

Summary of Part II: Restoring the Confession

Words matter. Translations matter. That is the entire reason why the EPC uses an “authentic modern version” of the Westminster Standards rather than the 17th century versions. The modern version is treated as the EPC’s *de facto* confessional standard, but has never actually been adopted as a replacement for the original version. Since the modern version, rather than the original, is treated as the constitutional standard for our church, the doctrine it teaches has become the working doctrine of the EPC. My contention in this section is that at numerous points the changes made in the modern versions of our confessional standards constitute functional amendments and revisions to our doctrine, not merely a modernizing of archaic terminology. Some of these revisions violate the doctrine as taught in the original version of the Standards. There are places where the revisions present either **inadequate** and **deficient** versions of Westminsterian doctrine on the one hand, or a **biblically erroneous contradiction** of the Standards on the other.

The doctrine of justification is the most important example of this doctrinal revision. The revision in terminology has changed the meaning of the doctrine to the point of being horribly incorrect. Other very significant errors include altering the doctrine of election and union with Christ, the inheritance of original sin, and the application of the benefits of Christ’s mediation. These are crucial, core doctrines of our church that are inexcusably altered from their original confessional mooring.

In some areas this may seem to be a semantic critique, which is exactly correct. The reason that there is a modern version of the WCF is due to the changing nature and understanding of words. Semantics matter. Yet a semantic difference can also result in a difference of substance. In some places it will be very clear that it is not merely semantic differences in play, but bald alterations and insertions into the text. The goal of the modern version is to have an authentic, accessible copy of our confessional standards that is easily readable while still being a faithful translation of the original. But if the modern version alters the theology of our doctrinal standards, or at best produces confusion about its meaning, then it has failed its purpose of communicating our biblical doctrine in accessible language. Instead it muddles the meaning of our doctrine. My intention in this section is to demonstrate that the modern version departs significantly from the meaning of the original in a number of critical areas. A retort to these critiques may be that this is splitting hairs, that there is no real difference in meaning between the original and modern versions. That is quite possible, and my case may be overstated. But if that is true, then why not revert back to the original? Allegedly the meaning is the same, after all, but has the added benefit of not alienating EPC elders who believe the modern version presents different doctrine and would assist in growing the EPC in closer fraternal relationships with sister Reformed churches.

And that will be my concluding argument: to revert the publication of the EPC’s confessional standards back to their 17th century language, either permanently, or until such time as superior modern versions are identified and thoroughly vetted.

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Background and Dubious Constitutionality

The EPC's 3rd General Assembly, held in 1983, received an ascending overture ("Overture D") which sought to provide clarification on the version of the Westminster Standards which were the actual constitutional standard of the EPC.¹ This overture not only identified which various amendments it argued should be considered constitutional, but also urged the EPC to adopt a modernized version of the WCF as its official confession of faith.² Overture D was referred to the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) by the General Assembly,³ who resubmitted it with their recommended adjustments to the 4th GA in 1984.⁴ The PJC recommended that Overture D, along with some alterations by the PJC, be approved by the General Assembly. This recommendation was approved by the Assembly.⁵

The wording of Overture D and the subsequent PJC recommendation adopted by the GA are critical. Overture D petitioned the General Assembly to *adopt* the WCF in the modern language edition. The recommendation from the PJC passed by the General Assembly authorized *printing* the modern language edition of the WCF.⁶ Similar language was used with the modern language version of the catechisms. The modern language version of the WSC was *endorsed* for addition in the denominationally published BOO.⁷ The modern language version of the WLC was similarly *commended*, and its *publication approved*.⁸ The 28th GA in 2008 approved a recommendation from the

¹ *Minutes of the Third General Assembly of the EPC*, Overture D, page 14.

² Kelly, Douglas F., Hugh McClure, and Philip B. Rollinson. *The Westminster Confession of Faith: An Authentic Modern Version*. 2nd ed. Signal Mountain, Tenn: Summertown, 1984. The initial overture from the 3rd General Assembly in 1983 had recommended *The Westminster Confession of Faith: A New Edition* published by Attic Press (1979), but these two versions are essentially the same and edited by the same people. The version adopted in 1984 is in reality the second edition of the version published in 1979. The EPC has not varied from publishing the second edition, though Kelly, McClure, and Rollinson have published a third edition (1988) and fourth edition (2004). The third and fourth editions only vary from the second in the commentary, arrangement of prooftexts, and identification of various denominational tweaks of the WCF. Hereafter, "modern" or "modern language version" refers to the Summertown edition of the WCF, P&R edition of the WSC, and modernized WLC, as otherwise explicitly amended by the EPC.

³ *Minutes of the Fourth General Assembly of the EPC*, Appendix G, page 177.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 13, 15.

⁶ The Acts of Assembly appended to the BOO states that in AoA 84-01 that the "General Assembly shall *print* the Summertown edition of the **Westminster Confession of Faith**... (italics added)."

⁷ *Minutes of the Seventh General Assembly of the EPC*, minutes 7-36. The official 'Preface' to the EPC's confessions only states that subsequent to 1988 that the modern English version of the WSC came into popular use. The modern version of the WSC was first published in 1986. It is still under copyright. Kelly, Douglas F., Philip B. Rollinson, and Frederick T. Marsh. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1986. This copyright prevents the EPC from distributing free versions of the WSC.

⁸ *Minutes of the 24th General Assembly of the EPC*, minutes 24-45, page 79, 250. It was commended and its publication authorized. The official 'Preface' to the EPC's confessions only states that the WLC was "approved." It is notable that on the EPC website both the WLC and WSC are offered in original and modern English, while the WCF is not. The EPC website erroneously states that the EPC "adopted" the modern language version of the WCF in 1984, which is likely the reason for this asymmetry.

Committee on Christian Education and Publication that established the EPC's current printing standards for our constitutional documents. This recommendation explicitly superseded the publication guidelines attached to the endorsement and commendation of the WSC and WLC, but does not explicitly identify the modern language versions of the Westminster Standards *as* our constitution, only that the modern language version *of* our constitution was to be published.⁹ This recommendation only modified printing standards, not the constitutional status of the modern language version of the Westminster Standards.

To put it simply: the EPC has never officially voted to adopt the modern language of the Westminster Standards as the official version of our constitution. **Therefore, the original language version of the Westminster Standards, as expressly amended by the EPC, remain our official constitutional standard.**

This can be demonstrated in a few other ways. First, Overture D was seeking clarification for which version of the Westminster Standards were the constitutional standard of the EPC. This clarification was needed for two reasons: 1) The WCF, WLC, and WSC were *already* the constitutional confessional standard of the EPC, and 2) The Westminster Standards had been amended numerous times by the UPCUSA and PCUS prior to the formation of the EPC.¹⁰ Since the Westminster Standards were part of the EPC's constitution prior to the approval of their modern language versions, any alteration of the Standards would have required a constitutional amendment, a process which includes approval by three-quarters of the presbyteries. This process did not occur, which means that the original constitutional standard (the original language version of the Westminster Standards as otherwise amended) remains in place.

Second, there are places where the modern language versions disagree with the originals. These disagreements are not “merely” semantic differences, but differences of substance. There are two possible solutions when the modern and original versions disagree. The first possibility is to compare the versions, and to defer to the original's meaning. In this case, we admit that the original takes priority over the modern version, meaning that the original remains the constitutional standard for our church. The second possibility is to side with the meaning of the modern version against the original. This possibility would require that the constitution have been explicitly amended, and since that has not occurred, the modern version can never take precedence over the original.

In summary:

1. When the EPC formed in 1981 the original language versions of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms were part of its constitutional standards. The EPC never voted to adopt the modern language version of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as our official confessional standard, and there is no evidence that such a change ever occurred.
2. At its 3rd General Assembly in 1983, the EPC received an overture requesting that a modern language version of the WCF be *adopted*. This overture was sent to the PJC, and in 1984 at

⁹ *Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth General Assembly of the EPC*, page 26, 74, 172, 360.

¹⁰ See Part I of this series for an in-depth discussion of this point.

the 4th General Assembly the PJC approved the modern language version and recommended that it be printed. The GA approved its *printing* and never voted on *adopting* it.

3. In 1986 the modern language version of the WSC was published by a third party. By the EPC's 8th GA in 1988 the modern language version of the WSC was in common use. In response to this, the Theology Committee recommended that the modern language version of the WSC be *produced* by the EPC, which never voted on *adopting* it.
4. In 2004 the EPC was approached by the publishers of the modern language version of the WLC. The Theology Committee recommended to the 24th GA the modern language version of the WLC be *commended* and its *publication approved*, and the EPC never voted to *adopt* it.
5. Points 2-4 show that the EPC has only voted to commend and approve the publication of the modern language version of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, not adopt them. The PJC even went so far in 1983-84 as to change the language from *adopt* to *print*.
6. Since the Westminster Confession and Catechisms were the constitutional standard of the church prior to the approval and publication of the modern language versions, adopting them as a revision or replacement to the original language versions would have required a constitutional amendment rather than an act of assembly. This process never occurred (50%+1 majority in one GA, 75% approval of presbyteries over the next year, 50%+1 majority in the subsequent GA) as it has for every other confessional revision. Therefore, the modern language versions are not the constitutional standard of the EPC.
7. Where there are differences between the original language and modern language versions of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms there are two possibilities:
 - a. If they disagree and deference is given to the meaning of the original language version, this shows that the original language version trumps the modern version because the original remains the constitutional standard of the EPC.
 - b. If they disagree and deference is given to the meaning of the modern version, this shows that an actual revision has taken place, which would have required a constitutional amendment. Since no such amendment process occurred, the original language version remains the constitutional standard of the EPC.

A few other North American Presbyterian denominations have published modern language versions of the WCF as well. In the early 1990s the RPCNA, with input from the PCA, published a modern language version of the WCF.¹¹ In 1993 the OPC produced a modern language “study edition” of the WCF.¹² The 4th edition of the Summertown version of the WCF used by the EPC describes this edition by the OPC as “very conservative,”¹³ which makes one wonder how the version used by the

¹¹ https://www.crownandcovenant.com/product_p/ds110.htm.

¹² Commentary on this version can be found here <https://www.opc.org/documents/MESV.html>. The modern version can be found here: https://www.opc.org/documents/MESV_frames.html.

¹³ Kelly, Douglas F., Hugh McClure, and Philip B. Rollinson. *The Westminster Confession of Faith: An Authentic Modern Version*. 4th ed. Signal Mountain, Tenn: Summertown Texts, 2004, page xv.

EPC would be described. The OPC also created a committee in 2018 tasked with modernizing all of the Westminster Standards.¹⁴ This possibility elicited a number of responses from within the OPC and PCA (which uses the OPC's version of the Standards). A number of arguments against this modernizing of the confession have been marshalled, and some of the fears of those arguments can find their validation in the EPC's modern language versions. These recent critiques fall into three categories: Catechisms are to be memorized and *then* studied, synonyms are rarely purely synonymous, and there remains a need for pan-generational fellowship.¹⁵

It is the concern over synonyms to which the remainder of this section will be devoted. Our Presbyterian system does not recognize something becoming constitutional simply by acceptance. While the modern language version of the Standards may be in common use, that usage does not make them actually constitutional, nor are there any constitutional grounds in the BOO for the EPC or its committees to rule that the modern language versions are constitutional due to that widespread usage. Even so, some may argue that the modern language versions are still helpful whether or not they are constitutional. What follows is a demonstration that the difference between the original and modern versions of the Standards is not a synonymous difference, but a difference in definition and substance. In too many instances the modern language versions present either a **deficient** or **biblically erroneous** change in the Standards. These changes are significant enough that the EPC should not only reaffirm that the original language versions remain our constitutional standard, but retract our affirmation of the modern language version so that they no longer function as an alternative, *de facto* constitution for our church.

There are also a number of instances where the rationale for updating the language is unclear, but the changes do not go so far as to meaningfully alter the doctrine of the Westminster Standards. Yet, these changes are still often arbitrary and without basis in the originals. For example, the modern version of WLC 172 replaces “Lord’s Supper” with “communion,” but only makes this change in one other place, a single line in WLC 175. “Communion” is replaced with “fellowship” in WCF 4.2, 6.2, 26.1-2, WLC 20, 27, 63, 90, and 162. But “communion” is left intact in a dozen places where its use is identical to the places where it was replaced. This gives the Standards a random, haphazard feel. There is not a consistent pattern for why some phrases and terms are “updated” for modern readers while other instances of the same phrase remain unchanged. WCF 2.2 declares that God is “the fountain of all being.” This evocative image of God’s relationship to his creation is modernized to “the source of all being.” Is the term “fountain” so unclear to modern readers that it needs to be replaced with “source”? Does “source” do the poetic justice of “fountain”? The modern version replaces the term “virtue” with “power” in a few instances (e.g. WCF 8.6, 13.1, 14.2, WLC 69) where it seems to mean “on the basis of, or a benefit of something” rather than power, while leaving the term in place in similar contexts, such as WLC 87. “Elect” is swapped out for “chosen ones” in WLC 154; is the biblical term “elect” too difficult for modern readers? The irony is that this changes also occurs in WCF 3.6 and 3.8, while the term elect is still retained in other parts of those same sections. It seems that changes were often made because that was expected of the translators, not because it actually brought the language of the Standards up to date.

¹⁴ http://opc.org/GA/85th_GA_rpt.html.

¹⁵ See this article in *Ordained Servant Online* by T. David Gordon: https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=758.

The Doctrine of God

The doctrine of God has been changed and made **deficient** in the modern language versions, and possibly a **biblically erroneous contradiction** of the original Standards in the second example below.

The first example is found in the descriptions of who God is and what his attributes are. When listing God's attributes, the original says that God is 'most' while the modern says 'completely.'

WCF 2.1, original: most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth.

WCF 2.1, modern: completely wise, completely holy, completely free, and completely absolute. He works everything according to the purpose of his own unchangeable and completely righteous will for his own glory. He is completely loving, gracious, merciful, and long-suffering.

WLC 7, original: most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious.

WLC 7, modern: completely wise, completely holy, completely just, completely merciful and gracious.

It is of course true that God is completely loving. He is totally loving in all his being. But 'completely' has a different meaning than 'most.' To be completely something is to be that thing thoroughly, which God is in his attributes. But to be most something is to not only be that thing thoroughly, but to be the greatest exemplar of that thing. God is archetypically holy: the one who is thoroughly and totally holy, whose holiness cannot be exceeded and sets the pattern for all to whom he communicates his attributes.

The doctrinal difference is not in 'completely' being incompatible with 'most'; anyone who affirms that God is most just would by definition also affirm that he is completely just. The doctrinal change lies in the deficient language of the modern version: 'completely' gracious does not completely describe God as 'most' gracious. The modern version presents a different definition of who God is, that while not inconsistent with the original, neither says nor means what the original does.

It is not like the term 'most' is archaic to the modern reader. The average American could pick up the difference between completely and most, even while still affirming that God is completely just. There is no reason for this change, and appears to have been made for the sake of making an "authentic update." This is doctrinal change by sloppiness.

This is a serious adjustment on the part of the modern version, not simply because of the difference between 'completely' and 'most', but because of *who* possess these attributes. These clauses from the WCF and WLC are part of our confessional definition of what God is. To downgrade the definition of God, with no apparent warrant or need, reveals a theological carelessness.

The second example is found in the description of God as Trinity in WCF 2.3. The original states, "...the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son." This is the historic manner of describing the Trinitarian dynamic, reflecting the Nicene Creed from the Council on Constantinople (381), the western addition of the *filioque* clause, and the Athanasian Creed.

The modern version states, "The Father *exists*. He is not generated and does not come from any source. The Son is eternally generated from the Father, and the Holy Spirit eternally comes from the Father and the Son (emphasis added)."

It is disheartening that the historic catholic language of begetting and proceeding was replaced by generation and "comes from." But the doctrinal problem arises from God the Father being distinguished from the other two persons of the Trinity because he *exists*. Of course God the Father exists and has that existence eternally, and we should enthusiastically confess that. But we should also be able to confess with enthusiasm that both God the Son and God the Spirit exist eternally as well. The modern version of the WCF throws that into doubt.

WCF 2.3 was intended to distinguish between the members of the Trinity, which is why the original version uses the catholic language of "the Father is of none." When the feature that distinguishes the Father from the Son and Spirit is the existence of the Father, the logical implication is that the Son and the Spirit do not exist eternally, but find their existential origin in the Father. This is heresy that smacks of Adoptionism, Arianism, and the errors of the pneumatomachians. Clearly the modern version of the WCF was not espousing these errors, but the language used is inappropriate for distinguishing the persons of the Trinity.

The historic catholic language can still be employed in modern English; the modern version of WLC 10 says, "From all eternity, the Father begets the Son; the Son is begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son." This demonstrates that the changes made to WCF 2.3 in the modern version are unnecessary for the doctrine to be clear to modern readers.

The third example relates to God's providence and the Christian's assurance of salvation. The 18th century English hymnodist William Cowper famously penned the hymn "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," which includes the stanza:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

A frowning providence is a poetic way of describing poor circumstances and suffering. God is in control, and even though conditions are bleak, God still smiles upon his children. We trust not because of the situations we find ourselves in, no matter how dire, but because of his grace shown us in Christ. Lack of pleasant circumstances do not mean that God is absent, but dire times do remind us that we require the light of God's favorable providence for any and all good things. This is the idea of Numbers 6:24-26, and how the Puritans spoke of the "light of God's countenance."

For God to shine his face upon his people is to remove the “frowning,” suffering-inducing providences in life that so often characterize it.¹⁶

There are three instances where the phrase “light of his [God’s] countenance” is used in the WCF and WLC, all in conjunction with assurance of salvation (WCF 11.5, WCF 18.4, and WLC 81)¹⁷. Those who are justified may have an assurance of salvation, but sometimes due to sin or God’s good providence his people may not possess a sense of assurance. This lack of assurance can be caused by God withdrawing the light of his countenance, resulting in providential suffering. However, that phrase is replaced in the modern version with, “not have a sense of his presence with them,” “from God’s withdrawing the sense of his presence,” and “from losing the sense of God’s favor.”

The objective reality of suffering as a result of God’s providential action (withdrawing the light of his countenance) is reduced to the subjective sense of God’s favor. Not feeling a sense of God’s presence or favor can be a way in which God’s withdraws the light of his countenance, but it is a small portion of what the original phrase can encompass. This change in language may not undermine the doctrine of the original Confession, but it does it a disservice by presenting an insufficient understanding of how the Christian’s assurance can be shaken, and the role God’s providence plays in that. The modern word choice also reflects the pervasive shift from the objective language of God’s action of the original to the subjective experience of the human individual in the modern.

¹⁶ This is the view of Westminster Divine Anthony Burgess in his work *Spiritual Refining*. See Beeke, Joel R. “Loss of Assurance.” *Tabletalk*, July 31, 2016. This article can be found online here <https://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2016/07/loss-assurance/> and here <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/loss-assurance/>. A more developed version of this argument can be found in Murray, John. *Behind a Frowning Providence*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990.

¹⁷ WLC 81 actually says that a Christian’s assurance may weakened by a number of avenues, including “manifold...desertions” which is taken in the modern version as “withdrawing the light of his countenance.” Regardless of the specific wording, comparing WLC 81 to WCF 18.4 shows that “desertions” has the same meaning as “withdrawing the light of his countenance.”

The Imputation of Sin

The doctrine of sin, particularly in how sin is imputed from Adam to humanity, is altered in significant ways in the modern language version of the WCF and WLC.¹⁸ The language of the original version supports an immediate imputation of sin from Adam to his posterity by virtue of his federal headship. By contrast, the modern version teaches a mediated imputation of sin, where Adam's sin is passed down to all of his posterity by virtue of their physical generation from him. The result is a **biblically erroneous contradiction** of the original Standards.

Immediate imputation is the doctrine that the guilt of Adam and Eve's sin is conveyed to all of humanity directly, without any mediating steps along the way. This is due to Adam's role as the federal, covenantal head of all of humanity.

Mediated imputation is the doctrine that the guilt of Adam and Eve's sin is conveyed to all of humanity through intermediaries, namely the parents of children regressing all the way back to Adam and Eve themselves. Adam and Eve convey sin to their descendants by virtue of propagating them, passing along the guilt of sin as a curse-induced trait of humanity. Sin is passed along to each subsequent generation in the same way as it was passed from Adam and Eve to their immediate children.

Traducianism is the doctrine that teaches that aspects of an offspring's soul are passed along from parent to child in the same way physical characteristics are passed along. Traducianism and mediated imputation are often intertwined, since sin is understood as a spiritual reality, and therefore transmitted spiritually in the soul from parent to child.

It needs to be shown that the two editions of the Confession teach different things. While the alterations to WCF 6.3 and WLC 22 directly relate to this issue, the changes are ambiguous enough as to not be definitive on the question. WLC 26, however, is changed enough so as to be clear in its differences from the original.

Section	Original	Modern
WCF 6.3: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof	the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, <u>conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.</u>	the guilt for this sin has been imputed <u>to all human beings, who are their natural descendants and have inherited</u> the same death in sin and the same corrupt nature.

¹⁸ In full disclosure, when I was ordained by the Presbytery of the Midwest of the EPC I was required to take an exception on this point, specifically because I upheld the meaning of the original language version and rejected the meaning of the modern version on the basis of agreeing with the original. My way of reading the original and modern versions, presented here, was affirmed explicitly by the Candidates Care Committee, and tacitly by the Presbytery by its approval of my exceptions. To my knowledge, this is the only instance where a court of the EPC has rendered judgment on the modern version of the WCF and WLC. It is for that reason that this section is provided with significantly more commentary from within the Reformed tradition.

<p>WLC 22 (original): Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?</p> <p>WLC 22 (modern): Did the whole human race fall in that first disobedience?</p>	<p>The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, <u>all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him</u>, and fell with him in that first transgression</p>	<p>Since the covenant was made with Adam <u>as a general representative of humanity, not only for himself but also for his natural descendants</u>, the whole human race sinned in him and fell with him in that first disobedience.</p>
<p>WLC 26 (original): How is original sin conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity?</p> <p>WLC 26 (modern): How is original sin passed from Adam and Eve to their descendants?</p>	<p>Original sin is conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity <u>by natural generation</u>, so as all that <u>proceed from them in that way</u> are conceived and born in sin.</p>	<p>Original sin passes from Adam and Eve to their descendants <u>by natural procreation</u>, so that all <u>subsequent human offspring</u> are conceived and born in sin.</p>

The grammatical logic of WCF 6.3 is that sin is conveyed to all of Adam and Eve’s progeny who descend from them by natural generation. The phrase ‘ordinary generation’ is not intended to communicate the mode of conveying sin, but to exclude all of their descendants by special generation, a category which only includes Jesus. The modern version, “imputed to all human beings, who are their natural descendants and have inherited,” changes the meaning. The phrase “who are their natural descendants and have inherited...” is a subordinate adjective clause which describes the preceding independent clause, “the guilt for this sin has been imputed to all human beings.” The grammatical logic of the modern version of WCF 6.3, along with WLC 22, is sufficiently ambiguous as to be easily understood as teaching that the guilt of Adam and Eve’s sin was imputed to their posterity by *means* of natural procreation.

Any ambiguity is removed in the modern version of WLC 26. The original states that original sin is conveyed to all who proceed (i.e. find their initiation) from Adam and Eve by natural generation. “By natural generation...proceed from them in that way” is describing *who* receives the guilt of original sin, not the *how* of receiving that guilt. The modern version explains that sin is passed from Adam and Eve by procreation, thereby all following human offspring receive the guilt of sin. The grammar of the modern version clearly reads as a description of who receives the guilt of original sin *and* how that guilt is conveyed: “Original sin...passes to their descendants by natural procreation so that all subsequent human offspring...” A normal reading of the modern version of WLC 26 results in the understanding that sin is passed to Adam and Eve’s descendants due to natural procreation.

Whereas the original version makes it clear that procreation is not the instrument of passing along sin (“so that all that proceed from them in that way [natural generation]”), the modern version does not (“so that all subsequent human offspring”). The original, by definition, excludes Jesus from the possibility of receiving the guilt of original sin since he did not “proceed from them in that way [natural generation],” but by the conception of the Holy Spirit. The modern version does not have this clarity: Jesus is one of the “subsequent human offspring.” The reason the modern version stumbles in this way is due to its grammatical structure, which concludes that sin is passed on by

procreation. The error of this possibility can only exist if the vocabulary chosen for the modern version was intended to communicate that sin is passed on by procreation.

The consensus position of the Reformed tradition is that Adam's sin is passed to his posterity by God imputing it to them on the basis of Adam's covenantal relationship to humanity, which was in turn established by God according to his wise judgment.

John Calvin in 2.1 of his *Institutes* argues against sin being passed physically, stating specifically in 2.1.7, "The cause of the contagion [original sin] is neither in the substance of the flesh nor the soul, but God was pleased to ordain that those gifts which he had bestowed on the first man, that man should lose as well for his descendants as for himself." God designated Adam as the representative of his descendants, and his fall affected his descendants precisely because he was their representative. Original sin is not passed biologically, nor through the soul's substance.

Zacharias Ursinus, author of the Heidelberg Catechism, stated in response to a hypothetical objection to his proposition that our corrupt nature is propagated and derived from Adam and Eve:

Original sin is neither transmitted through the body, nor through the soul but through the transgression of our first parents; on account of which, God even whilst he creates the soul, at the same time deprives it of original righteousness, and such other gifts as he conferred upon our first parents upon the condition that they should transmit them to, or lose them for, their posterity, according as they themselves should retain or lose them. Nor is God, by this act, unjust or the cause of sin; for this want of righteousness in respect to God who inflicts it on account of the disobedience of our first parents is no sin, but a most just punishment; although in respect to our first parents, who drew it upon themselves and their posterity, it is a sin.¹⁹

Ursinus is stating the exact principle as Calvin, and is doing so as an author of one of the premier confessional documents in the Reformed tradition.

The French Reformed Synod of Charenton (1644-1645) assessed the "moderate" Calvinism being taught at the Academy of Saumer in France and condemned the academy's teaching of mediated imputation as heretical. Saumer was the origin point of Amyraldism, and following the Synod of Charenton, the Swiss Reformed churches produced the Helvetic Consensus (1675) in order to unite their congregations against the errors of Amyraldism, including its doctrines of mediated imputation. Mediated imputation was condemned in Canons 10-12 of the Helvetic Consensus. These canons identify both immediate imputed sin and inherent hereditary sin as realities on the basis of Adam's representative status, not mediated through the parents of children. This hereditary sin is by virtue of the imputed sin, not by its mediation. The Consensus was added to the Second Helvetic Confession of Faith, the doctrinal standard of the Swiss Reformed church.

Francis Turretin, active at the time of the Helvetic Consensus and supportive of it, wrote, "Thus sin is properly propagated neither in the soul nor in the body taken separately, but in the man because

¹⁹ Zacharias, Ursinus. *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Scott, 1852, page 41.

neither the soul nor the body apart, but man in Adam sinned so far as there was power in him.”²⁰ Sin is passed on to all people because Adam is their representative head, not because of a genetic connection.

Commenting on WCF 6.3, Princetonian A.A. Hodge cites the Canons of Dort 3.2 to affirm that sin is passed exclusively from Adam in his fall according to God’s good judgment, “which is also explicitly taught in Scripture.”²¹

In his famous commentary on the WLC, J.G. Vos states in regards to WLC 26,

What has been imputed to us because of Adam's covenant relationship to us? The guilt of Adam's first sin has been imputed to all of his posterity (in other words, to all human beings except Jesus Christ). What have we received from Adam by reason of his natural relationship to us? We have grieved our physical or bodily life from Adam through our parents and more remote ancestors, who descended from him . . . Is it correct to say that we ‘inherit’ a sinful nature from Adam? It depends on what we mean by the word *inherit*. If we mean that we are born with a sinful nature because of our connection with Adam, our first ancestor, then it is correct to say that we ‘inherit’ a sinful nature from Adam. If we mean that we inherit a sinful nature as we might inherit blonde hair or a tall stature, then it is not correct to say that we ‘inherit’ a sinful nature from Adam. While we must recognize that the problem of the transmission of original sin is a very difficult one, still it seems safe to say that the Bible does not warrant a belief that a sinful nature is transmitted by the mechanism of biological heredity as physical characteristics are transmitted from generation to generation. Sin is a spiritual fact, not a bodily property or characteristic. If original sin were transmitted from parent to child by biological heredity, we would receive it from our immediate parents rather than from Adam. In that case, too, the children of believers would come into the world in a regenerate condition. But as a matter of fact the children of believers are born into the world dead in sin. We may conclude, therefore, (a) that our sinful nature comes to us by reason of our natural birth as descendants of Adam; (b) that it comes to us from Adam, rather than our immediate parents; (c) that we ‘inherit’ a sinful nature from Adam as a man might ‘inherit’ money or property from his father or grandfather, not as a person might ‘inherit’ blue eyes or brown hair from his parents.²²

The New England Theology (also known as The New Divinity) connected with Jonathan Edwards, and especially Samuel Hopkins, became associated with teaching mediated imputation. This became a point of contention between confessional Presbyterians and Congregationalists leading up to and following the Plan of Union (1801). Confessional Presbyterians did not believe that the mediated

²⁰ Turretini, François, George M. Giger, and James T. Dennison. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Vol. 1., Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Pub, 1992, page 640. Turretin cites the Synod of Charenton as a basis for rejecting mediated imputation. It is here that Turretin distinguishes between ordinary generation as describing the propagation for all of humanity, Christ excluded, and special generation as describing the conception of Christ.

²¹ Hodge, A.A. *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary*. Titus Books, 2015, page 53.

²² Vos, Johannes G., and G. I. Williamson. *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*. Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Pub, 2002, pages 62-64. Vos cites A.A. Hodge’s commentary on the WCF to sustain his confessional view on imputation.

imputation taught by the New England Theologians was compatible with the WCF.²³ Princeton theologian Samuel Miller forcefully wrote in 1833 against the inroads mediated imputation, along with its soteriological implications, had made into the Presbyterian Church through the Unitarianism promoted by Yale professor and Congregationalist minister Nathaniel Taylor. Miller argued that Taylor's views led to a denial of innate depravity,²⁴ an argument Warfield would take up with the benefit of hindsight.

B.B. Warfield argued for federal, immediate imputation in his work "Imputation."²⁵ Warfield summarized the Reformed Protestant efforts in the 16th and 17th century on this issue as,

...the three-fold doctrine of imputation—of Adam's sin to his posterity, of the sins of His people to the Redeemer, and of the righteousness of Christ to his people—at last comes to its rights as the core of three constitutive doctrines of Christianity—the sinfulness of the human race, the satisfaction of Jesus Christ, and justification by faith. The importance of the doctrine of imputation is that it is the hinge on which these three great doctrines turn, and the guardian of their purity.²⁶

The immediate imputation of Adam's sin, in its federated, covenantal nature, is the same pattern in which the sin of the elect imputed to Christ, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the elect, conforms. This is one reason why the doctrine is so critical: as sin was passed from Adam, so it is passed from the sinner to Christ, and Christ's righteousness to the sinner. To mediate imputation (e.g. through the parents of children) in one of these interactions distorts the imputation in the others. This doctrine of immediate and covenantal imputations places the Reformed view in contrast to Pelagian, Arminian, and Roman Catholic positions.²⁷

Warfield cites the Synod of Charenton and the theology of Charles Hodge as representative of the immediate, federal imputation position. He contrasts it with i) the New England Theology and its "ultimate denial of the quality of sin involving guilt in anything but the voluntary acts of a free agent" which springs from a belief in mediated imputation, ii) with the New School Theology in the Presbyterian Church and its doctrine of mediated imputation, represented by Henry B. Smith, and iii) the views of Presbyterian theologian W.G.T. Shedd, who held that all of humanity was present

²³ Fortson III, S. Donald. *The Presbyterian Creed: A Confessional Tradition in America, 1729-1870*. Colorado Springs, Colo: Paternoster, 2008, pages 43-46. Fortson notes that both B.B. Warfield and John Murray denied that Edwards taught mediated imputation, even if the theologians following in his footsteps did so. Regardless of whether Warfield and Murray were correct about Edwards' views, the point they are drawing out is that mediated imputation is not consistent with the Westminster Standards.

²⁴ Miller, Samuel. *Letters to Presbyterians, on the Present Crisis in the Presbyterian Church in the United States*. Philadelphia, PA: Anthony Finley, 1833, page 109-119. This is from Letter VII, which is devoted primarily to this subject.

²⁵ Warfield, B.B. "Imputation." In *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 262-69. Philadelphia, PA: P&R Pub, 1952. Originally published in 1909.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 266.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 264-266.

generically with Adam and sinned with him.²⁸ These three views all fall short of the confessional, biblical position that Adam's guilt was imputed to his posterity covenantally alone.

John Murray affirmed that the theology of the WCF and WLC taught immediate imputation, but worried that the language could be misconstrued as teaching that sin is transferred from Adam by virtue of propagation to his posterity rather than federally to his posterity.²⁹ This is federal propagation because, as Herman Bavinck asserted, "Original sin, after all, is not a substance that inheres in the body and can be transmitted by procreation. On the contrary, it is a moral quality of the person who lacks the communion with God that one should..."³⁰

The implications of the doctrinal differences are significant. First, as Warfield argued, the pattern of imputation in scripture is undermined if the transmission of Adam's guilt to humanity varies from the transmission of the Christian's sin to Christ and Christ's righteousness to his people. The nature of the problem will direct the nature of the solution.

This is why, secondly, mediated imputation leads to Pelagianism. The concern the confessional Presbyterians had with the New England Theology was grounded in the latter's doctrine of mediated imputation. A little over a century after the Plan of Union, Warfield observed that this had led the Congregationalists to define sin as a voluntary act of the will, excluding the idea of sin as an indwelling reality. Disconnecting the immediacy and reality of sin's imputation from the individual led the Congregationalists to reject the doctrine that humans are guilty of Adam's sin. If sin is not directly imputed to someone, but passed along by intermediaries, then it appears unreasonable to hold people guilty for sin that was not immediately theirs. If they are not guilty of sin that does not belong to them, then that original sin of Adam is therefore not passed them. In this case, sin is not a corruption with which people are born and which predisposes them to sinful acts, but is rather solely free acts of the will, which people freely chose without any natural inclination towards sin. This is Pelagianism. And if the problem of sin is bad choosing, rather than an evil condition, the solution is presenting a better choice. Consequently, this is how many of the Congregationalists embraced Unitarianism and an understanding Jesus' redemptive work as providing the perfect example for free humans to imitate.

Third, if sin is passed by procreation rather than covenantal imputation, there is no grounds for suggesting that Jesus was born sinless. This is exactly why the Roman Catholic Church articulated the doctrine of the immaculate conception. God worked a miracle so that Mary would be conceived and born without sin. Since Mary was sinless there was no sin nature to pass to Christ at his conception.

Fourth, mediated imputation and Traducianism provide theological ammo in defense of racism. As Vos pointed out his commentary on WLC 26, if sin is passed along as a trait, then not only is the

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 268-269.

²⁹ Murray, John. "The Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith." In *Scripture and Confessions* ed. John H. Skilton. Nutley, NJ: P&R Pub, 1973, pages 145-148. For an extended defense of immediate imputation, see also Murray's *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 1959.

³⁰ Bavinck, Herman, John Bolt, and John Vriend. *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003, page 116-117. Pages 110-117 address the inheritance of sin.

guilt of Adam's sin conveyed to his descendants, but all the accumulated guilt of the preceding people is passed along to their children. A child is guilty, and in possession of, the sin of his parents. This does not inevitably lead to racism, but inevitably enables racism. If mediated imputation is true, then one could argue with confidence that people born to certain ethnic or social groups which have historically not been Christian, or have been plagued with extraordinary evil, are more corrupt by virtue of having the sins associated with their ancestors imputed to them. It becomes easy to describe people of different races in patronizing and derogative terms, and to set up social structures to "compensate" for their innate moral "regressions." It is unsurprising that Southern theologians, such as Robert Dabney,³¹ either tolerated or embraced mediated imputation and Traducianism. On an individual level, people can easily find themselves feeling shamed because of their heritage, either due to social structures that disapprove of their social background, or because of the actions of their immediate parents. Mediated imputation is one more stumbling block between the sinner and the cross: a person has to believe that Jesus atoned not just for their sin, but also for the sins of their parents which they carry. Of course, Christ's atonement is effective to pay for all sin, but on a pastoral level, mediated imputation is something that sets up barriers to the cross which need to be torn down.

Fifth, mediated imputation leads to the belief that the children of believers are *born* morally superior to the children of non-Christians because they have had the righteousness of their parents mediated to them. If the moral status of person is passed to them from their parents, then they must receive their parent's moral status. Those born to a Christianized society can easily find themselves feeling superior compared to more morally "primitive" cultures, and can justify all sorts of foolishness on the grounds that they are not as corrupt as their neighbors. The doctrine of immediate imputation erases any sense of moral entitlement.

³¹ Dabney, Robert L. "The Doctrinal Contents of the Confession: Its Fundamental and Regulative Ideas, and the Necessity and Value of Creeds." 1983. In *Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly*, edited by Francis R. Beattie. Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1897. *The Westminster Confession and Creeds*, page 13.

Redemption Accomplished and Applied

Election and Union with Christ

Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WLC 66: What is that union which the elect have with Christ?	The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; <u>which is done in their effectual calling.</u>	WLC 66: What union do the elect have with Christ?	<u>By their union with Christ, the elect are effectually called</u> by the work of God's grace so that they are spiritually and mystically, but truly and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband.

The difference here is straightforward: the original WLC 66 states that the elect are united to Christ when they are effectually called to salvation. The modern WLC 66 states that the elect are effectually called because of their union with Christ. The modern version reversed the order of calling and salvation in a pretty ridiculous way. Union and communion with Christ is the summation of salvation for the elect (WLC 65) and effectual calling is the moment when God saves a person (WLC 67). The original version is teaching that the elect are united to Christ (saved) when God effectively summons them to himself. The modern version is in essence stating that God saves people (effectually called) because they are saved (united to Christ). This is either rank Arminianism (faith preceding calling) or a gravely thoughtless error. This is a **biblically erroneous contradiction** of the Standards.

Justification

The most egregious alteration in the modern version of the Standards is on the doctrine of justification. Justification is not a trifling doctrine, and the changes in the theology here are inexcusable and **biblically erroneous**.

Section	Original	Modern
WCF 11.1: Of Justification	not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, <u>and by accounting</u> and accepting their persons as righteous...but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them...	He does not pour righteousness into them but pardons their sins <u>and looks</u> on them and accepts them <u>as if</u> they were righteous...he imputes to them the obedience and <u>judicial</u> satisfaction <u>earned</u> by Christ

WLC 70 (original and modern): What is justification?	Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and <u>accounteth their persons righteous</u> in his sight	Justification is the act of God's free grace to sinners, by which he pardons all their sins and accepts and <u>looks on them as if they were righteous</u>
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There are two areas of profound difference.

First is the connection between God's pardon and his accounting as righteous those whom he justifies. The original states that God freely justifies his people by pardoning and by accounting and accepting them as righteous. The modern version's grammatical logic is that God justifies his people by pardoning their sins and then subsequently looks upon and accepts them as righteous. The looking and accepting in the modern version is a result of the pardoning, whereas in the original the accounting and accepting occurs in tandem with the pardoning since both are results of the imputation of Christ and his righteousness.

The problem in the modern edition is that it presents the justification of the sinner as only a declaration of righteousness, not a declared and actual righteousness as in the original. The change begins in the swapping out of the term "accounting" for "looks." In the original, *accounting* as righteous is God acknowledging that the justified sinner is righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. This happens in tandem with the pardoning and accepting, all three actions finding their source in the imputation of Jesus' righteousness.

Imputation is not only a declarative act, but an ontological reality, where, what is true of Christ is true of the Christian by virtue of their union with him. Imputation is a "receiving and resting on [Christ] and his righteousness." This is how WCF 11.1 ends. It is not just the righteousness of Christ that the sinners receives by imputation, but Christ himself (Romans 3:21-26, 1 Corinthians 1:30). Imputation is a covenantal action that results from the Christian's union with Christ: the benefit of redemption the elect share with Christ is union and communion with him in grace and glory (WLC 65, WCF 26.1), where they are mystically and really joined to him (WLC 66). Upon this basis the elect have communion with Jesus. This union and communion with Christ manifests itself specifically in justification, sanctification, and adoption as participation in the virtue of Christ's mediation (WLC 69). Justification is an expression of a reality: the Christian is righteous because they are united to Jesus in his death and resurrection. Justification is not only then a statement about guilt being cleared by Jesus' death, but an actual new creation of a person (i.e. actual transformation) by Christ's resurrection (Romans 4:25, 2 Corinthians 5:15-18).³²

³² Westminster Divine Anthony Burgess put it this way, "So that if the word should signifie as much *as to righteous*, as to *sanctifie* doth signifie to *make holy*, still we could grant it, though not in the Popish way; and indeed the Apostle *Rom. 5.* saith, *many are made righteous by the second Adam*, which if not meant of *inherent* holinesse, doth imply, that the righteousness we have by Christ is not meere *declarative*, but also *constitutive*; and indeed one is in order before the other, for a man must be *righteous* before he can be *pronounced* or *declared* so to be. But the Hebrew word doth not signifie this sense primarily; for whereas the Hebrew word in *Cal* doth signifie to be *righteous* by a positive quality; The word in *Hiphil* according to that Rule in Grammar, signifyeth to *attribute* and *account this righteousness unto a man by some words, or other testimony*, even as the word that in *Cal* signifieth to be *wicked*, doth in *Hiphil* signifie to *condemn* and *judge a man as wicked*, so that there are these two things in justifying, whereof one is the ground of the other, first to *make righteous*, and then to *pronounce or declare so* (emphasis original)." Burgess, Anthony. *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated, From the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially Antinomians in XXX Lectures Preached at Lawrence-Iury, London.* London: Printed by A. Miller for Tho. Underhill, 1651, pages 6-7.

In the original version of WCF 11.1, God pardons the sinner (your debt has been paid), accounts them as righteous (you are acknowledged as righteous because you possess the righteousness of Christ, because you possess Christ himself), and accepts them as righteous (welcome home, son).

Contrast this with the modern version, where God *looks* upon the justified sinner as if they were righteous. God treats the justified person as righteous, but the logic here is that the person is not actually righteous. While the original has God accounting the sinner righteous as the cause of his justification (along with pardoning and accepting), the modern version's "looking on...as if righteous" is the result of the justifying action, namely the pardon of God. The additions of words "as if" in the modern version demonstrate the change in the doctrine. "As if" means "not really."³³ The modern version teaches that God pardons the unrighteous, and then treats them as righteous (he did just pardon them) for Christ's sake alone, but they remain, in reality, still unrighteous. In other words, justification is the action where God declares and treats a sinner as righteous, whether or not they actually are. "As if" is not an update to 17th century language, but a total interpolation into the WCF;³⁴ there is nothing in the language of the original to justify inserting "as if" into the modern version.

The *second* area of difference arises from two more words added to the modern version of WCF 11.1: "judicial" and "earned." Neither word, nor anything like them, are in the original WCF. In fact, other than these two additional words, the sentences between the two editions are basically the same. The insertion of these terms does not serve to modernize the language of the WCF, but to interpret it by revising the vocabulary.

The adding of the term "judicial" makes sense of the modern version's approach to justification as pardon. And it is true that God is judicially satisfied with Christ's atonement. But this is an overly limiting term. The original WCF allows for a far more broad, all-encompassing understanding of God's satisfaction: satisfied with reparations for the shame shown to his honor and glory, satisfied with the defective creation's restoration, satisfied with the exile's return, etc. Justification may be primarily forensic, but it is not solely legal in nature. The modern version limits the satisfaction provided by Christ to restitution, which is not the full biblical (or original confessional) extent.

The addition of "earned" makes very little sense. It modifies "obedience and judicial satisfaction." There is some debate over whether the WCF teaches that we have both Christ's active and passive obedience imputed to us, or whether the Confession allows freedom on the issue. The debate hinges on whether "obedience and satisfaction" means "[active] obedience and satisfaction [by passive obedience on the cross]" or "[general] obedience and satisfaction [which resulted from both the obedience and the divine nature of Christ]."³⁵ Adding the term "earned" would seem at first glance

³³ See Merriam-Webster, Macmillan, Oxford, and Cambridge dictionaries.

³⁴ The modern version of WSC 33 retains the phrasing and theology of the 1647 version.

³⁵ The Congregationalist Savoy Declaration which updated the WCF was primarily authored by John Owen. The Congregationalists interpreted the WCF as leaving wiggle-room on the issue of the imputed active obedience of Christ, and so re-worded the Declaration's corresponding chapter, "but by imputing Christ's active obedience to the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness."

to definitively state that the active (i.e. earned) obedience of Christ is what is imputed. This would be another undercover amendment to the WCF masquerading as a language update. However, “earned” modifies “satisfaction,” not “obedience.” It is not clear what satisfaction the Son *earned* from the Father: the Father was certainly satisfied with Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:17, Luke 3:22) and at his transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). These, of course, occurred before Jesus was crucified.

Jesus’ active obedience did not earn him the right to redeem his people, but demonstrated his qualifications for being their redemptive provision. If Christ’s active obedience is imputed, it is because he fulfilled the law as covenant keeper, thus providing himself as the one capable of satisfying God’s justice. He did not “earn” God’s satisfaction.³⁶

Perhaps there are some EPC elders who prefer the modern WCF language to the original, or who do not believe the changes are changes of substance. What cannot be denied is that “as if,” “judicial,” and “earned” have no basis in the original WCF, and therefore cannot be described as updates, but must be recognized as amendments to the doctrine of justification. This is unacceptable. Justification is far too important a doctrine to reword flippantly, and the changes made are not insignificant. This is an embarrassment to our church.

The Execution of Christ’s Offices

In Christ’s work as the Christian’s covenantal mediator our Lord fills and executes three specific offices: prophet, priest, and king. These are not broad activities that Christ does, nor are they generic descriptions after the fact of his work. WSC 20-21 and WLC 32-42 establish that Christ’s mediation as our redeemer requires filling and accomplishing these covenantal roles. The modern version of the catechisms obscures this, and is at best, **deficient**. For instance,

Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WSC 23: What <u>offices</u> doth Christ <u>execute</u> as our redeemer?	WSC 23: Christ, as our redeemer, <u>executeth the offices</u> of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.	WSC 23: How is Christ our redeemer? ³⁷	WSC 23: As our redeemer, Christ is a prophet, priest, and king in both his humiliation and his exaltation

WSC 24-26 and WLC 43-45 describe Jesus as “executing the office” of prophet, priest, and king, language which is absent from the modern versions. There is no linguistic or grammatical reason for dropping out the terms “office” and “executing.” It is not an updating or clarifying of the terminology, but blurring the covenantal nature of Christ’s work in the offices he fills.

³⁶ See this article for a summary of John Owen’s theology of the imputation of Christ’s active obedience and the *pactum salutis*: <http://www.christurc.org/blog/2011/10/06/john-owen-on-the-imputation-of-christs-active-obedience/>

³⁷ WLC 42 is the parallel question, and the modern version employs the language of office and execution.

WLC 42 and WSC 23 teach that Jesus executes these offices as the mediator of God’s people, and that he executes them in both his humiliation and exaltation. WLC 46-56 focus on the ways the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of Christ relate to his humiliation and exaltation in his mediatorial offices. All of these redemptive actions of Christ are discussed in terms of his mediatorial work between God and his people. The modern version of WLC 52 on Christ’s exaltation in his resurrection shifts the focus from Christ being the mediatorial representative of his people to representing humanity in general.

Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WLC 52: How was Christ exalted in his resurrection?	...all which he did as a <u>public person</u> , the head of his church, for their justification, quickening in grace, support against enemies, and to assure them of their resurrection from the dead at the last day	WLC 52: How was Christ exalted in his resurrection?	He did all this as a <u>general representative of humanity</u> and as head of his church in order to justify believers, make them alive in his grace, support them against their enemies, and assure them that they too will be resurrected from the dead at the last day.

The vocabulary of “public person,” changed to “general representative of humanity,” is the area of mistake. It is easy to see how “public person” could be read as meaning Jesus functioning in some broad way on behalf of all humanity. The same translation of language occurs in WLC 22, where Adam in the original is described as having the covenant of life being made with him as a public person, with all of his descendants being represented in him (see the discussion above on the imputation of sin). The modern changes WLC 22 into “general representative of humanity” here as well.

But Adam was not the “general representative” of all humanity, but its covenant head. Being a “public person” is the WLC’s way of stating that Adam was covenanting with God not as an individual, but as a representative of an entire faction, which in this case includes the totality of the human race. When Jesus is raised as a “public person” it is as the covenant head of those whom God is redeeming, which is the argument of WLC 45-56.³⁸ As Adam brought corruption and condemnation upon his covenant faction as their head, so Christ is raised as a public person, not only for himself, but for the elect.

This is why the original WLC 52 states that Jesus was raised as “a public person, the head of his church, for their justification, quickening in grace, support against enemies, and to assure them of their resurrection from the dead at the last day.” Jesus was raised as the covenant head of his people, the mediator who provides life by his resurrection, since he was raised not as a private individual,

³⁸ Andrew Roycroft has an excellent article answering the question “For whom did Christ rise?” <https://thinkingpastorally.com/2019/04/17/for-whom-did-christ-rise/>

but a public person – the head of the church. The modern version of WLC 52 has to add an “and” between the clauses stating that Jesus was raised as a general representative of humanity and as head of the church, differentiating these two categories as distinct and separate areas. The sentence is now fractured: in the original, everything listed describes how Jesus’ resurrection is of benefit to his people, while the modern has an initial clause describing Jesus representing all of humanity, while the remainder of the sentence describes how his resurrection benefits the church. Clearly the original intended “public person” to be a covenantal description of Jesus as head of the church, not a role disconnected from the accomplishment and application of redemption to the elect.

The Covenants of Works and Grace

The “covenant of works” as a concept and technical term is an aspect of Westminsterian and Reformed theology often disparaged, sometimes even within Presbyterian churches. WSC 12 famously provided an alternative term to covenant of works, which helps shed light into the theological meaning of that covenant. That term is covenant of life. This is a technical term describing the name and purpose of the covenant God made with Adam. It is an alternate title to the covenant of works. However, instead of saying that God entered in a covenant of life with humanity at creation, the modern version of WSC 12 says, “After the creation God made a covenant with man to give him life.” This is wrongheaded and **deficient**. First, humanity already had life after being created. God did not covenant to with Adam to *give* him life, but to continue providing him life in communion with himself. Secondly, the modern version removes the technical term of ‘covenant of life’ for a generic phrase. This obscures the covenant theology WSC 12 originally taught.

The Purchase and Application of Redemption

There is a flagrant change related to the application of redemption in WCF 8.8:

Section	Original	Modern
WCF 8.8: Of Christ the Mediator	To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually <u>apply and communicate</u> the same	Christ insures [sic] with absolute certainty that everyone for whom he purchased redemption actually <u>accepts and receives it</u>

The change in language is stark. In the original, those for whom Christ has purchased redemption *be* applies and communicates its effects. In the modern version, Christ “insures” [sic] that those for whom he purchased redemption accept and receive redemption. The original is objective: this is what Christ does. The modern subjective: this is what the redeemed do. In the original, Christ’s role is the purchasing, application, and communication (i.e. effecting) of redemption. In the modern, Christ’s role is the purchasing and the insuring [sic] of our acceptance and reception of redemption. Throughout the WCF “communication” is meant as “giving.” In the original version of WCF 8.6 the effectiveness and benefits are described as “communicated” by promises, types, and shadows in the old covenant. Even the modern version of WCF 8.6 translates “communicated” as “given.” This is sacramental language, present as well in WCF 29 on the Lord’s Supper. Redemption is communicated (given) by Christ in his ordinances, particularly the sacraments (WLC 59, 153-154, 168-170).

The modern version of WCF 8.8 erases these connotations by switching the emphasis from what Christ has done to what the Christian does. No longer is redemption something applied and communicated, but accepted and received. There is no basis in the original for this translation. The meaning of the modern appears limited to the initial moment of salvation, since it uses the language of accepting and receiving Jesus into your heart. It erases the ongoing, sacramental application of redemption, which the original assures is effectively and certainly applied to those whom Christ has redeemed. The worst part of this change is that it seems intentional. It appears to be a purposeful shift in emphasis from what Christ has done and is doing to what we do in salvation. *Apply* and *communicate* are active verbs describing what Jesus does. *Accepts* and *receives* are active verbs describing what we do. Since there is no textual basis for this change, it seems designed to place the emphasis on the sinner's participation in their salvation, rather than upon the exclusive, objective work of Christ as in the original.

Word and Sacrament

Means of Grace and Interpretation of Scripture

WCF 1.7 addresses the perspicuity of scripture: scripture is sufficiently clear in regards to salvation so that all who read it may know what they are to believe to be saved. However, the original and modern versions differ as to how readers may come to know how to be saved.

Section	Original	Modern
WCF 1.7: Of the Holy Scriptures	that not only the learned, but the unlearned, <u>in a due use of the ordinary means</u> , may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them	that the uneducated as well as the educated can sufficiently understand it <u>by the proper use of the ordinary means of grace</u>

At first glance the differences between the two versions might appear negligible, but the modern still presents an incorrect and **deficient** understanding of growth in scriptural knowledge. The original says that people may understand scripture by ordinary means, meaning that by normal means of study both the educated and ignorant may achieve a sufficient understanding of what is necessary for their salvation. This knowledge does not imply acceptance: the non-Christian may read the Bible and understand its claims for the necessity of salvation, and yet still reject Christ. Because scripture “clearly propounds” the necessity and means of salvation, there is no excuse for the non-Christian who reads the Bible and rejects Jesus. The point of the phrase “ordinary means” in the context of scripture’s clarity is to drive home that no special insight or process is necessary for someone to read the Bible and know how to be saved, regardless of whether or not the Holy Spirit calls them to faith.

To the phrase ‘ordinary means,’ the modern version adds ‘of grace.’ There is no textual basis in the original WCF 1.7 for this addition, but it could be argued that the modern version is clarifying the original’s intent. This would mean the interpretation of WCF 1.7 in the previous paragraph is incorrect; rather, the way scripture’s teaching on the necessity of salvation becomes clear is through the ordinary means of grace. It may seem intuitive to translate “ordinary means” this way, but it is wrong.

The phrase “ordinary means of grace” is familiar to modern Reformed Christians as a reference to the way in which the Holy Spirit calls and grows the elect, specifically through the word, sacraments, and prayer. The problem is that this phrase is entirely absent from the Westminster Standards.³⁹ The “outward and ordinary means by which Christ communicates the benefits of his redemption and mediation” (WSC 85, 88, WLC 154) and “ordinary means of salvation” (WSC 91, WLC 63, 155, 161) are the terms used to describe the word, sacraments, and prayer. While the difference between the language of the Standards and “ordinary means of grace” may appear superficial, there is far less

³⁹ There is a potential exception in WLC 195, an exposition of what the Christian ought to pray based on “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The Christian is commanded to pray that “God bestow and bless all means of grace.” The idea here would certainly encompass the word and sacraments, but is far broader (all vs. ordinary) and seems aimed at all ways in which God may protect his people from temptation rather the specific application of the benefits of Christ’s mediation. This can be seen in the citations of Ephesians 4:11-12 and Hebrews 13:20-21, both of which possess a larger scope than word and sacraments.

ambiguity in our confessional language. “Ordinary means of grace” lacks the biblical precision, and fails to account for what grace is. Describing the sacraments as means of applying the benefits of Christ executing the offices of prophet, priest, and king in his mediation and our redemption tells us far more than describing them as means of grace.

In the case of WCF 1.7, if the modern version’s “of grace” were replaced with the precision of “outward and ordinary means by which Christ communicates the benefits of his redemption/mediation,” we see that it becomes non-sensical. Non-Christians do not receive the benefits of Christ’s mediation when they partake of the Lord’s Supper, but eat and drink judgment upon themselves, even if they later convert. Partaking of the sacraments does not make one better able to understand the plain, salvific message of scripture. Prior to their effectual calling, the Holy Spirit does not use scripture, the sacraments, or prayer to apply the benefits of their redemption to a person, since they are not yet redeemed.

This additional phrase ‘of grace’ then undermines the entire point of WCF 1.7. The non-Christian cannot be scripturally informed about the necessity and means of salvation (regardless of acceptance) apart from the ordinary workings of grace, that is, the application of the benefits of Christ’s redemption, since he has not (yet) redeemed them. This would mean that scripture’s teaching on salvation is not clear unless you have already been saved, which does not make sense and contradicts what the original version of WCF 1.7 teaches.

The Ordinary Means of Salvation

Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WLC 63: What are the special privileges of the visible church?	The visible church hath the privilege of... enjoying the communion of saints, <u>the ordinary means of salvation</u>	WLC 63: What are the special privileges of the visible church?	The visible church also provides fellowship for God’s people, <u>functions as the ordinary means by which people are saved</u>

The Westminster Catechisms use “ordinary means of salvation” as a synonym for “external means of Christ applying the benefits of his mediation,” which are the ordinances of the word, sacraments, and prayer (WLC 35, 154-155, 159, 161, WSC 88-91). WLC 63 states that the visible church enjoys privileges as the body of Christ, including the ordinary means of salvation. That is, the church possesses Christ’s ordinances. The modern version of WLC 63 misses this by translating the phrase as “the ordinary means by which people are saved” and adding the verb “functions.” The church no longer possesses these means of salvation as a privilege, but functions as the means by which people are saved. Now, it is certainly true that outside the church there is ordinarily no hope of salvation (cf. WCF 25.2), but the modern version of WLC 63 changes the intent of the original. The modern version is describing the function of the church, while the original describes the privileges the church enjoys. It is also difficult to read the modern version as speaking about the word, sacraments, and prayer rather than conversion. The phrase “by which people are saved” is most easily read in our evangelical context as referring to the moment of conversion, not the ongoing mediation of Christ (for instance, WLC 159 explicitly distinguishes between conversion and salvation). It is not that the modern version of WLC 63 is incorrect and **inadequate** here, it just misrepresents the

meaning of the original and therefore cannot be considered an authentic modern version of the answer.

This is exacerbated by the way the modern version formulates the relationship of the covenant to the sacraments.

Section	Original	Modern English
WCF 7.6: Of God's Covenant with Man	Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this <u>covenant is dispensed</u> ...in them [the gospel] is held forth <u>in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy</u> ...and is called the new testament	Under the gospel Christ himself, the substance <u>of God's grace</u> , was revealed. The ordinances of this New Testament... <u>and in them the spiritual power of the covenant of grace is more fully developed</u> .
WCF 20.1: Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience	and in <u>fuller communications</u> of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily <u>partake of</u>	and a <u>fuller gift</u> of the Spirit of God than believers ordinarily <u>had</u> under the law
WLC 35 (original and modern): How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?	Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper; in which grace and salvation <u>are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy</u> , to all nations.	Under the New Testament, Christ is revealed as the substance of the same covenant of grace, which was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the word and in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. In these <u>the spiritual power</u> of grace and salvation <u>is more fully and clearly developed</u> for all nations.

WCF 7.6 and WLC 35 are drastically altered in the modern version in a **biblically erroneous** direction. WCF 7.6 says that Christ is the substance of the gospel, and that under the gospel the covenant of grace is dispensed with efficacy in the sacraments and preached word. WLC 35 echoes this, stating that grace and salvation are held out in fuller efficacy in the preached word and the sacraments.

Grace and salvation come to God's people covenantally, and under the gospel of the covenant of grace, Jesus, the substance of that covenant and source of grace and salvation, is dispensed with effectiveness in the preached word and sacraments. The communion the believer shares with Christ is a partaking of his Spirit by his covenant in this way, not a mere possessing as the revisions to WCF 20.1 puts it.

This is not the Roman Catholic view that the power of the sacraments is *ex opere operato*; the Westminster Standards include the preached word here, and develop sacramental doctrine throughout their entire scope. But the modern versions reduce the covenantal nature of the sacraments and preached word to a display of God's grace, rather than the original's understanding

that they are divinely instituted means of *giving* Christ to his people. “In [preaching and the sacraments] the spiritual power of grace and salvation is more fully and clearly developed for all nations.” The modern version of WLC 35 takes on a memorialistic bent at best, and hardly communicates the meaning of the original. The original certainly teaches that these ordinances of the new testament more fully display the gospel (“evidence”), but goes further to affirm that they are effective in administering the covenant, that is, effective in administering grace and salvation. The modern version fails to represent an important aspect of Westminsterian, Reformed theology in these revisions.

The Meaning of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper

Section	Original	Modern English
WCF 28.1: Of Baptism	Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the <u>party</u> baptized into the visible church; but also, to be unto <u>him</u> a sign and seal	Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ. By baptism a person is solemnly admitted into the visible church. Baptism is also a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of the <u>believer’s</u> engrafting into Christ, of rebirth...
WLC 165 (original and modern): What is baptism?	to be a sign and seal of <u>ingrafting</u> into himself... <u>and enter into an open and professed engagement</u> to be wholly and only the Lord's	as a sign and seal of our being <u>joined</u> to Christ... and of <u>their making a public commitment</u> that they belong completely and only to the Lord

The problem in the modern version’s changes should be clear: the rewording of baptism’s definition excludes infants, and is therefore **biblically erroneous**. While the efficacy of baptism is not tied to the moment of administration, the grace promised is not only offered, but really conferred by the Holy Spirit to those who receive the sacrament, whether infants or adults, according to the counsel of God in his appointed time (WCF 28.6). That means the original of WCF 28.1 is correct: baptism is a sign and seal of the recipient’s ingrafting into Christ and their rebirth. This is no small point: is baptism a sign and seal to believers that they are ingrafted into Christ, or is it a sign and seal of the recipient’s ingrafting into Christ?

The modern version of WLC 165 runs afoul of the same problem: infants cannot make a public commitment that they belong to the Lord. They can, however, by virtue of the covenant of grace, be entered into a commitment from their church and parents that they belong to the Lord. The modern version excludes infants because it emphasizes the subjective side of baptism, that is, that baptism is about the baptized person committing to God. While that should be true for converts, it is not definitional of the sacrament. The definition of baptism, which WLC 165 is providing, should not exclude some of the legitimate recipients of baptism, such as covenant children. To put it bluntly: baptism is a sign and seal of infant recipient’s ingrafting into Christ, regeneration, and remission of sins as much as it is for converts.

WCF 28.1 and WLC 165 clearly differ between the original and modern versions. The modern version reveals a problem that often arises in the EPC. We talk of the administration of baptism to infants as if it were a separate sacrament from the baptism of converts. Even the most recent version of the Personal Information Form (February, 2018) asks, “Do you willingly offer the sacrament of infant baptism to Christian parents?” Honestly, the answer should be a resounding no from any Westminster-subscribing pastor. There is no sacrament of infant baptism; there is the sacrament of baptism, given to believers and their children. The sacrament is not offered to parents, but to their children.

This is the result of splitting the meaning of baptism differently for infants and converts. As a parent of a baptized child, I can tell him, “You belong wholly to God because you have been baptized. You have received the sign and seal of God’s covenant promises that he is your God, and that you’re his child. The promise of God is that if you turn to Christ and rest upon him for your salvation, you will be redeemed. Your baptism is a confirmation that God will keep this promise, and that you are his in Christ.” The original WCF and WLC provide a foundation for this comfort; the modern version has gutted it.

This intense subjectivism is highlighted again in the changes made to WLC 175.

Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WLC 175: What is the duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord’s supper?	The duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's supper, is seriously to consider how they have behaved themselves therein, <u>and with what success</u>	WLC 175: What should we do after we have received the Lord’s supper?	After receiving the Lord’s supper, we should think about our participation in the sacrament <u>and whether we got anything out of it</u>

The original answer informs us that the duty of the Christian is to soberly consider the nature of their behavior in receiving the sacrament (did I discern the body of Christ? Eat and drink in an unworthy manner? Approach God’s gift with sober joy?) and the appropriateness of that behavior. The modern version completely distorts this: “Whether we got anything out of it.” If you are a Christian *you got Christ out of it*, period. The effects of that reception (comfort in faith or lack thereof) are secondary to receiving the body and blood of Christ.

The modern version’s language is indefensible as an update to the original, crass in its phrasing, and inconsistent with the theology of the Westminster Standards. If taken seriously by a reader, the modern version of WLC 175 communicates that the importance of the sacrament is my subjective “whatever I got out of it.” As a pastor, I already struggle against people thinking that the importance of the Lord’s Supper is in the warm, spiritual fuzzies it gives them. People tend towards an attempt at extracting meaning from the sacrament independent of Christ and the application of redemption, and the modern version of WLC 175 provides no help on that count because it is a **deficient** expression of biblical teaching.

The Church

The Catholic and Universal Church

Both the original and modern version of the Westminster Confession use the terms “universal” and “catholic”. These terms are not synonymous with “invisible” or “true” church. WCF 25.3 teaches that the visible church is universal, meaning that the church is not limited to one nation or ethnic group. WCF 25.1-2 states that both the invisible and visible church are “catholic or universal.” The original WCF 25.3-4 then describes the visible church as catholic, while the modern version **inadequately** chooses “universal” instead.

Section	Original	Modern English
WCF 25.2-3: Of the Church	The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel ... Unto this <u>catholic</u> visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God	The visible church is also catholic or universal under the gospel ... Christ has given the ministry, Scriptures, and ordinances of God to this <u>universal</u> visible church
WCF 25.4: Of the Church	This <u>catholic</u> church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the <u>doctrine</u> of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed <u>more or less purely in them.</u>	This <u>universal</u> church has been sometimes more and sometimes less visible. Particular churches, which are members of it, are also more or less pure, depending on how the gospel is accepted and taught, how the ordinances of God are administered, and how public worship is performed.

There are two issues with this translation choice. First, since the modern version maintains both “universal” and “catholic” as distinct terms in WCF 25.2, switching out “catholic” for “universal” in WCF 25.3-4 is arbitrary. It is not an update to the language, since it already uses both terms. “Universal” in the modern version of WCF 25.3-4 cannot honestly be described as updating the original language since the modern version uses “catholic” anyways. It is simply replacing a term, rather than updating it. Secondly, “catholic” and “universal” are not synonymous. They have overlapping meaning, but “catholic” is not limited to universal. The use of “or” as a coordinating conjunction does not imply that the terms are interchangeable, but that they describe the same institution equally well. While the Westminster Standards do not define “catholic,” its historical meaning, a meaning that was embraced throughout the Reformation, was of universal, orthodox faith contrasted with anti-Nicene Christianity. This overlaps with the idea of a universal church, but is not one-to-one. This definition developed historically, and the contrasting with anti-Nicene theology can be seen in Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century),⁴⁰ Augustine (4th Century),⁴¹ Pacian of

⁴⁰ Catechetical Lectures 18.26 (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310118.htm>).

⁴¹ *Against the Manichaeans* chapter 5 (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.iv.viii.vi.html?>).

Barcelona (4th Century),⁴² and the Roman Edict of Thessalonica (380)⁴³ which established Catholic Christianity as the religion of the empire. The Reformers thought of themselves as Reformed Catholics, with William Perkins famously titling his defense of Protestantism “*A Reformed Catholic*”. In Reformed confessionalism, Heidelberg Catechism 54 comments on this, and the Second Helvetic Confession explicitly states this in §9 (The Creeds of Four councils Received and The Sects) and §17 (Of the Catholic and Holy Church of God and the One Only Head of the Church). Being Catholic (capital “C”, as it were) is an important feature of the Reformed church, and should not be so easily swapped out for “universal”. This is not an arcane, 16th-17th century debate, but an ongoing point of discussion in the broader Reformed world.⁴⁴

This is a relatively minor distinction theologically – what can be said in the Westminster Standards about the church as catholic can be also said of it as universal, and vice-versa. But the change between the original and the modern version cannot be substantiated from the text and cannot be called an authentic translation of the original. It also misses out on strongly identifying with the greater tradition of the church.

John Murray comments,

“There is truly a *catholic* tradition to which all due respect is to be paid and for which we should thank God. The Romish Church has attempted to monopolize the word ‘Catholic’ by trying to fix upon itself the denominational name, ‘the Catholic Church’. Protestants should not be the dupes of Rome in this respect and should resist every attempt on the part of Rome to appropriate that denomination... We should understand that all who profess the true religion belong to the catholic church and in the catholic tradition we glory. The catholic tradition is enshrined particularly in the ecumenical creeds, and is found also in the line of orthodox interpreters and theologians throughout the centuries (italics original).”⁴⁵

The EPC in its modern edition of the Westminster Standards has become the dupe of Rome.

The Church as a Society

WLC 62 asserts that “the visible church is a society” composed of all those people, in all times and places, who profess the true religion, along with their children. The modern version replaces this phrase with, “the visible church is all the people all over the world” in all times who profess the true religion, along with their children.

⁴² *Of the Catholic Name* (http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/pacian_1_letter1.htm).

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edict_of_Thessalonica.

⁴⁴ See Peter Leithart’s 2013 article at *First Things* (<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/11/the-end-of-protestantism>) and his follow-up book of the same name.

⁴⁵ Murray, John. *Collected Writings of John Murray*. Vol. 4, Banner of Truth Trust, 1982, page 269.

Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WLC 62: What is the visible church?	The visible church <u>is a society</u> made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children	WLC 62: What is the visible church?	The visible church <u>is all the people</u> all over the world and their children who <u>gather together</u> throughout the ages and profess the true religion.

The swapping out of “is a society” for “all the people” eliminates an important doctrinal point. The modern version in effect simply deletes “a society” and defines the visible church in terms of its membership, whereas the original defines the visible church as a society with a particular kind of membership. A society includes not only people, but customs, laws, institutions, and values. The visible church, as a society, requires and includes these things: worship with scripture, prayer, and sacraments, in the context of the Lord’s Day, along with officers and discipline all following the regulations established by God. These are not additional features that the church possesses, but definitional aspects of the visible church as a society.

If the visible church is defined only by its members to the exclusion of its institutional features (as in the modern version of WLC 62), then gatherings of Christian individuals without these features can claim (accurately) to fit the definition of the visible church (e.g. youth group outings, two or three people at a coffee shop, chapel at college, dinner with the family, etc.). Some may argue that this is a better biblical definition of the visible church, but it is not the definition found in the original WLC, and is therefore a **deficient** expression of biblical teaching.

Another instance of this is in WCF 19.3. In the original, Israel is described as a “church under age” which received the moral law along with the civil and ceremonial laws. The modern version changes this to “pre-Christian assembly of believers.” The original describes as Israel as a religious society, the church before the coming of its Christ, with all of the things that come with being the church. The modern, like with WLC 62, eliminates the institutional aspect of Israel as the church in favor of emphasizing it as a gathering of believers, a far more vague and unhelpful definition. Dispensationalists cannot affirm the original version of WCF 19.3, since they hold that the church began at Pentecost. But dispensationalists could affirm the modern version; no one disputes that the Old Testament Israelites were “pre-Christian” before the New Testament, or that they were believers who gathered together. This difference between the two versions demonstrates that the modern version is not a fair updating of the meaning of the original.

The modern version of WLC 62 adds the additional phrase “who gather together” to its definition. Gathering together and being a society are not the same thing, and grammatically the phrases do fit the same purpose. The original defines the visible church as a society, which includes members. The modern defines the visible church as members who gather. This phrase has no basis in the text of the original, and does not compensate for deleting the reference to the visible church as a society.

The Church and the Keys to the Kingdom

The “keys to the kingdom” (a reference to Matthew 16:19 and 18:18) are the means of opening and closing the kingdom of heaven through the preaching of the word and church censures. WCF 30 as

an entire chapter is essentially devoted to this subject, with specific reference to the keys of the kingdom of heaven in WCF 30.2. The Heidelberg Catechism addresses this subject in detail as well in HC 82-85.

WCF 23.3 teaches that the civil authorities may not take upon themselves the use of the keys, since those keys have been entrusted to the officers of the church (WCF 30.1-2). This doctrinal term is changed to the broadly generic “spiritual power” in the modern version of WCF 23.3.

Section	Original	Modern English
WCF 23.3: Of the Civil Magistrate	Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the <u>keys of the kingdom of heaven</u> ; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith	Civil authorities may not take on themselves the ministering of God’s word and the sacraments, the administration <u>of spiritual power</u> , or any interference with matters of faith

Of course, the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is a spiritual power, but there is no way to read the modern version and understand that WCF 23.3 is addressing a very specific kind of power. The modern version of WCF 30.2 maintains the terminology of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, so clearly the modern version does not believe the term in itself is inaccessible. There is no reason to make this change here, and it obscures an important aspect of the church’s authority. It cannot be defended as fair updating to the original language, but is a rather **inadequate** translation choice.

Part II Conclusion

The EPC should, by an act of General Assembly,

- 1) Explicitly affirm that the original 17th century language version of the WCF, WLC, and WSC are the sole confessional, constitutional standards of the church;
- 2) Instruct that the constitutional, 17th century language version of the WCF, WLC, and WSC are the standards to be used in ordination examinations;
- 3) Cease publication of the Summertown, modern versions of the WCF, WLC, and WSC;
- 4) Authorize publication of the original 17th century language version of the WCF, WLC, and WSC in the official version of the EPC constitution;
- 5) If a modern language version of our confessional standards is still desired for publication, authorize the Committee on Theology to,
 - a. evaluate the modern language version of the WCF jointly published by the RPCNA and PCA, and the modern language version published by the OPC,
 - b. seek counsel from the current OPC committee tasked with similarly evaluating the need and viability of a modern language version of the Westminster Standards,
 - c. make a recommendation to the GA based on these narrow parameters on what modern language version, if any, of the Westminster Standards the EPC should publish.

Appendix II

The Westminster Confession of Faith		
Section	Original	Modern English
WCF 1.2: Of the Holy Scripture	All which [books of the Bible] are given by inspiration of God <u>to be</u> the rule of faith and life.	All of these books are inspired by God <u>and are</u> the rule of faith and life.
WCF 1.6: Of the Holy Scripture	and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to <u>human actions and societies</u>	We also recognize that some provisions for the worship of God and the government of the church are similar to <u>secular activities and organizations</u>
WCF 1.7: Of the Holy Scripture	that not only the learned, but the unlearned, <u>in a due use of the ordinary means</u> , may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them	that the uneducated as well as the educated can sufficiently understand it <u>by the proper use of the ordinary means of grace</u>
WCF 1.9: Of the Holy Scripture	and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (<u>which is not manifold, but one</u>)	And so any question about the true and complete sense of a passage in the Bible (<u>which is a unified whole</u>)
WCF 2.1: Of God, and of the Holy Trinity	God is without... <u>passions</u> ... <u>incomprehensible</u> ... uses “ <u>most</u> ” as an adjective for eight attributes.	God is without... <u>emotions</u> ... <u>limitless</u> ... uses “ <u>completely</u> ” as an adjective for eight attributes.
WCF 2.3: Of God, and of the Holy Trinity	the Father <u>is of none</u> , neither begotten, nor proceeding	The Father <u>exists</u> . He is not generated and does not come from any source
WCF 6.3: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof	the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, <u>conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation</u> .	the guilt for this sin has been imputed <u>to all human beings, who are their natural descendants and have inherited</u> the same death in sin and the same corrupt nature.

WCF 6.3: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof	and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to <u>all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation</u>	the guilt for this sin has been imputed to <u>all human beings, who are their natural descendants</u>
WCF 6.6: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof	Every sin... <u>and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature</u>	Every sin...
WCF 7.6: Of God's Covenant with Man	Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this <u>covenant is dispensed</u> ...in them [the gospel] is held forth <u>in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy</u> ... <u>and is called the new testament</u>	Under the gospel Christ himself, the substance <u>of God's grace</u> , was revealed. The ordinances of this New Testament... <u>and in them the spiritual power of the covenant of grace is more fully developed.</u>
WCF 8.6: Of Christ the Mediator	promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and <u>signified</u> to be the seed of the woman	promises, types, and sacrifices which revealed him and <u>indicated</u> that he would be the seed of the woman
WCF 8.8: Of Christ the Mediator	To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually <u>apply and communicate</u> the same	Christ insures [sic] with absolute certainty that everyone for whom he purchased redemption actually <u>accepts and receives it</u>
WCF 9.3: Of Free Will	Man, by his fall into a state of sin	Man fell into a state of sin <u>by his disobedience</u>
WCF 11.1: Of Justification	not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, <u>and by accounting</u> and accepting their persons as righteous...but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them...	He does not pour righteousness into them but pardons their sins <u>and looks</u> on them and accepts them <u>as if</u> they were righteous...he imputes to them the obedience and <u>judicial</u> satisfaction <u>earned</u> by Christ

WCF 11.5: Of Justification	and not have <u>the light of his countenance restored unto them</u> ...and renew their faith <u>and</u> repentance	and not have <u>a sense of his presence</u> ...and renew their faith <u>in</u> repentance
WCF 12.1: Of Adoption	All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, <u>to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number,</u>	God guarantees the adoption of all those who are justified in and for the sake of his only son, Jesus Christ
WCF 14.1: Of Saving Faith	and is ordinarily wrought by the <u>ministry</u> of the Word, <u>by which also,</u> and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened	is ordinarily accomplished by the ministry of the word. It is also increased and strengthened <u>by the word,</u> by prayer, and by the administration of the sacraments.
WCF 16.3: Of Good Works	but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them	<u>Rather, they should diligently attempt to identify what good works God has commanded in his word and then try their best to do all of them, praying earnestly and daily for the empowering and enabling of the Holy Spirit, who lives in them.</u>
WCF 18.3: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation	but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be <u>partaker</u> of it	true believer may not have doubts and conflicts about it, possibly wait some time for it, and <u>grow</u> into it
WCF 18.4: Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation	by God's <u>withdrawing the light of his countenance,</u> and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light	or from God's <u>withdrawing the sense of his presence</u> and allowing them to walk in darkness
WCF 19.3: Of the Law of God	to give to the people of Israel, as a <u>church under age</u>	to give to the people of Israel, as a <u>pre-Christian assembly of believers</u>
WCF 20.1: Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience	and in <u>fuller communications</u> of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily <u>partake of</u>	and a <u>fuller gift</u> of the Spirit of God than believers ordinarily <u>had</u> under the law

WCF 21.7: Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day	so, in his Word, by a <u>positive, moral, and perpetual</u> commandment binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath	In his word God has similarly commanded all men in every age to keep one day in seven holy unto him as a Sabbath
WCF 21.8: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day	do not only <u>observe an holy rest</u> , all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations	rest the whole day from their own works and words, and from thoughts about their worldly activities and recreations
WCF 22.4: Of Lawful Oaths and Vows	Nor is it to be violated, although made to heretics, or <u>infidels</u> .	and must not be broken, even if made to heretics or <u>atheists</u>
WCF 22.7: Of Lawful Oaths and Vows	In which respects, <u>popish</u> monastical vows of perpetual single life	In this respect monastic vows of perpetual celibacy
WCF 23.3: Of the Civil Magistrate	Civil magistrates may not assume to themselves the administration of the Word and sacraments; or the power of the <u>keys of the kingdom of heaven</u> ; or, in the least, interfere in matters of faith	Civil authorities may not take on themselves the ministering of God's word and the sacraments, the administration <u>of spiritual power</u> , or any interference with matters of faith
WCF 25.3: Of the Church	The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel ... Unto this <u>catholic</u> visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God	The visible church is also catholic or universal under the gospel ... Christ has given the ministry, Scriptures, and ordinances of God to this <u>universal</u> visible church
WCF 25.4: Of the Church	This <u>catholic</u> church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the <u>doctrine</u> of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed <u>more or less purely in them</u> .	This <u>universal</u> church has been sometimes more and sometimes less visible. Particular churches, which are members of it, are also more or less pure, depending on how the gospel is accepted and taught, how the ordinances of God are administered, and how public worship is performed.

WCF 28.1: Of Baptism	Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the <u>party</u> baptized into the visible church; but also, to be unto <u>him</u> a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration...	Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ. By baptism a person is solemnly admitted into the visible church. Baptism is also a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of the <u>believer's</u> engrafting into Christ, of rebirth...
WCF 29.1: Of the Lord's Supper	the <u>sealing</u> all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body.	and as the seal of all the benefits of that sacrifice for true believers. <u>It also signifies</u> the spiritual nourishment and growth of believers in Jesus and their additional commitment to perform all the duties they owe him. <u>Finally</u> it is a bond and pledge of believers' communion with Jesus and with each other as members of his mystical body.
WCF 29.8: Of the Lord's Supper	but, by their unworthy coming thereunto, are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own <u>damnation</u>	However, by their unworthy coming to the Lord's table they are guilty of his body and blood and bring <u>judgment</u> upon themselves

The Westminster Larger Catechism			
Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WLC 2: How doth it appear that there is a God?	but his word and Spirit only do <u>sufficiently and effectually</u> reveal him unto men for their salvation	WLC 2: What evidence is there for God?	However, salvation only comes through God's revelation of himself in his word and Spirit.
WLC 7: What is God?	Uses "most" to describe five attributes	WLC 7: What Is God	Uses "completely" to describe five attributes
WLC 22: Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?	The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for	WLC 22: Did the whole human race fall in that first disobedience?	Since the covenant was made with Adam <u>as a general representative of</u>

	his posterity, <u>all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him</u> , and fell with him in that first transgression		<u>humanity, not only for himself but also for his natural descendants</u> , the whole human race sinned in him and fell with him in that first disobedience.
WLC 26: How is original sin conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity?	Original sin is conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity <u>by natural generation</u> , so as all that <u>proceed from them in that way</u> are conceived and born in sin.	WLC 26: How is original sin passed from Adam and Eve to their descendants?	Original sin passes from Adam and Eve to their descendants <u>by natural procreation</u> , so that all <u>subsequent human offspring</u> are conceived and born in sin.
WLC 35: How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?	Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper; in which grace and salvation <u>are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy</u> , to all nations.	WLC 35: How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?	Under the New Testament, Christ is revealed as the substance of the same covenant of grace, which was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the word and in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper. In these <u>the spiritual power</u> of grace and salvation <u>is more fully and clearly developed</u> for all nations.

WLC 52: How was Christ exalted in his resurrection?	all which he did as a <u>public person</u> , the head of his church, for their justification, quickening in grace, support against enemies, and to assure them of their resurrection from the dead at the last day	WLC 52: How was Christ exalted in his resurrection?	He did all this as a <u>general representative of humanity</u> and as head of his church in order to justify believers, make them alive in his grace, support them against their enemies, and assure them that they too will be resurrected from the dead at the last day.
WLC 53: How was Christ exalted in his ascension?	there to receive gifts for men, to <u>raise up our affections</u> thither	WLC 52: How was Christ exalted in his ascension?	There he receives gifts for men, <u>raises our minds</u>
WLC 62: What is the visible church?	The visible church <u>is a society</u> made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children	WLC 62: What is the visible church?	The visible church <u>is all the people</u> all over the world and their children who <u>gather together</u> throughout the ages and profess the true religion.
WLC 63: What are the special privileges of the visible church?	The visible church hath the privilege of... enjoying the communion of saints, <u>the ordinary means of salvation</u> ...testifying, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him	WLC 63: What are the special privileges of the visible church?	The visible church also provides fellowship for God's people, <u>functions as the ordinary means by which people are saved</u> ...testifying that whosoever believes in him will be saved and excluding no one <u>from fellowship who desires to come to Christ</u>

WLC 66: What is that union which the elect have with Christ?	The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; <u>which is done in their effectual calling.</u>	WLC 66: What union do the elect have with Christ?	<u>By their union with Christ, the elect are effectually called</u> by the work of God's grace so that they are spiritually and mystically, but truly and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband.
WLC 70: What is justification?	Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and <u>accounteth their persons righteous</u> in his sight	WLC 70: What is justification?	Justification is the act of God's free grace to sinners, by which he pardons all their sins and accepts and <u>looks on them as if they were righteous</u>
WLC 81: Are all true believers at all times assured of their present being in the estate of grace, and that they shall be saved?	and, after the enjoyment thereof, may have it weakened and intermitted, through manifold distempers, sins, temptations, and <u>desertions</u> ; yet are they never left <u>without such a presence and support of the Spirit of God</u> as keeps them from sinking into utter despair.	WLC 81: Are all true believers assured all the time that they are saved and are in a state of grace?	and once they have it, their assurance may be weakened and interrupted from being afflicted by all kinds of psychological problems, from sinning, from being tempted, and from <u>losing the sense of God's favor.</u> However, the Spirit of God keeps believers from complete despair by never allowing them to be <u>without some inner sense of his presence and support.</u>
WLC 101: What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?	Wherein God manifesteth his sovereignty, as being <u>JEHOVAH</u>	WLC 101: What is the introduction to the Ten Commandments?	In these words God reveals his sovereign being as <u>LORD</u>

WLC 116: What is required in the fourth commandment?	The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or <u>keeping holy</u> to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word	WLC 116: What does the fourth commandment require?	The fourth commandment requires all men to sanctify <u>or set apart</u> to God the times he has established in his word
WLC 142: What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?	...man-stealing...	WLC 142: What particular sins does the eighth commandment forbid?	...kidnapping...
WLC 165: What is baptism?	to be a sign and seal of <u>ingrafting</u> into himself... <u>and enter into an open and professed engagement</u> to be wholly and only the Lord's	WLC 165: What is baptism?	as a sign and seal of our being <u>joined</u> to Christ... and of <u>their making a public commitment</u> that they belong completely and only to the Lord
WLC 175: What is the duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's supper?	The duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's supper, is seriously to consider how they have behaved themselves therein, <u>and with what success</u>	WLC 175: What should we do after we have received the Lord's supper?	After receiving the Lord's supper, we should think about our participation in the sacrament <u>and whether we got anything out of it</u>

The Westminster Shorter Catechism			
Original Question	Original Answer	Modern Question	Modern Answer
WSC 2: What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?	<u>The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments</u> , is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.	WSC 2: What authority from God directs how to glorify and enjoy him?	The only authority for glorifying and enjoying him is <u>the Bible, which is the word of God and is made up of the Old and New Testaments.</u>
WSC 12: What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?	When God had created man, he entered <u>into a covenant of life with him</u>	WSC 12: What did God's providence specifically do for man whom he created?	After the creation God made a covenant with man <u>to give him life,</u>

WSC 23: What offices doth Christ execute as our redeemer?	Christ, as our redeemer, <u>executeth the offices of...</u>	WSC 23: How is Christ our redeemer?	As our redeemer, Christ is...
WSC 38: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?	and made perfectly <u>blessed</u> in the full enjoying of God to all eternity	WSC 38: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?	and will be made completely <u>happy</u> in the fully enjoyment of God forever.
WSC 94: What is Baptism?	doth signify and seal our <u>ingrafting</u> into Christ	WSC 94: What is baptism?	which is a sign and seal that we are <u>joined</u> to Christ
WSC 95: To whom is baptism to be administered?	Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the <u>visible church</u> , till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him; but the infants of such as are members of the <u>visible church</u> are to be baptized.	WSC 95: Who should be baptized?	Those who are not <u>members of churches</u> should not be baptized until they have publicly stated that they believe in Christ and will obey him, but the infant children of <u>church members</u> should be baptized.