

BOOK REVIEW: FEDERAL VISION

Timothy Spence (age 15)

Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root

David J. Engelsma

Jenison, MI; RFPA, 2012

Hardback, 252 pp.

The Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root by David J. Engelsma is a book written to inform and prepare its audience against “the chief threat to the Reformed faith.” This book is concise and most definitely to the point.

Engelsma makes no mistake when introducing the Federal Vision. Without any hint of man-pleasing or delivering a flattering message, Engelsma lets the reader know that “I [i.e., Engelsma] expose the root of the Federal Vision. I intend to destroy it.” It is good and comforting for Reformed believers to know that they are represented by a man who is by no means afraid of the opposition. Very soon the reader will want to know why Engelsma makes such bold statements against the Federal Vision (FV) and the reader will want to read on (making this a good book to give to someone who does not necessarily agree with Reformed doctrine, for it also contains comprehensive information on what Scripture and the Reformed creeds have to say about FV doctrine).

The first part of the book is an extended version of a speech against the FV commemorating the sixteenth-century Reformation of the church. Part one, consisting of six in-depth chapters, educates the reader about the origin of the FV. At the end of these six chapters, a newcomer to the FV, like myself, has a solid knowledge of the subject, including Norman Shepherd’s heretical *The Call of Grace*, published in 2000. Engelsma explains how that book “attacks all the doctrines of sovereign grace confessed by the Reformed churches in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.”

Engelsma frequently refers to the FV as a weed, dividing it into two parts: the root and the bad fruit. Engelsma, as always, explains his reasoning. He identifies the root as the conditional covenant and gives five in-depth reasons as to why the conditional covenant is heretical. He explains the fruit as justification by faith and works. A Protestant believer can immediately recognise

this as a putrid heresy of Roman Catholicism and will be alarmed that such a thing is found in the FV. Engelsma's explanation for his views is impeccable, as he leaves no stone unturned and no grey areas where we are left in doubt as to what he thinks. He nails the FV on the head and does so strongly and repeatedly.

Another alarming point that Engelsma draws out is that the FV could easily be accepted by many conservative Reformed and Presbyterian churches because "they are teaching it in its root form," for a conditional covenant will produce bad fruit.

The second part of *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* deals with almost fifty questions asked of Engelsma after the speech he delivered on various occasions in different venues. This is most beneficial to the reader as it clears up doubts and questions the reader may already have and also expands on what Engelsma previously said. These questions range from "What is the Federal Vision?" to "What are the implications of dealing with the root of the error that others refuse to recognize?" Each one of these questions is responded to with very helpful answers for those who asked the questions and those who read the book. Engelsma describes part two as a "further opportunity to root out the Federal Vision on behalf of the covenant of grace."

Again, the Reformed believer sees how their representative does not back down and does not even water down what he had previously said when he responds to questions and criticisms. Instead, he welcomes them.

By the end of reading this book, the reader knows that the FV is a "fancy of men's minds" that is "invented regardless of the Scriptures." On top of this, it is a mongrel doctrine made up of many different heresies: justification by faith and works; baptismal regeneration; Arminianism; common grace; the denial of unconditional election which, therefore, removes Christ as the head of the covenant, etc. The whole thing stinks and, because of Engelsma, I know this, for he repeatedly shows the reader why the FV stinks. It should make true believers' blood boil that such a monstrosity should be advocated or tolerated in any Protestant church, but the tragedy is that it is accepted by many in our day "and the elders are permitting it."

This book is a fine, well written, informative and engaging piece of literature that leaves the FV without a leg to stand on. I give this book 5 out of 5 stars.