

## **INTERVIEW**

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# **Warfield, Bavinck, and Kuyper: Interview with Cornelis P. Venema and David Garner<sup>1</sup>**

**PETER A. LILLBACK**

(March 16, 2020)

*The following is the transcription of a discussion Peter Lillback held with Cornelis Venema and David Garner on the day before Venema delivered the Fourteenth Annual Gaffin Lecture on “Should Effectual Calling and Regeneration Be Distinguished?” (March 17, 2021).<sup>2</sup> Besides discussing the contribution of Richard B. Gaffin Jr. and contemporary issues, this dialogue celebrates the memory of Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921), Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), and Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920)—three giants of the Reformed faith, who died just about a century ago—by recollecting some of their lasting contributions to theology, apologetics, and public theology.*

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelis P. Venema is president and professor of doctrinal studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He is the author of *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination: Author of “the Other Reformed Tradition”?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), and *Christ and the Future: The Bible’s Teaching about the Last Things* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2008).

David Garner is academic dean, vice president of global ministries, and professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. He is the editor of *Did God Really Say? Affirming the Truthfulness and Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012) and the author of *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnPsjpQXPBA>.

**PETER LILLBACK:** *Friends, it is a great joy to welcome you again to our Richard B. Gaffin Jr. Annual Lecture. It has been a privilege for Westminster to do this for several years now. The lecture is often hosted by Dr. David Garner, and we are very grateful this year that we have Dr. Cornelis Venema, who is the first president of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He will be dialoguing with us as we have an opportunity to talk about some urgent and contemporary issues that are engaging Reformed theology today. So let me begin by saying, Dr. Venema, thank you for being with us.*

**CORNELIS VENEMA:** Thank you. I am pleased to be able to participate as well.

**PL:** *As we begin, I thought we might take a few minutes to talk about the Reformed legacy of theology that has come to us as we are thinking about the anniversary of the passing of the great stalwarts, Benjamin B. Warfield and Herman Bavinck, and also Abraham Kuyper. They all passed away at almost the same time, about a century ago. As we think about their lives, Dr. Venema, what would be their lasting significance as you look at systematic theology today from a Reformed perspective?*

**CV:** I do not think we can overstate their importance. Even though Warfield never published his own systematic theology, his biblical and theological studies, which have been gathered together and printed, are gems, an extraordinary resource that presents a theologian with a breadth of knowledge and acquaintance with the history of the church's reflection on Scripture.<sup>3</sup> It was a fluorescent period in Reformed theology with Kuyper and Bavinck. I cannot speak too highly of Bavinck as a theologian. I am thrilled that his *Dogmatics* is now finally in the English language.<sup>4</sup> I do not think that Kuyper was as great a dogmatic or systematic theologian as Bavinck, but he was a giant in his own right, not only theologically, but also in terms of the articulation of what he liked to call a Reformed world-and-life view. That was certainly a very rich and gifted period for Reformed theology.

**PL:** *Dr. Garner what would you add to those thoughts?*

**DAVID GARNER:** I echo them completely. I have to say, as I think about Warfield in particular, that his work on the authority of Scripture is incomparable—with his work on the term *theopneustos*, for example, about Scripture being God-breathed, in view of the challenges that continue to

<sup>3</sup> See B. B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 10 vols. (1932; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003–2008).

come against the doctrine of Scripture and its authority (cf. 2 Tim 3:16).<sup>5</sup> Warfield's work still towers in response to that of today, as well as when it was written. Concerning the Dutch theologians, I share Dr. Venema's appreciation for both of them. Every time I open Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* and begin to read, not only is my mind challenged, but my heart soars because of the doxological tone of his writing, its scope and depth, and his vision of God's greatness. I appreciate that those men had a "big God" in the face of many challenges. That paradigm is lasting.

**PL:** *Dr. Venema, your lecture will present the theme of regeneration. What are your thoughts and why did you choose this topic for the Gaffin lecture?*

**CV:** Beginning last year, I engaged in a project dealing with the proposal that we can use speech act theory, associated with the names of Kevin Vanhoozer and Michael Horton, as a way of eliminating the necessity to sharply distinguish or make a fine distinction between effectual calling and regeneration. In my engagement with the topic, it is an *ordo salutis* question, and it seemed fitting, since Dr. Gaffin made some serious and meaningful contributions to our thinking about *ordo salutis*, to address it at the Gaffin Lecture series.<sup>6</sup> But I also think it is an interesting topic in terms of theological methodology in the way in which the speech act proposal has been argued. I am going to suggest it does not offer a better, more satisfactory, or more helpful treatment of the topic than, for lack of a better way of describing it, the classic understanding of the distinction between effectual calling and regeneration. It is a little bit too much shaped by interests in responding to contemporary philosophical and other challenges to Christian theology, particularly within postmodernism. Furthermore, it does not really deal with the whole testimony, the rich diversity of the Scriptures' teaching on the topic. To use an expression borrowed from Paul Helm, the net of the speech act proposal does not really catch all of that evidence.

**PL:** *Dr. Garner you mentioned you would like to engage Dr. Venema on some of the issues of the ordo salutis. What are the questions that you might have in mind?*

**DG:** Well, I was just thinking about this, as you are speaking about speech theory and *ordo salutis* concerns, how do you see it shaping your

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, vol. 1 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 229–80.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Andrew T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 271–88.

understanding, if it does it at all, of the *duplex gratia*, justification-sanctification?<sup>7</sup> Because it has been applied in those contexts as well.

**CV:** That is not the focus of my presentation, since I am going to focus largely on Vanhoozer's approach. But another significant theologian in the present day, Horton, borrowing from Vanhoozer, appropriated speech act theory and gave his own take on it.<sup>8</sup> He identifies the gospel word that really brings us into union with Christ and grants to us through union all of the blessings that are in Christ. He identifies that call of the gospel, or of the gospel word that is proclaimed, with a judicial act, a divine judgment regarding our absolution in Christ. Now that is a stimulating proposal. Maybe it is dangerous for me to say this, but were I to have compared the two or tried to compare them in my lecture, I would actually find Vanhoozer more congenial to my understanding than Horton.

**DG:** Do you think that speech act is useful in any way in terms of thinking about *ordo*?

**CV:** I think it is helpful. The one thing I will say by way of commendation is, these proposals share a very prominent theme in historic Reformed theology—that the person and work of the Holy Spirit is always a work and ministry intimately conjoined with the ministry of the Word. It is a Spirit and Word or Word and Spirit ministry; the two cannot be held apart or separated. Christ is present through his Word and in the power of his outpoured Spirit. The desire to keep the communication of the gospel and the drawing of men and women as fallen sinners into union with Christ, through the Word, and the Spirit's working as powerful and effective to truly bring in, to draw into communion with Christ, eliciting the proper response of faith and repentance, is commendable. On that score, both of the theologians in question, Vanhoozer in a broader and looser sense—and Horton in a more direct and more precise sense—are within the Reformed tradition. Bavinck would put it this way: the work of the Spirit ordinarily never takes place apart from the Word. But he still distinguishes the Spirit from the Word in

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<sup>7</sup> Venema dealt with the concept in Calvin in his doctoral work; see Cornelis P. Venema, "The Twofold Nature of the Gospel in Calvin's Theology: The 'duplex gratia dei' and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> In two places, Horton addresses the subject and explicitly notes making use of Vanhoozer's speech-act proposal: Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 216–42 and *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 556–75. Vanhoozer's view is most thoroughly presented in Kevin Vanhoozer, "Effectual Call or Causal Effect?: Summons, Sovereignty and Supervenient Grace," in *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 96–124.

order not to ascribe to the Word alone a power that it does not possess unless the Spirit making use of the Word gives it efficacy.<sup>9</sup>

**PL:** *Dr. Garner, how would you engage with these things as you make your contribution to the ordo in the arena of adoption?*<sup>10</sup> *Do you see any relevance here, or would you engage it from that perspective?*

**DG:** At a very broad level, I think there are themes within speech act that are useful. That said, I do not see that particular paradigm as useful in the way I think about adoption's function in the *ordo* or the way in which adoption is effectuated for us as believers by virtue of our union with Christ. So, I do not see a direct correlation there, though I do have a great appreciation for the way in which Dr. Venema has put it, about the efficacy of the Word. There is the objective Word that God has given, but the work of the Spirit is necessary, and this really takes us back to Kuyper, who was so good on this in terms of the role of the Spirit in the church, among the people of God, illuminating us to the truthfulness of God's Word and attuning our ears to it.<sup>11</sup>

**PL:** *As we think about the contributions of Warfield and Kuyper and Bavinck, one of the points of real difference between these theologians was in the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in apologetics. It seems that Warfield was much more comfortable with a classical apologetic, and that was something where Kuyper clearly wanted to emphasize the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Cornelius Van Til would follow along with that emphasis of Kuyper.*<sup>12</sup> *How does that issue work out in this day as we think about effectual calling and apologetics, the work of the Spirit? How would you address that, Dr. Venema, from your perspective?*

**CV:** One of the burdens of Van Til's approach to apologetics is to say that we engage also in the defense of the faith in the same way in which we proceed

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 404–38.

<sup>10</sup> See Garner, *Sons in the Son*.

<sup>11</sup> See Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (1900; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) and *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries, with an introduction by Benjamin B. Warfield (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1898), esp. 553–63. Cf. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Richard B. Gaffin Jr. on Old Amsterdam (Abraham Kuyper)," in *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today*, ed. Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 555–57.

<sup>12</sup> For Van Til's positioning vis-à-vis Kuyper, Warfield, and Bavinck, see Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 260–66, 286–99.



in the articulation of the faith. If we say that no one will ultimately stand under the Word of God or receive what the Word of God teaches unless their heart is opened, their ears made receptive, their minds illumined so as to be given understanding, even our best efforts will not add anything to the power that belongs to God's Word as the Spirit uses the Word. So, there is a very close relationship. In one sense, you can say that the classic Reformed understanding of effectual calling, the persuasiveness of the Word belonging to the Spirit as the Spirit makes use of the Word, is what Van Til was wanting to do in terms of a reformation in the area of apologetics. If we make affirmations biblically, confessionally, and theologically about the blindness of a mind darkened in sin, the willful resistance to receiving the truth as it is in Christ, and our disinterest, our hostility toward God and the things of God and the things that belong to his kingdom, without a working of the Spirit with and through the Word—what does that mean by way of implication for how we go about defending the faith? Methodology cannot make assumptions antithetical to the ones we affirm theologically, and in that sense Van Til's basic project, in my understanding, was to develop a distinctively biblical and Reformed approach to the way we defend the faith. The way we defend the faith is important and is closely linked to the faith defended. It is an inconsistency to defend the faith on the basis of an approach that actually compromises the things you are wanting to affirm.

**PL:** *Dr. Garner, do you think there is any abiding significance for Warfield's classical apologetics, given that concern of inconsistency that Van Til focused on, that really reflects the Dutch tradition of Kuyper and Bavinck? What abiding significance is there for Warfield's work?*

**DG:** Immediately, I would want to echo Van Til's treatment of the proofs of the existence of God.<sup>13</sup> Van Til does not throw the proofs out; the difference lies in how they are used. As Dr. Venema well put it, the persuasion is ultimately a work of the Spirit by his Word, but that does not mean there is no persuasion. I do think that there are some very helpful things in that broader classical apologetic tradition when the foundation is actually a reliance upon Word and Spirit to do the work of actually using those arguments. But words that are grounded in Scripture and the work of the Spirit lead to that persuasion. Warfield is representative of the broader classical tradition of apologetics, but we do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is still much to be learned from him.

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<sup>13</sup> For an introduction to this topic, see Thom Notaro, *Van Til and the Use of Evidence* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

**CV:** There have been studies of late that have pushed back a little in terms of Warfield. What he meant by “right reason” indicates that even in his more broadly “classical approach,” Warfield was aware that reason, in its exercise and use, in the context of the fallen human race is often distorted and corrupted, morally pushed or misdirected.<sup>14</sup> So, my comments earlier, I hold to them, but I also think that Warfield himself is not sometimes fully or fairly represented if you make a radical separation between him and the Dutch theologians.

**PL:** *As we are honoring Gaffin’s contributions to Reformed theology, we know the name Geerhardus Vos is very close to the core of his work, so that brings up the issue of biblical theology. Dr. Venema, as someone who spends a great deal of time in systematic theology, what are the benefits and the challenges that biblical theology brings to you as you try to do systematic theology?*

**CV:** In a general way, systematic theology builds upon a foundation, and, in that foundation, biblical theology is the most important component. I think that for systematic theologians—I still use the old language of dogmatics—the confessions also play a role as the church’s summary of what churches heard the Word of God teaching in Scripture. I think systematic theologians should themselves also be as much as possible directly engaged exegetically. As I say to my students, the enterprise is a difficult one because it requires some facility exegetically, familiarity with a more synthetic comprehensive representation of the course of redemptive history in a more biblical theological fashion; it involves an element of acquaintance with the history of the church’s engagement with Scripture, creeds and confessions, the history of doctrine. And then you also have to address contemporary questions, contemporary challenges, particular issues in our particular moment in history that may come to the foreground. So, it is a multifaceted multifaceted enterprise, which is why a theologian like Bavinck is so extraordinary, being engaged in the task in all of these respects, in many ways that are without parallel. Very few theologians, and I am certainly not one of them, can do what Bavinck did with the extraordinary excellence that is represented in his *Dogmatics*.

**PL:** *Dr. Garner, you have had the joy to know Dr. Gaffin for many years, and you have spoken from time to time with me about his efforts to define systematics as biblical theology, maybe to remove systematic theology entirely and then to find*

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<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Paul Kjoss Helseth, “Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), esp. 129–30.

*a way to integrate it. Walk us through Gaffin's experience and where you think he ultimately came out in that regard.*

**DG:** Well, you cannot think about biblical and systematic theology at Westminster without the 43 years of Dr. Gaffin's teaching here. Being at the forefront, he is not operating in a vacuum, as we have already talked about the influence of Vos, and then you think about John Murray's own language that dogmatics, systematic theology, becomes lifeless the moment that it departs from biblical authority, from the text itself, from exegetical theology.<sup>15</sup> And Gaffin as a New Testament scholar who moved from New Testament into systematic theology, as he was wrestling through these things in the early years of his career, did actually consider the abandonment of even the language of systematic theology.<sup>16</sup> He has retreated from that decision and boldly and very clearly articulates the necessity of systematic theology, but it is a systematic theology in the vein of Vos and Murray. Murray not only says that systematic theology is lifeless apart from the text but also that systematic theology faithfully done will be radically non-speculative—that is, it will be grounded in the text.<sup>17</sup> As we think about biblical and systematic theology's relationship, Gaffin will speak of biblical theology as the handmaid to systematic theology, but at the same time, systematic theology is to be governed by biblical theology, and so there is a humility of engagement in biblical and systematic theology as they work together.<sup>18</sup> Even Moisés Silva, who served as New Testament professor at Westminster Theological Seminary for some years, will contend that when you are doing exegesis, if your interpretation takes you on a path that departs from historic confessional systematic theology, you need to have your thinking directed by systematic theology.<sup>19</sup> So good New Testament work, good Old Testament work, is going to reflect on the church's work, as faithful servants of Christ through the years have given us confessional documents that are systematic in their orientation; these are attempts to faithfully represent the Scriptures and what the Scriptures teach in their

<sup>15</sup> John Murray, "Systematic Theology," in *Studies in Theology*, vol. 4 of *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 17.

<sup>16</sup> For early views of Gaffin on this topic, see Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Geerhardus Vos and the Interpretation of Paul," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 228–37; cf. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *The New Testament Student and Theology*, vol. 3 of *The New Testament Student and His Field*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 32–50, esp. 39.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Murray, "Systematic Theology," 20–21.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 39.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Moisés Silva, "Systematic Theology and the Apostle to the Gentiles," *Trinity Journal* NS 15 (1994): 23–26.



culminating way. And Gaffin epitomizes that sweet interrelationship of biblical and systematic theology in that way.

**PL:** *As we talk about Bavinck, those that study him seem to think that there is the orthodox Bavinck and maybe a Bavinck trying to move beyond orthodoxy, and some have spoken of two Bavincks. Dr. Venema, is that a fair reading Bavinck? How would you respond to those who see him as on the one hand classically orthodox but also open to a new direction in theology?*

**CV:** That is a difficult question. Bavinck has his biographers, and the tension that you describe is reflected in editor John Bolt's essay on Bavinck's life and thought that introduces Bavinck's four-volume *Dogmatics*, so that gives it further traction.<sup>20</sup> However, a recent biography on Bavinck by James Eglinton, possibly the best in English, pushes back a little on that.<sup>21</sup> It was not so much a tension in Bavinck as an awareness on his part that it was crucial, in the apologetical dimension of the entire theological enterprise, to engage the challenges that come from within the theological context, from liberal theology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He wanted to give an appropriate answer from within an orthodox framework. I do not think there is any evidence that a tension in Bavinck was pulling him in two radically different directions theologically. The tension was to speak in a context where the Christian faith was being challenged on a variety of fronts. Perhaps it is bad for me to put it this way, but he is our Friedrich Schleiermacher offering an answer to the cultured despisers of the faith.<sup>22</sup> I do know this: at the end of his life, he was somewhat discouraged and lamented that his *Dogmatics*, which he had hoped would be more persuasive to his interlocutors among the mediating theologians in The Netherlands, who leaned to more liberal theology, did not prove to be the case. They dismissed it as an impressive species of fundamentalist Reformed thinking. Later in life, Bavinck became somewhat cynical about some of the politics associated with Kuyper addressing issues in the public square in The Netherlands. Having grown up in a Reformed church context, I certainly understand what Bavinck meant by "politics is bad but the worst form of politics is church politics." That reflects Bavinck's personality. Kuyper was aggressive and forceful; Bavinck was more of an academic, sensitive soul. I could tell many stories about their personal relationship; they got along fine

<sup>20</sup> See John Bolt, "Editor's Introduction," in Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, 11–22.

<sup>21</sup> James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> An allusion to Schleiermacher's famous apologetic lectures and work, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799).

and worked together, but their personalities were so different, and Bavinck was always a little uncomfortable in Kuyper's presence.

**PL:** *Dr. Garner, as we continue to think about contemporary issues, Scripture's inerrancy is never easily accepted in a culture that is influenced by many unbelieving systems. As you mentioned, Warfield's engagement of inerrancy has stood the test of time. Would you like to say why you believe that is true? Can we still go to Warfield and find a great defense of the doctrine of inerrancy even at this moment with the new perspective on Paul, multiculturalism, issues coming from anthropology attacking the imago Dei?*

**DG:** That is a large set of questions. What I appreciate about Warfield is that, to use the Robert Dick Wilson's phrase, he did not shy away from the difficult questions. He would say about the difficult biblical passages of which he could not make sense that the safest thing to do is to side with Jesus and his apostles. He acknowledges that there are difficulties, but we do not allow them to keep us from aligning with the clear voice of Scripture. As Calvin himself said, some things cannot be explained, but every Christian knows that the objective self-attesting witness of Scripture is undeniable. When a lion roars, we do not wonder if it was a mouse. And there is a real sense in Warfield of the high view of God along with a high view of Scripture. His treatment of inspiration, *theopneustos*, in its rigorous exegetically careful and theologically way, is still irrefutable. And that still stands the test of time. Although there are new issues that the church is facing, you know Satan's tactics are as old as himself, and there is nothing new under the sun. He is trying to deceive, he is trying to lead people astray as he works as an adversary, and the real issue is the hearts of men and women.<sup>23</sup> When we have seen Christ in Scripture, we do not unsee that. Warfield's treatment of Scripture is going to be valuable to the church for generations to come.

**PL:** *Well, Dr. Venema, you have mentioned the problem of politics in the church and in the public square; obviously, Kuyper did not shy from the public square, whereas Bavinck was more reticent. As you engage the public square in your own thinking as a systematic theologian, it seems that so many issues we are confronting today have to do with anthropology. Issues like human sexuality; When does life begin? What is gender? How do we look at race? How would you as a systematician counsel the church on how we get our bearings to address these issues that are tearing the public square apart, but doing it from the perspective of a deep commitment to Scripture and Reformed theology?*

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Garner, ed., *Did God Really Say?*

**CV:** We have to go back to the first things. We recently had a course at our seminary dealing with some of the delicate and heated questions of social justice and the debates today in the public square. The main theme of our guest lecturer was what you call biblical anthropology, starting with the *imago Dei*, the creation of man as unique among all the creatures God called into existence, bearing his image: “Male and female created he them” (Gen 1:27 KJV). We are finding ourselves increasingly in the North American Western context—and rapidly, in my judgment—in an astonishing situation where we have lost some of the most basic ABCs of the biblical and Christian worldview related to the issues of human sexuality. The Congress of the United States passed a bill, H. R. 5<sup>24</sup>—I have not read it word for word; I doubt the representatives have either—but it institutes policies overtly diminishing protections for citizens of the country in terms of religious rights to hold opinions and to act accordingly in the free exercise of their convictions. I think it is very important in seminary and in our teaching in systematic theology to take note of the way that what we are teaching based on Scripture faces off against what are becoming prevailing currents of thought in our culture. Indeed, any student graduating who aspires to the ministry is going to be pastoring a congregation of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who live in that world. It is all the more incumbent upon them to teach and nurture the churches and their members in the whole of the Christian faith, in its breadth and depth, and equip and furnish them to remain steadfast in their profession and continue to live before God’s face in this world in a way that is far from perfect but at least shows what it means to live in accordance with what we know to be God’s will for our lives and conduct.

**PL:** *Dr. Garner, are there any final thoughts you would like to share?*

**DG:** One thing I might add on the question of human sexuality. Absolute inconsistencies and impossibilities characterize the varying views that people hold, and in varying places and circles; cracks appear, as people are recognizing that they cannot hold all these varying individualized views. This opens the door for some opportunity for an apologetic going back to Scripture’s authority about who we are and the *imago Dei*, who we really are before God. And then, the church will need to be bold in her witness and to issue warnings about rebellion against God in terms of calling wisdom foolishness and calling foolishness wisdom, as Paul teaches in Romans 1.

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<sup>24</sup> H. R. 5 – 117th Congress (2021–2022): The “Equality Act” passed by the US House of Representatives on February 25, 2021 by a vote of 224 to 206.

So, it is a time for clarity, but it is also a time for courage. As people find their feet are planted in midair, it is also a time of incredible opportunity to point to the Christ who is alone our rock and redeemer. It is a wonderful opportunity even in the midst of incredible challenge.

**PL:** *Dr. Venema, we want to thank you so much for joining us, for the Gaffin Lecture, for engaging in this dialogue. I would love you to share any final thoughts.*

**CV:** I would like to say first that I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this session and honored by the invitation to give the Gaffin Lecture. I hold Dr. Gaffin in the highest esteem. He is a wonderful combination of biblical theological insight, great love for the Christ of Scripture, and for his church. I was always amazed, attending assemblies of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, of which he is a part, that he is most of the time in the thick of it, in the life and ministry of the church going forward. Regarding the topics we have talked about, perhaps the only thing I would add is that as we see this acceleration of departing from a wealth of inheritances in the West and in countries like ours, for the church it is a time of testing, and there is something good about testing and trial. We have been resting perhaps a little too comfortably on our laurels and making assumptions about what it means to be a follower of Christ, a disciple, a citizen of his kingdom. We are now at a point where there are no props, no artificial advantages to professing Christ, to being a member of his church. Now you have to take up your cross and follow him, seek first his kingdom. If it costs something, there is also something that is precious in the sense that it is refining, produces patience, creates an eagerness and a hopeful looking for Christ's coming and the fullness of his kingdom. It helps in not misidentifying his kingdom perhaps with what now is, but in identifying with what will be.

**PL:** *Dr. Venema, we would be honored if you would conclude in prayer and ask that God might bless this dialogue and the time tomorrow with Dr. Gaffin.*

**CV:** All right. Let us pray.

Our father in heaven, we are grateful that we can once again come to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and know that you will hear us, that you are the one who has given us life and given us new life in Christ by your Spirit and Word. We are thankful for this conversation that we could have together, Dr. Lillback, Dr. Garner, and myself. We pray your blessing upon it, that it may be helpful and fruitful for those who listen in. We pray your blessing as well on Dr. Gaffin and his son

as they participate with us at the Gaffin Lecture tomorrow. We are grateful for his many years of service, for his witness, for the contributions that he has made in his own field, and for his love for Christ and for Christ's church. May that be for us also an encouragement in our own lives and in our own witness and labor. So, bless the events this evening as well as tomorrow, for your glory and for our blessing, we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.



