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*Calvinist, Arminian, and Baptist
Perspectives on Soteriology*



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Calvinist, Arminian, and Baptist Perspectives on Soteriology

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: CALVINIST, ARMINIAN, AND BAPTIST PERSPECTIVES ON SOTERIOLOGY



Steve W. Lemke, Ph.D.

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To oversimplify a bit, Southern Baptists have two theological tributaries flowing into our mainstream – the Arminian-leaning General Baptists and the Calvinist-leaning Particular Baptists. Unto themselves, these tributaries were essentially free-standing streams, independent of each other. The General Baptists were first chronologically, with leaders such as John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, and Thomas Grantham. The name *General* Baptist came from their belief in a *general* atonement – that is, that Christ died for all the people who would respond in faith to Him. These Baptists may not have had access to most or all of Arminius’ works, but they were in agreement with many points of his theology. This theological stream was expressed in doctrinal confessions such as Smyth’s *Short Confession* of 1610, Helwys’ *Declaration of Faith* in 1611, the *Faith and Practices of 30 Congregations* of 1651, and the *Standard Confession* of 1660. The Free Will Baptists and General Baptists are the purest contemporary denominational expressions of this stream of thought.

In contrast, the name of the *Particular* Baptists was derived from the fact that they believed in a *particular* (or *limited*) atonement – that is, Christ died only for particular people, i.e., the elect. Their best known doctrinal confessions were the *1644 London Baptist Confession* (expanded in 1646), the *Second London Confession* of 1689, and the *Philadelphia Confession* (of the Philadelphia Association) in 1742. The *Second London Confession* follows the language of the Reformed *Westminster Confession* verbatim (except at points that even Calvinistic Baptists differ from Presbyterians), and the *Philadelphia Confession* likewise copies the *Second London Confession* almost entirely word for word.

However, when these rather pure General Baptist and Particular Baptist streams flowed together into what would become the Southern Baptist mainstream, the water became a bit muddied. After the Great Awakenings, these older streams were mixed with other tributaries, particularly the revivalistic Separate Baptists (sometimes called the “Sandy Creek tradition”). The result was a conglomeration that was not identical to any of these tributaries. After the Second Great Awakening but long before the Southern Baptist Convention was formed, key

Baptist leader John Leland in 1791 described the theology represented in the best of Baptist pulpits in this way in *A Letter of Valediction on Leaving Virginia*: “I conclude that the eternal purposes of God and the freedom of the human will are both truths, and it is a matter of fact that the preaching that has been most blessed of God and most profitable to men is the doctrine of sovereign grace mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism.”¹

This mixture of Calvinism and Arminianism was expressed doctrinally in the *New Hampshire Confession of 1833*, which moved away from the more Calvinistic language of the *Philadelphia Confession*. The *New Hampshire Confession* became pivotal for Southern Baptist theology in that (a) it was included in even more formative and popular works such as the *Baptist Church Manual* published by J. Newton Brown and the American Baptist Publication Society in 1853, and the best-selling *What Baptists Believe* by O. C. S. Wallace in 1913; (b) it became the doctrinal confession of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at its founding and before the development of the first *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925; and (c) its language and format set the pattern for all three versions of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, and 2000), the official doctrinal confession of the Southern Baptist Convention. The more Calvinistic *Abstract of Principles* was adopted by the founding faculty of Southern Seminary (and later adopted by Southeastern Seminary), but its impact was much less on overall Baptist theology in that (a) the *Abstract* has never been approved as a denominational confession by any national meeting of Southern Baptists³; (b) the *Abstract* is fully satisfying to neither Calvinists nor non-Calvinists, since it embraces no more than four points of traditional Calvinist soteriology³; and (c) it was

¹John Leland, “A Letter of Valediction on Leaving Virginia, 1791,” in *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland*, ed. Louise F. Green (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), 172

²All three SBC seminaries that were founded before the first version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925 (SBTS, SWBTS, and NOBTS) developed or utilized a confession to guide their faculties -- SBTS had the *Abstract of Principles*, and NOBTS had the *Articles of Religious Belief* (each of these developed by the institution's founding faculty), while SWBTS utilized the previously developed *New Hampshire Confession*. After the *Baptist Faith and Message* was approved by the SBC in 1925, SBTS and NOBTS have continued to utilize these confessions that were unique to their institutional history as a secondary confession, and the most recent SBC-adopted version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* as their primary confession. Since the *New Hampshire Confession* was so close in format and wording to the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message*, SWBTS simply used that denominationally approved confession as its own confession. The *Baptist Faith and Message* (the 2000 version for most, the 1963 version for a few) is the primary confession for all six SBC seminaries; for most state conventions, associations, and related entities; and for many SBC-related colleges and universities.

³In the official sesquicentennial history of Southern Seminary, Greg Wills describes the *Abstract* as a four-point Calvinist document, omitting the affirmation of belief in limited or particular atonement. See Greg Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1859-2009)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

evidently a minority doctrinal confession among Southern Baptists both then and now.⁴ The *Baptist Faith and Message* is the standard confession of the Southern Baptist Convention and of all its seminaries, a consensus document which merges these streams together.

This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* will trace how the Arminian and Calvinistic doctrines of soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) helped shape Baptist beliefs today. The first section addresses the (Arminian) General Baptist theology of Thomas Grantham. The paper entitled “Thomas Grantham’s Theology of Atonement and Justification,” was presented by Dr. Matt Pinson, President of Free Will Baptist Bible College, at a Spring 2011 special event sponsored by the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry. Pinson contrasts the General Baptist Grantham’s affirmation of the substitutionary atonement with the view of John Goodwin, who might be described as a Wesleyan Arminian (since Wesley often cited him) and affirmed the governmental view of the atonement. Grantham and Goodwin represent two poles within Arminian theology – Grantham is a Classical or Reformed Arminian, while Goodwin is a Wesleyan Arminian.

The first section also includes the responses of three discussion panel members who interacted with Pinson’s paper at the conference. Clint Bass is an Associate Professor of Church History at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. Bass earned the Th.M. degree from Duke University, and his D.Phil. from Oxford University. He is an expert in the thought of Thomas Grantham, having recently published his doctoral dissertation, *Thomas Grantham and General Baptist Theology*. Jim Leonard is a Visiting Scholar at the H. Milton Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and is a Ph.D. Candidate at St. Edmund’s College of the University of Cambridge. He also serves as Vice President of the Society of Evangelical Arminians. Rhyne Putman has earned the M.Div. and Th.M. degrees from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he is currently completing his Ph.D. dissertation. He serves as an Instructor of Theology at NOBTS. After these responses, Dr. Pinson provides a brief rejoinder to each of these interlocutors.

The second section focuses on Calvinist (or Reformed) and Baptist views of soteriology. The first article in this section is a survey of the doctrine of regeneration in evangelical theology from the Reformation until 1800, authored by Kenneth Stewart. Dr. Stewart is Professor of Historical Studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and is author of the recent well-received book *Ten Myths about Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition*. Heather Kendall applies the Bible’s story line to the doctrine of soteriology, especially Reformed doctrines of soteriology. Ms.

⁴O. C. S. Wallace, whose *What Baptists Believe* sold nearly 200,000 copies before the creation of the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925, an enormous number at that point in Baptist life, was aware of the *Abstract* but chose to use the *New Hampshire Confession* in his article by article doctrinal study because “it is the formula of Christian truth most commonly used as a standard in Baptist churches throughout the country, to express what they believe according to the Scriptures.” See O. C. S. Wallace, *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1913), 4). Wallace included the *Abstract* in an appendix at the end of the book “for helpful comparison and study.” Wallace, 4, 204-208. So, long before the *Baptist Faith and Message* was written, the *Abstract* was not the preferred doctrinal confession of the majority of Baptists, and evidence from LifeWay Research suggests that the same is true today.

Kendall earned an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree from York University, and is a member of New Life Fellowship Baptist Church in Innisfil, Ontario. Glen Shellrude, Professor of New Testament at Alliance Theological Seminary, analyzes New Testament texts that are problematic for Calvinistic theology. In the concluding article, Eric Hankins, Pastor of First Baptist Church in Oxford, Mississippi, proposes a Baptist soteriology that is something of a *via media* between Calvinist and Arminian doctrines, based on the belief that the biblical notion of election is more nearly corporate election than the election of individual believers. We express our appreciation for each of these who have contributed articles to this issue of the *Journal*.

We would point your attention to three additional items. First of all, we hope you'll read the poem memorializing Dr. Alan Day, a fellow of the Baptist Center and for 25 years Pastor of First Baptist Church in Edmund, Oklahoma, who suffered an untimely death in an accident. You can get a touch of Dr. Day's heart in his [2001 Founder's Day Address](#) at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, posted on the Baptist Center website. A poem remembering Dr. Day, in our "Reflections" section, is contributed by Clay Corvin. Second, we commend to you some excellent book reviews by our reviewers. Thirdly, as always, we appreciate Joe McKeever's cartoons.

You'll note that this issue 8.1 of the *Journal* is labeled "Spring 2011." We apologize again for being behind our normal publishing schedule, but we are making a concerted effort to catch up within a few months. The Fall 2010 issue (7.2) came out just a few weeks ago, and we anticipate that the Fall 2011 issue (8.2) will be published in about a month. This Fall 2011 issue will be a *festschrift* in honor of Dr. Dan Holcomb, Senior Professor of Church History at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Holcomb announced his retirement this year, and our next issue will feature a series of articles about three areas of his great expertise – church history, culture, and the church. We believe you will enjoy this issue. We then hope to release the Spring 2012 issue at the normally scheduled time. The focus of the Spring issue will be how Christians interact with the government in the public square through activities such as chaplaincy and faith-based benevolent ministries.

Thank you for your readership of the *Journal*. Let us remind you that the Baptist Center web site (<http://www.baptistcenter.com/>) has many other resources that might be useful to you, including historic Baptist confessions, rare early writings of Baptists and other post-Reformation Christians, back issues of the *Journal*, and white papers on subjects of interest -- all indexed for your convenience. If you are interested in interaction on subjects of interest to Baptists, we would also recommend that you check out the daily articles and comments in the *SBC Today* blog (<http://sbctoday.com>). We hope that you find these resources to be helpful for your ministry.

Thank you again for your support of the Baptist Center and for the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*!

Steve W. Lemke, Editor
Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry

GREER HEARD

POINT-COUNTERPOINT FORUM



Dialogue Participants:



Gary Habermas

Dr. Gary Habermas is Distinguished Research Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Theology at Liberty University. He holds a PhD in History and Philosophy of Religion from Michigan State University as well as an MA in Philosophical Theology from the University of Detroit. His main areas of research include the philosophical study of miracles, near-death experiences, the historical Jesus, and the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Habermas has authored or co-edited over thirty books including *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* (2004), *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope* (2003), and *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality* (1998).



Michael Shermer

is the Founding Publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, the Executive Director of the Skeptics Society, a monthly columnist for *Scientific American*, the host of the Skeptics Distinguished Science Lecture Series at Caltech, and Adjunct Professor at Claremont Graduate University. His many books include *Why Darwin Matters: The Case Against Intelligent Design* (2007), *How We Believe: Science, Skepticism, and the Search for God* (2000), and *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time* (2002).

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PART I

**THOMAS GRANTHAM'S
VIEW OF SALVATION**



And He Himself is the propitiation
for our sins, and not for ours only but
also for the whole world.

1 John 2:2

THOMAS GRANTHAM'S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION



J. Matthew Pinson, Ed.D.

*Dr. Pinson is President of Free Will Baptist Bible College
in Nashville, Tennessee.*

Introduction

Thomas Grantham, the foremost English General Baptist of the latter half of the seventeenth century, is the quintessential representative of Arminian Baptist theology, combining classical Arminian soteriology with a distinctly Baptist view of church and state.¹ To say, however, that Grantham's or his General Baptist contemporaries' soteriology was Arminian requires much qualification. This is not because it differed exceedingly from Arminius's own soteriology, but because of the shape Arminian theology took in the early part of the seventeenth century and in the centuries that followed. A study of Grantham's theology of the atonement and justification serves not only to enable one to understand the nuances of that unique Arminian Baptist stream of theology, but also to help one grasp the diversity of Arminianism (or, as some have quipped, "Arminianisms"²) as a theological phenomenon.

To study Grantham's views in the context of the whole of Arminian theology prior to him would be a daunting task.³ But to examine them in the context of a representative English

¹The English General Baptists are the forefathers of those now known as Free Will Baptists. The early Free Will Baptists in the American South were influenced by Grantham's *Christianismus Primitivus*, and their confession of faith was the *Standard Confession, 1660*, which Grantham delivered to King Charles II in 1660 and which he reprinted with annotations in *Christianismus Primitivus*.

²See J. I. Packer, "Arminianisms," in *The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, vol. 4, (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999). In his insightful essay, Packer is right to posit several "Arminianisms," and to see the differences between Remonstrant and Wesleyan Arminianism. However, he posits all Arminianism as having rejected the doctrine of a penal satisfaction view of atonement and justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone.

³The purpose of this essay is not to discuss the five points of Calvinism or the five articles of the Remonstrance, but rather to point up the divergencies that can and do occur within Arminianism. It will be assumed, for the purposes of this essay, that all Arminians disagree with at least the last four of the five points of Calvinism: unconditional election, particular atonement, irresistible grace, and the unconditional perseverance of the saints.

Arminian in the half-century that preceded Grantham would serve at least two purposes. It would not only uncover Grantham's unique middle ground between orthodox Calvinism and what has come to be known as Arminianism since the time of Arminius, but it would also serve as a starting point for the discussion of doctrinal Arminianism in the seventeenth and succeeding centuries. Thus this study will comprise an exposition of Grantham's doctrines of atonement and justification with reference to John Goodwin (d. 1665), the Arminian Puritan.⁴

Thomas Grantham

Thomas Grantham was born in 1634 in Halton, near Spilsby, in eastern Lincolnshire, the son of a farmer and tailor.⁵ Grantham made his living, like his father, as a tailor and farmer. Grantham recalled that the "Lord wrought faith and repentance" in his heart when he was around fourteen or fifteen years of age, and at age nineteen (1653), he joined a small General Baptist church in Boston, Lincolnshire, and was baptized by immersion, as had been the practice of the General Baptists since approximately 1640. Three years after his baptism, in 1656, Grantham was chosen as pastor, which involved him in preaching in his own town as well as neighboring villages. This activity brought persecution upon Grantham and others.

In 1660, after the restoration of the monarchy, Grantham and a fellow believer, Joseph Wright, presented a plea for toleration to King Charles II. This plea included a statement of General Baptist loyalty to the crown as well as a confession of faith, which later become known as *The Standard Confession, 1660*. (Grantham subsequently reprinted it with annotations in his *Christianismus Primitivus*.) The crown was not receptive, and many General Baptist leaders soon found themselves imprisoned. Grantham himself was in and out of jail during the 1660s, which occasioned his tract *The Prisoner Against the Prelate* (1662). In 1666 he was elected a messenger "by the consent of many congregations, and ordained . . . by those who were in the same office before [him]," in essence a roving minister who helped plant churches, gave counsel to local churches and associations, and

⁴The best general treatment of Grantham is Clint C. Bass's masterful monograph, *Thomas Grantham (1633-1692) and General Baptist Theology* (Oxford, UK: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2012). The general nature of his book does not permit his delving into Grantham's thought on atonement, which is the chief concern of this essay. However, he correctly understands that Grantham viewed justification as the imputation of the active and passive obedience of Christ to the believer (see pp. 169-71). While I think Bass misinterprets Grantham as having a more optimistic anthropology than he actually does regarding human reason, depravity, and free will (see pp. 151-64), Bass is quick to note significant differences between Grantham and the other Arminians of his day. I believe that, despite Grantham's anti-predestinarianism, his anthropology is quite pessimistic, like Arminius's, and closer to the Reformed thought of his day than to that of most other Arminians. Despite these nuances, Bass's volume is stellar.

⁵The biographical information in the next three paragraphs is based on Samuel Edward Hester, "Advancing Christianity to Its Primitive Excellency: The Quest of Thomas Grantham, Early English General Baptist (1634-1692)" (Th.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1977), 9-32.

assisted in the ordination of ministers. Grantham then began to establish himself as an author, debater, and pamphleteer. He debated Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Quakers, Presbyterians, and Particular Baptists, and gained a reputation as an able and articulate spokesman for the General Baptists. His most monumental work was *Christianismus Primitivus, or, the Ancient Christian Religion*, published in 1678, of which the eminent General Baptist historian Adam Taylor said: “From the universal approbation it received, [it] may be considered almost a public document.”⁶ In this massive work, Grantham aimed to restore primitive Christianity, which he said had been abused and neglected for centuries. Like Grantham’s other works, *Christianismus Primitivus* is the product of a well read theologian who cited numerous contemporary authors but relied primarily on the Bible and the church fathers.

Grantham’s work as an author and messenger made him the foremost leader of the General Baptists in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and he also gained the respect of many outside the General Baptist community. He died on January 17, 1692. Grantham was to be buried in the yard of St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Norwich. Upon rumors that the body would be dug up, John Connould, the vicar of St. Stephen’s, with whom Grantham had previously debated and become friends, had Grantham’s body interred “before the West Doors, in the Middle Aisle” of the building. Connould conducted the burial service. A plaque in the General Baptist chapel in Norwich contains the following inscription:

When at closing the Book he [Connould] added
This day is a very great man fallen in our Israel:
For after their epistolary dispute in sixty letters, ended
That very learned Vicar retained,
The highest esteem and friendship for him while living,
And was at his own desire buried by him, May MDCCVIII.

Grantham’s theology can accurately be described as Arminian because it was strikingly similar to the soteriology of Jacobus Arminius. But Grantham was not fond of the label “Arminian,” just as he did not like the title “Anabaptist,” not because he was unsympathetic with either of these doctrinal positions, but because of the negative connotations attached to these names. While “Anabaptist” conjured up images of raving revolutionaries at Munster, “Arminian” invoked notions of semi-pelagianism (if not outright Pelagianism),⁷ works-righteousness, synergism, Romanism, rationalism, and even Socinianism. Grantham lamented that he was accused of

⁶Cited in David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1850), 334.

⁷For a discussion of the Pelagian tendencies John Smyth took from the Dutch Waterlander Mennonites, and which Thomas Helwys rejected, see J. Matthew Pinson, “Sin and Redemption in the Theology of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys,” (paper presented at the Theological Symposium of the Commission for Theological Integrity, National Association of Free Will Baptists, 2004), 13-29. Cf. Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1977).

preaching “Arminianism, the life and Soul of Popery.” Yet in another place, in a polemic against the “dangerous and impious Doctrines of those of Calvin’s Way,” he asserted the “purity of the Doctrine of those called Arminians, concerning the sinful Acts of Men.”⁸

Grantham had read many contemporary Calvinist and Arminian theologians, including John Goodwin, but his General Baptist soteriology was unique among the thinkers of his day. He differed from the Calvinists in his doctrines of election, the extent of atonement, the resistibility of grace, and the perseverance of the saints. On these subjects he agreed with his fellow Arminians. Yet he differed substantially with his Arminian counterparts on the doctrines of sin and depravity, human inability, the nature of atonement and justification by faith, and what was involved in falling from grace. Grantham stridently avoided a semi-pelagianism that would take the focus off the sovereign grace of God and place it on humanity’s own merit. Hence he differed from traditional Reformed theology in his view of predestination and the resistibility of grace, but not in his understanding of how redemption is accomplished by God in Christ and applied to the believer.

An examination of Grantham’s similarities with Calvinism and his differences with the Arminianism of his day defies the contrived classifications usually assigned to Protestant soteriological positions and gives one insight into the complexities of soteriological thought in the post-Reformation period. Consequently, it moves beyond the simplistic “Calvinism-Arminianism” debate so often discussed in studies of historical theology.

John Goodwin

The distinctiveness of Grantham’s soteriology becomes most evident when contrasted with that of the better known English Arminian, John Goodwin.⁹ While Grantham and Goodwin were both known as Arminians, they were far apart on many issues. Grantham was more radical than Goodwin on matters of ecclesiology, yet Goodwin moved much further from Calvinist orthodoxy than Grantham did. Goodwin was the chief advocate of what has been referred to as the “New Arminianism” or “Radical Arminianism” which took root during the Cromwellian era. Though some scholars have assumed that Goodwin’s soteriology exerted great influence over other Arminian sectaries, such as the General Baptists, a comparison of the thought of Grantham and Goodwin demonstrates the inaccuracy of this assumption.¹⁰

⁸Thomas Grantham, *A Dialogue Between the Baptist and the Presbyterian* (London, 1691), 27; *The Infants Advocate* (London, 1688), 2.

⁹The best treatment of Goodwin is John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2006).

¹⁰Cf. Ellen More, “John Goodwin and the Origins of the New Arminianism,” *The Journal of British Studies* 22 (Fall 1982), 52.

Goodwin was educated at Queens' College, Cambridge, and had by 1633 become vicar of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London. By this time, Goodwin had become an Independent, under the influence of John Cotton, and from his pulpit at St. Stephen's, Goodwin proclaimed his gospel of nonconformity combined with Arminianism. Precisely when Goodwin embraced anti-Calvinism is a matter of debate, but his magisterial *Imputatio Fidei* (1642) betrayed an understanding of atonement and justification that had moved a great distance from Reformed orthodoxy and even beyond Arminius himself and was much like that of Hugo Grotius. If Goodwin was not a full-blown Arminian when he wrote *Imputatio Fidei*, he was certainly thought to be one by the more strident Calvinists of the period. Indeed, Thomas Edwards, in his *Gangraena* (1646), described Goodwin as "a monstrous sectary, a compound of Socinianism, Arminianism, antinomianism, independency, popery, yea and of scepticism."¹¹ At any rate, Goodwin outlined a fully-developed anti-Calvinism in his 1651 work, *Redemption Redeemed*.¹²

Goodwin is best known as a controversialist, in matters not only theological and ecclesial, but also political. As the historian Edmund Calamy said, Goodwin "was a man by himself, was against every man, and had every man against him."¹³ Goodwin's ecclesiological stance was radical enough to result in his ejection from his living in May 1645 for refusing to administer infant baptism indiscriminately. (Though he continued to serve a gathered congregation at Coleman Street). His political views were perhaps even more radical. These opinions were reflected in such works as *Anti-Cavalierisme* (1642) and *Ossorianum* (1643), which attacked the divine right of kings. He was a stringent supporter of Cromwell, and he applauded Pride's Purge in a 1648 work, *Right and Might Well Met*. Because of his political affiliations, Goodwin was arrested in June of 1660 but was soon exonerated. He continued his activity as a vibrant preacher and prolific writer until his death in 1665.

Goodwin's legacy to later Arminian theology was mediated through John Wesley. Wesley, who made positive numerous references to Goodwin in his works, republished Goodwin's *Imputatio Fidei* in 1765. Goodwin probably had more influence on Wesley's doctrine of justification in the last thirty years of Wesley's life than any other single thinker, as is evidenced by his preface to Goodwin's treatise.¹⁴

¹¹*Dictionary of National Biography*, 22.145.

¹²A new edition of this work was recently published: John Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement*, ed. John Wagner (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

¹³*Dictionary of National Biography*, 22.146.

¹⁴Goodwin's influence on Wesley, though profound, seems to be later in his life. His earlier influences seem to be more from Anglican Arminianism, including authors such as Jeremy Taylor and William Cave, as well as Hugo Grotius. For more on Wesley's doctrine of atonement and justification, see J. Matthew Pinson, "Atonement, Justification, and Apostasy in the Thought of John Wesley." *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* 4 (2008): 73-92.

Grantham on Atonement and Justification

It goes without saying that Grantham and Goodwin, as Arminians, held fervently to a general atonement; this theme resounds throughout both men's works. Grantham, for example, argues:

When we are bid to behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the Sins of the World, John I. 29. Are we to except any Person in the World, or the greatest part of the World? God forbid. Are they all become guilty *per force* (except *Adam*) and have none to justify them? Where is then the *Lamb*? Behold here is Fire, the Wood, and the Knife, but where is the Sacrifice, may many say, if indeed the Lamb of God died not for them? But the Holy Ghost resolves the Query to the full, I John 2. 2. *He is the Propitiation for our Sins, and not for ours only, but also the for Sins of the whole World.*¹⁵

The crucial differences between Grantham and other English Arminians of his day arose, not with regard to the extent of the atonement, but rather with respect to the nature of the atonement, and, consequently, the character of justification. Grantham aligned himself with the Reformers and with Arminius.¹⁶

As a Reformed theologian, Arminius had taught that God must punish sin with eternal death unless one meets the requirement of total righteousness. God is portrayed as a judge who must sentence individuals to eternal death if they do not meet his righteous requirements. In typical Reformed fashion, Arminius employed the analogy of “a judge making an estimate in his own mind of the deed and of the author of it, and according to that estimate forming a judgment and pronouncing sentence.”¹⁷ The sentence pronounced on the sinner who cannot meet the requirements of God's justice is eternal death. Yet, since no one has this righteousness, it must originate from someone else. It can come only from Christ, who undergoes the penalty for sin on the cross, paying “the price of redemption for sins by suffering the punishment due to them.”¹⁸ For Arminius, this emphasis on justice does not militate against God's mercy, as some later Arminians held. God never had to offer Christ for the redemption of humanity in the first place. If God had not made a way of satisfaction for his justice (through mercy), *then*, Arminius says, humanity would have truly been judged according to God's “severe and rigid estimation.”¹⁹ This view has been called the penal satisfaction theory of atonement, and these were Grantham's sentiments exactly.

¹⁵Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* (London, 1678), Book II, 63.

¹⁶For more on Arminius's theology of atonement and justification, see J. Matthew Pinson, “The Nature of Atonement in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53 (2010): 173-85; and J. Matthew Pinson, “Will The Real Arminius Please Stand Up? A Study of the Theology of Jacobus Arminius in Light of His Interpreters,” *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* 2 (2003): 121–39.

¹⁷Jacobus Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius* (Nashville: Randall House, 2007), 2:256.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 1:419.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

Grantham's doctrine of atonement is rooted in his perspective on the justice and righteousness of God. Grantham believed that God's righteousness is not merely something to be posited of him but is in his essence as God. Justice is "essential to him . . . without which he would cease to be God."²⁰ While justice and righteousness in human beings is "mutable," not being a part of their being or essence, in God, "to be righteous, is the same as to be God, and therefore he is called Righteousness itself, *the Lord our Righteousness*. Like as it is said, *God dwelleth in the Light*, so it is as truly said, *That God is Light, and in him is no Darkness at all*, I John I. 5."²¹

God's essential justice evidences itself in the righteous "Judgment which he executeth" against people for their sin.²² According to Grantham, an accurate understanding of God's justice and righteousness enables one to see the serious nature of sin, the intensity of divine wrath against it, and the necessity that it be punished. When one comprehends the chasm between God's justice and righteousness and humanity's sinfulness, and the latter's "dreadful Nature and Effects," only then can one understand the need for atonement and for the gospel.²³ "To see Sin to be exceeding sinful," Grantham avers, "is an excellent Introduction to Christianity, and so necessary, that the internal part thereof is not rightly founded without it."²⁴

Grantham understands the need for atonement in the context of the "condemning Power and Curse of the Law" over sinners.²⁵ "The whole World stands Guilty" before the law, which makes it "subject to the judgment of God."²⁶ Grantham distinguishes between two sorts of righteousness: human beings' own futile attempts to obey the law and the "Righteousness of God." In this vein he cites Philippians 3.9 and Romans 3.21: "*And be found in him, not having on my own Righteousness which is of the Law, but that which is through the Faith of Christ, the Righteousness which is of God by Faith*. Again, *The Righteousness of God without the Law, is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*."²⁷ Since people were unable to fulfill the

²⁰*Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, 46.

²¹*Ibid.*, 46-47.

²²*Ibid.*, 46.

²³*Ibid.*, 80.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*, 62. Grantham states that Christ's death was "the Punishment due for our Sin, with the condemning Power and Curse of the Law" (62).

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*, 67. "So then, we see there is a Law, by which the whole World stands Guilty; and upon that account subject to the judgment of God" (*Ibid.*, 62).

law, Christ fulfilled it for them. He “cancelled the Law, which stood as an hand-writing against us, and was contrary to us, nailing it to the Cross of Christ. And hath manifested, or shewed forth a way to be made Righteous, without the Law; yea, by which we may be justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the Law.”²⁸ According to Grantham, the only way to keep the handwriting of the law from being held against believers was for Christ to fulfill the law in their place: “Nor can I see to what end Christ did so exactly fulfil the Law, if he did it not for us, or in our stead: and so is the end of the Law for Righteousness to every one that believeth, Rom. 10. For though it is true, he was born under the Law, and so stood bound to keep the Law, yet for our sakes he was so born; and so consequently all that he did in that capacity, was on our account also, as well as his Sufferings.”²⁹

In *St. Paul's Catechism*, Grantham, in a discussion of justification, explains the nature of atonement to clarify why the righteousness of Christ must be imputed to individuals for them to be justified. His reasoning is almost identical to that of Arminius: “God having made a Righteous Law, it must be fulfilled; and none was able to do this but Christ, and he did fulfil it in our behalf. *Heb. 10.5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Psal. 4.5, 6, 7.* and thus the Righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in the Children of God, because Christ's righteousness is made theirs through believing. *Rom. 10.3, 4. Phil 3.9.*”³⁰ Grantham taught that, since no one could satisfy God the judge's requirement of absolute righteousness, the only way for individuals to be freed from the penalty of sin and justified before God was for God to provide a righteousness by which people could be saved and to suffer the penalty for their sins. “The justice of God cried against us for Sin committed; and Sin must be purged by the Blood of Christ; He bare our sins, that is, the punishment of our Sins, in his own Body on the Tree, I Pet. 2.24.”³¹

Grantham summarized his theology of atonement in the title of Section V in book two, chapter three of *Christianismus Primitivus*, which reads, “According to the Will of God, and his Eternal Wisdom, Christ did, in the place and stead of Mankind, fulfil that Law, by which the whole World stood guilty before God.”³² In this section Grantham explained “how deeply Mankind stood indebted to the Righteous God of Heaven and Earth, and how unable he was to pay that score; and how consequently he must inevitably undergo the eternal displeasure of God, with the malediction of his

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid. In typical Reformed fashion, Grantham comments that Christ's fulfillment of the Law does not take away the responsibility of his people to submit to it and conform to it (Ibid.).

³⁰Thomas Grantham, *St. Paul's Catechism: Or, A Brief Explication of the Six Principles of the Christian Religion, as recorded Heb. 6.1,2* (London, 1687), 28.

³¹Ibid.

³²Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, 62.

Righteous Law.”³³ Humanity is subject to the harsh judgment and wrath of God, says Grantham, on account of “fall[ing] short” of the Law of God. Yet God in his wisdom has “designed to magnifie his Mercy in Christ, as the only Physician to Cure the Malady of Mankind,” providing a

Plaister commensurable with the Sore, that none may cry out and say, I am undone, I am wounded with the unavoidable wound of Mankind: And there is no Balm for me, the Physician hath made the Plaister so narrow, that Thousands, and ten Thousands, cannot possibly have Healing by it; nay, he hath determined to see us perish without Remedy. Alas! there is none to save us, neither could we come whole and sound into the World; we are born to be destroyed, and destroyed we must be. To quell which hideous (and indeed most just) complaint . . . we are bid to behold the Lamb of God.³⁴

Christ, the Lamb of God, is the only individual who can “pay the score” or the debt of sin that men and women have accrued to God.

Because, for Grantham, the essence of the atonement is Christ’s fulfilling the law and taking on himself “the Punishment due for our Sin,”³⁵ he goes into great depth eschewing a moral influence view of atonement, which was popular among the Socinians of his day. “How it cometh to pass, that any should take the Righteousness of Christ’s Performances, or actual Obedience, to be designed by God only as an excellent Pattern, or Examble to Men, is not easie to conceive.”³⁶ One can see between the lines of Grantham’s discussion an interaction with the merit-theology of the Council of Trent. Christ alone can be called our righteousness, Grantham argues, not the saints. Yet if the righteousness of Christ consists merely in his being our example or pattern, then the saints’ pattern or example could suffice. “Now if Christ should be called our Righteousness only because he is our Pattern,” Grantham argued, “he alone could not be called our Pattern; and consequently, he alone would not be called our Righteousness. But seeing Christ, and Christ alone, may truly be said to be our Righteousness, Jer. 23. 6. We must therefore look upon his Righteousness to be of far greater Concernment to us, than the Righteousness of the most holy Saint that ever yet lived.”³⁷ Grantham believed that it is “easie to demonstrate the Transcendent Advantages that accrue to us from his Righteousness, and from his only: For where are we bid to look to the Saints for Righteousness? Or where are they said to be made of God unto us Righteousness? But unto Christ we are thus directed. . . .”³⁸

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 63.

³⁵Ibid., 62.

³⁶Ibid., 66.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid. “Thus then the whole World being found guilty before God, could not, by any Righteousness which they have done, lift themselves out of that state of Sin and Misery; wherefore God, in the greatness of his love to Mankind, hath laid help upon One that is mighty to save; who brings near his Righteousness, to

Grantham held that there are two aspects of atonement, passive and active obedience. Passive obedience refers to Christ's submission to the wrath of God for the sins of humanity—the satisfaction of the penalty for sin—while active obedience refers to Christ's satisfaction of the justice of God in meeting the standards of God's righteous law. Christ obeys God the Father passively through his death on the cross to satisfy the penalty for the violation of God's law. Christ obeys God the Father actively by fulfilling the righteous law in a sinless life. Grantham noted that “it is true, he was born under the Law, and so stood bound to keep the Law, yet for our sakes he was so born; and consequently all that he did in that capacity [active obedience], was on our account also, as well as his Sufferings [passive obedience]: For the Transgressions committed against the Law, was he crucified in our place and stead.”³⁹

Grantham's penal satisfaction theology of atonement resulted in a penal satisfaction doctrine of justification like that of Reformed thought common in seventeenth-century England. This view of justification held that believing sinners are justified by the merit of Christ alone imputed to them through faith alone. This was also Arminius's doctrine of justification, namely that the righteousness of Christ is “made ours by gracious imputation.”⁴⁰

Grantham explained in *St. Paul's Catechism* that there are two kinds of righteousness, the one “imputative,” the other “practical.” The first, he said, “is called the *Righteousness of God*, Mat. 6.33. or *God's Righteousness*, Rom. 10.3.” This is “a Righteousness to us *without the Law*. . . . It is the Righteousness of Christ, who is the Lord our Righteousness, *Isa. 45.24, 25. Christ made of God unto us Righteousness*, I Cor.1.30.”⁴¹ This imputative righteousness is to be sharply distinguished from practical righteousness. Grantham describes practical righteousness as “a comely, yea, and a necessary Ornament.” Yet he goes on to say that practical righteousness “is not so immediately signified” as imputative righteousness, because the latter is “said to be *granted to the Saints*,” whereas practical righteousness “is acquired by Industry.”⁴² Practical righteousness, for Grantham, is associated with sanctification, and hence is progressive in nature, while imputative righteousness is the righteousness that justifies believers. Since people cannot by their own works of righteousness justify themselves, they can be justified only by the righteousness of God in Christ:

those that were far from Righteousness, that in him they might have Righteousness through Faith; though in themselves there is too much demerit, to bear the Appellation of Righteousness” (Ibid., 67).

³⁹Ibid., 68.

⁴⁰Arminius, 2:256-57, 406.

⁴¹Grantham, *St. Paul's Catechism*, 28.

⁴²Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, 68.

That God imputes Righteousness to Men without Works, is so plain, that it can never be denied. What is thus imputed, is not acted by us, but expressly reckoned as a matter of free Gift, or Grace; and this can be the Righteousness of none but Christ . . . because no other way can the Righteousness of God be made ours. . . . There is none righteous, no not one. Except therefore the Righteousness of Christ be laid hold on, there is no Righteousness to be imputed to Sinners.⁴³

Grantham's theory of active and passive obedience as essential aspects of the atonement is brought directly to bear on his doctrine of justification: "Now whether the Passive Righteousness of Christ only, or his Active Righteousness also, be that which is imputed to Sinners, is doubtful to some; but for my part I take it to be both. . . . The whole Righteousness of Christ, Active and Passive, is reckoned as ours through believing."⁴⁴ Grantham referred to the active and passive obedience of Christ imputed to believers as "that fine Linnen, white and clean, which arrayeth the Church of God, *Rev.* 19. 7. And the best Robe which God puts upon returning Sinners, *Luke* 15."⁴⁵

Grantham strove to distance himself from an emphasis on good works as a contributor to salvation, approaches that the Reformed were quick to decry, not only in Roman Catholic authors, but also in Arminian, Anabaptist, Quaker, and Socinian writers. Believers' justification rests wholly in their in-Christ status, without regard to their own works or merit: "We must therefore in no wise place our Justification in our Repentance," he wrote, "For that were to place our Justification from the guilt and condemning Power of Sin, in our Duty, and not in Christ Jesus."⁴⁶

A key element in Grantham's doctrine of justification is identification with Christ. Grantham argued that Christ identified with the believer in the atonement, and that through faith the believer identifies with Christ.⁴⁷ Grantham preached that the individual who exercises saving faith is brought into union with Christ, and is hence identified with Christ. In this identification, the active obedience of Christ becomes the active obedience of the believer, and the death of Christ, the payment of the penalty for sin, becomes the death of the believer. In turn, the believer's sin becomes Christ's. As Grantham explains, "Christ was made Sin for us only by imputation, for he had no Sin; and as he was made Sin, so are

⁴³Ibid., 67.

⁴⁴Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵Ibid., 67-68

⁴⁶Grantham, *St. Paul's Catechism*, 22.

⁴⁷In Anselmian fashion, Grantham emphasized that God had to identify with humanity to atone for sin. Even angels could not atone for humanity's sin. Atonement required someone who was both divine and human, a being with a "Divine Nature" who could "sympathize with the Human Nature in his Sufferings for us" (*Christianismus Primitivus*, 62).

we made the Righteousness of God in him, which must needs be by the free Imputation of his Righteousness to us.”⁴⁸

Thus, for Grantham, justification is completely *by* the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, apprehended *through* faith; Christ’s righteousness is the *ground* of justification, and faith is the *condition*. Against the Roman Catholics on one hand and many Arminians on the other, Grantham’s hallmark was *sola fide*: not by our works, but by God’s gracious imputation of the righteousness of Christ which is ours through faith.⁴⁹

Goodwin on Atonement and Justification

Because most Arminian theology has taught a less robust view of the nature of atonement and justification than Grantham’s penal satisfaction, it is instructive to contrast Grantham’s views with those of the more influential Arminian John Goodwin. As intimated earlier, Goodwin’s views on atonement and justification may be said to be more influential on the subsequent Arminian movement because Wesley re-published *Imputatio Fidei* and was heavily influenced by Goodwin’s thought. Grantham’s more reformed Arminian approach, by contrast, survived only in the smaller General-Free Will Baptist tradition.

Goodwin’s doctrines of atonement and justification differ extensively from Grantham’s. Goodwin bears the influence of Hugo Grotius’s governmental theory of atonement, which held that God could freely pardon sinners without any satisfaction for the violation of divine law, because such a pardon was within God’s discretion as governor or sovereign.⁵⁰ Thus the sacrifice of Christ is accepted by God as governor or ruler rather than as judge. The death of Christ, in this view, is a symbol of the punishment sin may induce. God uses this symbol as a deterrent. The penalty for sin is thereby set aside rather than paid. Therefore, upon faith, the believer is pardoned as a governor would pardon a guilty criminal, and all past sins are forgotten.

Goodwin articulated such a view of atonement and justification in *Imputatio Fidei*, a book of over four hundred pages the sole purpose of which was to disprove the doctrine that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers for their eternal acceptance with God. Goodwin’s disavowal

⁴⁸Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book II, 68.

⁴⁹Although scholars have historically held this understanding of atonement and justification to be the domain of strict, orthodox Calvinism, Grantham and the General Baptists held to such a view. Even Richard Baxter, who has been described as a “mild Calvinist,” rejected the penal satisfaction theory of atonement and the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ through faith. Revisionists such as R. T. Kendall and Alan C. Clifford argue that Calvin and Luther, contrary to received opinion, did not subscribe to the penal satisfaction theory of atonement and its attending doctrine of justification. Ironically, this was also the view of John Goodwin. R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979); Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

⁵⁰Grotius also influenced Richard Baxter and John Tillotson with his governmental view of atonement.

of the penal satisfaction theory of atonement is unabashed. He argues, “The sentence or curse of the *Law*, was not properly executed upon *Christ* in his death, but this death of *Christ* was a ground or consideration unto *God*, whereupon to dispence with his *Law*, and to let fall or suspend the execution of the penalty or curse therein threatened.”⁵¹ Whereas Grantham’s whole explanation for *cur Deus homo* is to meet the demands of the “Righteous Law of God,” Goodwin’s reason for Christ’s coming was so that God could dispense with his law. Not until God dispensed with his law, said Goodwin, could he pardon men and women and forgive their sins: “But God in spareing and forbearing the transgressors (who according to the tenor of the *Law* should have bin punished) manifestly dispenceth with the *Law*, and doth not execute it.”⁵² It was not absolutely necessary, according to Goodwin, for Christ to die on the cross to pardon sinners, but it was the method that God in his government chose. Goodwin explains:

Neither did *God* require the death and sufferings of Christ as a valuable consideration whereon to dispence with his *Law* towards those that beleeve, more (if so much) in a way of satisfaction to his justice, than to his wisdom. For (doubtlesse) *God* might with as much justice, as wisdom (if not much more) have passed by the transgression of his *Law* without consideration or satisfaction. For him that hath the lawfull authority and power, either to impose a *Law*, or not, in case he shall impose it, it rather concerns in point of wisdom and discretion, not to see his *Law* despised and trampled upon without satisfaction, then in point of justice.⁵³

Christ’s death was for Goodwin, therefore, an exhibition of public justice, not a penal satisfaction, as Grantham held.

Goodwin roots his doctrine of justification in his perspective on atonement. Inasmuch as God can, in his government, set aside the penalty for sin since it does not of necessity have to be suffered, God can freely forgive the believer, and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is not necessary. Nor is it desirable, for to impute Christ’s righteousness to the believer would be to admit that God did not set aside the demands of the law after all. Thus Goodwin concluded that justification consists primarily in the forgiveness or remission of sins (the nonimputation of sins).⁵⁴ Goodwin maintained that “the Scriptures constantly speake of this act of God justifying a sinner, not as of such an act whereby he will either make him or pronounce him legally just, or declare him not to have offended the Law, and hereupon justifie him; but of such an act, whereby he freely forgives him all that he hath done against the Law, and acquits him from all blame and punishment due by the Law.”⁵⁵

⁵¹Goodwin, *Imputatio Fidei*, part 2, 33.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 34-35.

⁵⁴Ibid., 177.

⁵⁵Ibid., part 1, 3.

As a consequence of his doctrine of atonement, Goodwin asserted that it would be erroneous to posit that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, for this would be admitting that God's free acquittal or pardon of the sinner is not enough. Thus Goodwin spends the entire first part of his book arguing against the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. It is not his righteousness that is credited or imputed to the believer, but faith is counted as righteousness.⁵⁶

Incidentally, Arminius had argued that the Pauline phrase "faith counted for righteousness" is fully compatible with the notion of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to believers. Arminius's enemies had charged him with teaching that "the righteousness of Christ is not imputed to us for righteousness, but to believe (or the act of believing) justifies us."⁵⁷ Arminius replied that he never said that the act of faith justifies a person. He held that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer and that our faith is imputed for righteousness. He believed both views were held by St. Paul: "I say that I acknowledge, 'The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us,' because I think the same thing is contained in the following words of the Apostle, 'God hath made Christ to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.' . . . It is said in the third verse [of Romans 4], 'Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness.' . . . Our brethren therefore do not reprehend ME, but the APOSTLE."⁵⁸

Goodwin's emphasis, in the last analysis, was on God's freedom to dispense with the law and freely pardon or forgive the sinner. The doctrines of atonement and justification are the most apparent disparity between Grantham's and Goodwin's types of Arminianism. The most practical difference is that, for Grantham, salvation consists totally in Christ's righteousness, whereas for Goodwin, it hinges on the individual's faith.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The essence of the disparity between Grantham and Goodwin lay in their respective understandings of the gravity of sin and the nature of divine justice. Grantham viewed sin as such an egregious violation of divine holiness that God, out of justice, must punish it. Goodwin, on the contrary, believed that the law of God (divine justice) "may be relaxed without contradiction to the

⁵⁶Ibid., 14.

⁵⁷Arminius, 2:42.

⁵⁸Ibid., 2:43-45.

⁵⁹This distinction has dramatic consequences for the doctrines of sanctification and the perseverance of the saints.

divine nature.”⁶⁰ Goodwin would have heartily agreed with Grotius’s statement that “the law is not something internal with God or the will of God itself, but only an effect of that will. It is perfectly certain that the effects of the divine will are mutable,”⁶¹ or that divine law is promulgated by God as “a positive law which at some time he may wish to relax.”⁶² This is why, as Goodwin stated, God could “dispense with his Law” in pardoning sinners.

Grantham would hear nothing of this. For him, the law of God is a necessary outcome of the divine nature, not simply an effect of the divine will. For Grantham, God’s holiness demands intolerance of sin. God’s holy nature necessarily repels sin. Consequently, divine wrath is not a capricious anger at sin. It is rather the necessary outcome of God’s nature. Because of this, divine justice must be satisfied. God’s requirement of absolute righteousness cannot be met by humanity, so people must undergo, as Grantham put it, “the malediction of his Righteous Law.” This, Grantham held, is why Christ’s death and righteousness must be imputed to believers. Christ’s sinless life and sacrificial death are the only thing that will satisfy the justice or holy nature of God.

These dissimilarities on the seriousness of sin and the nature of divine justice in turn caused Grantham and Goodwin to come down on different sides of the soteriological debate. For Goodwin, God dispenses with holy law and pardons sinners; for Grantham, God cannot do away with his holy law. So sinners must be imputed the righteousness of Christ through faith to be saved. Accordingly, Grantham held that this righteousness remains the possession of the believer as long as he or she remains in Christ through faith, whereas Goodwin emphasized the necessity of penitence for persevering in salvation, as though the believer must continue to be pardoned over and over again.

The traditional categories of Calvinism and Arminianism on which historians and theologians usually rely are somewhat imprecise and misleading. Calvinists and Arminians alike have been predisposed to understand Arminianism as even more semi-pelagian than Goodwin’s version. Yet Grantham and the General Baptists defied such classification, striving instead for a *via media* which, they were certain, was the way of the Bible and the primitive churches.

⁶⁰Henry C. Sheldon, *History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1897), 2:142. This statement is made with reference to Grotius’s theory of atonement.

⁶¹Hugo Grotius, *A Defence of the Catholic Faith Concerning the Satisfaction of Christ, against Faustus Socinus*, trans. Frank Hugh Foster (Andover, Mass.: Warren F. Draper, 1889), 75

⁶²*Ibid.*

RESPONSE TO J. MATTHEW PINSON'S "THOMAS GRANTHAM'S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION"



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The silence on Thomas Grantham in Baptist theological and historical studies is deafening. Even more remarkable is the lacuna created on the bookshelves of pastors, theologians, and historians who have little or no access to one of the most important texts in Baptist history. Many seem to believe that Grantham lost his relevance with the turn of the seventeenth century. In his article, "Thomas Grantham's Theology of the Atonement and Justification," Matt Pinson encourages us to think otherwise. He argues that General Baptist thinkers like Grantham can help us rethink the often superficial and hastily generalized categories of "Calvinism" and "Arminianism."

Pinson's article is commendable both for its labor in these texts and for its application to ongoing soteriological debates. As an exercise in historical theology Pinson does not evaluate the propriety of Grantham's exegesis or understandings of Pauline thought. Rather, he successfully employs Grantham, Goodwin, and Arminius to illustrate that, despite some claims to the contrary, Arminianism presents us with no single, monolithic soteriological scheme—especially with regards to the nature of the atonement itself. Much like Roger Olson, Pinson is interested in distinguishing between "myths and realities" in Arminian theology.¹ Pinson also successfully demonstrates that Arminians like Grantham, and Arminius before him, do in fact belong to a Reformed tradition that embraces central Reformation tenets such as forensic justification *sola fide* and penal substitutionary atonement. The recognition of our shared Reformation tradition is an important step toward removing straw men in the Calvinist-Arminian conversation.

As the earliest known systematic theologian in the Baptist tradition, Grantham modeled a practice of pastoral theology that was apologetic, biblical, irenic, and culturally engaged. He concerned himself with external cultural challenges such as Islam, skepticism, and deficient

¹See Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

views of Christ's humanity and divinity. Grantham handled the more internal, polemical issues, such as Calvinistic doctrines of unconditional election and limited atonement or Hugo Grotius's controversial views of the atonement with dignity and grace, yet with an unwavering commitment to biblical authority. Grantham also penned one of the most significant early treatises on religious liberty, seen in the third book of *Christianismus Primitivus*. Most important for Pinson's purposes here, however, is the way Grantham represents an often unnoticed stream of tradition that is very much in tune with the soteriological themes of the Reformation.

Let me be clear: there's nothing really all that unique about Grantham's view on the atonement and on justification. He does not stand that far removed from Arminius, whose own views on the atonement do not dramatically differ from the later Calvinistic tradition, save for his patently divergent opinion on the extent of the atonement. As Pinson notes, Grantham's position on general atonement virtually "goes without saying." (Unfortunately, Calvinists and Arminians tend to talk past each other on universal atonement because they are working in completely different language games here, as evidenced in their very different understandings of the referent action in the verb "atone"). Grantham's originality is not the issue here. What's important for Pinson is illustrating the ways in which General Baptists in the vein of Grantham tend to differentiate their own position from other Arminianistic schema. Pinson's apology for Grantham is thus a defense of his own Free Will Baptist tradition, which he is adamant about distinguishing from other Wesleyan-Arminian traditions.

Grantham stands alongside the Reformed tradition in several ways, including several key aspects. Central to his scheme is the doctrine of the union with Christ. The accusation of "legal fiction" often dealt to forensic models of justification like Grantham's comes from a fundamental misunderstanding of this Reformed doctrine. Often missed in these debates is the centrality and profundity of Paul's metaphor of being "in Christ." Reformers understood this term to mean a legal, life-giving, and mysterious union wherein Christ and the believer are made one in a way akin to but nevertheless greater than the bonds of marriage. When in union with Christ, what happens to the believer happens to Christ (e.g., the penalty of sin) and what happens to Christ happens to believers (e.g., victory over death and exaltation). For Grantham and the Reformation tradition, God is not arbitrarily passing off our blame to Jesus and designating his merits as our own. Rather, Christ's active and passive obedience is ours because we are linked to him through an otherwise inexplicable bond. "Imputed righteousness" cannot be understood apart from this framework.

Pinson also makes a helpful distinction between various Arminian understandings of apostasy, again using Goodwin and Grantham as dialogue partners.² For Grantham, who was committed to *sola fide* and an objective grounding for justification in Christ's penal-substitutionary act (which Pinson puzzlingly describes as Anselmian "penal satisfaction"), apostasy was the reversal of faith—an explicit rejection of faith in Christ. If grace is resistible prior to faith in Christ,

²See also J. Matthew Pinson, "The Diversity of Arminian Theology: Thomas Grantham, John Goodwin, and Jacobus Arminius," available at http://evangelicalarminians.org/files/The%20Diversity%20of%20Arminian%20Soteriology%20%28Pinson%29_1.pdf; accessed on April 14, 2011.

grace can be resistible after faith in Christ. Goodwin, on the other hand, makes apostasy or perseverance contingent not on continued faith but rather on continued good works. With the author of Hebrews, Grantham saw apostasy as irreversible and Goodwin did not necessarily see it a permanent condition. Once more, Pinson shows that there is not simply one “Arminian” way to understand apostasy and perseverance. I admit my own guilt in failing to make these distinctions when speaking of my General Baptist cousins and their place in the broader Arminian tradition.

The debate over Calvinism and Arminianism is not the only place where Grantham serves an illustrative purpose in contemporary soteriological discussions. The contrast between Grantham and John Goodwin on the grounds for justification in the atonement parallels much of the contemporary debates on the so-called “New Perspective(s) on Paul.” Whereas Grantham contended that the imputation of Christ’s active and passive obedience was made necessary by some kind of moral obligation within God, Goodwin’s more Grotian approach to the atonement represents a kind of theological voluntarism popular since *Euthyphro*. Many of the recent evangelical discussions about the nature of δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ raise a similar question: Is God’s righteousness an extension of a necessary or essential attribute that he possesses or is it simply something that he does (e.g., his faithfulness to the covenant)? The outcome of this debate is not yet clear, but my suspicion is that Arminians in the Wesleyan tradition (who represent views akin to Goodwin’s) will tend to be more favorable to the positions of N. T. Wright and other “New Perspectives” than will other Arminians who, like Grantham and Arminius himself, more fittingly belong under Pinson’s “Reformed Arminian” moniker.

In summary, Grantham’s contributions to the Baptist family have been too long neglected. So, Baptists of every stripe are indebted to Pinson and Clint Bass for their help in bringing new exposure to Grantham. We should also be appreciative that the editors of Mercer University Press’s *Early Baptist Texts* series who are striving to make new editions of Grantham’s works widely available for the first time in centuries. Hopefully this revival of Grantham can foster new appreciation for the broader Arminian perspective.

One of the most important elements of dialogue is for each party to understand the other in their own terms. We should also practice what philosophers call the principle of charity, which means we can withhold criticism of a perspective different from our own until we attempt to evaluate that position in its strongest and most cogent form. With Grantham, Pinson has pointed us to a stronger, more persuasive version of Arminianism than the monolithic straw man Calvinists often employ.

RESPONSE TO J. MATTHEW PINSON'S "THOMAS GRANTHAM'S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION"



Clint Bass, D.Phil.

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Though a fair number of anti-predestinarian Baptists Socinianized in the eighteenth century, Pinson's essay suggests that those living in the latter seventeenth century held a considerably traditional view of justification and the atonement. In fact, their views of justification and the atonement were much closer to Reformed Orthodoxy than were the views of some contemporary Independents, such as John Goodwin, or even some Puritans, such as Richard Baxter. This was demonstrated through Pinson's judicious comparison of Goodwin's thought to that of the principal theologian of the General Baptists, Thomas Grantham. The essay presents, for the most part, an accurate picture of Grantham's position.

Pinson concluded that "the most practical difference" between Grantham and Goodwin was "for Grantham, salvation consists totally in Christ's righteousness, whereas for Goodwin, it hinges on the individual's faith."¹ But such a conclusion seems to exaggerate the differences between them and it neglects Grantham's emphasis on human volition. Grantham argued that "God imputes Righteousness to Men without Works" and that "what is thus imputed, is not acted by us, but expressly [sic] reckoned as a matter of free Gift, or Grace." But to what extent did he understand justification as a gift? He acknowledged that the possibility of salvation was an undeserved blessing as was the imputation of Jesus' righteousness.² But what about the means of receiving these undeserved blessings? Was faith a work in any sense or was faith a gift in every sense? It was Grantham's view that the righteousness of Christ was "reckoned as ours through believing." Grace was inseparable from faith and yet man played some role in having faith. This is nowhere more obvious than in Grantham's order of causes. Proponents of Reformed Orthodoxy asserted that justification was by faith and that the formal cause of justification

¹Matthew Pinson, "Thomas Grantham's Theology of the Atonement and Justification," 18.

²Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus*, Book 2, Part 1, 67.

was the imputation of Jesus' righteousness.³ Grantham's explanation was radically different: "The formal Cause is believing and obeying the Truth through the Spirit." Though Grantham recognized that God was the first mover in regenerating sinners, he utterly rejected the idea that adults were passive in the work of regeneration: "All our faculties are given us of God. It's our duty to put these faculties into Act; to hear, repent, and believe, is Man's duty."⁴ For Grantham, faith was a condition for justification; it was not an instrument of justification granted to the elect. Though bathed in grace, faith was not a gift in every sense.

Where Grantham parted ways with continental Reformed Orthodoxy over the formal cause of justification, he joined a number of clergymen from the Established Church. Like Grantham, Herbert Thorndike's formal cause of justification contained a conditional element. Henry Hammond and George Bull held similar views.⁵ Grantham and the "holy living" divines were passionate defenders of universal atonement and both agreed that salvation could be affected by humans. Citations from the works of Jeremy Taylor abound in Grantham's writings. He would even go so far as to quote Taylor on original sin – a connection that most ministers would have avoided.⁶

Nevertheless, Grantham stood much closer to his Puritan forefathers than did the Caroline Divines who were reluctant to affirm the double imputation of Jesus' righteousness. As Pinson pointed out, Grantham affirmed the imputation of both the passive and the active obedience of Christ. This is all the more remarkable given the theological milieu of the Restoration Church of England. Grantham's context was one in which anti-predestinarianism was steadily gaining ground in the Established Church. Had he followed Grotius more faithfully he would have closed the distance between himself and some potential allies. Against the "holy living" school, Grantham insisted that justification was an instantaneous act through which the convert received the righteousness of Christ and the benefits of his death.

Pinson suggested that Grantham's views of justification and the atonement were also the views of the General Baptists.⁷ However, the identity of the General Baptists is not obvious. Most historians have employed the term broadly.⁸ Sabbatarians aside, all who held believer's

³John Spurr, *Restoration Church of England* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 299.

⁴Thomas Grantham, *Infants Advocate*, 8-9.

⁵C.F. Allison, *Rise of Moralism* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1966), 114, 132.

⁶Grantham, *Infants Advocate*, 11.

⁷"Grantham and the General Baptists defied such classifications, striving instead for a *via media* which, they were certain, was the way of the Bible and the primitive churches." Pinson, "Thomas Grantham's Theology," 20.

⁸See the histories of W.T. Whitley, A.C. Underwood, and B.R. White. Though cautious and with qualification, even Stephen Wright adopted the rather imprecise categories.

baptism and general redemption would qualify as General Baptists. All Baptists who affirmed limited atonement would be classified as Particular Baptists. If Pinson meant for the statement to be applied to all general-redemptionist Baptists, there are some difficulties. The “General Baptists” were hardly uniform beyond the doctrine of universal atonement. For example, Thomas Lambe has often been placed among the General Baptists. Lambe, however, was an Amyraldian Baptist who attacked Goodwin’s anti-predestinarianism.⁹ Edward Barber and John Griffith have typically been regarded as General Baptists but they disagreed over the doctrine of perseverance.¹⁰ Therefore, it is unlikely that all general-redemptionist Baptists held identical views of justification and the atonement as set forth by Grantham.

On the other hand, perhaps, by General Baptists, Pinson was referring to a specific group of general-redemptionist Baptists. By the mid-1650s, certain Baptists had organized a denominational structure called the General Assembly. In 1660 they adopted as their doctrinal statement *A Brief Confession*. Though Grantham did not participate in the original composition of the *Brief Confession*, he both edited and subscribed to later editions. Grantham was undoubtedly an important leader among the General Baptists of the General Assembly and it is very likely that many of his fellow churchmen adopted his doctrines of justification and the atonement. Nonetheless, even a narrower sampling fails to produce soteriological uniformity. Some Baptists who subscribed to the *Brief Confession* also signed the *Orthodox Creed* (1679). Whereas the authors of the *Brief Confession* denied perseverance, the authors of the *Orthodox Creed* declared that those justified “shall certainly persevere unto eternal life.”¹¹ The General Assembly did not discipline the signatories of the *Orthodox Creed*. Their leaders, such as Thomas Monck, continued to participate in the General Assembly. Interestingly, such a measure of latitude which was granted over soteriological concerns was not granted for those who spurned the laying on of hands. Despite its confessional document, which did not address justification and the atonement at great length, the General Assembly seems to have tolerated a variety of views and it is unlikely that all of their churches were in agreement with Grantham.

Samuel Loveday, in fact, seems to have rejected double imputation. In *Personal Reprobation Reprobated* (1676), Loveday borrowed heavily from Goodwin.¹² Commenting on the sinner’s benefit in justification, Loveday wrote “the blessednesse is not that he hath no sin, but that it is not imputed.”¹³ Furthermore, he defined justification in terms more akin to Goodwin than to

⁹Thomas Lambe, *Absolute Freedom from Sin by Christ’s Death for the World*.

¹⁰John Griffith, *A Treatise Touching Falling from Grace*. Ruth Clifford, “General Baptists, 1640-1660,” M.Litt. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1991, 187.

¹¹William Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1959), 230, 324.

¹²John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 228.

¹³Samuel Loveday, *Personal Reprobation Reprobated*, 320.

Grantham: “But suppose you should ask me, what it is to be justified? I answer; when a person is declared just upon the account of pardon and non-imputation of sin, that is the blessed state which the Apostle speaks of Rom. 4. 6, 7, 8. *blessed is the man to whom God doth not impute sin.*”¹⁴ It is improbable that Loveday was the lone Baptist to be convinced by Goodwin’s arguments while it is most probable that Loveday won some of his fellow churchmen of the General Assembly to his views.

¹⁴Ibid., 136-37.

RESPONSE TO J. MATTHEW PINSON'S "THOMAS GRANTHAM'S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION"



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Thank you Dr. Lemke for inviting me to be a respondent, and thank you Dr. Pinson for your commendable paper outlining the differences and similarities between Arminian Baptists and Wesleyan Arminians.

When we biblical theologians and exegetes are confronted with the language and thought patterns of systematic theology, when we hear terms such as penal satisfaction or governmentalism, or passive and active obedience, or imputed righteousness, we sometimes experience a physical affliction called the *heebie geebies*.

However, as a biblical theologian and exegete, I'd like to suggest that Grantham's soteriological urgencies are not far removed from that of Scripture, even if systematics and biblical theology speak in different tongues. In this response, I would first like to do some translating between the two so that Grantham's systematics is more firmly undergirded by biblical theology, and then to invite Dr. Pinson to distinguish further Grantham's view of continuance in salvation as an Arminian Baptist from the Wesleyan Arminian view of continuance.

To show the intersection between systematics and biblical theology, I would like to use one of the four Gospels, Matthew in particular since this is my own area of specialization.

The urgencies for penal satisfaction are 1) God's holiness as innate and essential to his being, and not something which he merely possesses; 2) the necessity of the satisfaction of God's wrath—God does not simply decide to forgive sinners without sin being punished; 3) the sinfulness of man, and therefore his need to be saved from the coming wrath; 4) God's love, mercy, and eagerness to provide salvation; 5) Jesus as the substitutionary sacrifice who pays the sinner's sin debt; and 6) the believer's union with Christ whereby Christ's passive and active obedience is imputed to the believer. The question is whether

these urgencies are also the urgencies of the gospel in general, and of the Gospel of Matthew specifically.

Regarding the first two urgencies about God's holiness and the need for his wrath to be satisfied, Matthew's Gospel has as part of its narrative world the God of Israel as reflected in Jewish scripture. And so there is no need for Matthew to emphasize the holy character of God or to articulate a doctrine of divine wrath. Nonetheless, the wrath of God is abundantly revealed, for example, when John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath!" which foreshadowed Jesus' damning words, "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" Matthew's Gospel may leave open the question of whether God *necessarily* punishes sin or if he may arbitrarily pardon sin without satisfaction of his wrath. I would only note that the eternal fires of hell and the eschatological wrath of God are put in such extreme terms in Matthew's Gospel that it is difficult to conceive of our God condemning someone to hell unless God's very nature demanded it. Moreover, although enigmatic and subject to multiple interpretations, Jesus' words that he did not come to abolish the law, and his assertion of its abiding to the end would tend to affirm that holiness is part of God's innate nature and caution against the Governmentalist assertion that God sets aside the righteous demands of the law in order to pardon man's transgression. Thus, the first two urgencies of penal satisfaction have reasonable correspondence with the data in Matthew, even if the necessity of divine wrath is not formulated as a direct response to our modern query.

The third urgency is the sinfulness of man and his need to be saved. This is an explicit urgency of Matthew's Gospel which is broached even in the first chapter. The glorious and inglorious genealogy with all its celebration and shame conveys first of all the identity of the people who God is going to save, as well as the need for them to be saved. God's people are in captivity, live in the land of the shadow of death, and need to be redeemed. We see this so clearly even in Matthew 2, with the slaughter of the innocents which tells us that Jesus came into a world that desperately needs salvation.

This desperate need for salvation is closely related to the fourth urgency, that God's love and mercy makes him eager to save; and so, the angel declares that Jesus will save his people from their sins. Jesus himself conveys the heartbreak of the Father to save those who were not willing to be saved, as He cries out, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You who kill the prophets and stone those 'missionaries' sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!"

Having shown that God wants to save, the question then becomes, how will he do so? Correspondingly, the fifth urgency of penal satisfaction is that Jesus is the substitutionary sacrifice who suffers divine wrath for sinners. Since Matthew writes his narrative in anticipation of the cross, he does not articulate this as emphatically as Paul, Peter, and John do in their post-resurrection reflections. Nonetheless, Matthew repeatedly conveys that Jesus must go to Jerusalem, that he must suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders, and that he must die. Further,

in the divine authentication of Jesus' sonship at the baptism, the voice from heaven conveys what kind of sonship this entails; for the declaration, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased," has echoes of Genesis 22 where Isaac was to be offered on Mount Moriah, as well as echoes of the Isaianic servant—God's suffering servant who endures the chastisement of our peace, and by whose stripes we are healed. Indeed, Matthew cites explicitly Isa. 53:4, "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases." Jesus gives his life as a ransom for many and takes the cup, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew's narrative may not formulate the penal satisfaction view as clearly as systematic theologians do, but the concepts that Jesus is innocent, that he is our substitute, that he bears our sins, and that his death has everything to do with our salvation are Matthean urgencies which do support penal satisfaction.

Penal satisfaction's sixth urgency is that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the one who puts his faith in Jesus, and that the believer shares Christ's righteousness through the believer's union with Christ. For Matthew's Gospel, this urgency is evident in the formation of the People of God consisting of those who decisively accept Jesus' universal call to the weary and burdened to leave their boats and nets and fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and lands, in order to take up their crosses to follow Jesus. It is such people whom Jesus identifies as his mother and brothers and sisters, who are with him *inside* the house, reclining at the Messiah's table, and not outside where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. These are Christ's little flock, those who are united with him in his sufferings and in his coming exaltation. It is not because they have cast out demons in Jesus' name or cry out, "Lord, Lord" that their sins are forgiven, but because they are in fellowship with the Messiah who, in contrast to those to whom he "never knew," does in fact know them intimately, who freely shares with them the bread and cup, and who poured out his blood of the covenant, which is their only hope for forgiveness of sins. To such as these is the kingdom of heaven.

Union with Christ is further amplified in Matthew's Gospel by Matthew's unique emphasis on Christ's presence with his people. This is seen in the "God-with-us" *inclusio* which frames the Gospel. Just as the Gospel begins with "You will call his name Immanuel, which means 'God with us,'" so also it closes with the promise that Jesus will be "with us" even to the end of the age. Likewise, where two or three gather in his name, Jesus is there in their midst, united with his people. Matthew's language here is nothing less than an appropriation of Old Testament temple theology, the essence of which is that God dwells among his people. Importantly, it is not the holiness of the *saints* that make the Holy Land holy, or the Holy City holy, or the temple holy. Rather, it is God's presence that makes the Holy Land holy, and the Holy City holy, and the temple holy. Likewise, it is not some perceived sense of personal holiness of the saints that counts for anything, but rather the holiness of Jesus Immanuel who makes his people holy by dwelling in their midst.

One of the enigmatic ways that Immanuel theology is manifest is in the Matthean notion that whatever might be done to one of his people—to one of his disciples, to one of "the least

of these,” is done to Christ himself. The depiction of the king separating the sheep from the goats on the basis of whether one ministered to “one of the least of these my brothers” who might be hungry or naked or ill or in prison, is not an exhortation to social programming, but an indication that Christ so abides with his disciples that any injury or blessing to a true disciple amounts to injury or blessing to Christ himself. This is so because they share an identity with Christ. This depiction is a reflection of the believer’s union with Christ, for the term “one of the least of these” is a Matthean technical term for the disciple.

Throughout this Gospel, Jesus announces the kingdom as it is manifest in his coming, and that the newly formed people of God—those who answer the call to discipleship—share in it and are sanctified by Immanuel’s presence. Although not explicit, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness fits well within these Matthean categories in which the disciple and Jesus share in one another’s history.

The question for us in light of Dr. Pinson’s contrast of Grantham’s view of the atonement with Goodwin’s view, especially in regard to the later development of Wesleyan Arminianism, is how do people who have been included in the new People of God maintain their status as members? How does a true disciple continue in salvation once he has been included in the People of God (to use Matthean language), or once he is united with Christ (to use the language of systematics)? Is it through faith that he continues, as indicated by the Baptist Faith and Message, or is our continuance in the grace in which we stand dependent upon our doing good as the opportunity presents itself?

Our curiosity over this issue was piqued by guest chapel speaker Dr. Witherington yesterday who seems to hold to the traditional Wesleyan Arminian view. He made a passing comment on Matt. 6:14-15, which makes divine forgiveness for us contingent upon us forgiving others. In Witherington’s magisterial work *The Indelible Image*, he conveys some very powerful points for Arminianism, although some points make Arminian Baptists nervous, to say the least. I quote now several passages with the hopes that Dr. Pinson can clarify Grantham’s understanding of our continuance in salvation.

Dr. Witherington writes,

Paul . . . believes that once people are converted, God expects them to actually go on and live righteous lives. Paul does not talk about Christ being righteous in the place of the believer or about the believer being clothed in the righteousness of Christ alone. Even farther off the mark is the notion that when God looks at believers, he sees only Christ and so neither holds believers accountable for their actions. . . . Were it the case that when God looks at believers, he only sees Christ, that in turn would mean that God is prepared to be deceived or at least overlook Christian sin and not hold believers accountable for it These ideas amount to a presentation to us of a God of legal fictions who in the end is less than totally righteous.

Witherington continues,

Although initial salvation certainly comes on the basis of grace through faith and without first doing works of any kind . . . , there can be no doubt that working out one's salvation involves deeds, not just beliefs or trust in God. . . . It is a team project that he is referring to, and it involves actions.

For Paul, then salvation is a work in progress . . . and it is neither finished nor completed until the eschaton. . . . Why is this so important to stress? Because Paul's eschatological ethics are grounded in this particular theology of salvation, a theology that says that good deeds, works, and holy behavior are expected and required of the saved, and that since salvation is not yet completed, apostasy by a true believer, however unlikely, is possible. Although good works will not by themselves get one into the dominion of God, clearly enough bad works, unethical behavior as listed in 1 Corinthians 6 and Galatians 5, certainly can keep one out of that final eschatological realm on earth. One is not saved *by* one's good works, but neither is one saved *without* them, if there is time and opportunity to do them" (emphasis is original).

Thus, Witherington claims that a person gets into the People of God by faith but is kept therein by doing good deeds and by avoiding bad deeds. However, while Matthew's Gospel says much about the holy behavior of Jesus' followers, Reformation Arminians would argue that such behavior is descriptive of those who are united with Christ but not the basis for the union.

Dr. Pinson's outline of Grantham's view of the atonement indicates Grantham's rejection of the later development of Wesleyan Arminianism's understanding of continuance in the faith as dependent upon works. In his reply to my response, I would ask that Dr. Pinson elaborate on his outline.

Jesus calls so graciously, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." We who are burdened recognize that we are deserving of the coming wrath, but have cast our lot upon Jesus for our eternal salvation, and have come to Jesus' sanctifying presence, believing that Jesus will save his people from their sins. Such is the theology of Matthew's Gospel, and such is the systematic theology of Arminian Baptist Thomas Grantham.

A REJOINDER TO THE RESPONSES TO “THOMAS GRANTHAM’S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION”



J. Matthew Pinson, Ed.D.

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I appreciate Dr. Steve Lemke for bringing together these three fine scholars to respond to my paper. It is beneficial to have a systematic theologian, biblical scholar, and historian bringing different lenses to bear on Grantham and his doctrine of atonement and justification.

Rejoinder to Rhyne Putnam

Rhyne Putnam demonstrates an uncommon facility with the contours of Grantham’s thought. This is gratifying to see in a rising star among Southern Baptist theologians. He is right when he says that the silence on Grantham in Baptist studies has been deafening. We are grateful that Clint Bass’s outstanding dissertation on Grantham as well as the Mercer University Press Early English Baptist Text Series’ projected publication of *Christianismus Primitivus* will help to bring this silence to an end.

I think there has been one primary reason for this silence: Baptist scholars outside Arminian Baptist circles such as the Free Will Baptist Church have tended to be interested in Particular Baptists when studying seventeenth-century Baptists. Apart from Free Will Baptist historians such as George Stevenson, William Davidson, Michael Pelt, and myself, until recently one heard only fleeting references to Grantham.¹ Now people outside Free Will Baptist circles are taking Grantham seriously. A new *ad fontes* interest in early Baptist faith and practice has no

¹George Stevenson, “Benjamin Laker,” in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); William F. Davidson, *The Free Will Baptists in History* (Nashville: Randall House, 2001); Michael R. Pelt, *A History of Original Free Will Baptists* (Mount Olive, NC: Mount Olive College Press, 1998); J. Matthew Pinson, *A Free Will Baptist Handbook: Heritage, Beliefs, and Ministries* (Nashville: Randall House, 1998); J. Matthew Pinson, “Confessional, Baptist, and Arminian: The General-Free Will Baptist Tradition and the Nicene Faith,” in Timothy George, ed., *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Recovering the Apostolic Witness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

doubt stimulated this renewed awareness. Further, many Baptist scholars are exhibiting a desire to probe non-Particular Baptist authors for source material for the contemporary theological task.

As with the contemporary appropriation of any historical author, one will not agree with Grantham on everything. As the Puritan Thomas Brooks illustrated, when one goes to eat an apple with a worm in it, he could simply throw the apple out or eat the apple worm and all. But the best thing to do is to cut the worm out and enjoy the rest of the apple.² That is what we must do with Thomas Grantham. And as we do this, we will find that, though there are a few of his ideas from which we demur, the general trajectory of his theology offers much fruit for contemporary Baptists. Even for those classical Calvinist Baptists who will differ from him soteriologically, there is much rich material to be mined from his ecclesiology, spirituality, and views on religious liberty and church and state. Putnam rightly notes that Grantham's writings on these matters are among the best and most plentiful among seventeenth-century Baptist writers.

What I like most about Putnam's comments is that he understands how Grantham symbolizes the differences between Wesleyan Arminianism and a more Reformation-oriented Arminianism, what Robert Picirilli once called "Reformed Arminianism" (a moniker many of his students picked up and ran with).³ And Putnam is correct to note that Grantham's views on atonement and justification are what makes the difference.

If, as Grantham thought, believers' penalty for sin is satisfied through Christ's cross-work applied to them, and they are clothed in his complete righteousness by virtue of their union and identification with him, then everything changes. That Reformational emphasis on forensic righteousness, on *sola fide*, means that, if a believer can fall from grace, as Grantham and his General/Free Will Baptist kin believed he could, it will be because he is no longer in union with Christ. And, as that union is conditioned on faith, it can be terminated only by unbelief. Furthermore, Putnam is correct in pointing out that Grantham viewed all apostasy as irremediable because of the decisive, once-for-all nature of the covenantal union between Christ and the believer. So this more-Reformed trajectory on atonement and justification does distinguish this sort of Arminianism from Wesleyan Arminianism.

I would like to chase a rabbit here for a moment and encourage Rhyne to help me revive the phraseology of "penal satisfaction," thus rescuing it from its shackles to Anselm. The Episcopalian scholar George Cadwalader Foley was correct when he stated that "the Reformers taught that our Lord's sufferings were *penal*, and Anselm expressly distinguishes between punishment and

²Thomas Brooks, "Heaven on Earth," in *The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: John Greig and Son, 1866), 2:308.

³Robert E. Picirilli, "General Editor's Preface," in F. Leroy Forlines, *Romans in the Randall House Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), viii.

satisfaction. . . . As a *commutation*, satisfaction was instead of punishment; but they transformed it into satisfaction *by* punishment.”⁴

Many Reformed scholars have used the term *penal satisfaction* to describe this Reformational emphasis. Nineteenth-century thinkers such as Charles Hodge, Augustus Strong, William G. T. Shedd, and Robert L. Dabney used the term, taking it over from earlier Reformed scholastics like Francis Turretin and Stephen Charnock. In the twentieth century the term was employed by writers as diverse as James Orr, Lewis Sperry Chafer, and Cornelius Van Til. Today scholars like J. I. Packer and Timothy George have employed the term. Interestingly, even the Methodist Thomas Oden uses “penal satisfaction,” arguing that Wesley himself believed in it (I wish I had as much confidence in that as Oden does, though Wesley certainly comes closer to it than most later Wesleyans).⁵ My mentor Leroy Forlines and his students use the phrase, and I believe it is worth reviving, because it emphasizes the penal nature of the satisfaction of divine justice Christ provides in his atonement.⁶

Lastly, I think Putnam zeroes in on an important point: Those Arminians who share Grantham’s more Reformed categories on atonement and justification are going to be more critical of N. T. Wright and the New Perspective on Paul than perhaps some Arminians would. Grantham’s views on atonement and justification clearly fly in the face of the New Perspective at the most essential points, and modern-day Reformed Arminians are going to agree with Calvinism’s major criticisms of the New Perspective.⁷

Rejoinder to James Leonard

This brings me to James Leonard’s insightful comments in his response. I want to commend Leonard for acknowledging that “Grantham’s soteriological urgencies are not far removed from that of Scripture, even if systematics and biblical theology speak in different tongues.” I have known Jim long enough to know that he gets squeamish about people who press systematic categories at the expense of careful exegetical theology. Indeed we all should share his aversion. But I appreciate his

⁴George Cadwalader Foley, *Anselm’s Theory of the Atonement* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 219.

⁵Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 216. See the discussion between Steve Harper (the Wesleyan Arminian view) and Stephen Ashby (the Reformed Arminian view) in J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

⁶See F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: Randall House, 2011).

⁷The same can be said of Arminius’s views, which are very similar to Grantham’s. See Pinson, “The Nature of Atonement in the Theology of Jacobus Arminius.”

desire (and ability as seen in some other pieces he has written) to bring together biblical exegesis and more-systematic theological categories into a truly biblical theology. He is attempting to deal with the “whole counsel of God” and the intertextual nuances of the best biblical theology. I love the way he does that in his comments on penal satisfaction and union with Christ motifs in the Gospel of Matthew. The work he models, I believe, is just the sort that is needed to get past the dichotomy between Jesus and Paul that has been erected by the New Perspective movement.

Leonard gets to the nub of the difference between Grantham’s kind of Arminianism and later, more-Wesleyan versions of Arminianism when he asks, “How does a true disciple continue in salvation once he has been included in the People of God—to use Matthean language, or once he is united with Christ—to use the language of systematics? Is it through faith that he continues, as indicated by the Baptist Faith and Message, or is our continuance in the grace in which we stand dependent upon our doing good as the opportunity presents itself?” And then he, provocateur that he is, brings in Ben Witherington (who had just spoken in chapel at NOBTS the morning before my lecture) as a foil.

I must admit I am trepidatious about discussing Arminian views of perseverance and apostasy in a Southern Baptist journal. But here goes: Witherington stands in a noble Wesleyan exegetical tradition in describing imputed righteousness as a legal fiction, arguing that “Paul does not talk about Christ being righteous in the place of the believer or about the believer being clothed in the righteousness of Christ alone.” Again, comments like these are the crux of the difference between Wesleyan Arminians and Arminians like Grantham and Arminius. Grantham and contemporary Reformed Arminians insist that Paul *does* talk about Christ being righteous in our place and our being clothed in his righteousness.

This distinction in turn highlights the practical difference between these two Arminianisms when it comes to perseverance in grace. Grantham is careful to argue, with the Reformed, that good works are a necessary evidence of saving faith but they are not the condition of salvation. Faith alone is. And this condition of salvation does not cease to be the condition after the initial act of regeneration. Salvation is, from start to finish, conditioned on faith. The believer’s union with Christ, apprehended by faith, is what saves the believer, and this does not change after initial conversion. One is not saved by faith and kept by works. One apostatizes only by making shipwreck of the faith that saves (1 Tim. 1:19), not by committing acts of sin.

This is why Granthamesque types of Arminians, while insisting that good works are the necessary fruit of saving faith, cringe when they hear Witherington say that “clearly, enough bad works, unethical behavior as listed in 1 Corinthians 6 and Galatians 5, certainly can keep one out of that final eschatological realm.” Like all good Calvinists, Reformed Arminians who lean toward Grantham’s approach believe that unrepentant sin will not be the pattern of a believer’s life. Yet unlike Calvinists, they believe that it is possible for a regenerate person to make irremediable shipwreck of saving faith, which removes the believer from union with Christ.

In short, I believe Grantham would agree with Leonard's comments that "Witherington claims that a person gets into the People of God by faith but is kept therein by doing good deeds and avoiding bad deeds. However, while Matthew's Gospel says much about the holy behavior of Jesus' followers, Reformation Arminians would argue that such behavior is descriptive of those who are united with Christ but not the basis for union."

Rejoinder to Clint Bass

I appreciate the opportunity to dialogue with a careful historian like Clint Bass. Although I have minor differences with some of Bass's understanding of Grantham's soteriology, I think his work on Grantham is generally brilliant. In his response he seems to be arguing that Grantham's theology of grace is somewhere between Reformed orthodoxy and the moralistic Arminianism of seventeenth-century Anglican divines such as Thorndike, Taylor, Hammond, and Bull. I also think that he would say that these Anglican Arminians agreed more with Grotius and Goodwin on atonement and justification, thus diverging from Grantham's Reformed account.

My perspective concurs with his in large measure. Grantham's sort of Arminianism differed strongly from the Reformed orthodox on how one *comes to be* in a state of grace. He radically eschewed the particularism of their predestinarian schema. In this way he *agreed* with Goodwin, Grotius, and the Anglican Arminians. However, when it came to the question of *what it means* to be in a state of grace, for Christ's redemptive work to be applied to the believing sinner, Grantham shared the Reformed view: In his righteous, law-fulfilling life and death, Christ satisfied the just demands of a holy God. He paid the penalty for human sin. Justification consists in those who are in union with Christ by faith being imputed with Christ's active and passive obedience. In this way he *disagreed* with Goodwin, Grotius, and the Anglican Arminians.

It is important to note that I am by no means arguing that Grantham was essentially Reformed in his soteriology.⁸ His doctrines of predestination and general atonement are anything but those of the Reformed orthodox of his period. But in his views of atonement and justification he is very Reformed, going further in his views of the imputation of both the active and passive obedience of Christ than even some of those at the Synod of Dort or the Westminster Assembly.⁹ I believe Bass and I agree on these matters.

⁸The whole meaning of the word *Reformed* is tricky. Early Baptists would not conceive of Reformed as a synonym for five-point Calvinism, as we often do today. Rather they would see it as a distinction with the Church of Rome, as in "reformed according to the Scripture."

⁹See, e.g., Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2009).

As far as the historical identification of the General Baptists, I think Bass is onto something. I am using the terms *General Baptist* and *Particular Baptist* more in the ways they are commonly understood. Bass is thus correct that I am using the term *General Baptist* to mean those in the General Assembly, the General Baptist “denomination” that was formed in 1654. I am not using it to describe all those Baptists who believed in a general atonement.¹⁰ He is also correct to note that the national assembly, like many Baptists today, did not bring people into strict conformity on all points. There were some, like Monck and the Orthodox Creed for example, who seem to have toyed with eternal security.

Yet I am speaking of the mainstream of the General Baptists. Bass uses Samuel Loveday as an example of a General Baptist who demurred from Grantham’s approach to atonement and justification. Yet Loveday cannot be seen as Goodwinian in his doctrine of atonement and justification. Again, Grantham and all General Baptists in the General Assembly would have agreed with what Goodwin and other Arminians said about things like predestination, reprobation, and Romans 9. These were the kinds of things Loveday was using in *Personal Reprobation Reprobated*, which is a treatment of reprobation in Romans 9. Loveday’s doctrine of atonement and justification cannot be extrapolated from one off-hand comment written in the context of a treatise on divine reprobation. Loveday never expounded a doctrine of the nature of atonement and justification as far as I can tell.

Bass says that it is “unlikely” that all General Baptists believed as Grantham did on atonement and justification. I am fairly confident that is an accurate statement, just as I am sure that it is unlikely that all Southern Baptists believe in eternal security. But that doesn’t affect my thesis, that the mainstream General Baptist view on atonement and justification, like that of their foremost spokesman and theologian Thomas Grantham, was more Reformed in character. So, like Bass, I wouldn’t be surprised to find ministers in the General Assembly who might have articulated a careful doctrine of atonement and justification more like that of Goodwin, Grotius, and the Anglican Arminians. That certainly wasn’t the mainstream, however, and I cannot find any one of them who does it. Yet they all agreed with those authors against Calvinist views on predestination and reprobation.

¹⁰The expression “General Baptist” was in flux during the English Civil War and Interregnum, the period between the unseating of Charles I as king of England and the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660. For example, general-atonement Baptists such as Henry Denne and Thomas Lambe were antinomian and more predestinarian and did not accept the laying on of hands after baptism, as affirmed by the General Assembly and the *Standard Confession* of 1660. However, after the restoration, “General Baptists” would refer more to the General Assembly of General Baptists.

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PART II

**CALVINIST AND BAPTIST
SOTERIOLOGY**



For by grace you have been saved
through faith, and that not of yourselves;
it is the gift of God, not of works, lest
anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION IN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY THE REFORMATION TO 1800



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With increasing regularity, an argument is now being made in conservative Protestant theology that runs thus: the related doctrines of regeneration and conversion took on an enlarged and even exaggerated role in the eighteenth century (the age of the Great Awakening) compared to anything given to them previously. As a consequence (so goes this argument) the now-conventional evangelical Protestant emphasis on the need for regeneration, not being an emphasis very fully anticipated in the theology of the Protestant Reformation¹ is something now best “pared back.” Children raised in Christian families can be nurtured towards faith in Christ without it; those “in the world” can be told of their need to be united with Christ without the conventional emphasis on regeneration.

This paper takes issue with this representation and consequently will survey the doctrine of regeneration as taught from the age of the Reformation to 1800 (a convenient terminus date for the first era of Awakening) and seek to analyze such developments to the doctrine as may have occurred. It is only to be expected that we will observe *some* developments – inasmuch as formulations of many doctrines may develop incrementally over time. But I hope to be able

¹Lewis B. Schenck, *The Presbyterian Doctrine of Children in the Covenant* (1940, Yale University Press; reprint, Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003), 8ff., is the first writer to have made this argument in modern times. He has been enthusiastically followed by pastor-theologian Tom Trouwborst in two essays, “A Response to ‘The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration’” in E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros and Cons* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Knox Seminary Press, 2004), 187-205, and “From Covenant to Chaos: The Reformers and their Heirs on Covenant Succession,” in Benjamin Wikner, ed. *To You and Your Children: Examining the Biblical Doctrine of Covenant Succession* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2005), 59-103. Schenck, followed by Trouwborst, approach the question of regeneration with the question of the children of Christian parents at the forefront of their thinking. D. G. Hart relays what is essentially the Schenck view of the negative drift taken by development in the doctrine of regeneration in the age of the Great Awakening in his *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), ch. 14. In this paper, I deliberately do not engage the discussion about regeneration and children but concentrate simply on the development of the doctrine itself.

to demonstrate that such developments to the doctrine of regeneration did not wait for the eighteenth century but arose much closer to the Reformation – and in response to the pastoral difficulties faced in a nominally-Christian Europe which still awaited full evangelization.

I. Our Current Usage of the Term “Regeneration” Does Not Strictly Conform to Early Protestant Usage

Today, it is not sufficiently appreciated that a significant part of the “gain” in the Reformation era was in the realm of the application of redemption. Given that Jesus Christ, by his incarnation, his perfect life, his death for our sins, and his resurrection had *accomplished* redemption, how was any given individual able to participate in this redemption? To answer the question only by saying that the individual participates in Christ’s redemption by the exercise of faith is true, yet it is an answer that raises still-additional questions. Whence comes this faith? Whence comes the awareness of and contrition for sin, without which no proper faith in Christ is exercised? Why does the response to the offer of the gospel come in a certain week or month or season of life and not at some other time? The Reformation era was indeed concerned with such questions and concerned to a degree that made the sixteenth century an epoch that expanded the boundaries of our understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption.²

In the sixteenth century itself, the Reformation emphasis was initially upon the paramount need for entry into forgiveness of sin by justifying faith in Christ. The question of how justifying faith relates to the reception of spiritual regeneration was not explored closely in earliest Reformation times. Huldrych Zwingli took small steps in this direction in his *An Exposition of the Faith* (1531)³ when he indicated the following:

It is not by good works that the son merits his position as heir to the estate, nor does he toil and labor to become the heir; but the moment he was born he was heir to his father’s property not by merit but by right of birth. . . . Similarly, the children of God who stand in

²James Orr’s *The Progress of Dogma* (1902, reprint, London: James Clarke, 1960) lecture viii, a lecture surveying the sixteenth century, was entitled “The Doctrine of the Application of Redemption.” Also of note are three volumes touching on the related doctrines of regeneration and conversion in the post-Reformation context: Bernard Citron, *New Birth: A Study of the Evangelical Doctrine of Conversion in the Protestant Fathers* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1951); Helmut Burkhardt, *The Biblical Doctrine of Regeneration* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978); and David F. Wells, *Turning to God: Biblical Conversion in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

³Geoffrey Bromiley, ed. *Zwingli and Bullinger*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. XXIV (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 240-41, indicates that the *Exposition*, though prepared by Zwingli in 1531 for the perusal of King Francis of France (with whom a military alliance was then contemplated) was only published subsequently in 1536 by Bullinger, the successor of Zwingli.

faith know that by their divine birth, that is the birth of the Spirit, and on the basis of free election, they are the sons of God and not servants.⁴

Here we have the most basic recognition that the standing of the Christian believer has commenced with a spiritual birth. But Zwingli apparently felt no urgency to expand on this idea in 1531.

The initial *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536) of John Calvin (1509-1564) did not advance beyond an elementary explanation of justifying faith.⁵ However, the conception expressed in Calvin's *Geneva Confession* (1536) and his expanded *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) show that "regeneration" was reckoned to mean "renovation and renewal," a process of modification of the character of the believer that would occupy the whole balance of his or her life.⁶ Regeneration, when understood in this way, is not very different than what has come subsequently to be called "progressive sanctification" or the mortification of sin. We are, with Calvin, admittedly some distance from the now-common conception that regeneration involves the inception of spiritual life in a fallen creature. Very much has been made of this fact, of late.⁷ Yet, Calvin's contemporary at Zurich, the successor to Zwingli – Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), has what seems to be a clearer conception of regeneration as inception than the reformer of Geneva. Discussing the significance of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, Bullinger writes:

The second birth (i.e. the one urged on Nicodemus by Christ) is wrought by means of the Holy Spirit, which being from heaven poured into our hearts, doth bring us to the knowledge of ourselves so that we may easily perceive, assuredly know and sensibly feel, that in our flesh there is no life, no integrity, or righteousness at all; and so consequently, that no man is saved by his own strength or merits. What then? The Spirit forsooth doth inwardly teach us that which the sound of the gospel doth outwardly tell us, that we are saved by the merit of the Son of God.⁸

⁴Ibid., 272.

⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536 ed., reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 34-35.

⁶John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, vols. XX, XXI (1559 ed. reprint, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.iii.9; there Calvin equates ongoing repentance with regeneration. See this emphasis as originally present also in the Geneva Confession of 1536, head 8 in Charles C. Cochrane, ed. *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 122. Calvin was also quite capable, however, of occasionally speaking of regeneration as inception; see for instance *Institutes* (1559) II.iii.6 where he says that 'regeneration....is the beginning of the spiritual life'. A most balanced treatment of these two emphases in Calvin is that of Pete Wilcox, "Conversion in the Thought and Experience of John Calvin," *Anvil* 14.2 (1997): 113-28.

⁷So Schenck, Trouwborst as indicated in footnote 1.

⁸Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, 4 vols. (London: Parker Society, 1839-52), IV.I., 37.

Here, already in mid-sixteenth century, we have a description of regeneration-as-inception, which the non-appearance of the precise terminology notwithstanding, quite fully anticipates later developments. One can detect the influence of Bullinger on this matter in the document of 1549, *Mutual Consent of the Churches of Zurich and Geneva As to the Sacraments*, a document produced under the threatening activity of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles. Taking up the difficult question of the relationship between a child's reception of baptism and the all-important activity of the Spirit of God (without which the ceremony would be empty) the position is taken that "those who were baptized when mere infants, God regenerates in childhood, or adolescence, occasionally even in old age."⁹ By implication, this is a regeneration which, because punctiliar, provides entry into the new life.

On the other hand, as in Calvin, there is no really developed doctrine of regeneration in Calvin's younger contemporary, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583). Ursinus, co-author of and commentator upon the Heidelberg Catechism (1562), can state that the effects of this all-important justifying faith are "conversion, regeneration, and universal obedience" and yet go on to explain that by regeneration he means something "which is begun in this life, and will be perfected in the life to come."¹⁰ There is really no movement here beyond what we find in Calvin's *Institutes* of 1559.

Yet when we have taken note of the recurring appearance of this sixteenth-century conception of "regeneration- as-process," it is not as though early Reformed Protestantism spoke of regeneration *solely* in that sense and not at all in the now more common sense of the inception of spiritual life. Consistent with what we have seen, in tendency, in Bullinger, regeneration in this more defined sense as distinct from sanctification is referred to in the Confession of the English (Refugee) Congregation at Geneva (1556), the French Confession (1559), and the Scots Confession (1560).¹¹ Particularly of note is that in the latter case, spiritual regeneration is described thus:

For by nature we are so dead, blind and perverse . . . unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of His blessed will. As we confess that God the Father created us when we were not, as His Son our Lord redeemed us when we were enemies to Him, so also we confess that the Holy Ghost does sanctify and regenerate us, without any respect to any merit proceeding from us, be it before or be it after our regeneration.

This plainly is regeneration conceived of as punctiliar.

⁹*Mutual Consent of the Churches of Zurich and Geneva As to the Sacraments*, Art. 20 in Henry Beveridge, ed. *Tracts and Treatises of John Calvin*, 3 volumes, (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), II. p. 218.

¹⁰Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (1591), trans. G. W. Williard (1851, reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), Lord's Day 7, Q. 21, 113.

¹¹"Confession of the English Congregation at Geneva," head III, "French Confession of 1559," Art. XXII, and the "Scots Confession of 1560," chap. XII in Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 133, 151, 171.

Similarly, the Belgic Confession of 1561 speaks of the way in which “the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost doth regenerate and make him a new man,”¹² while the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 uses the term “regenerate” repeatedly to describe the individual who is now in a state of salvation: “Scripture requires regeneration of whoever among us wishes to be saved.”¹³ Thus, while fully allowing that the conception of regeneration in Calvin and Ursinus was an extended conception, embracing not only the onset of new life in Christ but also its progress, we are not under any obligation to suppose that this opinion was utterly dominant. There is ample evidence that regeneration understood (as we now understand it) as the inception of spiritual life, encountered in connection with the hearing of the Word of God in the gospel, was an always-more-widespread conception as the sixteenth century advanced. But this is hardly the only consideration when we examine the doctrine of regeneration within the sixteenth century.

II. The Emergence of the Doctrine of Regeneration As Distinct from a Wider Conception of Special or Effectual Calling.

As one examines the writings of the sixteenth-century Reformed Protestants, it emerges that whatever may have been their conception of regeneration, narrowly considered as the inception of the new life within one who is to be saved, they had very clear conceptions of the secret workings of the Holy Spirit, associated with regeneration, which have the effect of drawing a person to faith in Christ. Thus, we find that John Calvin, who understood regeneration was lifelong, himself, was clear on the calling aspect. He speaks of the work of the Spirit in calling sinners to salvation in Christ “consisting not only in the preaching of the Word, but of the illumination of the Spirit.” He emphasizes that as to the timing of this call, “the elect are gathered into Christ’s flock by a call not immediately at birth, and not all at the same time, but according as it please God to dispense his grace to them.”¹⁴ Thus, even in the age of Reformation, there was an inching forward in understanding the mutual relationship of calling and regeneration and a growing understanding of how they are actualized in time. And this emerging change, perhaps only implicit in the late sixteenth century, becomes more evident in the seventeenth. Reflecting the pastoral reality in which an extensively Protestantized Europe was still largely nominal in its Christian profession a full century after Luther’s initial protest, various Reformed Protestant theologians begin to insist on the distinctiveness and necessity of regeneration, considered as this initial imparting of

¹²“Belgic Confession of Faith” Art. XXIV, in Cochrane, 205.

¹³“Second Helvetic Confession,” in Cochrane, 238.

¹⁴Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), vol., XX, XXI, III.xxiv, 2, 10.

divine life into a sinner's darkened heart.¹⁵ I stress that this is *not* the insistence of enthusiasts and sectarians. And if anything, this emphasis is more pronounced, initially, on the Continent than in England and Scotland.

Thus, regeneration as the initial impartation of divine life by a direct action of the Holy Spirit is already clearly in evidence in the Canons of the Synod of Dordt (1619). The advance in clarity of statement is marked:

But when God accomplishes his good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, he not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by his Holy Spirit . . . but by the agency of the same regenerating Spirit he pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised. . . . And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation; a resurrection from the dead; a making alive which God works in us without our aid.¹⁶

This is especially impressive when it is recalled that the Canons expressed the theological consensus of the Reformed churches of the United Netherlands, Rhineland, Switzerland, what is today Belgium and Great Britain – a group characterized by some theological diversity of its own.

Acknowledging this prominence given to regeneration in the Synod of Dordt, it is not surprising to find the same doctrine clearly enunciated in 1624 by Amandus Polanus of Hanover, author of *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae*:

Regeneration is God's *beneficium* (favor) by which our corrupt nature is begotten and renewed a second time in God's image through the Holy Spirit by the incorrupt seed of God's Word.¹⁷

Again, we find the Reformed theologian of Basel, Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629), writing in his *Compendium Theologiae Christianae* (1626) giving extended treatment to the subject of "Special Calling." It is plain that Wollebius, who proceeds to show that this "special calling" is called in Scripture "the new creation, rebirth, drawing, divine teaching, and

¹⁵William B. Evans hypothesizes in *Imputation and Impartation: "Union with Christ" in American Reformed Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), ch. 2, that over and above these pastoral realities, Reformed theology in the early seventeenth century was proceeding to make more and more of the "order of salvation." See hints of this also in Orr, 272-74.

¹⁶*The Canons of the Synod of Dordt*, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (1877, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), III, 590. (Third & Fourth Heads of Doctrine, arts. xi and xii).

¹⁷Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* VI, 37, as quoted in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out from the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thomson (1950, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 519.

resurrection,” is in fact discussing within that rubric what we now recognize as regeneration, i.e. the initial imparting of new life which constitutes an individual a Christian. It is also noteworthy that Wollebius, a paedobaptist, is careful to distinguish this “special calling” from the act of baptism: “The time of calling is not necessarily that of baptism; God calls some before baptism, some in baptism, and some after baptism.”¹⁸

The English Puritan writer, Reformed theologian, William Ames (1576-1633) who became professor of theology in the University of Franeker, the Netherlands, from 1622, took a similar stance in his *Marrow of Theology* (1629). His discussion of divine calling enfolded into it a consideration of regeneration, which he explicitly names:

. . . calling is termed conversion, Acts 26:20. All who obey the call of God are completely turned from sin to grace and from the world to follow God in Christ. It is also called regeneration or the very beginning of a new life, a new creation, a new creature – and it is often so called in the Scriptures.¹⁹

Yet the emphasis of seventeenth-century Reformed theology could also be more muted on this subject. The still-famous Irish archbishop of Armagh and Reformed theologian, James Ussher (1581-1656) reflected this in his *A Bodie of Divinitie* (1648). Ussher, so widely reputed to be a seminal theological influence among the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1649), would only state on the subject of calling and regeneration:

God does not only offer grace to us, but causeth us effectually to receive it: and therefore is said not only to draw us, but also to create a new heart in us, whereby we follow him.²⁰

And that is the sum of it! Here, as in the preceding century, we see the substance of the eventual doctrine of regeneration enunciated without any clear utilization of the terminology itself.

The Westminster Assembly of Divines, to whose number Ussher declined to be added, also followed this somewhat circumspect approach by devoting a chapter (ch. X) of the Westminster Confession of Faith to the broad topic of “Effectual Calling” and employing the verb “regenerate” but once within it. The verb appears again, twinned with “effectual calling,” in the Confession’s

¹⁸Wollebius, “Compendium Theologiae Christianae,” in John W. Beardslee, ed., *Reformed Dogmatics: Seventeenth-Century Reformed Theology through the Writings of Wollebius, Voetius, and Turretin*. (1965, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 157-58.

¹⁹William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (1629, reprint, Boston, MA: Pilgrim, 1968), ch. XXVI, head 19.

²⁰James Ussher, *A Bodie of Divinitie* (1648, reprint, Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2007), Sixteenth head, 170. The same muted emphasis can be noted in Thomas Watson’s *A Body of Divinity* (1692, reprint, London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 221. Watson’s treatment of “inward call” includes “renewal of heart” and “drawing of the will.”

chapter on Sanctification (ch. XIII).²¹ But it should be plain to us that a description of “Effectual Calling” which entails “calling out of the state of sin and death in which they are by nature . . . enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly . . . taking away their heart of stone and giving unto them a heart of flesh and quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit”²² is plainly a discussion of regeneration *as well* as calling. And these are motions of the Holy Spirit towards the fallen *in time* rather than in eternity.²³ The Savoy Confession of Faith, a slight modification of the Westminster Confession by Congregational Independents in 1658 went only marginally further; in a new chapter “Of the Gospel” it expanded upon the idea of effectual calling by saying that

men who are dead in trespasses may be born again, quickened, or regenerated (by) an effectual, irresistible work of the Holy Ghost upon the whole soul for the producing in them (of) a new spiritual life’²⁴

The treatment of this subject by the celebrated seventeenth-century Baptist writer, John Bunyan (1628-1688), is of a piece with what we have seen earlier in the seventeenth century. In his treatise, *A Confession of My Faith*,²⁵ Bunyan had affirmed:

I believe that to effectual calling, the Holy Ghost must accompany the word of the Gospel and that with mighty power; I mean that calling which of God is made to be the fruit of electing love. . . . Otherwise men will not, cannot hear and turn. Samuel was called four times before he knew the voice of him that spake from heaven.²⁶

III. The Age of Later Puritans and Reformed Orthodoxy

Now with the consideration of the viewpoint of the Westminster Divines, the Congregational Independents, and Bunyan, we have come to the age of the later Puritans and of Reformed

²¹Carl Robbins has gathered a fuller list of allusions to regeneration in the Westminster Standards. See also Robbins, “The Reformed Doctrine of Regeneration,” in Beisner, ed., *The Federal Vision*, ch. 13.

²²*Westminster Confession of Faith* X, i-ii. The primary use of the verb “regenerate” comes in X, iii where the difficult cases of those dying in infancy and others incapable of being outwardly called by the Word are considered.

²³The references to time in the Westminster Confession’s treatment of the application of redemption are worthy of much greater attention than they are receiving in current discussions. Note the references to time at X, i, iii; XI, iv.

²⁴See Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III. 718-19.

²⁵The date of first publication is not known. Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 171, indicates that the treatise was only added to the collection of Bunyan’s writings in 1736-37 and was not included in the 1692 edition.

²⁶John Bunyan, “The Confession of My Faith” in *The Complete Works of John Bunyan* (Marshallton, DE: NFCE, 1968), I, 421

orthodoxy. These, we find not to be the originators, but only the elucidators of a doctrine of regeneration as the inception of new life which is now capable of being discussed as an operation of the Holy Spirit distinguishable from special or effectual calling. The doctrine of regeneration as inception into spiritual life which had already appeared in Europe in the opening decades of the seventeenth century in the writings of Wollebius, of Polanus, and in the Canons of Dordt, was now taken up by writers such as Gisbertus Voetius (1588-1676), Franciscus Burmannus (1628-79), Herman Witsius (1636-1708), and Johannes Henricus Heideggerus (1633-1698).²⁷ Among the later Puritan writers John Owen (1616-1683), Stephen Charnock (1628-1680), John Flavel (1627-1691), and John Howe (1630-1705) there are generated extended systematic investigations of the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration and His means of granting it.

These Puritan developments, which are echoed in European Pietism, do have a pastoral context. As one reads the later Puritans closely, one finds them emphasizing the distinctiveness of regeneration as an operation of the Spirit active in the sinner's lifetime, and using the language of "new birth" to describe the distinguishing feature of the truly Christian man or woman. They do this in the face of a then-contemporary Christian moralism, which was working to reduce the Christian message to a question of right behavior and which – in light of the spiritual tumults of the period, just passed – now decries all "enthusiasm" and heart religion.²⁸ In the face of such a challenge, evangelical writers such as Owen are at pains to emphasize that right behavior and right action (which moralists "preach up") must be rooted in new life imparted by God.²⁹ Without the new life, the fruits of obedience and virtue cannot appear. Thus, regeneration must be a frequent theme for godly preachers:

The work of the Spirit of God in regenerating the souls of men is diligently to be inquired into by the preachers of the gospel, and all to whom the word is dispensed. For the former sort, there is a peculiar reason for their attendance unto this duty; for they are used and employed in the work itself by the Spirit of God and are by him made instrumental for the effecting of this birth and life. So the apostle Paul styles himself the father of them who were converted to God or regenerated through the word of his ministry.³⁰

²⁷See Heppie XX, supra for illustrations of this from Voetius (1648), Witsius (1694), Heidegger (1696) and Burmann (1699)

²⁸This period, known also as the "interregnum" because there was no monarch in England between 1649 and 1660, was characterized by unbridled activity of various sectarian expressions of Christianity. See C. Fitzsimmons Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (New York: Seabury, 1966).

²⁹Owen, in his "Discourse on the Work of the Holy Spirit" (1674), in *The Works of John Owen* (London: Banner of Truth, 1966), III, 121ff., has regularly refuted such insinuations by Samuel Parker, author of "Defence and Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Polity" (1671).

³⁰Ibid., 226.

This context is reflected equally in Stephen Charnock, who preached on *The Necessity of Regeneration* in the difficult times which followed both the restoration of monarchy and the ejection of Puritan ministers from the Church of England:

If regeneration be so necessary, then how much to be lamented is the ignorance of this doctrine in the world? And strange and sad it is that it should be so little considered. The common talk is of serving God and reforming the life, but who of a thousand speaks of the necessity of a new nature? It is a sad case that, when a doctrine is so clear, men should be so stupid and deludingly damn themselves; that they should be so sottishly ignorant of this who have Bibles in their hands and houses, yet not understand this, which is the great purpose for which God even sent the Scripture among the sons of men.³¹

Charnock's own approach was to urge his hearers to seek this all-necessary regeneration:

If it be necessary to be had, it is necessary to be sought. We are all at this present before God in an old or new nature; and if we die in the nature we have received from old Adam, without another from the new, it is as certain that every one of us shall be excluded out of the kingdom of God as it is certain we live and breathe in the places where we stand or sit. We are born of the earth, we must be born from heaven; we must have a spiritual as well as an animal life.³²

Another of the later Puritans, John Flavel (1627- 1691), devoted extensive attention to the theme of regeneration in his treatise, *The Method of Grace*. He stressed the decisiveness of this saving change:

This infusion of spiritual life is done *instantaneously*, as all creation work is; hence it is resembled to that plastic power which, in a moment, made the light to shine out of darkness; just so God shines into our hearts, 2 Cor. iv. 6.³³

John Howe (1630-1705), not to be outdone by his late-Puritan predecessors for attentiveness to the doctrine of regeneration in that time of religious confusion, preached thirteen sermons on the single text (1 John 5.1), "Whoever believes in Jesus Christ, is born of God." The emphasis was rather like of that of Charnock, who found religiosity rampant, but Christian faith scarce:

It may indeed seem a great thing to be a son of God, one born of God; but the name of believing is become so cheap amongst us, and carries so little and so diminished a sound with it, that we are

³¹Stephen Charnock, "The Necessity of Regeneration" in *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (1688, reprint, 1865, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 58.

³²*Ibid.*, 69.

³³John Flavel, "The Method of Grace," in *The Works of John Flavel*, 6 vols (reprint, 1820, London: Banner of Truth, 1968), II. 93.

too generally tempted to look upon it as a slight, and small and trivial matter.³⁴

All this unfolds in a confusing state of affairs in European Protestantized Christendom in which real and nominal Christianity are found intertwined. The same emphases we can note in these late Puritan writers are observable also in then-contemporary orthodox Reformed writers in Europe. Francis Turretin (1623-1687) regularly highlighted the importance of regeneration as the inception of Christian life. We find that like writers earlier in the seventeenth century, Turretin treats regeneration-as-inception as an aspect of effectual or special calling. Distinctive in Turretin is the evidence that he is laboring to uphold the orthodox Protestant position on this matter against the polemical assaults of Catholic counter-Reformation theologians such as Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621). Bellarmine had found the Reformed conception of divine calling as effectual to be highly objectionable, inasmuch as it enshrined the divine initiative at the expense of a human will that he deemed to be largely unaffected by sin. On such a view, divine calling must not go beyond persuasion, lest it interfere with human liberty. Against this point of view, Turretin insists that

the action of God in the conversion of man . . . consists not in a simple and bare moral suasion (which is merely objective), but in an omnipotent and irresistible power. It is nothing less than the very creation and resurrection of man, which therefore operates not only objectively, but also effectively with man. . . . Now who can believe that to regenerate and resuscitate man, to take away his heart of stone and to give him a heart of flesh is nothing else than to morally persuade to conversion? . . . But far different is the language of Augustine when he says, “Not by the law and doctrine sounding without, but by an internal and secret, a wonderful and ineffable power, God works in the hearts of men not only true revelations, but also good wills.”³⁵

The reference here to “omnipotent and irresistible power” might, by itself suggest, that Turretin supposed that this grace was only an exercise of divine might; but as he went on to make clear, his conception was that in regeneration, the omnipotent grace of God engages the sinner at multiple levels of need:

God regenerates the minds of the elect by a certain intimate and wonderful operation and creates them as it were anew by infusing his vivifying Spirit, who gliding into the inmost recesses of the soul, reforms the mind itself, healing its depraved inclinations and prejudices, (and) endues it with strength.³⁶

Fascinatingly, Turretin combats a then-contemporary criticism of the Reformed understanding of regeneration, which charged that the divine initiative understood in this way meant that

³⁴John Howe, *The Works of John Howe* (New York: John Haven, 1835), Sermon XXXVIII, 882.

³⁵Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols. ed. James T. Dennison (1696, reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), II, 519.

³⁶*Ibid.*, II, 523.

the human subjects of regenerating grace are as good as oblivious to what is transpiring, so disengaged are they. But Turretin responds:

Man is not like a log and a trunk in his regeneration as our opponents falsely charge upon us. The will is the receptive subject of grace; this cannot be said of a trunk. The Spirit does not force the will and carry it on unwilling to conversion, but glides most sweetly into the soul (although in a wonderful and ineffable manner, still most suitably to the will) and operates by an infusion of supernatural habits by which it is freed little by little from its innate depravity, so as to become willing from unwilling and living from dead. The will so renewed and acted upon immediately acts, converting itself to God and believing.³⁷

Benedict Pictet (1655-1724), theological successor to Turretin, similarly dealt with regeneration within the larger category of effectual or, as he terms it, “inward” calling.

It is termed “calling according to the divine purpose,” (Rom. viii.28), also regeneration, sanctification, and conversion...It is termed regeneration to denote the entire inability of man to what is good; to denote the great change which takes place in him, so great that he seems to be born anew; and also to intimate the almighty power of divine grace. . . . Calling and regeneration denote the mere acts of God, and not our own; sanctification and conversion denote the acts of God, and our own also, as stirred up within us by the grace of God. These terms, however, are frequently distinguished in this manner; effectual calling is the giving of faith and repentance, and thus it precedes both; regeneration sometimes includes effectual calling, and the renovation of the corrupt nature; at other times it is strictly taken for the latter only; sanctification is the continuance or carrying on of regeneration; conversion sometimes means the same as regeneration, sometimes as repentance.³⁸

IV. The Eighteenth Century, the Century of Awakening, is the Period in which the “Floodgate” is Alleged to have Opened and the Emphasis on Regeneration Becomes Obsessive. Do We Note Substantive Changes?

Most worthy of note, early in this century, is the now-famous work of the Scottish minister, Thomas Boston (1676-1732), *Human Nature in Its Fourfold Estate* (1720). In a way highly reminiscent of late Puritan writers, Owen, Charnock, and Flavel, Boston gives real prominence to this doctrine; it is the first theme dealt with in the opening of the “third estate,” the state of grace. One readily grasps Boston’s pastoral motivation in pressing this doctrine:

³⁷Ibid., II, 524.

³⁸Benedict Pictet, *Christian Theology*, trans. Frederick Reyroux (1696, reprint, London: Seeley, 1834), 339.

Many call the church their mother, whom God will not own to be his children . . . All that are baptized are not born again. Simon Magus was baptized, yet still “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” Where Christianity is the religion of the country, many will be called by the name of Christ, who have no more of him but the name; and no wonder, seeing the devil has his goats among Christ’s sheep. . . . Good education is not regeneration. Education may chain up men’s lusts, but cannot change their hearts. A wolf is still a ravenous beast though it be in chains.

Boston, very much like the late Puritans, is contending with nominal Christianity in a country where the Reformation has been in place for a century or more.

In these same years, the young Jonathan Edwards—even as a recent Yale graduate serving a short pastorate in New York City—was giving thought to the doctrine of regeneration. In a short piece of theological “Miscellany” penned in 1722, he compared the new birth of the sinner to the joining of the soul to the fetus in a mother’s womb.

In the new birth there is certainly a very great change made in the soul: so in the first birth there is a very great change when the rational soul is first infused, for the fetus immediately upon it becomes a living creature and a man, that before had no life; yet the sensible change is very gradual.³⁹

While he treated regeneration as a distinct reality in this early short meditation, it was his general tendency to treat regeneration as an aspect of effectual calling, a divine calling decisive in bringing sinners from darkness to light.⁴⁰

Philip Doddridge of Northampton (1702-1751) delivered a course of sermons (later published) on the theme of regeneration in 1741. The year is important. For this was just the time when both from various corners of Britain and from the then thirteen American colonies came reports of large-scale evangelical awakening. Doddridge stood theologically in the tradition of late Puritanism and was also abreast of current European Reformed theology. What did he, active as both pastor and theological tutor contribute to the theme we are exploring?

Here the doctrine of regeneration is stated with *simplicity*. The course of seven sermons begins from only four New Testament texts: Eph. 2:1, 2 (you he has quickened) John 3:3 (Jesus’ instruction to Nicodemus), 2 Cor. 5:17 (the Christian is a new creation) and Titus 3:5 (washing and renewal); it is also remarkably free of the fine theological distinctions one finds on every page of a Turretin (above). And yet, having said this, we dare not imply a theological regress. There is a complexity, a multi-faceted approach embodied in a definition of regeneration which is stated thus:

³⁹Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellany 241: Regeneration,” in John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 42.

⁴⁰So, for instance, “Miscellaneous Observations on Theological Subjects,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (1834, reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), II, 550.

A prevailing disposition of the soul to universal holiness, produced and cherished by the influences of God's Spirit on our hearts, operating in a manner suitable to the constitution of our nature, as rational and accountable creatures.⁴¹

While there is observable here the familiar emphasis on the ultimate necessity of God's taking the initiative in regeneration, there is also, a less familiar concern, (present also in Turretin, above) to fathom how the sovereign initiatives of grace *engage*, rather than merely conquer fallen creatures. Though it is somewhat anachronistic to speak this way, we might call this a psychological interest.⁴² Doddridge wants to understand what *manner* of a divine working in a fallen human is required to produce a change of "prevailing disposition." But for all this, we are only seeing here themes about the secret dealings of the Holy Spirit with a sinner, in conjunction with the ministry of the Word, which we have observed across the preceding two hundred years. Here is no unbridled enthusiasm, no rantings of the unlettered.

The theme of regeneration also was of importance to the eighteenth-century Baptist theologian of distinction, John Gill (1697-1771), as shown in his *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (1767). Though Gill was no doubt familiar at the time of writing with the treatises of the late Puritans, Doddridge, and European theologians on this theme, his treatment is truly his own. As with Doddridge, this is a less technical, less ornate approach than that shown in Turretin. Conversion, according to Gill is

excited and encouraged by the ministry of the word, by which it appears that a man is born again; so then the three thousand first converts, and the jailor were first regenerated, or had the principle of grace wrought in their souls by the Spirit of God, and then were directed and encouraged by the ministry of the apostles to repent and believe in Christ, whereby it became manifest that they were born again.⁴³

John Brown (1722-1787) the Scottish Secession Presbyterian divine was, in regard to the doctrine of regeneration, more like the Genevan theologians Turretin and Pictet than like the late Puritans in that he returned to treating regeneration as a subsidiary aspect of effectual calling. The particular stress of the treatment of regeneration in his *A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1782) is that it is the means by which the sinner is brought into union with

⁴¹Philip Doddridge, *Miscellaneous Works*, 2 vols. (1839, reprint, Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 2003), II, 726.

⁴²This "psychological" interest can also be detected in Jonathan Edward's treatise, "Narrative of Surprising Conversions" (1737), in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), I, 352, where he remarks on how, of late, the process of conversion seems accelerated compared to former times.

⁴³John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 2 vols. (1767, reprint, London, 1839, reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 115.

Christ.⁴⁴ Regeneration is effected in the sinner not by an act of bare divine omnipotence, but (in his striking phrase) “in the time of love.”⁴⁵

V. Drawing the Threads Together

This paper began with an acknowledgement of a disturbing current tendency to suggest that the doctrine of regeneration as inception into new life, because not prominent in the first age of Reformation, should be “pared back” now, in our time. We took note of the hypothesis, advanced by this viewpoint, that regeneration never achieved its more prominent role until preachers and evangelists of the Great Awakening era harped on it too often. It is an interesting hypothesis. To be fair, it should be allowed that this contention *might yet* be shown to be true if one took the time to study sermons which have survived from that time, compared to those of an earlier era. But the difficulty is that those who have advanced the theory have *not* attempted to demonstrate that eighteenth-century preaching about regeneration was distinctive or excessive. They have been content to merely *assert* that it was so.⁴⁶ Thus the suggestion that there was an obsession with regeneration in the eighteenth century has been much easier to advance than to substantiate. This paper has turned to hard evidence of a different kind and reached a very different conclusion.

This paper has shown that in spite of ambiguities associated with the view of Calvin and Ursinus on regeneration, the teaching that regeneration was the Holy Spirit’s inceptive work of awakening and infusing the sinner with new life was beginning to be clarified by 1560. Such teaching was explicitly evident by the time of the Synod of Dordt and was the common theme of British Puritans and Continental Reformed theologians through the balance of the seventeenth century. It was in *that* century, rather than in the century to follow, that the doctrine of regeneration as inception began to be considered in a free-standing way, distinct from special or effectual calling. And as for the eighteenth century, far from there being strong evidence that this doctrine was harped on too often, there is a different kind of evidence suggesting that if anything, the presentation of the doctrine was somewhat simplified and was explained in a less-technical form.

⁴⁴John Brown, *A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1782, reprint, as *The Systematic Theology of John Brown*, Grand Rapids: Christian Heritage, 2002), 336-37.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 355.

⁴⁶See footnote 1. Trouwborst, in his essay, “From Covenant to Chaos: The Reformers and their Heirs on Covenant Succession,” in Benjamin Wikner, ed., *To You and Your Children: Examining the Biblical Doctrine of Covenant Succession* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2005), 59-103, has revised his 2004 opinion (in which he followed Schenck and faulted the era of the Great Awakening). He now believes that an increased emphasis upon regeneration in the seventeenth century entailed a defection from the doctrine of the covenant earlier championed by the Magisterial Reformers.

The increase in attention to the doctrine of regeneration from the sixteenth century forward is evidently *not* best explained by making reference to the emphasis on revival in the eighteenth century, but by the sober realization of the inadequate evangelization of Reformation Europe, which dawned on thoughtful preachers and theologians. There is clear evidence that the heightened emphasis on regeneration, far from being “made in America,” was of European importance before it was taken seriously elsewhere. Transatlantic preachers such as Whitefield and Freylinghausen preached new birth on the far side of the Atlantic before proclaiming it here. Such are the fruits of our survey up to 1800.

That the doctrine of regeneration has declined in importance for us in the early twenty-first century is therefore *not* necessarily a sign of some recovered equilibrium. Conservative Protestantism is now marginalized in our culture to a degree hardly imaginable a half-century ago; we are too inclined to let the former searching (and sometimes nettlesome) emphasis upon the absolute need for regeneration give way to less confrontational themes. As well, strands of conservative Protestantism which, reflected in the literature surveyed in this paper, have done most to assail the former emphasis on regeneration, are those which in this unsettling context of Christian marginalization, are most likely to focus inward upon those who already comprise the visible church – to the potential neglect of those who need to hear, repent, and believe the gospel.⁴⁷

A judicious appropriation of the Reformed theological heritage will not insist that we slavishly stand by earlier, perhaps less coherent, formulations of the doctrine of regeneration traceable to early writers such as Calvin and Ursinus – especially when there is evidence that it was good theology and good pastoral practice which required the refinement of and additional elaboration upon themes such as regeneration, in the description of which they were, after all, but pioneers.

⁴⁷Note the salutary caution on this front to those who lay heightened stress on the doctrine of the covenant and on the visible church, issued by Gerald Bray in his *Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 208.

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THE BIBLE'S STORYLINE

HOW IT AFFECTS THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION



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Why is it so difficult for evangelical Christians to agree on the biblical storyline? Scripture is no different from other stories. It must have a beginning, middle, and end, determined by its author. Readers must not try to write God's story for him. As Baptists we should willingly accept the Bible's storyline. Consequently, why are there conflicting views among Baptists?

Evangelicals teach three different storylines: Covenant Theology, Dispensational Theology, and New Covenant Theology. Covenant theologians and Dispensationalists have argued with each other for years; neither considered whether both could be wrong. They believe New Covenant Theology to be a modern error.

For many years I thought underlying assumptions were the primary cause of theological disputes. But I now realize how much history has influenced the assumptions of modern day theologians. Those assumptions in turn affect the doctrine of salvation.

Therefore I shall compare the history, beliefs, and underlying assumptions of Covenant Theology and New Covenant Theology. I shall also discuss the implications of their assumptions on the doctrine of salvation. Specifically, how does their message of salvation affect the eternal destiny of non-believers? Afterward I shall conclude with the New Testament interpretation of God's covenants with Abraham, Moses and the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31.

Covenant Theology

The roots of Covenant Theology go back to the beginning of time. Since the formation of city-states, government and religion have joined together. Christian Roman emperors continued the practice. Having been raised a devout Catholic, Martin Luther firmly believed in the union of church and state. When he nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the Wittenberg Church door on October 31, 1517, he changed the world forever. It was the birth of Protestantism. Although Luther preached salvation by faith alone, he never changed his attitude toward the union of church and state. Other Reformers maintained the same position. Thus the coalition of government and religion continued in Protestant countries as well as in Catholic ones.

The Puritans were second generation Reformers in England. At first they attempted to reform the church from within, but eventually they separated from the state church. Yet they still believed in the union of church and state. As soon as possible, they united their churches to friendly secular governments. Hence in 1648 the English Parliament and Scottish General Assembly approved The Westminster Confession. Except for some minor changes this document is still the model for Covenant Theology in the English speaking world.

Like the Puritans modern covenant churches practice infant baptism and a church government where the local congregation is subordinate to the presbytery. Some of these churches wish civil authorities had the right to enforce church laws or discipline on the entire population. The recent Christian Reconstructionist movement in the United States demonstrates this.

Covenant theologians believe in the Doctrines of Grace, espoused by Calvin, and the unity of the biblical storyline. They teach that biblical history is the unfolding story of God's plan of salvation and they trace this story by means of three covenants. The covenant of redemption "stresses the total agreement between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the plan of salvation."¹ Before creation each person in the Trinity agreed what part each would have in the redemption story. The Father purposed salvation, the Son purchased salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation.

At creation God gave a covenant of works to Adam and Eve. They must obey God in order to live in sweet fellowship and innocence with their Creator forever. If they broke God's one and only rule, they would suffer the consequences of spiritual and physical death.

The covenant of grace is a covenant between God and sinners. These theologians divide history into two administrations or dispensations: the time of the Law and the Gospel age. Since this covenant embraces all of history, every biblical covenant is under its umbrella and is a covenant of grace. By considering the Mosaic covenant to be one of grace, covenant theologians flat line the biblical storyline, in effect making Moses equal to Christ. This means they feel at liberty to transfer certain principles from Moses to their churches. Since the Mosaic covenant united religion and politics under God's authority, they are justified in continuing the union of church and state. Infant baptism replaces circumcision. Moreover the state has the duty to punish anyone not conforming to the state religion because the Mosaic Law inflicted harsh punishments on lawbreakers.

Covenant theologians disagree on eschatology—the end of God's story. Some are postmillennial while others are amillennial. Concerning postmillennialism, Loraine Boettner explains:

Thus Postmillennialism holds that Christianity is to become the controlling and transforming influence not only in the moral and spiritual life of some individuals, but also in the entire social, economic and cultural life of the nations. There is no reason why this change should not take place

¹R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?: Understanding the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 108.

over the entire earth, with pagan religions and false philosophies giving place to the true, and the earth being restored in considerable measure to that high purpose of righteousness and holiness for which it was created.²

Other postmillennialists of the modern Christian Reconstructionist movement believe in Christianizing the world by force. Dennis M. Swanson comments:

For the Theonomist the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) is interpreted to mean not just the salvation of individuals, but also the salvation of the social structures of society. One Theonomist writes:

Personal redemption is not the do-all and end-all of the Great Commission. Thus, our evangelism must include sociology as well as salvation; it must include reform and redemption, culture and conversion, a new social order as well as new birth, a revolution as well as regeneration. Any other kind of evangelism is short-sighted and woefully impotent. Any other kind of evangelism fails to live up to the high call of the Great Commission.³

Thus Swanson concludes, “Theonomists clearly have an activist approach to the Great Commission bordering on militancy.”⁴

Unlike postmillennialism, amillennialism does not guarantee that the whole world will eventually be Christianized. During the gospel age God is continually enlarging his kingdom, but Satan is also building his kingdom. Some postmillennialists agree with amillennialists that there will be a time of worldwide apostasy and tribulation just before Jesus’ second coming. Others do not. Nevertheless all covenant theologians believe in the occurrence of the same events when Jesus returns: the general resurrection of the dead, the end of the world by fire, the general judgment, the consignment of the lost to hell, and the inauguration of the new heaven and new earth for the redeemed.

Covenant theologians assume the only way to correctly understand Scripture is through the concept of covenant, particularly the covenants initiated by God and confirmed by an oath. R. C. Sproul states, “Every written document has a structure or format by which it is organized. Paragraphs have subjects and chapters have focal points. Reformed theology sees the primary structure of biblical revelation that of covenant. This is the structure by which the entire history

²Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984), 53.

³Dennis M. Swanson, “*Theonomic Postmillennialism*: A Continuation of the Princeton Tradition?”, a paper presented at the Far-West Region of the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting, April 22, 1994, [Online], The Master’s College; available at <http://www.mastersem.edu/~swanson/Theopostmil.html>; accessed on 19 April 2000.

⁴Ibid.

of redemption is worked out.”⁵ He goes on to say, “Scripture takes the swearing of vows so seriously because it takes covenants so seriously. The very basis of our relationship with God is a covenant.”⁶

Agreeing with this common structure, Craig C. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen write, “The kingdom of God, as we explain below, is all about the reign of God over his people and eventually over all of creation. Covenant is particularly about the special relationship that God makes with his people as he works out his plans in history.” They elaborate, “After all our study, we find covenant and kingdom to be the double door of the same main entrance.”⁷

Because of their underlying assumption of covenant’s importance, covenant theologians equate the concepts of covenant and kingdom. The result of this teaching is that God’s kingdom in this world is political and consists of regenerate and unregenerate people. This is contrary to Scripture. Jesus teaches, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20, 21, NIV). Since God’s kingdom is spiritual and not physical, no one will ever be able to look at a geographical area and say, “There it is!” Furthermore, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21, NIV). This means that only regenerate people belong to God’s kingdom.

When churches apply the principal of equating covenant with kingdom, some members may be unsaved. How can believers allow unregenerate hearts to think they are right with God? I wondered about this one time when I was visiting a covenant church. The pastor announced an important business meeting in which he expected anyone twelve and over to attend. I thought, “Are they all saved?” Thus Covenant Theology fosters a false security of salvation for non-believers.

New Covenant Theology

Now let us consider New Covenant Theology. As mentioned previously, dispensationalists and covenant theologians consider New Covenant Theology to be a modern error. The name may be new, but it is distinctly Baptist with roots in the Reformation.

Since New Covenant Theology is Christ-centered, we must begin a discussion of its history with the Anabaptists. This movement began in Switzerland on January 21, 1525, when approximately

⁵Sproul, 99.

⁶Ibid., 105.

⁷Craig C. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 24.

twelve men rejected the Reformers' insistence on the union of church and state and belief in infant baptism. They proceeded to baptize each other.⁸

In 1528, Pilgram [sic] Marpeck of Austria joined the Anabaptists. In his writings we discover the first glimpse of a Christocentric storyline. William R. Estep explains:

Marpeck's most creative contribution to Anabaptist thought was his view of the Scriptures. While holding the Scriptures to be the Word of God, he made a distinction between the purpose of the Old Testament and that of the New. As the foundation must be distinguished from the house, the Old Testament must be distinguished from the New. The New Testament was centered in Jesus Christ and alone was authoritative for the Brethren. To hold that the Old Testament was equally authoritative for the Christian was to abolish the distinction between the two.⁹

Furthermore Estep continues:

He [Marpeck] drew some graphic contrasts which emphasize the transitory (*zeitlich*) nature of the Old Testament when compared to the eternal (*ewig*) nature of the New. In the Old Testament there is symbol (*Figur*); in the New the essence (*Wesen*) of that which is symbolized. The Old Testament speaks of Adam, sin, death, and the law; the New Testament centers in the message of redemption through the risen Christ. He alone brings us to the new birth through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

Over 100 years later some Particular Baptists in England embraced the same storyline. They seceded from a congregational church in England sometime between 1633 and 1638.¹¹ Believing in the Doctrines of Grace, these Baptists remained reformed but rejected the union of church and state. They separated over a belief in believer's baptism and formed churches consisting only of believers. By 1641 these Baptists practiced believer's baptism by immersion.¹²

Since England was embroiled in civil war (1642—1649), Particular Baptists had religious freedom to draft The London Baptist Confession of Faith in 1644. They entitled it, "The Confession of Faith of Those Churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptist." This document is Calvinistic and affirms believer's baptism by immersion. Estep comments,

⁸William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 10–11.

⁹*Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 142–143.

¹¹Erroll Hulse, *An Introduction to the Baptists*, 2d ed. (Sussex: Carey, 1976), 25.

¹²Estep, 229.

“For the first time Calvinism and Anabaptism merged to produce a new and different religious configuration in seventeenth-century England.”¹³

In 1662, Charles II granted royal assent to an Act of Uniformity. Clergymen had to plead allegiance to the revised Prayer Book of the Church of England or face penalties. By 1664, dissenters suffered much persecution. As Calvinists, the Particular Baptists felt closer to the Presbyterians and Congregationalists than to the General Baptists who taught free will in salvation. In 1677, they drafted The Second London Confession, a revision of the Presbyterians’ Westminster Confession, and signed it in 1689. The Baptists copied the language of the covenant theologians almost word for word, but corrected differences on believers’ baptism, church government, the role of civil magistrates, and the biblical storyline.

The Baptists retained a belief in the three covenants: those of redemption, works, and grace. Yet there was one important distinction. They deleted two sections, which explained how God worked in two different administrations, effectively denying the storyline of covenant theologians. Instead they wrote, “This covenant is revealed through the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by further steps until the full revelation of it became complete in the New Testament.”¹⁴ Thus the words “Covenant Theology” and “covenant of grace” meant one thing to Reformed Baptists but something different to Presbyterians.

In modern times some covenant theologians began to question the accuracy of the covenant of grace. Jon Zens was one such person. He wrote an article, “Is There a ‘Covenant of Grace?’” in the Autumn, 1977, Baptist Reformation Review. In the spring of 1978, the same magazine published another article by Zens entitled, “Crucial Thoughts Concerning ‘Law’ in the New Covenant.” Those two articles caused quite a stir. Since he was the first to question the covenant of grace by means of a published article, Zens is called the father of New Covenant Theology.

At first the movement attracted those Presbyterians and Reformed Baptists who questioned the covenant of grace. With the advent of progressive dispensationalism in the 1990s, many dispensational Calvinists also joined this movement. In addition, some historic premillennialists flocked to New Covenant Theology.

New Covenant theologians believe in a Christ-centered storyline and in the unity of the Scriptures. Like covenant theologians, they believe in the doctrines of grace and view biblical history as God’s unfolding story of salvation. Unlike covenant theologians, they believe the Bible to be one long upward progressive storyline from the fall of man to the consummation in the

¹³Ibid., 229.

¹⁴Phillip R. Johnson, “God’s Covenant,” in *The Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)*, [Online]; available at <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/bcof.htm> ; accessed on 23 February 2008.

new heaven and new earth. Since the Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament, they believe this provides a clue of what a Christ-centered storyline means. The Old Testament relates how God prepared for the coming of his Son while the New Testament tells his story from the birth of Christ to the end of time. Thus Jesus is the central character in God's story.

Before time began, God planned to form a community of redeemed people who would worship and praise him forever. As soon as Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sinned, God promised to send the Savior, the promised Seed. The Old Testament gradually reveals more of Jesus, who is this promised Seed. Since Israel was an important building block in God's plan, he set the Israelites apart to be his special people. Therefore the Mosaic covenant is like the foundation of a house. God gradually revealed more of his plan of salvation to Israel and prepared a family for Jesus to be born into.

The New Testament represents the house built upon the foundation of the Old Testament. It tells God's story during the New Covenant era, this present age in which God is building his eternal kingdom, the church, consisting of Jew and Gentile. The climax of the biblical story occurs at Jesus' death, resurrection and exaltation as king. At Jesus' return, the following events will occur: the general resurrection of the dead, the destruction of this present earth by fire, and the general judgment. God will consign non-believers to hell and gather the redeemed to live forever with him in the new heaven and the new earth. However Progressive Dispensationalists and Historic Premillennialists insert an earthly reign of Christ into history before eternity.

Since the New Testament often fulfills or explains the Old, God refers to the Old Testament in the New. That is why New Covenant theologians allow the New to interpret the Old. After his resurrection, Jesus told two believers on the road to Emmaus, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:25, 26, NIV). Jesus immediately proceeded to trace his story through Moses and the Prophets. Therefore the underlying assumption of interpreting the Old in light of the New is scriptural since Jesus did it. Moreover in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit often explained the Old Testament in an unexpected way. Doing this does not in any way diminish how the Israelites first understood God's Word in their own day. The Holy Spirit's interpretation in the New Testament is often a secondary but more important fulfillment.

New Covenant theologians also believe in allowing clear texts to overrule difficult or ambiguous ones. For example, the writer to the Hebrews exhorts the brethren to fix their thoughts on Jesus. He writes, "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses...Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house" (Hebrews 3:3, 5, NIV). Since Jesus is God the Son, he is superior to the servant Moses. Therefore we ought to give priority to Jesus' words over Moses'. That is why on the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father tells Peter, "This is my Son, whom I love; with

him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matt. 17:5, NIV).

Finally, New Covenant theologians employ the “now-not yet” principle in order to distinguish the spiritual nature of Jesus’ kingdom now from the eternal reality of his kingdom in the new heaven and new earth. By the time Peter wrote his second epistle in A.D. 67,¹⁵ he looked forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13, NIV). Only there will the redeemed live in a world free of sin forever. Then Hab. 2:14 will truly be fulfilled.

The division among New Covenant theologians over whether or not there is a future millennial kingdom affects the doctrine of salvation. Those who are Amillennial believe that now is the day of salvation. There is no other. Paul writes, “I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2, NIV). The writer to the Hebrews confirms this idea: “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (Heb. 3:13, NIV). This present age is the only time when people may be saved by the preaching of the Gospel. This opportunity will be gone when our bridegroom comes for us. Like the parable in Matthew 25 of the ten virgins, Jesus will tell unrepentant sinners, “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you” (Matt. 25:12, NIV).

Those theologians, who believe in a future millennial kingdom at Christ’s return, teach that people will be born in sin and die during this time. God will save some. Although Carl Hoch, Jr. believes this teaching, he obviously struggles with it:

Just exactly how “all Israel” will be saved is not spelled out by Paul or any other New Testament writer. It has been the contention throughout this discussion that salvation is only in Christ. So this eschatological group must believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. They will also enjoy all the blessings that Christ has secured through his death, burial, and resurrection. And they will receive those promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament that they have not yet enjoyed, such as possession of the land of Palestine. Their position in terms of Jews and Gentiles within the church at present is not clear. . . . What label can a premillennialist give to this group of redeemed? This writer does not believe that biblical revelation to this point offers enough clear information to come to a conclusive decision on the problem.¹⁶

Once I overheard a lady telling a new Christian that people would be saved after Jesus returns. This new believer’s husband was not saved. I speculated, “Is this going to give that woman a false hope that her husband may get saved after Jesus returns? Is she breathing easier, thinking he has a second chance?”

New Covenant Theology and the New Testament

I have considered the history, beliefs and assumptions of Covenant Theology and New

¹⁵David Maas, “A Chronology of Bible Events and World Events,” *Life Application Study Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1991) 2266.

¹⁶Carl B. Hoch Jr., *All Things New: The Significance of Newness for Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 317–318.

Covenant Theology. I have also examined how each storyline affects our attitude toward non-believers—if they are saved and when God will save them. Now I shall finish by discussing how the New Testament interprets God’s covenants with Abraham, Moses, and the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31.

First of all, how does the New Testament explain the relationship between God’s covenant with Abraham and the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31? “The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. The Scripture does not say, ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16, NIV). Thus only the spiritual blessing of salvation through Jesus alone will last forever. At the last supper Jesus declared, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20, NIV). God fulfilled the eternal blessings promised to Abraham through the new covenant based on Jesus’ blood. Jesus is the sacrifice, ratifying the eternal aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. That is why the Holy Spirit looks forward to the new covenant era in Jeremiah 31:31–34. Then in Hebrews 8:8–12, he declares this present age to be that era.

What does the New Testament teach about the Mosaic covenant? We must not allegorize Scripture, but we must pay attention when God does. In Galatians, God uses Hagar and Sarah as an illustration of the old and New Covenants. “These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants...But what does the Scripture say? ‘Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son’” (Gal. 4:24, 30, NIV). Also in Hebrews 8, God teaches the superiority of Jesus as high priest over the high priest of the Mosaic covenant. “By calling this covenant ‘new’, he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear” (Heb. 8:13, NIV).

God will always have a special place in his heart for individual Jewish believers before and after the cross. However, during the Gospel age the nation of Israel is no longer set apart by God. Therefore the laws and promises given to them are no longer in force. They forfeited those promises of political superiority because of their disobedience. God has chosen the church, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, to be his holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). As such, we are the recipients of eternal promises and must submit to the law of Christ (Matt. 28:18; Gal.6:2). Since these promises are based on Jesus’ death and resurrection, believers will never lose them.

Covenant theologians understand the Mosaic covenant to be one of grace. It is true that the saints in the Old Testament waited for the Savior’s coming. The blood of the animal sacrifices was God’s promissory note that he would fulfill his promise to accomplish their salvation. In this sense it was quite gracious. Yet the old covenant was only a stepping-stone in God’s plan. The capstone was the blood sacrifice of Jesus, the precious Lamb of the new covenant.

What is the Bible’s storyline? The answer lies in tracing the coming of the promised Seed throughout Scripture. When Jesus died and rose again, he accomplished the salvation of saints past, present, and future. At Jesus’ return, it will be forever too late. The old covenant given to

Moses is not a model for the church; nor is it a hope for a future Jewish political utopia. The old covenant is only a stepping-stone for God to accomplish his marvelous salvation through Jesus.

I know many followers of Covenant Theology are saved. But some children in covenant theology churches think they are saved when they are not. They trust in their heritage and their infant baptism. This is a false security of salvation. Although fervent in preaching the Gospel to the lost, some New Covenant theologians believe God will save non-believers after Jesus' second coming. This is a false hope which encourages a second chance for salvation after Jesus returns.

God warned Ezekiel, "When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood" (Ezek. 3:18, NIV). On judgment day God will hold us accountable for encouraging a false hope or a false security of salvation. That is why teaching the correct biblical storyline is so important. I believe we should reject any storyline which endangers the eternal destination of its listeners.

CALVINISM AND PROBLEMATIC READINGS OF NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS



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Introduction

Theological determinism affirms that everything that happens does so because God has ordained it to happen that way.¹ Augustine introduced this concept into Christian theology, though theological determinism is more commonly identified with John Calvin and the tradition of Reformed theology that he initiated.² For many, Calvinism is associated primarily with the doctrines of election and perseverance. However, it also affirms a theology of specific sovereignty (i.e., everything that happens does so because God has choreographed it to happen that way). As Robert Peterson and Michael Williams put it, God ordains everything down to “the trajectory of

¹In the words of the Westminster Confession (1646), “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established” (III.1). If everything that happens does so because God has ordained it, then it follows that not only has God ordained the eternal suffering of most of those he created, but in the present world God has, through the mechanics of second causes, choreographed down to the smallest detail every murder, every rape, every genocide, every act of child abuse, every famine, every serial killing, every instance of child prostitution, every terrorist atrocity, every expression of racism, every addiction, and every sin.

²Cf. Robert Peterson and Michael Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 141. John Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things,” in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views on Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger, and Randall Basinger, 19-43 (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986); Paul Helm, “Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God,” in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views*, ed. Bruce Ware, 5-52 (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008); and Bruce Ware, “A Modified Calvinist Doctrine of God,” in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views*, ed. Bruce Ware, 76-120 (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008).

the smallest raindrop.”³ Calvinism must deny that people have any free will (libertarian freedom), for that would mean choices could be made that run counter to what God has ordained for them at every moment. Instead, Calvinists work with the concept of compatibilistic freedom, meaning that people willingly always make the choices that God ordains they will make.

Many lay Calvinists prefer to say that God permits evil rather than ordains it. They prefer to say that while God intentionally wills what is good, He reluctantly permits many evils.⁴ However, mainstream Calvinist theologians do not hold this view, and Calvin himself was critical of those who used this language: “How foolish and frail is the support of divine justice afforded by the suggestion that evils come to be, not by His will but by His permission. . . . It is a quite frivolous refuge to say that God indirectly permits them, when Scripture shows Him not only willing, but the author of them. . . . It is quite clear from the evidence of Scripture that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as He will, whether to good . . . or to evil.”⁵

Calvinist theologians and New Testament scholars commonly develop their theology in relation to those texts that speak to the issues of salvation and perseverance. They rarely discuss the implication of a deterministic theological framework for the interpretation of a wide range of other kinds of New Testament texts. This paper will explore the implications of theological determinism for reading these texts.⁶

³Peterson and Williams, *Not An Arminian*, 141. As expressed by the Westminster Confession, Calvinists do not believe that God is the immediate cause of sin and evil but argue that God works through “second causes” to ordain sin and evil. Thus, for example, if God wants someone to become a serial killer, He will bring influences to bear on the person so that he or she willingly and without any direct coercive prompting from God will become a serial killer.

⁴Some Calvinist theologians do use the language of “permission” as a way of saying that God works through second causes when he scripts evil events. However they still believe that God intentionally wills that these evils occur and it is not a matter of reluctant permission.

⁵John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* [1552], trans. J. K. S. Reid (Louisville: WJK, 1961), 176-7. A theological axiom undergirding Calvinist theology is that God’s grace is always irresistible. This has a much broader application than the irresistible character of grace with respect to salvation and perseverance. It applies to every moment of the life of every person—believer and unbeliever. Many lay Christians who identify themselves as Calvinists appear to be “cafeteria Calvinists,” believing that the grace that enables salvation and perseverance is irresistible, while in the daily outworking of the Christian life they have some degree of free will. However, no Calvinist theologians take this view.

⁶For excellent critiques of Calvinist theology see: Roger Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP Press, 2004); David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville: B& H Publishing Group, 2010). Cf. Roger Olson, ‘The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God’ in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, 148-172, for an excellent summary of a theological framework that affirms libertarian freedom. As Olson points out, Arminian-Wesleyans do not believe that we have ‘absolute’ free will in that there are a range of forces that shape and influence our will: e.g. our sinful humanity; culture and our personal biography; the work of God in a person’s life (151).

Moral Exhortations in the New Testament

Every text in the New Testament contains a wealth of moral exhortations as to how God's people are to live, for example: remain committed to their marriages (e.g., Matt. 5:31-32); forgive those who wrong them (e.g., Matt. 6:14-15); be other focused rather than self centered (e.g., Phil. 2:1-4); love and care for their wives (e.g., Eph. 5:25-33); live worthy of the Gospel (e.g., Phil 1:27); resist sin (e.g., Rom. 6:12). These moral exhortations are comprehensible on the assumption that God has gifted his people with libertarian freedom and has extended the grace which will enable them to obey. God's people are challenged to respond to God's grace by daily striving to live obediently.

If these exhortations are read within the framework of theological determinism, then the implication is that the extent of the believer's obedience is determined by what God has ordained for them at any moment, not by the person in his or her exercise of the gift-of-grace-empowered libertarian freedom. Since God's grace is always irresistible, Christians sin ultimately because God withheld the grace that would have enabled obedience.⁷ When Christians divorce, refuse to forgive, are self-centered, give into temptation, bring shame on the gospel, or abuse their loved ones, the explanation must be that God has withheld the grace that would enable obedience to the moral exhortations of Scripture because He wanted them to commit these sins.⁸

The positive function of moral exhortations is to show believers what obedience will look like when God ordains their obedience. When God withholds the grace that would enable obedience, the moral exhortations function as an indictment of the behavior that God ordains. The necessary implication is that God exhorts believers to obedience while simultaneously withholding the grace that would enable obedience in those situations where Christian obedience would result in outcomes that run counter to what God wants. Or, to put it another way, if Christian obedience resulted in an outcome that God did not ordain, e.g., that a marriage remain intact, then God

⁷Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 230-58, makes a distinction between "sufficient grace" and "effective grace." When applied to God's work in the life of the believer, effective grace is for when obedience is the desired outcome. When God ordains that believers sin, he extends sufficient grace so that the believers can be held accountable for their disobedience. However, if God intentionally withholds the grace that would enable obedience so to render the sin certain, it is problematic to call this sufficient grace.

⁸To take another set of examples, when Christians grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30), lack moral discernment (Phil. 1:10; Rom. 12:2), succumb to sexual sin (1 Thess. 4:3), choose evil rather than good (1 Thess. 5:21-22), fail to share with those in need (Rom. 12:13), are untruthful (Matt. 5:33-37), are gripped with fear and anxiety (Matt. 6:25-34), are judgmental (Matt. 7:1-5), are unfaithful in prayer (Rom. 12:12), are hearers but not doers of Jesus' teaching (Matt. 7:21-23), are found to deny their faith when persecuted (Matt. 10:16-20), are catalysts for dividing and destroying the church (1Cor. 10:10-17), or are causes of other believers to sin (Matt. 18:6-7), they do so ultimately because God withheld the grace that would have enabled obedience.

would withhold the grace that would enable obedience, with the result that in this example He would render the divorce certain. These conclusions are necessary deductions from the Calvinist view that God ordains everything that happens and that God's grace is always irresistible. As Williams and Peterson put it, "God sovereignly directs and ordains . . . our sinful acts as well as the good that we do."⁹

God's Purposes for the Believer

Closely related to the previous point is that God frequently expresses his purposes and goals for believers in the New Testament. They are to: bring God glory (Eph. 1:12); do good works (Eph 2:9); do what pleases God (Phil. 2:13); be holy (1 Thess. 4:3-7); love God and others (Luke 10:27); and be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). Theological determinism requires that the extent to which these purposes are realized in the life of individual believers and churches is determined entirely by God, not by the person in his or her exercise of the gift-of-grace-empowered libertarian freedom. God is the one who determines the extent to which believers bring glory to God or do good works. When believers fail to love God and others it is because God has withheld the grace that would enable love. God is the one who determines the specific path for each person with respect to his or her progress in the Christian life and being "conformed to the image of Christ." The disparity between Christians who lack spiritual development and those who demonstrate significant growth can only be explained in terms of what God has ordained for each person with respect to his or her progress in the Christian life.

God's Daily Work in the Life of the Believer

To come at this from another angle, there are a number of statements in the New Testament that directly focus on God's ongoing work in the life of the believer: enabling the Philippians to be partners with Paul in the spread of the Gospel (Phil. 1:6), empowering believers to live righteous lives (Phil. 1:11), and enabling them both to will and do what pleases Him (Phil. 2:13). This language makes sense on the assumption of grace-enabled libertarian freedom. God is at work to empower the believer to break free from the conditioning of the flesh (their fallen humanity) so that they have the ability to desire what is right and then to do it. To put it in contemporary terms, God grants the believer the gift-of-grace-empowered libertarian freedom. The moral exhortations that occur in the context of these affirmations encourage the believer to embrace and live out the gift-of-grace-empowered libertarian freedom each day.

The problem with interpreting these statements within the framework of compatibilistic freedom is: How does one explain disobedient believers? The failure cannot be traced to the misuse of libertarian freedom. The problem must be that when believers sin, they do so because God did not extend sufficient grace "to enable them to will and do what pleases God."

⁹Peterson and Williams, *Not an Arminian*, 161. To restate an earlier point, this is a mainstream Calvinist position, not some extreme hyper-Calvinism.

To take a specific Pauline example, in 1 Cor. 10:13 Paul tells the Corinthians that when tempted—in this context to attend temple meals—God will provide the grace that will enable them to resist temptation (in other words, a way out). This makes sense with the assumption of libertarian freedom, i.e. grace is not irresistible and therefore believers must exercise their grace-enabled libertarian freedom to take the way out. It makes less sense with the assumption of compatibilistic freedom. If God always extends the grace to resist the temptation to sin, then why do some Christians fail to embrace that grace and resist temptation? The Calvinist answer must be that God ordained that the person succumb to temptation and attend temple meals. In these circumstances, God extends to some the grace that will provide a way out of temptation, while He simultaneously extends to the others the grace that will not provide a way out of temptation.

One way a theological determinist might rationalize this would be to argue that when tempted some Christians receive “general grace” while others receive “effectual grace.” General grace is for when God ordains that believers do not resist temptation and fall into sin, and effectual grace is when God ordains that believers resist temptation and do not sin.¹⁰

Critiques of the Sins of Believers

In many New Testament texts, churches are rebuked for embracing sin and erroneous theological and ethical perspectives. The Corinthian epistles provide a glimpse into a church that had embraced a remarkable concentration of problematic positions: they wanted to marginalize the message of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:18); tried a variety of strategies to demonize Paul (e.g., 2 Cor. 10); argued that there was no ethical objection to using prostitutes (1 Cor. 6:12-20); concluded that sex between believers was inappropriate (1 Cor. 7); advocated attending meals at pagan temples where drunkenness and sex with prostitutes was the norm (1 Cor. 8, 10:1-22); used tongues as a means of self-promotion (1 Cor. 12-14); allowed the Lord’s Supper to be an occasion for overeating and getting drunk (1 Cor 11:17-33); and defined Christian leadership using Greco-Roman cultural values such as rhetorical ability, a strong physical appearance, the ability to avoid suffering, and a willingness to engage in patronage relationships (2 Cor 10-13). In response to these and other problems Paul labored strenuously to try to correct their flawed perspectives. If Paul were a theological determinist, then he believed that God (1) choreographed each of these sins in the Corinthian church, (2) ordained all the specifics of Paul’s response, (3) determined how the Corinthian church would respond to Paul’s appeals.¹¹

¹⁰As Calvinists will recognize, this is a play on the Calvinist distinction between a “general call” and “effectual call.” When the gospel is preached, those whom God has predestined to damnation hear it only as a general call, while the elect hear it as an effectual call, i.e. God enables the elect to respond. My tongue-in-cheek proposal actually corresponds to Tiessen’s distinction between sufficient grace and effectual grace (cf. note 7).

¹¹Ezekiel 24:13–16 provides an illuminating O.T. parallel: “You mix uncleanness with obscene conduct. I tried to cleanse you, but you are not clean. You will not be cleansed from your uncleanness until I have exhausted my anger on you.” With a Calvinist reading, God simultaneously tried to cleanse Israel and prevented them from being cleansed because he wanted to judge them. Cf. Jeremiah 7:12-14.

In Revelation 2-3 Jesus dictates letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. For each church, the letters blend commendation and/or censure. Where circumstances require words of censure an opportunity is given for repentance. Finally, promises of eschatological salvation and/or judgment are given depending on how believers respond to Jesus' words. If these letters are read within the framework of theological determinism, Jesus dictates these letters with full awareness that God has ordained (1) the precise pattern of obedience and disobedience in each church, (2) the specifics of the sins of each church, (3) to what extent each church will respond to his call to repentance and change. In the case of Revelation 3:20, for example, Jesus knows that the Father has ordained both that the church shut Jesus out and that He would plead with the church for a restoration of relationship. He also knows that God, not the church, is the one who determines whether or not the church will respond to Jesus' call to be invited into their midst.

James 4:2-3 states that there are times when believers do not receive from God either because they fail to pray and/or because their prayers are self-seeking and self-indulgent. A Calvinist understanding must conclude that God Himself ordained the failure to pray and/or the self-indulgent focus of prayers.

Warnings to Believers

Related to the above point are the frequent warnings in the New Testament about embracing erroneous teaching. Jesus warns about false prophets (e.g., Matt. 7:15-20), Paul warns the Philippian church about the dangers of both Judaizers and libertines (Phil. 3:2-21), and the Colossian church about a theology that is somewhat difficult to reconstruct precisely (Col. 2:16-23). In his letter to the Galatians he rebukes Christians for embracing a Judaizing theology, and in the Johannine epistles, John rebukes those who embrace a theology that again is difficult to reconstruct precisely. When read within the framework of theological determinism, the conclusion is that God choreographed all the details of these heretical theologies as well as the extent to which believers would resist or embrace false teaching or realign themselves with truth when they stumbled.

In Rev. 14:9-13 believers are warned not to compromise when persecuted. Those who fail to heed this warning and deny their faith will come under eschatological judgment, while those who remain faithful to the point of death will "rest from their labor" (i.e. will experience eschatological salvation). Elsewhere Revelation explicitly states that God extends the grace that will enable believers to remain faithful in a tribulation context (e.g., Rev. 7:1-8; 11:1-2). Revelation 14:9-13 assumes that believers can exercise their grace-empowered libertarian freedom by choosing either to defend their faith or to deny it. However, based on Calvinist assumptions, God is the one who decided "before the foundation of the world" how each believer would choose.

Well-Intentioned Differences among Christians

The New Testament contains a number of texts which acknowledge that Christians differ among themselves on various issues. In Rom. 14:1-15:4 Paul instructs Christians how to handle those situations in which Christians differ on issues that Paul believes lack intrinsic moral significance (the strong and the weak). Acts reflects differences of opinion about the Gentile mission and the conditions for acceptance of Gentiles as believers (Acts 15). Galatians 2:11-13 describes a situation in which Paul strongly disagrees with Peter and Barnabas. The Jerusalem Council stipulates that Gentile Christians are not to eat marketplace meat which originated in pagan sacrifices (Acts 15), but about six or seven years later Paul says that this meat can be eaten by any Christian (1 Cor. 11:23-33). In Phil. 3:15 Paul acknowledges that Christians will have different perspectives on some issues. He develops a strong theological argument for women wearing head coverings in public worship but acknowledges that not all will agree with him (1 Cor. 11:2-16). Theological determinism claims that God has ordained all these differences of opinions as well as the specifics of whether Christians will handle their differences well or poorly.¹²

Statements about the Christian Life

In Rom. 5:3-4 Paul states that God uses adversity as a catalyst for the character development of a believer. The question is whether this statement is conditional on the believer's appropriate response to the difficult circumstance in order for it to be character building. Schreiner argues that ultimately it is not conditional because God will always overcome the believer's temptation to respond poorly to adversity.¹³ The unstated assumption is that believers respond poorly to suffering, which ultimately results in a negative impact on their personal and spiritual formation, because God has ordained the situation. The character building function of adversity is now conditioned not upon how the person responds but on what God ordains for the person in any particular experience of adversity.

Paul understands that the Christian life is one in which there is a tension between what God wants for us and desires rooted in our fallen humanity.¹⁴ In Rom. 7:14-25 Paul explores those times in the experience of the believer when 'the flesh' rather than 'the Spirit' wins. There are

¹²Down through the centuries Christians have differed on countless points of theology and biblical interpretation. Theological determinism assumes that God ordained each and every concept, no matter how outrageous, erroneous and destructive. Furthermore God ordained all the conflicts and divisions within the church that resulted from these differences. When New Testament scholars defend a wide range of interpretive options on a given text, a Calvinist must assume that God ordained each of these interpretive positions and it is possible that none of them are correct. We can, thus, never be sure whether God has determined that we arrive at an erroneous or correct understanding of a text. It is impossible to reconcile this conclusion with Paul's affirmation that "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33, the context being a statement about worship).

¹³Schreiner, *Romans*, 256.

¹⁴E.g., the conflict between the flesh and Spirit in Gal. 5:16-17.

times when believers wants to do what is right but instead do what they know is wrong. On the assumption of libertarian freedom, Paul is saying that in spite of God's grace, which is at work to enable him "to will and to do" what pleases God, Paul occasionally chooses wrongly and sins. The failure lies with Paul's exercise of his grace-empowered libertarian freedom. On the assumption of compatibilistic freedom, Paul is saying that there are times when God extends sufficient grace, which enables Paul to desire to do the right thing, but not enough grace that would enable him to carry out this intention and as a result Paul chooses wrongly and sins. On this assumption the problem ultimately is that God withheld the grace that would have enabled Paul to translate God's ordained intentions into actions, which God did not ordain for those circumstances. Or, to put it another way, God extends the general grace, which enables the believer "to will to do the good," but withholds the effectual grace, which would enable the person "to do what pleases God."

In Rom. 5:10-17, Paul says that the Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are sons and daughters of God. Some believers have a deep and consistent experience of this witness of the Spirit. Other believers, however, have no experiential sense of being loved and accepted by God. Some experience deep anguish and torment from this lack. On the deterministic assumptions, God is the one who ordains what will be true for each believer.

In 1 Cor. 3:10-17, Paul differentiates three ways that Christians can contribute to shaping the church: (1) a constructive one ('building with gold and silver'); (2) an anemic one ('building with wood and hay'); (3) a destructive one ('if anyone destroys God's Temple'). When read within the framework of theological determinism, the passage portrays God as determining what will be true for any given individual.

In Matt. 18:16-17, Jesus speaks to a situation in which a disciple, when confronted, refuses to repent of his sin. On a Calvinist reading, God is the one who ordains that he or she is unresponsive to discipline.

Jesus states that God is responsive to the prayers of his people (e.g., Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8). On the assumption of theological determinism, this could only be true if God choreographed the specifics of believers' prayers so that they petitioned precisely what God had already determined would happen. God would "respond" in the sense that there was a one-to-one correlation between what was prayed and what transpired. Once again this is counterintuitive because this is not how people understand God's responsiveness to prayer today or in biblical Judaism, and there is no contextual evidence that this is how Jesus meant his words to be understood.¹⁵

A number of New Testament texts promise "rewards" or "blessings" for faithful discipleship and service (e.g., Matt. 6:4; 6, 18; 10:41-42; Lk. 6:35; 1 Cor. 3:8; 4:5; Gal. 6:19). The intent of

¹⁵Cf. David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 129-30, 289-91. Crump critiques the Calvinist reading of petitionary prayer along similar lines. This is especially remarkable because he is Professor of Theology and Religion at Calvin Seminary.

these statements is to motivate believers to use their grace-empowered libertarian freedom in faithful discipleship. This is expressed broadly in 2 Cor. 5:10 when Paul says that each believer will stand before Christ and give an accounting of his or her discipleship. All persons will “receive what is due them for the things done . . . whether good or evil.” With Calvinist assumptions, God has determined before the foundation of the world what will be true for each believer with respect to the quality of his or her discipleship; therefore, He has determined the “rewards” or “rebukes” he or she will receive. God then uses these promises of reward as a catalyst for motivating obedience in those believers whom He wants to bless. When God ordains that some believers will receive eschatological rebukes, the promises will not be a catalyst for motivating obedience and therefore the believer will receive their God-ordained rebuke.¹⁶

Other New Testament Texts

The Matthean version of the Lord’s Prayer has the petition “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). The assumption behind the statement would appear to be that in the present age God’s will is not fully realized on earth in the same way that it is in heaven. This would appear to contradict the Calvinist assumption whatever happens in this age is because God has ordained it; therefore, his will is always done “on earth as it is in heaven.”¹⁷

If Jesus worked with a deterministic theology, then when He critiqued the failures of the Pharisees He would have done so with the realization that God ordained each of these sins (e.g., Matt 23:1-36). The same would be true of his words of judgment spoken to unresponsive Galilean villagers (e.g., Matt. 11:20-24). After exploring options for understanding the reasons for Israel’s unbelief, Paul concludes in Rom. 10:23 that the real problem is stubborn disobedience in spite of having God continuously “holding out his hand” to Israel. A Calvinist reading of this requires that God Himself ordains the stubborn disobedience. Therefore, He is “holding out his hand” to Israel while simultaneously withholding the grace that would enable them to respond.¹⁸

¹⁶For these promises of reward and rebuke to have a motivational function for most people, the hearer must read them with the assumption of libertarian freedom, i.e. it is within their power to make right or wrong choices that lead to these different outcomes. If Calvinists are right, then it seems to me that these statements are communicated necessarily within a misleading and even deceptive framework in order to be effective. I will restate this point in the concluding section.

¹⁷The Calvinist solution is to distinguish God’s revealed moral will and His secret ordaining will. The latter is always done on earth. Thus, the petition is a prayer that God’s revealed moral will would be done on earth.

¹⁸Schreiner, *Romans*, 520. Schreiner argues that in this text God simultaneously invites people into relationship while simultaneously withholding the grace that would enable them to respond.

The biblical concept of ‘divine grief’ is inexplicable in the face of theological determinism. The Gospels record Jesus’ grief over the unresponsiveness of Jerusalem and the people of God (e.g., Matt. 23:37-39). If Jesus were a theological determinist, then He believed that God Himself had ordained this unresponsiveness, but if God had choreographed this unbelief, why grieve over it?¹⁹

Human expressions of moral outrage (e.g., Gal. 1:6; 3:1) are also problematic with the assumption of theological determinism. Why be angry about realities which God has ordained? With Calvinist assumptions, when believers are distressed at evil in the world and church, God has ordained that they express moral outrage about realities that God Himself choreographed. God is also the one who decides whether an expression of moral outrage is a catalyst for correcting problems or an exercise in futility.

God’s Universal Salvific Will

The New Testament contains many affirmations that God desires the salvation of every person.²⁰ Calvinism argues God has an extraordinarily limited salvific will which embraces a small subset of humanity that is unconditionally selected for salvation. Calvinist interpreters use a variety of strategies to deal with the texts affirming God’s universal salvific will: (1) restricting “all” to “all the elect”; (2) defining “all” as “all kinds of people” from every sector of society; (3) interpreting the intention as salvation is not just for the Jew but also the Gentile. Each of these interpretations is counterintuitive and lacks contextual support. Schreiner recognizes this and concedes that texts such as 2 Peter 3:9 affirm that God *desires* the salvation of every person. However, he argues that while God does *desire* the salvation of all, He *ordains* to make salvation possible only for a limited number.²¹ In addition to being

¹⁹This is also a problem for reading the Old Testament texts that portray God’s grief and anger over the sins of Israel with profound intensity (e.g., Jer. 13:15-17; Isa. 1:10-15). If God has “morally sufficient reasons” to ordain the sins of His people, why would He grieve that they are doing precisely what He has scripted for them? Sanders, *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, 142. Sanders points out that Augustine and Calvin were consistent on this point and argued that God is never grieved.

²⁰Matt. 22:14; Luke 2:10; John 1:7, 9, 29, 36; 3:16; 4:42; 5:23; 6:45; 11:48; 12:32; Acts 17:30; 22:14; Romans 5:15-19; 10:11-13; 11:32; 2 Cor. 5:19; Phil. 2:11; Col. 2:20; 1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 22:17. Cf. I. Howard Marshall, “For all, for all my Saviour Died,” in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. Stanley Porter and Anthony Cross, 322-46 (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003).

²¹Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 2003), 380-3. Cf. also Ware, *Divine Election*, 32-5. John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?,” in *Still Sovereign*, 107-13, has developed the fullest defense of this construct. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 381-382, acknowledges that “Many think this approach is double-talk and outright nonsense.” I would add that this interpretive approach is counterintuitive, contextually unsupported, and ahistorical because no evidence shows that this is how these statements would have been read in a first century context.

a counterintuitive way of reading the relevant texts, it raises the logical question of why God would desire one thing but ordain something else.²² To put it more starkly, why would God *desire* that all of humanity experience the glory of his presence for eternity but choose to *ordain* that the majority of people experience the horror of eternal separation? And, why in His self-revelation would He say that He desires that all be saved when He knows that He is going to ordain something completely different? And, where is the contextual evidence that this is how the Jesus, John, Paul, and Peter understood the affirmations of God's universal salvific will?

Seven Concluding Observations

First, there is a lack of historical and contextual evidence that would validate interpreting the New Testament within the framework of theological determinism. No evidence suggests that mainstream Second Temple Judaism embraced exhaustive theological determinism. If Jesus, Paul and other writers of the New Testament had a different view on this matter, then we would expect it to be clearly expressed. If they wanted to be understood correctly they would have wanted to distinguish their theological framework from the traditional Jewish construct of reality, which assumed libertarian freedom.²³ However, nothing in

²²John Piper argues that God ordains both the damnation of the majority of humanity as well as the evil and carnage so pervasive in human experience for the express purpose of magnifying His glory since these realities are necessary prerequisites for the elect to understand the depth of God's holiness, majesty, and glory. For a critique of this construct along with a response from Piper see Thomas McCall, "I Believe in Divine Sovereignty," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 29 (2008), 205-26; John Piper, "I Believe in God's Self-Sufficiency: A Response to Thomas McCall," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 29 (2008), 227-34; Thomas McCall, "We Believe in God's Sovereign Goodness: A Rejoinder to John Piper," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 29 (2008), 235-46.

²³The lack of evidence that either mainstream Second Temple Judaism or Jesus and the early church were theological determinists is an important consideration when considering Old Testament texts which Calvinists take as proof texts for theological determinism (e.g. Gen. 50:20; Exod. 8:15, 32; 9:12; 10:1; Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21; 2:10; Eccles. 7:14; Lam. 3:38; Prov. 16:9; 21:1; 1 Sam. 2:6-7; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6). If this was how the original authors intended their statements to be understood, then one would expect that this would be reflected in Second Temple Jewish literature or the New Testament. The lack of evidence for theological determinism in this literature suggests that neither Second Temple Jews or Jesus and the early church understood these Old Testament texts in the way that Calvinists propose. However, the real problem for using these texts as Scriptural evidence for theological determinism is that when viewed in the total context of the Old Testament, a Calvinist interpretive framework is contextually unsupported and results in counterintuitive and ahistorical readings of thousands of Old Testament texts and many different kinds of material (precisely the same problem as reading the New Testament within the framework of theological determinism). Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, 290-1, n. 16. Crump points out that Calvinist theologians ignore the meaning of the texts in their original context. For a historically and contextually based interpretation of these texts see F. Lindstrom, *God and the Origin of Evil: A Contextual Analysis of Alleged Monistic Evidence in the Old Testament* (Lund: Gleerup, 1983).

the context indicates that they departed from Jewish thinking on this point and embraced comprehensive theological determinism.²⁴

Christians in the early centuries would have been familiar with a deterministic world view in light of the pervasive impact of Stoic philosophy. I find it remarkable that no theologian, pastor, or scholar in the early church prior to Augustine found theological determinism in the New Testament.²⁵ This is not what one would expect if the New Testament contained significant contextual indicators that the writers conceptualized reality within a deterministic theological framework.

Second, as illustrated in the above reviews of New Testament texts, theological determinism conflicts with the natural, intuitive reading of so many passages. A good hypothesis is one that accounts for the largest amount of data with the fewest number of residual challenges. Reading the New Testament within the framework of theological determinism does not create the occasional tension that may require a somewhat counterintuitive interpretation of scattered texts. The challenges are monumental and a Calvinist reading requires counterintuitive and ahistorical interpretations of thousands of texts and many various kinds of material. Such a Calvinist reading, in the end, is an exercise in eisegesis on a grand scale that in turn generates an enormous amount of textual destruction. One must impose a deterministic theological framework on texts through the use of consistently counterintuitive and ahistorical interpretive strategies.²⁶

²⁴Romans 9:6-23 is the text most commonly cited by Calvinists to prove that Paul was a theological determinist. Statements like “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy” (9:15) and “he has mercy on whom he wishes and hardens whom he wishes” (9:18) sound like an expression of theological determinism. These statements must be read within the context of Paul’s entire argument in Romans 9-11. Paul is responding to the twin objections that if the promises to Israel were indeed realized in Jesus then (1) God was under obligation to ensure that the covenant people recognized and responded to this reality, and (2) it would be wrong for God to allow Gentiles to be the primary beneficiaries of the promises to Israel. In 9:6-23, Paul is arguing that God (1) has no obligation to turn up the heat of irresistible grace so that Israel will respond to what he does and as a result he is free to act in judgment towards Jews who spurn His grace; (2) is free to show mercy to responsive Gentiles—who were not the primary recipients of Scriptural promises. In response to the Jewish demand for preferential treatment, Paul wants to affirm God’s freedom in the exercise of His mercy and judgment. Romans 9-11 contains numerous statements which clearly demonstrate that Paul was not a theological determinist. Cf. Glen Shellrude, “The Freedom of God in Mercy and Judgment: A Libertarian Reading of Romans 9:6-29,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 81.4 (2009), 306-18.

²⁵Augustine would have been familiar with determinism from both Manichaeism and Stoicism. However, it appears that his determinism is rooted in the Platonic and Neoplatonic concept that an absolutely perfect being (God) must be ‘impassible or immutable,’ (i.e. could not experience any inward changes). Cf. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 149-53.

²⁶When reading online responses to books debating the Calvinist-Arminian issue (e.g., on Amazon.com), I often notice lay Calvinists pointing out that Arminians argue from a more philosophical perspective while Calvinists argue from Scripture and have the upper hand with respect to scriptural proof-texts. They

Third, with a Calvinist reading of Scripture, the motivational effectiveness of many scriptural statements is dependent on the reader being deceived. God's people are motivated to faithful service and discipleship with the promise of eschatological blessing when, in reality, God has already determined the precise experience of blessing and rebuke that will be true for each person. Believers are promised that God will enable them to resist temptation when, in reality, He has already determined that in many situations they will give in to temptation and sin. The warnings against apostasy motivate believers to persevere in their faith when, in reality, apostasy is a theoretical impossibility. God assures His people that He will enable them to be renewed in their thinking while simultaneously ordaining that they embrace a wide range of erroneous ideas. The promise is made that the Spirit will enable obedience when, in reality, God only intends that believers have very limited experiences of obedience. In these and many other instances, the effectiveness of scriptural affirmations is dependent on the reader being deceived (i.e. reading the passage with the assumption of libertarian freedom).

Fourth, we need to account for the chasm between what God says about His moral will for humanity and the way God actually choreographs human experience. God is opposed to evil and the champion of goodness and truth but writes a script for human history in which evil and carnage are the dominant realities. In order to account for this, Calvinists must distinguish between God's "revealed will" (aka "preceptive will") and His "secret/hidden or ordaining will" (also called "decretive will"). God's revealed will is the expression of His moral will for humanity, while His secret or ordaining will is what God ordains will be the experience of each person.

God has revealed that He is responsive to prayer, while in His secret will He ordains that only those petitions, which He ensures correlate with the script He wrote before creating the world, will appear to have been answered. God has revealed that believers should align themselves with truth, while simultaneously ordaining that believers embrace a wide range of erroneous thinking. God has revealed that believers are to be perfect as He is perfect, while simultaneously ordaining the precise expression and degree of sin that will characterize each believer. God has revealed that believers should not divorce their spouses, but in His secret will He has ordained that believers divorce their spouses with about the same frequency as in secular society. God has revealed that He cares about children, while simultaneously ordaining that vast numbers of children are abused, neglected, and sexually exploited. God has revealed that believers are to honor and delight Him, while ordaining that much of the time believers deeply grieve Him and bring shame on the gospel. God has revealed that He is uncompromisingly opposed to sin and evil, while in His ordaining will He has scripted a staggering level of sin and evil in human history.

conclude from this that Calvinism is the more scriptural theology. Calvinism, however, is deeply and profoundly contradicted by Scripture, because theological determinism requires the exegetical abuse of countless biblical texts. This point is not immediately apparent to most people for they do not reflect on the implications of consistent theological determinism for reading the kinds of biblical material discussed in this paper.

God's 'secret will' is fully knowable with respect to the present and past since all that happens corresponds precisely to what He has ordained. What cannot be known are the disparities between God's revealed will and His secret will as it relates to future events. One implication of this construct is that Christians are often simultaneously working on the side of God's revealed will but against God's secret will. Thus, for example, Christians who give themselves to working with the suffering children of the world can be assured that their goals are in complete alignment with God's revealed will. However, they could possibly be working against God's secret/ordaining will. If this is the case, then their work will bear little or no results. This is true for every aspect of Christian ministry. The result is a view of God which represents Him as having two distinct wills that are deeply conflicted and contradictory.

Fifth, Calvinists use language and concepts in ways which are unparalleled in human experience. They affirm that God loves each and every person while simultaneously ordaining that the majority of those He 'loves' will have no opportunity to avoid the horror of eternal separation. Calvinism affirms that God is pure holiness while simultaneously ordaining and rendering certain all the sins and evils in human experience. Calvinists claim that God holds people responsible for their choices even though every single choice has been choreographed by God and people can never do other than what God has ordained they do. This theology affirms that God is in no way responsible for sin and evil, even though He has structured reality and human experience in such a way that people willingly commit the sins God has ordained for them. Calvinism claims that God has choreographed all the evils and horrors that will characterize human experience for the purpose of enhancing His own glory. Each of these positions is logically and morally offensive as well as being without parallel in human experience. If human parents were to act with respect to their children in any way similar to how Calvinists claim God acts, then those parents would be declared moral monsters.²⁷

Edwin Palmer acknowledges the absurdity of what Calvinism affirms: "He [the Calvinist] realizes that what he advocates is ridiculous. . . . The Calvinist freely admits that his position is illogical, ridiculous, nonsensical and foolish." However, he argues that the scriptural evidence requires one to embrace this intrinsically absurd view of God.²⁸

If God has created us with a rational and moral discernment that to some extent mirrors his own, then the cluster of logical and moral absurdities inherent in the Calvinist system suggests that there is a problem with the theology itself. The appropriate response is not to celebrate absurdity, or as is more commonly done, to appeal to mystery but rather to rethink the theology in light of the totality of the scriptural evidence.

²⁷ Olson, *Against Calvinism*, develops and illustrates these ideas at many points, cf. especially pp. 166f; 175-79.

²⁸ Edwin Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 106.

Sixth, the Calvinist view of God is contradicted by God's self-revelation in Scripture. For example, God reveals an uncompromising opposition to sin and evil, but Calvinism argues that God has decreed every expression of sin and evil in human experience; God reveals a universal salvific will, but Calvinism affirms that God has an extraordinarily restrictive salvific will; God challenges His people to obedience on the assumption that they can make meaningful choices to be obedient, but Calvinism argues that God has ordained the choices believers will make in every situation.

Calvinists justify God's ordination of the monumental scale of evil and sin in human experience by arguing that God has "morally justified reasons" for acting in this way because some greater good, fully known only to God, is served by all the carnage. The difficulty with challenging this argument is the claim that "the reasons are known only to God." However, given the magnitude of sin and evil in human experience, if the Calvinist argument were true, then it should be obvious that in many cases these evils served some demonstrable good. Furthermore, since on Calvinist assumptions God can script history as He chooses, He could have accomplished the same good results with much less evil and ambiguity. In any case, it is easier to evaluate the argument with respect to the eternal destiny of men and women. What are the "morally justified reasons" for God's decision to prevent the vast majority of people from being able to respond to God because He has ordained that their destiny will be one of eternal torment? How can this reconcile with God's self-revelation, which is characterized by absolute love, mercy, and holiness? This is especially problematic for those Calvinists who claim that God desires the salvation of every person but chooses to ordain that the majority of humanity will experience the horror of eternal separation. Given the Calvinist denial of free will, nothing would prevent God from ordaining the salvation of all and working in each person so ultimately they respond to Him.

Because these things are part of our experience, many find it difficult to come to terms with the idea that God has choreographed all the evil and carnage that characterizes human experience (e.g., genocides, rapes, murders, abuse of children, etc.). However this suffering is completely inconsequential in comparison with the thought that God has ordained the damnation of the vast majority of the human race. Suffering in this world is for an infinitesimally short period of time when compared to eternal suffering. If one accepts that God has predestined the eternal damnation of most of those He created, it should be easy to accept that God has scripted all the evil we see in human experience. Cafeteria Calvinists, who stumble at the thought that God has scripted all the evil and sin in present human experience, need to ask themselves why they find it easier to accept that God has ordained the eternal suffering of the vast majority of humanity.

The scale of evil and carnage in the world truly is monumental. One might ask which worldview best accounts for this phenomenon: (1) atheism, (2) a deterministic theism, (3) a theistic perspective, which affirms the reality of libertarian freedom. I believe an atheistic view of reality is more plausible than theological determinism. With atheistic assumptions, the explanation might be that humans are the product of natural evolutionary forces, and what we choose to describe as evil are all part of the natural evolutionary process. With the assumptions

of theological determinism, God could just as easily have constructed a script for human history in which no evil is present or far less evil than is actually the case is present. However, with Calvinist assumptions, God intentionally chose to write a script with all the evil and carnage that we observe. It is impossible to reconcile this with God's self-revelation as one characterized by love, mercy, holiness and an uncompromising opposition to sin and evil. A theistic worldview constructed on the assumption that God has created men and women with genuine libertarian freedom provides a much more plausible account of reality because the explanation for a great deal of what is wrong with the world can be traced to the sinful abuse of the gift of libertarian freedom.²⁹ Calvinists like to claim that their theology serves to highlight the holiness and glory of God. In reality, Calvinism denigrates God's holiness and glory with its claim that God has choreographed every expression of sin and evil in human experience.³⁰

Seventh, theological determinism in effect denies the scriptural affirmation that God desires to be in relationship with the women and men He created. If one day we are able to actualize the science fiction notion of creating artificial intelligence, I find it difficult to imagine that people would find joy in relationships with those who are following their programming. I also find it impossible to imagine that the God who created men and women in order to have a relationship with them would find joy with those who were simply following their divine programming. Why would God find delight in human responses to His grace that were completely ordained by Him and not freely chosen? Are we to believe that God takes delight in expressions of love, worship, and praise that He has scripted?

What would we think of a novelist or playwright who restricted their relationships to mental ones with the characters they had created in literary works and movies? A good movie is one that creates tension and drama by conveying the impression that people are making real decisions, therefore the outcome is in doubt. But the storyline is an illusion, for every action and word

²⁹I realize that the affirmation of libertarian freedom does not explain everything and leaves plenty of room for "mystery."

³⁰In his sermon *Free Grace*, John Wesley said that Satan might as well take a permanent leave of absence since God does Satan's work far more effectively: "You, with all your principalities and powers, can only so assault that we may resist you; but He can irresistibly destroy both body and soul in hell! You can only entice; but His unchangeable decrees—to leave thousands of souls in death—compel them to continue in sin, till they drop into everlasting burnings. You tempt; He forces us to be damned; for we cannot resist His will. You fool, why do you go about any longer, seeking whom you may devour? Have you not heard that God is the devouring lion, the destroyer of souls, the murderer of men?" Found at <http://new.gbgbm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/128/> (I have modernized the language). In reality the God of Calvinism requires Satan to stay on the job in order "to keep his hands clean." God choreographs evil and sin in human experience through "second causes" and Satan is a major source of second causes. Roger Olsen (*Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, 163) points out that Arminius himself argued that on Calvinist assumptions the only real sinner in the universe is God. I am struck by how in the present many Christians go ballistic over the "gnat" of open theism but happily embrace the "camel" of Calvinism.

has been scripted in advance. Calvinism claims that this also is true of real life and that, by implication, God delights in relationships with the characters who are playing out their divinely scripted roles.

In the modern world determinism is a dominant paradigm in secular philosophy, for honest atheists, based on the assumption that humans are products of natural evolutionary forces, can find no logical basis for libertarian free will. By contrast, Christians should celebrate that libertarian free will has a scriptural basis. The triune God, who is the perfect embodiment of libertarian freedom, chose to create people in his image, who are endowed with grace-enabled libertarian freedom, so that they could enter into a relationship of reciprocal love with their Creator.



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BEYOND CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM TOWARD A BAPTIST SOTERIOLOGY



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The Claim

After four hundred years, Calvinism and Arminianism remain at an impasse. The strengths and weaknesses of both systems are well-documented, and their proponents vociferously aver each system's mutual exclusivity. This paper is based on the observation that these two theological programs have had sufficient time to demonstrate their superiority over the other and have failed to do so. The time has come, therefore, to look beyond them for a paradigm that gives a better account of the biblical and theological data. Indeed, the stalemate itself is related not so much to the unique features of each system but to a set of erroneous presuppositions upon which *both* are constructed. As the fault lines in these foundational concepts are exposed, it will become clear that the Baptist vision for soteriology, which has always resisted absolute fidelity to either system, has been the correct instinct all along. Baptist theology must be willing to articulate this vision in a compelling and comprehensive manner.

The following four presuppositions shared by Calvinism and Arminianism demonstrate the degree to which a new approach to soteriology is needed. One presupposition is primarily biblical, one is primarily philosophical, one is primarily theological, and one is primarily anthropological, although each is intertwined with the others. Having established the need for a new approach to soteriology and the Baptist vision for such an approach, the paper will conclude with a brief description of a way forward.

The Biblical Presupposition: Individual Election

The idea that God, in eternity past, elected certain individuals to salvation is a fundamental tenet of Calvinism and Arminianism. The interpretation of this biblical concept needs to be revised. Quite simply, when the Bible speaks of election in the context of God's saving action, it is always referring to *corporate* election, God's decision to have a people for Himself. When the

election of individuals is raised in Scripture, it is always election to a purpose or calling within God's plans for His people as a whole. In the OT, the writers understood election to be God's choice of Israel, yet they also clearly taught that the benefits of corporate election could only be experienced by the individual Israelite (or the particular generation of Israelites) who responded faithfully to the covenant that had been offered to the whole nation.¹ This trajectory within the OT is unassailable. It is reinforced in the intertestamental literature and is the basis for the way election is treated in the NT.² The Bible, therefore, does not speak of God's choice of certain individuals and not others for salvation.³ When the Bible does speak of the salvation of individuals, its central concept is "faith," never "election."

Take away individual election, and the key components of Calvinism and Arminianism disappear.⁴ God does not elect individuals to salvation on the basis of His hidden councils, nor does He elect them on the basis of His foreknowledge of their future faith. Simply put, God does not "elect" *individuals* to salvation. He has elected an eschatological people whom He has

¹See, for instance, Deut. 29:14-21. Israel is reaffirming the covenant promised to the patriarchs and to future generations. However, if there is an individual man or woman who boasts, "I have peace with God though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart," the Lord will "single him out" from the people for destruction (vv. 18-21, NASB). Although the covenant is for the whole community, the individual must respond in faith in order to benefit from those corporate covenant promises.

²Critics of the corporate view of election will quickly raise Rom. 8:29-30 and 9-11 (among others) in defense of their position, but the pre-temporal election of individuals is not Paul's purpose there. Rom. 8:29-30 is setting up Paul's point in chapters 9-11 about two groups: Jews and Gentiles. The end of Romans 8 crescendos with the greatness of salvation in Christ. Verses 29-30 articulate God's actions toward His people from beginning to end in order to bring about His ultimate "purpose" (28): God knew He was going to have a people; He determined to bring them into existence in Christ; He actualized that people in history through His call; He justified them by faith; He has determined to bring them into resurrection glory. In light of this incredible plan to have this kind of people for Himself, Paul is heartbroken at the beginning of Romans 9 that his Jewish brothers have responded to the gospel with unbelief. The Jews appear to be "out," and the Gentiles appear to be "in." But God works in unexpected ways. Jews are "out" now so that the Gentiles can come "in." But the Gentiles coming "in" will ultimately cause the Jews to come "in" at the proper time. That is why Paul will continue to preach the gospel to Jews as a part of his mission to the whole world, looking forward to the response of a remnant by faith. One thing is certain: Romans 9-11 is *not* teaching the election of some individuals and the reprobation of others without respect to their genuine response of faith. Ephesians 1:4, 5, and 11 function in Ephesians 2 the same way that Rom. 8:29-30 functions in Romans 9-11.

³See William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 257-63 for an extended exegetical analysis of all the relevant biblical data concerning the concept of "corporate election." Klein argues that there is not a single verse or overarching tendency in the Scriptures in support of the idea that God chooses certain individuals for salvation.

⁴Indeed, if "individual election" is what the writers of the NT meant, then Calvinism and Arminianism really are the only options, and Baptists should pick one and move on to other matters. It is significant that we have been unwilling to do so.

determined to have for Himself. This group will be populated by individuals who have responded in faith to the gracious, free offer of the gospel. The group, “the Elect,” is comprised of individuals who are “saved by faith,” not “saved by election.” This being the case, there is no longer any need for the theological maneuvering required to explain how God elects individuals without respect to their response (which evacuates the biblical concept of “faith” of all its meaning) or how He elects individuals based on foreseen faith (which evacuates the biblical concept of “election” of all its meaning).

Asserting that “individual election” should be abandoned is striking, to say the least. It is the foundation on which evangelical soteriology is often constructed.⁵ It is painful to consider the enormous investment of time and energy that has been spent trying to reconcile how God chooses individuals and, at the same time, how individuals choose God, only to discover that the whole endeavor has been based on a misreading of Scripture. Nevertheless, most Baptists have never felt fully comfortable with either Calvinist or Arminian understandings of election because neither comport well with the whole counsel of God. The reason is clear. The Scriptures lead to the conclusion that Augustine, Calvin, and Arminius were simply wrong in their construction of individual election. Baptists have never been theologically or confessionally committed to these august theologians, and the time has come to move beyond them.

The Philosophical Presupposition: The “Problem” of Determinism and Free-Will

Like Calvinism and Arminianism, the 2,500-year-old debate concerning the “problem” of determinism and free-will has also reached an impasse. This is because absolute causal determinism is untenable.⁶ Put simply, the “problem” is not a problem because the paradigm for causation in the Western philosophical tradition is wrong. The whole of reality cannot be explained in terms of uni-directional causation from a single first-principle. The universe does not work that way. Causation is complex, hierarchical, and interdependent. God sits sovereignly and non-contingently atop a hierarchy that owes its existence to the functioning of the levels below it, levels that include the fully operational free-will of humans.⁷ Opposing God’s sovereign guidance of the universe and the operation of free-will within that universe is a false dichotomy based on reductionistic metaphysical assumptions. God has made a free and sovereign decision to have a universe in which human free-will plays a decisive role. Human agency is one force among many that God has created to accomplish His cosmic purposes.

⁵For example, if individual election to salvation were removed from Millard Erickson’s massive systematic theology, there would be essentially nothing left in his chapters on “God’s Plan” and those in the whole section on “Salvation.” See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

⁶Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 93–99.

⁷Nancey Murphy, “Introduction and Overview,” in *Downward Causation and the Neurobiology of Free Will*, ed. Nancey Murphy, George F. R. Ellis, and Timothy O’Connor (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2009), 2–3.

Free-will plays a unique role within God's purposes for the universe because it is the unique power of human beings freely to enter into and maintain covenant relationships, especially a covenant relationship with God. This makes human willing fundamentally moral. Under certain circumstances, God, in His freedom, contravenes free-will, just as He is free to contravene any other force in nature, but this is not His normal *modus operandi*. Because God is God, He knows all of the free acts of humans from eternity, but this knowledge does not cause these acts nor does it make Him responsible for them. Moreover, the existence of these acts in no way impinges upon either His freedom or His ability to bring about His ultimate purposes. The ability of humans "to do otherwise" does not call God's sovereignty into question; it actually establishes and ratifies His sovereignty over the particular universe that was His good pleasure to create. Opposing free-will and sovereignty is, from a philosophical perspective, nonsensical.⁸

Calvinism's desire to protect God's divine status from the infringement of human free-will by denying it completely or reducing it to some form of "soft-determinism"⁹ is unnecessary. God's corporate elective purposes are accomplished by individual free acts of faith. Arminianism's need to inject ideas such as God's election of individuals based on their future free acts is also a move designed to maintain both a strong view of God's sovereignty and the free choice of individuals. Unfortunately, this move is made at the expense of any regular understanding of biblical election, which is unilateral. God does not choose Israel because He knows she will choose Him in return. He chooses her even though He knows that her history will be one of rebellion and failure. Moreover, Arminianism's desire to protect the inviolability of free-will to the degree that God cannot keep His promise to seal a believer's free response fails to take seriously the totality of the biblical concept of faith.

Many Baptists have tended to opt for what they think is a "compatibilist" understanding of determinism and free-will in salvation: God chooses individuals unconditionally, and individuals

⁸C. S. Lewis, *Yours, Jack: Spiritual Directions from C. S. Lewis*, ed. Paul Ford (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 186. The word "nonsensical," while a bit harsh, is chosen purposefully. I take my cue from Lewis: "All that Calvinist question--Free-Will and Predestination, is to my mind undiscussable, insoluble. . . . When we carry [Freedom and Necessity] up to relations between God and Man, has the distinction perhaps become nonsensical?"

⁹"Soft-determinism" is the view that humans are free to do what they desire most, but they are not free to choose what they desire. Since, "the good" is off the table as an object of desire (because of the Fall), "evil" is the only option left, and therefore, humans always "choose" to do evil because they cannot do otherwise. "Soft-libertarianism" (mentioned below) is the view that human freedom, while limited in many aspects by environment and prior choices, is still characterized by the ability, often at crucial moments, to choose between two live options for which the agent is responsible. For a more full discussion, see Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 63–79.

choose God by faith.¹⁰ Unfortunately, compatibilism demands a deterministic view of both God and free-will with which those same Baptists would be very uncomfortable. What these Baptists really want to say is that a “determinist” view of God is compatible with a “libertarian” view of free-will, but this is philosophically impermissible. Another typical strategy of Baptists, at this point, is to appeal to “mystery” or “paradox:” *We don’t know how God chooses individuals, and, at the same time, individuals choose God. But, like other complex doctrines such as the Trinity or the hypostatic union, it is still true.* To say, however, that God chooses individuals unconditionally and that He does not choose individuals unconditionally is not to affirm a mystery; it is to assert a logical contradiction. Baptists need to abandon the language of compatibilism and “mystery,” which do not adequately reflect what they believe about God and salvation, and embrace the concept that a robust (soft-) libertarian free-will is the actualization of God’s sovereign direction of His universe.

The Theological Presupposition: Federal Theology

Both Arminians and Calvinists assume a “Covenant of Works” between Adam and God in the Garden of Eden, even though there is no biblical basis for such.¹¹ The Covenant of Works, they assert, was a deal God made with Adam whereby Adam would be rewarded with eternal life if he could remain morally perfect through a probationary period. Failure would bring about guilt and “spiritual death,” which includes the loss of his capacity for a good will toward God. Adam’s success or failure, in turn, would be credited to his posterity. This “Federal Theology” imputes Adam’s guilt and total depravity to every human.¹² In Calvinism, actual guilt and total depravity are the plight of every person. Free-will with respect to salvation is, by definition, impossible, and with it, the possibility of a free response to God’s offer of covenant through the gospel. The only hope for salvation for any individual is the elective activity of God. In

¹⁰This often expressed in the old saw that “Whosoever will may come” is written over the entry into heaven, but, once inside, the verse over the door reads, “You did not choose Me, but I have chosen you.”

¹¹William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 44–6, Reprint.

¹²The principle text for Federal Theology is Rom. 5.12-21, but the evidence within this text and its place within the argument of Romans speaks against such an interpretation. The strict parallelism between Adam and “all” demands a strict parallelism between Christ and “all,” necessitating universalism, which is not possible theologically and not the point exegetically. Paul’s focus in the passage is clearly on physical death and eternal life, not the imputation of Adam’s guilt to all people (the same is true for Eph. 2:1-7 and 1 Cor. 15:20-28). Paul’s point: Adam’s sin brought in the condemnation of death for all people. All people demonstrate that they deserve such condemnation by their own sin. Christ, the sinless one, has overthrown that condemnation by receiving it undeservedly into Himself, which is the ultimate act of obedience, and rising again. All who ratify Christ’s obedient life, death, and resurrection with their faith in Him will have eternal life.

Calvinist soteriology, election is privileged above faith because regeneration must be prior to conversion. In Arminianism, the effects of Federal Theology and the Covenant of Works must be countermanded by further speculative adjustments like “prevenient grace” and election based on “foreseen faith,” a faith which is only possible because prevenient grace overcomes the depravity and guilt of the whole human race due to Adam’s failure. All this strays far beyond the biblical data. Such speculation does not emerge from clear inferences from the Bible, but is actually *a priori* argumentation designed to buttress Augustine, not Paul.

God’s gracious action in Christ is not “Plan B,” a “Covenant of Grace,” executed in response to Adam’s failure at “Plan A,” the “Covenant of Works.” The pre-existent Son has always been the center-point of creation and covenant. Adam was not created and placed in the Garden for the purpose of demonstrating moral perfection through his own efforts.¹³

This original “works righteousness” was read into the Garden by Pelagius and assumed by Augustine. Adam was not being called to moral perfection; he was being called into world-changing covenant relationship. The command not to eat of the tree was simply a negative construal of God’s offer for Adam to know Him and be satisfied in Him and His plan alone. It was a specific instantiation of the covenant offered to Adam and Eve in Gen. 1:26-28: In a blessed relationship with God, they were to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over it.¹⁴ In the Garden, Adam was being asked to do what Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, David, and, ultimately, everyone would be asked to do: trust and accept the gracious covenant offer of God in Christ for the purpose of bringing the created order to its intended conclusion. Adam and Eve were to respond to God in faith. The sensual temptation of the fruit itself came after the temptation to question God’s character and His covenant plan. It was in Adam’s rejection of God’s covenant offer that he failed to be moral. In Christ, God re-offers the covenant through successive renewals, culminating in His final offer of the gospel revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of the Incarnate Son. Adam was asked to believe God and bless the whole world, as were Noah, Abraham, Israel, David, and ultimately Christ, who succeeded where all others failed. His victory is extended to all those who put their faith in Him, just like Abraham, the father of the faithful did.¹⁵ Covenant in Christ by faith is not “Plan B;” it is the point of the Bible.

¹³This is not to say that perfect obedience was not the standard; it was just not the point. True obedience is the expression of covenant faithfulness and utter dependence on God.

¹⁴Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 17.

¹⁵In Gal. 3:8, Paul states quite clearly and without any need for further explanation that “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, ‘ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.’” This single covenant in Christ is also in view in 1 Cor. 10:4: “. . . and all [Israel] drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.”

Once again, speculation such as a Covenant of Works, Federal Theology, prevenient grace, etc. are little more than theological “fudge factors” designed to make the Augustinian synthesis work. They do not emerge from the biblical text but are *a priori* arguments pressed into the service of a fifth century Catholic bishop, not the authors of the Scriptures, and Baptists have never been comfortable with them. These adjustments mitigate the centrality, power, and immediacy of the biblical concept of “covenant” which has, at its heart, God’s desire for a relationship with His people through a real response of faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the nexus of Baptist soteriology.

The Anthropological Presupposition: Total Depravity

The Scriptures clearly affirm that all people are sinners. Because of sin, humans are in a disastrous state, unable to alter the trajectory of their rebellion against God, unable to clear their debt of sin against Him, unable to work their way back to Him through their best efforts. This situation is one of their own creating and for which they are ultimately responsible.¹⁶

About these realities, there is little debate in evangelical theology. What is at issue is what being a sinner means when it comes to responding to God’s offer of covenant relationship through the power of the gospel.

Both Calvinism and Arminianism affirm that the Fall resulted in “total depravity,” the complete incapacitation of humanity’s free response to God’s gracious offer of covenant relationship.¹⁷ In Calvinism, the only remedies for this state-of-affairs are the “doctrines of grace” in which the free response of individuals is not decisive. For Arminianism, total depravity, which is purely

¹⁶Paul’s point in Rom. 1-3, the *locus classicus* of human sinfulness, is not that people *cannot* respond to God, but that they *will not*, even though the results lead to their utter ruin.

¹⁷Ephesians 2:1 and 5 are frequently cited in support of this view, with a focus on the phrase “dead in your trespasses.” “Dead” here is taken to mean “spiritually” dead, utterly unresponsive to spiritual things. This reading, however, does not work exegetically. Paul’s point in 2.1-7 is that Jews and Gentiles alike were in the same sorry situation and in need of the resurrected and ascended Christ. If Paul means that everyone was “spiritually” dead, then he must also mean that everyone was made “spiritually” alive “with Him.” Does this mean that Jesus was, at some point, incapable of a response to God? Is Paul’s point that Jesus is now “spiritually” alive, responsive to God? Are we now “spiritually” raised and seated with Him in heavenly places? What could this possibly mean? Clearly, Paul is speaking eschatologically here: “Before we trusted Christ our destiny was the condemnation of death. Our behavior confirmed that we were deserving of that sentence. But now our destiny is bound up with His destiny so that ‘in ages to come’ the inclusion of sinners like us will put God’s unbelievable grace on display. How did we come to belong to Christ? By faith.” Paul’s point is not that we are incapable of faith without “regeneration.” His point is that Christ has made a way for those deserving of death to have eternal life, no matter what their ethnicity or level of religious effort.

Moreover, if Paul thought that Adam’s sin resulted in spiritual death/total depravity for everyone else, how could he write in Rom. 7:9: “I was once alive apart from the Law”?

speculative, is corrected by prevenient grace, which is even more speculative, and makes total depravity ultimately meaningless because God never allows it to have any effect on any person.

Nothing in Scripture indicates that humans have been rendered “totally depraved” through Adam’s sin. Genesis 3 gives an extensive account of the consequences of Adam’s sin, but nowhere is there the idea that Adam or his progeny lost the ability to respond to God in faith, a condition which then required some sort of restoration by regeneration or prevenient grace. In fact, just the opposite appears to be the case. The story of God’s relationship with humankind is fraught with frustration, sadness, and wrath on God’s part, not because humans are incapable of a faith response, but because they are capable of it, yet reject God’s offer of covenant relationship anyway. To be sure, they are not capable of responding in faith without God’s special revelation of Himself through Christ and His Spirit’s drawing. Any morally responsible person, however, who encounters the gospel in the power of the Spirit (even though he has a will so damaged by sin that he is incapable of having a relationship with God without the gospel) is able to respond to that “well-meant offer.”

Therefore, the time has come once again for Baptists to reject another dichotomy mediated by the Calvinist/Arminian debate: monergism and synergism. Monergism insists that salvation is all of God. Monergists conclude that faith emerging from a decision within the will of the believer is a “work” that makes salvation meritorious, but this idea demands a theologically objectionable determinism. As a technical theological concept, synergism¹⁸ still operates off of a framework that views sovereignty and free-will as problematic, often forcing too fine a distinction between “what God does” and “what man does.” Synergism tends to put “faith” in the category of performance, rather than an attitude of surrender. This has led some Arminian theology into over-speculation concerning the nature of the act of faith, psychologizing and sensationalizing the “moment of decision,” so that one’s experience becomes the basis of his assurance. Synergism also tends to demand further acts in order to receive further blessing and opens the door to the possibility that, if a person fails to act faithfully subsequent to the experience of salvation, God will cease to save.

¹⁸“Synergism,” to be sure, would be the category to which the soteriological viewpoint of this paper belongs, if we persist in using these categories, because monergism, in the true sense of the term, is untenable. Unfortunately, this word has theological associations that Baptists reject. Synergism is often considered to be the functional equivalent of semi-Pelagianism, which throws the whole discussion back into abstruse arguments about “operative” and “cooperative” grace, “general” and “effectual” calling, *facere quod in se est*, etc. forcing us to approach soteriology from Augustinian and medieval Roman Catholic categories rather than biblical ones. Monergism and synergism have simply outlived their usefulness.

Baptists must get off of this grid.¹⁹ We have preferred terms like “trust,” “surrender,” and “relationship” to “monergism” or “synergism” when we reflect on God’s offer and our response. These terms secure the affirmation both that individuals can do nothing to save themselves, yet their salvation cannot occur against their wills or without a response of faith that belongs to them alone.

The Baptist Vision

So, what would a biblically-sound, Christ-centered, grace-filled soteriology look like without appeals to individual election, determinism, Federal Theology, or total depravity? What would it look like if it were free from the presuppositions of Calvinism and Arminianism? It would look exactly like what most Baptists have believed instinctively all along. Baptists have consistently resisted the impulse to embrace completely either Calvinism or Arminianism. We simply posit that we are “neither.”²⁰ The basis for this resistance to the two systems is our aversion to theological speculation beyond the clear sense of Scripture and our willingness to go our own way when Scripture and conscience demand. The way forward is basically backward, a massive simplification, a walking out of the convoluted labyrinth that evangelical soteriology has become in the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. It is a move not dissimilar to the basic impulse of Luther at the birth of the Reformation, which was to reject the Medieval scholasticism that had turned the gloriously simple gospel of grace into its absolute antithesis. For Luther, the solution was to start over with the Scriptures (and Augustine), no matter what the implications. Baptists need to apply the Reformation principles of *sola scriptura* and *semper reformanda* to Luther himself. Augustine’s soteriology and the bulwark constructed subsequently to defend it must be removed.

Baptists believe in the clarity and simplicity of the Bible. We search in vain for decrees, a Covenants of Works, the distinction between a “general call” and an “effectual call,” hidden wills, and prevenient grace. We react with consternation to the ideas that God regenerates before He converts, that He hates sinners, that reprobation without respect to a response of faith brings Him the greatest glory, or that the truly converted can lose their salvation. Baptists have felt free to agree with certain emphases within Calvinism and Arminianism, while rejecting those that offend our commitments to the possibility of salvation for all and to the eternal security of that salvation based exclusively on faith in the covenant promises of God. The free offer of an eternal, life-changing covenant with the Father through the Son by the Spirit to all sinners by the free

¹⁹See Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 101–8. After thoroughly dismantling the determinism of Calvinism, Keathley, a Baptist theologian, still wants to retain the term “monergism,” qualifying it with his assertion that people can still refuse God’s grace. But if one’s refusal matters, then salvation is not monergistic. Any Calvinist worth his salt would agree. Persisting in the use of the term “monergism” and in defending the logically contradictory concept that “what man does matters and what man does doesn’t matter” is unhelpful.

²⁰Malcolm Yarnell, *Neither Calvinists Nor Arminians but Baptists*, White Paper 36 (Ft. Worth, TX: Center for Theological Research, 2010), 7.

exercise of personal faith alone has been the simple, non-speculative but inviolable core of Baptist soteriological belief and practice. Baptist soteriology (specifically including the doctrines of the sovereign, elective purposes of God, the sinfulness of all humans, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, and the security of the believer) is not in jeopardy and does not need to be reinforced by Calvinism or Arminianism. It can be successfully taught, maintained, and defended without resorting to either system.

It has been typical of Baptists to believe that anyone who reaches the point of moral responsibility has the capacity to respond to the gospel. While all persons are radically sinful and totally unable to save themselves, their ability to “choose otherwise” defines human existence, including the ability to respond to the gospel in faith or reject it in rebellion. God initiates the process; He imbues it with His Spirit’s enabling. When people respond in faith, God acts according to His promises to seal that relationship for eternity, welding the will of the believer to His own, setting the believer free by His sovereign embrace. Our assurance of salvation comes not from a “sense” that we are elect or from our persistence in holy living. Assurance comes from the simple, surrendered faith that God keeps every one of His promises in Christ Jesus.

Baptists’ historical insistence on believer’s baptism is a solid indicator of our soteriological instinct. Historically, neither Calvinism nor Arminianism had a correct word for infant baptism because both were burdened with the justification for total depravity, original sin, and individual election. For many Arminians (like those in the Wesleyan tradition), infant baptism functions with reference to original sin and prevenient grace and plays a role in the faith that God “foresees.”²¹ For many Calvinists, infant baptism has become an extremely odd vehicle by which they deal with the fate of infants, an issue that is illustrative of the fundamental inadequacy of the system. If Calvinism is true, then its own logic demands that at least some infants who die before reaching the point of moral responsibility spend eternity in hell.²² By and large, Calvinists do not want to say this and will go to great lengths to avoid doing so.²³ Covenant Theology and infant

²¹The question remains, however, concerning how God foresees faith in the child that dies in infancy. Now God is making decisions based on possibilities rather than actualities, which is extremely problematic. In Arminian traditions that do not practice infant baptism, the tendency toward belief in baptismal regeneration or subsequent Spirit-baptism over-emphasizes human effort in the understanding of free-will over against God’s sovereignty.

²²Adam Harwood, *The Spiritual Condition of Infants: A Biblical-Historical Survey and Systematic Proposal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 23.

²³R. Albert Mohler, Jr. and Daniel L. Akin, “The Salvation of the ‘Little Ones:’ Do Infants Who Die Go to Heaven?” [article on-line]; June 16, 2009 *AlbertMohler.com*; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/07/16/the-salvation-of-the-little-ones-do-infants-who-die-go-to-heaven/>; accessed 12 March 2011. Mohler and Akin’s argument is that all infants who die are elect. It is an astounding display of *a priori* reasoning that runs like this: Since Calvinism is true and since we don’t want to say that some infants go to hell, all infants who die must be elect (even though there is no biblical basis for such a claim).

baptism have been the preferred method for assuring (at least Christian) parents that they can believe in original guilt and total depravity and still know that their children who die in infancy will be with them in heaven. While Baptist Calvinists and Arminians do not allow for infant baptism, the fact that their systems allow for and even advocate it is telling.

Prevenient grace and Covenant Theology have never played a role in Baptist theology. This frees us to deal biblically with the issue of infant baptism: it is simply a popular vestige of Roman Catholic sacramentalism that the Magisterial Reformers did not have either the courage or theological acuity to address. Privileging election necessarily diminishes the significance of the individual response of faith for salvation, thus creating room for infant baptism and its theological justification. But with faith as the proper center of Baptist soteriology, infant baptism has never made any sense. Our distinctive understanding of the ordinance of baptism celebrates the centrality of the individual's actual response of faith to the free offer of the gospel.

Finally, Baptists' historic passion for evangelism and missions is underdetermined by Calvinism and Arminianism. For Calvinism, if the decision about who is saved and who is not has already been made by God, then the actual sharing of the gospel with the lost does not matter. The vast majority of Calvinists strenuously object to this charge, employing a variety of tactics to obviate what is, unfortunately, the only logical conclusion of their system. Saying that God elects the "means" of salvation as well as the individuals who are saved demands a determinism that is theologically unacceptable and philosophically unsustainable. Insisting that evangelism is still necessary because it "glorifies God" and demonstrates obedience to the Scriptures is simply a variation of that same determinism. The historical struggles of Calvinism with doctrinal and attitudinal opposition to missions and the "promiscuous preaching of the gospel" is evidence of the weakness of their system. Insisting on a "well-meant offer" while at the same time insisting that not all are able to respond is not the affirmation of a "mystery;" it is stubborn fidelity to a logical contradiction. For Arminianism, if election is based on foreseen faith, then it must be assumed that every person will receive enough of the gospel to trust or reject Christ. We know that billions still have not heard the gospel. This privileges the effort of the faith-capacity of people over the power of the gospel alone to save. If all people have the ability to figure out some form of faith in Christ, why worry overmuch about evangelism? It is this sort of weakness that lends itself to the frequent liberal trend in Arminianism.

Baptist anthropology affirms that, because of personal sinfulness, no one is capable of coming to faith in Christ without the proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Spirit. While there are certainly unique instances of individuals receiving the gospel through dreams and non-human proclamation, this is not God's normal manner of working and those instances of salvation still require both a proclamation of Jesus as Lord and a response of faith. Baptists believe that the proclamation of the gospel is necessary for a faith response to Christ. Those who do not hear will not be saved. Everyone who does hear has the opportunity to respond to Christ in faith or persist in unbelief. This is the only proper biblical motivation for the urgent proclamation of the gospel. Baptists have excelled in evangelism and missions because we believe it really matters.

It is safe to say that Federal Theology, Eternal Decrees, Covenants of Works, Grace, and Redemption, and prevenient grace have played essentially no major role in the expansion of the Baptist witness, especially among Southern Baptists, from the late nineteenth through the late twentieth centuries. This is not because ordinary Baptists are unintelligent or simplistic in their beliefs; it is because ordinary Baptists have played a significant role in the direction of denominational identity, and they have been serious about what the Bible plainly does and does not say. In the older Baptist confessions and in the writings of older Baptist heroes like Spurgeon, Fuller, and Carey, echoes of the doctrinal speculation above can be heard, but they sit uncomfortably with the strong affirmations of the opportunity of everyone to respond in faith to the preaching of the gospel and the inability of any believer to fall away. In the *Baptist Faith and Message*, such problematic speculation disappears completely.²⁴ Baptists have known that these things were unnecessary for the articulation of God's unstoppable plan to redeem the whole world through the bold proclamation of salvation in Christ alone by faith alone. From the beginning, the work of Christ in creation and redemption for the purpose of covenant relationship with humankind has always been the center of the biblical narrative. There is no need for an alternate metanarrative of secret decrees and hidden covenants to sort out the history of redemption. The plot of God's purpose for humankind can be found right on the surface of the text from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, all summed up succinctly in John 3:16.²⁵

Without committing to either Calvinism or Arminianism, Baptists have evangelized millions, planted thousands of churches, and reached literally around the globe with the life-changing, world-changing message of salvation by grace through faith. When either system has come to the forefront in debate or dispute, the outcome has rarely been positive for kingdom work through us. Baptists have been well-served by a simpler, less-speculative, less metaphysical approach to soteriology. As we move into a new millennium, a more constructive, positive statement of our soteriology based on this heritage of simplicity and faith-focus will sharpen us as to what is essential to the message and motivation of the gospel for all who stand in desperate need of it.

A Baptist Soteriology

So, what would a soteriology based on the Baptist vision look like? The four presuppositions discussed above, indeed, provide a sound framework upon which the Baptist vision could be set. Around the core biblical principle of faith, the philosophical principle of God's purpose for human free-will, the theological principle of "covenant in Christ alone," and the anthropological principle of the sinfulness and salvability of every person could be arranged. It is interesting that, in actual practice, these key concepts are identical with the emphases in the most widely

²⁴Malcolm Yarnell, "The TULIP of Calvinism in Light of History and the Baptist Faith and Message," *SBC Life*, April 2006.

²⁵Jerry Vines, "Sermon on John 3:16," in *Whosoever Will*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 13–15.

used personal evangelism tools in Baptist life. *F.A.I.T.H. Evangelism, Continuing Witness Training, Evangelism Explosion, The Four Spiritual Laws*, and *Share Jesus without Fear* all highlight (1) faith in Christ, unpacking such faith as (2) the absolute necessity of a personal, individual response of repentance and trust, (3) an entry into God's holy and loving, eternal purposes in the person and work of Christ alone, and (4) available for anyone who will admit his radical sinfulness and inability to save himself.²⁶ In none of these gospel presentations is there even a hint of the issues of election, determinism, Federal Theology, or total depravity. In such gospel witness, the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* is a helpful reminder that our actual evangelistic practices are crucial indicators of what we truly believe about soteriology.

The Biblical Presupposition: Individual Faith

The central biblical presupposition for a Baptist soteriology is, therefore, "faith" (Eph. 2.8-9). "Election" is a term that belongs properly in the Doctrine of God. Faith captures the fundamentally relational nature of NT soteriology. "Justification by faith," which lies at the center of Protestant soteriological identity, speaks of the initiating and sustaining activity of God in bringing an individual into right relationship with Himself and the necessity of the individual's response for God's justifying work to be actualized in his life. While the totality of justification has numerous aspects (past, present, future, spiritual, physical, individual, moral, social, ecclesiological, cosmic, etc.), it does not happen without personal faith. Faith has a variety of nuances as well, but, ultimately, it is an act of the will that belongs to the believer. It is not a "gift" God gives to some and not others. When we call people to salvation, we emphasize the biblical concept of faith, not election.

The Philosophical Presupposition: The Freedom of God and the Free-Will of People

The manner in which biblical faith functions in creation is this: God sovereignly and freely made a universe in which the free-will of humans plays a decisive role in His ultimate purposes for that universe (Rom. 10:9-10). Without free-will, there is no mechanism for the defeat of sin and evil, no mechanism for covenant relationship, no mechanism for a world-changing, world-completing partnership between God and His people. For Baptists, faith has never been something that occurs without our willing. We deny that people's eternal destinies have been fixed without respect to a free-response of repentance and faith. We preach that the decision of each individual is both possible and necessary for salvation.

²⁶The scriptural basis for each soteriological presupposition discussed below is drawn from the scripture references most common to these gospel presentations.

The Theological Presupposition: Covenant in Christ

In a Baptist soteriology, Christ is the central object of belief. He is believed as the mediator of covenant relationship, the full expression of the kingdom of God, eternal life, God's ultimate purpose for everyone and for the cosmos (John 3:16). We have no interest in a series of extra-biblical covenants created to bolster a soteriology that does not take seriously the necessity of personal faith as an expression of free-will. In our preaching, we do not burden people with the calculus of covenants of works, grace, and redemption. We do not invite people to believe in Calvinism or Arminianism. We offer Christ alone, the only hope of Adam, Noah, Abraham, the Patriarchs, Moses, David, Israel, and the whole of humankind. His perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection comprise the object of confession and belief that is sufficient to save (John 14:6, Rom. 10.9-10).

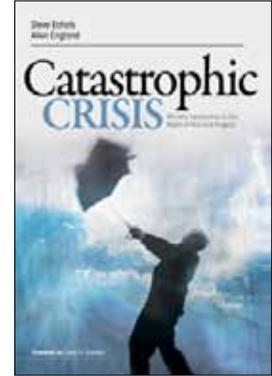
The Anthropological Presupposition: The Sinfulness and Salvability of Everyone

Finally, the anthropological presupposition is that no one can save himself, but anyone can be saved (Rom. 3:23). No person ever takes the first step toward God. Humankind's history is broken; its destiny is death; its context darkness; its reality is rebellion. This sinfulness has put us out of fellowship with God and under the verdict of eternal separation (Rom. 6.23). Through the person and work of Christ, which is proclaimed through the gospel, God reaches out His hand of "first love," providing a ground of salvation to which any one can respond in faith. If people do not hear and respond to this gospel, they will not be saved. So, we preach the gospel broadly, regularly, and passionately. We offer an invitation every time we preach because we believe every unbeliever, no matter how sinful and broken, can respond, and no matter how moral and self-righteous, must respond (Rev. 3:20).

These four pillars are the super-structure of the soteriology that has driven Baptist preaching, evangelism, and missions. It is the basis for life in Christ and the way of discipleship. Into this matrix, the totality of biblical soteriological language can be fed, but no other single concept can be allowed to dominate doctrinal development to such a degree that one or more of these emphases are abandoned or effectively neutralized. From these fixed-points of Baptist soteriology, such issues as the effects of the Fall, the order of salvation in its various dimensions, and other important implications can be discussed in full. In this construction, election is an important but tangential and transitional concept, connecting the borders of soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and theology proper. Faith, however, must stand at the center of Baptist soteriology, so that we might proclaim to all with firm conviction: "Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).



Catastrophic Crises: Ministry Leadership in the Midst of Trial and Tragedy. By Steve F. Echols and Allen England. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011. 192 pages. \$19.99, paper.



The preacher in Ecclesiastes claimed there is no end to the writing of books (Ec. 12:12). Writing a book that glues the reader to the narrative, however, is an appropriate end that justifies the means of diligent research, keen analysis, and thoughtful prose. Steve Echols and Allen England have given us a rich resource of transformational leadership for times of catastrophic crises. They define catastrophic to mean an event of overwhelming destruction and ruin. While all leaders face crises in their tenure of ministry, a catastrophic crisis usually occurs once in a lifetime. Consequently, the authors selected, examined, and evaluated eight catastrophic situations: seven that struck churches and one that almost devastated New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. By combining case studies with strategic leadership lessons the reader feels the weight of the trial or tragedy and learns the cruciality of effective leadership.

Several practical examples stand out. For those of us who endured the destructive fury of Hurricane Katrina the authors stir provocative memories of the long and laborious assessment and recovery. Dr. Chuck Kelley along with the trustees and the administrative team of the seminary tackled the New Orleans catastrophe swiftly and decisively in order to minimize the loss of students and faculty to the seminary. Hard times require hard decisions from leaders. As a result Dr. Kelley asked the faculty to make a personal sacrifice by meeting on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary 10 days after the hurricane in order to reestablish communication, foster support, and allow for an opportunity to collectively grieve. Maintaining a clear perspective during emotionally volatile circumstances creates a potential for serious conflict. Nevertheless visionary leaders like Chuck Kelley provide hope in the midst of heartache and direction in the midst of chaos that enables everyone to adapt to a new normal.

Leading during a disaster is also what Echols and England emphasize when an F2 tornado leveled Bethel Baptist Church in Moody, Alabama. Pastor Chris Burns discovered the importance of creativity when his congregation had no place to worship. Furthermore he learned the art of navigating through conflicting congregational opinions while leading Bethel to reach out to the community. Transitioning an established rural church into a growing suburban church takes a toll upon both pastor and people, but servant-leaders help a congregation move from survival to revival during a malevolent crisis.

But what about the nightmares that come true? What kind of leadership is necessary when a deranged gunman interrupts a worship service and fatally wounds the pastor? And how do you manage the shock factor when a church bus accident injures and kills several students?

The authors skillfully explore the relational dynamics and communication techniques necessary at such catastrophic moments. Furthermore, the authors show the necessity of staff cooperation and cohesion from the position of second chair leadership: "Often people forget

about the service they could provide from the second chair because they are so focused on getting to the first chair” (55). When a catastrophic event occurs church staff leaders must not reproduce the infamous mistake of Alexander Haig. Within minutes after President Ronald Reagan was shot Secretary of State Haig erroneously stated, “I’m in charge”.

During the tragic bus accident involving the students of First Baptist Church Shreveport, Gene Hendrix minister of administration and education made it clear that the pastor was the primary leader. Gene handled behind the scene details so the pastor could give attention to grieving families and conduct media interviews. From a secondary position he emphasized that the senior pastor was clearly in charge.

One of the many strong points in this thoughtful book is the way Echols and England apply stylistic competencies to the biblical foundation of godly leadership. They affirm the two biblical stances of (1) transformational leadership and (2) servant leadership as essential models regardless of which stylistic competency a leader may exhibit.

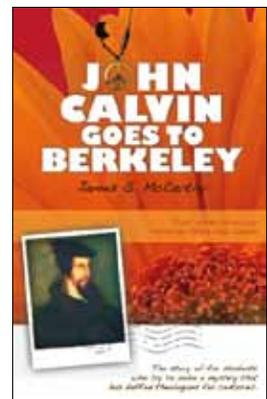
Afterall, leadership is always under the scorching light of criticism but never more so than during a catastrophic event. Such experiences allow leaders to distinguish themselves as Christ-like servants who rise to the occasion with empathetic ministry and courageous integrity.

My copy of *Catastrophic Crisis* is marked, underlined and dog-eared for ready reference. I will give copies to young pastors that I mentor and encourage them to read it eagerly and allow its wisdom to seep deeply. Indeed God leaves His fingerprints upon the catastrophic crises of our lives so that by prayer and humility we may demonstrate that His grace is sufficient for the unexpected moment that can happen to any leader anywhere.

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John Calvin Goes to Berkeley. By James G. McCarthy. San Jose, CA: City Christian Press, 2010. 304 pages. \$14.95, paper.

When I was a young college and seminary student, the two main issues we debated in dormitory rooms and Bible studies were millennial views and Bill Gothard’s teachings about the family. Among the most discussed topics today in those same settings is a few key tenets of Calvinism. It is important for everyone (particularly Christian students in high school, college, and seminary) to be well-informed on these issues. *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley* is an excellent introduction to this subject.



John Calvin Goes to Berkeley is a novel, not a theological treatise, and thus affords a creative approach to the Reformed-Arminian debate, which has evoked many one-sided theological treatises but little meaningful dialogue. We often learn more from dialogue than from a monologue, more from a story than a lecture, more from a novel than from a theological treatise. The format of a novel allows us to overhear the debate over Reformed theology as a bystander without feeling pressed by a one-sided author to affirm that position. Overhearing the debate provides the readers with a balanced presentation of multiple sides of the issue, and allows the readers to think through their own positions without feeling defensive.

The author, James McCarthy, is a converted Catholic who serves as an elder at Grace Bible Chapel in San Jose, California. He also teaches in the Discipleship Intern Training Program hosted by Grace Bible Chapel and Hillview Bible Chapel, which ministers in part to students at the University of California at Berkeley. After authoring four other books and co-authoring another on ministering to Catholics, *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley* is McCarthy's first novel, and the first in an intended University Christian Fellowship series.

The storyline in *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley* concerns the University Christian Fellowship (UCF) at the University of California at Berkeley, in which the issue of Calvinism and predestination became divisive. Five members of UCF covenanted to meet together and study the issue in depth until they could resolve the issue. However, the storyline is enriched by a number of subplots, including an irresponsible investigative reporter who accused UCF of being a part of the Dou Yat Ji Lou doomsday cult, an accusation of UCF President Alex Kim for an alleged cheating scandal, a tie to Patricia Hearst and the Symbionese Liberation Army, the salvation of a student from Singapore, a drug-crazed vagrant man who kept assaulting UCF displays, a trip to Geneva to learn more about Calvin, and a number of personal struggles experienced by the UCF members. This is an interesting novel even if someone were less interested in the theological issues about which it rotates.

When dissension arose among the UCF leadership, their President Alex Kim (a Korean American engineering student) called a series of meetings at the Graduate Theological Union library in Berkeley. The Calvinist protagonist in the discussions was UCF Vice-President Rod Sutherland, who hoped to attend Westminster Theological Seminary. The other participants were not as committed to a particular doctrinal tradition though had their own presuppositions: Angela (a Hispanic student with a Catholic background), Elliot (a doctoral student in mathematics), and Jamie (a popular "Joe College" surfer boy). The group researched theology, history, and the Bible, and yet still struggled to come to a consensus answer. However, the discussions present all the major arguments from Scripture and theology for and against the Reformed view of predestination. These discussions are helpful to anyone who wants to hear both sides of these issues and a survey of the relevant biblical texts in order to think through these issues. In fact, the various views are presented with such balance that the reader will not be sure which way the majority of the group is going to go until the very end of the book.

Without “spoiling” the end of the story for future reader, the research group surveys all the major views on the subject, and some of them come up with their own distinct proposal. Rod leads part of the UCF to leave and start a Reformed Christian Fellowship, while the others agree on a compromise proposal in which God enlightens those who are willing to repent and believe.

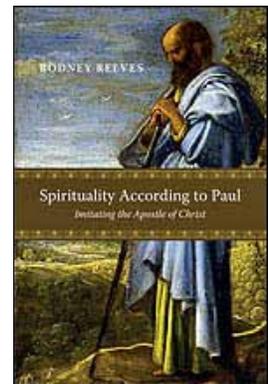
Many of the theological texts on Reformed theology are either written for laypersons and are too simplistic for theological precision, or are written for scholars and are too technical for the typical layperson. *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley* strikes a good balance – although it is obviously not a technical theological treatise, it does discuss the key biblical texts and theological issues impinging on predestination, and even word studies of key biblical words relating to predestination. It is an excellent book to recommend to a college student, seminarian, or informed layperson who is interested in this important doctrinal issue.

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Spirituality according to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ. By Rodney Reeves. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011. Pp. 253. \$16.00 paperback.

Dr. Rodney Reeves is professor of biblical studies and dean of the Courts Redford College of Theology and Ministry at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. In his latest book, *Spirituality according to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ*, Reeves fleshes out what Paul’s understanding of spirituality entails, which essentially is, “Take up the cross and follow me!” Reeves updates Paul’s clarion call to be like him so as to be like Jesus for a culture of convenient Christianity, a church fudging on biblical truth, and a mindset that has capitulated to postmodern pluralism. According to our author, Paul’s spirituality is cruciform in shape, guided by three brand images: crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Thus toward the conclusion of his introduction, Reeves writes, “[Paul] believed he imitated Christ. That’s because he was convinced that the gospel is the story of Christ—death, burial and resurrection—that will be the narrative of spirituality for all time. And he believed that he was the one to show us how to live that story because he walked in the power of Christ’s Spirit” (17). This three-fold concept provides the framework for Reeves’ entire book, which I now summarize.

Part I is devoted to the notion of the Christian being crucified with Christ, which is developed in four chapters. The first chapter makes the point that Paul’s true spirituality was not rooted in his accomplishments as a Pharisee but rather in his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, when Paul discovered that the suffering Jesus was none other than the glorified



Messiah. Such an insight turned Paul's theology around, causing him to embrace Jesus the suffering Messiah. Consequently, the newly called apostle embraced the cross of Christ as the means to experiencing divine glory: "This pattern of humiliation leading to exaltation is the essence of the gospel according to Paul. Messianic suffering must precede messianic glory. Death gives life. Loss becomes gain. Shame morphs into honor. The cross explains resurrection" (35). God's power displayed in Paul's weakness would become the theme of Paul's apostleship and for all who wished to follow him as he followed Jesus, the theme of Reeves' chapter two. Here the author draws much on 1 and 2 Corinthians and the Pauline opposition documented there. It boils down to the fact that the church at Corinth held Paul in disdain for his ineloquent speech. He had not been influenced by Greek rhetoric like his missionary counterparts had been. But, for the apostle to the Gentiles, it was precisely through his weaknesses that the power of the gospel was being demonstrated. Here Reeves offers an interesting diagnosis of Paul's deficient speaking skills, namely, Paul suffered the continuing effects of head trauma perpetrated upon him in Galatia (48-49). In chapter three, our author sticks with Paul's message to the Corinthian Christians, especially in his challenge for them to deny themselves and be the holy temple of sacrifice God had called them to be. Such a message flew in the face of the idolatry that glorified sex had become in that day, a message that has continuing relevance for the twenty-first century. The last chapter in unit one explains why the Law of Moses failed to produce obedience and holiness and why only walking in the Spirit provides the solution.

Part II of Reeves' book is devoted to the Pauline metaphor of baptism with Christ which, according to the author, must be seen as a communal act. Thus chapter 5 asserts that when the Christ follower (Reeves' preferred term for a Christian) is baptized, she is baptized into Christ's body, the church: "Indeed, most books on Paul's spirituality skip over the significance of being buried with Christ. That's because we tend to emphasize our personal experience as the locus of spiritual formation" (98). Rather, the believer is baptized into the community of faith when he is baptized into Christ. Indeed, the churches at Corinth serve as a foil in this regard because their very gloating over being baptized into the names of their respective heroes belied the true significance of baptism. Chapter 6 continues Reeves' critique of the Corinthian Christians, this time with reference to their celebration of the Lord's Supper. Reeves demonstrates, among other things, that the Corinthian churches' participation in the agape meal right before the Lord's Supper undermined the communal aspect of Christianity. When the wealthy patrons of the house churches ate better food and drank more wine in their secluded posh part of the house than the poorer believers did who were confined to the more common areas, this divided the church into the haves and have-nots thereby invoking the judgment of God. Chapter 7 addresses the issue of immorality in the church at Corinth and the church today. Reeves emphasizes the corporate dimension of sexual sin for the Christian; it drags the body of Christ into the illicit relationship organically as well as provokes the world's criticism. Chapter 8 reminds the reader that to be Christian is to give to others, especially one's fellow believers. Paul's collection of money from his Gentile churches for the Jerusalem church demonstrated the importance of such grace-giving. These three actions, then—unity at the Lord's Supper, sexual purity, giving to others—flow from the believer's baptism into Christ and His body.

Part III explores the role of the resurrection in Paul's spirituality under the rubric of "raised with Christ." In chapter 9, Reeves expounds how it is that Jesus' resurrection power is at work in the mortal lives of Christians. He writes of this paradox, "So what does resurrection power look like on earth? On the outside it looks like death. It looks like weakness and groaning. It looks like loss, foolishness and failure. It looks like a hopeless cause, a problem that never goes away, a wasted effort. Indeed, it looks like a man who labors in vain. But even as "our outer nature is wasting away," Paul believed "our inner nature is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). "Because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen," believers operate with an abiding hope that God is at work in our lives in mysterious ways (172). Chapter 10 continues the theme of the paradox of the resurrection by observing that God shows up in Christ followers in the midst of loss. God turns losing into gain, death into life, sorrow into joy, weakness into strength, futility into glory. Indeed, if God can turn a cross into resurrection, then He can work all things for good (182). Chapter 11 asserts that being raised with Christ also means being fit for spiritual battle with Satan and his malevolent forces. This was something that the Ephesian believers needed to understand and something the modern church can ill afford to neglect. Chapter 11 concludes Reeves' book by discussing glimpses of the resurrection in signs, miracles, and visions; happenings that God granted to Paul and occasionally to us as well. But most important of all is the foretaste of divine glory that believers encounter when they pore over sacred Scripture, God's primary vehicle of communicating His truth.

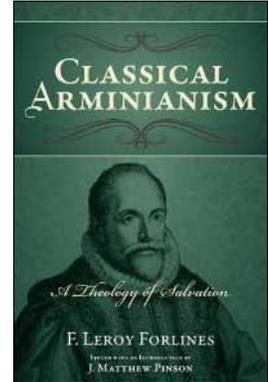
Reeves concludes his book by asking the question: What would following Paul look like today? Rather than concentrate on specific issues that plague modern Christianity, our author challenges his readers to count on the Spirit like Paul did, which means to live the crucified life by promoting the welfare of all people by edifying the church and by caring for all creation because the glory of Christ's resurrection invades every corner of the earth. Paul believed we could participate in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ so that all might see the good news of God's reclamation of all things (236).

Reeves provides us with a convicting yet liberating profile of Pauline spirituality. In doing so, he points the way out from the moral morass and spiritual lethargy that have long had an impact on the modern church. So what does it mean for the Christian to take up the cross and follow Jesus? It means to imitate His servant the apostle Paul!

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Classical Arminianism. By Leroy Forlines. Edited by J. Matthew Pinson. Nashville: Randall House, 2011. Pp. 379, \$27.99 paperback.

Arminian theologian Leroy Forlines' doctrine of salvation has been expanded and compressed from its previous incarnations in this new volume, edited by J. Matthew Pinson (cf. *Biblical Systematics* [Nashville: Randall House, 1975] and *The Quest for Truth* [Nashville: Randall House, 2001]). This substantial book sets forth a comprehensive systematic theology of the doctrine of salvation in ten chapters. The book includes an index of references to authors and subjects (but not of Bible verses), and is documented and supplemented by endnotes – instead of footnotes.



Many readers are likely to be struck by four aspects of this Arminian theology. First, this is an Arminian theology that is well denominated as “Reformation Arminianism” due to its advocacy of key Reformed theological elements. Secondly, it is an Arminianism more closely reflecting the theology of Arminius, than the Wesleyan Arminianism of a later era. Thirdly, it is an Arminianism with a pedigreed Baptist lineage, traceable to 17th-century English Baptists. Fourthly, it is an Arminianism that is freshly argued by a mind that looks at the pertinent theological elements in an ingenious way and in a way that makes theology personal and relevant.

The book is introduced by J. Matthew Pinson, whose differentiation of Forlines' theology in the Arminian spectrum is worth the cost of the book and the time investiture of reading it. Both Pinson and Forlines are Free Will Baptists, but Pinson's introduction shows how Forlines' Arminianism can appeal to a wider audience of those seeking an alternative to both Calvinism and Wesleyan Arminianism.

Forlines begins his initial chapter by discussing what it means to be created in the image of God. For Forlines, this may be summed up as individuals being created as *persons*, beings who think, feel, and act, and are endowed with reason and morality. Forlines' discussion is characteristically simple, but carries profound implications for his entire theological system. In particular, man is designed for an interpersonal relationship with God, one that is characterized by influence and response, rather than cause and effect. Forlines argues that “in some sense, an individual's actions are both his or her own and under his or her control. If this were not the case, he or she would be less than a person” (12). Forlines notes that it is hard to find a theology book that deals extensively with human personality, suggesting that Calvinists avoid the issue for fear that it will “take something away from God[’s sovereignty]” (59).

The lengthy chapter goes on to argue for a nuanced view of total depravity, one that recognizes that the Fall seriously impacted personhood but did not nullify it: fallen man is still a thinking, feeling, and acting being endowed with reason and morality, even if these characteristics have become deeply flawed. Thus, even as a sinner, “the image of God within cries out for Truth, a right use of reason, moral uprightness, forgiveness for guilt” (19), although “fallen humanity

has no ability or power to reach out to the grace of God on its own” (citing Pinson, 23). Forlines concludes the chapter by incorporating Reformed doctrinal commitments regarding the imputation of Adam’s sin to the race, the means whereby it was imputed (natural headship), and the means whereby depravity is transmitted (Augustinian).

The second chapter introduces issues pertaining to election. Forlines’ treatment of the various orders of the decrees in Calvinism, and how one theological commitment logically flows from another, is so clear that individual Calvinists may find it helpful in clarifying their own particular positions. The discussion includes various Calvinistic views on God’s sovereignty, in counterpoint with various aspects of human freedom. Forlines raises the simple question, “Is the *cause* and *effect* model the only way that a sovereign God can carry out His purposes? Or, can God work effectively in carrying out His purposes through the *influence* and *response model*?” (80). He answers emphatically by showing how an influence and response model is compatible with God’s sovereignty. Forlines affirms a view of God’s absolute foreknowledge that does not result in divine causality. He denies Molinism and Open Theism through substantial argumentation. The chapter concludes with an outline of an Arminian order of decrees, and with a discussion of the types of decrees consistent with Arminian theology (conditional and unconditional efficacious decrees, decrees to influence, and decrees to permit).

Any reading of the third chapter will dispel the popular but unschooled notion that Arminians do not believe in election. In fact, Forlines not only affirms election, but thinks that the thorny ninth chapter of Romans is his best prooftext to support his view that God elects individuals on the condition of faith, and he provides an extensive theological analysis of it, section by section. Essential to Forlines’ analysis is the Jewish presumption of their *unconditional* election, by virtue of Abrahamic descent, a theme revisited throughout the work. Thus, Paul answers the objection that large numbers of Jews were not saved by arguing that salvation is conditioned upon the individual believing, as reflected in the chapter’s summation which indicates that the decisive factor in election is faith (Rom. 9:30-33).

The third chapter highlights both Forlines’ genius as well as some deficiencies. His genius is seen in that his perspective on election and Romans 9 moves away from older models and reflects some of the thinking of the New Pauline Perspective found in the writings of Sanders, Dunn, and Wright, although he had independently arrived at his conclusion long before the New Pauline Perspective became well known (cf. Forlines’ *Romans* [Nashville: Randall House, 1988]). On the other hand, Forlines’ treatment of Romans 9 could be strengthened significantly by greater interaction with more recent exegetical treatments; although there is some interaction with modern scholars, such as Grudem, Moo, Piper, Schreiner, and Yarbrough, the majority of Forlines’ interaction on this topic is with older scholars such as David Brown, John Brown, Clarke, Ellicott, Godet, Haldane, Hodge, Lenski, Liddon, Meyer, Murray, Plumer, Sanday and Headlam, and Shedd. Elsewhere, Forlines’ exegesis seems more dependent upon older and less reliable works, such as word studies by Vincent, Earle, Trench, and Thayer. In one case, Forlines cites *The Amplified Bible* (331).

Having worked extensively through Rom 9 and arguing for its support of an Arminian election that is individual, eternal, and conditional, Forlines turns to dispelling other prooftexts

for Calvinistic unconditional election in chapter 4, and then to garnering scriptural support for Arminian conditional election in chapter 5.

The discussion in chapter 5 covers terminology, such as predestination, foreknowledge, election, and whether the biblical data require that these terms imply unconditional election. Forlines shows that election is centered “in Christ” (Eph 1:4), explaining, “We are chosen in Christ. [Paul] does not say that we were chosen *to be in Christ*” (183). To explain the difficulty of a Calvinistic election that precedes the decree to provide atonement, Forlines quotes Arminius: “God can previously love and affectionately regard as His own no sinner unless He has foreknown him in Christ, and looked upon him as a believer in Christ. . . . For, if God could will to any one eternal life, without respect to the Mediator, He could also give eternal life, without the satisfaction made by the Mediator” (184). Forlines concludes by discussing logical arguments for the various views of election. The discussion would have been strengthened by a discussion of Jesus’ being God’s elect Son, or simply, the Elect One, since whatever it means for Christians to be elect must correspond in some sense to the Son’s status as elect.

Forlines argues in chapter 6 for an atonement that grasps “the seriousness of sin and the understanding of God’s holiness” (199). In doing so, he affirms the Reformed doctrinal commitment to the nature of the atonement as being penal satisfactory, and that salvation could only be accomplished by the punishment of sin through Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice. Forlines gives a clear contrast of the basic assumptions of this view of atonement with those of the Governmental View, a view which many well known Arminians have advocated. The Governmental View rejects the notion that God’s holiness requires that sin be punished but that punishment is an option to be exercised at God’s discretion. The chapter concludes by addressing objections to the Penal Satisfaction View, and an argument for infant salvation (accomplished through the atonement by the removal of racial guilt). Forlines’ exposition of Penal Satisfaction is clear and logically coherent, and is one of the strengths of the book. However, one gets the impression that the system is occasionally imposed upon certain texts. Moreover, the meaning of a number of passages, especially in regard to God’s wrath being poured out upon Christ, need to be strengthened in light of recent exegetical treatments which question traditional interpretations.

Forlines raises multiple issues regarding the condition of salvation in the seventh chapter. First, he asserts that repentance and faith reflect different aspects of the same single condition. Secondly, he defines saving faith in a way similar to many Reformed theologians (“the abandonment of all trust in self or anything else, and a complete confident trust in Christ for salvation,” 254); in doing so, he circumvents the Calvinist claim that in Arminianism, faith is a work (citing Rom. 4:3-5). Thirdly, Forlines safeguards against the notion that people can be forgiven without experiencing a change in their lives by emphasizing that faith involves the whole personality (mind, heart, and will). Fourthly, Forlines affirms that faith is a gift in that it “cannot be exercised without the work of the Holy Spirit,” while insisting that nonetheless “it is a response of the person in such a way that it is a response of his or her personality” and “is in a real sense his own action” (258). Since this issue is so important in the Calvinist-Arminian controversy, Forlines goes on to clarify that faith is merely the condition for justification, not its ground. He denies the Calvinistic claim that regeneration must precede faith, in which regeneration is the *cause*, and faith is the guaranteed

effect. Instead, he points out an inconsistency in Calvinism whereby Reformed theologians such as Berkhof and Strong affirm that regeneration is a part of sanctification, even though God “cannot enter with His sanctifying grace until the guilt problem is solved by justification” (citing Calvinist theologian Robert Haldane, 263). Interestingly, Forlines quotes Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul to argue that faith is synergistic in both Calvinism and Arminianism, while asserting that regeneration is monergistic in both systems (260-61). Forlines is remiss in discussing the theological groundswell in New Testament scholarship of whether the phrase for “the faith of Christ” in passages such as Gal. 2:20 is to be taken as a subjective or objective genitive, and reduces the subjective genitive to the nearly non-sensical meaning “Jesus’ faith,” rather than “Jesus’ faithfulness” (258).

Through Wesley’s emphasis on Christian perfection, Arminians have been well known for their emphasis on personal sanctification. In the eighth chapter, Forlines likewise emphasizes holiness: “The redemptive process is designed to restore us to favor with God and to restore the holiness that was lost in the fall. Justification is a step in that process by a personal God who is intensely interested in holiness” (280). However, Forlines addresses the issue of personal holiness through a traditional Reformed approach rather than through a Wesleyan approach. He points out the errors regarding sanctification that may arise through a governmental view of the atonement. He distinguishes his view from a popular view of sanctification advocated by Charles Finney by asserting, “Sanctification is always an *accompaniment* of justification, but it is *not a condition* or *ground* of justification.” Likewise, he denounces the notion that sanctification is optional (“pseudo-Calvinism” and “cheap easy-believism”). Thus, he grounds sanctification in the atonement: “Our guilt stood as a barrier between us and the sanctifying power of God. . . . When the guilt was removed by the justifying grace of God, the way was open for the entrance of God’s sanctifying grace” (279). While Forlines recognizes that there is some latitude within “the framework of possibilities” for the influence of God’s sanctifying grace and the response of the believer, he nonetheless argues for “the guaranteed results of sanctification (295-97): “it is not within the framework of possibilities for the Christian to practice sin. It is within the framework of possibilities for him to please God and to live right” (297). This chapter is refreshing in that it offers a systematic framework for sanctification, while having the tone of a work on spirituality. Amazingly, however, in a chapter that should be replete with references to the Spirit, Forlines manages to refer to the Spirit but five times.

The final two chapters are devoted to the issue of continuance in salvation and the possibility of apostasy, which Forlines adroitly refers to as “making shipwreck” of one’s faith (320). Since Forlines grounds both salvation and continuance in salvation in the atonement, the only way that a saved person could be lost again is if he makes shipwreck of his faith. Thus, so long as a person is united with Christ by faith, his sins are forgiven (341). Accordingly, “we do not have room for a halfway state between being saved and being lost. If we are in union with Christ . . . , we are justified. If we are not in union with Christ, we are not justified. We can be in danger of losing our salvation. However, we have lost it only when the union is broken.” Forlines’ insistence that continuance in salvation is conditioned upon faith, dispels the claim that it is a works-salvation: “The Bible plainly conditions salvation on faith. To insist that salvation is *kept on the condition of faith* no more contradicts the notion of free salvation than saying that it is *received*

on the condition” (345). Hence, Forlines would affirm the present continuous tense formula that those who *are* truly *believing* endure to the end, but would question the present perfect tense formula that those who *have* truly *believed* do so (italics mine; compare with the Baptist Faith and Message which reads “All true believers endure to the end,” section V). Forlines argues for the position that a person who has made shipwreck of his faith cannot be saved again (319-25). Chapter nine addresses the prooftexts for and against the various Calvinist and Arminian positions of continuance in salvation, while chapter 10 addresses the theological arguments. Much of the discussion is original.

Forlines’ *Classical Arminianism* is a worthy endeavour, essential for any serious theologian interested in traditional theological systems. However, it delivers weighty matters in a style that appeals to non-specialists, pastors and church leaders, and to theology students. Not only does it provide an alternative to Calvinism, but it does so in a way that undermines much of the logical force behind Calvinism. One easily concludes that Forlines’ system (really, Arminius’s system) is the strongest alternative to Calvinism.

To be sure, there are some weaknesses. There is room for a good biblical exegete to strengthen some of Forlines’ exegesis and to ground his systematic theology in biblical theology. Interaction with recent exegesis is relatively low.

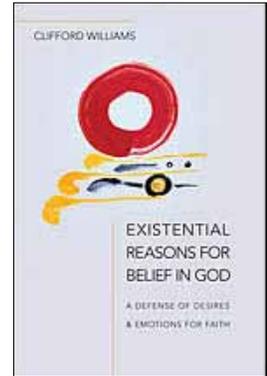
The book is strikingly free of mechanical errors. While some of Forlines’ denominational audience may find the Scripture quotations from the KJV appealing, other readers will find it curious, to say the least; Forlines’ need to explain KJV readings or alternate it with modern versions is occasionally intrusive. Also, the layout of headers with sectional numbering would help the reader distinguish sections from subsections, and facilitate cross-referencing.

These criticisms hardly detract from the book’s real urgencies. In particular, Forlines impresses upon the reader God’s real concern for holiness, as it is manifest in his plan to engage mankind as individual persons in an influence-response model to bring about their salvation. As such, the book is nearly as much a theology of spiritual growth as it is a systematic theology of salvation.

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Existential Reasons for Belief in God: A Defense of Desires & Emotions for Faith. By Clifford Williams. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011. 188 pages. \$22.00.

Clifford E. Williams serves as Professor of Philosophy at Trinity International University's Trinity College and as Chair of the Philosophy department. He has written more than ten books with topics ranging from free will, virtues, and Kierkegaard to Modern American Hoboes. His journal articles include various discussions of time and ethics. In *Existential Reasons for Belief in God* Williams attempts to legitimize need as a basis for faith. He argues that both reason and emotional need fulfillment are part of coming to faith.



According to Williams, most people who come to faith do so because their faith meets an existential need and because they think their faith is true. His book introduces several needs people have and he argues that need satisfaction is a legitimate reason to come to faith in God. The bulk of the work is dedicated to defending his argument from four objections.

Williams identifies two categories of needs: “self-directed needs” and “other-directed needs” (20). Fulfilling self-directed needs benefit the individual and consist of having cosmic security— heaven, life after death, goodness, feeling loved, a richer life, meaning, and forgiveness (21-24). Fulfilling other-directed needs benefits others or are intrinsically good and consist of loving, experiencing awe, delighting in goodness, being present to others, and justice/fairness. He does not intend to provide an exhaustive list nor does he claim that everyone feels these needs.

Williams’s existential argument is simple. Humans have certain needs that are satisfied by faith in God, therefore faith in God is justified (32). His argument is directed at rational ways to satisfy a need— by believing in God—but his argument is not designed to prove God exists (41). The justification for belief in God is that having such a belief satisfies certain needs. Williams’s project shows that people are rational for believing in God because certain needs are satisfied by having that belief (or faith).

The bulk of the book defends Williams’s project from four objections. The first is that the existential argument *does not guarantee truth*. Belief in God may satisfy certain needs but it cannot guarantee God’s existence (62). Williams admits to the veracity of this criticism but that it does not defeat the existential argument. When the existential argument is supplemented with reasons to believe that God exists, it can aid a person in coming to faith (81).

The second objection is that the existential argument *justifies belief in any God*. Williams explains that his argument does not guarantee anything about any God (88). His criteria for legitimate needs are designed to exclude deviant needs as a way to avoid using his argument to justify belief in a malevolent God. Williams also admits the second criticism is true but it does not defeat the existential argument.

The third objection is that *not everyone feels existential needs*. Williams discusses different aspects associated with introspection and self-identifying needs. He claims that some people may be unaware of their own needs since we sometimes have obstacles that hinder need recognition. He concedes that while the argument will not work for those who claim they do not feel the existential needs, the argument will work for those who do feel the existential needs (109).

The final objection is that *existential needs can be satisfied without faith*. If the objection is true, then whatever satisfies the needs would be as justified as belief in God including non-belief. Williams develops methods to test how to best satisfy the existential needs and he argues that Christian faith best satisfies them.

The last two chapters of the book examine the relationship between faith and reason and presents reasons to pursue faith. Williams argues that faith is emotion with commitment illustrates the emotive and reasonable aspects of faith. His final chapter presents positive benefits having faith in God.

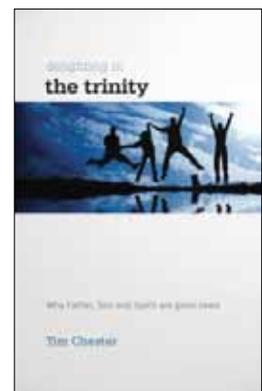
Williams work is valuable. Emotions are part of the human condition and have a role in all aspects of life, including faith. He made the case that satisfying needs is a reasonable justification for belief in God. Although useful to Christians, his argument also can be used to justify belief in a non-Christian god or gods.

Existential Reasons for Belief in God is not an overly technical book, but the topic is deep and Williams's writing requires persistence and attention. He sprinkles case studies in the chapters to demonstrate his position and provide a way for the reader to relate. Those familiar with philosophy will be very comfortable with his presentation, but any thoughtful person would be able to understand his argument. Although William's book cites some biblical examples, it is philosophy. I recommend this book for those who are interested in an in-depth discussion of justifying belief/behavior with need fulfillment.

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Delighting in the Trinity: Why Father, Son and Spirit are Good News. By Tim Chester. 2d ed. United Kingdom: The Good Book, 2010. 192 pages. \$12.99, paper.

With a Ph.D. in eschatology and missions, Tim Chester sees his ministry as not to take people to church but to take church to people. In his most recent book, *Everyday Church* (June 2011), he describes how, in our post-Christian western culture, people no longer come to church so we must bring the church to them. To this end, he serves at *The Crowded House*, a church plant in Sheffield, UK, he is the director of The



Porterbrook Institute, a distance learning center that specializes in practical, missional, ministry training, and he is a prolific author (timchester.wordpress.com).

With Chester's background in mind, we should expect his book on the Trinity to be accessible and well written yet informative and practical. *Delighting in the Trinity* is just that. Chester lays out an easy to follow lesson plan that is very conversational in tone but brings the necessary research to bear. He begins by building a case for the importance of the study despite the inherent difficulty of the subject. Taking a cue from Karl Barth, Chester places the Trinity at the center of the gospel so it is something with which we need to grapple in order to understand ourselves and our faith: "By telling the story of the triune God, we invite people to know the God who both rules the world and has come close to us, welcoming us into His family" (18).

After the introductory chapter, Chester begins part one by interacting with the biblical evidence for the triunity of God. As he plumbs the depths of Scripture, astute readers will notice a slight "reformed" perspective in his research and writing. For example, while most Baptists hold that Jesus was abandoned on the cross by the Father and the Spirit, Chester agrees with Calvin that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was made possible by the Spirit: "On the cross Jesus is abandoned by His Father, but the Spirit is present with Him enabling Him to offer Himself to the Father" (74). One way Chester's writing is accessible is in the way he dispels mistaken views of the Trinity. For example, he points out that the Son is not placating a stern Father but is fulfilling an act of love that "started with the Father" (68). He adds that the Son is not the victim of the Father but is a willing participant. The focus of the entire first part is on the unity of the godhead and the relationality of the Trinity.

In the second part, Chester probes the historical development of the Trinity. He lights softly upon some of the important people and events in Christian history: Origen, Arius, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Aquinas, the *filioque* controversy and the subsequent east-west schism, the reformers (esp. Calvin), the Enlightenment, Barth, and liberation theology. This survey helps ground the doctrine in all its practical significance.

Chester, in part three, explores the practical implications of a trinitarian doctrine of God, which, not surprisingly, is the largest section of the book. For him, the proper way to apply the Trinity is relationally. Thus, God can only be known through relationship, that atonement is only possible with a triune God (130), and that we were created to be in relationship with God and with others (172).

Chester's concluding chapter is missions-focused. He compares the uniqueness of Christ to Islam. While Christians hold that we are created in the image of God, Muslims are offended by any depiction of God so believe the Christian claim to the *imago Dei* to be blasphemous. And while Christians accept the concept of Trinity so depict Yahweh as both transcendent and personal, Muslims portrait of Allah is that of a deistic, distant being, who cannot be personal yet remain holy. For Chester, the study of the Trinity is all about how we are made as relational beings for community living. To miss this point is to miss the point of Christ and the Trinity.

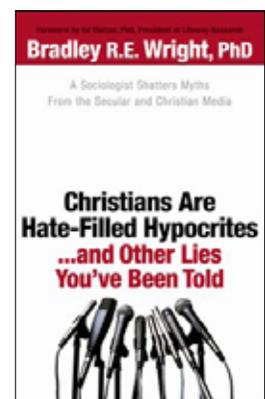
Delighting in the Trinity deserves high praise. The writing is accessible. Chester introduces key terminology but always provides a concise definition. For example, on page 92 he presents and defines two sets of terms: “*homoousios* (‘same substance’)” and “*homoiousios* (‘similar substance’)” and “the ‘economic Trinity’ (the Trinity in relation to creation) and the ‘immanent Trinity’ (the Trinity as it is in itself)” (92). His presentation of the historical development was detailed but not so meticulous that we get lost in the details. As discussed at the beginning of the review, Chester’s focus is on getting the Gospel to the people. The tone of this book meets that need and makes the complexity of the Trinity accessible to those interested in understanding this important pillar of the Christian faith.

The weaknesses are few and minor. One soft spot is how Chester compares our inability to know about God to our inability to know about a distant city or person we have never met (124). But, as he argued earlier (18ff), God is not distant but personal. Thus, the analogy is weak; though Chester’s overarching point is not adversely affected. Another soft spot is in the comparison of Yahweh to Allah (176-80). Following a clear presentation of the Muslim’s belief in a distant Allah, he adds that “there is little sense of God’s love and no place for the fatherhood of God” (177). The writing is unclear. While earlier Chester differentiated between Yahweh and Allah (28-29), here he could be read as claiming Allah is another name for Yahweh. A little editing would help remove the seeming contradiction. This, again, is a minor issue and has little affect on the overall impact of the book. I would be happy to recommend it to anyone interested in reading an uncomplicated but serious presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

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Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites . . . and Other Lies You’ve Been Told: A Sociologist Shatters Myths From the Secular and Christian Media. By Bradley R. E. Wright. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010. 333 pages. \$14.99, paper.

Ironically both the church’s harshest critics and her strongest proponents love sensationalist quotes and statistics about the dire state of the church in America today. Critics rejoice in the downfall of the church, while pastors often believe that negative claims about the state of the church will compel Christians to do the work of the church. Wright proposed that many of these statistics, used by both critics and proponents of the church alike, are grossly misleading, exaggerated, or just plain wrong—stats like “only prostitutes rank lower than Christians in terms of respect in the mind of the public.” Wright paints a much brighter picture of the state of Christianity than is often found in the newspaper or in the pulpit.



Wright covered six areas of church life: church growth, doctrine, involvement in church activities, family and sexual issues, how Christians treat others, and how the world perceives

Christians. His goal was to examine popular claims about Christianity to determine whether these claims are true, and to see what the actual evidence says about the state of the church.

To use one example, many bemoan the involvement of youth and young adults in the church today. Wright cited Josh McDowell, the Southern Baptist Convention Council on Family Life, and John Lennon, who suggest that the flight of young people from the church when they become adults could lead to dire problems for the church in the years to come. Some would go so far as to say that the last Christian generation has already been born. But adults have been lamenting the degenerate ways of children for thousands of years, and critics have been predicting the demise of the church for at least hundreds of years. Thomas Jefferson speculated in 1822 that Christianity would soon fall to Unitarianism, saying, "There is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian" (73).

Wright's more hopeful conclusion is that young people tend to leave the church when they leave home, but they return to church when they start families of their own. This pattern has held true for several generations, so one could assume that many members of this generation of young adults will return to the church as well. The issue of young people leaving the church is a real problem, and the church would be wise to address the issue, but reports of the collapse of the church are exaggerated at best. Such exaggerated claims might raise eyebrows and sell tickets to conferences, but they are misleading and unhelpful in addressing the real issues that the church faces.

While Wright offered a very positive assessment of the church today, he did highlight a few areas where the church needs significant growth, including racism, loving attitudes toward homosexuals, and a negative self image to name a few. Certainly the church is not perfect, but neither does Wright believe that the church is destined to fall apart within a few generations.

Wright's sober look at church statistics has much to offer those studying the state of the church today. But as a statistical book, it necessarily falls short in offering a complete picture of the Christian landscape. First, surveys cannot measure genuine Christian devotion. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that most churches have an average worship attendance somewhere between one-quarter to one-half of their resident membership. The Southern Baptist Convention has some 16 million members, but most of these members will not be worshipping with a church on a given Sunday morning. At the heart of the issue, most Americans would claim to be Christian, but large numbers of these self-professed believers have little to no involvement in the church. While church numbers may be strong, other evidence would seem to indicate that genuine Christian devotion and commitment to Christ's church are far from where they need to be.

Second, Wright's analysis did not distinguish between individual churches since he was operating at a denominational or large-group level. While he could claim that church attendance numbers were not plummeting as some might claim, he does not address whether certain kinds of churches are suffering major losses in attendance. For example, with the rise of mega-churches, have smaller, more traditional churches suffered in favor of larger, more contemporary churches?

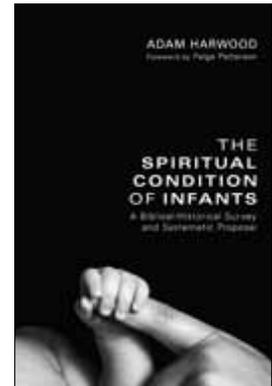
These questions are outside of Wright's scope, but answers to these questions would certainly help Christians as they seek to apply his findings to specific settings. For example, that somewhere between 70-80 percent of American churches are plateaued or declining has become a truism for many, but how could Wright's conclusion that the state of the church is relatively healthy be true if 70-80% of Southern Baptist Churches are struggling?

Though Wright's book left a few questions unanswered, overall he offered a powerful reminder of the need to love and support Christ's church instead of lambasting her. Many feel the need to motivate people by painting a grim picture of the church in desperate need of devout believers. Such motivation does not lead to permanent change. Believers should be motivated by love for Christ's church, not fear over her impending doom. Christians already know that she is victorious, and they should be motivated because they have the chance to be a part of God's master plan, not because of fear that His church will not survive unless Christians are scared into action.

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The Spiritual Condition of Infants: A Biblical-Historical Survey and Systematic Proposal. By Adam Harwood. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011. Pp. 118, \$23.00.

Adam Harwood's new book, *The Spiritual Condition of Infants: A Biblical-Historical Survey and Systematic Proposal* was released this year. Harwood, Assistant Professor of Christian Studies at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia, answers a profound question which has baffled the greatest minds of the Christian church—the eternal destiny of children. Paige Patterson wrote the foreword while endorsers include heady theologians Charles White, James Leo Garrett Jr., Malcolm Yarnell III, and Rustin J. Umstattd.



After the foreword by Patterson, Harwood divides his subject nicely into three uneven sections—Introductory, Biblical, and Historical—followed by a conclusion, bibliography, and indexes. The introductory material includes a brief but helpful survey of the literature on the subject and shows how his book is different by focusing more on the “spiritual condition of living infants” than strictly with infant salvation (5). Chapter two reveals Harwood's assumptions which serve as “boundaries” in studying the proposal. The author reveals four of his working assumptions: 1) a person is a person no matter how small; 2) Infants have a sinful nature because of their descent from the first Adam; 3) God can welcome infants with a sinful nature into heaven; 4) if number 3 occurs, then it is through the person and work of Christ. The remainder of the chapter teases out Harwood's assumptions.

Much of Harwood's book is spent on engaging Baptist theologian, Wayne Grudem. In fact, Harwood confesses "I cut my teeth as a young believer" on Grudem's highly popular *Systematic Theology* (13). And, while Harwood remains undeniably respectful throughout his work, he shows no hesitation in offering Grudem's idea on the spiritual condition of infants a persuasive alternative. Such remains why, for example, chapter three may draw blood from die-hard Grudem fans since Harwood pounds so heavily on the charismatic Calvinist's view of infant salvation.

From Harwood's standpoint, Grudem is "in a minority of scholars who either imply or state some people who die in infancy will or might end up in hell" (23). Harwood makes one wonder since Grudem's *Systematic Theology* is perhaps the most popular systematic theology among seminarians today, how Grudem gets so many free passes from Southern Baptist scholars for his less than flattering views on the eternal destiny of infants. Even so, Harwood delivers some powerful critique in this section—including valuable commentary on Romans 5:12—making much of the distinction between inherited *sinful nature* and inherited *sinful guilt*, a distinction which becomes a major plank in Harwood's argument.

Harwood acknowledges one of the key texts reformed theologians like Wayne Grudem and John Murray employ in understanding the spiritual condition of infants is Romans 5:12: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—" (NASB). Harwood objects to Grudem's view—the mainstream view among most Augustinian-Calvinists—which asserts "[since the aorist verb form of the word translated "sinned" in v.12 means "completed past action"] Paul must be meaning that when Adam sinned, God considered it true that all men sinned in Adam" (15). For Harwood, the classic Augustinian-Calvinist interpretation of the aorist verb tense is hardly conclusive.

Drawing from a broad range of diverse scholarship including Buist Fanning, Frank Stagg, and Elaine Pagels, Harwood persuasively contests: "The grammatical presupposition that forms the basis of both Murray and Grudem's theological conclusions is based on a narrow understanding of the aorist verb tense . . . the case for an Augustinian-Calvinist reading of Romans 5:12 cannot be based on the verb tense alone" (16). Apparently, Southern Baptist and New Testament scholar, Frank Stagg, offered overwhelming evidence from his analysis of the Greek text that the aorist verb can be used to "cover any kind of action" making it either a "completed or open ended" action. In short, Stagg showed the aorist tense "simply points to an action without describing it." Similar conclusions on the aorist tense were found by Buist Fanning, Department Chair and Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary. Consequently, Harwood argues it's more consistent to understand Romans 5:12 as stating that sin entered the world through one man, Adam, but that men die not because of the sin of Adam but "because of *their own* acts of sin" (17, italics original).

The Biblical section comprises chapters 4 through 10 and includes exegesis on several important passages of Scripture including Romans 5:12-21, Psalm 51:5, Ephesians 2:3, Luke 1:15, Mark

10:13-16, and 1 Corinthians 7:14. Throughout the chapters, Harwood engages various scholarly commentators—both Calvinist and non-Calvinist—and offers sober conclusions of his own based on his own examination of the biblical materials. Harwood focuses on mainstream representatives of the positions with which he contends. Hence he avoids needless criticisms that his work is irrelevant because he engages peripheral advocates of certain positions.

The final section offers an historical survey of the various positions on infant salvation held within the Christian church. Beginning with the Church Fathers (both East and West, chapters 11 and 12 respectively) Harwood traces what Christians broadly held on the question under consideration. Moving on to Augustine and the Magisterial Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli), Harwood also deals with the views of Radical Reformers (Harwood calls them “Anabaptist Reformers”), Hubmaier and Marpeck (chapter 15).

Perhaps more appealing to Southern Baptists, Harwood looks at nineteenth-century Baptist views including James P. Boyce, A. H. Strong, and E. Y. Mullins (chapter 16). Just as Grudem fans will surely not like their hero so effectively criticized as Harwood manages to do in the Introductory section, Calvinists who make James Boyce the theological standard among historic Southern Baptists will undoubtedly chill toward Harwood for his critique of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary founder. Harwood clearly exposes Boyce’s glaring internal inconsistency in his view of inherited sinful guilt as applied to infants (136-144). In fact, another surprise may be Harwood’s essential agreement with E. Y. Mullins since, unlike Boyce and A. H. Strong, Mullins “better maintained” the twin truths of Scripture: infants inherit a sinful nature (but not sinful guilt) and God judges sinful actions (but not sinful nature, 144). In the final chapter, Harwood examines twentieth-century Baptist views represented by two eminent theologians, William Hendricks and Millard Erickson.

Spiritual Condition is a must-have to better understand this vexing question. Harwood makes a convincing case that not only is the Bible *not* silent about the spiritual condition of infants, the Bible has much to say. And, what the Bible affirms is, at least in some important ways, inconsistent with a robust Reformed anthropology. Or, at minimum, the biblical view seems to negate the Reformed understanding of original sin. Whereas Reformed believers normally affirm that all infants inherit both Adam’s sinful *nature* and sinful *guilt*, Harwood’s book persuasively argues *while all infants inherit Adamic nature, no infant inherits Adamic guilt*. It is only when a person knowingly commits sinful action (including thoughts and attitudes), that the person becomes sinfully guilty and liable to God’s divine, eternal judgment.

Moreover, Harwood’s view is clearly more consistent with language in *The Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) concerning the sinful human condition than classic Augustinian-Calvinists. Under Article III “Man” in the BFM (2000), it reads, “Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity *inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin*. Therefore, *as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation*” (emphasis

added). The BFM seems to affirm that while all infants “inherit a nature” that is inclined toward sin, it is only when they become “capable of moral action” that they are “under condemnation.” This seems to be the heart of Harwood’s thesis throughout his volume. In his conclusion, he argues: “I have tried to argue throughout this book that infants do not inherit guilt from Adam. Instead infants inherit a sinful nature. In the Scriptures, God does not judge people for their inherited sinful nature. Instead God judges people who are morally responsible” (160).

From my perspective, the only glaring weakness is the thin survey in the post-Reformation historical section of the book. Roughly 40 pages long, Harwood traces the idea from the Reformation to modern times. Of course, 40 pages could have been written on each of the Magisterial Reformers alone. And, so far as the section on Baptists goes, Harwood again is well under weight (even though half the post-Reformation section was allotted to Baptists!). Obviously, editorial restrictions prohibited longer sections. Yet an introductory statement on pre-Reformation Christianity would have sufficed, consequently, freeing much more space to deal with the Protestant understanding of infant salvation. The result would have been a stronger book for Harwood’s probable readership.

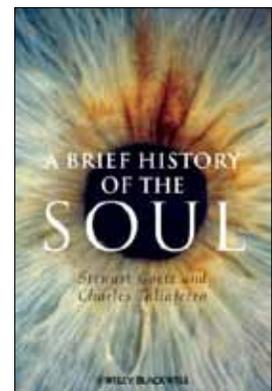
Even so, this is only a minor quibble of the reviewer. I highly recommend *Spiritual Condition* and judge it to be a formidable treatise on a vexing subject. Get the book!

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A Brief History of the Soul. By Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. 240 pages. \$24.95, paper.

Christian dualists have been feeling attacked by those in the philosophical world who argue against the existence of the soul. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro offer a brief history of philosophy of mind and challenge the philosophical claims against dualism. The purpose of the book is for the authors to mount a defense against naturalism, which has been working to strip all spirituality from humanity (203-5). They begin by tracing the history of philosophy of mind from Socrates and Plato to Hume and Kant. From the survey, they make the case that belief “in the existence of the soul . . . as a hypothetical entity whose existence is postulated in a god-of-the-gaps fashion [and is used] to account for human experiences that cannot yet be exercised in physical terms [is] thoroughly groundless” (155). They have good reasons for their belief in the existence of the soul.

Throughout *A Brief History of the Soul*, Goetz and Taliaferro defend dualism, from a substance dualism perspective; but the strength of the book is their arguments for the existence of the soul.



Although the soul cannot be observed outright, its effects are observable through introspection, causal interaction, and free will.

In their presentation of the soul in Greek thought, the authors build upon Aristotle's explanation that we perceive that we sense ourselves sensing. This position is dismissed by many as falling into infinite regression. That which perceives my perception is itself being perceived, which in turn is being perceived, etc. But Goetz and Taliaferro suggest that another possible way is that the soul as "the self" need not require "any further distinct act of awareness" (25). Thus, through introspection, the act of knowing that we see something proves that we possess first-person perspective, which is "the self" or "the soul" (24-25).

During their discussion of causal interaction, the authors set out the parameters for causal relations: "A causal relation obtains when a substance that possesses causal power exercises that power to produce the actualization of a capacity" (135), and "In general, a causal relation obtains when a causal power is exercised and actualizes a capacity" (137). They use these definitions to challenge Ernest Sosa's and Jaegwon Kim's claims that spatial relations are necessary condition for causal relationships to obtain. Such a conclusion makes sense when discussing spatial agents, but the soul may not be spatial. If it is not spatial, according to Goetz and Taliaferro, "then it is not obvious in strict a priori or conceptual terms that it cannot interact causally with an object located in space" (138). But if it is spatial, then non-Cartesians are "justified in holding that there is a noncausal pairing relation that makes possible causal interaction between one soul and a body—but not another soul" (143).

Their argumentation comes to a head with their discussion of free-will. Goetz and Taliaferro accept the scientific claims of neuroscientists who have mapped the neural impulses that, for example, raise an arm. But from where did these impulses originate? Such causation could not be neural because of free will. Therefore, Goetz and Taliaferro conclude "that there can be gaps (causal openness) in the course of events in the physical world such that there is room for the explanation of some physical event in terms of a soul's causal activity, which, in turn, is ultimately explained teleologically, by recourse to a purpose" (170). In other words, neural activity alone does not allow for free decision making? The authors also conclude that if all mental causation is reducible to brain activity, then "there is no explanatory room for God and God's purposes" (175).

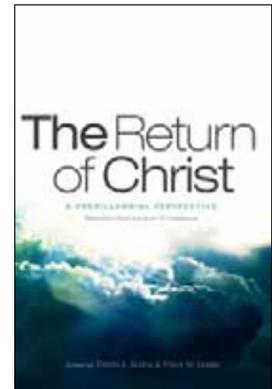
These philosophical arguments are well documented, well thought through, and refuse to shy away from the hard issues. Furthermore, Goetz and Taliaferro's writing is accessible and understandable for readers who are not trained philosophers—though some background in the field is essential. The problem with the book, however, is not really with the book but with society. The book may seem convincing to the converted but ultimately will not be accepted by its opponents. Both sides of the debate will continue to draw opposite

conclusions from the same data. Dualists claim that the data is evidence for the existence of the soul, while monists dismiss the data as epiphenomenological, emergent, supervenient properties of a highly complex brain. In other words, no evidence will suffice to convince otherwise. Such is the state of debate today—in all facets of society.

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Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective. Edited by David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke. Nashville: B&H, 2011. Pp. 285, \$24.99 paperback.

Who cares about eschatology? In many circles this query would receive a sharply negative response: no one. We live in a society where increasing numbers of people are becoming less concerned than ever about being “left behind.” However, the churches have the privilege and responsibility of demonstrating the urgent need for clear thinking about what will happen at the “end of days.” Because extravagant caricatures of biblically based eschatological reflection are not hard to find, there is a consistent need for balanced discourse about the end times and the return of Christ. In this volume, David Allen and Steve Lemke seek to provide a cogent and reflective presentation of these issues from a “premillennial perspective.”



Allen and Lemke divide the volume into two main parts that serve two different purposes. In part one, they gather the messages given at the Acts 1:11 Conference that took place in 2009 at North Metro First Baptist Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia. The presenters are all prominent figures within the Southern Baptist Convention and each deal with an important eschatological topic. Jerry Vines begins the volume with a sermon on the central text that served as the launchpad for the conference. From the words of the heavenly messengers spoken to the disciples after Jesus’ ascension, Vines exhorts believers to be “soul winners” rather than “stargazers.” He also highlights the theme of the volume and the motivation for believers to think carefully about eschatology by pointing to the promise that “this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come” (Acts 1:11).

In the following presentations, the basic outline of the eschatological timetable is explicated. Ergun Caner surveys a number of millennial options and argues that a premillennial and eminent return of Christ is consistent with Scripture. Danny Akin treats the expectation of believers when Christ returns, including a secret rapture of the church, an appearance at the “judgment seat” of Christ, and the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. Paige Patterson discusses the nature of the great tribulation and also outlines the active role of Israel during this period. David Allen surveys the biblical support for a millennial reign of Christ upon the earth prior to the eternal

state. Richard Land summarizes what will take place at the final judgment as well as the arrival and nature of the eternal state that will include both a real heaven and a real hell. Evangelist Junior Hill rounds out part one with an exhortation about “what to do until Jesus returns.” He urges the believer not to be a “gazing Christian looking to the past,” but to be a “going Christian, looking to the present and the future” (107).

In part two, five contributors provide additional reflection on issues of eschatology. R. Stanton Norman provides a brief systematic treatment of the doctrine of eschatology, covering both individual (e.g., “What happens when we die?”) and corporate dimensions (e.g., “What happens at the end of the world?”). He also connects the study of the end times to what believers are called to do in the meantime (i.e., a call to evangelism, holiness, and faithfulness). Following this general overview, Craig Blaising explains the way that the millennial kingdom fits into the overall picture of history and the harmony of Scripture. Lamar Cooper surveys the “Second Coming” in the Old Testament, Steven Cox surveys the main eschatological discourses of Jesus in the Gospels, and Michael Vlach concludes the volume with a thematic survey of eschatological topics in the Pauline corpus. Vlach seeks to demonstrate that eschatology is not “merely an appendix to Christian theology” for Paul, but rather a “crucial aspect of the Christian faith” (264).

A clear strength of this collection of essays is its overall focus on the return of Christ. Though sometimes derided by critics, ignored in preaching, or relativized in favor of other areas of theological emphasis, eschatology should matter to any believer that holds out hope in God’s promises about the future. In their own way, each of the essays contributes to this overarching emphasis. Additionally, throughout the volume, key texts that have significant bearing on the millennium and the return of Christ are highlighted and expounded (e.g., Ezek 40-48, Isa 2, Matt 24-25, 1 Cor 15, and Rev 12, 19-22). These features will help orient readers to the main areas of discussion and encourage them to reflect further on these areas of Scripture and their eschatological import. Because the messages of part one and the essays of part two are written in an engaging style, the book as a whole can serve as a resource for both pastors and laymen. In fact, many preachers will find the range, contents, and sequence of topics covered to be a possible outline for a sermon/teaching series on eschatology.

One area where clarification could be helpful is the nature of premillennialism and what it necessarily entails. A more accurate subtitle for this volume might be “A Dispensational Perspective,” or at least, “A Pretribulation-Premillennial Perspective,” as each of the contributors affirm a pre-tribulation secret rapture of the church prior to a millennial reign of Christ on earth (6). Allen and Lemke note in the introduction that “the contributors to this volume all support a premillennial position with a pre-tribulational rapture” and that they seek to present a “scholarly version of that perspective” (6). Indeed, for much of the book, the basic tenets of dispensationalism are assumed when the term “premillennial” is used (e.g., see Akin’s presentation of the “big picture” of the “pretribulation/premillennial understanding,” 50). To give one example, the clear distinction between Israel and the Church, perhaps the hallmark feature of dispensationalism, is consistently maintained (62ff, 198-205, 246-48).

Clarification might also be in order regarding the use of history to support a pre-tribulational, pre-millennial position. The “imminence of Jesus’ return” throughout the volume typically refers to the rapture of the church before the tribulation. Caner argues that the “premillennial view of the return of Christ carries with it *a measure of urgency*” and that “to be ‘snatched up’ (from the Gr. *harpazo*) at any moment is tremendously motivating for the believer” (38). As evidence of this position, he quotes Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Phillip Schaff, and a number of Anabaptists. However, in the quoted texts these figures refer not to a pre-tribulational rapture but more generally to the millennial reign of Christ on earth before the eternal state. This type of treatment resonates with the common assumption throughout the book that a natural feature of premillennialism is not only that “Christ will return before the millennium” but also that “in this system, the church will be snatched out before the tribulation” (32). Because a pre-tribulational rapture of the church is integral to the overall perspective of the book, it would have been helpful to include in the “additional reflections” a sustained exegetical argument for a dispensational understanding of the rapture. Moreover, in addition to Akin’s interaction (49-57), further explanation of 1 Thess. 4:16-17 in particular (the locus *classicus* of a discussion of the “rapture”) and how it relates to other views could be a worthwhile development.

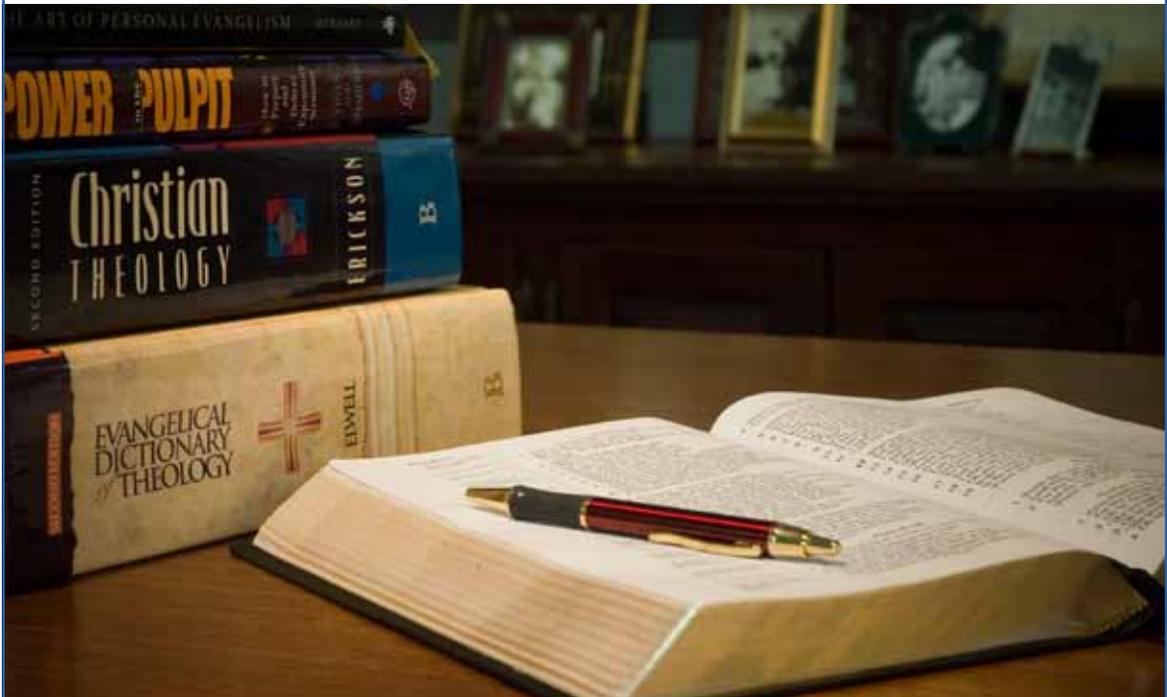
Because some readers will possibly hold to a form of non-dispensational premillennialism (sometimes called “historic premillennialism”), a little more discussion about how the concerns of the book apply equally to this camp would enhance the conversation. This perspective is mentioned twice in the book (34-35, 49), but the more frequent dialogue partner in the discussion is the amillennial position that interprets the 1,000 year reign as an example of apocalyptic symbolism. This decision makes sense because amillennialism and premillennialism are at opposite ends of the eschatological spectrum and provide the strongest interpretive contrast. However, readers aware of an alternative option regarding the thousand-year reign of Christ might wonder where the key differences lie between dispensational and non-dispensational premillennialism.

As Blaising notes in his essay, “the firm belief that Jesus is coming again” is “central to the Christian faith” (141). If read sympathetically, this volume has the potential to encourage believers to continue clinging to Christ and resting in the staggering promise of his return. A number of times while reading this book, I put it down and picked up my Bible (and even my Greek lexicon a few times) to examine a passage or the textual context of a point being made by an author. This biblical examination of eschatological themes seems to be the effect intended by the contributors and editors.

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about how best to fulfill God's
calling in our lives.



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REMEMBERING RICHARD ALAN DAY

————— *Clay Corvin February 18, 2011* —————

My heart bleeds for Alan
We miss him in New Orleans
Edmond is brought to its knees
Southern Baptists are hurting
Alan has gone to his Father
Lord we miss him here on earth

Brilliant communicator
Trusted God's inerrant Word
Filled with Jesus
Taught God's Word
Willingly, patiently shared Christ
All things are possible with Jesus

Obstacles were things he reveled in surmounting
He knew Christ had a job for him to do
Alan felt his place was with his church
A shepherd, a spiritual leader like no other
Beloved, a friend you could count on
His church will miss his steady hand

Our heart bleeds for Alan
He was a devoted father
Building his family with his lovely and loving wife
Investing his heart and soul
He was a daily example
His children lived his teaching

A mighty man of God
He faithfully served
His life is being celebrated today
Heaven rejoices over Alan's life
Lord we release him to You
But we will not forget Richard Alan Day

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