The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology

Volume 13 · Number 4 Winter 2009

Editorial Office & Subscription Services:
SBTS Box 832
2825 Lexington Rd.
Louisville, KY 40280
(800) 626-5525, x 4413

Editorial E-Mail:
journaloffice@sbts.edu

John Calvin at 500 Years

Yearly subscription costs for four issues: $25, individual inside the U. S.; $50, individual outside the U. S.; $40, institutional inside the U. S.; $65, institutional outside the U. S. Opinions expressed in *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* are solely the responsibility of the authors and are not necessarily those of the editors, members of the Advisory Board, or the *SBJT* Forum.

This periodical is indexed in Religion Index One: Periodicals, the Index to Book Reviews in Religions, Religion Indexes: Ten Year Subset on CD-ROM, and the ATLA Religion Database on CD-ROM, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, IL 60606, atla@atla.com, www.atla.com.

The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology is published quarterly by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280. Winter 2009. Vol. 13, No. 4. ISSN 1520-7307. Second Class postage paid at Louisville, KY. Postmaster: Send address changes to: SBTS, Box 832, 2825 Lexington Road, Louisville, KY 40280.

Editorial: John Calvin: Reflecting upon One of God's Gifts to the Church

Stephen J. Wellum

In Eph 4:1-16, the apostle Paul, after exhorting the church to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and after reminding her of the oneness of Christ's body brought about by the sovereign Triune work of God in salvation, beautifully goes on to describe that part of the Lord's victorious work was to pour out gifted leaders to the church for her growth and edification. As our Lord accomplished our redemption in his glorious cross-work, resurrection, and ascension, he not only poured out the Holy Spirit for us at Pentecost, he also gave to the church various leaders in order "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (vv. 12-14, ESV). This text, along with many more throughout the New Testament, establishes the importance of Christian leaders for the church—leaders who are nothing less than gifts of the risen, exalted Christ—for the good and benefit of the people of God. Here we have the beautiful balance between the entire people of God as those who know the Lord, who have direct access to him through Christ, and who are all gifted by the Spirit for works of service due to the inauguration of the new covenant, and the important role that God-ordained and called leaders play within the church. Even within the church where the entire covenant community is regenerate, gifted, and empowered by the Spirit, there is still a unique role for pastors, teachers, and leaders. In fact, without them, the church would be impoverished and unable to grow to full maturity in Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we think of such gifts, certainly we ought

Stephen J. Wellum is Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dr. Wellum received his Ph.D. degree in theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and has also taught theology at the Associated Canadian Theological Schools and Northwest Baptist Theological College and Seminary in Canada. He has contributed to several publications and a collection of essays on theology and worldview issues.

SBJT 13.4 (2009): 2-3.

to think of our present leaders—pastors, teachers, and so on—in our local churches. But it is also important that we do not limit our thoughts only to the present time. There is a real sense in which we should view godly leaders from church history, not merely as gifts from our Lord for their time and place, but also as gifts for us today as we stand on their shoulders, read their writings, and learn from their example. Leaders from the past provide for us role models to follow and emulate as we seek to learn from them, both positively and negatively. This is one of the reasons why the study of historical figures is so important. They help teach us how to think through so many important matters both doctrinally and personally, and our study of their lives, theology, and service challenges us afresh to live for our Lord in our day and age. No doubt, no human example ever takes the place of our constant dependence upon the Lord and our looking to him. The author to the Hebrews reminds us that we are to run with endurance the race that is set before us, "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:2, ESV). But in this same context, the author also reminds us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses from the past, which also serve as encouragement for us on how to run the race with perseverance and how to live for the Lord today in light of their past example.

With all of this in mind, it is always a privilege to focus our attention on key Christian leaders from the past. To think through their lives and teaching, how they endured hardship for Christ, and how they faithfully served the people of God and sought to carry out the Great Commission in their time and place. The only problem is who to choose to focus on, given the fact that there are numerous examples of past Christian leaders who deserve our time and attention. In previous issues of *SBJT,* we have made various attempts to focus on a variety of historical periods and people and in the future we will continue to do so. But as 2009 has come and gone, we would be remiss not to focus on one important Christian leader from the past—a leader who was born 500 years ago, who has been remembered this year in a variety of conferences around the world and in the publication of numerous volumes reflecting upon his life and thought—namely, the life and theology of the great Reformer, John Calvin.

It is hardly an overstatement to say that Calvin's influence upon the church and upon the world has been enormous. Many consider him as probably the greatest of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, and that is quite a statement in itself. His writings are prolific, his commentaries on every book of the Bible except the book of Revelation are still read today, and his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has shaped the minds and hearts of the church since it was penned. His work in theology and biblical exegesis is still hard to match, and his influence upon Western society is incalculable. But in addition to that, he has taught us how to serve as a faithful pastor and preacher and servant of the gospel. It is certainly worthwhile on the quincentennial of his birth to reflect upon one of Christ's great gifts to his church and to learn from him and to be challenged anew to be God-centered in our lives, Christ-glorifying in our preaching and teaching, and to desire above all else to live for and to model to others what it means to live under the authority of Scripture for God's glory in the face of Christ. It is my prayer that this issue of *SBJT* will serve to do just this, which, after all, would be the greatest tribute we could pay to him.

John Calvin as Pastor

Shawn D. Wright

INTRODUCTION

Everyone seems to have a strong opinion about John Calvin. Charles Spurgeon did. He said, "The longer I live the clearer does it appear that John Calvin's system is the nearest to perfection." Another preacher had a more negative view. Jimmy Swaggart noted that "Calvin has, I believe, caused untold millions of souls to be damned." Even supposedly "neutral" and scholarly sources like the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* cannot help claiming that "Calvin was the 'cruel' and 'the unopposed dictator of Geneva.'" So much for scholarly objectivity! Even Calvin's contemporaries had varied evaluations of him. One of his best friends and his chosen successor, Theodore Beza, eulogized him in this way: "I have been a witness of him for sixteen years, and I think that I am fully entitled to say that in this man there was exhibited to all an example of the life and death of the Christian, such as it will not be easy to depreciate, and it will be difficult to imitate."[1] Jerome Bolsec was another early biographer of Calvin. He, though, had been run out of Geneva by Calvin and the city authorities for his attack on predestination and later reverted to Catholicisim. Here's his evaluation of the Genevan:

> It seems that in our day this enemy of God and Christian unity [that is, Satan] has gathered most of the described heresies and false doctrines already long refuted and condemned and stowed them away in the city of Geneva through Jean Calvin of Noyon, a man, among others of the world, ambitious, presumptuous, arrogant, cruel, malicious, vindictive and, above all, ignorant.[2]

If nothing else, this shows us that the study of Calvin is a very interesting subject indeed.

In this article, I am not going to prove definitively that Calvin was good, or bad for that matter. I have much more modest aims. I hope to show that John Calvin, the great Reformed theologian, was a pastor. This is often overlooked as we think of Calvin the systematic theologian or the biblical scholar. He was these things, but his fundamental occupation was as a shepherd of the flock of God. Those who were associated with Calvin (like Beza, Guillaume Farel, and Martin Bucer), those who wrote Calvin seeking his ministerial advice, and

Shawn D. Wright is Associate Professor of Church History at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He has been active in church planting and pastoring and currently serves as an elder at Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. In addition to contributing in journals, Dr. Wright has authored *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Wipf and Stock, 2007) and co-edited *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant In Christ* (Broadman & Holman, 2007) with Thomas R. Schreiner.

those who heard him regularly preach in one of the three churches in Geneva knew that he was at heart a pastor. Ministry consumed Calvin's life. After his "sudden conversion" to the Lord, as he called it, Calvin's life—except for an aborted attempt to be a reclusive scholar—was consumed with the labors of a pastor.[3]

We can see this in numerous ways. First of all, we can read the agendas that Calvin wrote directing the Genevan church to change in a more biblical direction. His *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* as well as his *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church* fall into this category. Second, we could peruse his *Catechism*, written to clarify basic Christian doctrines and instruct the populace of Geneva in the new-found truth of Protestantism. This was important enough to Calvin that he revised it and released it in a second edition. Third, we could look at Calvin's massive epistolary output, quite a bit of which is pastoral in nature. He was often asked to pastor persons from a distance, through letters, and he did so willingly and thoroughly. Fourth, we could pay attention to the many liturgical innovations that Calvin wrought first in Strasbourg and then throughout his ministry for about twenty-three years, from 1541 to 1564, in Geneva. Not only did Calvin the pastor work tirelessly to produce an order of service for the young church and write out special orders for the sacrament of the eucharist and the celebration of marriages, but he also pioneered efforts in the Reformed churches to prioritize the singing of the Psalms in corporate worship. Fifth, we might pay attention to Calvin's sermons, regularly filled with sensitive, or forceful, applications to the weary Genevan congregation. Sixth, we could notice several of Calvin's occasional treatises that are at heart pastoral in nature. For example, his *Reply to Sadoleto* may be the best short introduction to the pastoral flavor of Calvin's thought. In all of these ways we see that Calvin was a pastor.[4]

And we also see Calvin's pastoral emphasis in his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, for which Calvin is most famous. When we remember that *institutio* meant "instruction" for Calvin and remember that Calvin's first audience in this book was not seminary students but rather Protestant pastors and laypeople—as is shown by Calvin's own translations of the *Institutes* out of Latin into French so that the beleaguered French Protestants could read it—we get a firm clue that this greatest of all Protestant reformational treatises is intensely pastoral. For the sake of time, we will limit our attention to Calvin's pastoral theology seen in his *Institutes*.

CALVIN'S PASTORAL THEOLOGY IN THE *INSTITUTES*

Indeed, it may be its pastoral orientation that makes the *Institutes* so relevant for twenty-first century readers.[5] I think that it is this pastoral focus, which gives the *Institutes* its "feet," so to speak, and allows modern readers to connect so familiarly with Calvin, even though he inhabited a different world—several religious, political, social, and intellectual revolutions ago. In fact, I believe that Calvin's "pastoral vision," that is, his view of the priority of God and a relationship that all human beings must have with him in either friendship or judgment, permeates the *Institutes* and makes it intensely relevant for us. For Pastor Calvin would remind us that although we may not be newly-Protestantized, French refugees concerned with maintaining our liberties from Savoy and France and often frustrated by the heavy-handed policies of big-brother Bern, we are the same sort of persons as they were, having to do with the same God, and on a similar pilgrimage to the same destinies.[6]

At the very beginning of the *Institutes*, we are confronted with Calvin's pastoral emphasis. Here he lays out the rubric he will employ for the next 1,487 pages, in the standard English translation. Calvin's entrée for the whole work is this: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."[7] We must know God; and we must know ourselves. These two

"knowledges" are correlative, related to each other in such a way that in order to do the one, we must do the other. We see that Calvin was not merely about increasing his readers' data set; he didn't just want to give them more information. His labors had a relational end. His goal was to bring his readers into a relationship with the living God, and this relationship would be enriched as they understood themselves—and themselves in relation to God—better.

Just a few pages later, Calvin gives us another glimpse into the pastoral motivation for the *Institutes*. His goal in this work is to develop heart-felt "piety" in his readers.[8] This piety will lead them into a growing, more vibrant *relationship* with the Lord. Note his logic:

> I call "piety" that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces. *For* until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him—they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him.[9]

He goes on to elaborate this even more. True knowledge of God, he notes, is extremely relational and affectionate. It's this knowledge he desires for his readers. "What help is it," he asks, "to know a God with whom we have nothing to do?" True knowledge of God leads to two vibrant realities in a person's life: first, it teaches one to "fear and reverence" the sovereign Lord; second, "with it as our guide and teacher, we should learn to seek every good from him, and, having received it, to credit it to his account."[10] We see, then, that Calvin's goal is not just more intellectual understanding on the part of his readers. The intellectual understanding he hopes to impart throughout the *Institutes* has two tangible goals. Whether or not these goals are met in his readers will, in effect, determine if they have begun the journey to have true knowledge of God. On the one hand, he hopes that God will be honored as believers learn more about him and show him greater reverence. On the other hand, he desires that believers will worship God more wholeheartedly and seek their every good from him. He thus ends the second brief chapter of the work by summarizing his goal. He desires for his readers "pure and real religion" which is "faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law."[11] Pure religion, according to Pastor Calvin, is gauged by its tangible effects in one's life.[12]

It would be well worth your time to read and ponder Calvin's first two chapters in the *Institutes*, which are just nine pages long, if you've not had the opportunity to do that before. But I want to try to do three other things in an attempt to outline the contours of Calvin's pastoral theology. First, I will try to quickly sketch out for us John Calvin's "pastoral vision." Second, I will briefly note the important role Calvin assigns to pastors as the central human agents in implementing and teaching this pastoral vision. Third, I will show the way that Calvin applied this pastoral vision in two instances in the *Institutes*.

"Pastoral Vision"

Let's first of all then notice Calvin's "pastoral vision." As far as I know, Calvin never used the word "worldview" to speak of this. But that is what I am attempting to unpack in Calvin. What was Calvin's pastoral worldview, his vision of reality that influenced what he did, wrote, preached, and prayed? Like you and me, Calvin believed things that deeply influenced his pastoral practice. I think we can see that vision encompassing five different aspects.

The first aspect of Calvin's pastoral vision is the glorious God. God is the one constant reality in the universe. Although Calvin does not include a section elaborating on the existence and attributes of God—except for a rather brief discussion of the divine Trinity, the Lord is in many

ways the central actor in the *Institutes*. He is the sovereign King, around whom everything in his creation revolves. Thus he truly is the Lord. He is holy and majestic, and therefore all worship is due to him. We are all obligated, thus, to adore him: "Adoration," says Calvin, "I call the veneration and worship that each of us, in submitting to [God's] greatness, renders to him."[13] We submit to God's greatness and give him worship. "We should wish," Calvin observes, "God to have the honor he deserves; men should never speak or think of him without the highest reverence."[14] In addition to being gloriously majestic, the Lord is also the Father of his children. Therefore, they are to find their joy in knowing him. Calvin stresses throughout the *Institutes* that sinners—dead in their sin and confirmed in their opposition to God—cannot save themselves. God must do that, and he does that through his regenerating activity. There is no such reality as "free will" in sinners that allows them to seek spiritual good; for that they require "special grace, which only the elect receive through regeneration."[15] In another place, Calvin very affectionately recounts that the Lord gives us "great occasion" "to contemplate his mercy" by often pursuing "miserable sinners with unwearied kindness, until he shatters their wickedness by imparting benefits and by recalling them to him with more than fatherly kindness!"[16] So, Christians should rejoice in God and find their greatest joy in knowing him and being forgiven by him.

The second aspect of Calvin's pastoral vision is his view of humanity. Remember, Calvin stresses that we must know ourselves if we are to know God better. So, what must we know about ourselves? What did Pastor Calvin know about the people he was shepherding?

We could begin by noting Calvin's discussion in Book One, on God the Creator, where he recounts that as those who are the creatures we are absolutely dependent on God. God not only created us, but he sustains our every breath, and providentially does all for us. We are absolutely dependent on him. The fact that we are created in God's image brings great potential to humanity—not the least of which is knowing the living Lord. The problem, though, is that the image has been starkly shattered through Adam's sin.[17] As those with great potential, then, we require someone outside of us to save us. This becomes the foundation for later "Calvinism's" soteriology and its emphasis on monergism, the necessity of God's saving his people.

But I want to trace out Calvin's view of humanity from more of a pastoral angle. Calvin believed that persons were extremely complicated. They can be viewed from several perspectives, all of which need to be engaged by God's truth if it is to result in their eternal good. Of course, people are thinking beings. That's why Calvin taught them the truth, so that they would *know* the truth and be conformed to it. That point alone accounts for the almost Herculean efforts of the reformer to explain, comment on, and preach biblical truth for most of his adult life. But we must note that Calvin believed people were more than intellects. They were also affectionate beings, filled with *love* for various things. These affections were often misplaced, so that if men were not honoring the true God they will almost have to find some false god to reverence because of their very nature to love *some thing*. This recognition of people's God-given affectionate nature probably accounts for Calvin's desire to have the Psalms sung in Christian worship; music was a gift of God useful in tuning the affections of God's people towards him. It also explains Calvin's stark—and sometimes surprising—affectionate language about the importance of loving God our Father. Christians are those who should be growing in love for God in our piety and who should take more and more joy in knowing Christ. But there's yet a third aspect to human nature; we're more than knowing and loving beings. We're also beings who have, and who seek, *experiences*. Calvin did not deny the experiential importance of knowing God. Perhaps we see this aspect of persons most strikingly in Calvin's explanation of what takes place when a Chris-

tian receives the Lord's Supper. Although Calvin has numerous definite things to assert about the eucharist, at one point he admits that he cannot define exactly what transpires when a Christian receives the elements. Ultimately, it's a "mystery, which I see that I do not even sufficiently comprehend with my mind." So Calvin continues,

> I urge my readers not to confine their mental interest within these too narrow limits, but to strive to rise much higher than I can lead them. For, whenever this matter is discussed, when I have tried to say all, I feel that I have as yet said little in proportion to its worth. And although my mind can think beyond what my tongue can utter, yet even my mind is conquered and overwhelmed by the greatness of the thing. [Do you sense Calvin's experiences here?] Therefore, nothing remains but to break forth in wonder at this mystery, which plainly neither the mind is able to conceive nor the tongue to express.[18]

The eucharist is something a Christian ultimately experiences, even though its significance cannot be finally understood.

Calvin didn't try to dichotomize these components of human nature. He addressed his congregation—and his readers—as multifaceted, complicated people. And all of our being needs to be engaged with biblical reality so that we not only know ourselves but also grow in knowledge of God—as we know him and his care for us, as we grow in love towards him, and as we experience his goodness and faithfulness to us. Indeed, I believe that you see Calvin alluding to each of these three components in humanity in his discussion of "piety" and "true religion" that we looked at previously.

The third aspect of Calvin's pastoral vision concerns the chief mark of a Christian, faith in Jesus Christ. Faith—belief in Christ and trust in his death for you—is the chief defining point of a Christian, according to Calvin. So the reformer takes pains to stress the sufficiency of Christ's death for sinners. There is nothing lacking in the atoning work of the Mediator that should leave us trembling before the judgment seat of God. No, Christ has made complete atonement. And, even more than that, by faith a believer is now united with Christ. Present union with Christ is, in fact, one of Calvin's chief doctrines. These derive from faith, which Calvin defines as "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."[19] So, Calvin viewed his congregation as those saved by the mercy of the Father, through the sacrifice of the Son, granted faith by the Holy Spirit, and presently united to Christ by faith.

Although we might conclude from this that Calvin, therefore, viewed the life of a Christian as a comfortable, easy period on the way to heaven, this would be to neglect the fourth aspect of Calvin's pastoral vision. Calvin thought the life of a Christian was a battle, an extremely difficult pilgrimage as the believer wearily struggled to get to his final home in heaven.[20] And the battle, according to Calvin, was brutal. It involved spiritual forces that were out to shipwreck the faith of Christians—if that were possible. Not only were Christians assaulted by spiritual forces outside of themselves, but they were also hindered by their remaining sin. The life of a Christian was thus a life of denying himself; a life of continual repentance exemplified in the habit of bearing Christ's cross by humbly submitting to God. One of Calvin's great pastoral burdens was, thus, not just to strengthen his readers for the battle. It was also to remind them that the battle—with its many attendant hardships—was normal. This is what they should expect in this life. Calvin spells this out in great detail in the only part of the *Institutes* that was published as a separate entity during his lifetime, his discussion of the Christian life in Book 3. But he alludes to it in other places as well. For example, while refuting Servetus's over-realized eschatology, Calvin observes,

> I admit, indeed, that in believing Christ we at once pass from death into life. But at the same time we must remember that saying of John's: although we know that "we are the children of God, it does not yet appear ... until we shall become like him, when we shall see him as he is." Although, therefore, Christ offers us in the gospel a present fullness of spiritual benefits, the enjoyment thereof ever lies hidden under the guardianship of hope, until, having put off corruptible flesh, we be transfigured in the glory of him who goes before us. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit bids us rely upon the promises, whose authority with us ought to silence all the barkings of that unclean dog [Servetus].[21]

The fifth aspect of Calvin's pastoral vision was its eternal scope. We've already seen the manner in which Calvin spoke of the Christian life as a pilgrimage. The pilgrimage was a journey to heaven for believers. At the final resurrection, in heaven, they would experience God's gracious presence in its fullness. Unbelievers, however, would receive eternal punishment for their proud dismissal of God's lordship in their lives. This eternal reality influenced all that Calvin did as a pastor. He was shepherding people who would live forever—either in God's glorious presence in joy, or suffering God's wrathful vengeance in hell.[22] Heaven would be glorious, and Calvin urged his readers to think often of its truthfulness, especially since in this life "hardships distress us." "He alone," Calvin asserts, "has fully profited in the gospel who has accustomed himself to continual meditation upon the blessed resurrection."[23] We see his pastoral heart shining forth when he encourages his readers that, although we can't speak definitively about our experience of heaven now, in that day "in the very sight of it there will be such pleasantness, such sweetness in the knowledge of it alone ... that this happiness will far surpass all the amenities that we now enjoy."[24] On the other hand, hell would be awful; its reality should, in an opposite fashion, fill unbelievers with dread. Hell is eternal in nature because "God's majesty, and also his justice, which they have violated by sinning, are eternal."[25] So Calvin presses upon his readers the dreadful reality of hell:

> Because no description can deal adequately with the gravity of God's vengeance against the wicked, their torments and tortures are figuratively expressed to us by physical things, that is, by darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teach, unquenchable fire, an undying worm gnawing at the heart. By such expressions the Holy Spirit certainly intended to confound all our senses with dread.... So we ought especially to fix our thoughts upon this: how wretched it is to be cut off from all fellowship with God. And not that only but so to feel his sovereign power against you that you cannot escape being pressed by it.[26]

John Calvin pastored with eternity—and the eternal condition of his listeners and readers—always in his mind.

This, then, is the outline of Calvin's pastoral worldview. First, its God-centeredness. Second, its robust view of humanity. Third, its stress on the work of Christ and the necessity of trusting him. Fourth, its admission that the Christian life is the path of a difficult pilgrimage. And, fifth, its eternal focus.

The Role of the Pastor in Implementing this "Pastoral Vision"

Now, we can look briefly at Calvin's view of the role of the pastor in the implementation of this "pastoral vision." First of all, we can note Calvin's own statements about the role of a pastor.[27] The pastor of God's church "is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable."[28] The pastor is not to hide the realities of life; rather, he is to strengthen believers for the battle they are in. Calvin makes a similar statement in his discussion on the value of a Christian privately speaking about his troubles to his pastor; "he should beg

the private help of him whose duty it is," Calvin reminds his readers, "both publicly and privately to comfort the people of God by the gospel teaching."[29] The pastor's role, wedded to the teaching of the word, is to bring comfort to those who by grace are God's children.

In Book Four, "The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein,"—the longest of the four books in the *Institutes*—Calvin speaks at length about the role of the pastor. He notes there that the pastor's task is essential to the growth, edification, and perseverance of the church.[30] The pastor is essential not only as a counselor and comforter; he is also essential as a preacher of truth and an example of faithfulness in the midst of the Christian pilgrimage. God is the only one who can change Christians; more than that, he is the only one who can sustain them in the hardships of life on their journey to heaven. So, his voice must be heard in the church. And his voice is heard through the voice of the preacher. Thus Calvin notes that "among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is the singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them."[31] It is for this reason that throughout the *Institutes* Calvin argues that the word of God and the Spirit of God function in tandem with each other. The error of groups such as the Catholic Church and the radical Anabaptists is that they in effect try to separate the Spirit of God from his word. But a faithful pastor will not do that. He will recognize that the Spirit functions by giving and sustaining vital Christian life through his word preached. Therefore, he will preach the word. And, lastly, he will model this very same word for believers. Calvin stresses the importance of evident piety in the lives of pastors. "Learning joined with piety"[32] is Calvin's way of speaking of the requirements of a pastor. Or, as he also says, the only ones who should be chosen by the church to be their pastors are ones "who are of sound doctrine and of holy life."[33] In this the church needs to trust the Lord to supply them with orthodox and pious pastors, for "[t]hose whom the Lord has destined for such a high office, he first supplies with the arms required to fulfill it, that they may not come empty-handed and unprepared."[34] The living God must be heard by his people. And he will be heard by them; he does it as pastors faithfully proclaim his word to his people and as they try to model to his people true Christian piety.

Application of Pastoral Vision

Now I want to move into our third section. Here I want to show the way in which Calvin operated pastorally in two particular doctrines in the *Institutes*. These two—first, God's sovereignty in providence and predestination, and, second, the purpose of prayer in the Christian's life—are just helpful examples of what we see Calvin doing in the pages of the *Institutes*. Throughout, Calvin makes two regular pastoral applications: first, the necessity of submitting to and adoring the sovereign God and, second, Calvin's desire to comfort weary Christians by reminding them of the reality of their sovereign heavenly Father. These pastoral applications permeate all of the *Institutes*.

God's Sovereignty in Providence and Predestination

First, then, we will notice the manner in which Calvin dealt with the sovereign authority of God, especially as he presented it in his discussion of providence and predestination. We need to note first of all that Calvin carefully defines his understanding of providence: "Providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events."[35]

In the course of his discussion of providence, Calvin takes pains to differentiate carefully his understanding from numerous deviations from the truth. On the one hand, Calvin's is not a fatalistic doctrine. In providentially governing his creation, the Lord makes use of secondary agents who

do what they want to do, yet who, in the process, are culpable for their choices. The Lord is thus completely sovereign, but he never sins. On the other hand, Calvin spends much of his discussion defending the point, as he says, that "nothing at all in the world is undertaken without [God's] determination."[36] God determines everything that happens. He is in complete, absolute control of everything that occurs in his creation. Everything. Even that which is difficult for us to understand and which may be hard for us to accept. Our weaknesses do not limit God's authority.

But what is Calvin's pastoral reason for stressing God's perfect, sovereign providence? Fortunately the reformer does not leave us wondering but tells us explicitly what his two pastoral motivations are. So, first of all, he notes that only such a doctrinal presentation glorifies God. People who deny God's complete providence "defraud God of his glory."[37] Any presentation that neuters God's involvement and carrying out of his purpose in the world is not only an error. One may even be motivated by a desire to get God "off the hook" for evil. As well-intentioned as Calvin's detractors may be, though, nevertheless they are robbing God of his glory. The Lord will be known and worshiped as the One whose "will is said to be the cause of all things.... [H]is providence [is] the determinative principle for all human plans and works."[38] A biblical notion of providence thus honors God the creator and sustainer.

On the other hand, only this robust view of God's providential ordering of the universe can comfort Christians in this troubled life. Calvin notes this in the same context where he initially argues that providence alone brings glory to God. There he says that "in times of adversity believers comfort themselves with the solace that they suffer nothing except by God's ordinance and command, for they are under his hand." Those who fight against the doctrine of providence thus deny themselves "a most profitable doctrine."[39] Calvin the pastor calls on his readers to submit to the clear testimony of Scripture. It is for our good that we do this.[40] In fact, nothing can be more profitable for a Christian than to be convinced of this truth.[41] If one does not believe God's perfect providence, you have entered treacherous waters where the evil and unbounded forces of the world can have their way with the Christian. In a sense, the non-providence-believing-Christian is stupidly denying himself the precious certainty of God's fatherly care for him.[42] So Calvin urges his readers to trust tenaciously in God's providence because of the numerous benefits which will come into such a person's life.[43] That person will display "gratitude of mind for the favorable outcome of things, patience in adversity, and also incredible freedom from worry about the future," says Calvin.[44]

We see, then, the way in which Calvin pastorally frames his discussion of providence. He appeals to two goods which result from a Christian's holding to this biblical truth. God is glorified. And the Christian is comforted. The two are not antithetical but work perfectly together for a believer who is growing in piety to reverence and love his God. As Calvin states, a Christian restrains himself "from sinning, not out of dread of punishment alone; but, because [he] loves and reveres God as Father, [he] worships and adores him as Lord."[45] God receives the worship that is his due, and the Christian believer is comforted in knowing God as his heavenly Father.

We can be briefer in pointing out Calvin's pastoral emphases in his discussion of predestination, since in many ways this doctrine is a specific application of God's providence, according to Calvin. Predestination is God sovereignly determining from eternity past whom he will graciously save and whom he will justly condemn.[46] Calvin does not shy away from asserting that this predestination activity of God is "double," encompassing both those elected for salvation and those elected for damnation. "We call predestination God's eternal decree," says Calvin, "by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal

damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death."[47] Or, as he asserts in another place,

> As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction. We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation.[48]

Calvin spends a great deal of time noting the biblical rationale for this assertion. As he says, the doctrine must be taught because it highlights in poignant fashion that God's grace is the reason for our salvation, and in this God is glorified.[49]

But of great interest to us in the pastoral usefulness of this doctrine according to Calvin. First of all, Calvin points out that belief in this doctrine—according to which God is both the sole efficient agent of salvation and the just judge of those condemned to hell—functions at one level to glorify God. The Lord stands out according to this doctrine as "the Lord." No one can oppose his desire to act as he chooses. This is especially clear in the case of the reprobate, those whom God determines will be damned. In discussing the Lord's rejection of Esau, for instance, Calvin notes that it would have been most easy for the Lord to say that he rejected Esau because of the evil works he performed. But he didn't do that. Rather, God "contents himself with a different solution, that the reprobate are raised up to the end that through them God's glory may be revealed."[50] Throughout his discussion, Calvin argues that we must let God determine what God will determine about persons; his will alone will be done. Rather than seeking to implicate God for injustice in election, we must remember that "God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he willed it, must be considered righteous."[51] We must not be embarrassed to discuss this doctrine, as if God were embarrassed by it. If he were, he wouldn't have put it in Scripture. Calvin notes this while commenting on Rom 9:20-21. Paul, he notes, "did not look for loopholes of escape as if he were embarrassed in his argument but showed that the reason of divine righteousness is higher than man's standard can measure, or than man's slender wit can comprehend."[52] In this fact God will be glorified.

In a similar fashion, belief in God's predestinating activity should have salutary effects in a believer's life, according to Calvin. This is one of the most fascinating aspects of the Reformer's doctrine of predestination—he believes it should comfort believers rather than cause them to despair! Predestination is "very sweet fruit," he says. Have you heard double predestination presented in that way!? It's sweet to the Christian, because "We shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others."[53] It's sweetness, then, comes from seeing the completely gracious character of our salvation. If you want comfort, look to God's election. Look to it by asking if you have faith in Christ. If you trust in Christ, you can be assured of your election because, says Calvin, "it is certain that faith is a singular pledge of the Father's love, reserved for the sons whom he has adopted." "No man," he says, "makes himself a sheep but is made one by heavenly grace."[54]

According to Calvin predestination is also "sweet fruit" because it leads a believer to have assurance of salvation, for the God who elected and granted faith to the Christian will sustain him throughout his life. As Calvin argues, "For those whom Christ has illumined with the knowledge

of his name and has introduced into the bosom of his church, he is said to receive into his care and keeping. All whom he receives, the Father is said to have entrusted and committed to him to keep unto eternal life."[55] Rather than asking if God's love for us will remain constant, believers may be convinced "that they are out of danger of falling away because the Son of God, asking that their godliness be kept constant, did not suffer a refusal. What did Christ wish to have us learn from this but to trust that we shall ever remain safe because we have been made his once for all?"[56]

Another benefit of belief in this doctrine, according to Pastor Calvin, is that it teaches a believer humility. Several times throughout the *Institutes* Calvin notes that humility should be the defining mark of a Christian. For example, he quotes Augustine approvingly who commented that "When a certain rhetorician was asked what was the chief rule in eloquence, he replied, 'Delivery'; what was the second rule, 'Delivery'; what was the third rule, 'Delivery'; so if you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, 'Humility.'"[57] This should be a joy, not a cause of discomfort, for a Christian. For one who knows he is saved only because of God's grace, and who is resting in this salvation, humility can result without the fear that a Christian must just "maintain appearances." The only thing that matters is God's loving election. Thus, Calvin argues that nothing will

> suffice to make us humble as we ought to be nor shall we otherwise sincerely feel how much we are obliged to God [as the truth of election]. And as Christ teaches, here is our only ground for firmness and confidence: ... he promises that whoever the Father has entrusted into his keeping will be safe. From this we infer that all those who do not know that they are God's own will be miserable through constant fear.[58]

Predestination's "intent is that, humbled and cast down, we may learn to tremble at his judgment and esteem his mercy. It is at this mark that believers aim."[59] When a Christian recognizes this, he can both think rightly about God's glory and honestly look at himself.

The Purpose of Prayer in the Christian's Life

As we move into a discussion of Calvin on prayer we see him using the same rubric to direct his readers' attention to the God-glorifying and soul-comforting aim of prayer. By way of introduction, we see Calvin's pastoral motivation by including a discussion of prayer in this book. We might not expect to see that in a "dry theological tome." But this is no academically-oriented systematics; this is a pastoral treatise. Nor should we overlook the fact that Calvin's chapter on prayer is the longest one in the *Institutes*![60] He obviously felt it was an important subject for his readers to know something about.

Why, though? What is the motivation of prayer, according to Calvin? In order to introduce this subject, let me first give you a couple of quotes from Calvin which show the intensity with which he pressed on his readers their obligation to pray. Notice the affective language that he uses as he pleads with them to be ever more active in praying.

> After we have been instructed by faith to recognize that whatever we need and whatever we lack is in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the Father willed all the fullness of his bounty to abide so that we may all draw from it as from an overflowing spring, it remains for us to seek in him, and in prayers to ask of him, what we have learned to be in him. Otherwise, to know God as the master and bestower of all good things, who invites us to request them of him, and still not go to him and not ask of him—this would be of as little profit as for a man to neglect a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him.[61]

Similarly, Calvin notes,

> It is, therefore, by the *benefit of prayer* that we reach those *riches* which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father. For there is a *communion* of men with God by which, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal to him *in person* concerning his promises in order to *experience*, where necessity demands, that what they believed was not vain, although he had promised it in word alone. *Therefore we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true it is that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.*[62]

If I had more space, I would have liked to address the topic of Calvin's teaching on prayer because I think it is *very* insightful and challenging for evangelicals who have more of a doctrinal orientation. It is so helpful to remember that this same man also espoused double predestination! If you've never read the *Institutes* before, you can't do better than begin by reading Calvin on prayer.

Rather, I will address Calvin's pastoral vision regarding prayer. First of all, we see again that for Calvin one reason to pray was that it honored God as the sovereign Lord to whom his people looked for their every need. Prayer does not tell God anything he does not already know. Nor does it twist his arm to help us, as if he needed us to convince him to be good to us! No, God is glorified as we pray to him because in praying we acknowledge that he is the Sovereign with both the will and the power to help us.

We see this throughout Calvin's lengthy discussion. God is glorified, he says, when we pray because it reminds us of his sovereign providence in caring for us.[63] In the act of prayer, "we give ourselves over to his care, and entrust ourselves to his providence, that he may feed, nourish, and preserve us."[64] For this reason, then, we need to approach God reverently in prayer—in fact, Calvin labels this the first rule of prayer. We are not playing games but are coming to the King. So Calvin reminds us that "the only persons who duly and properly gird themselves to pray" are the ones who are "moved by God's majesty" when they come before him.[65] Our support when we come to God in prayer is his promises, not our merit. Again, this brings glory to God, "inasmuch as our prayers depend upon no merit of ours, but their whole worth and hope of fulfillment are grounded in God's promises, and depend upon them."[66] The only worth of our prayers, the only hope of their being answered comes from God. He receives the honor in this. So, Calvin reminds his readers that in prayer "we should wish God to have the honor he deserves; men should never speak or think of him without the highest reverence."[67] As we remember to whom we pray, and why it is that we need to look outside of ourselves and come to him in the first place, God receives glory for being recognized by us as the Sovereign King.

But Calvin does not stop with that point. Scattered throughout his discussion of prayer is the second of his two emphases—Christians are comforted as we bring our concerns to God, whom we know can meet our needs. We already heard Calvin say, "It is, therefore, by the *benefit of prayer* that we reach those *riches* which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father."[68] Calvin stresses that our great comfort in prayer is that we come to God as our Father. Thus, he says, because we are certain of our adoption by God, "we embrace this great blessing with sure faith" and it plays itself out in our prayers.[69] "By the sweetness of this name, ['Father']," Calvin notes, "he frees us from all distrust, since no greater feeling of love can be found elsewhere than in the Father. Therefore he could not attest his own boundless love toward us with any surer proof than that fact that we are called 'children of God.'"[70] It is for our comfort, then, that God adopts us as his children, and it is for our good that he grants us the privilege of prayer. In his comments on Jesus' first address in the Lord's Prayer, Calvin makes this striking conclusion:

> To strengthen our assurance that he is this sort of father to us if we are Christians, he willed that we call him not only "Father" but explicitly "our Father." It is as if we addressed him: "O Father, who dost abound with great devotion toward thy children, and with great readiness to forgive, we thy children call upon thee and make our prayer, assured and clearly persuaded that thou bearest toward us only the affection of a father, although we are unworthy of such a father."[71]

Thus, because of the great comfort that comes with praying, and as a means to further our communion with our Heavenly Father, Pastor Calvin urges his readers—and us—to pray. I conclude by noting once again Calvin's affectionate language when speaking about this chief exercise of faith. He warns his readers that "the godly must particularly beware of presenting themselves before God to request anything unless they *yearn* for it with *sincere affection of heart*, and at the same time desire to obtain it from him."[72] Affectionately, then, with an eye towards our comfort, we should pray.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, I would like to make two applications in light of what I have said. First of all, I would urge you to read Calvin's *Institutes*. Not only is this year the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth; it is also the 450th anniversary of the publication of Calvin's final edition of his masterpiece. It is one of the very few works from the sixteenth century that is still important for us to read, today. If your desire—as I hope it is—is to glorify God, find comfort in Christ, and arrive safely in heaven, after reading the Bible, I don't know that you can do yourself any more good than to spend time *pondering*, being *affected* by, and *experiencing* the wonder of God's sovereignty and goodness as presented in the *Institutes*. (Remember Calvin's three perspectives of viewing the complexities of humanity.)

Second, for those of you whom God has called to pastor Christ's church, I would urge you to evaluate Calvin's five-fold pastoral vision to see if it is biblical. If it is—and I am convinced it is—then seek to model your pastoral duties on its foundation. There is so much in our culture, in our churches, and in ourselves (!) that works against our seeking to pastor in a God-honoring fashion. If Calvin can help us to honor the Lord and bring comfort to God's people more, then by all means let us use and profit from him.

ENDNOTES

[1]These various quotes are from *Christian History* 5, no. 4 (1985): 2-3.

[2]Jerome Bolsec, *Histoire de la vie, moeurs, actes, doctrines, constance et mort de Jean Calvin* (1577), 12; in *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants* (ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 210.

[3]A helpful survey of Calvin's pastoral ministry, drawn largely from his letters is found in Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin* (trans. George Shriver; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 72-93. Other useful resources include Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation: A Study of Calvin as Social Worker, Churchman, Pastor and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 131-218; and W. Robert Godfrey, *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 58-192.

[4]For an overview of Calvin's numerous writings, including his pastoral compositions, see Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide* (trans. Lyle D. Bierma; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). On Calvin's churchly orientation, see Timothy George, "Introduction," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* (ed. Timothy George; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 15-26. A wonderful treatment of Calvin's pastoral writings and his piety, including many selections from his writings, is Elsie Anne McKee, ed., *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 2001).

[5]"Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is undoubtedly a great work of theology and a demon-

stration that Calvin is one of the great theologians in the history of the church. But ever more the *Institutes* demonstrate that Calvin is always the pastor stressing the essential elements of true religion" (Godfrey, *John Calvin*, 192).

[6]E. G. Rupp helpfully notes about the *Institutes* that "it was much more than a theological compendium for the learned. This exposition of the economy of redemption was also a prospectus of the Church militant on earth, a handbook for Christian warriors" ("The Swiss Reformers and the Sects," in *The New Cambridge Modern History, Vol. 2: The Reformation, 1520-1559* [ed. G. R. Elton; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1958], 117).

[7]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.1.1; p. 35.

[8]On Calvin's emphasis on piety, see Joel R. Beeke, "Calvin on Piety," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004), 125-52. Also, note Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 189-91.

[9]*Institutes* 1.2.1; p. 41.

[10]Ibid., 1.2.2; pp. 41-42.

[11]Ibid., 1.2.2; p. 43.

[12]For a helpful overview of Calvin's spirituality, see James E. McGoldrick, "John Calvin, Practical Theologian: The Reformer's Spirituality," in *Reformed Spirituality: Communion with Our Glorious God* (ed. Joseph A. Pipa Jr. and J. Andrew Wortman; Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian, 2003), 43-60.

[13]*Institutes* 2.8.16; p. 382.

[14]Ibid., 3.20.41; p. 904.

[15]Ibid., 2.2.6; p. 262.

[16]Ibid., 1.5.7; p. 60.

[17]For a very helpful survey of Calvin's view of humanity's sin see Michael S. Horton, "A Shattered Vase: The Tragedy of Sin in Calvin's Thought," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 151-67. Also see George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 213-16.

[18]*Institutes* 4.17.6; p. 1367.

[19]Ibid., 3.2.7; p. 551. On Calvin's teaching on the work of Christ and the importance of faith see George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 219-28; Robert A. Peterson, "Calvin on Christ's Saving Work," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, 226-47; and Joel R. Beeke, "Appropriating Salvation: The Spirit, Faith and Assurance, and Repentance," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, 270-300.

[20]See Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (trans. Albert Grootjes; Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varisty, 2009) for a useful biographical study of Calvin built around the theme of the life of the Christian as the journey of a pilgrim.

[21]*Institutes* 2.9.3; p. 426.

[22]Ibid., 3.25.5; p. 995.

[23]Ibid., 3.25.2, 1; pp. 989, 988.

[24]Ibid., 3.25.11; p. 1007.

[25]Ibid., 3.25.5; p. 996.

[26]Ibid., 3.25.12; pp. 1007-08.

[27]See George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 241-44.

[28]*Institutes* 1.14.4; p. 164.

[29]Ibid., 3.4.12; p. 637.

[30]Ibid., 4.1.5; p. 1017.

[31]Ibid., 4.1.5; p. 1018.

[32]Ibid., 4.3.11; p. 1063.

[33]Ibid., 4.3.12; p. 1063.

[34]Ibid., 4.3.11; p. 1063.

[35]Ibid., 1.16.4; p. 202. See George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 204-13; and Joseph A. Pipa Jr., "Creation and Providence," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, 123-50.

[36]*Institutes* 1.16.6; p. 205.

[37]Ibid., 1.16.3; p. 200.

[38]Ibid., 1.18.2; p. 232.

[39]Ibid., 1.16.3; p. 200.

[40]Ibid., 1.18.4; p. 237.

[41]Ibid., 1.17.3; p. 215.

[42]Ibid., 1.16.5; p. 204.

[43]Ibid., 1.17.8; p. 221.

[44]Ibid., 1.17.7; p. 219.

[45]Ibid., 1.2.2; p. 43.

[46]See George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 231-34; and R. Scott Clark, "Election and Predestination: The Sovereign Expressions of God," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, 90-122.

[47]*Institutes* 3.21.5; p. 926.
[48]Ibid., 3.21.7; p. 931.
[49]Ibid., 3.21.1; p. 921.
[50]Ibid., 3.22.11; p. 947.
[51]Ibid., 3.23.2; p. 949.
[52]Ibid., 3.23.4; p. 951.
[53]Ibid., 3.21.1; p. 921.
[54]Ibid., 3.22.10; p. 946.
[55]Ibid., 3.24.6; p. 971.
[56]Ibid., 3.24.6; p. 973.
[57]Ibid., 2.2.11; pp. 268-69.
[58]Ibid., 3.21.1; p. 922.
[59]Ibid., 3.23.12; p. 960.
[60]See George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 228-31; and David B. Calhoun, "Prayer: 'The Chief Exercise of Faith,'" in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, 347-67.
[61]*Institutes* 3.20.1; p. 850.
[62]Ibid., 3.20.2, p. 851 (emphasis added).
[63]Ibid., 3.20.3; p. 853.
[64]Ibid., 3.20.44; p. 908.
[65]Ibid., 3.20.5; p. 854.
[66]Ibid., 3.20.14; p. 868.
[67]Ibid., 3.20.41; p. 904.
[68]Ibid., 3.20.2; p. 851.
[69]Ibid., 3.20.36; p. 899.
[70]Ibid., 3.20.36; p. 899.
[71]Ibid., 3.20.37; p. 900.
[72]Ibid., 3.20.6; p. 857.

The Biblical Preaching of John Calvin

Steven J. Lawson

Regarded as arguably the most important and influential figure in Western Civilization over the past one thousand years,[1] John Calvin towers above the landscape of church history as the greatest Reformer of the sixteenth century.[2] A man of immense abilities and prolific industry, this monumental pillar of the Christian faith was many things—a world-class theologian, a revered exegete, a renowned teacher, a master commentator, a church statesman, and the most prodigious leader of the Protestant movement. But first and foremost, Calvin was a pastor, the faithful shepherd of two churches for almost thirty years, and amid his many pastoral duties, he was primarily a preacher of the Word. For this magisterial Reformer, biblical preaching was job number one.

Steven J. Lawson is the Senior Pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama.

He has served as a pastor in Arkansas and Alabama for the past twenty-seven years, and his pulpit ministry takes him around the world. Dr. Lawson is president of New Reformation, a ministry designed to bring about biblical reformation in the church today. He is the author of many books, including *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* (Reformation Trust, 2007).

Born five hundred years ago on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, France, Calvin, a second generation Reformer, gave himself to the exposition of the Word of God as perhaps no one ever has in church history. Educated at the finest universities in France under the leading instructors of the day, this brilliant lawyer became the theological genius of the Reformation, the man whom many believe to be the greatest teacher of Christian doctrine since the apostle Paul. Apart from the biblical authors themselves, Calvin stands as the most influential preacher of Scripture the world has witnessed.

THE REAL AND AUTHENTIC CALVIN

On the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Calvin's birth, in 1909, Emile Doumergue, a noted Calvin biographer, stood in the great Reformer's pulpit and said, "That is the Calvin who seems to me to be the real and authentic Calvin, the one who explains all the others: Calvin the preacher of Geneva, moulding by his words the spirit of the Reformed of the sixteenth century."[3] Doumergue added, "While he has come to be remembered as a theologian who recovered the doctrinal landmarks, which had been buried under the debris of confused centuries, or as a powerful controversialist, whose name opponents have sought to fasten upon beliefs which they judged odious, the truth

SBJT 13.4 (2009): 18-34.

is that Calvin saw himself, first of all, as a pastor in the church of Christ and therefore as one whose chief duty must be to preach the Word."[4] This was the *true* Reformer of Geneva, Calvin the preacher.

Church historian J. H. Merle d'Aubigné concurs with this assessment, maintaining that Calvin viewed the primacy of the pulpit to be "the heart of his ministry."[5] James Montgomery Boice likewise asserts,

> Calvin had no weapon but the Bible. From the very first, his emphasis had been on Bible teaching.... Calvin preached from the Bible every day, and under the power of that preaching the city began to be transformed. As the people of Geneva acquired knowledge of God's Word and were changed by it, the city became, as John Knox called it later, a New Jerusalem from which the gospel spread to the rest of Europe, England, and the New World.[6]

If Calvin had been forced to relinquish all his ministries except one, he would have certainly kept the pulpit.

THE CONTEXT OF CALVIN'S PREACHING

"Any appraisal of Calvin's preaching," John Leith writes, "must begin with the context out of which and in which Calvin preached."[7] This being so, it is necessary that we recognize Calvin's preaching in light of the historical times in which he lived, that time known as the Reformation. Next to first century Christianity, Phillip Schaff writes that the Protestant movement of the sixteenth century is "the greatest event in history ... the chief propelling force in the history of modern civilization."[8] As it sought to bring the church back to the standards of Scripture, John Broadus (1827-1895), distinguished Professor of Homiletics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, notes four distinguishing marks of the Reformation.

A Revival of Preaching

First, Broadus states that this monumental movement was marked by *a revival of preaching*. During the medieval centuries, the primacy of preaching had been all but lost. The pulpit was relegated to secondary status with the mass and its ritualism assuming the central place. What few preachers did exist, Broadus notes, were "exceptions to a rule."[9] For the previous millennium, from the fall of the Roman Empire (c. 500) to Luther's posting his 95 Theses (1517), preaching was subordinate to the sacerdotal system of Rome. But the dawning of the Reformation changed that. The Protestant movement ushered in a new day that restored preaching to its prominent place in Reformed churches. Broadus notes that the sixteenth century witnessed "a great outburst of preaching, such as had not been seen since the early Christian centuries."[10] Spearheading this outburst of preaching was the French born pastor who occupied the Geneva pulpit, John Calvin.

The Reformation was so pulpit-driven that it actually changed the architecture of the churches. Boice notes that Calvin ordered

> the altars, long the centers of the Latin mass, be removed from the churches and that a pulpit, with a Bible on it, be placed at the center of the building. This was not to be on one side of the room, but at the very center, where every line of the architecture would carry the gaze of the worshiper to the Book which alone contains the way of salvation and outlines the principles upon which the church of the living God is to be governed.[11]

With the Reformation, preaching was back in its preeminent place and at the helm was Calvin.

A Revival of Biblical Preaching

Further, Broadus notes that the Reformation witnessed *a revival of biblical preaching*. More than mere preaching was regained; it was a certain kind of preaching—*expository* preaching. Broadus

writes,

> Instead of long and often fabulous stories about saints and martyrs, and accounts of miracles, instead of passages from Aristotle and Seneca, and fine-spun subtleties of the Schoolman, these men preached the Bible. The question was not what the Pope said; and even the Fathers, however highly esteemed, were not decisive authorities— that honor rightly belonged to the Bible alone. The preacher's one great task was to set forth the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Word of God.[12]

In other words, *sola Scriptura* was restored to the pulpit.

"When the Reformation swept over Europe in the sixteenth century," Boice adds, "there was an immediate elevation of the Word of God in Protestant services."[13] The Bible, long a neglected book in the public gathering of the church, was suddenly restored to the Reformed pulpit, and no one preached the Bible more than Calvin. The sheer volume of Calvin's preaching is staggering. Upon his return to Geneva in 1541, Calvin preached twice on Sunday and then on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In 1542, he was asked to preach more often, which he accepted. In October 1549, he increased his preaching duties to twice on Sunday, and every weekday, every other week. Calvin brought ten new sermons every fourteen days—an impressive number considering his vast commitments.

A Revival of Controversial Preaching

Moreover, Broadus observes that the Reformation was *a revival of controversial preaching*. To this point, he writes, "It must not be forgotten that religious controversy is inevitable where living faith, in definite truth, is dwelling side by side with ruinous error and practical evils. And preachers may remember that controversial preaching, properly managed, is full of interest and full of power."[14] In this Protestant movement, the full counsel of God was heard again, and with this full disclosure came controversy. The inevitable result of preaching the entire Bible is *always* controversy. Some four hundred years later, J. Gresham Machen would write, "Every true revival is born in controversy, and leads to more controversy."[15] The Reformation was no different.

At the forefront of this new movement, calling for reform, was the provocative preaching of John Calvin. As a naturally shy and introverted man, Calvin never sought the spotlight, much less controversy. Instead, he was a reclusive individual who preferred the quiet seclusion of the scholar's study. But Calvin was providentially thrust into the pulpit in Geneva where he preached the full counsel of God. As a result, he found himself embroiled in controversy throughout his ministry. But such disputation is *always* inevitable when the unadulterated Word of God is proclaimed. Preaching *all* Scripture—*tota Scriptura*—always breeds a storm of unavoidable controversy, and Calvin stood in the eye of it.

A Revival of Preaching the Doctrines of Grace

Finally, Broadus notes that the Reformation was marked by *a revival of preaching the doctrines of grace*. He asserts,

> The doctrine of Divine sovereignty in human salvation was freely proclaimed by *all* the Reformers. However far some Protestants may have gone at a later period in opposition to these views, yet Protestantism was born of the doctrines of grace, and in the proclamation of these the Reformation preaching found its truest and highest power.[16]

Broadus unequivocally maintains that "the power of the gospel … reside[s] in the great truth of salvation by sovereign grace."[17] Suffice to say, Calvin became the strongest exponent of these truths. Broadus states that this Genevan pastor "gave the ablest, soundest, clearest expositions of Scripture that have been seen for a thousand years."[18] So

convincing was Calvin in this proclamation that Broadus states, "The people who sneer at what is called Calvinism might as well sneer at Mount Blanc."[19] To be sure, Calvin's assiduous expositions of these lofty doctrines in Scripture are irrefutable.

Calvin's pulpit electrified Geneva and sent shock waves throughout Europe, Scotland, and England. Calvin's teachings soon surged across the Atlantic to America with the arrival of the Pilgrims and others. The New England Colonies were staunchly Calvinistic, as were the Ivy League colleges, which were established to train men in the very truths taught in Geneva. Subsequently, sovereign grace preachers such as William Carey and Andrew Fuller would launch the Modern Missions Movement. The reverberations of Calvin's sixteenth century pulpit are still being felt around the world to this day.

Given such a lasting and worldwide effect, what can be said about the preaching of Calvin? What are the salient features of his timeless pulpit? What distinguished his Bible exposition? Certain leading indicators can be cited that define and describe his approach to preaching.

THE FOUNDATION OF CALVIN'S PREACHING

The underlying foundation of Calvin's preaching is his unwavering commitment to the authority of Scripture itself. Calvin believed that when the gospel is preached, "it is as if God Himself spoke in person."[20] In others words, he maintained with Augustine that when the Bible speaks, God speaks. This was the solid rock upon which Calvin stood in the pulpit. This foundational commitment to God's Word involved the following features.

Biblical Authority

The chief cornerstone of Calvin's preaching was his utter submission to the supreme authority of the Scripture. T. H. L. Parker writes, "For Calvin, the message of Scripture is sovereign, [both] sovereign over the congregation and sovereign over the preacher. His humiliation is seen by his submitting to this authority."[21] This sixteenth century Reformer believed that the Bible is "the infallible rule of His holy truth" and "the unchangeable oracles of our heavenly Master."[22] Calvin maintained that God's Word is "eternal, unchangeable, and incorruptible and cannot, like the rain, vanish away."[23] With the immutable standard established, he claims, "Nothing is more precious to [God] than His own truth."[24] Calvin further declared, "God is not to be separated from His Word."[25] As with all great men of God, the Scripture held a preeminent place, not only in Calvin's pulpit, but in his heart as well.

It was to the Scripture that Calvin was firmly anchored. Commenting on this point, D'Aubigné notes, "In Calvin's view everything that had not for its foundation the Word of God was futile and ephemeral boast, and the man who did not lean on Scripture ought to be deprived of his title of honor."[26] The great Reformer himself said, "As soon as men depart even in the smallest degree from God's Word, they cannot preach anything but falsehoods, vanities, imposters, errors, and deceits."[27] Calvin was resolute when he asserted, "A rule is prescribed to all God's servants that they bring not their own inventions but simply deliver as from hand to hand what they have received from God."[28] Elsewhere, he affirmed, "The office of teaching is committed to pastors for no other purpose than that God may be heard there."[29] God Himself *is* heard, Calvin contends, whenever His people gather to hear His Word preached. Therefore, Calvin maintained, "No one then ought to be deemed a sound teacher, but he who speaks from God's mouth."[30] Calvin was unwavering concerning the primacy of the Word of God in preaching. All preaching *must* be *biblical* preaching—no exceptions.

The sacred duty of the preacher, Calvin believed, is confined to "Thus says the Lord": "The minister's whole task is limited to the mystery of God's Word, their whole wisdom to the

knowledge of His Word, their whole eloquence to its proclamation."[31] With unrelenting resolve, he maintained, "When we enter the pulpit, it is not that we may bring our own dreams and fancies with us."[32] Thus, Calvin stood under the supreme authority of holy Scripture whenever he stepped into the pulpit. Unlike Rome, Calvin maintained that the church was to be under the Word, not the Word under the church.

Exhaustive Study

Further, Calvin knew the importance of diligently studying the Scripture before preaching. As a result of a brilliant mind and persistent study, Calvin possessed an "extensive and intensive knowledge of Scripture."[33] Much of it he knew virtually by memory. John Leith writes, "He *knew* the Bible in his person, in his quick, in his mind."[34] His thorough preparation consisted of reading the church fathers, the Scholastics, and his fellow Reformers, along with a careful exegesis of the biblical text. He also traced down cross-references, as well as digging into the historical background. Jones explains, "All of these thoughts were then sorted and stored in his amazing memory."[35] Most of his arduous preparation was available to him by spontaneous recall.

In the pulpit, Calvin drew from his rigorous and many years of study. Emphasizing the necessity of preparing to preach, Calvin said, "If I should climb up into the pulpit without having designed to look at a book and frivolously imagine, 'Ah well! when I get there God will give me enough to talk about,' and I do not condescend to read, or to think about what I ought to declare, and I come here without carefully pondering how I must apply the Holy Scripture to the edification of the people—well, then I should be a cock-sure charlatan and God would put me to confusion in my audaciousness."[36] If Calvin was anything, he was well-studied and thoroughly-prepared.

Before each sermon, Calvin also gave careful thought to the practical application of the biblical text. In his mind, he must give prior consideration to its relevance for his listeners. Calvin said, "If I do not carefully consider how I must apply Holy Scripture to the edification of the people, then I should be an arrogant upstart."[37] In short, Calvin's mind was submitted to the disciplined study and perceived importance of each passage of Scripture.

Specific Text

As Calvin ascended into the pulpit, he always had before him a specific biblical text. Depending upon its literary genre, the number of verses expounded would vary. On the whole, Calvin dealt with more verses from narrative passages, usually enough to cover a basic unit of the story. When preaching the prophets, he covered a smaller literary unit. And when expositing an epistle, he treated a smaller portion of usually a verse or two. But regardless the genre, Calvin always had a specific section of Scripture before him.

Along this line, Parker observes, "[Calvin's] text will vary in length from a single verse to a whole passage of perhaps ten or a dozen verses. Not infrequently he will preach two or three consecutive sermons on one verse.... But the general rule was for two to four verses a sermon."[38] Parker goes on to add, "Clause by clause, verse by verse, the congregation was led through the epistle or the prophecy or the narrative."[39] As a result, Calvin's sermons are not "mealy-mouthed commonplaces or sermons which he had up his sleeves to make them serve all passages of the Scripture, like a shoe for all feet, but expositions, true, pure, plain, and proper for the text which he had to explain."[40] Without adding to or altering the verse(s), Calvin simply expounded what arose from the text.

These meaty expositions lasted at least one hour.[41] Without any oratorical gimmicks, he merely explained and applied the biblical passage before him, closely following the text itself. He explained important Hebrew and Greek concepts, while making short applications. In his sim-

ple approach to the pulpit, Calvin believed "the preacher was but the mouth of God, expounding what God says in His Word."[42] He regarded preaching—explaining and applying the biblical text—as the primary means by which God's presence and power is made real in the life of the listener.

Sequential Exposition

Further, Calvin was firmly committed to sequential, passage by passage, exposition through entire books in the Bible. Boice explains that Calvin's sermons "were in the nature of continuous expositions. He began at the first verse of a Bible book and then treated it in successive sections, averaging four or five verses until he reached the end, at which point he began another book."[43] This consecutive approach—*lectio continua*—reflected the ancient Christian practice of preaching through entire books from beginning to end, guaranteeing that he address the whole counsel of God. In this disciplined manner, controversial subjects were unavoidable. Hard sayings were inescapable. Difficult doctrines could not be bypassed. Calvin chose to explain every truth of Scripture as it appeared in the text and to reveal its relevance to his listeners.

During his three-year ministry in Strasbourg (1538-1541), Calvin preached through the Gospel of John and Romans entirely. Upon his return to Geneva in 1541, he preached through much of the New Testament. Beginning in 1549,[44] he preached through Acts (89 sermons, August 25, 1549-1550, 1552, 1553, 1554, 1555, 1560), and between 1555-1557, he expounded 1 Corinthians (110 sermons), 2 Corinthians (66 sermons, 1557), Galatians (43 sermons, 1557), Ephesians (48 sermons, 1558), 1 and 2 Thessalonians (55 sermons, 1554), 1 Timothy (55 sermons, 1554), 2 Timothy (31 sermons, 1555), Titus (17 sermons, 1555), and a harmony of the Synoptic Gospels (65 sermons between 1549, 1553,1554-1555, 1559-1560, 1562-1564), a series stopped by his final illness and death.

Calvin also preached extensively from the Old Testament, expounding Genesis (123 sermons, September 4, 1559-1561), Deuteronomy (201 sermons, March 20, 1555-July15, 1556), Judges (a shorter series in 1561), 1 Samuel (107 sermons, 1561-1562), and 2 Samuel (87 sermons, 1562-1563), 1 Kings (a lengthy series, 1563-1564), Job (159 sermons, February 26, 1554-March 1555), Psalms (72 sermons, 1549-1557, 1560), Psalm 119 (22 sermons, 1553), Isaiah (353 sermons, 1556-1559), Jeremiah (91 sermons, 1549), Lamentations (25 sermons, 1550), Ezekiel (175 sermons, 1552-1554), Daniel (47 sermons, 1552), Hosea (65 sermons, 1551), Joel (17 sermons, 1551), Amos (43 sermons, 1551-1552), Obadiah (5 sermons, 1552), Jonah (6 sermons, 1552), Micah (20 sermons, November 12, 1550-January 10, 1551), Nahum (we do not have the number), and Zephaniah (17 sermons, 1551). It is impossible to estimate the rich deposit of truth placed into those who gathered in Saint Pierre's Cathedral by Calvin's preaching.

Regarding this relentless constancy in the Word, Parker writes, "Sunday after Sunday, day after day, Calvin climbed the steps into the pulpit. There he patiently led his congregation verse by verse through book after book of the Bible."[45] Parker added, "Almost all Calvin's recorded sermons are connected series on books of the Bible."[46] So committed was Calvin to consecutive exposition that when he returned to Geneva on September 13, 1541, after being banished for almost four years, he resumed his exposition at precisely the *next* verse. This is an indication of his firm commitment to sequential exposition. On another occasion, Calvin became ill while preaching through Isaiah and was out of the pulpit due to illness for some nine months, beginning October of 1558. But when he returned to the pulpit, almost a year later, he picked up at exactly the *next* verse. To be sure, there were no trite or trivial messages issued by Calvin, but only a steady diet of the Word was served from his pulpit.

THE FEATURES OF CALVIN'S PREACHING

Calvin was uniquely gifted in both the science and art of preaching. Regarding its science, this learned scholar was governed by the fixed laws of human language, skilled exegesis, and sound interpretation. Concerning the art of preaching, Calvin was well-versed in the principles of effective rhetoric and arresting communication. Calvin mastered both the substance and style of biblical exposition. Having received the finest liberal arts education of the day, he was especially adept at using the many literary devices and figures of speech available to the preacher.

Straightforward Introduction

From the very beginning of the sermon, Calvin's preaching was remarkably to the point. As he mounted the pulpit, there were no wasted words or needless verbosity. He spoke "with [an] ability to explain clearly, using only a few words."[47] Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor, writes that his, "every word weighed a pound."[48] Thus, from the outset of the sermon, there was little flair, but what, Hywel Jones describes as, "a brief but lucid summary of his message on the immediately preceding passage."[49] Thus, "Calvin never spoke without filling the mind of the hearer with the most weighty sentiments."[50] With carefully chosen words, Calvin encapsulated the passage at hand, capturing the focus of his listeners.

In the introduction, Calvin was primarily establishing the context of his passage. He viewed every passage in light of the larger context of that particular book and the whole Bible. As a result, this proficient expositor preached in a style that was "easy for people to follow, using short, clear sentences."[51] In this direct fashion, Calvin simply preached through books in the Bible, using, in his word, "brevity."[52] That is to say, he desired to give a clear, simple explanation with an economy of words. Calvin usually introduced each sermon with a thesis statement of the passage that lay before him. At the outset, he succinctly stated the main idea of his passage, distilling the central thrust of his text into a simple statement.

An example is seen in his sermon on Micah 3:5-8, in which Calvin says, "Now, from this text, as I have reiterated, we see how opposed our God is to having His Word falsified; for blinding the false prophets as He does is a harsh and stiff penalty, resulting in their being disowned by God."[53] "This message," Calvin states, "will deal with how opposed God is to the false teaching of false prophets."[54] By this introduction, the congregation knows that the entire sermon will follow this central theme. From the beginning of his message, his hearers knew the primary thrust of his passage and where this message would take them.

Lively Delivery

Calvin was intentionally energetic in his preaching style. For this passionate preacher, the pulpit was not the place for the monotone voice of a lecture. Calvin called such sermons "dead." As a result, he resisted the trend of the day, which was merely to read a sermon manuscript in a cold, lifeless manner. The great Reformer said, "It appears to me that there is very little preaching of a lively kind in the kingdom, but that the greater part of delivery by way of reading from a written discourse … preaching ought not to be lifeless but lively, to teach, to exhort, to reprove."[55] He believed that preaching must come in demonstration of "lively power and energy."[56] Calvin held that preaching without passion is dangerous when he wrote, "Doctrine without zeal is either like a sword in the hand of a madman, or ... else it serves for vain and wicked boasting."[57] To be sure, a sermon must be dynamic in its delivery, a proclamation of truth accompanied by zeal.

In order to achieve this, Calvin stepped into the pulpit with nothing except a Bible. He had no written manuscript before his eyes. Neither was there a preaching outline, nor any sermon notes. When preaching from the Old Testament, he had only the Hebrew Scriptures; when preaching from the New, just the Greek. Hywel Jones comments,

"The sheer simplicity of the sight must have contributed greatly to the power of the occasion."[58] Here was simply one man with a Bible alone, standing before the people, and then, Hughes Oliphant Old says, "the sermon itself was put together before the congregation."[59] Extremely gifted by God, Calvin's sermon came together in the pulpit with both lively passion and biblical precision.

Regarding Calvin's delivery, Old writes, "Calvin did not have the warm personality of Luther. One does not find in Calvin the oratorical eloquence of Gregory of Nazianzus nor the lively imagination of Origen. He was hardly the dramatic public speaker that John Chrysostom was, nor did he have the magnetic personality of Bernard of Clairvaux. Gregory the Great was a natural-born leader, as was Ambrose of Milan, but that was not a gift Calvin had. Yet, few preachers have affected such a tremendous reform in the lives of their congregations as did the Reformer of Geneva."[60] With that said, what Calvin *did* possess was a deep conviction that gripped his soul. He despised "oratorical flourishes" and "never quoted other authors."[61] All this was intended to make his preaching animated and energetic.

Sound Exegesis

As Calvin stood before an open Bible, he expounded it with exegetical depth and theological precision. As one trained in law and classical literature, he gave careful attention to the meticulous interpretation of the passage before him. He always sought to discover the plain or literal meaning of his text, giving scrutiny to its historical background, original language, and grammatical structure. John Murray explained, "Calvin was the exegete of the Reformation, and in first rank of biblical exegetes of all time."[62] Philip Schaff adds, "Calvin is the founder of the modern grammatical, historical exegesis. He affirmed the sound and fundamental hermeneutical principle that the biblical authors, like all sensible writers, wish to convey to their readers—one definite thought in words which they could understand."[63] With remarkable powers of analysis, Calvin exegeted the biblical text with accuracy and proficiency.

In this pursuit, Calvin was firmly committed to discovering the meaning of the biblical text by giving attention to its grammatical structure, verb tenses, historical background, and geographical setting. He believed that to interpret the Scripture correctly, he must put himself into the mind of the biblical writer. Calvin wrote, "Since it is almost the interpreter's only task to unfold the mind of the writer whom he has undertaken to expound, he misses the mark or at least strays outside its limits by the extent to which he leads his readers away from the meaning of his author. It is presumptuous and almost blasphemous to turn the meaning of Scripture around as though it were some game that we are playing."[64] This is to say, Calvin was determined to discover what the original intent of each passage. Further, Calvin held to the *analogia Scriptura*, which states that Scripture must be compared with Scripture to discover its true meaning, as it cannot contradict itself.

Literal Interpretation

Prior to the Reformation, Medieval preachers had allegorized the biblical text with little restraint, seeking four levels of interpretation for any passage. But Calvin helped bring the church back to a more literal interpretation of the Bible. Certainly, the great Reformer allowed for figures of speech and symbols, as well as poetic and prophetic language. But Calvin held to the perspicuity of Scripture, meaning that what is most important in the Word is most clear. He once said, "The true meaning of Scripture is the natural and obvious meaning."[65] This vigilant exegete was not searching for a hidden meaning, but what the author plainly intended. Calvin believed the Bible is lucid in its teaching. The proper interpretation of a text, Calvin held, was its clearest meaning.

Prioritizing a plain interpretation, Calvin maintained, "I have observed … a simple style of teaching.… I have felt nothing to be of more

importance than a literal interpretation of the biblical text."[66] To this point, Schaff writes, "Calvin kept constantly in view the primary and fundamental aim of the interpreter, namely, to bring to light the true meaning of the biblical authors according to the laws of thought and speech. He transferred himself into their mental state and environment so as to become identified with them, and let them explain what they actually did say, and not what they might or should have said."[67] Thus, Calvin argues that the Bible speaks in literal terms, and he must allow it to speak for itself.

Not until the proper interpretation has been established can the right application be made. Recognizing this priority, David Puckett notes, "Calvin rarely loses sight of the fact that before one can explain how a passage applies to the person of the sixteenth century, he must determine first what its meaning was for the original writers' contemporaries."[68] Context should be a leading indicator of the right interpretation. Puckett further adds, "In larger textual units, Calvin almost always favors the interpretation that he believes best suits the context. Any interpretation that cannot be justified contextually is at best improbable."[69] Calvin states, "The important thing is that the Scripture should be understood. How it is explained is secondary."[70] The bottom line is that the Geneva Reformer prioritized substance over style and interpretation over application.

Familiar Language

Calvin exhibited the virtue of being easily understood in the pulpit. Boice states, "His words are straightforward, the sentences simple. This is because Calvin understood his calling, as well as that of all other preachers, to make the biblical text as clear as possible to his hearers."[71] Jones likewise adds, "his vocabulary was non-technical."[72] It has been said that Calvin's communication was directed to the common man, "heavy with the smells and tastes and sights of every day life in city and country and was clearly observant of the smallest things in the life of his people."[73] For this caring shepherd, there was no glory in preaching over the heads of his listeners. Being unintelligible was the error of Rome, not the Reformers.

Regarding this readily accessible style, d'Aubigné writes, "Calvin was neither a Dracon[74] nor a Lycurgus;[75] neither a political orator nor a statesman. His pulpit was no tribune for harangues; his work was not that of a secret chief of Protestantism."[76] That is to say, this Frenchman was not overbearing in the pulpit, but easily understood. Parker explains that Calvin nearly always used familiar and easy language; "He is so intent on making himself understood that now and then he will think it necessary to explain a simple word which is nevertheless ambiguous."[77] His vocabulary was "non-technical."[78] Parker adds, "The word that Calvin used to describe what he regarded as the most suitable style for the preacher is *familièré*."[79] By this word, Calvin meant personal, to make the message a personal matter and not just a collection of historical ideas.

Despite the superior force of his mind—Gordon writes, "he never felt he had encountered an intellectual equal"[80]—Calvin's preaching was neither encyclopedic nor elitist, but was readily understandable and easily digested. Calvin stated that preachers must be like fathers, "dividing bread into small pieces to feed their children."[81] Calvin understood the importance of coherent speech in bite-size portions that feeds the flock.

Skilled Rhetoric

Aiding his intelligible delivery, Calvin used the many rhetorical devices at his disposal. Leith writes, "His sermons are replete with metaphors, comparisons, proverbial images, and wisdom that appeal to the imagination."[82] Put another way, his sermons were "full … of analogies taken from realms of ordinary human experience."[83] In so doing, Calvin employed a rich variety of literary tools that made his preaching interesting, arresting, and compelling. He used vivid expressions to enhance imagery in his listeners' minds. Most

frequently, he "assimilated the metaphors and images of the Bible, its concepts and nuances."[84] In addition, he stirred the imagination of his congregation with word pictures that had military, judicial, natural, artisan, or academic connotations. He often flavored his sermons with colloquial expressions used in everyday life that were sure to pique the interest of his parishioners. Calvin rarely used humor, but his biting sarcasm was sure to draw a smile or shock the listener, leaving a lasting impression.

Calvin also skillfully employed thought-provoking questions. He made "constant use of the interrogative in which he engages his congregation."[85] Some questions were rhetorical, requiring no answers. Other questions, Calvin chose to answer. Sometimes he posed questions in rapid-fire succession to provoke the thinking of his listeners. At other times, Calvin would raise an objection by an imaginary objector and, then, issue a biblical reply. For example, he might say, "Now, here one could ask" and subsequently address what he knew his listeners were surely thinking.

Another rhetorical device implemented by Calvin was to restate a verse or statement in alternative words. According to Ford Lewis Battles, Calvin was a superb explicator of Scripture because he was "a master of the paraphrase"[86] by which he could restate Scripture "with precision and clarity, translating it into the language of the common human discourse of his own time."[87] Calvin's signature formula that introduced a restatement was, "It is as if he was saying …," or "In effect, he is saying …," or "In other words…." This literary technique was especially successful in the pulpit where repetition is an effective teacher.

Seamless Transition

A skilled speaker, Calvin spoke with smooth transitions as he proceeded from one main thought to the next. Avoiding abrupt and awkward breaks in his sermon, Calvin would construct appropriate words and phrases to serve as bridges in communication, gracefully leading the listener to the next heading of truth. In using such techniques, he added polish to his already profound messages. By this method, Calvin established the uninterrupted flow of his thought and made sure that his sermons were skillfully woven together.

> Consider some of the transitional phrases from his sermon on Micah 1:1-2. Calvin pulled his listeners along as he introduced new paragraphs of thought with the following segues:
>
> At the same time…. Furthermore…. But let us consider…. It is time now, to summarize…. In addition, we might wonder why…. Now it is quite true that…. On the contrary…. From this example it can be seen that…. Accordingly, we should infer from the foregoing that…. Now from this text we glean…. But, on the contrary, one finds…. We now come to what the prophet adds…. In the meanwhile, let us note…. That, I say, is how proud and presumptuous…. Now the prophet specifically says to them…. That is the similarity that the prophet alludes to here…. In truth…. Having said that, however, we should note….[88]

Clearly, this trained scholar was no sterile exegete, devoid of communication skills. Instead, Calvin was an adept and accomplished conveyor of biblical truth.

THE RELEVANCE OF CALVIN'S PREACHING

For Calvin, Scripture must not only be properly interpreted, but rightly applied to his congregation. Herman Selderhuis writes, "Calvin's strength lay in the way he applied the text to the situation of his listeners. His sermons built bridges between the past and the present."[89] On this subject, Parker explains, "Expository preaching consists in the explanation and application of a passage of Scripture. Without explanation it is not

expository; without application it is not preaching."[90] Both explanation and application are absolutely necessary. With that said, let us turn now to the application of Scripture in Calvin's preaching.

Pastoral Encouragement

As a preacher, Calvin sought warmly to encourage his listeners with his expositions. He never lost sight of the fact that he was a pastor feeding his needy flock. Calvin was consciously aware that he was a shepherd addressing *real* people with *real* needs. Hundreds of his listeners had escaped from bloody persecution in France, England, and Scotland to come to Geneva, which had become an international city of refuge. Among them were John Knox, Myles Coverdale, William Whittingham, and Thomas Bodley, men who had fled Bloody Mary to find protection in this Reformed city. Such was hardly the time to browbeat an already-beleaguered people avoiding persecution. Calvin's listeners desperately needed pastoral edification. Thus, instead of berating his congregation for their shortcomings, compassionate pastor sought to build them up.

With noticeable humility, Calvin even included himself in the call to self-examination and repentance. Commenting on Calvin's tone in the pulpit, Parker writes,

> There is no threshing himself into a fever of impatience or frustration, no holier-than-thou rebuking of the people, no begging them in terms of hyperbole to give some physical sign that the message has been accepted. It is simply one man, conscious of his sins, aware how little progress he makes and how hard it is to be a doer of the Word, sympathetically passing on to his people (whom he knows to have the same sort of problems as himself) what God has said to them and to him.[91]

Calvin sought to lavish grace upon his listeners, not guilt.

For example, listen to Calvin's call for self-examination and how he included himself in the appeal:

> We must all, therefore, examine our lives, not against one of God's precepts but against the whole Law. Can any of us truly say today we are blameless? Or, this was not written for the benefit of the Galatians. Therefore, we must apply today. If each of us was to examine ourselves carefully, we would find that we are all stained with sin until God cleanses us.[92]

With the repeated use of *we* in these exhortations, Calvin's encouraging tone is clearly revealed in his searching appeals.

Challenging Rebuke

Calvin would also issue loving rebuke from the pulpit when correction was needed. Selderhuis notes, "But he claimed to aim at moderation in such rebukes."[93] His pastoral concern sometimes included firm love. Consequently, loving admonition often distinguished Calvin's preaching when he was aware that members of his flock were entangled in sin, but he did it carefully "so as not to bruise the souls with immoderate harshness."[94] He openly attacked vice, despite knowing that his words would probably provoke anger. But this proponent of the truth did so knowing that personal holiness was their greatest good.

In this spirit, Calvin confronted the worldliness and immorality of the people. For example, there were times when Calvin saw the French Huguenots living lives of carnality in Geneva and called for their repentance, stating,

> Those who have come from afar should set themselves to behave in a holy manner as in the house of God. They could have stayed elsewhere to live in such debauchery; it was not necessary that they move from Catholicism to live such a dissolute life. And, in fact, there are some for whom it would have been better to have divorced themselves from the collar than to have ever set foot in this church to have behaved so badly.[95]

In other words, Calvin was so persistent in opposing sin that he declared, as Scripture itself taught, that self-mutilation should be preferred over entering the church in open sin.

On another occasion, Calvin added,

> There are households where husband and wife are like cat and dog; there are some who try to "heighten" their own importance and imitate the lords without reason, and have given themselves to pomp and world superfluity. Others become so "delicate" that they don't know how to work anymore, and are no longer content with any foods. There are some gossipers and "bad mouthers" who would find something to say against the angel of paradise; and in spite of the fact they are "bursting" with vices, they want to put all their "holiness" into controlling ("blessing") their neighbors. Nevertheless, it seems to them all that God must be pleased with the fact that they made the voyage to Geneva, as if it would not have been better for them to stay on their manure than to come to commit such scandalous acts in the church of God.[96]

Such challenging words were meant for their good, namely, their sanctification.

Polemic Confrontation

As a guardian of the truth, Calvin was a heroic defender of the Christian faith. This stalwart of the gospel was convinced he *must* resist the many enemies who would attack its purity. Believing the Bible to be a sharp, two-edged sword that cuts both ways, he wrote, "For to assert the truth is only one-half of the office of teaching, because Satan ever leads his ministers to corrupt the pure doctrine with falsehoods. It is not then enough to proclaim the truth itself, except all the fallacies of the devil be also dissipated."[97] He believed that preaching the Word necessitated confronting the devil's lies in their many forms. To this end, Calvin said, "The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves."[98] In his mind, the full weight of Scripture must be brought to bear against all error that would corrupt the gospel.

For example, Calvin did not hesitate to denounce the blasphemies of the Roman Catholic Church. In his sermon on Gal 1:1-2, Calvin announced, "The Roman Catholic Church today continues the same kind of idolatrous practices that were common amongst the heathen, but in the name of the apostles and of the virgin Mary. The only things that have changed are the names of the idols! But superstition is as wicked and detestable today as it was amongst the first idolaters!"[99] Then Calvin further declared,

> The Pope and all his followers are found guilty of falsifying and corrupting the whole teaching of the gospel.... The entire system is built on lies and gross deception, for they have been bewitched by Satan himself, as most of us are already aware. But what cloak does Satan use to cover all this evil? It is the notion that there has been a continuous succession since the days of the apostles; thus these bishops represent the apostles today in the church, and whatever they say must be accepted.[100]

Calvin not only taught sound doctrine, but he refuted those who contradict the truth.

Evangelistic Appeal

Toward the unregenerate, Calvin was fervently evangelistic in his pulpit ministry, extending the gospel to those without Christ. D'Aubigné notes, "He was before all things an evangelist, a minister of the living God."[101] To put it bluntly, Calvin was *not* a hyper-Calvinist. He did not hide the gospel from his listeners until they showed concern for their souls. Preaching, Calvin believed, must repeatedly offer Christ to unbelievers and call them to faith. Such gospel presentations should be extended so powerful, he reasoned, that "if an unbeliever enter, he may be so effectually arrested and convinced, as to give glory to God."[102] He continually demonstrated this free offer of the

gospel in his preaching. This Genevan Reformer persuaded and pleaded with sinners that they *must* come to faith in Jesus Christ.

The fact is, the high doctrines of Calvin's pulpit never diminished his evangelism, but only emboldened it. With an eye on God's sovereignty, Calvin said, "There is nothing which we ought to desire more earnestly than that the whole world should bow to the authority of God."[103] Accordingly, he knew that such submission necessitates the preaching of the gospel. Calvin wrote, "God begets and multiplies His Church only by means of His Word…. It is by the preaching of the grace of God alone that the Church is kept from perishing."[104] Elsewhere, Calvin stated, "The Gospel is preached indiscriminately to the elect and to the reprobate; but the elect alone come to Christ, because they have been 'taught by God.'"[105] To accuse Calvin of being non-evangelistic is to be ignorant of him and his preaching.

At the end of his sermons, Calvin would often give a fervent evangelistic appeal. Listen to one such gospel presentation in his sermon on Gal 2:15-16. With emphatic urging, Calvin pleaded with his listeners,

> Let us, therefore, understand that there is no salvation whatsoever outside of Jesus Christ, for He is the beginning and the end of faith; and He is all in all. Let us continue in humility knowing that we can only bring condemnation upon ourselves. Therefore, we need to put all that pertains to salvation in the pure and free mercy of God. We must be able to say that we are saved through faith. God the Father has appointed His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that He might be both author and finisher of our salvation. We are to deny ourselves and give ourselves to Him wholly and completely that all the praise might belong to Him.[106]

Because Calvin understood the deep truths of God's Word, he preached the gospel with heart-stirring persuasion, urging unbelievers to cast themselves on God's sovereign mercy.

THE PINNACLE OF CALVIN'S PREACHING

The primary goal of Calvin's preaching was never to bring God down to the level of his listeners, but rather to take them up before His throne of grace. In Calvin's mind, both he and those who sat under his preaching must be awestruck with the supreme majesty and infinite glory of God. The entire sermon must maintain this theocentric focus, Calvin believed, but this is especially seen in the dramatic conclusions of his sermons.

God-Centered Thrust

As the exposition concluded, Calvin was intensely God-centered. Rather than tapering off, the message actually escalated at the end, as he lifted high the banner of *soli Deo gloria*. Calvin said, "The proclaiming of [God's] glory on the earth is the very end of our existence."[107] As God's greatness must be the highest aim of preaching, so it must be to the very end of the sermon. Calvin's aim to glorify God was the overriding thrust of his many expositions. Calvin stressed, "The majesty of God is ... indissolubly connected with the public preaching of His truth."[108] Again, Calvin asserted, "Teachers cannot firmly execute their office except they have the majesty of God before their eyes."[109] This singular preoccupation with the supremacy of God saturated his preaching.

To the finish, Calvin maintained this emphatic God-centered thrust. Calvin would always conclude his preaching by pointing his congregation upward to the supreme greatness of God. Virtually every sermon peaked with such a lofty thrust. In one such example, Calvin cried out, "Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our faults, and praying that it may please Him to make us increasingly conscious of them, that we might be brought to a better repentance. May we, who have been regenerated, really feel that we are being led by the Holy Spirit."[110] Almost every exposition by this magisterial Reformer left

his hearers fixed with this upward gaze toward God.

God-Exalting Transcendence

Having lifted the peoples' focus upon the Lord, Calvin would conclude his sermon with a pastoral prayer, elevating his congregation before the throne of grace. With his final intercession, he would leave them *corum deo*, "before the face of God." Calvin would ask that God lavish His rich mercy upon them. As the sermon concluded, the worshipers were left in heavenly places before God's throne. "Here we have the secret of Calvin's greatness and the source of his strength unveiled to us," B. B. Warfield writes, "No man ever had a profounder sense of God than did he."[111] This exalted view of God towered over Calvin's preaching and the people. His passionate preoccupation with the glory of God gave Calvin's message an arresting sense of transcendence, wonder, and amazement toward God.

In this present hour, preachers must recover a soaring vision of the supremacy of God over all things. Such men alone will deliver sermons that are radically life-changing and history-altering. If the church today is to witness a new reformation, then pastors must reclaim the high ground of God's infinite holiness and absolute sovereignty over all human history. Such lofty thoughts of God's glory must captivate preachers and the people once more. Only such deep theology can produce high doxology in humbled hearts.

FIVE HUNDRED YEARS LATER

Despite the many difficulties he faced, John Calvin remained faithful to the end in preaching the Word. In the last months of his life, the great herald of truth grew so weak that he had to be carried from his home through the streets of Geneva to Saint Pierre's Cathedral. His last sermon was preached on February 6, 1564, when violent coughing interrupted his message and blood gushed into his mouth. He was forced to step down from the pulpit, and his congregation realized that he would never enter it again. The time, at last, had come for Calvin to lay down the invincible weapon of spiritual warfare—the preached Word—and enter the presence of his glorious Lord. On May 27, 1564, Calvin died. According to his humble request, he was buried in an unmarked grave.

A Pulpit with Lasting Influence

Calvin's preaching is nearly five hundred years removed, and yet its impact remains a strong force to the present hour. A study of the last five centuries reveals that Calvin's sermons, drawn from the rich mines of Scripture, helped fashion the reformation of the church and lay the foundations of Western civilization. Calvin the preacher—this is the Calvin who towers over church history with monumental importance.

This study of Calvin's preaching should kindle our longing for a new generation of preachers that will arise and preach as did this great man of God so long ago. The Geneva Reformer remains one of the greatest models, if not *the* greatest, for recapturing the power of biblical preaching. A decisive return to the preaching that is Bible-based, God-exalting, Christ-centered, and Spirit-empowered requires men cut from the same bolt of cloth as Calvin. We *must* have such valiant men who are ready to stand in pulpits and boldly proclaim the full counsel of the Word.

"We Want Again Calvins"

Let us hear the plea of Charles H. Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, spoken over a century ago:

> We want again Luthers, Calvins, Bunyans, Whitefields, men fit to mark eras, whose names breathe terror in our foemen's ears. We have dire need of such. Whence will they come to us? They are the gifts of Jesus Christ to the church, and will come in due time. He has power to give us back again a golden age of preachers, and when the good old truth is once more preached by men

> whose lips are touched as with a live coal from off the altar, this shall be the instrument in the hand of the Spirit for bringing about a great and thorough revival of religion in the land.[112]

O sovereign Lord, we entreat You to answer Spurgeon's heartfelt prayer once again in this day.

We *must* have Calvins again. And by God's grace, we shall see them raised up again by the Head of the church. May He give us legions of biblical expositors, as in the days of the Reformation, ready to unleash the unvarnished truth of Scripture. May we see the power of the Word preached again in this midnight hour of history. *Post tenebras lux*—after darkness, light.

ENDNOTES

[1]David Hall, *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003), 446.

[2]Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University, 2009), vii.

[3]Publisher's introduction, "John Calvin and His Sermons on Ephesians," in John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), viii.

[4]Ibid., viii.

[5]Douglas Kelly, introduction to John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel: Chapters 1–13* (trans. Douglas Kelly; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), ix.

[6]James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 83–84.

[7]John H. Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and His Significance for Today," *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* (ed. Timothy F. George; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 221.

[8]Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, vol 7 (1888; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 1.

[9]John A. Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (1907; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004), 113.

[10]Ibid., 113-14.

[11]James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*, 188–89.

[12]Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 114.

[13]Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*, 188–89.

[14]Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 116-17.

[15]J. Gresham Machen, *Selected Shorter Writings* (ed. D. G. Hart; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 148.

[16]Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 117-118.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., 115.

[19]A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1909), 396-97.

[20]Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine," 211.

[21]T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 39.

[22]John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews,* "Epistle Dedicatory" (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), xxi.

[23]John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 4:171.

[24]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536 edition), trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 3.2.8.

[25]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:45.

[26]J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation in Europe in the Time of Calvin* (vol. 7; 1880; repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2000), 85.

[27]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations* (trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:226–27.

[28]Calvin, *Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, 1:43.

[29]John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah* (trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 95.

[30]Calvin, *Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, 3:168.

[31]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536 edition), trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 195.

[32]John Calvin, as quoted in T. H. L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 83.

[33]Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine," 223.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Hywel R. Jones, "The Preaching of John Calvin," *The Banner of Truth Magazine* 545, Feb 2009, 12.

[36]Calvin, in a sermon on Deuteronomy 6:13–15, as quoted in Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 81.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid., 84.

[39]Ibid., 90.

[40]Attributed to Badius, as cited in Calvin, *Ephesians*, xiv.

[41]Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (trans. Albert Gooties; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 113.

[42]Calvin, *Isaiah,* on 55:11.

[43]James Montgomery Boice, foreword to John Calvin, *Sermons on Psalm 119 by John Calvin* (1580; repr., Audubon, NJ: Old Paths, 1996), viii.

[44]For a detailed chronology of the books in the Bible that Calvin preached, see Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 150-57.

[45]Ibid., 1.

[46]Ibid., 80.

[47]Selderhuis, *John Calvin*, 113.

[48]Theodore Beza, as quoted in Leroy Nixon, *John Calvin, Expository Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 31.

[49]Jones, "The Preaching of John Calvin," 12.

[50]Beza, *The Life of John Calvin*, 121.

[51]Selderhuis, *John Calvin*, 112.

[52]See the preface on 1 Cor. 1:18ff in John Calvin, Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians (trans. John Pringle; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

[53]Calvin, *Sermons on the Book of Micah* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 156.

[54]Ibid., 156

[55]John Calvin, "To the Protector Somerset," *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters, Volume 5: Letters, Part 2, 1545-1553* (ed. Jules Bonnet; trans. David Constable; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 190.

[56]Ibid., 190.

[57]John Calvin, *Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 2:20.

[58]Jones, "The Preaching of John Calvin," 10.

[59]Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Vol. 4: The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 129.

[60]Ibid., 128-29.

[61]Jones, "The Preaching of John Calvin," 12-13.

[62]John Murray, "Calvin as Theologian and Expositor," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 1:308.

[63]Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:532.

[64]John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1.

[65]John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Galatians* (trans. Kathy Childress; Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 136.

[66]General Introduction in *Calvin: Commentaries* (ed. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, Henry P. Van Dusen; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1958), 28.

[67]Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8:531.

[68]David L. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 64.

[69]Ibid., 64.

[70]John Calvin, as quoted in T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 50.

[71]Boice, foreword, x.

[72]Jones, "The Preaching of Calvin," 13.

[73]As quoted by Jones, "The Preaching of Calvin," 13.

[74]Dracon was an Athenian legislator (fl.c. 620 BC), a leader who was harsh, cruel, severe, and strict.

[75]Lycurgus was the reputed founder of the ancient Spartan constitution, probably about the end of the ninth century B.C., a man who was harsh and severe.

[76]Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation*, 7:117.

[77]Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 141.

[78]Jones, "The Preaching of John Calvin," 12-13.

[79]Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 139.

[80]Gordon, *Calvin*, vii.

[81]John Calvin, as quoted by Joel Beeke in "John Calvin,

Teacher and Practitioner of Evangelism" *Reformation and Revival* 10, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 114.

[82]Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine," 221.

[83]Jones, "The Preaching of John Calvin," 13.

[84]Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine," 223.

[85]Ibid., 221.

[86]Ford Lewis Battles and Andre Malan Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 79.

[87]Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine," 212.

[88]Calvin, *Sermons on the Book of* Micah, 4-16.

[89]Selderhuis, *John Calvin*, 112.

[90]Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 79.

[91]Ibid., 119.

[92]Calvin, *Galatians*, 419.

[93]Selderhuis, *John Calvin*, 114.

[94]As quoted in ibid., 114.

[95]As quoted in Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine," 216.

[96]As quoted in ibid.

[97]Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 3:423.

[98]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) on Titus 1:9.

[99]Calvin, *Galatians*, 3.

[100]Ibid., 9.

[101]Merle d'Aubigné, *History of the Reformation*, 7:117.

[102]John Calvin, "To the Protector Somerset," 190.

[103]Calvin, *Isaiah*, 4:286.

[104]John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (trans. Henry Beveridge; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1:388-89.

[105]Calvin, *Isaiah*, 4:146.

[106]Calvin, *Galatians*, 186.

[107]Calvin, *Psalms*, 358.

[108]Calvin, *Jeremiah*, 1:280.

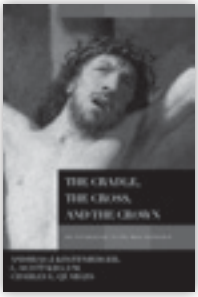
[109]Ibid., 1:44.

[110]Calvin, *Galatians*, 16.

[111]B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1932, 2000), 24.

[112]Charles H. Spurgeon, Autobiography, Vol. 1: The Early Years, 1834–1859, compiled by Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), v.

SETTING THE STANDARD FOR NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES



THE CRADLE, THE CROSS, AND THE CROWN

An Introduction to the New Testament

Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, Charles L. Quarles

"Among available New Testament introductions for theological students this one stands out for meticulously thorough coverage, bibliographical fulless, attention to canonical issues, juicy pastoral reflections, and lashings of masterful common sense."

—J.I. PACKER, professor of Theology, *Regent College*

FREE PowerPoint Teaching Outlines and suggested syllabi for 1 and 2 semester courses!

978-0-8054-4365-3 / HC / 960 Pages / $59.99

COMING APRIL 2010

INTERPRETING GOSPEL NARRATIVES

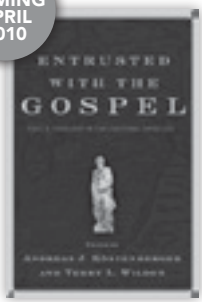
Scenes, People, and Theology

Timothy Wiarda

A powerful resource for pastors, this book is about interpreting the testimony provided for us in the Gospels about Jesus. The goal is to see the apostles' portrait of Jesus as clearly as possible.

978-0-8054-4843-6 / TP / 256 Pages / $24.99

COMING APRIL 2010



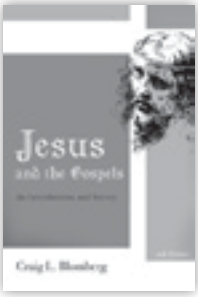
ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL

Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles

Edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger, Terry Wilder

Except for a small number of commentaries, critical scholars have by and large neglected evangelical scholarship on these letters. To fill in this gap, this volume offers a collection of important essays written by evangelicals on 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

978-0-8054-4841-2 / TP / 352 Pages / $19.99



JESUS AND THE GOSPELS

An Introduction and Survey, 2nd Edition

Craig L. Blomberg

This new edition of the 1997 book that won a Gold Medallion Award factors in new scholarship, debate, and critical methods.

978-0-8054-4482-7 / HC / 496 Pages / $39.99

Visit BHAcademic.com to order FREE review copies. B&H ACADEMIC

"A Sacrifice Well Pleasing to God": John Calvin and the Missionary Endeavor of the Church[1]

Michael A. G. Haykin

Michael A. G. Haykin is Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is also Adjunct Professor of Church History and Spirituality at Toronto Baptist Seminary in Ontario, Canada. Dr. Haykin is the author of many books, including *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Joshua Press, 2000), *"At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word": Andrew Fuller As an Apologist* (Paternoster Press, 2004), *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival* (Evangelical Press, 2005), and *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Evangelical Press, 2007).

INTRODUCTION

It has often been maintained that the sixteenth-century Reformers had a poorly-developed missiology and that overseas missions to non-Christians was an area to which they gave little thought. Yes, this argument runs, they rediscovered the apostolic gospel, but they had no vision to spread it to the uttermost parts of the earth.[2] Possibly the very first author to raise the question about early Protestantism's failure to apply itself to missionary work was the Roman Catholic theologian and controversialist, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). Bellarmine argued that one of the marks of a true church was its continuity with the missionary passion of the Apostles. In his mind, Roman Catholicism's missionary activity was indisputable and this supplied a strong support for its claim to stand in solidarity with the Apostles. As Bellarmine maintained,

> [I]n this one century the Catholics have converted many thousands of heathens in the new world. Every year a certain number of Jews are converted and baptized at Rome by Catholics who adhere in loyalty to the Bishop of Rome.... The Lutherans compare themselves to the apostles and the evangelists; yet though they have among them a very large number of Jews, and in Poland and Hungary have the Turks as their near neighbors, they have hardly converted so much as a handful.[3]

SBJT 13.4 (2009): 36-43.

But such a characterization fails to account for the complexity of this issue. First of all, in the earliest years of the Reformation none of the major Protestant bodies possessed significant naval and maritime resources to take the gospel outside of the bounds of Europe. The Iberian Catholic kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, on the other hand, who were the acknowledged leaders among missions-sending regions at this time, had such resources aplenty. Moreover, their missionary endeavors were often indistinguishable from imperialist ventures. It is noteworthy that other Roman Catholic nations of Europe like Poland and Hungary also lacked sea-going capabilities and evidenced no more cross-cultural missionary concern at that time than did Lutheran Saxony or Reformed Zurich. It is thus plainly wrong to make the simplistic assertion that Roman Catholic nations were committed to overseas missions whereas no Protestant power was so committed.[4]

Second, it is vital to recognize that, as Scott Hendrix has shown, the Reformation was the attempt to "make European culture more Christian than it had been. It was, if you will, an attempt to reroot faith, to rechristianize Europe."[5] In the eyes of the Reformers, this program involved two accompanying convictions. First, they considered what passed for Christianity in late mediaeval Europe as sub-Christian at best, pagan at worst. As the French Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) put it in his *Reply to Sadoleto* (1539):

> [T]he light of divine truth had been extinguished, the Word of God buried, the virtue of Christ left in profound oblivion, and the pastoral office subverted. Meanwhile, impiety so stalked abroad that almost no doctrine of religion was pure from admixture, no ceremony free from error, no part, however minute, of divine worship untarnished by superstition.[6]

The Reformers, then, viewed their task as a missionary one: they were planting true Christian churches.[7]

In what follows, a brief examination of the missiology of John Calvin clearly shows the error of the perspective that the Reformation was by and large a non-missionary movement.[8] John Calvin's theology of missions is developed by looking first at the theme of the victorious advance of Christ's kingdom that looms so large in his writings. Statements from Calvin regarding the means and the motivations for extending this kingdom are then examined to further show Calvin's concern for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Finally, there is a brief look at the way Calvin's Geneva functioned as a missionary center.

THE VICTORIOUS ADVANCE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

A frequent theme in Calvin's writings and sermons is that of the victorious advance of Christ's kingdom in the world. God the Father, Calvin says in his prefatory address to Francis I in his theological masterpiece, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, has appointed Christ to "rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth." The reason for the Spirit's descent at Pentecost, Calvin notes further in a sermon on Acts 2, was in order for the gospel to "reach all the ends and extremities of the world." In a sermon on 1 Tim 2:5–6, one of a series of sermons on 1 Timothy 2, Calvin underlines again the universality of the Christian faith: Jesus came, not simply to save a few, but "to extend his grace over all the world."[9]

From that same sermon series, Calvin can thus declare that "God wants his grace to be known to all the world, and he has commanded that his gospel be preached to all creatures; we must (as much as we are able) seek the salvation of those who today are strangers to the faith, who seem to be completely deprived of God's goodness."[10] It was this global perspective on the significance of the gospel that also gave Calvin's theology a genuine dynamism and forward movement. It has been rightly said that if it had not been for the so-called Calvinist wing of the Reformation many of the great gains of that era would have died on the vine.[11]

MEANS FOR THE EXTENSION OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

Calvin is quite certain that the extension of Christ's kingdom is first of all God's work. Commenting on Matt 24:30, he can assert that it is not "by human means but by heavenly power … that the Lord will gather His Church."[12] Or consider his comments on the phrase "a door having also been opened to me" in 2 Cor 2:12.

> [The meaning of this metaphor is] that an opportunity of furthering the gospel had presented itself. Just as an open door makes an entrance possible, so the Lord's servants make progress when opportunity is given them. The door is shut when there is no hope of success. Thus when the door is shut we have to go a different way rather than wear ourselves out in vain efforts to get through it but, when an opportunity for edification presents itself, we should realize that a door has been opened for us by the hand of God in order that we may introduce Christ into that place and we should not refuse to accept the generous invitation that God thus gives us.[13]

For Calvin, the metaphor of an "open door" spoke volumes about the way in which the advance of the church is utterly dependent on the mercy of a Sovereign God.

Now, this does not mean that Christians are to be passive in their efforts to reach the lost and can sit back and wait for God to do it all. In his comments on Isa 12:5, Calvin deals with this common misinterpretation of God's divine sovereignty.

> [Isaiah] shows that it is our duty to proclaim the goodness of God to every nation. While we exhort and encourage others, we must not at the same time sit down in indolence, but it is proper that we set an example before others; for nothing can be more absurd than to see lazy and slothful men who are exciting other men to praise God.[14]

As David Calhoun rightly observes, "The power to save [souls] rests with God but He displays and unfolds His salvation in our preaching of the gospel."[15] While missions and evangelism are indeed God's work, he delights to use his people as his instruments.

The first major way in which God uses his people for the conversion of others is through prayer—our prayers for the conversion of unbelievers.[16] In Calvin's words, God "bids us to pray for the salvation of unbelievers"[17] and Scripture passages like 1 Tim 2:4 encourage us not to "cease to pray for all people in general."[18] We see this conviction at work in Calvin's own prayers, a good number of which have been recorded for us at the end of his sermons. Each of his sermons on Deuteronomy, for instance, ends with a prayer that runs something like this: "may it please [God] to grant this [saving] grace, not only to us, but also to all peoples and nations of the earth."[19] In fact, in the liturgy that Calvin drew up for his church in Geneva, there is this prayer:

> We pray you now, O most gracious God and merciful Father, for all people everywhere. As it is your will to be acknowledged as the Saviour of the whole world, through the redemption wrought by Your Son Jesus Christ, grant that those who are still estranged from the knowledge of him, being in the darkness and captivity of error and ignorance, may be brought by the illumination of your Holy Spirit and the preaching of your gospel to the right way of salvation, which is to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.[20]

Moreover, Calvin would admonish believers not to be discouraged if they do not see fruit immediately issuing as a result of their prayers. As he states in his comments on Gen 17:23,

> So, at this day, God seems to enjoin a thing impossible to be done, when he requires his gospel to be preached everywhere in the whole world, for the purpose of restoring it from death

> to life. For we see how great is the obstinacy of nearly all men, and what numerous and powerful methods of resistance Satan employs; so that, in short, all the ways of access to these principles are obstructed. Yet it behooves individuals to do their duty, and not to yield to impediments; and, finally, our endeavors and our labors shall by no means fail of that success, which is not yet apparent.[21]

Believers, then, must actively employ their strength to bring God's salvation to others. In his *Sermon on Deuteronomy* 33.18-19 Calvin can thus argue that it is not enough to be involved in God's service. Christians need to be drawing others to serve and adore God.[22] Specifically, how does God use the strength of Christians? Calvin's answer is that it is by their words and by their deeds. Given Calvin's high appreciation of the Word of God one would naturally expect that this would be seen as a major means of witness. Thus, Calvin can state that whenever the Old Testament prophets foretold "the renewal of the Church or its extension over the whole globe," they always assigned "the first place to the Word."[23] Acting on this conviction, Calvin encouraged the translation and printing of the Scriptures in the work of Reformation in Geneva. This also explains his own devotion to regular expository preaching and his penning of commentaries on all of the books of the New Testament (except for 2 and 3 John, and Revelation), and on a goodly number of Old Testament books. Preaching is also central here, as Calvin notes, "God wants his grace to be known in all the world, and he has commanded that his gospel be preached to all people."[24]

Witness, though, is borne not only by the Word, but also by our deeds. Calvin had established an academy in Geneva especially to train men to be missionaries for his native land, France. A significant number of these men did indeed go back as missionaries and some died as martyrs. Five such missionaries, for example—Martial Alba, Pierre Ecrivain, Charles Favre, Pierre Navihères, and Bernard Seguin—had come from Lausanne to Geneva in the spring of 1552 where they had gotten to know Calvin as they prepared to go back to France as missionaries in the region of Lyons. As they were on the road to Lyons they met a man who asked if he could travel with them. They had no suspicions of the man. He seemed very hospitable, and on arrival at Lyons, he urged them to come and stay with him. They did so, and he subsequently betrayed them into the hands of the authorities in April 1552. As soon as Calvin heard of their arrest he began a letter-writing campaign seeking to bring pressure on the French king Henri II through a number of German Protestant allies. By the spring of 1553, however, it became obvious that he would not be able to obtain their release. Calvin wrote the five who were facing death by martyrdom on May 15, 1553. The students never saw this letter for they were burned on May 16:

> Since it pleases [God] to employ you to the death in maintaining his quarrel [with the world], he will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain. And though the fruit may not all at once appear, yet in time it shall spring up more abundantly than we can express. But as he hath vouchsafed you this privilege, that your bonds have been renowned, and that the noise of them has been everywhere spread abroad, it must needs be, in despite of Satan, that your death should resound far more powerfully, so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby. For my part, I have no doubt, if it please this kind Father to take you unto himself, that he has preserved you hitherto, in order that your long-continued imprisonment might serve as a preparation for the better awakening of those whom be has determined to edify by your end. For let enemies do their utmost, they never shall be able to bury out of sight that light which God has made to shine in you, in order to be contemplated from afar.[25]

Here, Calvin saw the act of martyrdom as a powerful witness for the gospel, though it is one without words.

Calvin was also convinced that each and every Christian must be prepared to witness, by both word and deed, about God's grace and mercy in Christ and that to all whom they can. When it comes to the spreading of the gospel, it is noteworthy that he makes no distinction between the responsibility of pastors and of other Christians. All believers must be involved.[26]

It also needs noting that Calvin and the Genevan pastors helped further the work of Reformation evangelism in Europe through print media. In fact, by Calvin's death, his interest in Christian publishing meant that there were no less than 34 printing-houses in Geneva, which printed Bibles and Christian literature in a variety of European languages. In the 1550s Geneva was particularly a hive of biblical editions and translations: for example, Robert Estienne's Greek New Testament of 1551 which divided the text into verses for the first time; a new edition of the Vulgate; an Italian translation and Spanish translation in 1555 and 1556 respectively; at least 22 editions of the French Bible. And in 1560 a complete English translation of the Bible was printed sometime between April 10 and May 30 of that year. This was the *Geneva Bible*, the bedrock of early English Puritanism.

There is one means that Calvin expected God to use in the spread of the gospel that we today in the West probably do not expect, that is, evangelism through Christian rulers and magistrates. For example, when Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603) came to the throne of England, Calvin saw it as a hopeful sign for the advance of the gospel in England. Over the years he also corresponded extensively with a number of French noblewomen, especially Jeanne d'Albret (1528-1572), queen of Navarre. This French noblewoman played a significant role in the French Reformation, and Calvin recognized his need of her support, and that of other nobility, if new territories were to be opened up to the spread of the evangelical faith.

MOTIVATIONS FOR EXTENDING CHRIST'S KINGDOM

What was to motivate the believer in bearing witness to the faith? First and foremost was the glory of God. As Calvin stated in his *Sermon on Deuteronomy* 33:18-19: "When we know God to be our Father, should we not desire that he be known as such by all? And if we do not have this passion, that all creatures do him homage, is it not a sign that his glory means little to us?"[27]

In other words, if we are truly passionate about God's glory, this passion will result in witness. The Christian life, in all of its apostolic fullness, is marked by self-denial, the recognition that the Christian does not belong to himself or herself, but belongs totally to God and is to live for God's glory. In Calvin's words,

> Even though the law of the Lord provides the finest and best-disposed method of ordering a man's life, it seemed good to the Heavenly Teacher to shape his people by an even more explicit plan to that rule which he had set forth in the law. Here [in Romans 12], then, is the beginning of this plan: the duty of believers is "to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him"…we are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may hereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory.[28]

Moreover, bearing witness to the faith is pleasing to God. Consider in this regard Calvin's letter to a Christian landowner on island of Jersey that was written around the year 1553.

> We praise God for having inclined your heart to try if it will be possible to erect, by your means, a small church on the place where you reside. And indeed, according as the agents of the Devil strive by every act of violence to abolish the true religion, extinguish the doctrine of salvation, and

> exterminate the name of Jesus Christ, it is very just that we should labor on, our side to further the progress of the gospel, that, by these means, God may be served in purity, and the poor wandering sheep may be put under the protection of the sovereign Pastor to whom everyone should be subject. And you know that it is a sacrifice well pleasing to God, to advance the spread of the Gospel by which we are enlightened in the way of salvation, to dedicate our life to the honor of him who has ransomed us at so costly a price in order to bear rule in the midst of us.[29]

Then, we are to evangelize because we have been commanded to do so by Christ.[30] Compassion for the lost condition of people also should drive Christians to witness. "If we have any humanity in us," he declared in a sermon on Deuteronomy 33, "seeing men going to perdition … ought we not be moved by pity, to rescue the poor souls from hell, and teach them the way of salvation?"[31] In fact, a Christian who is not involved in witness is really a contradiction in terms. As Calvin remarks in his *Commentary on Isaiah*:

> [T]he godly will be filled with such an ardent desire to spread the doctrines of religion, that everyone not satisfied with his own calling and his personal knowledge will desire to draw others along with him. And indeed nothing could be more inconsistent with the nature of faith than that deadness which would lead a man to disregard his brethren, and to keep the light of knowledge choked up within his own breast.[32]

GENEVA AS A MISSIONARY CENTER

Geneva was not a large city. During Calvin's lifetime it reached a peak of slightly more than 21,000 by 1560, of whom a goodly number were religious refugees.[33] Nevertheless, it became *the* missionary center of Europe in this period of the Reformation. Calvin sought to harness the energies and gifts of many of the religious refugees so as to make Geneva central to the expansion of Reformation thought and piety throughout Europe. This meant training and preparing many of these refugees to go back to their native lands as evangelists and reformers.

Understandably, Calvin was vitally concerned about the evangelization of his native land, France, and his countrymen, the French. It has been estimated that by 1562 some 2,150 congregations had been established in France with around 2 million members, many of them converted through the witness of men trained in Geneva.[34] That 2 million comprised 50 percent of the upper and middle classes, and a full 10 percent of the entire population. The growth is enormous when one reckons that at the time of Calvin's conversion, in the early 1530s, there were probably no more than a couple of thousand evangelicals in France.

But Calvin was concerned not only for France, but also for the reformation of the church in places like Scotland and England, Spain as well as Poland, Hungary and the Netherlands. He even encouraged a mission to Brazil in 1555, which turned out, though, to be a failure.[35] It is noteworthy that when the church in Geneva heard of this Brazilian opportunity, contemporary chronicler (and participant in the mission to Brazil) Jean de Léry recorded that "Upon … hearing this news, the church of Geneva at once gave thanks to God for the extension of the reign of Jesus Christ in a country so distant and likewise so foreign and among a nation entirely without the knowledge of the true God."[36]

Little wonder that in light of all these missionary projects, Calvin could write, "When I consider how very important this corner [i.e., Geneva] is for the propagation of the kingdom of Christ, I have good reason to be anxious that it should be carefully watched over."[37]

A CONCLUDING WORD

Of late, there have been assertions that the Christian tradition that comes down from Calvin is essentially uncomfortable with missionary zeal and is inherently anti-missionary. Some of

those making these assertions are knowledgeable historians who are rightly esteemed in their respective schools. Possibly they are confusing biblical Calvinism with the hyper-Cavinism that has frequently developed on the fringes of the Reformed tradition. Every movement has its fringe element that no more represents the center than chalk resembles cheese. In this essay, we have seen that the missionary zeal that marks biblical Calvinism—espoused by men like John Bunyan and John Eliot, Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd, Andrew Fuller and William Carey, Horatius Bonar and Charles H. Spurgeon—is traceable back to one of its key sources, John Calvin himself.

ENDNOTES

[1]An earlier version of this article first appeared in the online journal *Reformation21* 13 (September 2006). Used with permission.

[2]See Kenneth J. Stewart, "Calvinism and Missions: the Contested Relationship Revisited," *Themelios* 34, no. 1 (April 2009), especially the section "A Much Older Charge: The Entire Reformation Movement Neglected Missions" [cited 7 Dec 2009]. Online: http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/publications/34-1/Calvinism-and-missions-the-contested-relationship-revisited.

[3]Robert Bellarmine, *Controversiae,* Book IV as quoted in Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964), 221.

[4]Stewart, "Calvinism and Missions."

[5]Scott Hendrix, "Rerooting the Faith: The Reformation as Re-Christianization," *Church History* 69 (2000): 561.

[6]John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoleto, *A Reformation Debate* (ed. John C. Olin; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 74–75.

[7]Hendrix, "Rerooting the Faith," 558–68.

[8]David B. Calhoun, "John Calvin: Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," *Presbyterion: Covenant Seminary Review* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 17.

[9]For the three quotes in this paragraph, see ibid., 17.

[10]*Sermon 13* on 1 Tim 2:8. For this quote, I am indebted to Elsie McKee, "Calvin and Praying for "All People Who Dwell on Earth," *Interpretation* 63 (2009): 134.

[11]Jean-Marc Berthoud, "John Calvin and the Spread of the Gospel in France" in *Fulfilling the Great Commission* (Westminster Conference Papers; [London]: Westminster Conference, 1992), 44–46.

[12]Cited in Calhoun, "Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 18.

[13]*Commentary* on 2 Corinthians 2:12 [Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 10; *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (trans. T. A. Smail; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), 32].

[14]Commentary on Isaiah 12:5 in John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (trans. William Pringle; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851) 1:403.

[15]Calhoun, "Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 18.

[16]In this regard, see the masterful essay by McKee, "Calvin and Praying," 130–40, *passim*.

[17]Cited in ibid., 133.

[18]Cited in ibid., 138.

[19]Calhoun, "Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 19, n.23; McKee, "Calvin and Praying," 139–40.

[20]Cited in McKee, "Calvin and Praying," 139.

[21]Commentary on Genesis 17:23 in John Calvin, *Genesis* (trans. and ed. John King; 1847 ed.; repr., Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 465.

[22]*Sermon 196* on Deuteronomy 33:18–19 in *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia* (ed. William Baum, Edward Cunitz, and Edward Reuss; *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 57; Brunswick, 1885; repr., New York: Johnson, 1964), 29:175.

[23]Cited in Calhoun, "Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 22.

[24]Cited in McKee, "Calvin and Praying," 134.

[25]*Letter* 318 [in Jules Bonnet, ed., *Letters of John Calvin* (trans. Mr. Constable; 1858 ed.; repr., New York: Lenox Hill, 1972), 2:406.

[26]Calhoun, "Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 22.

[27]*Sermon 196*, on Deuteronomy 33:18–19 (*Ioannis Calvini Opera*, 29:175).

[28]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:689–90 (3.7.1).

[29]*Letter* 339 in Bonnet, *Letters*, 2:453.

[30]Calhoun, "Missionary Hero or Missionary Failure," 20.

[31]*Sermon 196* on Deuteronomy 33:18–19 (*Ioannis Calvini Opera*, 29:175).

[32]Commentary on Isaiah 2:3 in Calvin, *Isaiah*, 1:94.

[33]Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 121.

[34]W. Stanford Reid, "Calvin's Geneva: A Missionary Centre," *The Reformed Theological Review* 42, no. 3 (September–December, 1983): 69.

[35]See the story of this important mission in G. Baez–Camargo, "The Earliest Protestant Missionary Venture in Latin America," *Church History* 21 (1952): 135–145; Amy Glassner Gordon, "The First Protestant Missionary Effort: Why Did It Fail?", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 8, no.1 (January 1984): 12–18; and Stewart, "Calvinism and Missions."

[36]Jean de Léry, *Journal de Bord de Jean de Léry en la Terre de Brésil 1557, presénté et commenté par M.R. Mayeux* (Paris, 1957) as quoted in R. Pierce Beaver, "The Genevan Mission to Brazil" in *The Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. John Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 61.

[37]Bonnet, *Letters*, 2:227.

John Calvin as Teacher

David L. Puckett

For almost five centuries, when Christians have thought of John Calvin, the theological content of his teaching has been the focus. He has been especially identified with his teaching on man's depravity and inability to turn to God and the correlated teachings of God's sovereignty in salvation and predestination. His teaching on church government and on baptism and the Lord's Supper have had inestimable influence on the development of Reformed doctrine. The persistent influence of his thought is still evident among evangelical scholars. As recently as twenty five years ago, a survey of members of the Evangelical Theological Society found Calvin to be the individual with the single greatest influence on society members in their scholarly work. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* handily beat out George Eldon Ladd's *Theology of the New Testament* as the academic book that had made the greatest impact on members' scholarship and the direction of their academic work.[1] It seems that Calvin has continued to teach the church through his written work—especially through the *Institutes*.

Calvin's educational background and personal connections prepared him for a ministry of teaching through the written word. As a young man, he participated in an intellectual movement that scholars today often refer to as Christian humanism.[2] A number of the leaders of the early Reformation were drawn from this movement. Many of them looked to the great Desiderius Erasmus as a role model and source of inspiration and were, like him, persuaded of the need for an educational project to remedy the ignorance of the Bible in their day.[3] Erasmus and others attempted to address the problem, producing a vast array of resources for Bible study. Among these were new texts, translations, and paraphrases, all published so that Scripture might have its widest possible transforming influence. They also produced new editions of the Fathers, especially those who were regarded as helpful interpreters of the Bible's meaning. Their concern extended far beyond the upper classes and the well-educated. They were committed to providing resources for understanding the Bible for people of all vocations and all levels of society.

Calvin shared this commitment and it is key

David L. Puckett is Associate Vice President for Doctoral Studies and Professor of Church History at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Prior to coming to Southern Seminary, he served as Professor of Church History and Director of Th.M. and Ph.D. Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and as founding headmaster of Trinity Academy of Raleigh, North Carolina. He previously taught historical theology at Dallas Theological Seminary and church history and theology at Criswell College. Dr. Puckett is the author of *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Westminster/John Knox, 1995).

to understanding his work as a reformer, but his interest went beyond providing texts, translations, paraphrases, and new editions of the Fathers. He sought to provide commentary on the Bible and guidance for those who would be reading it.[4] This commitment bore its first fruit when Calvin published a small, but well-received, work in 1536—a work that would grow over the next two decades into his great *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

It was entirely consistent with Calvin's humanist background (and with his own retiring personality) that, following his conversion, he chose the written word as the means through which he would instruct God's people. He apparently intended to confine himself to a life of study and writing and planned to stay away from public ministry. But his desire to live a quiet writer's life was soon frustrated. Calvin described this in the preface to his *Commentary on the Psalms*, written late in his life: "God fastened upon me so many cords of various kinds that he never allowed me to remain quiet, and in spite of my reluctance dragged me into the limelight."[5]

It must have been the exceptional promise that the young Calvin had displayed as a writer that first drew the attention of the early reformers, William Farel and Martin Bucer. They pried a reluctant Calvin out of his study and into a public ministry of teaching and preaching. Calvin later reflected on his reluctance and Farel's insistence: "When [Farel] realized that I was determined to study in privacy in some obscure place, and saw that he gained nothing by entreaty, he descended to cursing, and said that God would surely curse my peace if I held back from giving help at a time of such great need."[6] When, after less than two years of ministry, he and Farel were expelled from Geneva, Calvin saw this was an opportunity to leave the ministry of the pulpit and lectern and plant himself again in his study. Then, he heard a familiar call, this time to service in Strasbourg: "I decided to live quietly as a private individual. But that most distinguished minister of Christ, Martin Bucer, dragged me back with the same curse which Farel had used against me."[7] Calvin served in Strasbourg for three years—as pastor to a congregation of French refugees and lecturer on the Bible.[8] Then he was called once again to Geneva.

TEACHING OFFICES

When Calvin returned to Geneva, it was to spend the rest of his life there—a life that would provide little opportunity for the peace and quiet he had believed necessary for his calling as a writer. He became the most public person in Geneva, and for over two decades was deeply engaged in almost every controversy in a very contentious society, all while preaching and teaching through the Bible. Upon his return to the city, he and the other ministers worked with the city leaders to draft the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances,* an agreement that outlined a new relationship between state and church. It also established a pattern for ministry through four ecclesiastical offices—pastor, doctor, elder, and deacon.

The teaching role was highlighted in the first two of these offices.[9] Pastors were "to proclaim the Word of God, to instruct, to admonish, exhort and censure, ... to administer the sacraments and to enjoin brotherly correction."[10] These activities were to take place in public and in private. Pastors were also expected to catechize. One of the key pastoral functions described in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* was the teaching of children:

> All citizens and inhabitants are to bring or convey their children on Sundays at midday to Catechism.... A definite formulary is to be composed by which they will be instructed, and on this, with the teaching given them, they are to be interrogated about what has been said, to see if they have listened and remembered well. When the child has been well enough instructed to pass the Catechism, he is to recite solemnly the sum of what it contains, and also to make profession of his Christianity in the presence of the Church.[11]

Calvin took a personal interest in the instruction

of children, providing a catechism in question and answer form[12] and a primer to be used in school for teaching the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles Creed, and the Ten Commandments, along with the alphabet.[13] As works of instruction for children, these catechetical works may be understood as fruit of Calvin's labor as pastor.[14]

The office of doctor (or teacher), as described in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, was focused entirely on instruction and included none of the administrative or disciplinary functions of the pastoral office:

> The office proper to doctors is the instruction of the faithful in true doctrine in order that the purity of the gospel be not corrupted either by ignorance or by evil opinions. As things are disposed today, we always include under this title aids and instructions for maintaining the doctrine of God and defending the Church from injury by the fault of pastors and ministers.[15]

The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* refers to the office of doctor as the "order of the schools." It explains that the one in this office may be a "lecturer in theology" and it suggests that it will be good to have one in Old Testament and one in New Testament.[16] This office is especially focused on the task of preparing candidates for ministry. It involves both positive teaching and correction of error.[17] A lecture hall or schoolroom was to be a primary context for this ministry. To profit fully from the instruction of the doctors, knowledge of the biblical languages and of the humanities was needed, and this would best be gained in a school.[18] The purpose of the school was to prepare students for ministry (and to prepare some to be godly magistrates). It took almost two decades for Calvin's dream of an academy in Geneva to be realized. In the meantime, those preparing for Christian ministry in Geneva still needed training. This took place through in Geneva in a less formal way—through attendance at sermons in the city's churches, through attendance at lectures on the Bible given by Calvin and others, through attendance at meetings of ministers and church leaders where there were lectures or discussions of doctrinal issues, and by reading Calvin's *Institutes*.

Through the offices of pastor and doctor, the instructional needs of every element of Genevan society would be provided for. The major distinction between the teaching roles of the two offices was this: the pastor was focused on teaching the congregation; the doctor was focused on teaching those who would teach the congregation. Randall Zachman sees the distinction as partly a distinction between particular and universal. While pastors have assignments to specific congregations, "doctors teach the universal church its essential dogmas and doctrines of piety, and defend such doctrines from error by preserving the true, simple, and genuine meaning of Scripture. Doctors have the responsibility for teaching future pastors, and for correcting any damage done to the church by faulty pastors."[19]

Calvin was called to both offices, but it is especially in his office as doctor that Calvin influenced the Christian community beyond his own lifetime. The literary products of that office, the *Institutes* and the biblical commentaries, are best understood as products of that office, both directed toward helping the reader read the Scriptures with understanding.

THE INSTITUTES

The first edition of Calvin's *Institutes* was published in 1536, before he began his public ministry.[20] The definitive 1559 edition was an entirely different work, reflecting the study and experience of over two decades of ministry. Its growth from six chapters to eighty reflects a change in pedagogical purposes it was intended to serve. In its earliest form, the *Institutes* was intended to offer instruction for those who had recently been freed from the tyranny of the papacy. It may properly be thought of a reflecting Calvin's role as pastor. As a work of basic instruction, it served the function of a catechism, and catechizing for Calvin was, with

preaching, at the heart of the pastor's work.[21]

By 1541, while the function of the *Institutes* as a summary of Christian doctrine remained, its function as a guide for readers of the Bible had become prominent.

> Although the holy scripture contains perfect teaching to which nothing can be added, because our Lord has chosen to unfold the infinite treasures of His wisdom in it; nevertheless, someone who does not have very much practice in using it needs some guidance and direction to know what to look for in it, in order not to go astray and wander here and there but to keep to a certain path, so as to arrive finally where the Holy Spirit calls him.... I exhort all who revere the word of the Lord to read this and impress it in their memory with diligence, if they want first to have a summary of Christian teaching and then an entry point to profit well in reading the Old as well as the New Testament.[22]

Later editions of the *Institutes* were clearly the product of Calvin's labor as doctor. He indicated that his purpose in writing it was "to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word."[23] The *Institutes* was, therefore, not intended to function as a stand-alone theology summary. It was not intended to replace lectures, sermons, or the personal reading of Scripture. Calvin expected the truth of what he said in the *Institutes* to be tested by others who were engaged in Bible study.

It is interesting that Calvin, who is better known for his theological work than for his biblical work, apparently never delivered lectures on theology as do modern academic theologians and as did the great scholastic theologians of the later Middle Ages. His *Institutes*, the work through which he has exercised such enormous influence on the theology of later generations, does not correspond to any of his known lectures. He did, however, lecture through much of the content of the Bible, and the fruit of that labor is preserved in his biblical commentaries.

THE COMMENTARIES

Calvin's commentaries were a written extension of his spoken ministry as doctor, mostly of the lectures delivered to ministerial candidates. Some were slightly edited transcriptions of his lectures, but even for those that were not first delivered as lectures, there was a close connection to Calvin's speaking ministry.

In 1540, during his ministry in Strasbourg, Calvin published his first biblical commentary, a commentary on Romans.[24] This was followed by an interval of six years in which no commentaries were issued, probably due to the urgency of pastoral and administrative tasks as he settled into his work in Geneva. The remainder of his commentaries on the epistles (1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Peter, James, 1 John, and Jude) were published over a five year period from 1546 to 1551. Calvin's commentary on Acts was issued in two parts (Acts 1-13 in 1552; Acts 14-28 in 1554). His commentary on John was published in 1553, followed by a commentary on a harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in 1555.[25]

Calvin's lectures on the Old Testament came later than most of his work on the New Testament. First came the lectures on Isaiah, delivered in the late 1540s; published in 1551. Through the early 1550's, he lectured on Genesis. These lectures were published in 1554. Through the mid-1550s he lectured on the Minor Prophets—lectures that were published in 1559. In 1559 and 1560, he lectured on Daniel; from 1560 to 1563, on Jeremiah and Lamentations. When he was consigned to his deathbed in 1564, he was in the middle of his lectures on Ezekiel. Each of these lecture series was published within a year or two of its conclusion.

Since Calvin lectured extemporaneously, he could provide no outline or notes to be used in the production of a commentary. His secretary, Nicholas des Gallars, came up with a workable

approach for preserving the lectures. Calvin lectured, des Gallars took notes, later read them back to Calvin, and made whatever changes he requested.[26] The system was later improved with three young scholars each taking down what Calvin said, comparing their notes, and producing a single version that recorded his words exactly. "They did not permit themselves to replace a single word by a better." This document would be read to Calvin on the day following the lecture and he would make whatever changes he wished. He expressed amazement that the process worked as well as it did: "I would not have believed, unless I had seen it with my own eyes, how, when they read it back to me the next day, their transcriptions did not differ from my spoken words.... They recorded so faithfully what they heard me say that I can see no alteration."[27] Calvin thought they may even have recorded his words too perfectly. "It might perhaps have been better if they had used greater liberty and deleted superfluities, arranged other things into a better order, and made yet others more distinct or more stylish."[28] He was not entirely happy with them as published works. They were "bearable as lectures" but betrayed their extemporaneous origin and only reluctantly agreed to allow them to be published. Ironically, it is their lack of eloquence that suggests that these commentaries preserve the form of Calvin's lectures, as well as their substance.

Calvin produced only three expositions of the Old Testament that were intended, from the first, to be published as commentaries. These were commentaries on the Psalms, Joshua, and a harmony of "The Last Four Books of Moses." Apparently, he published his Psalms commentary somewhat reluctantly—at least in part, out of a fear that someone might publish the content of his lectures behind his back.[29] While they may not contain the form of Calvin's oral teaching, they surely reflect the content of that teaching. The material for each commentary had been covered in weekly meetings of ministers and other interested persons.

In general, we can conclude that, there was a very close relationship between Calvin's spoken ministry and his commentaries on the Bible. We can, accordingly, know through them much about the form and the substance of Calvin's teaching ministry.

CONCLUSION

The work for which Calvin is justifiably famous is his magnificent final edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. His reputation as a theologian rests upon this work, and it is mostly through it that Calvin's influence has continued. In recent decades, however, the large collection of commentaries he produced has begun to receive long overdue attention.[30] These writings are crucial for understanding Calvin's work as a teacher, because they preserve the daily component of Calvin's spoken labor as he prepared students for ministry. Calvin came to recognize that the public ministry from which he had initially recoiled was, in fact, his calling. Having recognized that he was called by God to this labor, he faithfully assumed the offices of pastor and doctor, preaching and teaching the Word. His commentaries, with his *Institutes*, preserve very rich resource for those who share the calling to preach and teach. To benefit fully from Calvin's ministry as teacher (or doctor), we should study these to use alongside his *Institutes*.[31]

ENDNOTES

[1]Mark A. Noll. *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 210.

[2]John C. Olin adopts this term for the title of his excellent collection of Erasmus' writings: *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus* (New York: Fordham, 1987).

[3]Philipp Melanchthon and Ulrich Zwingli were both, as young men, attached to the community of Christian humanists. Zwingli, especially, was a great admirer of Erasmus.

[4]An excellent discussion of Calvin's intent that all

Christians be engaged in Bible reading is Randall C. Zachman's "Do You Understand What You Are Reading? Calvin's Guidance for Reading Scripture" in *John Calvin as Teacher, Pastor, and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 55-76.

[5]John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Calvin's Commentaries (Calvin Translation Society Edition, 1843-55; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979). This is from Calvin's preface.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

[8]T. H. L. Parker, *John Calvin: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 69.

[9]Calvin assumed both of these soon after he arrived in Geneva in 1536. Zachman, "Do You Understand What You Are Reading?" 58, citing Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin* (trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 108-09.

[10]Calvin's fourfold polity is fully developed and defended by the 1559 edition of his Institutes. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), IV.3.

[11]John Calvin, *Theological Treatises* (ed. J.K.S. Reid; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 69

[12]Ibid., 77.

[13]Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide* (trans. Lyle D. Bierma; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 133.

[14]Catechisms were also used as tests of orthodoxy and, as such, they may be understood to reflect Calvin's other role—that of doctor.

[15]Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, 62.

[16]Ibid., 62-63.

[17]Much of Calvin's work has a strongly polemical character. Polemical sections abound in later editions of the *Institutes*. He fulfilled the Doctor's office as well in his famous *Reply to Sadoleto* (refuting the winsome appeal of the cardinal who sought to bring the Genevan church back into fellowship and submission to Rome), his *Psychopannychia* (refuting the doctrine of soul-sleep between death and the resurrection), his *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with an Antidote*, and his later writings against Lutheran polemicists in which he defended his view of the Lord's Supper.

[18]Calvin had seen a model for this type of school in Strasbourg academy led by Jacob Sturm.

[19]Zachman, "Do You Understand What You Are Reading?" 61. Zachman offers an excellent discussion of Calvin's goal of preparing Christians to read the Bible with understanding in his essay, "Do You Understand What You Are Reading?" 55-76.

[20]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition* (trans. and annotated Ford Lewis Battles; rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

[21]Even in its early form, the *Institutes* flows partly from Calvin's labor as doctor—defending the truth against error. This is at the case in the letter of dedication to Francis I, which is a sustained rebuttal of erroneous understandings of the evangelical message and the resulting false accusations.

[22]*Institutes of the Christian Religion: The First English Version of the 1541 French Edition* (trans. Elsie Anne McKee; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 3-4.

[23]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (McNeill and Battles), 4.

[24]Calvin's commentary on Romans was not only his first commentary; it was, in his view, one of the more important: "If we have gained a true understanding of this Epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture" *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. Vol. 8, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 8.

[25]Calvin's commentaries are extant for every portion of the New Testament except 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation. T. H. L. Parker argues convincingly that Calvin produced no commentaries on these three writings (*Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 75ff.).

[26]John Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, vol. 2, Calvin's Commentaries, preface by Nicholas des Gallars.

[27]Translation by T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1986), 27-28.

[28]Ibid., 27.

[29]Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, preface.

[30]The modern study and appreciation of Calvin as a Bible scholar must be largely attributed to the work of T. H. L. Parker in his study of *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*. Parker later published a study of *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*.

[31]It is there that Calvin laid out what he saw as the main themes of Scripture. He speaks of the relationship between the *Institutes* and his commentaries in the opening letter to the reader of the *Institutes*: "If, after this road has, as it were, been paved, I shall publish any interpretations of Scripture, I shall always condense them, because I shall have no need to undertake long doctrinal discussions, and to digress into commonplaces. In this way the godly reader will be spared great annoyance and boredom, provided he approach Scripture armed with a knowledge of the present work, as a necessary tool" (*Institutes* [McNeill and Battles], 4-5).

John Calvin and N. T. Wright on Imputed Righteousness

Paul Helm

SETTING THE SCENE

At a number of points in his book on justification, *Justification, God's Plan and Paul's Vision*,[1] Bishop Tom Wright, in the course of telling the reader what he thinks Paul teaches about justification, contrasts it with that of the "Augustinian tradition." Here is a representative sample of what he says,

> Ever since the time of Augustine, the discussions about *what has been called* "justification" have borne a tangled, but only tangential relation to what Paul was talking about."[2]

> Justification ... has regularly been made to do duty for *the entire picture of God's reconciling action towards the human race* ... everything from God's free love ... through final *judgment*.[3]

> That always meant, for Augustine and his followers, that God, in justification, was actually *transforming the character* of the person, albeit in small, preliminary ways (by, for example implanting the beginnings of love and faith within them).[4]

> [There has grown up] in the Western church a long tradition of (a) reading God's righteousness as *iustitia Dei*, then (b) trying to interpret that phrase with the various meanings of *iustitia* available at the time, and (c) interpreting that in turn within the categories of theological investigation of the time (especially to make "justification" cover the entire sweep of soteriology from grace to glory).[5]

> The problem with the old perspective on Paul is that it has followed the medieval tradition (to which it was never more thoroughly indebted than when reacting to some of its particulars) ... [I]t has *de-Judaized* Paul.[6]

> *It is therefore a straightforward category mistake, however venerable within some Reformed traditions including part of my own, to suppose that Jesus "obeyed the law" and so obtained "righteousness" which could be reckoned to those who believe in him.* To think that way is to concede, after all, that

Paul Helm is Teaching Fellow in Theology and Philosophy at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia.

He also serves as Professor of Theology at Highland Theological College in Dingwall, Scotland. He is the author of *The Providence of God* (InterVarsity, 1994), *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford, 2006), and the forthcoming work, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford, 2010).

> "legalism" was true after all—with Jesus as the ultimate legalist. At this point, Reformed theology lost its nerve … "legalism" itself was never the point, not for us, not for Israel, not for Jesus.[7]

Wright makes it clear that the Reformed account of justification, involving the imputation of Christ's righteousness, though somewhat distinct from medievalism, is nonetheless a part of this "tradition." He says this about the Reformed view:

> The idea that what sinners need is for someone else's "righteousness" to be credited to their account simply muddles up the categories, importing with huge irony into the equation the idea that the same tradition worked so hard to eliminate, namely the suggestion that, after all, "righteousness" here means "moral virtue," "the merit acquired from lawkeeping," or something like that. We don't have any of that, said the Reformers, so we have to have someone else's credited to us, and "justification" can't mean "being made righteous," as though God first pumps a little bit of moral virtue into us and then generously regards the part as standing for the whole.[8]

Though he understands the Reformed view to involve the imputation of "someone else's righteousness," and so a distinct view from that of the medieval Augustinians, he sees it as being basically tarred with the same brush. The righteousness that is involved in the Reformed teaching on the imputation of Christ's righteousness inhabits the same thought-world about justification as did the medieval view deriving from Augustine. Justification involves the acquiring of moral virtue by the merit acquired from law keeping being credited to us. He says elsewhere in the book, that such an idea "muddles up the categories." And though he does not tell us in so many words what this muddle is, it seems to involve two aspects: the confusing the language of inner character with the language of objective declaration, and, secondly, the understanding of that inner character in legal terms. According to Tom Wright, justification is an objective declaration of a person's status, whereas the language of imputed righteousness is the language of personal virtue, "legalistic" virtue. So the idea of imputed righteousness, he thinks, embodies a category mistake: in less polite language, it is a nonsense.

However, it may be that Wright has not altogether extricated his own view from this muddle, if that is what it is. For it is important to understand that though targeting the idea of imputed righteousness, and criticizing it as inhabiting the world of "legalism," Wright himself provides an account of Pauline justification that occupies much common ground with the Reformed view. According to Wright, Christ is the substitute-Savior, who "*represents* his people, now appropriately *standing in for them*, taking upon himself the death which they deserved";[9] justification is a forensic concept; there is imputation. The crucial difference is that for Wright the imputation in question is what might be called the negative imputation of not counting, of being "acquitted," "forgiven," or "cleared."[10]

Wright says,

> "Righteousness" remains the status that you possess as a result of the judge's verdict. For the defendant in the lawcourt (Romans 3:19-20) it simply means "acquitted," "forgiven," "cleared," "in good standing in the community as a result of the judge's pronouncement." "Imputed righteousness" is a Reformation answer to a medieval question, in the mediaeval terms which were themselves part of the problem. [11]

But such negative imputation clearly involves the use of legal and moral categories; it can hardly itself avoid the charge of "legalism." It is Wright himself who refers to justification as a "judicial sentence on sin."[12] So if "legalism" is a failure of the Reformed view of positive justification by the imputation of righteousness, then it is also a fail-

ure of negative imputation, justification by the non-imputation of sin that Wright thinks is Paul's view, and which he endorses. After all, Wright can hardly insist that "justification" is a law-court term and then deny that it has anything to do with legality and illegality. Although it is true that Wright is somewhat reticent about how what Jesus did grounds the acquittal, yet if the judge acquits the accused then he is delivered from the charge that he broke the law. That's Wright's first objection, the "legalism" objection.

In addition, for some strange reason—a reason that he never overtly identifies or explains—for Wright the term "moral" cannot imply merely a *standard* of righteousness (as in "the moral law" or "a moral issue"), but must involve the subjective, personal possession of a set of qualities or "virtues." This is what he thinks the Reformed view teaches, i.e., the counting or reckoning or imputing to a person of such a subjective moral state. "Here we meet, not for the last time, the confusion that arises inevitably when we try to think of the judge transferring, by imputation or any other way, his own attributes to the defendant."[13] He appears to think that the Reformed view is that the believer has Christ's righteousness in the way in which it may be said that I have your toothache. This is also an aspect of what Wright believes to be a "category mistake," it is "illogical and impossible."[14] You and I can have the same (sort of) toothache, but it is impossible for me to have the very toothache that is your toothache. This is Wright's second objection, the "personal quality" objection, as we might put it.

But (as we shall shortly see) the Reformed view, at least as embodied in John Calvin, never involved such a logical impossibility. The imputation of righteousness never was the imputation of Christ's righteousness in the sense that his very subjective righteousness is transferred by imputation. That is utter confusion! How could there be such an imputation? How could someone have reckoned to him the very subjective state that is Christ's righteousness or virtue so that it becomes his? And who ever said such a thing? In the imputation of righteousness, *nothing moves*. Imputation is not an electronic moral transfer. Righteousness is not transmitted, transfused, or relocated in any way. Any more than if I receive free insurance coverage I receive a transfusion of some mysterious substance called "insurance." The believer's imputed righteousness remains inalienably Christ's perfect righteousness. What *is* true is that by an act of the unspeakable mercy of God, the believer is shielded by, or seen through, or covered by, the righteousness of another.

CALVIN'S VIEWS

In order to show how problematic and unclear Wright's views are, in the rest of this article my aim is to set forth the Reformed view of imputation through the eyes and mouth of John Calvin, and to do so with the aim of allaying the fears and misunderstandings of Wright and of any others as to its exact character. We shall do this firstly by drawing out two of its central features: its alien, objective, external character insofar as it relates to the believer's own status, and also its deeply legal character. It has to do with the law of God, with our failure, and with Christ's victory. Since in Calvin's view righteousness has to do with the law, it is in some sense undoubtedly "legalistic." But it is not "legalistic" in the further sense that it has to do with the letter of the law and not with its spirit or purpose. Certainly not. It is "legal" in the sense that justification is intrinsically connected with perfect law-keeping; in Adam we failed; in Christ, our sponsor and representative, God graciously provides us with an alien, perfect righteousness. Secondly, we shall see in what sense, according to Calvin, we are "covered" with Christ's righteousness. Finally I shall briefly try to show how these views of Calvin link with others of his views, and by this endeavor to display something of the "grammar" of imputation as he understood it.

Imputation as Alien/Objective and Legal

The key to appreciating Calvin's account of justification is that it is a distinct blessing from sanctification but inseparable from it, both being the gifts of the risen and ascended Christ to his church. Noting this will alert us to the conceptual pattern of justification.

What has come to be regarded as Calvin's fundamental statement on the relation between justification and sanctification is the following:

> I trust I have now sufficiently shown how man's only resource for escaping from the curse of the law, and recovering salvation, lies in faith; and also what the nature of faith is, what the benefits which it confers, and the fruits which it produces. The whole may be thus summed up: Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by faith, by means of which we obtain in particular a twofold benefit; first, being reconciled by the righteousness of Christ, God becomes, instead of a judge, an indulgent Father; and secondly, being sanctified by his Spirit, we aspire to integrity and purity of life.[15]

The double benefit that we receive embraces both justification and sanctification,[16] two inseparable but distinct blessings.

So the basis of justification is something that is external to us, namely the righteousness of Christ. This externality is underlined by Calvin in two polemical sections of his treatment of justification in the *Institutes*; first his mild but important criticism of Augustine's view of justification, and then his fierce arguments against the Lutheran theologian Andreas Osiander (1498-1552). Both of these discussions throw light on Calvin's understanding of the objective, external ground or basis of justification.

Augustine

David F. Wright has this to say, in general, about why it is easy for the children of the Reformation both to read and yet to misread Augustine.

> He cites Scripture at great length, and especially the Pauline Epistles, which establish for him salvation received by grace alone—the initiative is entirely God's, who elects whom he wills, through faith apart from works performed in advance of reception, and faith itself the gift of God. That is to say, his anti-Pelagian writings in particular are replete with Pauline-inspired discussions of this kind, which do not call upon him to clarify repeatedly that *justifico* basically means "to make righteous", or to show his readers how he understands the gift of justification—of being *jusitificati*—in relation to this normal meaning. [17]

I believe that it is in such general terms as these that Calvin rather guardedly appropriates Augustine on justification. Augustine sees clearly that justification (however exactly understood) is by grace alone. This is repeatedly expressed in the Anti-Pelagian writings which were such a rich resource for the Reformers in establishing their views of the "servitude" of the human will and the freeness and power of divine grace.

We can reconstruct Calvin's view of Augustine on justification by considering two lines of evidence. First by noting the striking fact that throughout his discussion of justification Calvin cites Augustine voluntarily (that is, he is not forced into a citation through the pressure of controversy) and almost wholly with approval. The second line of evidence is the reasons that he provides where he thinks that Augustine is defective.

Here are some of the places where Calvin records his approval of Augustine.

> And lest you should suppose that there is anything novel in what I say, Augustine has also taught us so to act [viz. To pay no regard to our works for justification]. "Christ," says he, "will reign forever among his servants. This God has promised, God has spoken; if this is not enough, God has sworn. Therefore, as the promise stands

> firm, not in respect of our merits, but in respect of his mercy, no one ought to tremble in announcing that of which he cannot doubt."[18]

> Besides, if it is true, as John says, that there is no life without the Son of God (I John 5.12), those who have no part in Christ, whoever they be, whatever they do or devise, are hastening on, during their whole career, to destruction and the judgment of eternal death. For this reason, Augustine says, "Our religion distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, by the law, not of works but of faith, without which works which seem good are converted into sins."[19]

> The same thing is briefly but elegantly expressed by Augustine when he says, "I do not say to the Lord, Despise not the works of my hands; I have sought the Lord with my hands, and have not been deceived. But I commend not the works of my hands, for I fear that when thou examinest them thou wilt find more faults than merits. This only I say, this ask, this desire, Despise not the works of thy hands. See in me thy work, not mine. If thou sees mine, thou condemnest; if thou sees thine own, thou crownest. Whatever good works I have are of thee."[20]

It is in this fairly regular way that Augustine (and to a lesser extent Bernard) are cited in order to emphasize *sola gratia*. Sometimes the citations are for a positive purpose, sometimes negatively. Positively, that salvation is due only to the merits of Christ, and negatively, our own supposed "merits" count for nothing as regards forgiveness and justifying righteousness, no ground of boasting, because only the merits of Christ count.

Despite this widespread positive use of Augustine, there are two issues on which Calvin faults him. The first has to do with his use of the term "merit," which does not directly concern us here. More centrally, Calvin notes that for Augustine the connotation of *justificare* includes subjective renewal. Reviewing the way in which the biblical idea of justification had degenerated in the church, Calvin says, in the first instance about Lombard,

> You see here that the chief office of divine grace in our justification he considers to be its directing us to good works by the agency of the Holy Spirit. He intended, no doubt, to follow the opinion of Augustine, but he follows it at a distance, and even wanders far from a true imitation of him, both obscuring what was clearly stated by Augustine, and making what in him was less pure more corrupt. The Schools have always gone from worse to worse, until at length, in their downward path, they have degenerated into a kind of Pelagianism. Even the sentiment of Augustine, or at least his mode of expressing it, cannot be entirely approved of. For although he is admirable in stripping man of all merit of righteousness, and transferring the whole praise of it to God, he classes the grace by which we are regenerated to newness of life under the head of sanctification. Scripture, when it treats of justification by faith, leads us in a very different direction. Turning away our view from our own works, it bids us look only to the mercy of God, and the perfection of Christ.[21]

That is, in Calvin's view for Augustine justifying grace is not distinct from, but includes, sanctification, subjective renewal. Not that justification is a meritorious consequence of renewal, for renewal is also the fruit of grace. But in Calvin's view Augustine holds that a person is justified as he is being renewed, and (as well as being forgiven) in being renewed.

> It is not unknown to me, that Augustine gives a different explanation; for he thinks that the righteousness of God is the grace of regeneration; and this grace he allows to be free, because God renews us, when unworthy, by his Spirit; and from this he excludes the works of the law, that is, those works, by which men of themselves

> endeavour, without renovation, to render God indebted to them.... But that the Apostle includes all works without exception, even those which the Lord produces in his own people, is evident from the context.[22]

There is ambivalence here, a certain awkwardness, in Calvin's treatment of Augustine. On the one hand, he states that we must not entirely approve of Augustine's thinking, "or at least his mode of expressing it." This suggests a mere verbal disagreement. On the other hand, the Bible's way of thinking "leads us in a very different direction." What is it in Augustine's way of expressing what he thinks that we may not approve of? It is not merely that Augustine uses the term "merit," because that term can be given a good sense, even though (in Calvin's eyes) it came in the medieval church to have a very bad sense. Augustine can hardly be blamed for that. Rather it is that he muffles the vital point that justification and sanctification are not only inseparable but also distinct. For in the Augustinian way of thinking, while there is agreement that justification involves freedom from condemnation through forgiveness and the provision of righteousness, and that faith is active in it, subjective renewal is also included in it. It is this merging of the two that, in Calvin's view, eventually led to appealing to good works as meritorious, and to the idea of supererogation on which the scandalous medieval abuses relied. Justification and sanctification are inseparable and *distinct*.

Osiander

Like Calvin, Osiander thinks of justification as an expression of our union with Christ. But for the Lutheran, we become righteous not first through free justification and inseparably and yet distinctly through the renewing of our characters through union with Christ and the work of Christ's Spirit. Rather, we become righteous by God actually imparting Christ's own divine righteousness to us in a much more substantive sense. It is not that we become God by some kind of ontological merging, for Osiander does not, according to Calvin, teach that in justification God's *essence* is given to us, but that an *essential property* of God is given.

Osiander, however,

> clearly shows, that not contented with that righteousness, which was procured for us by the obedience and sacrificial death of Christ, he maintains that we are substantially righteous in God by an infused essence as well as quality.... [H]e introduces a substantial mixture, by which God, transfusing himself into us, makes us as it were a part of himself.[23]

There are two or three objections Calvin has to this idea, besides its basic metaphysical oddity, which Calvin notes by his use of the phrase "substantial mixture," i.e., a mixture of substances. First, Osiander confuses union with Christ (in what Calvin regards as the Pauline sense) with a metaphysical diffusion of the deity of Christ in the soul. Second, and consequently, he ascribes our justification only to Christ's divine nature. Osiander leads us away "from the priesthood of Christ and his office of Mediator to his eternal deity."[24] That is, he ties justification to the infusion of the divine nature, rather than to the mediatorship of Christ and his office as priest, which has no place in his account of justification. Third, like Augustine, he mistakes the nature of sanctification, co-mixing it with justification.

> For, in the whole of this discussion, the noun righteousness and the verb to justify, are extended by Osiander to two parts; to be justified being not only to be reconciled to God by a free pardon, but also to be made just; and righteousness being not a free imputation, but the holiness and integrity which the divine essence dwelling in us inspires. And he vehemently asserts that Christ is himself our righteousness, not insofar as he, by expiating sins, appeased the Father, but

> because he is the eternal God and life. [25]

In Osiander's view our subjective righteousness is Christ's divine nature possessed by us and so (as far as Calvin is concerned) he splits Christ apart, disregarding the fact that it is as the incarnate Mediator that Christ is united to us by his Spirit.

According to Calvin, "Osiander derides us for teaching that to be justified is a forensic term, because it behoves us to be in reality just.... [He] objects that it would be insulting to God, and contrary to his nature, to justify those who still remain wicked."[26] This kind of objection to the idea of forensic justification, and the idea of Christ as the substitute for his people, bearing their sin on their behalf, has become widespread. How can God call those righteous (by freely imputing his righteousness to them) who are not righteous? How can he justify the wicked? If Osiander was not the originator of this objection, the objection that justification by imputed righteousness is a "fiction," he was certainly an early proponent of it.

In different ways, then, in his objection to making justification partly or wholly to consist in the subjective renewal of the one justified, Calvin makes it clear that the righteousness of the sinner is an objective, external matter, that of a person coming to possess, by imputation or "reckoning," the righteousness of Christ, and so being justified.

> [A] man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as if we were righteous, and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. [27]

So the imputation of Christ's righteousness is not a paler, weaker version of the Augustinian and medieval idea of the impartation or infusion of righteousness. It is the downright opposite of Osiander's view. Righteousness is objectively reckoned, and, as a consequence, the believer's status is changed. It is not, "The judge has found in their favor and therefore they have a righteous character," but, 'They are reckoned righteous and thus the judge must find in their favor."[28]

It is true that sometimes Calvin writes of imputation as communication: "The righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation, while he is strictly deserving of punishment.... Our Lord Jesus Christ communicates his righteousness to us, and so by some wondrous way, insofar as pertains to the justice of God transfuses its power into us,"[29] citing Romans 5:19. The nature of the communication or transfusion clearly depends upon the character of what is imparted. To transfuse means "to cause to pass from one to another." To transfuse human blood from one person to another is obviously different from the transfusion of what "pertains to the justice of God," a moral status. Similarly with "impute," which means "to regard as being done or caused or possessed by." A person can be imputed with a fault because he already has it, or not imputed with it even though he has it. He can be imputed with a legal status if he already has it, but also imputed with it even if he does not yet have it. Calvin continues, "To declare that we are deemed righteous, solely because the obedience of Christ is imputed to us as if it were our own, is just to place our righteousness in the obedience of Christ."[30]

So on Calvin's view, Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer is "alien," external, the righteousness of another, and even when imputed, *it will always remain alien*. God justifies the ungodly as ungodly. The widely-used illustration, that Christ's righteousness is credited to my account, is misleading. (If I'm credited, must not Christ be debited? Am I free to pass on my credit to someone else?) By the use of such extended book-keeping analogies, the external, purely forensic character of imputation tends to be

watered down or to be compromised. To repeat, in the imputation of righteousness, *nothing moves*. Righteousness is not transmitted, transfused, or relocated in any way. It is inalienably Christ's perfect righteousness.

In the case of justification, then, those who do not have a righteous status—who are liable to condemnation—are imputed with Christ's righteousness. So it is the status of the person which is transformed by justification, not the character.[31] And although Calvin uses the illustrations of ransom, payment, and so forth, drawn from the New Testament, and writes in his *Commentary on Romans* of a "transferring to us" of Christ's righteousness, he does not develop these into elaborate analogies featuring ledgers or bank accounts.[32] Calvin's fundamental point is that in Christ we are righteous without being inwardly changed. "Those are regarded as righteous who are not so in reality,"[33] and "clothed with the righteousness of Christ, they dread not the judgment of which they are worthy, and while they justly condemn themselves, are yet deemed righteous out of themselves."[34] So much for Calvin's idea of imputation.

The Meaning of "Covered" with Christ's Righteousness

We shall next consider what Calvin means by "righteousness," what its connotations are. It immediately becomes clear that only the immaculate righteousness of Jesus Christ himself is sufficient for justification. If this righteousness were not to be imputed to us, but to be imparted to us so as to become part of our inner nature, our moral character, (as it is, according to Calvin, in sanctification) then it would inevitably become tainted, and so lose its perfection and its power to justify. Sanctification in this life is always imperfect, tainted, and as a consequence the believer has to ask for pardon (based upon the objective provision of Christ's righteousness) for the deficiencies of even his best, sanctified, efforts. We see from this that the impartation or communication that is involved in imputation cannot imply anything that would compromise or sully the character of the righteousness in question. The imputation must be understood in a way that completely guarantees and safeguards the character of the righteousness that is imputed.

So for Calvin, only a perfect righteousness will secure pardon, and such righteousness is that possessed only by God himself. "[T]he righteousness of which God makes us partakers is the eternal righteousness of the eternal God."[35] Nevertheless, it is as the Mediator, as God-man, that Christ procures such righteousness for us.

> Hence I infer, first, that Christ was made righteousness when he assumed the form of a servant; secondly, that he justified us by his obedience to the Father; and, accordingly that he does not perform this for us in respect of his divine nature, but according to the nature of the dispensation laid upon him. For though God alone is the fountain of righteousness, and the only way in which we are righteous is by participation with him, yet as by our unhappy revolt we are alienated from his righteousness, it is necessary to descend to this lower remedy, that Christ may justify us by the power of his death and resurrection.[36]

Believers are "clothed" in this righteousness,[37] they are "covered" by it. [38] And they completely depend on it alone for justification for as long as they live, not matter how godly they become.

> Therefore we must have this blessedness not once only, but must hold it fast during our whole lives. Moreover, the message of free reconciliation with God is not promulgated for one or two days, but is declared to be perpetual in the church (2 Cor 5:18, 19). Hence believers have not even to the end of life any other righteousness than that which is there described. Christ ever remains a Mediator to reconcile the Father to us, and there is a perpetual efficacy in his death, i.e., ablution,

> satisfaction, expiation; in short, perfect obedience, by which all our iniquities are covered. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul says not that the beginning of salvation is of grace, but "by grace are ye saved", "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2: 8, 9). [39]

So the righteousness in question is the perfect righteousness of the Mediator. Further, its "legal" character is made clear in the following way:

> For the righteousness of Christ (as it alone is perfect, so it alone can stand the scrutiny of God) must be summoned for us, and as a surety represent us judicially. Provided with this righteousness, we constantly obtain the remission of sins through faith. Our imperfection and impurity, covered with this purity, are not imputed but are as it were buried, so as not to come under judgment until the hour arrive when the old man being destroyed, and plainly extinguished in us, the divine goodness shall receive us into beatific peace with the new Adam, there to await the day of the Lord, on which, being clothed with incorruptible bodies, we shall be translated to the glory of the heavenly kingdom.[40]

Justification is not a mere threshold blessing; something which applies to people at their conversion and not subsequently. It is operative at all times, an objective, perfect, judicial righteousness. It is this righteousness, complete and unassailable, that is the ground of Christian assurance. So there is a sense in which, for Calvin, the believer never leaves the law-court in which the judge declares us righteous for Christ's sake. He needs that declaration always to stand, and never to be relegated into something over and done with, or requiring to be supplemented by some righteousness of his own.

The "Grammar" of Imputation for Calvin

A reader of Calvin on justification cannot but be struck by the intensely personal and individual way in which he couches his discussion. It may be that at points such as that just quoted, Calvin's language in the *Institutes* reflects his own experience. The primary question for him is not whether or not a person is a member of the visible covenant community. That's a secondary question, though by no means unimportant. For Calvin, the primary question is, how can I face God's judgment? This is seen in the structure of his discussion. Having set forth the main elements of justification by faith,[41] after chapter 11 of Book III, with its polemic against Augustine, Osiander, and the schoolmen, the reader is stopped short by the heading of chapter 12: "The necessity of Contemplating the Judgment Seat of God in Order to Be Seriously Convinced of the Doctrine of Gratuitous Justification." Justification is not a matter merely of academic debate, one confined "within the precincts of the schools," nor is it basically an ecclesiological matter, but it has to do with the "judgment seat of God."

> [T]he question must be: How shall we answer the heavenly Judge when he calls us to account? Let us contemplate that Judge, not as our own unaided intellect conceives of him, but as he is portrayed to us in Scripture (see especially the book of Job), with a brightness which obscures the stars, a strength which melts the mountains, an anger which shakes the earth, a wisdom which takes the wise in their own craftiness, a purity before which all things become impure, a righteousness ... which once kindled burns to the lowest hell.... [I]f our life is brought to the standard of the written law, we are lethargic indeed if we are not filled with dread at the many maledictions which God has employed for the purpose of arousing us, and among others, the following general one: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them" (Deut. 27.26).[42]

At such points we begin to see some of the elements of Calvin's "grammar" of justification. The

first element is that the one justification, depending only on Christ's righteousness, must be sufficient to carry the believer to the final judgment and to vindicate him there. The hint or suggestion that the grounds of "final justification" might be different from "first justification" makes no sense.[43] Given the immaculate righteousness of Christ, why would human works, however saintly, also be necessary? For however saintly, they are still tainted by sin. So a second element is that since the believer's best efforts in sanctification are themselves tainted and spoiled by his sin, even these efforts need forgiveness. This is so-called "double justification."[44] One consequence of this is that, as A. N. S. Lane puts it, "[F]or the Protestant being reckoned righteous through faith alone is a truth not just for the moment of conversion but for the whole Christian life."[45] As a consequence, because the best actions have aspects that need forgiveness, they cannot provide the basis of a further, final justification. Calvin's sees Paul's answer to his own exultant question "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" to be the "unremitted continuance of God's favour, from the time of our calling to the hour of death."[46] There is a final element of the grammar, in fact, one that does not depend on the need for "double justification," but that rests purely upon a point of logic, namely, that what is an inseparable concomitant of justification, namely sanctification and the inward changes that constitute it, cannot itself be a ground of justification.[47] Justification is sufficient for acceptance, and though sanctification is inseparably attached to justification, sanctification cannot in any way be necessary for acceptance.

This returns us to Calvin's point about the distinctness and yet inseparability of the two elements of the "double grace," and so brings our brief exposition of his view of justification a full circle. The clarity of Calvin's expression, and the differences between his views and those of Bishop Tom Wright will, I hope, be apparent.

ENDNOTES

[1]N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristy, 2009).

[2]Ibid., 80.

[3]Ibid., 86.

[4]Ibid., 91.

[5]Ibid., 178.

[6]Ibid., 195.

[7]Ibid., 232.

[8]Ibid., 213.

[9]Ibid., 105.

[10]Ibid., 213.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., 206.

[13]Ibid., 66.

[14]Ibid., 70.

[15]John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (trans. Henry Beveridge; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), III.11.1.

[16]For a first-rate exposition of Calvin's view of the relation between justification and union with Christ as presented in the *Institutes*, see Richard B. Gaffin Jr. "Justification and Union with Christ" in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (ed. David W. Hall and Peter A Lillback; Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008).

[17]D. F. Wright, 'Justification in Augustine' in *Justification in Perspective* ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 59-60.

[18]Calvin, *Institutes*, III.13.4. The quotation is from Augustine's narration on Psalm 88, Tract 50.

[19]Ibid., III.14.4. The Augustine quotation is from *Against Two letters of the Pelagians,* 3.5.

[20]Ibid., III.14.20. The quotation is from Augustine on Psalm 137. See also Ibid., III.11.22, III.14.3, III.18.5, III.18.7.

[21]Ibid., III.11.15-16.

[22]John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 3:22.

[23]Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.5.

[24]Ibid., III.11.8.

[25]Ibid., III.11.6.

[26]Ibid., III.11.11.

[27]Ibid., III.11.2.

[28]Cf. Wright, *Justification*, 69.
[29]Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.23.
[30]Ibid., III.11.23.
[31]Wright, *Justification*, 70, 71.
[32]Calvin, *Romans*, 3.22.
[33]Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.11.
[34]Ibid., III.11.11.
[35]Ibid., III.11.9.
[36]Ibid., III.11.8.
[37]Ibid., III.11.2.
[38]Ibid., III.11.23.
[39]Ibid., III.14.11.
[40]Ibid., III.14.12.
[41]In Ibid., III.11.
[42]Ibid., III.12.1.
[43]Compare the ambivalence (or ambiguity) of Wright, who writes that the future judgment "corresponds to the present verdict which is issued simply and solely on the basis of faith" (*Justification*, 165); 'the *present* verdict which *anticipates* the verdict that will be issued on the last day' (179; see also 207-12, 223). But see also 166-67 "the verdict on the last day will truly reflect what people have actually done."
[44]Calvin, *Institutes*, III.17.10.
[45]Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2002), 265-66.
[46]Calvin, *Romans*, 8:30.
[47]Calvin, *Institutes*, III.14.19-20.

Books on Calvin in 2009

Michael A. G. Haykin

It is not at all surprising that the John Calvin quincentennial of this year has been attended not only by numerous conferences around the world, but also by a plethora of books on the French Reformer, far more than can be mentioned in a review essay like this. Given the number of these books, a basic rule for inclusion in this essay has been that the book actually appeared this year, even though I will not treat all of the books published in 2009. There were a number that did come out in 2008 in anticipation of the quincentennial, but no comment has been passed on these.

Michael A. G. Haykin is Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is also Adjunct Professor of Church History and Spirituality at Toronto Baptist Seminary in Ontario, Canada. Dr. Haykin is the author of many books, including *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Joshua Press, 2000), *"At the Pure Fountain of Thy Word": Andrew Fuller As an Apologist* (Paternoster Press, 2004), *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival* (Evangelical Press, 2005), and *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Evangelical Press, 2007).

BIOGRAPHIES OF CALVIN

In some ways, the most important of this variety of books is the biography by Bruce Gordon entitled simply *Calvin*.[1] Gordon, who is the professor of Reformation History at Yale, has written the magisterial biography of the Reformer for this generation, one that will well stand the test of time. The research that lies behind the work is impressive. For instance, I do not recall ever having read that the mother tongue of John Calvin was not French—which he learned later in life—but Picard, a Romance language still spoken today in Picardy, in north-eastern France, where Calvin was born in 1509. As Gordon notes, Picard is close to but distinct from French.[2] Gordon not only knows well such details of Calvin's life, but he also understands the great themes that dominated his thought: the unity of the church around the Word of God, the proper worship of God, and the sovereignty of God over his entire creation, especially when it comes to the matter of salvation. He is balanced in treating matters that have long been used to disparage Calvin's name, such as the Servetus affair,[3] yet he rightly refuses to whitewash Calvin's failings—his occasional outbursts of anger, at times "volcanic," and his "soft spot" for European aristocracy, for example.[4] Gordon's biography is a must-read for anyone who desires a detailed and scholarly, yet easily readable, overview of Calvin's life.

Other biographies that have appeared this year include one by Herman J. Selderhuis, professor of church history and church polity at the Theological University Apeldoorn in the Netherlands,[5] and a popular study by Robert Godfrey, the president of

Westminster Seminary California.[6] Both of these biographies focus to some degree on the theme of pilgrimage, certainly a central feature of the Reformer's thought and one that grew out of his own status as a religious refugee.[7] While Selderhuis also traces the life of Calvin through various images—Calvin the preacher or the soldier, for example—Godfrey particularly focuses on elements of Calvin's pastoral ministry, such as Calvin's thinking about the church or about predestination. I found Godfrey a much more satisfying study, even though generally the territory he covers is familiar ground to anyone moderately acquainted with Calvin's life. Selderhuis is a widely recognized scholar on Calvin—his study of Calvin's commentary on the Psalms is a gem, for instance[8]—but his biography has a slight acerbity. Commenting on Calvin's views about courtship, for example, Selderhuis notes that Calvin emphasized that there was to be "no sexy clothing; no make-up … no going out without chaperones; no bathing or swimming together; and, of course, no sexual intercourse." What could they do? Well, Selderhuis remarks, precious little except to "read the *Institutes* together"![9]

Two other small biographical studies deserve mention. The first is part of the Day One "Travel with" series. These are visually stunning, compact studies of various church history figures, replete with photographs and maps, designed to facilitate travelling to the area associated with the subject of the book. Running through each of them is a solid biographical account. In the case of *Travel with John Calvin*, the author is Kenneth Brownell, who has a earned Ph.D. in modern history from the University of St. Andrews and who is currently the pastor of the historic East London Tabernacle Baptist Church in London, U.K. Brownell gives a first reader of Calvin's works a succinct study of his life and thought which hits all of the key points—things such as his friendships with Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret, and his passion for the reform of the church in France[10]—as well as a final chapter that clearly shows the massive influence Calvin has had on western society.[11]

The other biographical study is by John Piper, the well-known and prolific pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It is a very brief book—nine thousand words or so, a scant forty pages—and can be read in an hour and a half at most. Although Piper's doctorate was in New Testament, he has devoted time each year to studying and then delivering a lecture on a person from church history at his annual pastors' conference. Usually these biographical studies[12] (which is how this slim book on Calvin began) look at a key theme in the subject's life. In Calvin's case, Piper chose to focus on his "passion for the majesty of God." As Piper rightly notes, Calvin was "a man utterly devoted to displaying the majesty of God," and that primarily through the exposition of God's Word.[13]

One final book that falls into the category of biographical studies of Calvin is Machiel A. van den Berg's *Friends of Calvin*.[14] John Calvin's delight in and dependence on a number of close friends has long been known to Calvin scholars, but this new work by a Dutch Reformed pastor provides an easily accessible study of this crucial aspect of the life of the French Reformer. In a word, this book is a gem. It reads well, is rooted in solid scholarship, and contains much that is fascinating. Some friends, like his ministerial co-workers, Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret, are familiar to most who have read a little about Calvin's life. Other friendships, like that with the Dutch couple Lord and Lady de Falais, are much less known. All of them reveal how significant these friendships were for the European Reformation and for Calvin's own personal spiritual maturity. Reading these delightful sketches it is evident that what gave these friendships a depth unmatched by many friendships of our day was the conviction that these relationships were God-wrought and eternal. As Calvin wrote to Philip Melanchthon in a classic description of the nature of Christian friendship, "The distance in place cannot prevent us—content with the bond that Christ has established through his blood and has enclosed in our hearts through his Spirit—from holding on to the hope … that

we will in the end live together eternally and in eternal enjoyment of our love and friendship."[15]

CALVIN'S IDEAS

Turning now to the study of Calvin's ideas, probably the best place to begin is Herman Selderhuis' *The Calvin Handbook*, which functions as a comprehensive dictionary of Calvin's life and thought and which well reveals the current state of research on Calvin.[16] There are tremendous resources here, such as John Witte, Jr.'s study of Calvin on "Marriage and Family Life" or Arie Baars' examination of Calvin's teaching on "The Trinity."[17] What makes this book so valuable is that each of the areas examined is written by a published and recognized Calvin scholar. This will be an invaluable reference work for anyone seeking to get brief, but substantial, studies of the many facets of Calvin's thinking.

Another noteworthy collection of academic studies on Calvin is Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Sallmann, eds., *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509–2009*.[18] The twelve essays in this ground-breaking volume examine the Reformer's impact on areas of the world like the Swiss Confederation and North America, as well as probing the main principles of his theology and his thought on topics such as ethics, capitalism, and religious tolerance. Although the twelve essays in the volume are based on current research and are first-class academic studies, a number of them largely dispense with the scholarly apparatus of documentation. A substantial bibliography is provided in the place of footnotes.

One critical area of Calvin's thought has to do with his political philosophy, which has been wrongly lampooned on occasion as little better than the advocacy of a theocratic police state. An excellent corrective to this wrong thinking has been provided by Mark Larson, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with a Ph.D. in historical theology from Calvin Theological Seminary, where his doctoral supervisor was Richard Muller, the renowned expert in Reformed thought. In his monograph *Calvin's Doctrine of the State*, Larson especially outlines Calvin's thinking about war and the principles by which a state wages a just war, a timely topic indeed.[19] As in a number of the studies already mentioned, Larson reminds us that Calvin was a man of his time and that in some areas of his political thought he was still operating from within a medieval mindset. This is especially so, Larson insists, with regard to Calvin's involvement in the Servetus affair.[20] What Larson does conclusively demonstrate is that Calvin was firmly opposed to the concept of holy war, an achievement that was vital in the development of the modern democratic state.

The most important source for Calvin's ideas remains his theological *magnum opus*, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (5th Latin ed., 1559), though it would be a mistake to suppose that one can grasp the totality of Calvin's thought by simply absorbing the final edition of this remarkable work. Calvin's commentaries, sermons, treatises, catechisms, and correspondence reveal other aspects and nuances of his thinking that must be taken into account in any reflection on the entirety of his written corpus.[21] Having said that, reading and understanding the *Institutes* is vital for anyone studying Calvin and his times and the larger historical impact of Calvin's written work. It was on the basis of this work that Philip Melanchthon dubbed Calvin "the theologian."[22] Helping work through the structure of his thought in the *Institutes* is now Anthony Lane's *A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes*.[23] Lane is an internationally-known Calvin scholar who, among other things, helped produce a very fine abridgement and modernization of Calvin's *Institutes* in the late 1980s.[24] This more recent work is based to some extent on that previous endeavor.[25] Lane also provides an excellent introduction to the history of the publication of the *Institutes* in both its Latin and French versions.[26] The first edition appeared in 1536 (published in Basel), and in Calvin's *Opera selecta* it occupies 243 pages. The second edition (Strasbourg, 1539) is three times as large and the final edition (Geneva, 1559), which is the

fifth edition—there were editions also in 1543, again published in Strasbourg, and in 1550 (also reprinted in 1553 by Robert Estienne and again in 1554)—is almost five times larger than the first edition. He also translated the 1539 Latin edition of the *Institutes* into French in 1541 (Geneva on the press of Jean Girard), and supervised the translation of three later French translations (1545, 1551, 1560). The final Latin edition of the *Institutes* is approximately five times the length of the first edition, a significant fact that betrays an essential characteristic of Calvin the theologian: his teachability.

The English translation of the title *Institutio Christianae Religionis* may not be the best translation from the original Latin. The Latin word *religio* at the time did not have its modern rendition as "religion." *Religio* comes from the Latin verb *religare* "to bind" and used in a theological sense would mean the bond that unites humans to God, as exemplified in the late medieval period by the monastic vow. The phrase *Christianae religionis* then would indicate the "Christian bond" to God or Christian piety or even the Christian life. The Latin word *institutio* can mean *arrangement, custom, introduction,* or *education*. A more accurate English title might then be *Introduction to Christian Piety*. Though this author has no expectation that this suggestion would be taken up, it does help us see how important piety was for Calvin.

PIETY AND PASTORALIA

An excellent introduction to the important place that spirituality had in the Reformer's life is provided by Joel Beeke's *"The Soul of Life": The Piety of John Calvin*.[27] Beeke, president and professor of Systematic Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, has done extensive research into Calvin's piety and this representative selection of texts dealing with piety is the fruit of his close work in this area. After a lengthy introduction that details Calvin's life and the main areas of his spirituality, Beeke presents forty-five extracts from the writings of the Frenchman that give an excellent introduction to the contours of Calvin's piety, a piety that would shape many disciples of Christ in the centuries to follow.

One final work that bears mentioning is another slim volume consisting of four chapters, Victor Shepherd's *A Ministry Dearer Than Life: The Pastoral Legacy of John Calvin*.[28] Shepherd is professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Tyndale University College and Seminary in Toronto. His doctoral dissertation was on Calvin's understanding of faith,[29] and he has done extensive study of Calvin in lectures since then. This recent series of studies has a small sketch of Calvin's life, a study of Calvin's thinking about prayer (which comprises the second longest section of his *Institutes*), a chapter entitled "My Ministry is Dearer To Me Than My Own Life," and a study of Calvin's tract, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (1543). The third chapter is especially powerful. It was originally delivered as an address in Toronto at the annual meeting of the Centre for Mentorship and Theological Reflection, which this reviewer attended. He remembers being struck with the power of the address at the time, which explored Calvin's understanding of the calling of the pastoral office in light of his statement, "My ministry is dearer to me than my own life." It is good to see this address in print, and to be reminded afresh of the cost of Christian discipleship as it relates to the pastoral office. It was a cost that can be seen writ large in Calvin's own sufferings and yet one that he rejoiced in, for it brought glory to the God who had saved him.

ENDNOTES

[1]Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University, 2009).

[2]Gordon, *Calvin*, 4.

[3]Gordon, *Calvin*, 217–32.

[4]Gordon, *Calvin*, 281–82.

[5]Herman J. Selderhuis, *John Calvin: A Pilgrim's Life* (trans. Albert Gootjes; Downers Grove, IL: InterVaristy, 2009).

[6]Robert Godfrey, *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

[7]See especially Selderhuis, *A Pilgrim's Life*, 34–109; and Godfrey, *Pilgrim and Pastor*, 13–53.

[8]Herman J. Selderhuis, *Calvin's Theology of the Psalms* (Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007).

[9]Selderhuis, *A Pilgrim's Life*, 181.

[10]Kenneth Brownell, *Travel with John Calvin* (Leominster, England: Day One Publications, 2009), 37–41, 100.

[11]Ibid., 109–21.

[12]For Piper's other biographical studies, see online: http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TopicIndex/42_Christian_Biography [cited 15 Dec 2009].

[13]John Piper, *John Calvin and His Passion for the Majesty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 27.

[14]Machiel A. van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin* (trans. Reinder Bruinsma; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

[15]van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin*, ix.

[16]Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *The Calvin Handbook* (trans. Henry J. Baron, Judith J. Guder, Randi H. Lundell, and Gerrit W. Sheeres; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

[17]Ibid., 455–65, 245–57.

[18]Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Sallmann, eds., *John Calvin's Impact on Church and Society, 1509–2009* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

[19]Mark J. Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State: A Reformed Doctrine and Its American Trajectory, The Revolutionary War, and the Founding of the Republic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

[20]Larson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the State*, 82–88.

[21]For a 2009 reprint of a selection of his correspondence and an important selection of his treatises, see the seven-volume edition of Calvin's *Tracts and Letters* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

[22]I. John Hesselink, "Calvin's theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (ed. Donald K. McKim; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004), 74.

[23]Anthony N. S. Lane, *A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

[24]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (trans. Henry Beveridge; ed. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

[25]Lane, *Reader's Guide*, 19, n.18.

[26]Ibid., 16–19.

[27]Joel Beeke, *"The Soul of Life": The Piety of John Calvin* (Profiles in Reformed Spirituality; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

[28]Victor Shepherd, *A Ministry Dearer Than Life: The Pastoral Legacy of John Calvin* (Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2009).

[29]Victor Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in Theology of John Calvin* (Dissertation Series, no.2; Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1983).

The SBJT Forum

Editor's Note: Readers should be aware of the forum's format. Thomas J. Nettles, Marvin Olasky, David W. Hall, Stephen J. Nichols and Michael Lawrence have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

***SBJT:* Of what value is the work of John Calvin to evangelicals in general and Southern Baptists in particular?**

Thomas J. Nettles: I count it a privilege to answer this question because it leads to a discussion on the most vital aspects of Christian ministry and preaching. Before stating the important aspects of Calvin's contribution that should be embraced and implemented with the hopes of creating a purer, more God-honoring church in the present, we must insist on some serious caveats. One major point of disagreement with Calvin comes at the point of his view of baptism. While some evangelicals would affirm Calvin's understanding, I find it most unevangelical and inconsistent with the thrust of his other powerful insights in the nature of the gospel.

Thomas J. Nettles is Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He is widely regarded as one of the foremost Baptist historians in America. He previously taught at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Along with numerous journal articles, Dr. Nettles is the author of many books, including *his most recent work, James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman (P & R, 2009).*

In his *Antidote to the Council of Trent,* Calvin, in rejecting the sacrament of confirmation asserted "that the whole guilt of sin is taken away in baptism, so that the remains of sin still existing are not imputed." He wrote of the "two-fold grace in baptism" in which, for "both remission of sins and regeneration are offered to us." He affirmed that "full remission is made, but that regeneration is only begun and goes on making progress during the whole of life." Baptism can be given to infants, he claimed because in the promise of Gen 17:7, "the children of believers, before they were begotten, were adopted by the Lord." With a confidence unwarranted by its foundation, Calvin assured his readers "that in this promise the Baptism of Infants is included is absolutely certain." Moreover, not only does the promise warrant baptism, but "the offspring of believers are born holy, because their children, while yet in the womb, before they breathe the vital air, have been adopted into the covenant of eternal life." In fact, they are brought into the Church by baptism on no other ground than "because they belonged to the body of the church before they were born." This

SBJT 13.4 (2009): 70-79.

view does not match the usually incisive exegetical argument Calvin produced and is a complete *non-sequitur* to his discussions of justification by faith, conversion, the operation of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling, and the unity of word and Spirit in the production of saving knowledge.

A second caveat must apply to Calvin's failure to rise above his age on the use of physical punishment and the civil power in the defense of orthodox doctrine. Though historical circumstances may be argued to mitigate the opprobrium placed on Calvin for his part in the burning of the heretic Servetus, no amount of argument can justify his viewpoint or make the physical punishment or civil disability for religious convictions consistent with the provisions of the new covenant.

Given that necessary dissent, still much that is positive remains. To Calvin, more than to any of his contemporaries, we owe the sealing of the success of the Reformation. In at least five areas he contributed to its enduring viability in the face of a hostile Roman Catholicism.

First, Calvin presented the most coherent and comprehensive *systematization of Protestant thought* on an exegetical foundation during the Reformation period. Luther, though an astute theologian. was not a systematician. His *Bondage of the Will* is a powerful synthesis of Scripture and doctrine, assuming the truthfulness of a much larger field of theological ideas, but he was at his best in focusing on the one idea at a time. Both Melancthon and Zwingli made stabs at a systematic presentation, but are pale when set beside the robust spectrum of theological beauty of Calvin's *Institutes.*

Second, more than even Bucer, Calvin *universalized the Reformation*. His participation at colloquies, synods, and diets in Worms, Ratisbon, and Speyer, his fervent work on the *Consensus Tigurinus* in which he wrote, "I judge that I am doing nothing untimely in urging that some public testimony should be provided of the agreement that exists between us" [Register 116], his accepting and training of exiles from persecuting situations, as well as his over 4000 letters written to further the impact of the Reformation and encourage faithfulness unto death helped seal the continued influence of Reformed Christianity. To the Protestant preachers imprisoned in Lyons Calvin wrote, "Since it pleases Him to employ you to the death in maintaining His quarrel, He will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain." Calvin's missionary encouragement and zeal for expansion of the gospel led to the founding of literally thousands of churches in France, other countries of Europe, and to an attempt to send the gospel to Brazil.

Third, Calvin stayed active in the controversies that constantly swirled in the sixteenth century and gave *exhaustive answers in polemical situations*. When an immediate response to Catholic action was needed, Calvin responded both with an answer and a positive presentation of the Protestant alternative. His reply to Jacopo Sadoleto, his engagement with the theologian Pighius, his interaction with the theological publications issuing from the Council of Trent, his broadside lampoons of the ridiculous and corrupting practices that made Christianity another religion of idolatry, his analysis of the errors of several radical groups kept the development of Reformation theology focused on its bibliocentric and christocentric soteriology. *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church* cut to the quick of Reformation thought vis-à-vis Catholic sacramentalism, tradition, and concepts of worship revealing the flow of the life-blood of Protestantism at the very points where Catholicism had a mortifying effect on the eternal interests of souls. In 1548 Calvin wrote *The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom* as a response to the Interim, or declaration of Religion, of Charles V. Not only did this again set forth key doctrines of the Reformation, especially justification by faith in Christ's blood and righteousness, but was a fervent reminder that when Christ calls "all who are touched with any feeling of piety may remember that God is with outstretched hand, calling them

to die." In closing a poignant reveille to courage, he closed, "For myself, conscious as I am of my own weakness, still, by the help of God, I trust, that when the occasion demands it, I shall be able to shew how firmly I have believed, and do believe, that 'blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.'"

Fourth, Calvin's *model of biblical exposition* as set forth in his commentaries as well as his exegetical/expository style of preaching provided an extended model of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. In his first commentary, *Romans*, Calvin described his task by observing that "lucid brevity constituted the particular virtue of an interpreter." He added that one should "not only study to be comprehensible, but also try not to detain his readers too much with long and wordy commentaries." His reason for taking on *Romans* as his first task highlighted the priority of Scripture and the health of the church. He explained, "If we understand this Epistle, we have a passage opened to us to the understanding of the whole of scripture" and claimed that he had been led to "undertake it for no other reason than the common good of the Church."

Fifth and finally, *Calvin absolutized the gospel* as the means through which God calls His elect. Calvin argued convincingly that the biblical view of humanity is that all are without excuse, thus justly condemned. God is merciful to save and does so by a decree that is consistent with his nature. This decree involves not only the justification of the ungodly by a forensic activity in which God can be just and yet justify the sinner, but also involves the transformation of mind in our understanding of ourselves and of God. This transformation necessitates the intrusion of special revelation, and the consequential and accompanying illuminating work of the Spirit. The preaching of the gospel, therefore, is the ordained means for the calling of the elect. If we share his passion that the glory of God in the gospel be known by all creatures, our missionary and evangelistic labors will be more zealous, more consistent, more biblical, more God-centered, more sanctifying to us and others, and more durable in that day when God tries all things by his judgmental fire.

Marvin Olasky is provost of The King's College, New York City, and editor-in-chief of *World* magazine.

He is also a senior fellow at the Acton Institute and the author of 20 books, including *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Crossway, 1992) and *Standing for Christ in a Modern Babylon* (Crossway, 2003).

***SBJT*: How did Calvin's thought change understandings of politics and government?**

Marvin Olasky: The famous five-point TULIP summarized a theological revolution, but five points John Calvin made concerning government brought about a political revolution.

First, many Christians throughout medieval times had heard that work in a church or life in a monastery was the best way to follow God's will. But Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*, book four, chapter 20 (other quotations also come from there unless otherwise noted) that "No one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men." Such thinking led many of the founders of the American republic to enter politics rather than the ministry.

Second, many Christians throughout medieval times had heard that they should not go to court. One result was that the weak had little redress against the powerful. Submission to church and state authority was a Christian duty. Any talkback in court or otherwise was rebellion against God. But Calvin wrote, "As for those who strictly condemn all legal contentions, let them realize that they therewith repudiate God's holy ordinance, and one of the class of gifts that can be clean to the clean…. The Christian endures insults, but with amity and equity defends the public interest… [he will use] the help of the magistrate in preserving their own possessions." Such thinking led Americans to push for a government of laws, not of men.

Third, many Christians throughout medieval times had heard that rulers and magistrates could do virtually whatever they want. The powerful were bound only by their own power, and their

edicts were not to be challenged by Scripture. Calvin, though, wrote that "kings should not multiply horses for themselves; nor set their mind upon avarice…. [Princes] should remember that their revenues are not so much their private chests as the treasuries of the entire people which cannot be squandered or despoiled without manifest injustice." He argued, "If [note the *if*] kings want to be considered legitimate and as servants of God, they need to show that they are real fathers to their nation." Such thinking led Americans in the 1760s and 1770s to argue that taxation without representation was tyranny, because they had a right to decide how their taxes should be levied and spent.

Fourth, Christians throughout medieval times had almost never been able to vote for leaders, but Calvin in exegeting Deut 1:14-16 stated that "those who were to preside in judgment were not appointed only by the will of Moses, but elected by the votes of the people. And this is the most desirable kind of liberty, that we should not be compelled to obey every person who may be tyrannically put over our heads; but which allows of election, so that no one should rule except he be approved by us. And this is further confirmed in the next verse, wherein Moses recounts that he awaited the consent of the people, and that nothing was attempted which did not please them all."

Calvin also argued, in his commentary on Micah, that it is "the best condition of the people, when they can choose, by common consent, their own shepherds … when men become kings by hereditary right, it seems not consistent with liberty." In commenting on Acts, Calvin wrote that "It is tyrannous if any one man appoint or make ministers at his pleasure." Such thinking led the American founders to establish a republic: They knew that, given sin, few kings could resist robbing and even killing to get what they wanted.

Fifth, many Christians throughout medieval times had heard that it would be unbiblical to rebel against those said to rule by divine right. But Calvin, while arguing against private individuals taking the law into their own hands, wrote about "magistrates of the people, appointed to restrain the willfulness of kings." He wrote that such magistrates must not "wink at kings who violently fall upon and assault the lowly common folk." He wrote that a refusal to oppose monarchs in such situations is "nefarious perfidy, because they dishonestly betray the freedom of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by God's ordinance."

Calvin in his writing did not stretch out that doctrine. His most notable defense of rebellion concerned one of the greatest aggressions in history, Pharoah's order that all Hebrew babies be killed. Calvin in his commentary on Exodus defended the Hebrew midwives who disobeyed: He wrote that obedience in this situation was "preposterously unwise." He argued that those who obeyed were attempting to "gratify the transitory kings of earth" while taking "no account of God." Calvin largely defended rebellion to preserve life.

His disciples, facing a murderous monarch, went further. Roman Catholic aggression had its major sixteenth century manifestation in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, which began on August 23, 1572, and ended with the murder by governmental decree of anywhere from 5,000 to 60,000 Huguenots (estimates vary widely). That tragedy precipitated new declarations of the right to oppose kings. One Calvin disciple in 1579 wrote *Vindiciae Contra Tyranos* ("Vindication Against Tyrants"), which contended that even military revolt might be necessary to defend God's law against kings who give orders contrary to it.

This was a huge change. The author of *Vindiciae* argued that fundamental law comes from God, so obeying the law means obeying God, not necessarily the state. Rebellion against an unlawful state act, led by "lesser magistrates" such as local leaders, was thus a justifiable maintenance of true law. As generation after generation of Calvinists read *Vindiciae* or other works that emphasized

the limitations of power, the idea of government-almost-like-God diminished.

***SBJT*: John Calvin is primarily known for his theology. What is often forgotten is how Calvin affected political reform. What were some of his main contributions in this area?**

David W. Hall: Many of John Calvin's (b. 1509) contributions have been extolled with excellence during this Calvin Quincentenary. Most are familiar with Calvin's robust theology, his spirituality that exceeded the era's standard piety, his impact on education and business, his resulting worldview, and his influence on culture and art in general. Notwithstanding, I think that besides his advocacy for the gospel itself (which changed lives for centuries to come), perhaps Calvin's largest contribution was to the area of political reform.

While never holding elective office, Calvin articulated ideas that were both radical for his day and also that would alter the political landscape thereafter. Below are *four governmental givens* that changed the political landscape because of Calvin's influence.

(1) *Rulers became accountable*. Prior to Calvin, rulers—whether by tribal tradition or monarchical authority—were viewed as above correction. Of course, that is not to suggest that previous citizens could not recognize a tyrant when they saw one, but there were few ideological rationales for holding a ruler accountable, much less deposing him. While to some, Calvin was vexingly moderate in this regard, after him (particularly following the 1572 Bartholomew's Day Massacre), Calvinists dared to suggest that a magistrate who went beyond the law of God could be resisted. Resistance to magistrates, which was not considered viable prior to Calvin's time—say, as in the words of Tyndale ("God hath made the king in every realm judge over all, and over him there is no judge. He that judgeth the king judgeth God, and he that layeth hand on the king layeth hand on God.")—could occur in good faith after Calvin. His exegetical key, which was buttressed by his disciple Theodore Beza, was that a hierarchy of morals was biblically revealed. If the ruler ever commanded one to transgress God's law, that ruler exceeded his authority and could be resisted.

By 1751, in a formative sermon at the American republic's founding, Jonathan Mayhew would preach "A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers." One of Benjamin Franklin's constitutional convention colleagues, John Adams (like numerous others), believed Mayhew's sermon drew a line in the sand, arguing that if Parliament could tax the Colonies, it could then finance and appoint a bishop. Americans, who grew increasingly allergic to ecclesiastical hierarchy, saw the logical connection and would not willingly submit to what they perceived as ecclesiastical tyranny or civil taxation without consent. Interestingly, one dogma (the ecclesiastical) led to another (the civil). That may help explain why Samuel Adams thought he was reviving the Scottish League and Covenant.

(2) *Political power, once the magistrate was not seen as incorrigible, was distributed to the people, and dispersed power structures had God's blessings*. If kings did not possess inalienable power, then it was lodged elsewhere than in their royal persons. Calvin's exegesis of passages showed that he believed the Scriptures taught concepts such as popular election (Deut 1:13-16; Micah 5:5), that no governor should have power except by the consent of the governed (Exod 18:21), and that the citizens adopted a covenant that kept a national union together. Colonial American and British Puritan sermons often reprised these themes, further providing a megaphone for Calvin's political ideals.

(3) The third governmental given that changed after Calvin was that *people ruled through elected*

David W. Hall is the Senior Pastor at Midway Presbyterian Church in Powder Springs, Georgia, and was the Executive Director of Calvin500.

He is the author of *Calvin in the Public Square: Liberal Democracies, Rights, and Civil Liberties* (P&R, 2009) and *Calvin and Commerce: The Transforming Power of Calvinism in Market Economies* (P&R, 2009).

representatives, not strictly via a direct democracy. Calvin had the prudence and the balance to be as suspicious of a *vox populi*, pure democracy as he was of a divine-right-of-king-monarchy. He prioritized the biblical institution of elders (akin to senators in the civil realm) as key intermediating magistrates, ruling as a representative body. Calvin, agreeing with Aquinas and Aristotle, warned against the excesses of corrupt forms of government (exhibited in their extremes as hierarchies or anarchies) and commended as the better solution to have representatives (elders or aldermen) who would bring their godly wisdom together and make decisions collegially. This avoided the Scylla of democratism (realizing that fallen masses could make mistakes long before Reinhold Niebuhr reminded us of such) and the Charybdis of hierarchical oppression.

(4) After Calvin, *government also became to be seen as limited by an inherent set of mandates*. Government was not authorized nor intended to mitigate any other God-given liberty or sector. If God assigned responsibility to individuals, families, or churches, the civil government was not to interfere with those divine assignments. Subsequent history shows the wisdom of that—further corroborated by the murky trail of the unintended consequences of statism and by the astronomical debts incurred by over-eager governments, even if well-intentioned.

Prior to Calvin, most of Christendom believed that (1) rulers were free to reason to their own charters; (2) hierarchies were *jus divinum* based on a non-contextual reading of various submission passages (e.g., Rom. 13); (3) unqualified submission to authorities, both in church and in state, thus was a Christian duty; and (4) autonomy in the scope of government permitted unchecked political power. That consensus changed after Calvin's impact; by the early seventeenth century, a new tradition was congealing.

A summary by Dartmouth historian Herbert Foster noted the following as hallmarks of Calvin's political legacy,[1] and most are exhibited by the works of his closest disciples:

> (1) The absolute sovereignty of God entailed that universal human rights (or Beza's "fundamental law") should be protected and must not be surrendered to the whim of tyranny.
> (2) These fundamental laws, which were always compatible with God's law, are the basis of whatever public liberties we enjoy.
> (3) Mutual covenants, as taught by Beza, Hotman, and the *Vindiciae*, between rulers and God and between rulers and subjects were binding and necessary.
> (4) As Ponet, Knox, and Goodman taught, the sovereignty of the people flows logically from the mutual obligations of the covenants above.
> (5) The representatives of the people, not the people themselves, are the first line of defense against tyranny.[2]

For these and other reasons, Emory University legal scholar John Witte has characterized the Protestant Reformation as a human rights movement. Witte notes that the work of Calvin and others began with efforts to gain liberty for the church but eventually overflowed into all areas of human endeavor. Calvin's work led to "freedom of the individual conscience from intrusive canon laws and clerical controls," freedom from ecclesiastical control, freedom of ministers from centralized rule, be it papal or monarchical. Witte further notes, "'Freedom of the Christian' became the rallying cry of the early Reformation. It drove theologians and jurists, clergy and laity, princes and peasants alike to … urge radical constitutional reforms."[3] In his recent *Law and Protestantism*, Witte confirms that "Calvin developed arresting new teachings on authority and liberty, duties and rights, and church and state that have had an enduring influence on Protestant lands." Moreover, Calvinist exemplars revised and extended Calvin's principles to create impressive political and legal alterations in the public consciousness. Thus, he concludes: "A number of our bedrock

Western understandings of civil and political rights, social and confessional pluralism, federalism and social contract, and more owe a great deal to Calvinist theological and political reforms."[4]

As this quincentenary wanes, many of us can concur with Abraham Kuyper who summarized Calvinism's impact on politics as protesting "against State-omnipotence; against the horrible conception that no right exists above and beyond existing laws; and against the pride of absolutism, which recognizes no constitutional rights, except as the result of princely favor." Calvinism, he noted, "built a dam across the absolutistic stream, not by appealing to popular force, nor to the hallucination of human greatness, but by deducing those rights and liberties of social life from the same source from which the high authority of government flows—even the *absolute sovereignty of God*."[5] Calvin's contributions to political liberty made that much difference; that view of rights fully deserves celebration.

ENDNOTES

[1]*Collected Papers of Herbert D. Foster* (privately printed, 1929), 163-174.

[2]Ibid., 174. Besides Calvin, this idea was reiterated in Buchanan, Beza, Peter Martyr, Althusius, Hotman, Daneau, *Vindiciae*, Ponet, William the Silent, and others.

[3]John Witte, Jr., "Law, Religion, and Human Rights: A Historical Protestant Perspective, *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27 (1999): 258.

[4]John Witte, Jr., *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002), 2-3.

[5]Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (1931; repr., New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 98.

***SBJT*: In your study of Calvin, what has surprised you the most about the man?**

Stephen J. Nichols: It is precisely when you think you know someone well that the person surprises you the most. I first came to know Calvin reading his sermons on Ephesians as a freshman in college. Later, especially during seminary days, came *The Institutes*, the tracts and treatises, and the raft of secondary literature. I wrote briefly on Calvin, sending me even deeper into his writings and the literature. I thought I knew Calvin well.

Then I came across a line in Calvin that seemed to set much of what I knew of him in a whole new light. Calvin gets rather typically portrayed as a reluctant Reformer, reluctant pastor. Calvin, as this line of interpretation goes, much preferred the cool closets of academia. I've said something to this effect myself. Then I came across the line in a letter from Calvin to Heinrich Bullinger on February 21, 1538.

Calvin sets up the line by informing Bullinger, "Were I to describe to you at length the full narrative of our most wretched condition, a long history must be unfolded by me." Calvin here references the conflict between him and the councils that ruled the city of Geneva. This controversy dogged Calvin throughout his first pastoral charge, which began in 1536 and which Calvin undertook most reluctantly. By February of 1538 the conflict reached a tipping point, prompting the letter from Calvin. Sparing Bullinger a lengthy narrative—in part because it was painful for Calvin to tell—Calvin put the matter directly, "The generality of men are more ready to acknowledge us as preachers than as pastors" (John Calvin to Heinrich Bullinger, February 21, 1538, *Selected Works of Calvin,* Volume 4, 66).

Geneva, like most European cities up until the Reformation, had grown rather accustomed to having preachers who delivered occasional homilies and performed the mass. Pastoral care was largely proscribed to the confines of the confessional, to which parishioners returned again and again in preparation for taking the sacrament.

When Geneva voted to become a Reformed city, the members of the four councils that ruled, as well as many of the citizens and residents, failed to grasp the full implications of the vote. Calvin, conversely, saw the full implications rather clearly. Calvin was not concerned with maintaining some

sense of the church service as performance. Neither was he concerned with proscribing the pastoral role to merely preaching. He understood the pastoral charge to entail pastoring, to be engaged in the lives of people. Calvin understood the pastoral role to be such because he understood the gospel to have a transformative effect. The gospel is to take root deep within our lives, transforming us. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the word of God, which they had heard and had accepted, was "at work" in them and would transform them, making them imitators of Christ (1 Thess 2:13-14). Calvin likewise understood the gospel to be at work in those who accepted it. The gospel forms, shapes, and transforms those who confess it truly.

This line of Calvin's, concerning being a pastor and not merely a preacher, along with all that it entails, sheds much light on the thrust of the life and thought of Calvin. Many have declared Calvin to be first and foremost a theologian of the church. That is most certainly true. What is equally true is that Calvin was committed to the church not only from the time of his first pastoral charge at Geneva, 1536-1538, but that he remained committed to it even after his first pastoral charge ended in his unequivocal, unceremonial dismissal. What Calvin expressed in his letter to Bullinger in the throes of controversy remained a guiding principle throughout his life. He sought to be a pastor.

It also deserves notice that he sought to be a pastor early on in his career. Having been converted in 1534, Calvin took up a pastoral charge only two years later. And, as is well-known, he took the pastoral charge at Geneva under a rather strange form of coercion, Guillame Farel's infamous curse. Calvin was anything but superstitious, which means that something far greater than the curse compelled him to stay. One conclusion, among others, may be that if Calvin was a reluctant pastor, his reluctance was neither long nor strong. Even after Calvin made it to Strasburg, after being expelled from Geneva's pulpit, he took up another pastoral charge. Most others would have gone running from the ministry after such a blistering experience.

There are other things we may learn from this little line regarding Calvin's commitment to being a pastor, as well. This line of interpretation, the pastoral Calvin, offers the best route to grasping his theology. Calvin worked out his theology in the context of the burgeoning "new learning," a context replete with epistemological discussions that tended toward the abstract and the speculative. Such was especially true of the discussions orbiting the knowledge of God. Read later medieval theology for proof. Calvin set out in his *Institutes* to mark off a divergent trajectory. (I have been influenced here by the work of Paul Helm and Edward A Dowey's *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994].)

This pastoral-theological approach in Calvin may be seen right in the beginning of *The Institutes*, evidenced in lines such as this:

> What help is it in short to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? Rather our knowledge should teach us fear and reverence; secondly, with it as our guide and teacher, we should learn to seek every good from Him and, having received it, to credit it to his account (*Institutes*, I, ii, 2.).

Calvin reminds all of us—whether we are pastors, theologians, academics, or laity—that the knowledge of God is not about speculative abstractions, but about being driven back to God, to fearing him and reverencing him and then being grateful to him.

It is when we think we know people the most that they surprise us the most. Just when I thought I knew Calvin the theologian, I met Calvin the pastor and Calvin the pastoral-theologian.

Stephen J. Nichols is Research Professor of Christianity and Culture at Lancaster Bible College and Graduate School in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

The author of a dozen books, he has written widely on church history, historical theology, and the church and culture. He blogs on *Reformation21*, hosted by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, and frequently speaks in churches and at conferences. Some of Dr. Nichols's recent books include *The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World* (Crossway, 2007), For *Us and For Our Salvation: The Doctrine of Christ in the Early Church* (Crossway, 2007), and *Jesus Made in America: A Cultural History from the Puritans to* The Passion of the Christ (InterVarsity, 2008).

SBJT: Was Calvin's view of a plurality of elders similar to a Baptist view of plurality?

Michael Lawrence: Let's start by acknowledging that not all Baptists believe in a plurality of elders. I was raised in several churches across South Carolina and Tennessee with a single elder, the pastor, who preached God's Word, and a board of deacons, who led the congregation in governing the affairs of the church. In some respects, Calvin would recognize this organizational model, which has been very common among Baptist churches, and even approved of it. In other respects, he would be critical, perhaps even scandalized, by the way Baptists put it into practice.

On the one hand, inside the single office of elder, or pastor, or bishop (three words which he admitted refer to the same person) Calvin thought that Scripture established a distinction. Some elders were primarily gifted and called to preach and teach God's word. He referred to these elders as "ministers." It was their task to "minister spiritual food to us, whereby our souls are nourished." Other elders, however, had a different calling. Their task was to govern the affairs of the church, especially the behavior of the congregation, rather than to preach God's word. They established policy, conducted discipline, exercised oversight, "as men appointed in the behoof (viz., to the benefit) of the whole church" (*Sermons on 1 Timothy 5*). Both sets of men were elders, but some were teaching elders and others were ruling elders.

Michael Lawrence serves as Associate Pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C.

He completed his M.Div. at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. at Cambridge University. Previously, Dr. Lawrence served on the staff of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill and at Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Concord, Massachusetts. He has contributed to several books and is the author of the forthcoming book *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Crossway, 2010).

Calvin found this distinction in his exegesis of 1 Tim 5:17:

> We may learn from this, that there were at that time two kinds of elders; for all were not ordained to teach.... And, indeed, there were chosen from among the people men of worth and of good character, who, united with the pastors in a common council and authority, administered the discipline of the Church, and were a kind of censors for the correction of morality (*Commentary on 1 Timothy*).

This division of labor among elders between teaching and ruling became characteristic of Presbyterian and Reformed churches on the Continent and in Britain during the Reformation, and was carried to America by the Puritans. It remains a hallmark of Presbyterian polity today. Ironically, it resembles well the traditional division of labor between the pastor and deacons in many Baptist churches today. If Calvin happened to drop in on a deacons' meeting at First Baptist Geneva, Alabama, he would recognize and approve of what he saw.

But the approval wouldn't last. Despite the familiar division of labor, Calvin would have been appalled at seeing deacons exercise the function and authority of elders. As he read 1 Tim 3:8-13, the office of deacon did not "denote presbyters who are inferior to the bishop" (*Commentary*). Instead, the office of deacon was a separate office altogether, one of service rather than authority. They were to minister to the poor and sick.

More to the point, the distinction between elder and deacon should not be treated as simply a matter of semantics. Calvin understood that Scripture gave to one office, and not the other, the responsibility to teach and the authority to govern. Putting deacons in the place of elders means that "we cannot brag that we have a church well ordered, and after the doctrine of the gospel, but a confused thing and a hodgepodge." What's worse, the enemies of the gospel could justly say that "they follow not the order appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Sermons on 1 Timothy 3*).

But how does Calvin's view on plurality of elders compare with the Baptist view that also affirms a plurality of elders? Once again there is similarity and difference. The similarity consists in the agreement that the local church should have

a plurality of elders. But while Calvin had a legitimate criticism of the Baptists who put deacons in the place of elders, these other Baptists rightly critique Calvin.

First, the Baptist understanding of plurality rejects Calvin's distinctions among different types of elders as unbiblical. As we've seen in his sermons on 1 Timothy, Calvin focused on two types of elders: teaching and ruling. But in both his draft *Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541* and the final version of the *Institutes*, Calvin admitted three divisions of elder: the pastor (who held all the functions of an elder), the teaching elder or "doctor" (who taught but did not administer the ordinances or exercise discipline), and the ruling elder (who exercised government and discipline, but did not teach or administer the ordinances).

In contrast, Baptists read Paul's instructions in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9 as pertaining not only to the office in general, but also to each elder in particular. Every elder should be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2); every elder's management of his personal life should obviously qualify him to "take care of God's church" (1 Tim 3: 5). This doesn't mean that every elder should be able to preach on Sunday morning. Some elders' teaching will more naturally be exercised in other settings. But every elder should be known in the church as a man who "can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). The category of an elder who rules but doesn't teach, or who teaches but doesn't govern, flies in the face of Paul's instructions. It would seem that in this matter, it is Calvin who is not following "the order appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ"! The Lord Jesus made provision for a plurality of elders in the church. Some may be called to the work full-time, but vocational or lay, every elder should be teaching and every elder should be giving oversight to the flock that Christ bought with his blood.

Even more significant than the criticism over types of elders, though, is how Baptists critique the authority that Calvin gave to the elders. As we've already seen, meeting together in council, called the consistory, Calvin understood that the teaching and ruling elders had final authority in matters of doctrine and discipline. Together they literally ruled the church. But Baptists, including those who affirm a plurality of elders, understand that final authority for doctrine and discipline is given not to the elders, but to the congregation assembled. In Matt 18:17, Jesus says that the final step of church discipline is to be exercised by the *ecclesia*, the church. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul doesn't tell the Corinthians to call an elders' meeting to deal with the immoral man in their fellowship but to deal with it when they are "assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus" (v. 4). And in Galatians 1, Paul doesn't rebuke the elders for tolerating a false gospel; he holds the entire congregation responsible (vv. 6-9).

What then does a plurality of elders do in the context of congregational government? They lead, they teach, they rebuke and admonish, they encourage, they shepherd. As Paul says in Eph 4:12-13, they work so that "the body of Christ might be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." As Calvin rightly recognized, this isn't the work of deacons or of a single pastor. This is the work of elders. But as Baptists have rightly seen, it is the work of all the elders. May Christ strengthen us to be faithful to such a high and holy calling.

Book Reviews

The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World. By William A. Dembski. Nashville: B&H, 2009, xviii + 238 pp., $22.99.

I heard of a man that spanked his children soundly every Sunday evening without regard to anything that they had done during the day. His explanation was that he knew they would do things worthy of punishment during the week and he just wanted to go ahead and get it over with and let them know the cost of disobedience. William Dembski has presented an elaborate defense of such parental anticipation by defending his theory of God's creation of the world in a fallen state, the punishment for sin at a cosmological level being instituted retroactively. "I will argue," the author states, "that we should understand the corrupting effects of the Fall *retroactively* (in other words, the consequences of the Fall can also act backward into the past)" (50). Dembski adds later, "An omniscient and omnipotent God, by anticipating human actions, can respond in advance to humanity's Fall" (138).

He states this same idea differently, and strangely, later by writing, "In focusing on divine anticipation as God's way of controlling the Fall's damage, I have stressed the active role God played in bringing about natural evil prior to the Fall" (175). How the creation of a fallen world actually serves to control the Fall's damage may seem counterintuitive, but he points to a human immune system able to cope, to some degree, with pathogenic microbes (175f.) as an evidence of gracious "divine anticipation." It must be noted, however, that a gracious divine anticipation and the creation of a fallen world are two very different things, one of which rests on firm biblical exposition and the other only asserted.

In the unending challenge presented by naturalism and materialism to the Christian view that the world was created by an infinite, and thus infinitely intelligent, deity, the arguments presented by the proponents of intelligent design (ID) have been immensely helpful. Their reasoning from several different disciplines (e.g., mathematics, biochemistry, and paleontology) has succeeded in showing the much more likely probability that the world in all its teleologically related parts, as a conglomerate and as individuals, came into being as a result of a plan rather than chance. William Dembski has been no small part of this movement and is to be appreciated for his relentless pursuit of putting an intelligent designer (God!) in the middle of some very sophisticated scientific discussions.

The ID method of operation has been to elicit conclusions by drawing inferences only from scientific data. Supposedly, religious presuppositions

are kept at bay while proponents of the view argue that the body of scientific facts points to design and mindful purpose, or, as Dembski states, "an intelligence that structures and directs the world" (74). Other conclusions that may follow this singular conclusion are left, or should be left, to the various theologians and apologists of the respective theistic religions. Thus a Christian, if so inclined to incorporate such data, may use the prolegomena of intelligent design to argue that this designer is also a creating, revealing, and redeeming God. He may argue that the Bible is the place where we find the body of revelation that this God has given.

Because it is a revelation from God, the Christian apologist argues that the Bible is without error; its perspicuity means that we interpret other sources of revelation, such as general revelation in conscience and nature, in a manner consistent with the Bible. We recognize the possibility of error in our interpretation of Scripture, and we remain, therefore, in constant dialogue with the whole corpus of special revelation as well as with other interpreters so as to minimize our propensity to myopic and misleading readings of the text. We also recognize the possibility of errors in our interpretation of natural phenomena, an inferior source of knowledge of God, and thus do not canonize present scientific theories as equal to, or more compelling than, clear biblical exegesis.

In this book, William Dembski has become a theologian intent particularly on framing a theological argument that has powerful implications for apologetics and theodicy. In pursuit of this goal, moreover, Dembski has subdued the gown of theology to the lab robe of the scientist. He has given to natural revelation the task of tutor to special revelation. The result is an attempt to explain the problem of evil in light of some assumptions that Dembski considers a part of "scientific orthodoxy" derived from the "book of nature" (chapters 8 and 9).

He uses the term "orthodoxy" because he believes that these scientific assertions are so sure, so explicitly a part of the undeniable data, that any biblical idea or theological construction must take them into account and be shaped so as to accommodate them. This "orthodoxy" he derived from the disciplines of geological science and astrophysics. "In our current mental environment," Dembski writes, "informed as it is by modern astrophysics and geology, the scientific community as a whole regards young-earth creationism as untenable" (55). One undeniable conclusion that provides an infallible scientific framework for theological discussion is that the universe is 13 billion years old and the earth around 4.5 billion (49). A second scientifically orthodox parameter is that suffering, death, disease, parasitism, corruption, destruction, and catastrophe preceded the appearance of man on earth.

Dembski also is concerned about "theological orthodoxy." Along the way he rejects process theology and open theism, engages Trinitarian orthodoxy positively, criticizes some old-earth creationists for dealing inadequately with the problem of evil (78-81), and affirms the necessity of an exegetical foundation for theological formulations. Although he gives a fair amount of space to the cross and has some hints at penal substitution (18, 24), his interest seems more to be on divine suffering (18, 20) as a means of participating in the human condition, increasing our confidence in God's genuine sympathy for us, and restoring us to a relationship of love with him. His overall explanation of the cross has elements of A. H. Strong's immanentism and seems more attuned to moral influence and moral government than to propitiatory sacrifice. As a matter of biblical fidelity, he is particularly concerned to locate the origin of evil in this present world as the result of human sin. To that particular aspect of Christian theodicy he points his readers, and on that issue he believes he has made some original contribution. His perception of what he is about is stated in one paragraph:

> Much of my past work has been on intelligent design and the controversy over evolution. Nothing in this book, however, takes sides in that debate. In arguing that the Fall marks the entry of all evil into the world (both personal and natural evil), I make no assumptions about the age of the Earth, the extent of evolution, or the prevalence of design. The theodicy I develop here looks not to science but to the metaphysics of divine action and purpose. At the heart of this theodicy is the idea that the effects of the Fall can be retroactive as well as proactive (much as the saving effects of the Cross stretch not only forward in time but also backward, saving, for instance, the Old Testament saints) (9, 10).

While it is true that Dembski argues that an evolutionist, supposedly a theistic one, can receive his theodicy (146, 154f., chapter 21) (in my opinion a point not favorable to the credibility of his construction), I fail to see the benefit that derives from his supposed lack of assumptions about the age of the earth. He certainly maintains an extended criticism of young-earth advocates throughout the book, but, of course, not by his *assuming* it but because science has so incontestably proven it! The claim, therefore, that he does not look to science for support in his argument also rings hollow. Unless I am completely oblivious to his dominant argument, the age of the earth as supposedly demonstrated by the sciences of geology and astrophysics has everything to do with—is the very *raison d'etre* of—this book.

Dembski insists that the facts of scientific orthodoxy must somehow be made consistent with the point of theological orthodoxy that human sin is the immediate cause of all moral and natural evil. He cites Rom 5:12 as determinative of human sin as the immediate cause of natural and personal suffering and rightly criticizes viewpoints that dismiss this connection (27-31). The difficulty that drives the entire book is making millions of years of creature suffering the direct result of human sin prior even to the appearance of humanity. "For hundreds of millions of years," in fact, "multicelled animals have been emerging, competing, fighting, killing, parasitizing, torturing, suffering, and going extinct," all prior to human sin (49).

So sure is Dembski of his leading features of scientific orthodoxy that he contends that the virtually universal Christian understanding of Genesis 1-3 may be dismissed in light of the demands of science. "Indeed, the history of biblical interpretation until the rise of modern science in the seventeenth century overwhelmingly supports a young earth view," but science, in light of its discovery of "momentous new truths"—that is, data that require an old earth—"trumps the most natural reading of Genesis and the overwhelming consensus of theologians up through the Reformation" (52, 54). Compare this with Dembski's assertion on page 35 where a straightforward reading of Genesis 1-3 gives way to the caveat, "Today this traditional reading of Genesis seems less reasonable." Not only is it less reasonable, it is impossible if one is committed to the scientific orthodoxy of an old earth. That curse followed fall is not at all necessary chronologically, according to Dembski, if one sees creation as incorporating judgment from the beginning.

Surely one must concede some difficulty in Dembski's view that "God wills the disordering of creation, *making it defective on purpose*" (his italics, 145). He believes that such action is justified on the basis of "humanity's covenant headship in creation." On the other hand, he takes great care to describe how the first fully God-conscious humans must not experience the "effects of the Fall while they were still, literally, innocent" (155). Why it is more justifiable for the creation to experience the curse with all its horrendous suffering described so aptly by Dembski when its covenant head still is innocent and uncursed is a mystery. He works to make it seem philosophically plausible and psychologically satisfying, but there is no positive exegetical foundation for such an arrangement. Dembski is driven solely

by his commitment to old-earth scientific orthodoxy. Among the many places where this scientific orthodoxy drives the entire discussion is in his opening paragraph on "The Trinitarian Mode of Creation."

> Contemporary science holds that the Earth and universe are not thousands but billions of years old, that humans have been around only a miniscule portion of that time, and that prior to their arrival natural evils abounded. To see how natural evil could precede the first human sin and yet be a consequence of it, we need to explore what it means for God to create and then act within creation (84).

The default assumption is that what science presently holds on the age of the earth must be accepted and theology must be fit into that assumption. When Dembski's resistance to the naturalistic assumptions of biological evolution is so high, it seems incongruous that he unquestioningly accepts those of geology and astrophysics on the earth's age (chapter 7), and hardly stops short of ridicule, and misrepresentation, of the work of young-earth creationists on these issues (chapters 6 and 7). To Henry Morris's interpretation of the relation of created light to the light observed in stars, Dembski responds, "It is difficult, in my view, to reconcile such a God with a God of truth" (67). That would be a very appropriate response to his interpretation of Genesis 1-3, to be mentioned below.

While it is true that God acts redemptively in history prior to actual fulfillment of redemption in the historic work of Christ, one comes to this conclusion on the basis of clear revelation with an explanation of how God could be just in doing so (see especially Rom 3:21-26; Eph 3:4-13; Heb 1:1-4, 11:39-40). No such exegetical foundation exists for God's making the curse imposed for sin retroactive. The theological life of Dembski's proposal hangs by a slender exegetical thread. All of it depends on Dembski's success in reinterpreting Genesis 1-3. He prepares the way for this by discussing theories of communication, the transcendent and independent character of information, and applying concepts of two types of time and two types of logic.

According to Dembski, time is seen in terms of *chronos* and *kairos*. Logic is described as causal-temporal and intentional-semantic. *Chronos*, which speaks of the sequence of events in history, is aligned with causal-temporal logic. *Kairos*, which deals with particularly meaningful events in the purpose of God, is tied to intentional-semantic logic. In this way Dembski is able to disrupt chronology, or the appearance of it, in biblical narrative by shifting some passages into the category of *kairos* to be understood in terms of intentional-semantic logic. Genesis 1 is not to be interpreted as "ordinary chronological time (*chronos*) but rather as time from the vantage of God's purposes (*kairos*)" (142). Genesis 1 becomes a narrative of how God sees the world ideally, but has never yet actualized (144f.). His saying, his seeing, his making, and his pronouncing of it as "good," all recorded in Genesis 1, never actually took place. The originally intended world (the first creation) as described in Genesis 1 was never made, but God settled for an imperfect world (the second creation) due to his anticipation of human sin. Genesis 1 employs intentional-semantic logic and thus sees the days, not as chronology or even as having any palpable existence, but as a statement of the basic spiritual order of importance and fitness in the relation of created things to each other. Dembski writes, "Genesis 1 summarizes the order of creation viewed kairologically" (144).

Dembski seeks to justify this odd reading by saying that he is following "the common scriptural practice of employing physical realities to illuminate spiritual truths" (142). If there is no creation such as Genesis 1 described, to what physical reality does it refer? Is it like real bread symbolizing the real broken body of Christ or real wine symbolizing the real flowing blood of Christ? In one case the symbols are both familiar and palpable, but in Dembski's attempt at spiri-

tualizing, such a "physical reality" intended to evoke a spiritual correspondent never existed. What spiritual truth does this non-existent physical reality teach us? An ideal future state? Plenty of Scripture addresses that issue directly without being clouded with this picture of an original creation that never existed.

For Dembski the "spiritual reality" is an original intention that was set aside in light of the anticipation of human sin. That which the Bible represents God as calling "good" has never, in fact, existed; God never created it. God never brought the animals to Adam to name, for they already were wild and vicious, predatory, and blood-thirsty. Contrary to Dembski, Adam understood the curse God pronounced on the ground to be immediately related to his sin, as did subsequent generations. When Lamech, the father of Noah, was 126 years old, Adam died. Fifty-six years after Adam died, when Lamech fathered Noah, Lamech said, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands" (Gen 5:29). Adam had told every generation of the descendants of Seth, who lived fifty-six years beyond the birth of Noah, of the curse on the ground. He believed that even that ground out of Eden into which Lamech had poured so much sweat and pain had not always been cursed but had become so as a result of, and subsequent to, his sin. Now with the death of Adam, perhaps Lamech reasoned, a generation was arising in which the curse no longer would be operative. Both Adam and Lamech would be surprised at the reasoning of Dembski.

To be sure, in the intentional-semantic logic by which God creates and organizes the world—not chronologically but kairologically—evil is always logically downstream. In that logic God creates a good world, it becomes even better once humans are created, and then it goes haywire once humans sin. Seen chronologically, however, the world has always been haywire—hence the need for a new heaven and a new earth (172).

Dembski purposely borrowed the *kairos/chronos* distinction from Paul Tillich (125). For the sake of his own theological purposes, Tillich exaggerated the distinction. In fact, such a clear distinction simply does not hold true. The words are often used interchangeably in Scripture. For example such an important event as the incarnation is spoken of as *chronos* in Galatians: "When the fullness of *time* was come" (4:4). This same word is used to denominate the time of the birth of Jesus in Luke 1:57, while *kairos* is used concerning the birth of Moses in Acts 7:20. One of the most striking uses of *kairos* as synonymous with *chronos* occurs in Luke 18:29, 30 when Jesus refers to this present age, emphasizing its temporary character, as *kairos*: "There is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in *this time*, and in the age to come eternal life." In short an investigation of the actual occurrences in the New Testament indicates very little difference in the use of *kairos* and *chronos* in the New Testament, while Paul Tillich's exaggeration of the difference arose only as an apologetic for his radical ontological existentialism and treatment of biblical categories as symbols of self-actualization. In that way, it seems entirely appropriate that Dembski employ the Tillichian distinction, for he indicates no more assent to the historical nature of the creation narrative than Tillich does of the particular, personal, and unique character of the incarnation.

In fact, the biblical history always embeds God's purposive action in the real chronology of the world. Everything in Scripture is a picture of how God is in every event, controlling each for his own purposes. The Bible has no *kairos* that is distinct from its *chronos*, but every critical action of God in pursuit of his eternally ordained purpose becomes manifest as the irresistible flow of events in real time and space. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:12). "He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24). "In the days of Jesus' life on earth he offered

up prayers.... He learned obedience.... And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation" (Heb 5:7-9). These events of such powerful and infinite redemptive importance occurred in chronological time and within finite space. The words and the narrative, even if called intentional-semantic logic of *kairological* importance, nevertheless occurred as narrated in the biblical record and would have no meaning if not real historical events. So stands the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and curse and its subsequent importance in the redemptive history.

Dembski's exegetical difficulties extend far beyond Genesis 1-3. He describes virtually every event of Genesis 4-11 under the phrase "highly dubious claims" (170). This comes from his capitulation to "the current mental environment" that makes a "face-value reading of Genesis 4-11 and the chronology presented there difficult." He is quite a bit happier with Genesis 12-50 for it "can be confirmed through independent archeological and anthropological evidence" (170). As a result of his intellectual discomfort in the absence of a present day science to confirm what appears to be written with meticulous clarity and purpose, he cannot accept the biblical dating of the flood, the adequacy of the ark to provide all that it was intended to provide, or that Noah and his wife and children populated the world, though the text says with utter clarity, "These were the sons of Noah and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed" (Gen 9:19). He finds it difficult to believe that Abraham arose a mere 200 years subsequent to the Tower of Babel. In addition he states, "Noah's flood, though presented as a global event, is probably best understood as historically rooted in a local event" (170). This he prefers to the Mosaic testimony that the waters prevailed more than twenty-two feet above the tops of the mountains and that God "blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark" (Gen 7:23f.). He also prefers his consent to the "current mental judgment" to the testimony of Peter that "the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished" (2 Pet 3:6).

In short, Dembski has demonstrated anew that Genesis remains the battleground of Christian thinking. Science has challenged Christian thinkers to develop a variety of circumlocutions in treating Genesis 1-11. So it was with the C. H. Toy controversy, the evolution controversy of the 1920s, the controversy over Ralph Elliott's *The Message of Genesis* in the early 1960s, and the Broadman Commentary controversy in the early 1970s. Dembski now has developed his own way of handling the apparent historical narrative of creation, Fall, pre-flood development, and Flood. The old earth demanded by the naturalistic assumptions of contemporary astrophysics and geology must be honored and the ancient text must give way. Even if hidden in the verbal haze of intentional-semantic logic, Genesis 1 simply did not happen; even though the Bible presents it as having happened, Dembski says that it did not. His theodicy is necessary only because he has created a massive theological and exegetical difficulty by denying that the creation was ever "very good" (Gen 1:31) in chronological time and squeezing millions, if not billions, of years of suffering and death into the world prior to the curse pronounced in Genesis 3. Whereas Paul sees the creation "subjected to futility" and concurrent with human bondage until the redemption of the body (Rom 8:20-23), Dembski sees the subjection to futility as an act of creation.

– Tom J. Nettles
Professor of Historical Theology
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Dying to Preach: *Embracing the Cross in the Pulpit*. By Steven W. Smith. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009, 175 pp., $14.99 paper.

Steven W. Smith's *Dying to Preach* focuses on the heart of Christian ministry in general, and Christian preaching in particular. Smith calls the pastor to live out Paul's model of dying that others may live (2 Cor 4:12). While other books rightly champion the need to preach the cross, Smith provides a wonderful contribution to the field by urging the preacher to take up the cross personally, as well. In Smith's words, "The principle metaphor for the act of preaching the Gospel is the Gospel" (13).

Therefore, while this is not a practical "how to prepare sermons" book primarily, it is a book on how one "prepares himself" to preach expositional sermons. Smith urges the preacher to prepare himself by dying to himself and purposing to preach not for the praise of man, but for the glory of the crucified and risen Redeemer. Due to the importance of his selected subject, I would recommend this book to students and pastors for at least five reasons.

First, Smith's work is thoroughly biblical, which makes it trustworthy. Smith's primary focus of source material is Paul's words to the Corinthians, along with other key biblical texts. In chapter 1, Smith provides an excellent summary table of how the cross of Christ informed Paul's view of ministry. Smith records, "No less than twenty times in his two extant letters to Corinth, he [Paul] alludes to this idea of suffering for others" (28). In chapter 2, Smith expounds 1 Corinthians 2 clearly, and draws out implications for preaching. Chapters 3-6 make up part 2 of the book, which deals with how the cross impacts preaching more practically. Chapter 3 is an exposition of 2 Corinthians 4; chapter 4, an exposition of Colossians 1:24; chapter 5, an exposition of Heb 13:11-14; and in chapter 6, Smith focuses on Phil 2:5-7. Each of these chapters actually models faithful exposition, as the author develops his Christocentric thesis.

Second, Smith writes with pastoral vulnerability, which makes the book encouraging. In other words, he is aware of the inner struggles of the pastor. For example, he identifies with the discouraged pastor when he writes, "We lay our guts out in the pulpit, and in response see stone-cold faces with no ambition toward godliness or motivation to change" (24). What pastor cannot identify with this struggle? Smith offers needed encouragement in light of these types of realities.

Third, Smith reminds us of the theological underpinnings of preaching, which makes the book timeless. For example, he reminds us that we should preach with a "healthy fear of God's judgment" instead of succumbing to the pressure to perform and entertain (47).

Fourth, Smith includes some helpful reminders from the history of preaching (mainly from Francois Fenelon's *Dialogues on Eloquence*), which makes the book informative and inspiring. I always appreciate references to homileticians from years past. One of the reasons for various contemporary pitfalls in preaching seems to be the lack of reflection on preaching history.

Fifth, Smith reminds us of the true essence of expository preaching—that is, being surrendered to the text of Scripture (chapters 7-9—the final three chapters), which makes the book useful for personal reflection and instruction.

I found myself throughout the book saying "Amen" to particular points, examining my heart at other places, and praying for the outworking of his thesis in my own life throughout the book. Seasoned pastors, young pastors, and others who handle God's Word would benefit from hearing this call to bear the cross in the pulpit.

—Tony Merida
Teaching Pastor
Temple Baptist Church
Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Assistant Professor of Preaching
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

ESV German / English Parallel Bible. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Wheaton: Crossway, 2009, 2432 pp., $79.99.
English Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, 1446 pp., $25.00.

In 2008 the much anticipated *ESV Study Bible* was released, and it did not disappoint. When the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association awarded it top honors at the 2009 Christian Book Awards, it marked the first time that a Bible had won not only best Bible but also Christian Book of the Year. Given how well the English Standard Version (ESV) has been received as a translation by many evangelicals, it is not surprising that various editions continue to be produced. Two recent ESV editions—that have perhaps been overshadowed by the *ESV Study Bible*—are well worth mentioning.

The *ESV German / English Parallel Bible* combines the ESV and the 1984 German Luther Bible. As the KJV influenced the English language, so Martin Luther's translation had a significant impact on the German language. The 1984 update to Luther's classic translation, first printed in 1534, is widely used by German (Protestant) readers today. According to historian Philip Schaff: "Luther's version of the Bible is a wonderful monument of genius, learning, and piety, and may be regarded in a secondary sense as inspired. It was, from beginning to end, a labor of love and enthusiasm. While publishers and printers made fortunes, Luther never received or asked a copper for this greatest work of his life" (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7 [1888; repr., Hendrickson, 1996], 354).

The German and English translations appear in parallel columns on each page, allowing for easy verse-by-verse comparison. Textual notes for both translations are included in the back. Given the amount of text, it is quite thick (2 in.), but the other dimensions (8.5 x 5.5 in.) make it a manageable size. The *Parallel Bible* is hardcover and includes a ribbon page marker.

This Bible can be a helpful tool for those who want to improve their German, especially students learning German for theological research. As with learning any language, vocabulary must be mastered. However, for those who have studied some German, reading through the *ESV German / English Parallel Bible* enables one to acquire German biblical vocabulary in context—a much more effective and preferable method than rote memorization of word lists.

The other recent edition of the ESV is the *English Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha*, which includes the ESV translation with the Apocrypha in the back. The translation of the Apocrypha is based on the 1971 Revised Standard Version (RSV) Apocrypha (the ESV also used the 1971 RSV as its starting point) and was updated by a translation committee consisting of David A. deSilva (Ashland Theological Seminary), Dan McCartney (Westminster Theological Seminary), and Bernard A. Taylor (Loma Linda University). Besides the books customarily included in the Apocrypha, this edition also includes the books of 3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151, which were added to the RSV Apocrypha in 1977.

Though the entire text was compared to the original languages, the "main points of interaction," according to the translation committee, included "updating archaic language, clarifying obscure words, removing inaccuracies, and bringing punctuation up to current American English standards" (1177). The textual basis is the Göttingen Septuagint, except for 4 Maccabees (translated from Rahlf's Septuagint) and 2 Esdras (translated from the 1983 Vulgate published by the German Bible Society). The *English Standard Version with Apocrypha* is hardcover and relatively slim in spite of the added content.

In contrast to Roman Catholics, evangelicals do not, of course, recognize the Apocrypha as inspired or canonical. Unfortunately, for many evangelicals, non-canonical translates as unimportant or something to be avoided. However, this

was not the response of early Protestants. Martin Luther rejected the canonicity of the books of the Apocrypha, but he and other Reformers affirmed their value and encouraged Christians to read them. Sixteenth century translations of the Bible, like Luther's German Bible and Coverdale's English Bible, included the Apocrypha (along with a caveat that its contents were not equal in authority to the Scriptures). Even the venerable King James Version (1611) included it.

The Apocrypha is a significant part of the Jewish literary and theological context out of which Christianity and the New Testament arose. Not only do we gain from it important knowledge of the history, culture, and piety of Second Temple Judaism, but we can also trace the articulation of theological views and the use of relevant words that are crucial to questions of biblical interpretation. For the serious exegete of the Scriptures, the Apocrypha is not to be ignored. I am glad to see this updated translation coupled with the ESV.

—Christopher W. Cowan
Associate Editor
The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology

Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology. Edited by Gary T. Meadors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 369 pp., $19.99 paper.

How do we get from the Bible to theology and practical application? Such a concern is not new, but the issue has become more intense among evangelicals, particularly with the publication of William Webb's *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (InterVarsity, 2001). The issue of how to get from the Bible to theology is packaged in this book in a familiar format. Four different views are presented. Walter Kaiser defends the notion that we must derive principles from the Bible to apply it to everyday life. Daniel Doriani advocates a redemptive historical approach where the epochal character of Scripture plays a central role. Kevin Vanhoozer presents a drama of redemption model where believers are called upon to improvise the script of the theodrama in accord with the overarching story of the scriptures. William Webb continues to outline his redemptive movement model, illustrating it by considering slavery and corporal punishment texts. After each author presents his viewpoint, the other three contributors interact and respond to the view presented. The volume is rounded out by three reflection essays by Mark Strauss, Al Wolters, and Christopher Wright. These three authors respond to the four contributions and ruminate on the hermeneutical task facing believers today.

I can hardly survey the contribution of seven different scholars, and hence it seems most helpful to consider the impact of the work as a whole. Virtually all the contributors agree that Kaiser's principalizing approach is reductionistic, especially since it does not consider the role of narrative. And yet all the contributors end up principalizing as well, even if they emphasize other features of the biblical text. It is somewhat surprising that Kaiser, an OT scholar, does not present a more prominent role for redemptive history. And yet Mark Strauss's six criteria at the conclusion of his essay are not remarkably different from Kaiser's use of principles to derive the message of Scripture. Doriani and Vanhoozer rightly emphasize the importance of narratives and story in forming theology. Vanhoozer illustrates his method by considering the theology of Mary and what we should think about sex-change operations. What is unclear, however, is how Vanhoozer's model actually relates to the two issues he considers. Certainly Vanhoozer's essay is full of wit and wisdom, but it is also rather vague in terms of practical application. Vanhoozer emphasizes living out the story of the scriptures, but some might wonder after reading his essay how we do this as believers. I am probably most sympathetic to Doriani's redemptive historical reading. What was quite surprising was the limited

extent to which his essay actually addresses the nature of redemptive history. Many fine insights dot his essay, but it seems (at least to this reader) that he did not explain with sufficient depth what it means to read the scriptures in redemptive historical terms.

One of the problems with four and three views books surfaces in this volume. Are the views presented here mutually exclusive? The models of Doriani and Vanhoozer are quite close to one another. Even if they presented exactly the same model, they would have surely found some places where they disagreed with one another. I have already mentioned that all of the contributors derive principles from Scripture, and hence the differences among the contributors could be overestimated. Perhaps it would have helped if each of the contributors addressed the same issue in terms of practical application, so that readers could discern where they truly differed. More likely, the presentation of four different views is a bit distorting since the strengths of each of the models can be integrated into a larger perspective. I am not suggesting some kind of Hegelian synthesis here! There are disagreements among the authors, but the book suffers a bit (especially when the reflection essays are included) from diffuse discussions on the issues. For instance, it is helpful in one sense to include the reflection of Christopher Wright, especially in terms of his missiological concerns. But how does Wright's essay relate to the four major views presented? We can be thankful for his insight and wise counsel, but in some ways the book takes on the feel of "More Reflections on Hermeneutics." Since the views of the various authors overlap at many points, is this really a four views book? In any case, readers will profit by considering the dimensions of the hermeneutical task.

The most controversial contributor is William Webb, and yet even in his case there is overlap at certain junctures with the other authors. Remarkably, Webb still does not show clear evidence that he understands the redemptive historical character of biblical revelation. His discussion on corporal punishment, though it has some helpful insights, is on the whole methodologically confusing. He jumbles together all kinds of texts in presenting his view on the matter, so that texts about disciplining slaves are lumped together with texts about disciplining children. The manner in which the biblical material is presented does not inspire confidence that Webb has done careful exegesis.

This is not to say that readers cannot learn from Webb. Certainly it would be a mistake to think that we can or must replicate the cultural world of the Bible in the modern world. All of the contributors help us to see this to some extent. Even after reading the book, more clarity would be helpful in defining what it means to go *beyond* the Bible. Obviously we all go beyond the Bible in one sense since the biblical world differs dramatically from ours. Insofar as the contributors assist us to think more carefully about the whole matter they are to be thanked.

I found Al Wolters's reflection on the book to be the most penetrating and trenchant. At point after point he identifies some of the strengths and weaknesses of the various positions, though I am not necessarily endorsing his own emphasis on general revelation. Wolters, in particular, points out the weaknesses in Webb's paradigm. Whether Webb addresses slavery, corporal punishment, or the role of women, it seems that his ultimate ethic is too often sundered from the biblical text, so that reigning cultural norms represent how God intends for us to live today. In part Webb goes astray because of his exegesis, but space is lacking to pursue that matter here. Wolters rightly cautions that we must beware of our own cultural blinders. Those of us in the West are typically quite proud of our enlightened stances over against our predecessors, and we deem ourselves to be much kinder and gentler than our ancestors. And it is probably true that we have remedied some blind spots of those who went before us. Still, the danger is that the ultimate ethic proposed by Webb actually contravenes

what Scripture teaches. Surely that is not Webb's conscious intention, but good intentions must not be equated with satisfying results.

—Thomas R. Schreiner
James Buchanan Harrison Professor of
New Testament Interpretation
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

God and Race in American Politics: A Short History. By Mark A. Noll. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, xiv + 209 pp., $22.95.

In *God and Race in American Politics,* University of Notre Dame historian Mark Noll gives readers a complex yet coherent analysis of the political movement of America from the 1820s to the twenty-first century. In this interpretation of America's history, race and religion have been intersecting forces serving as more than the lead actors in the play of the nation's "deepest and most enduring moral problem." They have combined in unique ways to act as America's "broadest and most enduring political influence" (1).

The book's period of discussion—"from Nat Turner to George Bush"—is organized largely around "three of the four great transformations in American history": the antebellum period (1830-1860) when slavery was the most significant political issue in the country; the post-bellum period (1865-1900) when the was no movement on equal rights in the country; and the 1950s to the early twenty-first century of the Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights era (10). Through these periods, the author reveals that national debates over states' rights and big government clouded the debate on race as the strides for racial progress were viewed by whites as one of many efforts of the government to intrude into the private lives of its citizens. By "refocusing historical analysis to controversies about central government authority," Noll intends to help the reader avoid seeing slavery and civil rights as regional questions that were mostly important for the South. Instead, he writes with an even-handedness that "makes it easier to grasp the national influence of race in American political history" (24).

In order to accomplish his task, the author argues that American public religion, in its non-Catholic form, largely has functioned in Calvinistic clothing, in which the Scriptures are employed for the sake of public moral persuasion. Noll shows that this philosophy was—and is—a two-edged sword, giving intensity to both sides of national moral debates on race, even as Scripture was used to justify both the existence and abolition of slavery. Religious beliefs and practices "were not the *causes* of the war in the way that dispute over the right of states with respect to slavery was a cause," Noll contends (44). Yet the Civil War was as religious as the Crusades—if only an American version—as the cross again became the mask disguising the face of desires for power and dominion.

As Noll explains, the unfortunate results of both whites and African-Americans co-opting post-Puritan rhetoric for their causes is evident in the African-American and white interpretations of the Civil War. For African-Americans, that is, God providentially provided the war, responding to his needy people. For whites, however, most significantly and enduringly for our national history, a "disjunction between consideration of slavery and consideration of black people" became a great result of the war. For Noll, because neither side stopped and asked the question, "What does the Bible say about 'race'?" before asking, "What does the Bible say about 'slavery'?", the church could not offer the nation unified guidance out of the moral sinkhole left by the Civil War.

Even emancipation in America became atypical of post-slavery patterns in ancient history because of the role of race in American slavery. Noll writes, "Because solutions to economic and political problems of slavery differed from solutions to the social problems of race, repeated efforts by both whites and blacks to differen-

tiate issues of slavery from issues of race exercised almost no influence" (40). Jim Crow laws, southern "Redemption," the nation's retreat from Reconstruction, and almost every major social issue after the Civil War was affected by the religious community's response to the unseen, erroneous tie of African-American rights to the role of the government. Yet, as Noll notes, glimmers of hope would shine through for African-Americans, as "the creation of an independent black religious life proved to be a momentous and irresistible consequence of emancipation" (51).

The author is self-critical of evangelicals. "Support for black causes," from the likes of Williams Jennings Bryan, "could not be too aggressive … since he needed the electoral votes of the Democratic Solid South" that was experiencing the completion of "black disenfranchisement" that began after the Civil War. Returning to themes from his earlier writings, Noll also stabs at the individual pietistic strands of evangelical Christianity, speaking of them as insufficient to solve the problem of race apart from voices of corporate intellectual rigor and social responsibility in the public square.

In small criticism of an otherwise exceptional work, some items are addressed almost in passing, and are overlooked for more development in a later chapter, i.e.:

> The retreat from Reconstruction, the unleashing of lynch-law terrorism, the general concern for black civil rights in the North, and the imposition in the South of Jim Crow laws to quash black political participation seemed to neuter the nation's African-American population. (58)

In similar minor criticism, the small work does not discuss the roles that the Nation of Islam and Moral Majority played in the race/religion/politics complex. This might be because these movements centered on such influential individual figures as Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakkan, and Jerry Falwell—each of whom greatly influenced the relationship of religion and race in the American political landscape—and this work does not give great attention to individual figures. Or the absence could be because Noll's discussions about the mid- to late-twentieth century were not the major focus of this study.

Noll marshals a wealth of scholarship to his cause and has distilled it carefully into "a short history." The reader will appreciate the author's humility, and willingness to consider broader issues that could provide a different set of perspectives and conclusions, for his own efforts in this volume are not "an iron-clad demonstration of historical certainty" (137). One also might appreciate that Noll is low on making judgments of personal opinion until the last chapter, "Theological Conclusions." Tellingly for the author's thoughts on race relations in the nation, in contrast, the one exception of opinion comes in a paragraph before the concluding chapter: "The United States pays a heavy price, and it pays it daily, for its history of injustice to African-American citizens. African Americans who wait for redress, who do not take into their own hands the challenge of shaping the future, compound the larger difficulty" (175).

Highly regarded by the present reviewer, this book should be read to awaken the church to the complexities of race in American society, racial reconciliation, and the political divide existing among African-American and white evangelicals. Noll writes to alert the reader that an effective religious answer to the race problem in America will come only when religious rhetoric and action rises above politics with a solution that unites people of all races without being motivated by—or repelling against—Caesar.

—Eric C. Redmond
Assistant Professor of Bible and Theology
Washington Bible College

Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue. By Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009, 175 pp., $17.99 paper.

Todd E. Johnson is Associate Professor of Worship, Theology and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary, and Dale Savidge is executive director of Christans in Theatre Arts and chair of the theater department at North Greenville University. Their book is based on the premise that theater has theological content, that it uniquely "embodies three central theological categories that define the nature of human and divine interaction: incarnation, community, and presence."

In this scholarly and thoughtful study, the authors examine past and current dramatic theory and theologies of drama and its relationships to ritual, to culture, and to the Christian gospel and worldview. They give informative accounts of the viewpoints of Peter Senkbeil, Peter Brooks, French theorist Antonin Artaud, Stanislavsky, anthropologist Victor Turner, and others. Beginning with a thoughtful discussion of the patristic writers and medieval mystery plays, they bring their survey of theater and dramatic theory into the twentieth century, with the plays of T. S. Eliot and megachurch pageants. The latter phenomenon, which marks the high point of live drama in North American churches in recent decades, has been followed by a decline of live theater, especially in evangelical worship, in favor of video and film. What has been lost in the shift?

The great distinctive of live theater is that both actors and audience must be present in the body for theater to happen. In its enfleshment of narrative, the authors argue, theater of all the arts most closely approaches Christian worship or sacrament. After all, it is its dramatic narrative that sets theater apart from instrumental performance or from a sporting event. And it is the incarnation of script and story experienced by actors and audience together that unites them in a powerful—if temporary—community, a time of unrepeatable encounter and connection. (Interestingly, historian Sandra Sizer made very similar claims about the emotional effects of Sankey's gospel hymnody in D. L. Moody's mass urban revivalism of the late nineteenth century.) The authors are careful not to claim too much similarity between theater and liturgy. Most engaging to me was their synthesis of culture analysis by McLuhan, Postman, and others with dramatic theory and ritual study across cultures, a discussion that will be useful to students of world cultures and cross-cultural ministry.

Practitioners of the theater will value the solid biblical advice in the closing chapters on developing discernment and the pursuit of excellence in plying one's craft. On the concept of "art for art's sake," which the authors describe as "an unhealthy extreme of serving the art," they note, "Honoring the art isn't the goal, honoring God in the art is." Many principles apply to church music and other ministries as well: "'God gave me this play' … can be a mask for shoddy craftsmanship. God's leading is never apart from God's attributes of beauty and excellence." I recommend this book as a valuable read for ministers, drama scholars, Christian artists, and believers who wish to experience and understand the arts more fully and more biblically, and trace God's presence in them.

—Esther R. Crookshank
Ollie Hale Chiles Professor of Church Music
Director of the Academy of Sacred Music
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views. Edited by Bruce A. Ware. Nashville: B&H, 2008, 273 pp., $24.99 paper.

The title of this volume is, at first glance, a bit confusing. A multi-view book on God could mean any number of things. Is it a discussion on the existence of God between a theist, an agnostic, and an atheist? Is it an interfaith dialogue on the nature of God between a Christian, a Hindu, and

a Muslim? Or is it something else entirely?

The idea of "multiple views" on God is, of course, as old as Eden itself. Beyond that, even among orthodox Christians, questions about God's nature and involvement with the world have provoked some of the fieriest debates in the history of the church. If the number of professional society papers, monographs, and scholarly articles can serve as a measuring stick, then American evangelicals particularly have demonstrated a resurgent interest in the doctrine of God over the last twenty or so years.

Recognizing this renewed focus, Bruce Ware assembled a reputable cadre of scholars to debate theology proper in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*. Since the book deals mostly with the foreknowledge of God and the freedom of humanity, it seems as if the book would have been more accurately titled *Perspectives on the Providence of God* (cf. 54).

Defending the "Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God," Paul Helm argues for a Calvinist view of God's foreknowledge and a determinist understanding of human freedom. Arguing for a "Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God," Bruce Ware articulates a Molinist view of God's foreknowledge combined with a compatiblist view of human freedom. Supporting the "Classic Free Will Theist Model of God," Roger Olson couples God's simple foreknowledge with libertarian human freedom. Finally, describing "Divine Providence and the Openness of God," John Sanders contends for a dynamic omniscience understanding of God's foreknowledge tethered with libertarian human freedom.

Since the contributors have developed their views more extensively elsewhere, the primary benefit of the book is not just in the quality of their insights but also in the interchange of their views. While other multi-view books limit responses to 3-5 pages, this work facilitates interaction by allowing longer rejoinders. This exchange of ideas signals the future direction of the contemporary evangelical debate on the doctrine of God. Therefore, the duration of this review will focus on several trajectories from the book that will shape future discussion of theology proper.

First, the book confirms why open theism is not a viable option for evangelical theology. Specifically, Ware identifies an irony in the open theist view of God's foreknowledge (255). When the issue is whether we can trust the God of open theism with the future, open theists praise his extensive foreknowledge. Yet, when the issue is how to explain evil in the past, they appeal to his ignorance and risk taking. As inconsistencies such as this are exposed in the open theist argument, its appeal to evangelicals will continue to wane.

Second, the book raises concerns about the ongoing interrelationship of free will theism and open theism. In fact, Roger Olson goes so far as to say that he cannot see how open theism's view of God's foreknowledge "undermines any Christian doctrine" (248). Yet, is it actually possible that such a drastic change in someone's view of God would not negatively affect other doctrines? If free will theists embrace Olson's opinion, it will likely enable open theism to remain an appealing option in the future for those who embrace libertarian free will.

Third, the book signals the need for continued conversation about the legitimacy of Molinism for those who hold to compatibilist freedom. In particular, is it possible for Molinism to be a viable viewpoint if its original connection to libertarian free will is jettisoned for compatibilism? Are there alternative ways for compatibilists to account for counterfactuals apart from a Molinist view of middle knowledge (126-29)? The dialogue in this book reveals the need for further discussion on these issues.

Fourth, the book raises the question of whether constructive dialogue between the varying camps can occur in the future. Tension is evident throughout the work. Helm equates the Calvinist view of God with the Christian view of God, which irks the free will theists (53). Ware points out that Olson claims that the God of Calvinism is

"virtually indistinguishable from the devil" (195). This type of discussion leaves the reader wondering if Sanders is correct when he asserts that profitable discussion can occur within Calvinist and Arminian camps but not between them (201). For further developments to occur in the three areas of discussion described above, a more charitable conversation must prevail.

At the onset of this decade, Bruce Ware served as a key figure in the evangelical refutation of open theism. Now, with the publication of his edited work, *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, Ware is further defined as one who will frame the future of the broader discussion on theology proper. This book provides not only a helpful debate between various views on the providence of God but also a clear window into future dialogue on the doctrine of God.

—Phillip R. Bethancourt
Director of Academic Advising and Research
Doctoral Studies
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography. By Bruce Chilton. New York: Doubleday, 2004, xvi + 335 pp., $24.95.

Bruce Chilton has followed up his biography of Jesus (*Rabbi Jesus*) with a biography of Paul. The story commences with Paul's early days in Tarsus, sketching in the nature of life in that city, and concludes with Paul's execution in A.D. 64 in Rome when Nero was emperor. In addition to the eleven chapters that form the heart of the book, Chilton also includes a preface, a brief chronology of Paul, footnotes, sources, and acknowledgements. The section on sources is more than a bibliography since Chilton comments on the various sources.

We only have space to sketch in some of the highlights of the book. It should be noted at the outset that the style of the book makes it a good read, and Chilton does not get bogged down in assessing various scholarly debates, which is fitting in a biography. Even though the book is engagingly written, one is not carried along by the story to the extent that the book is difficult to put down. Another strength of the book is the grounding of the story in the historical context of Paul's day, whether it is Paul's early days in Tarsus, the Pharisaic sect, or the various cities of Paul's mission.

Any biography, of course, depends on the critical stance of the author, and the assessment of the historical reliability of Acts plays a central role in any Pauline biography. Sometimes Chilton accepts Acts as historical and sometimes he does not. Given the nature of the book, it was difficult to perceive on what basis he made his decisions, and hence at times Chilton's categorical statements were frustrating since evidence was often not adduced to support the claims made.

A number of the critical judgments that inform the biography should prove to be of interest to readers. Chilton rejects the idea that Paul personally studied with Gamaliel; argues that Paul was significantly influenced by Stoicism; claims that the empty tomb was irrelevant to the Pauline view of the resurrection; maintains that Paul's eye affliction was herpes zoster; claims Paul never married; maintains that Barnabas abandoned Paul in Derbe and did not return with him as Acts claims; uses very late sources in painting a portrait of James; accepts the view that Paul circumcised Timothy (which is often rejected, of course, by those who doubt the reliability of Acts); questions the reliability of the account that relays the conversion of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16); says that Silas also abandoned Paul; insists (contra Acts) that Paul did not accept the decree in Acts 15; accepts the standard critical view that Paul and the Antiochene church parted ways; argues that Galatians fails as a letter since it is filled with venom and theatrical devices; asserts that Paul had a negative view of marriage; defends the view that 2 Corinthians represents a patchwork of several Pauline letters; and maintains that Timothy wrote Colossians and probably Ephesians and that

the Pastoral Letters come from an even later hand.

Chilton's judgments are a mixed bag. The theory that Paul had herpes zoster is fascinating (though difficult to establish), and many, probably most, would agree that Paul never married. On the other hand, many of his decisions are dubious. For example, his view that Galatians was a failure seems questionable, for the preservation of the letter by the Galatians suggests otherwise. Perhaps Chilton's view that the letter is abusive and off-center reflects his own estimate of the letter from his own social location rather than the response of the Galatians themselves. Chilton claims that by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians he had learned to desist from calling his readers stupid, but in 1 Cor 15:36 some of the readers are identified as fools, and Paul is rather sarcastic in 1 Cor 4:8-10, and so it seems that Chilton exaggerates the differences between the two letters.

Chilton is quite dogmatic about the resurrection and implies that only fundamentalists think that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. Such a judgment flies in the face of massive evidence to the contrary, including now the impressive and convincing work by N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. As noted earlier, many of Chilton's conclusions stem from his view of the historical reliability of Acts. Those who think that Acts portrays genuine history, like the present reviewer, will depart from Chilton at a number of points.

The author of *Acts of Paul and Thecla* said that he wrote out of love for Paul. It seems that Chilton writes with some admiration for Paul, but he also freely criticizes Paul throughout the book, and does not convey adequately the depth of Pauline theology. Chilton's book represents mainstream critical scholarship, and reflects the Enlightenment convictions and the philosophical view that reigns in most of our universities. Even those of us who stand at a very different place will profit from Chilton's locating Paul in the historical context of his day.

—Thomas R. Schreiner
James Buchanan Harrison Professor of
New Testament Interpretation
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Thy Will Be Done: A Biography of George W. Truett. By Keith E. Durso. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2009, x + 240 pp., $35.00.

Polite, dignified, and circumspect, George Washington Truett, though a native of western North Carolina, followed his family to the Texas frontier in 1889. By 1897, he had assumed the role of pastor at the First Baptist Church of Dallas. Seven years later, J. B. Cranfill and S. A. Hayden, both well-known Baptists and editors of competing Texas journals, boarded the same train heading for Nashville. Not surprisingly, an argument ensued and both Cranfill and Hayden drew revolvers and exchanged several shots. The fact that no one's shots connected to the target (if not intentional) was a greater embarrassment to Cranfill, a veteran cowboy of Old Chisholm Trail fame, who, under normal conditions, would not have missed twice.

Welcome to Texas Baptist life, Pastor Truett. Perhaps the restraint and regal posture of the new Dallas pastor was precisely what the Texas frontier required. Keith E. Durso suggests as much in *Thy Will Be Done*, his memorable biography of Truett. Scholarly biographies should be perceptive assessments, free from both hagiography and bitter recrimination. Upon completion of his perusal, the reader should sense that he knows the biographer's subject exactly as he was—both in character and contribution. If that is the essence of a good biography, Durso has succeeded splendidly. This tome is readable, accurate, just, and largely free of the intrusion of the author's unsupported perspectives. Further, the importance of the volume for an understanding of Texas Baptist history, and even the historical record of the Southern Baptist Convention and of the Baptist

World Alliance, can scarcely be overstated.

Truett's birth, conversion, baptism, and early years in North Carolina, north Georgia, and eventually Texas, are chronicled by Durso in the first chapter. His call to ministry, his rather incredible and successful efforts to save Baylor University, his assistance in the building of a cowboy camp in Paisano in West Texas, and his unlikely call to First Baptist, Dallas, are the subjects of chapter 2. Chapters 3–7 sketch the ministry of Truett in Dallas and its rapid extension to a worldwide impact prior to the advent of television or the availability of travel by air. A final chapter provides a brief summary and evaluation. Documentation is extensive and helpful, though this reviewer prefers footnotes rather than the endnotes provided here. Within this 377-page biography, 102 pages are devoted to endnotes. The index is thorough and helpful, and the first 24 pages consist of a perceptively selected gallery of photographs that are actually valuable in viewing the historical development of the era.

Durso's sketch of Truett reveals a complex character of considerable ambition, tempered by apparently genuine humility. Recognizing early the value of education, Truett availed himself of every opportunity. As a part of that pursuit of knowledge, Truett mastered the art of debate. In light of his ministry, which was characterized by a generally non-combative approach, this early love for debate seems to have been abandoned during Truett's ministry years. Durso's acknowledgment of the impact of Truett's mother on the pastor's development is refreshing in a day when motherhood is frequently under-appreciated. Citing Truett in *A Quest For Souls*, Durso notes,

> She was down on her face before God. I can remember until yet the surpassing pathos of her prayers. She said: "Lord, Jesus, I never can rear this houseful of boys like they ought to be reared, without thy help. I will make shipwreck with them, without thy help. I cannot guide them, I cannot counsel them, I cannot be the mother that a woman ought to be to her children, without God's help. I will cleave to thee. Teach me and help me, every hour." I heard her like that, and then she came back singing every morning (6).

Jerry Falwell, move over! Other than having their respective genesis in the same part of the country, Truett and Falwell may not have had much in common. But when the subject is fundraising, these two preachers were cut from the same cloth. While I knew that Truett raised a mountain of *dinero*, Durso's biography surprised me in the revelation of just how effective Truett's fundraising activities had been. Durso not only enumerates the extensive causes for which Truett sought support, together with the amounts secured, but he also provides in parentheses what these figures would look like in the contemporary economy. When the amounts raised by the entrepreneurial preacher are viewed in the perspective of 2007 purchasing power, added to the plethora of projects for which he sought such funding, Truett has to be considered one of the greatest development strategists in American history. Further, the pastor accomplished this task with no media support and only a modicum of what, by some analysis, might be reckoned "direct mail" solicitation. In stark contrast to many contemporary preacher/fundraisers, Truett's success seems actually to have enhanced the public's confidence in his integrity. A portion of this was due to Truett's personal generosity and the fact that only much later in his life did he allow himself significant remuneration.

The dissenter from the Truett chorus of praise was bombastic John Franklyn Norris, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth. The antics of Norris were so sufficiently despicable that even when right on an issue, he commands little affection or sympathy. Durso clearly elucidates the unrelenting pressure generated by both public and private sniping administered by Norris. Truett refused to respond in kind or even, for the most part, to acknowledge the allegations of the

pesky but indefatigable Norris. The imprecations of Norris surface throughout the biography like the dark threads of an otherwise colorful fabric. Doubtless, Norris had no intention of elevating the public image of the illustrious pastor, but the "dark threads" in the end only provided stark contrast for the nobility and decidedly Christian responses of Truett.

There is little to criticize in this biography. A chapter on Truett's theology would have been helpful. Of course, Truett was a pastor with only a college degree, and Durso does discuss Truett's doctrinal commitments in the development of various chapters. However, the current practice of using names like Carroll and Truett as names for institutions that do not represent the perspectives of those whose names are thus invoked probably make the issue of Truett's theology require greater attention.

To be fair, however, Durso does not misrepresent Truett's theology. He introduces the eschatological optimism of Truett with his postmillennialism, which was renewed by his hope that no war of the magnitude of World War I would ever again occur. Durso notes that while the Dallas pastor maintained amicable and even close relationships with ministers in other denominations, he was no ecumenist. Rather he vigorously endorsed Baptist beliefs and openly opposed Catholicism (185). Acknowledging Truett's fierce devotion to religious liberty and his own efforts to bridge the racial divide, Durso nonetheless finds Truett's own language about African Americans to be typical of the times and, therefore, demeaning. Naturally and appropriately, he is critical of Truett's claim that Baptists have always been champions of civil liberties when the very birth of the denomination was on the wrong side of the slavery issue (186).

The author correctly notes Truett's opposition to Darwinism but spots the inconsistency in Truett's emotional defense of Baylor when J. Frank Norris made allegations concerning the science professors in the university. Durso presents Truett as fully orthodox, defined in both general evangelical terms and specifically from Baptist perspectives. This includes full confidence in both the unquestioned authority and full reliability of the biblical text. He even notes the financial savior of Baylor as lamenting "the 'ominous trend' in the United States to divorce religious denominations from their colleges and universities." Durso notes, however, his confidence that "Baylor will remain true to the ideals of the fathers" and "not be ashamed of the noble denomination that founded and fostered her" (97).

The irony involved in the fact that not only Mercer, Stetson, University of Richmond, Wake Forest, and finally even Baylor, to name just a few, did exactly what Truett vowed would be unthinkable actually leads to an understanding of another of Durso's critiques of Truett. Durso remarks that, "During the evolutionary controversy, Truett, as was his custom, remained in the background. Such aloofness, however, unsettled many Baptists" (189). He cites another Dallas pastor who spoke of Truett's "lack of backbone" (190).

The author also features Truett not only as president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), but also as its principal promoter among Southern Baptists. Here, too, the seeds of compromise that would take that body on a course far removed from the commitments of Truett and its other founders were already growing. Durso cites Erich Geldbach, possibly the most liberal of contemporary German Baptist theologians, admitting that Truett, the German Baptists, and the BWA in general found that their newfound freedom under the Nazi state was an illusion and that they "had been the victims of massive self-deception" (216).

Was Truett a victim of deception? Did he have difficulty admitting problems in people and institutions that he cherished? Was he simply attempting to work out the implications of practical Christianity in his hesitancy to address contested issues in Baptist life? Durso seems to suspect that the great preacher simply despised controversy.

The answer to this question requires the adju-

dication of motives, which mortals can never make. Such judgments must be left to God, who alone deciphers men's motives. What can be said is that Durso's biography illustrates what happens when top leaders, for whatever reason, fail to answer the bell when a conflict begins. Non-retaliation toward J. Frank Norris and his obnoxious and often untruthful attacks certainly exhibit a brand of Christianity rare in any era. On the other hand, even if unintentionally, the failure of Truett to roar like a lion in theological controversy paved the way for Baylor and the BWA to move inexorably to the left theologically. In the end, Durso is correct to consider this as serious flaw in an otherwise great man.

—Paige Patterson
President
Professor of Theology
L. R. Scarborough Chair of Evangelism
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics. Edited by Larry L. McSwain and William Loyd Allen. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2008, 354 pp., $45.00.

The editors of this book set the scene for Baptist social ethics in the twentieth century by picturing for us the 1934 Baptist World Alliance meeting in Berlin. There, they tell us, the official report "praised Adolf Hitler's personal example of abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, while John R. Sampey, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, cautioned against judging Hitler too hastily since he prohibited women from smoking or wearing red lipstick in public."

Against this shortsighted form of uniquely southern-cultural pietism, the editors offer another tradition prominent in the last century's Baptist witness: that of prophetic social activism. This book introduces readers to some of those whom the editors consider the "major prophets" of twentieth-century Baptist life. Some will be immediately recognizable to all readers, whether Baptist or not: Walter Rauschenbusch, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jimmy Carter. Others will be recognizable to those familiar with the Southern Baptist Convention leadership structures of the last generations: J. M. Dawson, Foy Valentine, James Dunn. Each chapter includes both a biographical sketch and an outline of the major ideological or activist contributions of the figure analyzed.

The best chapters are those written by those closest to the ethicists described, and thus able to include personal insights into their background and motivations. The chapters on T. B. Maston and Henlee Barnette, ethicists of Southwestern and Southern seminaries respectively, are perhaps the best in the volume because they are written by their respective students with a personal attention to detail that seems rooted in honor and love.

This attempt to honor, a primary strength of the book, also turns out to be a weakness at some points. The analysis lacks nuance when it comes to possible critiques of the ethicists involved. Some ethicists' positions on, for example, abortion rights and the separation of church and state are examined with little reflection on the (often very ugly) anti-Catholic rhetoric that came along with them (not to mention, in the case of abortion rights, the departure from the small "c" catholic witness of the church universal throughout the ages).

The book's other major flaw is in the "shapers" chosen and those ignored. It is appropriate that the book starts with Rauschenbusch because the "progressive" tradition stands virtually alone here, enough to make one wonder if a better title might have been *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Liberal Baptist Social Ethics*. Many of those chosen would, of course, need to be in any treatment of this subject (King, Maston, Barnette, Valentine). The editors tell us in the introduction they cannot deal with every influence on Baptist social ethics in the last century (and that's undoubtedly true). They

then tell us that they are leaving out some (such as Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry), but they leave this almost as though this neglect is a matter of space in the pages.

But can it really be said that Glen Stassen had more to do with "shaping" Baptist social ethics than Carl Henry? Hardly. And who could assert that Billy Graham's influence on race, Vietnam, the counter-culture, and the relationship between the church and the White House (whether one agrees with how this influence was used or not) is less than that of Jimmy Carter?

Despite these missteps, the book is worth reading by all interested in seeing the intersection between Baptist life and social ethics. A careful reading can remind those of us in the conservative confessional stream of the Baptist tradition of the necessity of judging our social views in light of Scripture as we seek to be in and not of the world around us.

—Russell D. Moore
Dean, School of Theology
Senior Vice President for
Academic Administration
Professor of Theology and Ethics
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Why Johnny Can't Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers. By T. David Gordon. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2009, 108 pp., $9.99 paper.

If you thought you were soon to die and could only write one book, what would it be? T. David Gordon's answer to that question was his jeremiad *Why Johnny Can't Preach*. Gordon penned the volume in 2004 while undergoing eleven months of treatment for cancer and facing a twenty-five percent chance of survival (the cancer is presently in remission). He was not sure if he would live through the year and was driven with a sense of urgency to express thoughts on preaching that he had desired to write for thirty years (10-11).

Gordon presupposes that contemporary preaching is poor and is of the opinion that "less than 30 percent of those who are ordained to the Christian ministry can preach an even mediocre sermon" (11). His critique is focused on conservative evangelical and Reformed churches (his constituency), and while he acknowledges there are great preachers today, his burden is for the average Christian family sitting on the average pew on an average Sunday (14). In 1966, the landmark volume, *Why Johnny Can't Read* (Rudolf Flesh) was published and was followed in 1990 by *Why Johnny Can't Write* (Linden and Whimbey). According to Gordon's argument, *Why Johnny Can't Preach* is the logical corollary, because if Johnny can't read and write then it is just a matter of time until he can't preach.

Gordon cites media studies that demonstrate that the contemporary dominance of image based and electronic media have altered the thinking of American culture, transitioning it away from a typographical based culture. Gordon believes that for preaching, all of the change in this regard has been negative. The volume begins with a chapter that offers an anecdotal argument for the fact that Johnny can't preach. Chapters 2 and 3 unfold Gordon's thesis: Johnny can't preach because he cannot read texts and because he cannot write. In both of these areas he contends that the problem is atrophy.

Fewer people read today than in previous generations; even fewer read literature, and fewer still read verse. Technology has robbed us of much important face-to-face communication and the priority of clear, well composed writing. Inconsequential reading, thoughtless babbling, and text message compositions do not prepare preachers to read the biblical text or to write a sermon for oral proclamation. Gordon perceptively notes that the result of Johnny's inability to read and write is a failure to distinguish the significant from the insignificant (67). This failure is devastating for the task of preaching which is rooted

in recognizing the weighty, the significant, and the consequential. In the fourth chapter, Gordon calls for the content of preaching to be Christ-centered in the tradition of Dabney, Clowney, and Chapell. Most notable is his contention that the *only* key to a return to Christ-centered preaching is learning to read and write so the preacher can regain a sensibility of the significant, therefore realizing nothing is more significant and central than Christ (92).

Gordon believes the situation is desperate but not hopeless for Johnny as a preacher. He argues Johnny should pursue a degree in English literature instead of religion or Bible in his undergraduate studies and read as much pre-twentieth century poetry as possible. He contends that reading verse and great novels can help turn Johnny away from modern tone deafness and toward consequentiality. Gordon also suggests pastors have an annual review and consistently practice composed communication in order to develop pre-homiletical sensibilities.

This is an important book because it directly and passionately uncovers the problem of much contemporary preaching in *conservative* evangelical pulpits. Much of the banal, self-oriented, cliché-ridden, how-to preaching found in evangelical pulpits is not simply a choice of style but the default hermeneutic for a generation who cannot read texts closely or write well ordered compositions. Therefore, the preacher is inhibited in his ability to think through and communicate the significance of the biblical text. Thus talk of the biblical storyline, organic unity, unifying theme, or interpretation and application mediated through Christ is an unknown tongue to many. It is simply easier for some people, it seems, to profess their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible—but then read every passage as though it is all about them, jumping immediately from every text to their lives apart from the mediation of Jesus.

Though Gordon overstates his case at times and admits he is speaking from a particular perspective and not giving "the full story" (10), the essential case he is making is true—and yet it is the very thing that has been left largely unsaid in regard to evangelical preaching today. One minor critique is Gordon's emphasis on English literature and the study of pre-twentieth century poetry for one's ability to render a faithful, close reading of the biblical text, and consequently an accurate preaching of the text by Gordon's standards could smack of a form of academic elitism, at least to some. Gordon undervalues the power of knowing and being saturated with the biblical narrative itself. After all, the Scripture is an amazing collection of diverse genres of literature. Church history is replete with Johnnys who, like the apostles, were formally "uneducated, common men" (Acts 4:13), but who were drenched in biblical texts, were steeped in biblical poetry, and became good writers because of their familiarity with the divinely ordered composition of the Bible. Because they were so familiar with the Bible they knew it possessed a metanarrative that centered on Jesus, and they could preach. Anyone who reads Gordon's book and embraces his central message will be a better preacher as well.

—David E. Prince
Pastor of Preaching and Vision
Ashland Avenue Baptist Church,
Lexington, Kentucky