of Dr. Gaffin does not reference the reports that he may have authored as a member of the ecclesiastical committees on which he served.
1. Gaffin’s Student Years at Westminster, 1958–1961

In 1958, Gaffin arrived on Westminster’s campus just as the faculty’s writings had begun to add to Machen’s substantial legacy. Stonehouse in 1941 had written the *Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ* emphasizing the inseparable authority of Christ with the authority of the Gospels themselves. Woolley and Stonehouse had edited the *Infallible Word* in 1946. Van Til had written *Why I Believe in God* in 1948. Young’s *Old Testament Introduction* had appeared in 1949. The scholarly works continued to flow: Murray’s *Baptism* (1952) and *Divorce* (1953), Stonehouse’s *Biographical Memoir of Machen* (1954), Murray’s *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (1955), Van Til’s *Defense of the Faith* (1955), Murray’s *Principles of Conduct* (1957), and Young’s *Thy Word is Truth* (1957). 1958 was also the year the young Gaffin married Jean, Professor E. J. Young’s daughter. By 1961 Gaffin had completed his B.D.

Central for the young Gaffin was the theological impact of Geerhardus Vos, the Princeton professor who had taught both Murray and Stonehouse. Vos did not join the new seminary, but retired from Princeton in 1932, two years after Murray left Princeton to join the newly formed Westminster faculty. Vos’s relationship with Westminster deepened through the years. When Vos died in 1949, Westminster Apologetics Professor Cornelius Van Til preached at the graveside gathering. Vos defined biblical theology as the history of revelation or the history of redemption that was to be expressed through careful biblical exegesis.

13 “A climactic event in Machen’s earlier career—occurring not long after the fortieth anniversary of his birth—was the publication of his brilliant book on *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* in the year 1921. Though the designation *opus magnum* has to be reserved for *The Virgin Birth of Christ* published in 1930, the book on Paul, in the judgment of the biographer, excels in some respects even that volume whose preparation was a principal concern for about twenty-five years” (Stonehouse, *Machen*, 315).

14 “For good or ill the momentous issue of the authority of Jesus Christ is bound up with the decisions which are reached regarding the authority and truth of the canonical gospels. Although many efforts have been put forth to discover a Jesus other than the divine Christ of the gospels to whom men might pledge fealty, the history of that search appears more and more clearly to have demonstrated its futility” (Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels to Christ* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], xi). 


16 “The first feature characteristic of supernatural revelation is *its historical progress*. God has not communicated to us the knowledge of the truth as it appears in the calm light of eternity to His own timeless vision. He has not given it in the form of abstract propositions logically correlated and systematized. The simple fact that it is the task of Systematic Theology to reproduce revealed truth in such form, shows that it does not possess this form from the beginning. The self-revelation of God is a work covering ages, proceeding in a sequence of revealing words and acts, appearing in a long perspective of time. The truth comes in the form of growing truth, not truth at rest. . . . As soon as we realize that revelation is at almost every point interwoven with and conditioned by the redeeming activity of God in its wider sense, and together with the latter connected with the natural development of the present world, its historic character becomes perfectly intelligible and ceases to cause surprise” (Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* [ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980], 7-8).
This became the hallmark of Murray as he developed the Vosian perspective.\(^\text{17}\) This became the methodological commitment of Gaffin as well.\(^\text{18}\) In 1962, shaped by the theological perspectives of Vos, Murray, and Stonehouse, Gaffin completed his Th.M. thesis, “Calvin and the Sabbath.”

In 1962 and 1963, Gaffin studied at Georg-August Universität in Göttingen. Gaffin’s years at Göttingen solidified his agreement with Van Til’s critical assessment of liberal theology and neo-Orthodoxy.\(^\text{19}\) Professor Stonehouse died suddenly in 1962, creating a position for a New Testament scholar which the young Gaffin would eventually fill. In 1963, Gaffin’s lifelong friend and many-year Westminster colleague, Professor Norman Shepherd, joined the faculty at Westminster. Gaffin also published his first scholarly piece.\(^\text{20}\)

The year 1964 saw the publication of Professor Edmund Clowney’s *Called to Ministry*. It was also the year when Meredith Kline resigned as a voting faculty member, although Kline continued to teach a course or two each academic year as a visiting faculty member until 1977. And the young Gaffin published his first study on the doctrine of Scripture, an area of lifelong theological concern.\(^\text{21}\) Gaffin began his career as a teaching fellow in New Testament the following year.

### 2. Gaffin as Teaching Fellow, 1965

The year 1965 brought two important first steps for Gaffin, his ordination in the OPC and the beginning of his teaching at Westminster, as a teaching fellow. This year also saw the formation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod. Teaching Fellow Gaffin continued to publish, authoring two reviews: review of R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* and review of H. Thielicke, *Between Heaven and Earth*.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{17}\) John Murray wrote, “Systematic theology is tied to exegesis. It coordinates and synthesizes the whole witness of Scripture on the various topics with which it deals. But systematic theology will fail of its task to the extent to which it discards its rootage in biblical theology as properly conceived and developed. . . . The fact is that only when systematic theology is rooted in biblical theology does it exemplify its true function and achieve its purpose” (“Systematic Theology, Part 2,” *WTJ* 26 [1963]: 44).

\(^{18}\) “If it is fair to view Geerhardus Vos as the father of Reformed biblical theology, then we are now at a point several generations later where we can begin assessing something of the lasting impact of that theology. . . . Among pastors, teachers and other interested persons more or less conversant with Vosian biblical theology, it’s fair to say, a fairly sharp difference of opinion presently exists. On the one side are those enthusiastic about biblical theology (or redemptive-historical interpretation of Scripture) and who see themselves in their own work as building on the insights of Vos and others (like Meredith Kline and Herman Ridderbos). Others, however, question the value of biblical theology, if they have not already concluded that it has introduced novelties detrimental to the well-being of the church. . . . I would certainly include myself among the first group just mentioned, the ‘enthusiasts’” (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards,” in *The Practical Calvinist: An Introduction to the Presbyterian and Reformed Heritage; Essays in Honor of Dr. Clair Davis* [ed. Peter A. Lillback; Fearn, U.K.: Christian Focus, 2002], 425).

\(^{19}\) Muether, *Van Til*, 135.


The early years of Gaffin’s teaching saw several generational shifts in the Westminster context. For thirty-seven years Westminster had followed a faculty governance model and operated without a president. As Edmund P. Clowney became Westminster’s first president in 1966, the legacy of faculty leadership as had been provided by Machen and Van Til gave way to a shared faculty and administration governance under the guidance of a president. President Clowney led the seminary, and thus Instructor/Professor Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., from 1966 to 1982.

There were other dramatic changes as well that shaped and impacted Gaffin’s experiences at Westminster. During these early years R. B. Kuiper died. Clair Davis became a faculty member, and C. John Miller began teaching at Westminster. 1967 saw the retirement of Gaffin’s exegetical and theological mentor, John Murray. In 1968 Karl Barth died, and faculty members and teachers Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, Norman Shepherd, and Dick Gaffin attended his memorial service at Princeton.23 More personally, 1968 saw the sudden passing of Gaffin’s father-in-law, E. J. Young, stalwart Old Testament professor and defender of the inerrancy of the Scriptures.24


Dr. Gaffin signed the Westminster Faculty Signature Book in 1968 becoming an Assistant Professor of New Testament. In 1969 he earned his Th.D. from Westminster with his dissertation entitled “Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Eschatology.” During these years, he also published articles on topics that would become key emphases of his scholarly work: hermeneutics, Paul, New Testament theology, and the Sabbath.25 And noteworthy is his first study of his guiding theologian: “Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul.”26

23 Muether, Van Til, 191.
24 E. J. Young wrote, “The Church is indeed at the crossroads. Shall she listen to God or to man? Will she receive what the Spirit says concerning inspiration, or, turning her back upon Him, will she cleave unto man? This is the choice to be made. Sad is it, however, that many do not realize the necessity for making a choice. Having their vision obscured by the dense fog that modern theology is casting over the way, many do not realize that there is a crossroad. They are not aware that they must decide which road they will follow. Unless something is done, they will travel on, taking the wrong turning, until the road leads them at last into the valley of lost hope and eternal death” (Edward J. Young, Thy Word Is Truth: Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 35).
During these years Gaffin encountered several major changes in relation to his faculty colleagues. Thus, immediately following his signature in the Faculty Book are Cecil John Miller, Robert B. Strimple, and John M. Frame. In 1971 Ray Dillard came to Westminster. In 1972 a faculty sea change in terms of personality occurred when founding faculty member and *de facto* seminary leader Cornelius Van Til retired and the energetic Harvie Conn, fresh from the Korean mission field, became a member of the Westminster faculty.

During this period Dr. Gaffin’s leadership as a presbyter manifested itself. As current Westminster professor, OPC minister, and successor of Dr. Gaffin to the Charles Krahe Chair of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Dr. Lane Tipton, explains, “Dr. Gaffin is, first and foremost, a churchman. His service to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is astounding, especially in light of his numerous seminary responsibilities. He has the longest continuous presidency of a standing committee in OPC history (Committee on Foreign Missions, 1969–present; president 1971–76, 1981–present).”

During these years, Dr. Gaffin began his service on various OPC special study committees as well.


In 1972 Assistant Professor Gaffin was promoted to Associate Professor. The following year founding faculty member Oswald T. Allis died, and the Presbyterian Church in America began. In 1975, Gaffin’s friend and theological mentor John Murray died in Scotland, and C. John Miller left the faculty. It was also the year that the Shepherd controversy erupted over the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith. The controversy that engulfed the seminary and the OPC attracted the interest of many theologians. The controversy lasted in the Westminster context until 1982.

In 1976, Vern Poythress joined Westminster’s faculty, teaching New Testament alongside Dr. Gaffin. 1977 saw the retirement of founding professor Paul Woolley. Among the five articles that Gaffin produced during this period was his contribution to the definition of the relationship between systematic and biblical theology. He also wrote “The Holy Spirit and Charismatic Gifts.” This was the first of what would total by the end of his career some twenty-two articles and books on the theme of the Holy Spirit. Dr. Gaffin continued to provide his scholarly insights...
to the OPC on these same topics as he also served on the Committee on Baptism of the Holy Spirit (1975–1976) and the Committee on Baptism and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1977). During this period Gaffin also began his service on the OPC Committee on Reformed Ecumenical Synod Matters (1973–1987; chairman, 1986).


This epoch of Dr. Gaffin’s career also had several dramatic changes in faculty relationships that each in differing ways impacted his ministry and his teaching. In 1979 Dr. Samuel Logan joined the Westminster faculty, and Dr. Strimple departed to California as Westminster California opened. Dr. Robert Godfrey and Professor John Frame also shortly thereafter joined the new faculty in California.

In 1980, in spite of the theological support and friendship provided by Dr. Gaffin and several other members of the Westminster faculty, Norman Shepherd was removed as a professor by the Westminster Board of Trustees as the controversy raged over faith and works in the Reformed doctrine of justification. A number of the Westminster faculty and staff supported the termination of Professor Shepherd’s position, including Board Member/Adjunct Professor W. Stanford Reid, Professor Robert Godfrey, Professor O. Palmer Robertson, and Seminary Librarian Arthur Kuschke. Shortly thereafter Professor Shepherd transferred his credentials from the OPC to the Christian Reformed Church. Despite theological differences between them that subsequently emerged, Gaffin and Shepherd have remained in conversation through the years.

In 1981 Leslie Sloat retired, Dr. Moisés Silva joined the faculty to teach New Testament, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church began. 1982 was the last year of Dr. Clowney’s service as Westminster’s president and the beginning of George Fuller’s service as president. President Fuller’s years of leadership were 1982–1991. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson joined the faculty in 1982 and served until 1998. The beginning of the PC (USA), the arrival of Dr. Dan McCartney to teach New Testament, and the departure of Professor Jay Adams from Westminster all occurred in 1983. Dr. Clowney left Dr. Gaffin’s beloved OPC for the PCA in

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1984, which was also the year when founding Westminster faculty member and OPC minister Paul Woolley died. In 1985 Old Testament professor Dr. Bruce Waltke joined the Westminster faculty.

In spite of the theological controversy, the many faculty changes, and his extensive publications, Dr. Gaffin remained steady in his service to the OPC. During this period he served on the Committee on Principles of Diaconal Ministry (1980), the Committee to Study the History and Development of the OPC (1982), the Committee on Hermeneutics (1984), and the Committee on the Hermeneutics of Women in Office (1985–1987). He also moderated the fifty-first OPC General Assembly in 1984.


In 1986 Dr. Gaffin changed field committees at the seminary, moving from New Testament to Systematic Theology. If one keeps in mind his interest in biblical theology as a discipline, this is an understandable transition. Moreover, the departure of Norman Shepherd from the systematics department and Gaffin’s recent intense reflection on justification, union with Christ, the history of salvation, and the ordo salutis which emerged from his biblical-theological engagement with the scriptural teaching on justification by faith made this move reasonable. During this period he had some twenty publications, including the republication of The Centrality of the Resurrection as Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology.36

Significant faculty changes again occurred during this time. In 1987 Dr. Gaffin’s deeply respected teacher and friend Cornelius Van Til died. Dr. Gaffin preached the memorial service at the seminary, entitled “The Scandal of the Cross” from 1 Cor 1:18-25.37 Dr. William Barker joined the faculty in 1987 to teach church history and later to serve as dean, and in 1989 Dr. Bill Edgar joined the faculty to teach apologetics and to carry on the extraordinary legacy of founding faculty member Cornelius Van Til.

Dr. Gaffin’s remarkable service to the OPC was evident again in this period as he served on the Committee to Study the Involvement of Men and Women in Places of Leadership in Worship Services (1988–1989) and the Committee on the Involvement of Unordained Persons in the Regular Worship Services of the Church (1990–1991). He also resumed service on the OPC’s Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (1989–2004).

37 Reflecting on what seemed to be Dr. Van Til’s penchant to go it alone, Dr. Gaffin explained, “But we should not miss his intention. His desire is not to turn the Reformed tradition into a sect, nor a ghetto mentality that wants to cut off Reformed believers from other believers and churches. The point is not that the Reformed tradition has found some kind of perfection and can no longer grow. Nor that Reformed Christians have nothing to learn from other Christians and other traditions. Rather, he is concerned for what by God’s grace the Reformed tradition has received, and the burden and the responsibility that it places upon us” (see Muether, Van Til, 227).
8. Gaffin as Professor, Biblical and Systematic Theology, 1990–1999

In 1990 Dr. Gaffin’s title changed from Professor of Systematic Theology to Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology. The change in title only made explicit what was the reality. During this time Dr. Gaffin published over twenty articles as well as the book *Calvin and the Sabbath*, released in 1998.38

Dr. Gaffin again saw important changes in the Westminster community that he had now served for thirty-five years. In 1990 Dr. Scott Oliphint began to teach apologetics. In 1991 Professor Bruce Waltke left the faculty, President George Fuller concluded his leadership, and Samuel T. Logan began his presidency. The Logan years were 1991–2005. In 1992 Dr. Douglas Green joined the Old Testament faculty. In 1993 Old Testament professor Dr. Ray Dillard died. In 1994 Dr. Peter Enns joined the faculty. 1995 saw the retirement of Dr. Knudsen. In 1996 Professor Moisés Silva left the seminary, and Professor Steve Taylor joined the faculty to teach New Testament. In 1997 long-serving New Testament professor and model of diaconal service John Skilton retired, and Dr. Tim Witmer joined the faculty as professor of practical theology. 1998 was the retirement year of Professor Harvie Conn and when Professor John Leonard joined the faculty. In 1998 Dr. Ferguson resigned to return to pastoral ministry in Scotland, although he has continued from time to time to teach courses at the seminary. Dr. Gaffin’s scholarly service to the OPC continued as he was elected to the Committee to Study the Method of Admission to the Lord’s Supper (1991–1993).

9. Gaffin as Charles Krahe Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, 1999–2008

In 1999 Dr. Gaffin assumed the title of the Charles Krahe Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology. The first holder of the Krahe Chair had been Professor of Systematic Theology Sinclair Ferguson. During this final active decade of his service Dr. Gaffin published over thirty articles and two books. The first book was entitled *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*; and the second, *God’s Word in Servant Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and the Doctrine of Scripture*.39

Faculty changes again swirled around Dr. Gaffin, whose service would reach forty-five years by the time of his full retirement from the Westminster classroom and faculty meetings. 1999 saw the death of Harvie Conn as well as the arrival to the faculty of Old Testament Professor Mike Kelly. Dr. Carl Trueman joined the faculty in 2001 to teach church history with the retirement of Clair Davis after thirty years of teaching at Westminster. In 2002 Church History Professor Dr. Jeff Jue joined the faculty, as well as Sandy Finlayson who entered the faculty as the seminary’s librarian. In 2003 Dr. Lane Tipton was added to the faculty in

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systematics, as the successor to Dr. Gaffin in the Charles Krahe Chair of Biblical and Systematic Theology. In 2005 the seminary’s first president, Dr. Clowney, died. This same year Dr. Sam Logan’s presidency concluded and Dr. Peter Lillback became president. Lillback’s leadership years have been 2005 to the present. In 2007 David Garner joined the faculty in systematic theology. In 2008 Professor Steve Taylor departed from the seminary.

During 2006–2008 controversy again broke out centered on the writings of Old Testament Professor Peter Enns. Once again Dr. Gaffin, Westminster’s historic and stalwart defender of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, took a leading part in the controversy that centered on Professor Enns’s approach to hermeneutics and doctrine of Scripture. After lengthy discussions, debates, and board and faculty votes, Professor Enns resigned in 2008. As a means of clarifying where Westminster Seminary and its Board of Trustees stand on the hermeneutical and doctrinal issues that emerged from this controversy, the “Affirmations and Denials” on the doctrine of Scripture were composed, debated, and adopted by board and faculty.40 This document was proposed by President Lillback and written by Professors Gaffin and Poythress. It was engaged by the board and faculty and edited at length and ultimately adopted by the Westminster faculty and board. Thus, even during his final year of full-time service, Professor Gaffin played a pivotal role in the life of the seminary.

His service for the OPC continued as he labored on the Committee on the Doctrine of Justification (2004–2006).

10. Gaffin as Professor Emeritus, Biblical and Systematic Theology, 2008–Present

As Dr. Gaffin became Professor Emeritus of Biblical and Systematic Theology in 2008, he continued to teach part-time offering his much beloved course, Acts and Paul. So although retired, he was still not retired. Dare we say he was already retired, but not yet?

In 2009 the Westminster faculty saw the departure of New Testament Professor Dan McCartney and the arrival of the accomplished biblical scholar and biblical theologian, Dr. Greg Beale. And in 2011 the seventy-sixth name was added to the Faculty Signature book when Dr. Brandon Crowe joined the faculty. Both Dr. Beale and Dr. Crowe join Dr. Poythress in the area of New Testament studies. The biblical theology and systematic courses taught by Dr. Gaffin continue to be carried by Dr. Oliphint, Dr. Garner, and Dr. Tipton. Thus, the Gaffin legacy rests safely in these professors’ careful commitment to Scripture and the great Westminster legacy that descends from Vos, Murray, and Gaffin to themselves. Moreover, I am confident that Dr. Gaffin’s service to his church and to his seminary will continue until the Lord calls him to glory.

40 The Affirmations and Denials can be found on the Westminster Theological Seminary webpage at http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/statements/affirmationsanddenials.html.
III. Illustrative Selections of the Main Theological Emphases of Dr. Gaffin

There have been several key emphases in the life work of Dr. Gaffin. These are impossible to explore fully here. Yet a sense of Dr. Gaffin’s main commitments and key insights can at least be offered. So through selections from his writings, twelve of his main emphases can be illustrated: (1) the Doctrine of Scripture, (2) Union with Christ, (3) Hermeneutics, (4) Biblical Theology, (5) Salvation and the Work of Christ, (6) the Ordo Salutis, (7) the Holy Spirit, (8) Resurrection, (9) Eschatology, (10) Sabbath, (11) Ecclesiology, and (12) Christian Ministry.

1. The Doctrine of Scripture

There are some thirteen writings by Dr. Gaffin relating to the doctrine of Scripture. Dr. Gaffin consistently emphasizes the divine origin of Scripture. He writes,

The basic thrust . . . is plain: Scripture, like Christ, is both truly human and truly divine. Yet in the case of Scripture, as for Christ, these two factors are not equally ultimate, the priority and originating initiative belong to the divine, not the human. Specifically, the Word, in his antecedent identity as the Word, became flesh; and God is the primary author of the Bible, in distinction from the secondary human authors.

Another important insight from Gaffin’s writings on the doctrine of Scripture is how the New Testament canon, textual criticism, and the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration relate. In other words, can we really have a reliable, infallible, and inerrant Word from God if no one possesses an original copy of the apostles’ writings and the existing copies are not letter for letter and word for word identical? Gaffin explains,


The questions of canon and of the original text of the New Testament documents are not of the same order. To decide between variant readings is not to be involved, as it were, with the canon issue on its smallest scale.

The key to the categorical difference between these two concerns—text and canon—lies in the historically progressive and differentiated character of revelation. Inscripturated revelation did not come straight down from heaven into history, already written and all at once. The Bible in this respect differs markedly from the claims made, for instance, for the Book of Mormon (a translation of gold tablets all unearthed at the same time) or the Koran (dictated to Muhammad in a series of night visions over a relatively short time span). Scripture, instead, originates in history, through the full personal involvement and instrumentality of various human writers, over a long period of time, and with a great variety of literary genres. The Bible is not uniform, a monolithic set of words or sequence of statements. In its unity it is manifold, multiplex (see Eph. 3:10).

The theological importance—even necessity—of this consideration should be appreciated. Its diverse and progressive character is intrinsic to biblical revelation, bound up with the ongoing movement of the history of redemption and the accompanying correlation, already discussed, between revelatory word and redemptive act. To use a figure, inscripturated revelation is not one large gold ingot produced at one point in time but a variety of pure gold nuggets given over an extended period of time.

This figure helps to identify the qualitative rather than the merely quantitative, arithmetic difference between the questions of canon and text. The concern of the former is to identify the collection of gold nuggets—what gold nuggets belong to the collection? The concern of the latter is the transmission of the collection and the removal of the specks of tarnish that have built up on this or that nugget. The difference between the canon question and textual criticism is, in a word, the difference between recognizing the gold and removing the tarnish.

It should not be thought, then, that the logic of an approach to the issue of canon that stresses the apriori of faith, like that adopted above, demands the superiority of either the Received or Majority texts of the Greek New Testament. It is wrong-headed to suppose that, if we admit uncertainty about particular textual variants or recognize that the Majority text is not the best and needs to be corrected, we are then denying God’s wise and providential oversight of the transmission of the text and so are pitched into uncertainty about the New Testament canon as a whole.

In this regard, it needs to be remembered that plenary, verbal inspiration (inspiration at the level of words and extending to every word) does not mean that every word in Scripture has the same semantic importance or is equally crucial to its meaning. Nor does verbal inspiration mean that we must have every word of an autograph if we are to understand any word.

The issue of textual criticism needs to be kept in balance. Certainly its principles are not to be canonized and are always open to review and even revision. But as often pointed out, if we adopt any one of the current, mutually conflicting theories of the transmission of the New Testament text and reconstruct, in terms of that particular theory, the best and worst texts, the resulting differences are minimal and do not affect any substantial element of biblical teaching. This observation applies in particular to the differences between the Majority text (or the Received text) and a critically reconstructed text. Giving full, legitimate scope to textual criticism still enables us to continue confessing that God’s inscripturated Word, “by His singular care and providence,” has been “kept pure in all ages.”

2. Union with Christ

Dr. Gaffin has sought to elevate the concept of union with Christ as the core of the believer’s salvation. The great saving benefits of Christ are not given separately in a certain order to believers. Rather, they are the multiple, simultaneous blessings that belong to the believer who is “in Christ” or has union with Christ. Gaffin writes,

The nature of our union with Christ is such that justification and sanctification coexist. . . . Justification and sanctification are inseparable because “Christ cannot be torn into parts.” Or as Calvin puts these considerations later (3.16.1—798), “Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness [justification] in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces.” The “triangulation” of union, justification, and sanctification could hardly be expressed more clearly; the controlling priority of Spirit-worked union is plain (“you must first possess Christ”), involving the integral inseparability, without confusion, of justification and sanctification. There is no partial union with Christ, no sharing in only some of his benefits. If believers do not have the whole Christ, they have no Christ; unless they share in all of his benefits they share in none of them.

3. Hermeneutics

Dr. Gaffin’s writings have focused on hermeneutics or the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments. The process of interpreting the Bible requires us to understand that the Bible is a unity because of its focus on God’s saving work in Christ that unfolds in an organic or holistic manner in the history of redemption that is revealed in the Bible. Dr. Gaffin explains,

It is not always recognized how vitally concerned the Protestant Reformation was with matters of biblical interpretation. . . . The Reformers, realizing that nothing less than

the gospel itself was at stake, insisted that the text had but one true sense, and they were intent on determining that sense. Further, the sola scriptura itself is pointedly hermeneutical. It is directed against the notion that the ongoing body of tradition (interpretation) controlled and validated by the teaching office of Rome is necessary for a right understanding of the Bible. This hermeneutical thrust Luther made explicit in the well-known dictum that Scripture interprets itself. . . . To say that Scripture interprets itself means that it has one pervasive sense—a unified meaning. Because it is God’s word, the Bible is a unity, so that any one part has its place within the unified teaching of the whole. A particular passage is located within a pattern of God-given contexts which can only serve to clarify. The pervasive meaning of Scripture should be brought to bear on any single portion. Biblical revelation is self-elucidating because it has an organic, unified structure. . . . Ultimately this structure is not literary but is resident in the subject matter itself, present in the marked and irreducible variety of literary forms which Scripture displays. The basic structure and unity of biblical revelation are the structure and unity of the history of revelation which it faithfully records. And the structure of the history of revelation, as the ongoing attestation and interpretation of the redemptive history that centers in Christ, is that of an organically unfolding process of a maturing organism. Theology which is rigorously and methodically controlled by this perspective will not only be prone to reach thoroughly biblical conclusions; it will also tend to begin with the right questions. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the biblical-theological method, or, better, the redemptive-historical orientation exemplified by Vos, is, to date, the most fruitful and pointedly biblical realization of the Reformation insistence that Scripture interprets Scripture.47

4. Biblical Theology

Dr. Gaffin has published numerous items pursuing the idea and importance of biblical theology48 and its relationship with systematic theology.49 He writes,

47 Gaffin, ed., Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, xvii-xviii.
I hope to help show here a deep compatibility exists between the Westminster Standards and biblical theology. ... I begin with two observations of a more general sort pertaining to the often alleged or perceived novelty of biblical theology. Without for a moment wanting to slight the epoch-making value of Vos’s work, for which my admiration continues undiminished, it has always been important to me to recognize his continuity with those who came before him. Contrary to the impression occasionally left by some, it is not as if the church were stumbling about in interpretive darkness until he burst onto the scene, lightening-like, toward the close of the 19th century. In fact, already in the second century in the first great struggle for its existence, the battle with Gnosticism, the church had impressed upon it indelibly the controlling insight, as much as any, of biblical theology, namely that salvation resides ultimately not in who God is or what he has said, but in what he has done in history, once for all, in Christ. Virtually from its beginning on and more or less consistently, the church has been incipiently biblical-theological.

Narrowing the scope to Reformed theology Vos himself has observed that it “has from the beginning shown itself possessed of a true historic sense in the apprehension of the progressive character of the deliverance of truth. Its doctrine of the covenants on its historical side represents the first attempt at constructing a history of revelation and may be justly considered the precursor of what is at present called biblical theology.”

5. Salvation and the Work of Christ

For Dr. Gaffin, salvation is entirely bound up with God’s grace in Christ and his saving work. This salvation is applied to those who are in union with Christ. Gaffin has published several pieces on salvation and justification. He writes,
... few will dispute that union with Christ in his resurrection, being united to the resurrected Christ by faith, grounds in its entirety Paul’s teaching on sanctification and the renewal of the Christian. But union with Christ as resurrected is not only renovative. That union also has judicial or forensic significance, as does Christ’s own resurrection.

The judicial importance of Christ’s resurrection is plain from Romans 4:25, “who was delivered up for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.” Here a direct connection is drawn between the resurrection and justification. In the light of the immediate and broader context of Paul’s teaching, that connection is best understood as follows. As the representative sin bearer and righteous substitute (Rom. 3:25; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21), in his full obedience culminating in his death (Phil. 2:8), Christ’s resurrection is his own justification in the sense that the resurrection itself is God’s de facto declarative recognition, on the ground of that obedience, of his righteousness (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30). As an event, his resurrection, we may say, “speaks” and it does so judicially, in a legal manner. For Christians, then, Christ’s justification, given with his resurrection, becomes theirs; when united, by faith, to the resurrected Christ, that is, the justified Christ, his righteousness is reckoned as theirs or imputed to them.54

6. The Ordo Salutis

Dr. Gaffin’s interest in biblical theology has enabled him to reassess the doctrine of salvation that often places its focus on the order of the specific benefits we have from Christ and the Holy Spirit in our experience of saving grace. 55 But this approach can make the order, timing, and character of the benefits more central than Christ himself. Thus, a better understanding of the history of salvation and the order of salvation is needed, a better way of conceiving of redemption accomplished in history and redemption applied in the lives of God’s people. Dr. Gaffin writes,

In his magisterial book on Paul’s theology Herman Ridderbos observes repeatedly and on a variety of topics, sometimes explicitly, more often implicitly, that the apostle’s interest is primarily the history of salvation (historia salutis), not the order of salvation (ordo salutis). This distinction, its formulation apparently original with Ridderbos, signals not only what Paul’s controlling concern is, redemptive-historical, but also what it is not. Why the negative as well as the positive? In large part because of his perception, expressed already in the opening pages, that increasingly since the Reformation preponderant interest within Lutheran and Reformed theology and church life has shifted to the personal appropriation of salvation, to questions of ordo salutis, and so moved away from where it was for Luther and Calvin, like Paul and following him, on salvation as revealed once for all in Christ’s death and resurrection (historia salutis).

This perception has validity, as long as what is primarily the case is in view, both for Paul and the Reformation tradition. As he proceeds, however, Ridderbos tends to

leave the impression on a variety of topics that Paul has little or no interest in issues of ordo salutis. This has the effect, as I will try to show, of unnecessarily widening the difference between Paul and Calvin, on the one hand, and subsequent Reformed theology, on the other.

At this juncture it may be helpful to make a clarifying comment about the expression ordo salutis, at least as I am using it here. It can have two distinct senses, one broader, the other more specific. The latter, more technical sense is the more common and has in view the logical and/or causal, or even temporal “order” or sequence of various saving acts and benefits, as unfolded within the actual life of the individual sinner. It may also be used, however, without having yet settled on a particular “order” or even that there is one in the sense just indicated, to refer, more generally, to the ongoing application of salvation, in distinction from its once-for-all accomplishment. Understood in this sense, the historia salutis/ordo salutis distinction reformulates the classic Reformed distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, but in a way that accents the redemptive-historical nature of the accomplishment (imperation) and so the need to keep that in view in discussing issues of application (individual appropriation).

It is important not to confuse or otherwise equivocate on these two senses of ordo salutis. The narrower concept is subject to the criticism of tending in effect, in some instances more than others, to focus on ordo at the expense of salutis, of being so preoccupied with various acts of application in their logical/causal and even temporal sequence and interconnections that salvation itself, in its wholeness, becomes eclipsed, of so concentrating on the benefits of Christ’s work in their variety and mutual relations, that he, in his person and work, recedes into the background. However, in making such criticism, particularly from a redemptive-historical perspective, we must avoid the opposite extreme of depreciating all ordo salutis issues as unnecessary or even inappropriate. In fact, it is not putting it too strongly, the integrity of the gospel itself stands or falls with the ordo salutis in the broader sense, equivalent to the application of salvation (applicatio salutis) and distinct from its accomplishment. . . .

. . . I turn to Calvin . . . Book 3 of the Institutes (3.1.1), “First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us.” . . . Calvin is saying something like, “the redemptive-historical Christ, the Christ of redemptive history, as often conceived, is not enough”; in fact, he says, this Christ is “useless and of no value to us”! . . . It should be apparent, then, that Christ is not only active in redemption accomplished but also in redemption applied; the one just as much as the other is his work. In fact, from the perspective of his present exaltation the distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, between historia salutis and ordo salutis begins to blur. The way it is often put, that accomplishment is Christ’s task, application the Holy Spirit’s, is helpful but can also be misleading. The latter, no less than the former, is Christ-centered.56

7. The Holy Spirit

Dr. Gaffin has emphasized the Holy Spirit and his work in his writings,57 with some twenty publications on themes related to the Spirit.58 Here two selections

are given to illustrate his main emphases concerning the Holy Spirit. First, Gaffin’s perspective on the Holy Spirit issues a call for believers to understand that the Spirit’s renewing grace is a manifestation of the presence of the risen Christ. Then, second, we will see how, along with Gaffin’s underscoring of the Holy Spirit’s pivotal work in the Christian, he nevertheless simultaneously has developed a strong cessationist view with regard to the continuing reality of the Pentecostal and New Testament charismatic gifts of the Spirit.

(1) This first selection emphasizes the biblical-theological and eschatological impact of Christ’s resurrection on the present ministry of the Holy Spirit in believers.

What must also be recalled here—by now, after nearly a century, a virtual consensus across the broad front of NT scholarship—is the eschatological dimension or context of this Christocentric focus. Paul (and the other NT writers), faithful to the kingdom proclamation of Jesus, have a broadened, already/not-yet understanding of eschatology. For them eschatology is defined in terms of his first as well as his second coming. Specifically Christ’s resurrection is an innately eschatological event—in fact, the key inaugurating event of eschatology. His resurrection is not an isolated event in the past but, in having occurred in the past, belongs to the future consummation and from that future has entered history.

That is perhaps clearest in 1 Cor 15:20, 23, in context: Christ’s resurrection is the “firstfruits.” In his resurrection the resurrection harvest that belongs to the end of history is already visible. His resurrection is the guarantee of the future bodily resurrection of believers not simply as a bare sign but as “the actual beginning of the general epochal event.” Pressed—if present, say, at a modern-day prophecy conference—as to

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when the event of bodily resurrection for believers will take place, the first thing the apostle would likely want to say is that it has already begun.

We should anticipate, then, given the overall coherence of his teaching, that Paul’s understanding of the Spirit will prove to be “eschatological in nature and Christocentric in quality.” Without denying the presence of other determining factors, Christology and eschatology especially shape the matrix of his pneumatology. The death and resurrection of Christ in their eschatological significance control Paul’s teaching on the work of the Spirit.

The preceding comments provide a framework for focusing on the final clause of 1 Cor 15:45: “The last Adam became life-giving Spirit.” I do so primarily for two reasons. (1) In all of Paul, as far as I can see, there is no assertion about the Spirit’s activity as pivotal, even momentous, as this. (2) On the other hand it does not appear to me to have received the attention it deserves, especially among interpreters with an evangelical commitment.

“The life-giving Spirit” is not a timeless description of Christ. Rather, he “became” such (ἐγένετο). There is little room for doubt about the time point of this becoming. It is his resurrection or—more broadly, together with the ascension—his exaltation. The flow of reasoning in chap. 15 makes that virtually certain. For one thing it would make no sense for Paul to argue for the resurrection of believers as he does if Christ were “life-giving” by virtue, say, of his preexistence or incarnation—or any consideration other than his resurrection. This is not to suggest that his preexistence and incarnation are unimportant or nonessential for Paul, but they lie outside his purview here. Expressed epigrammatically in the terms of the chapter itself: As “firstfruits” of the resurrection harvest (vv. 20, 23) Christ is “life-giving Spirit” (v. 45); as the life-giving Spirit he is “the firstfruits.”

According to v. 47 the last Adam as “the second man” is now, by virtue of ascension, “from heaven.” He is “the heavenly one” (v. 48) whose image, by virtue of his own resurrection, believers will bear fully at the time of their bodily resurrection (v. 49; cf. Phil 3:20-21). All told, then, the last Adam, as he has become “the life-giving Spirit,” is specifically the exalted Christ.

Certainly in the immediate context this life-giving contemplates Christ’s future action when he will resurrect the mortal bodies of believers (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22). It seems difficult to deny, however, that his present activity is implicitly in view as well. That the resurrected Christ, as life-giver, currently exists in a suspended state of inactivity would be a strange notion indeed to attribute to Paul. And in fact, as he explicitly teaches elsewhere, believers have already been raised with Christ. The resurrection life of the believer in union with Christ is not only future but present (e.g. Rom 6:24; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:5-6; Col 3:1-4). Christ, as resurrected and ascended, is already active in the Church in the life-giving, resurrection power of the Spirit. And that activity is rooted in whom he has become and now is: “the life-giving Spirit.”

Paul’s inherently eschatological conception of the Spirit’s activity is on the face of this passage. The sustained link here between the Spirit and resurrection, the primal eschatological event, is hardly merely incidental. The eschatological aeon, the resurrection order, is by way of eminence “spiritual.” That is the virtual sense in v. 46 of the generalizing expression “the spiritual.” Elsewhere the instrumentality of the Spirit in the resurrection is explicit in Rom 8:11 (cf. 1:4) and implied in 1 Cor 6:14 (“through his [God’s] power”); Rom 6:4 (“through the Father’s glory”).

That this eschatological aspect is inalienable, not waiting to be assumed by the Spirit only in the future at Christ’s return, is clear from the well-known metaphors Paul uses to describe the present work of the Spirit in the Church and within believers. He is “the firstfruits” of their full adoption to be realized in “the redemption (= the
resurrection) of the body” (Rom 8:23). Similarly he is “the deposit” toward the resurrection body (2 Cor 5:5). Again, in his sealing activity as “the Spirit of promise” he is the “deposit” on the Church’s “inheritance” (Eph 1:14), an unambiguously eschatological reality (cf. 4:30). Note how effectively both metaphors capture the already/not-yet structure of Paul’s eschatology, the partial yet nonetheless consummate quality of the Spirit’s work in the believer. That present experience is of a piece with the full experience of the Spirit’s activity at Christ’s return and so anticipates that future activity.  

(2) This second selection illustrates Gaffin’s understanding of the cessation of the New Testament gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps by now it is clear that what happened at Pentecost was not first of all or basically a matter of the special, striking experience of the 120 Christians there. Even less is it the model for a postconversion, second-blessing experience of the Spirit to be sought by all believers in every generation of the church. Here we find ourselves at odds with a viewpoint that has had great influence and is still widely held, both in the older Pentecostal denominations and the present charismatic movement. We ought, then, to give some attention to it for the bearing it has on the subject of spiritual gifts.

The controlling point in the position taken here is that Pentecost is to be understood first of all as part of the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption (historia salutis) rather than as a part of its ongoing, continual application (ordo salutis). Obviously the two are intimately related and inseparable, but they must not be confused. To do so necessarily jeopardizes the absolute sufficiency and finality of Christ’s work. As I have already tried to show, the baptism with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is a unique event of epochal significance in the history of redemption. Therefore it is no more capable of being repeated or serving as a model for individual Christian experience than are the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, with which it is so integrally conjoined as part of a single complex of events (see again Acts 2:32f.).

8. Resurrection

Throughout Dr. Gaffin’s writings there is an accent on the centrality of the resurrection of Christ for the understanding of Christianity. He has written seven works that engage or focus on this theme. To gain a sense of Dr. Gaffin’s emphasis on Jesus’ resurrection from a biblical-theological perspective consider the following written by Professor David Garner.

59 Gaffin, “‘Life-Giving Spirit’,” 575, 578-79.
For Paul, soteriology is exhaustively christological, a fact that he expresses unambiguously in the opening of his letter to the Romans. In his reflections on Romans 1:3-4, Richard Gaffin builds on Murray’s biblical theology, challenging the traditional ontological interpretation (cf. e.g., Calvin, Hodge) of this formative passage. With regard to Romans 1:3, Calvin insists, “two things must be found in Christ, in order that we may obtain salvation in him, even divinity and humanity.” Following in the footsteps of more recent Reformed biblical scholarship, Gaffin defends his mentors’ redemptive-historical interpretation (cf. e.g., Vos, Ridderbos, Murray), where the Christological entrée to this epistle unveils the messianic sonship of Jesus Christ. In other words, this text does not unpack the hypostatic union, as Calvin proposed; instead, it advances a transitional, redemptive-historical point: Christ’s own adoption, or in characteristic Gaffin-esque clarity, Jesus’ “judicially constitutive declaration of sonship.” According to Gaffin, Christ in his resurrection begins a “new and unprecedented phase of divine sonship. The eternal Son of God, who was born, lived and died [kata sarka], has been raised [kata pneuma] and so, in his messianic identity (of the seed of David), has become what he was not before: the Son of God in power.”

9. Eschatology

There are some seven writings in Dr. Gaffin’s works that focus on eschatology, although this is a theme that penetrates all aspects of his writings. He explains,

The Reformation doctrine of justification recaptures the eschatological heart of the gospel. This appreciation, largely implicit and however often compromised or inadequately appreciated, is definite and clear in its effect. In fact, it probably does not overstate, this rediscovery is perhaps what is most important about the Reformation soteriologically. Certainly nothing is more important.

For instance, in a verse like Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” Luther and others, instinctively and implicitly if not explicitly, heard an eschatological pronouncement. They understood that the “now” . . . is nothing less than eschatological in its force; it is the “now” of eschatological realization.

Late medieval Roman Catholicism left the future verdict at the final judgment the ever anxious and uncertain outcome of the Christian life. In contrast, the Reformers grasped that the verdict, belonging at the end of history, has been brought forward and already pronounced on believers in history, and so, constituting the certain and stable basis for the Christian life, provides unshakeable confidence in the face of the final judgment.


64 For example, see Gaffin, “The Holy Spirit and Eschatology” (1989), 14-28.
This Reformation understanding, I take it, is true to the New Testament and, in particular, to Paul’s teaching that believers have already been justified by faith. In this chapter that teaching, eschatological to its core, is not my primary concern, and will be proposed rather than argued. . . . Instead, in light of clear New Testament teaching on justification as realized and a present reality for believers, I want here to focus on the question of justification as future. Addressed for the most part as an issue in Paul’s teaching, what about justification and the “not yet” of our salvation? Should we, according to him, think of our justification as in some sense still future? Should we, in other words, see his teaching on justification in terms of his already-not yet outlook on salvation as a whole and within what I take to be the controlling anthropological grid provided by the “inner self”-“outer self” distinction explicit in 2 Corinthians 4:16?

It might seem, at least as an initial reaction, that our answer should be in the negative, and an emphatic “no” at that. The reason for such a reaction is not only understandable but bound to be appreciated. To speak of justification as in any sense future or “not yet” appears to take away from its “already,” definitive character. To view it as in some sense still future seems to threaten its present absolute finality and so to undermine its settled certainty in the life of the Christian. It would surely betray or misrepresent Paul, then if anything I say here would be heard or allowed to call into question that settled certainty. That is no more or less the case, for instance, than it would be to call into question for him, because the resurrection of the body is still future, the settled certainty of the believer’s already having been resurrected with Christ (e.g. Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 3:1; Gal. 2:20). . . .

Secondly, few will dispute that union with Christ in his resurrection, being united to the resurrected Christ by faith, grounds in its entirety Paul’s teaching on sanctification and the renewal of the Christian. But union with Christ as resurrected is not only renovative. That union also has judicial or forensic significance, as does Christ’s own resurrection.

The judicial importance of Christ’s resurrection is plain from Romans 4:25, “who was delivered up for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.” Here a direct connection is drawn between the resurrection and justification. . . .

. . . how are bodily resurrection and final judgment related? So far as Paul is concerned, it seems clear (as Larger Catechism 88 affirms), especially in the light of 2 Corinthians 5:10, that the resurrection precedes the final judgment. In other words, believers, in union with Christ, will appear at the final judgment as already resurrected bodily. That is, they will appear there in their “spiritual” bodies, that is, bodies that are enlivened and transformed by the Holy Spirit and so are as imperishable as they are glorified and powerful (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Christians will appear for final judgment as fully conformed, by bodily resurrection, to the image of their brother, the exalted Christ (v. 49; cf. Rom. 8:29).

This carries an implication, as important as it is obvious, for understanding, and for ministering, Paul’s teaching on justification as future. If believers appear at the final judgment as already resurrected bodily, then they will appear there as already openly justified. Their future justification, as we have been speaking of it, will have already taken place in their resurrection, with the de facto declarative, forensic, justifying significance it has in Paul, as we have pointed out above. This means, further, we may say, that, for believers, the final judgment, as it is to be according to works, will have for them a reality that is reflective of and further attests their justification already openly manifested in their bodily resurrection.

It would be perverse to an extreme, then, to read Paul’s teaching on the final judgment, as well as my discussion of it here, as leaving Christians in this life, in the face of death, uncertain of the future—unable to know for sure the outcome for them at the
final judgment and wondering whether they have produced enough “good works” in this life for a favorable verdict entitling them to eternal life. To the contrary, everything at stake here including their assurance, depends on Christ, specifically his finished righteousness imputed to them, in union with him, and received by faith alone. At the same time, Paul’s teaching on the final judgment and the role it will have for believers does put in ultimate perspective the integral, unbreakable bond he sees between justification and sanctification, and on the truth that faith as “the alone instrument of justification . . . is . . . not alone in the person justified” (Westminster Confession of Faith, II:2).65

10. Sabbath

Seven of Dr. Gaffin’s writings address the question of the continuing validity of the Sabbath for the Christian.66 For example, he writes,

From its beginning the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has had a concern for the sanctity of the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath, a concern which is not merely traditional but an element in its confessional commitment (Westminster Confession of Faith, XXI:7,8). I hope in this chapter to help maintain the vitality of that concern, in the face of signs that it is weakening and at a time when it is being challenged as never before.

In the perennial Sabbath-Sunday debate, From Sabbath to Lord’s Day unquestionably represents a significant milestone. In the words of its editor (D. A. Carson), “it is not merely a symposium but a unified, cooperative effort” . . . an effort calculated above all to convince the reader that the Lord’s Day is not the Christian Sabbath. Even those, like myself, who remain unconvinced are bound to value the care, balance and, for the most part, the thoroughness with which this project has been planned and carried out. . . .

It would be perverse to suggest that the Sabbath-Sunday issue can be settled solely on the basis of Heb. 3:7ff., and there is always the danger of reading into the passage what is not there. But it would be equally remiss to overlook or minimize relevant exegetical givens, whether explicit or implied.

Rest for the church in Hebrews 3–4, in gist, is:

(a) Eschatological,
(b) Entirely future,
(c) Called Sabbath-resting and
(d) Grounded in God’s rest at creation.

1. In view of (a) and (c) the (weekly) Sabbath, whatever else may be its significance(s) and function(s), is an eschatological sign or type, a pointer to eschatological rest. To deny this is to suppose that the writer, as we have seen, not only apparently coined

65  Gaffin, “Justification and Eschatology” in Justified in Christ, 1, 6, 21.
the term “Sabbath-resting” for eschatological rest himself but also connected that rest with Gen. 2:2-3 (which elsewhere in Scripture is only used for instituting the weekly Sabbath), yet that he did so without any thought of the weekly ordinance—a rather unlikely supposition.

2. In view of (b) the weekly Sabbath continues in force under the new covenant. To deny this is to suppose that for the writer the weekly sign has ceased, even though the reality to which it points is still future—again an unlikely supposition. What rationale could explain such a severing, by cessation, of sign and unfulfilled reality?

3. In view of (d) the weekly Sabbath is a “creation ordinance.” To deny this is to disagree with the writer’s own interpretive treatment of Gen. 2:2. He finds there not only a description of God’s rest at creation but the (eschatological) design and mandate that mankind enter and share it (4:3b-4, 6a). Accordingly, the sign pointing to the reality mandated at creation is itself grounded in that mandate. As eschatology is the goal of protology, so the eschatological sign has a protological basis. There are no offsetting considerations to this inference in the context.

4. Sum: For the writer the weekly Sabbath is an eschatological sign, grounded in creation and continuing under the new covenant until the consummation. He does not support the view that because of the “spiritual rest” already brought by Christ weekly Sabbath-keeping is no longer necessary or even appropriate. The notion of an evangelical or Christian Sabbath is entirely in harmony with the teaching of Hebrews 3–4.67

11. Ecclesiology

Dr. Gaffin’s concern for the church is evident in his many efforts to serve on the committees of the General Assembly of the OPC. This concern is evident as well in his writings which specifically point to aspects of living in the church.68 The following message was given by Dr. Gaffin on various occasions through the years including at my ordination service.

No Rolling Stones

What is the church? What is the purpose of the church? What does it mean for me to belong to the church? These are perennial questions, and each generation of Christians needs to be ready with informed answers. That readiness is so essential not only because such answers are basic to our identity as believers in Jesus Christ, but in every generation wrong answers crop up—answers that in varying ways mislead the church and blur its identity.

A key New Testament passage about the church is 1 Peter 2:4-5. One way we may usefully reflect on its teaching is to note, in contrast, what the church is not. This passage, we may say, shows us that the church is not made of rolling stones (believers are not the rolling stones!). That’s true in two senses.

**Built On Christ**

One of the favorite New Testament pictures or models for the church is a building; the church is God’s house. The church is the great construction job that God, the master architect and builder, has going in the period between the resurrection and return of Jesus (see also especially Eph. 2:19-22). Specifically, here Peter says that believers, together with Christ, are the building material, and a most remarkable construction material at that—living stone. The uniqueness of the church-house is that as “living stones” they form a “spiritual house.” Christians are to understand themselves as those stones, “dead in your transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1,5), that God, the sovereign Savior, has picked up off the rubble heap of sinful humanity, enlivened by his Spirit, and built together with Christ.

But we must be sure not to miss the special place, the primacy, that Jesus has in this house; he is the living stone. As Peter immediately adds (verses 6-7), he is the “cornerstone” (cf. Eph. 2:20); he is the foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11). Believers are built together with Christ only as they are built on him, because they rest on and are supported by him. It is not the other way around; Christ does not rest on them.

How is Christ the foundation, the solid rock, on which the church is being built? Peter is clear on that—because of his death (verse 24) and resurrection (1:3). Christ is not the foundation-stone because of his wisdom (though he is a profound teacher) or because of the example he sets (though we are to “follow in his steps,” verse 21), but because of his sacrifice, because he died for our sins. Christ is the foundation of the church because he did for us the one, absolutely necessary thing that we can’t do for ourselves, and he did it perfectly, once for all.

So, first of all, believers are not rolling stones in this sense: they are those stones firmly built on Christ, fixed upon the solid rock of his righteousness. We have been bonded to Jesus Christ and nothing can detach us from him; as Paul assures us, not even death itself can separate us from his love (Rom. 8:38-39).

**Built Together**

Peter’s word picture enables us to see another, second aspect in which believers are not rolling stones; this aspect, we must appreciate, is inseparable from the first.

In the church-house, as in any building, not only are there perpendicular forces, the vertical lines of support that run down to the foundation, but there are also horizontal lines to consider. The stability of any structure depends as well on lateral ties, cross-cutting relationships between the various parts.

We must recognize, then, that our relationship to Christ cannot be separated from our relationships with other believers. Certainly the two must not be confused, the vertical with the horizontal. That often happens today, in the confused notion, for instance, that I find Christ in other human beings as such (“Christ is my fellow man”). That sort of confusion is serious; it destroys the gospel by denying the uniqueness of Christ and leaving us dependent on our own efforts to save ourselves.

But still our relationship with Christ is not an isolated one. To belong to Christ is to belong to his church. To be built on Christ is, necessarily, to be built next to other believers. To be “in Christ” is to be “with one another.” You simply cannot have the one without the other.

This passage is a graphic and unmistakable challenge to the *individualism* that plagues much contemporary Christianity, at least in the West. Too often when evangelical Christians hear the word “church” what they think of primarily, even exclusively, is a place, a building that I enter once (or maybe even twice or more) a week to worship God and hear his word preached.
Don’t misunderstand. True worship with sound preaching at its center is vital; it is the life-blood of the church. Take away preaching, or even slight its importance, and the church will wither and eventually die.

Still, a deep-seated problem in the church, seriously impairing its effectiveness, is that too many people operate with a “preaching station” model of the church. The church Peter pictures for us is not a kind of spiritual filling station that I drive into on Sundays, tank up for the rest of the week, and then drive away. The church, ultimately, is not a building I come to but a building I am a part of, so much so that my very identity depends on my place in it.

Despite much popular thinking, the church is not just one, even important, institution of society. Moved by God’s Spirit, we do respond freely to the gospel and join the church willingly. But we must appreciate that ultimately, in the deepest sense, the church is not a voluntary association; it results from God’s sovereign, irresistible activity.

Being a Christian is personal, but it is not private; believing in Christ is something I must do as an individual, but it is not an individualistic activity. The notion that I can believe by myself, that I can function as a believer apart from other believers, is simply unthinkable for the New Testament.

A Christian is not a recluse; there is no place in the church for spiritual loners. One of the great presuppositions of New Testament teaching on the church is captured in the frequently occurring phrases “each other” and “one another.” We need to recognize, then, that it is not only a Roman Catholic error but the sense in which it is true, as our Confession itself teaches (25:2), that ordinarily there is no possibility of salvation outside of the church.

Built To Serve

“A rolling stone gathers no moss,” says the old proverb. But that’s not true in the church. Believers, even though they are not rolling stones, are not idle, inactive moss-gatherers!

The church is not a mausoleum; it is made of living stones. Nor is it simply an impressive monument, standing there for passers-by to look at and admire. Rather it is a “spiritual house”; that means it’s a place where things are to happen. Specifically, the church is a “holy priesthood” that exists to offer “spiritual sacrifices.” In a word, what Peter pictures is a temple. Just as Jesus foretold (John 2:19-22), the church-house is the new and final temple that replaces and surpasses the structure of literal, inert stone in Jerusalem.

We frequently speak of “the priesthood of all believers.” That is the great truth re-captured especially at the time of the Reformation, the precious gospel reality that sinners are not dependent on human priests, or any other mediator than Christ, to come to God for salvation.

But this passage enables us to think of the priesthood of believers in yet another sense, one not so often recognized. Through Christ, all believers are priests not only because of their direct access to God but also because of their service of God. All Christians, not just some, are called to serve God as priests, and that, not as some option, but because of their basic identity. Simply because we (can) do nothing for our salvation, we are called to do everything for our Savior. To be a living stone is to be qualified, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, to offer spiritual sacrifices.

Plainly, spiritual sacrifice is a comprehensive reality. There is no reason to restrict it to a special sector of Christian activity; it includes everything that God wants us to do for him. It is one way of looking at the Christian life in its entirety.

But what is at the core of such sacrifice, and perhaps Peter’s foremost concern as he writes, comes out just a few verses prior to our passage in chapter 1:22: Now that you have
purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Here, “you have purified yourselves” does not refer primarily, perhaps not at all, to ethical renewal or the removal of moral corruption. The language is sacral, with an Old Testament background; it describes being consecrated a priest. So we may fairly paraphrase, “Now that you have been set apart as priests . . . , love one another. . . .” With that the direct link with our passage is unmistakable: spiritual sacrifice begins and in large part consists, we may say, in loving other Christians.

In this connection two things at least need to be stressed.

First, Peter’s word picture applies to the church at all levels. It refers to the whole, one, universal church in all times and places. But it has in view most concretely and directly, so far as our experience is concerned, the local congregation. The other living stones that I’m built closest to, those that are most directly adjacent to me, are those with whom I have (or ought to have) constant contact in the ongoing congregational worship and life of which I’m a part; spiritual sacrifice “begins at home.”

Second, in the matter of spiritual sacrifice, the love called for, as always in Scripture, is not something vague and indefinite. It is not simply an attitude or feeling; it is not just a “warm glow” toward others (although it may often involve that). Rather, it expresses itself, like God’s love for his people, in concrete deeds of love. In unremitting, virtually inexhaustible ways, it seeks the best for others (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Spiritual sacrifice is self-sacrificing love for God and others. Because Christians are not rolling stones, they are to serve one another.

Love one another from the heart, continually. That’s difficult, very difficult—especially when we get to know each other. Inevitably we discover in others, as they discover in us, a lot that is unlovable, unattractive and difficult to live with. We might ask, then: this priestly service of spiritual sacrifice, who is capable of it?

The answer, of course, is that no one of us is; of ourselves none of us has the “secret.” And that’s why the message of the New Testament is not a “try harder” pep talk, not a message of positive thinking or “self-esteem,” but the gospel, the good news of who we are in Christ and what God in Christ has made the church to be.

Remember, finally, that the gospel and its effectiveness is at stake in all this. For today, as always, the world is watching, even when it may not be aware of doing so, to see if there really is a difference between itself and the church, whether being a Christian is all that different. What then is it to think if it sees there, in the church, the disharmony and discord, the strife and self-centeredness it is all too familiar with in itself?

May God grant to the church in our own time a clear sense of identity—for believers to see that they are no longer rolling stones, drifting about aimlessly in the deadness of their sins, but living stones, firmly built on Christ and together with other believers. May he grant that as, in Christ, we are with each other, more and more, to his glory, we may be for each other.69

12. Christian Ministry

The last area of Dr. Gaffin’s theological interest that we will highlight here is his concern for the relevance of the Reformed faith for Christian life and ministry. Some of his writings focus specifically on this matter.70 The following selection

comes from his effort to show the relevance of the biblical doctrine of total depravity for the development of business ethics.

If the Bible teaches anything clearly, it is the reality of sin. That is the dark side of the clarity of Scripture, confessed by the Protestant Reformers—its unsparing portrayal of human sinfulness. From beginning to end, Genesis 3 through Revelation 22, the Bible documents the full range of sin and its consequences. Sin is rebellion against God.

A good place to begin with biblical teaching on the depth and scope of human sinfulness is 1 Corinthians 2:14: “But the natural man [that is, the person without God’s Spirit] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (NKJV).

The doctrine of total depravity has always had its detractors, both outside and within the church. That is so for at least two reasons, apart from inadequate and confusing ways in which the doctrine may sometimes be presented. The deepest reason is our own sinfulness—our native resistance to acknowledging that we are sinners and the full magnitude of our sinfulness. Only the Holy Spirit can produce genuine confession of sin (see John 16:8-11).

But another reason especially warrants our attention here. The doctrine of total depravity seems to contradict reality. To confess radical human corruption, apparently, is in conflict with life as we experience it. Everywhere around us outside the pale of Christianity and among those who make no pretense of being believers are countless and evident instances—in the great as well as the small affairs of life—of kindness and helpfulness to others, of philanthropy and deeds of mercy, of attraction to what is good and right, noble and honorable, of efforts that advance peace and human well-being, of beneficial cultural and artistic accomplishment, of heroism and self-sacrifice, even to the point of death.

. . . the question is how to account for undeniable gradations and variations within the bounds of total depravity. The answer, according to the Bible, lies not in us but in God—in His kindness, His graciousness, His patience. From one angle the entire message of the Bible from Genesis 3 on is a message of postponed judgment. The full measure of eschatological death and destruction that the sin of our first parents deserves is delayed.

Within this framework of God’s general benevolence, His common grace, belong those phenomena of our experience confirmed in Scripture noted above: the frequent interest of unbelievers in what is right and good, their devotion to expanding the frontiers of knowledge, to developing the arts and sciences in a constructive and worthwhile fashion, to advancing society and promoting the well-being of the human race. In His common grace, God not only bestows good on sinful human beings. He also produces good through them.

Clearly this aspect of common grace has a direct bearing on economics as a whole and business ethics in particular.

But—and this is critical—common grace, no matter how positive its effects, is restraint, not renewal. It is not a matter of the heart; it does not restore unbelievers at the core, in the integrity of their persons. It does not destroy the disposition of the “flesh.”

The conclusions reached so far may be summed up in two controlling perspectives on business and economic life. (1) Balance needs to be maintained between common grace and total depravity as two correlative, mutually qualifying poles. To ignore either or emphasize one without the other results in distortions. (2) Until Christ’s return for final judgment—despite catastrophes, periodic disruptions, and ever-present, often widespread pockets of poverty—we can count on the maintenance of at least some
measure of economic stability, on the continuation of available resources and structures for production, distribution, and exchange that ensure throughout the world conditions of economic viability and, on occasion, well-being and even prosperity. . . .

. . . . The Scriptures are the indispensable “spectacles” for rightly examining and perceiving the world about us, essential, among other things, for formulating sound business ethics. . . . Any economic system, including capitalism, is subject to exploitation by the deceit and perversity of the human heart. No system is immune to or a protection against that corruption. There ought to be no doubting that reality, even on the assumption that private ownership and a free market economy are compatible with or even demanded by biblical principles.71

IV. Personal Reflections on the Ministry of Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Sancti Libri Theologicus Magnus Westmonasteriensis

I have had the joy previously to celebrate Dr. Gaffin’s long and fruitful career, as contributor to his festschrift and as a planner of the endowed Gaffin lectures that actually took him by surprise, thanks to the help of Jean. I also wrote an abbreviated version of this paper for Ordained Servant. Similarly, I write this article in honor of Dr. Gaffin with deep respect and sincere gratitude for his ministry to the seminary, to the church, to his students, and to me.

On a personal level I am truly grateful for the many ways Dr. Gaffin has aided me in my call to serve our Lord. I have had the privilege to know him as a teacher, as an administrator of a Ph.D. area exam, as a fellow member of a Sunday school class, as a counselor and consoler in the midst of some very tense moments in my Presbytery exams, as a preacher at my ordination, and as the first person I recognized at Abington Hospital many years ago on a Sunday afternoon in September 1981 who rejoiced with me at the news that our first daughter was born.

I have known Dr. Gaffin as a faculty colleague, as a participant in the seminary’s development efforts, as a moderator of the OPC General Assembly, as a fellow seminary representative at the World Reformed Fellowship, as a fellow stranded professor with Dr. Garner and Dr. Jue as we enjoyed fellowship for a week in the United Kingdom waiting for a volcanic cloud from Iceland to clear.

He has been a wise theologian in the midst of community-shaking theological controversy, an author I’ve read and from whom I’ve learned, a co-author with whom I have labored, as well as a theological conversationalist, not to mention a fellow Phillies fan.

Finally, I thank God for the way that the Gaffin family has been an encouragement to so many in word and deed through their own personal suffering and grief. A moving witness to the Gaffins’ faithful love for our Lord and his church was reported by those who saw Dick and Jean quietly setting up chairs for the congregation on the Sunday immediately after the funeral of their daughter.

Dr. Gaffin’s personal and godly impact has been multiplied thousands of times more through family cared for, students taught, articles and books published and read, sermons and lectures given and heard, and wise decisions reached and counsel given to churches, seminaries, and Christians worldwide.

All of this helps us to understand how the Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., has practiced what he has taught and what he has written:

The pressing and promising task before the church today is to demonstrate unambiguously, in practice as well as proclamation, that at its core the gospel concerns not only the free and full remission of sin but the present reality of a new creation and eschatological life in Christ, the present renewal and transformation of the believer in his entirety, according to the inner man, and the redirection and reintegration of human life in all its aspects. The gospel is the gospel of the exalted Christ, the life-giving Spirit. This is one perspective on Pentecost the church cannot afford to lose.72

Thank you, Dr. Gaffin, for making sure the church has not lost sight of the gospel of Christ’s life-giving Spirit on your long and faithful watch at Westminster.

As it is my privilege as the President of Westminster Seminary to confer the graduating students’ degrees in Latin, the historic language of theology in the West, I would also like to confer this title upon you: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Sancti Libri Theologicus Magnus Westmonasteriensis, which translated means, Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Westminster’s Great Theologian of the Holy Scripture. We all congratulate you on your successful completion of this ministerial program, even if it has taken forty-five years to complete!

72 Gaffin, Perspectives on Pentecost, 122.