

# My Review Article: A Clarification

by Mark A. Garcia

I have been asked to clarify a few points raised in my review (in the October issue of *OS*) of the essays on justification published by the faculty of Westminster Seminary California, and I am happy to do so.<sup>1</sup>

There is concern among some readers about my own relationship to the ongoing discussions regarding the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. On this topic I wrote in the review as follows:

Also in Clark's essay the important distinctions between imputation, Christ's active obedience, and the imputation of Christ's active obedience are often ambiguous. They are used synonymously so that evidence in a given writer of imputation or even of the necessity of Christ's "active" obedience, e.g., in Calvin, is assumed to stand as evidence of the full doctrine (cf. the citations in Clark, 229–65). In this discussion it is important to be clear that one can hold theoretically to imputation and to the necessity of Christ's active obedience without holding to the imputation of Christ's active obedience as belonging to the meritorious ground of justification. I write, I should add, as one who does hold to the "full" doctrine.

My goal in this statement was to highlight some crucial methodological missteps. Since Norman Shepherd's position is often the one in view in these discussions, it is important to remember that he holds strongly both to imputation and to the active obedience of Christ. What Shepherd denies is specifically the imputation of the active obedience of Christ (IAOC). Thus references to the necessity of imputation or of the active obedience of Christ beg the question if they do not treat the matter of the imputation of this active obedience. This is a matter of careful scholarship and careful treatment of the actual points at issue. Secondly, let me reiterate what I noted at the end of this statement,

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<sup>1</sup> *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. by R. Scott Clark. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006, xii + 465 pages, \$24.99, paper.

namely that I do hold to the IAOC. Personally I do consider Shepherd's theology of justification erroneous in its denial of the IAOC and of the category of merit, and in speaking of the works of obedience as co-instrumental with faith in justification. But of course I am still obligated to treat Shepherd's work fairly and in a way that he would recognize, and not merely for the sake of academic integrity.

On another note, as I stressed in my review, the agreement in the definition of justification in the Lutheran and Reformed confessions is significant and important. However, this must be distinguished carefully from the theological framework in which justification is located and according to which it is related to other saving graces. Of course, appreciation of this important, systemic difference hardly precludes our benefiting from reading Luther or Lutherans, which is something I have never suggested, but it is indeed basic to appreciating the reason there is a Reformed tradition at all. This is especially the case when reading Calvin, who figures so prominently in the gradual divergence of the Reformed from the Lutheran tradition. In my view, careful analysis of the texts in context confirms decisively that the reading of Calvin in *CJPM* is an "accommodated" one, made to serve the interests of pan-confessionalism.<sup>2</sup>

There has been some question too about my own understanding of the relationship of justification and sanctification, particularly about any "priority" of the former to the latter. First of all, I would guess we all find language of "priority" to be at least somewhat ambiguous. What does one mean by priority, even "logical" priority? Is it chronological? Causal? Of central importance? Something else? I find that proponents of the priority of justification are ordinarily unable to explain this idea without using causal language

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's Note: Mark Garcia's book on this subject, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Studies in Christian History and Thought; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), is due for release shortly.

(suggesting, for instance, that sanctification “flows from” or in some sense arises from justification as its effect) and without being left with a doctrine of union with Christ that is merely formal or nominal.

However, I would alert the reader to the fact that, in my article, I affirmed one sense in which I think language of priority is helpful: experiential, and not theological. As I said in reply to a point raised in Dr. Jones’s essay, “I am not aware of anyone who would deny this [i.e., the realization that one is pardoned motivates obedience to the will of God], and speaking in this way of ‘motivation’ is surely appropriate. But we must not confuse the existential – what can be described in terms of my experience of grace – with the theological, as Jones, Godfrey (270, on Calvin), and others in *CJPM* seem to do.” This is a useful and biblical way to think about priority, and I do not find it contradicts what is said in the OPC’s Justification Report. In the Report, the relevant language speaks specifically of justification as the prerequisite to sanctification *understood as a process* (p. 60 in the edition published by the CCE). Because justification is in its very nature definitive (i.e., non-progressive), its being prior to progressive sanctification is self-evident and beyond dispute. What the Report does not affirm, however, is that justification is the prerequisite to *definitive* sanctification. Instead the Report includes an important footnote to the effect that definitive sanctification is not in view in their discussion (p. 58, n. 92). On justification as a definitive act being prior to sanctification understood only in its progressive dimension, I would think that the contributors to *CJPM* and I strongly agree. Further, the preceding paragraph on p. 60 of the Report clearly states that both justification and sanctification come to us in our union with Christ, a point I heartily affirm and with which my statement regarding their simultaneity sits

rather nicely. And whatever our understanding of this priority, let us be clear that *CJPM* presses a specifically causal, “fruit” or “effect” understanding of the relationship sanctification bears to justification. My citations (and those I did not list but can be found in the essays) confirm this.

Lastly, regarding my criticism of their position on good works as, to use Dr. Clark’s language again, “*merely* evidence of sanctity and nothing more” (emphasis Clark’s), I urged readers, especially OPC officers, to examine this view in light of our confessional standards. To explain more fully, the Westminster Confession speaks in eminently biblical fashion of a sanctification-holiness without which no one will see the Lord (WCF 13.1, using the language of Hebrews 12:14 and noting also 2 Corinthians 7:1; Colossians 1:28; and Colossians 4:12); of justifying faith as “no dead faith” (WCF 11.2); of saving faith as obedient (WCF 14.2); of no pardon without repentance (WCF 15.3); and of eternal life as the end-fruit of sanctification-holiness (WCF 16.2). Of course, good works are not meritorious for justification, and do not form any part of its ground, but, however we read the Confession, these works are certainly not merely the evidence of justification. This was my point, and it is the testimony not only of the Confession but of Scripture and of the great texts in the Reformed tradition as well. In contrast, *CJPM* sees only two options: good works are either merely evidence of justification or they must be meritorious for justification. Thus I find in *CJPM* an inability to conceive of any real necessity or conditionality of obedience for salvation in non-meritorious terms. Further, I would note again that to speak with *CJPM* of good works as the fruits and effects of justification puts the strictly forensic nature of justification at great risk.

Not having seen the response by Professors Godfrey and VanDrunen, I am unable to offer any clarifications with their remarks in view. Nevertheless, I hope my comments here will prevent any mischaracterizations of my own concerns. Along these lines, I would note that I contacted Dr. VanDrunen shortly after deciding to review the book many months ago. I was concerned to ensure that my reading of the essays was accurate. I greatly appreciate his efforts to help me in this, and if readers are convinced I have not read them accurately it is certainly not attributable to him. Indeed I welcome further discussion of these important matters, not least because I too am deeply concerned to guard and commend the biblical truth that our justification is grounded entirely and permanently on the righteous obedience and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, and not at all in the merit of our own works, even those the Spirit produces within us.

As one would expect from the contributors to *CJPM*, and as I pointed out at the beginning of my review, there are some helpful parts of the book, and I am sincerely grateful for them. In these respects *CJPM* makes a useful contribution to the ongoing discussion. However, these virtues are eclipsed by the foundational flaws I discussed in the arguments and conclusions of my review article, and I further believe an awareness of these flaws is crucial to our identity as a Reformed confessional body committed to the authority of Scripture.

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