

## *Pots, Kettles and Glasshouses: A Response to Austin Walker's Review of McGrane*

In this article, I speak only for myself. While I am confident that other new-covenant<sup>1</sup> theologians would agree with the point I make, obviously I cannot speak for them. Hence my use of the singular first-person pronoun.

Kevin McGrane wrote a series of articles which were published in *The Gospel Magazine*, which he then expanded to produce a book that was published by The Gospel Magazine Trust in 2018, entitled *New Covenant Theology Weighed and Found Wanting*.

The *Banner of Truth* has recently published Austin Walker's review of McGrane's book.<sup>2</sup>

As in my previous response to McGrane (brought about by Kevin Bidwell's review of McGrane's book),<sup>3</sup> even though I am privileged to be mentioned by name both in the original book and the reviews, I am not responding to Walker's review to defend new-covenant theology; certainly not to defend myself. Though it might seem I am trying to do the latter, I have far bigger fish to fry. Indeed, defence of any kind could not be further from my mind. I am on the attack!

The fact is, I want to try yet again to push a rock uphill and, on this question of the law, make Reformed writers actually mean *and do* what they are so fond of saying – parroting, more like;

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<sup>1</sup> I have introduced the hyphen; it is vital. NCT is not a new form of covenant theology, but is the theology of the new covenant. The two are radically different. Indeed, the difference lies at the heart of this debate. See my 'A Theology By Any Other Name...'

<sup>2</sup> Austin Walker: 'New Covenant Theology Weighed and Found Wanting', *Banner of Truth*, Aug,-Sept. 2020, pp61-62.

<sup>3</sup> See my 'A Breath of Fresh Air Wanted: A Brief Review of McGrane on NCT'.

namely, that they regard their Confessions and Catechisms as subsidiary standards whereas Scripture is their true authority.

If only! Their works belie them!<sup>4</sup>

Specifically, according to Walker, McGrane's position is that:

New-Covenant Theology (NCT) has been established on unsound exegesis and a faulty hermeneutic [that is, way of interpreting Scripture] determined by particular presuppositions... NCT effectively imposes a hermeneutical grid on texts of Scripture based on an *a priori* theological position; namely inductivism [that is, using a particular set of facts or ideas to form a general principle]... [McGrane] is critical of a theology resting on a single phrase from Galatians 6:2.

Well! Talk about the pot calling the kettle black! Would Walker (and/or McGrane) like to tell me what 'particular presuppositions' 'determine' my 'faulty hermeneutic'? The only presupposition I make is that Scripture is the authority, and I must read and interpret every biblical passage in its context. As evidence, see my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law*, where I expound every New Testament passage on the law – not just Galatians 6:2. So I find it a bit rich to read such accusations from Reformed writers who, whatever they say to the contrary, make a Confession their touchstone, that Confession depending on mere proof texts for a presupposed theological template, which proof texts pretty often are glossed or are irrelevant to the point being made.

The truth is – as everybody knows, and Walker's short review is brim-full with proof – that the Reformed simply cannot read the Bible on the law without a Reformed Confession open before them, and that Confession and its theology telling them how to interpret what they read in the Scriptures. In short, they make Scripture conform to the Reformed theology presupposed in the

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<sup>4</sup> See my 'A Must-See Debate'; 'The Law and the Confessions'; 'Is it Me? Or: The Cat Let Out of the Bag'; 'The Law: Reformed Escape Routes'; "'No Confession? Nothing to Debate!'"; 'Misleading, Sad, Revealing: "Relevant Today"' by Jeremy Brooks'; 'A Must-Listen Podcast'; and, of course, 'A Breath of Fresh Air Wanted: A Brief Review of McGrane on NCT'.

Confession. Walker owns McGrane's position at the very start of his review:

McGrane writes as a man committed to traditional Reformed covenant-theology as expressed in the Reformation Confessions of faith.

*Q.E.D.* for McGrane.

And Walker tells us his own position as he closes his review:

The reviewer [Austin Walker] is a persuaded Reformed Baptist, who, like his seventeenth-century forefathers,<sup>5</sup> is firmly committed to covenant theology and rejects the tenets of NCT.

*Q.E.D.* for Walker.

While this is commendably honest, it must serve as a health warning. One can hardly expect a scriptural assessment of NCT from men who are completely committed to a system that will only – can only – interpret Scripture by a Reformed Confession! And yet they have the gall to accuse me (and others like me) of having ‘a faulty hermeneutic determined by particular presuppositions!’ Really!

I appeal to the Reformed to stop this pot/kettle nonsense. It is worse than nonsense. Their accusations about my approach are false. And that's putting it politely!

Consequently, once again I issue the challenge to Reformed writers and teachers: just produce a work on the law, establishing the apostolic doctrine from Scripture without starting with a Confession. Just let Scripture speak for itself. Do it for all the key passages – passages, not mere individual verses – passages such as Romans 6:1 – 8:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6 – 4:6; Galatians; Ephesians 2:1-22; Philippians 3:2-16; Colossians 2:9-23, Hebrews. If you want to introduce the so-called threefold division

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<sup>5</sup> Not all of them! Walker should weigh the evidence I present in my *Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated: Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton and John Saltmarsh; John Bunyan: Antinomian, New-Covenant Theologian, or...?; Exalting Christ: Thomas Collier on the New Covenant; 'The Law and the Confessions'*, for instance.

of the law (moral, ceremonial and judicial), or any other Reformed gloss, establish such by Scripture.

Moreover, Walker actually (and, I am sure, inadvertently) made my case for me when he exposed McGrane's failure (and it is a failure of all the Reformed):

A further chapter [in McGrane's book] explaining more fully the significance of Jeremiah 31:31-34, and the way in which that passage is used in Hebrews 8:7-13 and 10:15-18, would strengthen the whole.

This won't do! It goes far wider than that. Yes, these are key passages, but only some among many. It is not a question of 'strengthening the whole'. As I have said, let the Reformed scrap their unscriptural way of measuring everything in Scripture by a Reformed Confession, forcing Scripture into a Reformed template, and simply expound all – all – the relevant passages of Scripture on the subject of the law. I have done it. Now let these glasshouse stone-throwers do the same.

When can we expect that?

I'm not holding my breath. After all, as I have just shown, Walker openly rejects the tenets of NCT. In which case, alas, it is impossible for him to rise to the challenge. Why? Because, as I have said, and have made as clear as noonday in my works, one tenet which I hold to (and this will be true of all who advocate the theology of the new covenant) – and, in this context, it is the principal tenet – is that Scripture – and nothing else – is our authority. Since Walker rejects the tenets of NCT, he must reject that.<sup>6</sup> If so, my appeal must fall on deaf ears.

Let me close by referring the Reformed to their own Confession when it makes a point I wholeheartedly endorse. If only – if only –

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<sup>6</sup> Again, I am convinced – and it is a tenet of NCT – that Christ fulfilled the old covenant and brought in the new. Does Walker reject that? I am also convinced – and it is a tenet of NCT – that believers are children of the new covenant, not the old. Does Walker reject that? And so on. And on.

the Reformed would not only endlessly repeat, but act in accordance with their Confession:

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.<sup>7</sup>

Quite! So let Scripture speak on the law, and speak unfettered by man-made Confessions.

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<sup>7</sup> Westminster Confession 1.10.