

FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

CALVINISM

The Old vs

The New

Daily Vacation Bible College

April 30 – May 5, 2018

FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

Calvinism: Old Vs New

April 30 – May 5 2018

Ko Lintang

1. Course Description

- a. The purpose of this course is to examine the claims of the movement known as New Calvinism, and to compare them in light of what Old or traditional Calvinism has always stood for.
 - i. Study will first do a historical look of what Calvinism really is, and then to trace its rise and decline, to show how it led to the New Calvinism of today.
 - ii. Focus will then be on particular traits or aspects of New Calvinism, to critically examine them in light of God's Word and history, to determine if they are right in the sight of the Lord.
- b. To guide the students to know how to discern and understand for themselves about what is right and wrong about New Calvinism.

2. Course Texts

- a. The King James Version (KJV)
- b. Lecture notes

3. Course Requirements

- a. Attend all lectures.
- b. Read through the notes and the additional materials given in the appendix.
- c. There will be a final examination at the end of the course based on the lecture notes and what was covered in the lecture.

4. Course Grading

- a. Reading 20%
- b. Final Examination 80%

5. Selected Bibliography

- Allen, Curtis “Voice.” *Does God Listen to Rap?: Christians & The World’s Most Controversial Music*. Maryland: Cuniform Press, 2013.
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- . *Calvin’s Commentaries*. 22 Vols., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005.
- Crampton, W. Gary. *What Calvin Says: An Introduction to the Theology of John Calvin*. Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2002.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
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- Hart, D. G. *Calvinism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Horton, Michael. *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014.
- McGoldrick, James Edward, Richard Clark Reed, and Thomas Hugh Spence. *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches: A Global History*. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012.
- Milne, Garnet Howard. *Has the Bible been kept pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the providential preservation of Scripture*. Independently published, 2017.
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Tow, Timothy. *A Glimpse of the Life & Works of John Calvin.* Singapore: Christian Life Publishers Pte Ltd, 1993.

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Tow, Timothy, and Jeffrey Khoo. *Theology for Every Christian: A Systematic Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J Oliver Buswell.* Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007.

Walker, Jeremy. *The New Calvinism Considered: A Personal and Pastoral Assessment.* Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013.

Warfield, Benjamin B. *Essays on the Life, Work, and Theology of John Calvin.* Kindle Edition. GLH Publishing, 2011.

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John Calvin and Calvinism

Life of Calvin¹

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, a small town in Northern France, sixty miles from Paris. His father, Gerard Cauvin (d. 1531), who was a financial administrator of the cathedral of Noyon, desired for young Calvin to study for the priesthood. In 1523, at the age of 14, Calvin was sent to College de la Marche in Paris, where he studied (and excelled in) Latin and classics. Three years later, he entered the College de Montaigu to continue his training to become a priest.

Upon graduation in 1528 with a Master of Arts degree, instead of continuing a theological education, his father, seeing a greater financial prospect in the legal profession, decided that his son should pursue law instead. At the University, Calvin studied Greek under German scholar Melchior Wolmar (1497-1560), who had by then converted to the protestant faith through the influence of Martin Luther.

The exact details of Calvin's conversion are unknown, nor do we know who his direct influences were. But it was some time during his legal studies, at the age of about 21-22 years old, that Calvin was converted, for he himself testified in the preface to his commentary on the book of Psalms:

When I was yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who followed it to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy, and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavoured faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardour.²

Soon after his conversion, he began to declare the gospel, preaching in the surrounding villages and even house to house. He began to attract attention, as people took notice of this

¹ Following biography is summarised from Timothy Tow, *A Glimpse of the Life & Works of John Calvin* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers Pte Ltd, 1993); Joel R. Beeke, David W. Hall, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Theology Made Practical: New Studies on John Calvin and His Legacy* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), with some additional quotations from Calvin's own testimony in the preface to his commentary on the book of Psalms.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans by. James Anderson, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005), xl-xli.

young convert who had such rich insights into the Word of God. Calvin himself was rather taken aback by the popularity that he was beginning to receive:

I was quite surprised to find that before a year [after conversion] had elapsed, all who had any desire after purer doctrine were continually coming to me to learn, although I myself was at yet but a mere novice and tyro.³

In 1532, at the age of 23, Calvin published his first book, a commentary on Seneca's "De Clementia"⁴. It was not a theological work, but rather a display of his mastery of Latin and Greek classical literature, the fruit of the excellent legal training that he had received.

In the meantime, the situation in Paris was becoming tenser, as opposition against the protestants were coming to a head. Calvin's good friend, Nicholas Cop, the rector of the University of Paris, was due to give the inaugural address on Nov 1, 1533, which would be heard by the whole faculty and the parliament of Paris. Historians generally agree that the speech was either entirely written by, or at least heavily influenced by Calvin. It was described as a "protestant manifesto", that amongst other things, explained justification by faith alone, and attacked the abuses of the old systems of the Catholic Church. Both Cop and Calvin were forced to leave Paris in the wake of that address.

For about six months, Calvin sought refuge in Angouleme, at the home of a wealthy friend, Louis du Tillet, who possessed a library of four thousand volumes. It is in this time that Calvin began writing theological works, beginning with *Psychopannychia*, a pamphlet that argued against the Anabaptist teaching of soul sleep. It is likely that he began laying the groundwork for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, as well as aiding his cousin Olivetan in the revision and completion of a French translation of the Bible. He also wrote the preface to this translation.

As the situation in France was becoming more dangerous for protestants, Calvin decided to leave France, intending to move to Germany, but was redirected to Basel in Switzerland. It was there in 1536 that he published the first edition of the *Institutes*. Evident even in this initial work was the theological framework that was distinctly 'Calvinistic'. It is said that much of the gist (though in a very brief form) of the final 1559 edition was already present in this first edition. He explains the circumstances that prompted his writing, and also of the contents of this first edition.

Leaving my native country, France, I in fact retired into Germany, expressly for the purpose of being able to enjoy in some obscure corner the repose which I had always desired, and which had been so long denied me. But lo! Whilst I lay hidden at Basle, and known only to a few people, many faithful and holy persons were burnt alive in France... it appeared to me, that unless I opposed them to the utmost of my ability, my silence could not be vindicated from the charge of cowardice and treachery. This

³ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:xli.

⁴ Seneca was the tutor to Emperor Nero in first century Rome, who wrote *De Clementia* as a philosophical work to Nero on the importance of showing clemency as a good sovereign.

was the consideration which induced me to publish my Institute of the Christian Religion.

When it was then published, it was not that copious and laboured work which it now is, but only a small treatise containing a summary of the principal truths of the Christian religion; and it was published with no other design than that men might know what was the faith held by those whom I saw basely and wickedly defamed by those flagitious and perfidious flatterers.⁵

Shortly after publishing the *Institutes*, in a bit to maintain his anonymity, Calvin decided to leave Basel for Strasburg. However, God thwarted his plans, for He had a far higher calling for Calvin. As Calvin writes:

I had resolved to continue in the same privacy and obscurity, until at length William Farel detained me at Geneva, not so much by counsel and exhortation, as by a dreadful imprecation, which I felt to be as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me. As the most direct road to Strasburg, to which I then intended to retire, was shut up by the wars, I had resolved to pass quickly by Geneva, without staying longer than a single night in that city. . . . Then an individual who now basely apostatised and returned to the Papists, discoursed me and made me known to others. Upon this, Farel, who burned with an extraordinary zeal to advance the gospel, immediately strained every nerve to detain me. And after having learned that my heart was set upon devoting myself to private studies, for which I wished to keep myself free from other pursuits, and finding that he gained nothing by entreaties, he proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquillity of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent. By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken.

From 1536-1538, Calvin then settles at Geneva and serves alongside William Farel as pastors to this troubled city. Though it was by this time declared as being aligned with the Protestant, yet the city was still in a state of unrest, and vice and immorality abounded. Calvin was instrumental in formulating confessions, establishing ecclesiastical order and enforcing discipline in the city. However, there was strong opposition to his efforts at reform from some of the populace. There was a particular group of worldly men known as ‘Libertines’ who strongly opposed Calvin’s moral reforms. After some incidences, both Calvin and Farel were deposed by the city council and banished from the city.

From Geneva, Calvin travelled to Strasburg, which was then a city of Germany. He arrived there in September 1538 and stayed there for what was said to be three of the happiest years of Calvin’s life. He was appointed professor of theology and taught the Bible daily. He also preached regularly and established a thriving French church in the city. From his lectures, he also published various commentaries, including his seminal work on Romans. His second edition of the *Institutes* was published in 1539.

⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:xli–xlii.

It was in Strasburg that Calvin married Idelette de Bure, a faithful wife whom he described as “the excellent companion of my life, the ever-faithful assistant of my ministry and a rare woman”. She bore him a son in 1542 but sadly he only lived a fortnight. Idelette herself passed away 9 years later in 1549.

Meanwhile in Geneva, since Calvin’s departure in 1538, the city had come under fierce onslaught from the Papacy in attempting to lure them back to Rome. Without the strict guiding hand of Calvin, the city had also descended into moral chaos and civil disorders. The city elders therefore began to plead with Calvin to return. Of the struggle over this decision, Calvin testifies:

Necessity was imposed upon me of returning to my former charge, contrary to my desire and inclination. The welfare of this church, it is true, lay so near my heart, that for its sake I would not have hesitated to lay down my life; but my timidity nevertheless suggested to me many reasons for excusing myself from again willingly taking upon my shoulders so heavy a burden. At length, however, a solemn and conscientious regard to my duty, prevailed me to consent to return to the flock from which I had been torn; but with what grief, tears, great anxiety and distress I did this, the Lord is my best witness.⁶

It is also in this context that Calvin writes to Farel, sharing that “When I remember that in this matter I am not my own master, I present my heart as a sacrifice and offer it up to the Lord, promptly and sincerely in the work of the Lord”.

On September 13, 1541 Calvin returned to Geneva. This time he had a greater mandate and support from the city council to enact the changes that he felt would bring about the most effective reform amongst the people. However, the unregenerate Libertines continued to rebel against the rules that Calvin had set in place, indignant that these new laws were impinging upon the sinful lifestyles that they were accustomed to.

In 1553, matters came to a head regarding the ant-trinitarian heretic Michael Servetus. Because of his blasphemous teachings, he had been condemned by both Catholics and Protestants alike, and already had a death sentence passed against him in Vienne. When he suddenly surfaced in Geneva (despite Calvin’s stern warnings against his coming), and appeared in a worship service to taunt Calvin, the city council were obligated to arrest him and try him for blasphemy and heresy. Regarding this incident, Calvin is often caricatured as a harsh, intolerant, vindictive dictator who murdered anyone who dared to oppose his teachings, but nothing could be further from the truth. It was the city council who tried Servetus and determined his sentence, and Calvin had no power to control their decision. Although Calvin did agree with the death penalty, understanding the severity of false doctrine, he did plead for a more human method of killing him. He also visited Servetus in prison and earnestly sought to convert him before his death.

1559 saw two significant events happening. Firstly, Calvin published his final edition of his *Institutes*. Of this final edition, Calvin wrote in the preface. “Although I did not regret the labor spent, I was never satisfied until the work had been arranged in the order now set forth.

⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:xliv.

Now I trust that I have provided something that all of you will approve”.⁷ Of its contents, Calvin explains:

It has been my purpose in this labor to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling. For I believe I have so embraced the sum of religion in all its parts, and have arranged it in such an order, that if anyone rightly grasps it, it will not be difficult for him to determine what he ought especially to seek in Scripture, and to what end he ought to relate its contents.⁸

Secondly, an Academy was founded by Calvin that same year for the training of men for the ministry. It was dedicated on June 5, 1559 with ten professors and six hundred students. For the next many years, a steady stream of students from all around Europe would gather in Geneva to study Reformed theology, first under Calvin and then his successor Theodore Beza. These students would then be sent out to establish churches and missions all across Europe, and to mission stations as far as Brazil.

Calvin continued to serve in Geneva, teaching, preaching, writing, pastoring and governing, until his death in 1564. Aside from the *Institutes*, Calvin also published commentaries of almost every book of the Bible, and wrote numerous other tracts, treatises, letters and sermons.

What is Calvinism

The late Rev. Timothy Tow often said that “Calvinism is Paulinism systematized”.⁹ As Paul’s theology is basically the theology of the Bible, it is safe to say that Calvinism is a biblical and orthodox system of theology that clearly lays out the fundamental teachings of Scripture. When one uses the term Calvinism, it is generally meant to refer to the specific soteriology of the doctrines of grace, otherwise known as the five points of Calvinism: Total Depravity, Unconditional Grace, Limited (or Particular) Atonement, Irresistible (or Infallible) Grace, Perseverance (or Preservation) of the Saints. The general idea here is that God is sovereign over every aspect of man’s salvation, and it is entirely the work of God, not of man (Eph 2:6-8). This is clear in all of Calvin’s writings, and central to his thought concerning God and His dealings with man. However, Calvinism is not just TULIP. To be a Calvinist involves far more than just believing in the five points of Calvinism. Implied in this system is a high view of God and His Word, submitting all things to His sovereign will and control, and taking Scripture to be the supreme rule of all faith and practice. It is to these points that we will now turn:

⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed by. John T. McNeill, trans by. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.

⁸ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:4.

⁹ Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian: A Systematic Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J Oliver Buswell* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007), 277.

High View of God's Word

A Calvinist is one that has a high view of Scripture. His whole system of theology is one that is derived directly from the faithful study of the Bible and submits to God's wisdom rather than man's thinking. Evident in the writings of Calvin, and also of the writings of Calvinistic theologies, books, creeds and confessions, is the simple belief in *Sola Scriptura*, of the authority, inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture, which is none other than the very words of God. More specifically, Calvin taught that the Bible is a regulative authority, whereby the Christian ought to be governed by what the Scripture explicitly directs, and not to just be content with not doing what Scripture prohibits. As B. B. Warfield commented on Calvin's method as a theologian:

His instrument of research was not logical amplification, but exegetical investigation. In one word, he was distinctly a Biblical theologian, or, let us say it frankly, by way of eminence the Biblical theologian of his age. Whither the Bible took him, thither he went: where scriptural declarations failed him, there he stopped short.¹⁰

Calvin himself testified in the *Institutes*:

For by his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion... Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard... When that which is set forth is acknowledged to be the Word of God, there is no one so deplorably insolent – unless devoid also both of common sense and of humanity itself – as to dare impugn the credibility of Him who speaks.¹¹

In like manner, the WCF states in no uncertain terms, in the very first chapter of the document, that

IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

V. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it does abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God: yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

¹⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Essays on the Life, Work, and Theology of John Calvin*, Kindle Edition. (GLH Publishing, 2011), Kindle Location 365-367.

¹¹ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:71, 74.

VI. The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.¹²

A true Calvinist therefore must necessarily agree to all of the above, accepting the Bible as the perfect, divinely inspired words of everlasting life. The Calvinist must submit himself to the full authority of the Word of God. Every aspect of his life must be lived in obedience to all of God's truth.

Divine Sovereignty

The next aspect of Calvinism we would like to explore is the emphasis on divine Sovereignty. Evident throughout all of Calvin's writings, is a humble acknowledgement of the divine, supernatural, omnipotent control that God has over all things. That is a fundamental presupposition that one must have if he is to accept Calvinistic soteriology. The logical foundation of the doctrines such as predestination and election, is that God alone is the one who has the right to dictate whether one is saved or not, and how this salvation will take place. Therefore, "to be Calvinistic is to stress the comprehensive, sovereign, fatherly lordship of God over everything: every area of creation, every creature's endeavour, and every aspect of the believer's life".¹³ Calvin describes God's omnipotence over all things as "a watchful, effective, active sort, engaged in ceaseless activity... governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation".¹⁴ Again in the words of Warfield,

The Calvinist, in a word, is the man who sees God. He has caught sight of the ineffable Vision, and he will not let it fade for a moment from his eyes—God in nature, God in history, God in grace. Everywhere he sees God in His mighty stepping, everywhere he feels the working of His mighty arm, the throbbing of His mighty heart. The Calvinist is therefore, by way of eminence, the supernaturalist in the world of thought. The world itself is to him a supernatural product. not merely in the sense that somewhere, away back before all time, God made it, but that God is making it now, and in every event that falls out. In every modification of what is, that takes place, His hand is visible, as through all occurrences His "one increasing purpose runs". Man himself is His— created for His glory, and having as the one supreme end of his existence to glorify his Maker, and haply also to enjoy Him for ever. And salvation, in

¹² WCF I.IV-VI

¹³ Beeke, Hall, and Haykin, *Theology Made Practical*, Kindle Location 5032-5033.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:200.

every step and stage of it, is of God. Conceived in God's love, wrought out by God's own Son in a supernatural life and death in this world of sin, and applied by God's Spirit in a series of acts as supernatural as the virgin birth and the resurrection of the Son of God themselves—it is a supernatural work through and through. To the Calvinist, thus, the Church of God is as direct a creation of God as the first creation itself. In this supernaturalism, the whole thought and feeling and life of the Calvinist is steeped. Without it there can be no Calvinism, for it is just this that is Calvinism.¹⁵

TULIP

Also known as the doctrines of Grace, the five points of Calvinism or TULIP is an acronym that stands for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. Very briefly, this is what these five points represent:

Total Depravity – the notion that man is fallen and so totally sinful that he is unable to do anything to merit salvation for himself. (Rom 3:10-12)

Unconditional Election – that God had, before the foundation of the world, predestined or elected some to salvation. This is a choice solely according to the good pleasure of His will, and not through any condition placed upon man. (Eph 1:4, Rom 9)

Limited Atonement – that though the value of God's redemptive sacrifice was sufficient to make an atonement for the sins of the whole world, yet the efficacy of this atonement is extended only to the elect. (1 John 2:2, Eph 5:25)

Irresistible Grace – that God's inward effectual call to salvation is irresistible, in that God through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit will infallibly bring His elect to faith and repentance. (Rom 8:14, 30)

Perseverance of the Saints – that once the elect are saved, they are eternally secure in Christ and will never lose their salvation. God himself will enable the believer to persevere till the very end. (John 10:27-29)

In the words of Spurgeon, this is nothing more than the gospel as found in the Bible:

I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel... unless we preach the sovereignty of God in his dispensation of grace... unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of his elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called.¹⁶

¹⁵ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Calvinism Today," 1909, https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/warfield/warfield_calvinismtoday.html (accessed April 3, 2018).

¹⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon Autobiography: The Early Years 1834-1860 Vol. 1*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981), 172.

Glory of God

A Calvinist is also one that has a vision and desire for the glory of God in all things. Ultimately the purpose of man's salvation is not for man's benefit, but for the glory of God. Such a vision for the glory of God is crucial in enabling one to align his will and desires all to the pleasure and glory of God. Such was Calvin's vision of God's glory, that he wrote:

[W]herever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness.¹⁷

Calvin understood that "it is not very sound theology to confine a man's thoughts so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God and not for ourselves". Therefore a prayer that he made in the same letter, was that "the thing which I chiefly aimed, and for which I most diligently labored, was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice, after dispersing the mists by which it was formerly obscured, might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ might be fully displayed."¹⁸

Therefore Warfield also comments that:

Calvinism however, is not merely a soteriology. Deep as its interest is in salvation, it cannot escape the question--"Why should God thus intervene in the lives of sinners to rescue them from the consequences of their sin?" And it cannot miss the answer--"Because it is to the praise of the glory of His grace." Thus it cannot pause until it places the scheme of salvation itself in relation with a complete world-view in which it becomes subsidiary to the glory of the Lord God Almighty. If all things are from God, so to Calvinism all things are also unto God, and to it God will be all in all. It is born of the reflection in the heart of man of the glory of a God who will not give His honour to another, and draws its life from constant gaze upon this great image.¹⁹

Influence of Calvin

The legacy of that John Calvin has left behind is indisputable. The very fact that there is a whole theological system that bears his namesake is testament to the broad influence that he has had over Christendom, and specifically, over Reformed Theology. Because of his voluminous works that were translated into so many languages and read widely throughout Europe, his impact over all areas of life and worship are indisputable.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:52.

¹⁸ John Calvin, "Sadolet's Letter and Calvin's Reply," trans by. Henry Beveridge, September 1, 1539, http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/calvin_sadolet.html (accessed April 6, 2018).

¹⁹ Warfield, *Essays on the Life, Work, and Theology of John Calvin*, Kindle Location 574-579.

John Calvin of France did the work of ten men in the compass of a relatively short life. At the heart of his life and work was the task of exegeting Scripture, to which he devoted himself day by day. Yet no aspect of life and society went untouched by Calvin's influence. Not only theology, worship, church polity, and missions, but also education, government, economics, industry, and social work all bear the imprint of Calvin's thought. Consequently, some say that Calvin wielded greater influence over our history and culture than any other individual in the last millennium or since the close of the New Testament canon.²⁰

Yet what we are ultimately concerned about, is not the glory of Calvin himself (a thought which would have been most abhorrent to Calvin), but the truth that he proclaimed.

Among all those who have been born of women, there has not risen a greater than John Calvin. No age before him ever produced his equal, and no age afterwards has seen his rival. In theology, he stands alone, shining like a bright fixed star, while other leaders and teachers can only circle round him, at a great distance, with nothing like his glory or his Permanence. Calvin's fame is eternal because of the truth he proclaimed; and even in heaven, although we shall lose the name of the system of doctrine which he taught, it shall be that truth which shall make us strike our golden harps, and sing: 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory for ever and ever,' For the essence of Calvinism is that we are born again, 'not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'²¹

It was not his talent, writing ability, or work rate that has influenced men through the ages, but simply because he has directed believers to have a better understanding of the glory of God and to be convicted by the truth of His Word.

His influence was spread through devoted individuals who had been gripped by Calvin's vision of the sovereignty of God and their calling to God's service and who responded in faith and obedience... Ultimately Calvin's impact arose from the conviction of believing individuals who recognized that what he taught found its ultimate authority in the Bible, the Word of God.²²

²⁰ Sinclair B. Ferguson, Joel R. Beeke, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Church History 101: The Highlights of Twenty Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 78–79.

²¹ C.H Spurgeon, cited in Tow, *A Glimpse of the Life & Works of John Calvin*, 2.

²² Stanford W. Reid, ed., *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 51-52.

Spread of Calvinism: Calvinism in the 17-18th century

When Calvin died in 1564, he left behind a massive collection of literary works that would have an enduring legacy, impacting generations of Christians in the years that followed.

In the decades after Calvin's death and through the seventeenth century, Calvinism became a distinct ethos and body of thought that crossed national and denominational boundaries, shaping church life from Eastern Europe in places like Lithuania and Poland to the Celtic nations of the British Isles, Scotland and Wales, and even in the New World with the British colonies of New England. Whole denominations developed that identified themselves with the shape of his thought, from the Reformed churches in Germany for which the Heidelberg Catechism was first developed to the Reformed congregations in Holland that defended their Calvinist heritage at the Synod of Dort.²³

The spread of Calvinism and the Reformed Faith can be traced through the various groups that wholeheartedly adopted the writings and teachings of Calvin

Continental Reformed

Geographically speaking, the countries of Switzerland and France had the most direct link to Calvin's ministry. He was born and educated in France, and then spent the bulk of his time ministering in Geneva in Switzerland. It is natural then, that the initial spread of Calvinism would take place in these countries.

Swiss Reformed

After the death of Calvin, the influence of Reformed theology, or Calvinism as it became known as, continued through men like Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) and Calvin's disciple and successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605). The former wrote, and the latter edited a confession of faith that would later become known as the Second Helvetic Confession – a standard that would be adopted by not just the Swiss Reformed churches, but also adopted in Hungary in 1567, France and Poland in 1571, and Scotland in 1578, and was well received in Holland and England too.²⁴

When the controversies over the Academy of Saumur arose in the mid-17th Century, it was the Swiss theologians like Johann Heinrich Heidegger (1633-98), Lukas Gernler (1625-75) and Francis Turretin (1623-87) who stood firm against the heresies that were being propounded there. It was in response to these aberrant teachings that the three aforementioned theologians penned the Helvetic Consensus Formula in 1675.²⁵ In this document, they defended the doctrines of the verbal inspiration and preservation of Scripture, as well as

²³ Beeke, Hall, and Haykin, *Theology Made Practical*, Kindle Location 5652-5656.

²⁴ Reid, *John Calvin*, 63–64.

²⁵ English translation of this document can be found here: Martin I. Klauber, trans by., "The Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675)," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 103–123.

traditional Calvinist understanding of the doctrines of atonement, imputation of sin, election and covenant theology.²⁶ This document was later extolled by A. A. Hodge as being “the most scientific and thorough of all the Reformed confessions. Its eminent authorship and the fact that it distinctively represents the most thoroughly consistent school of old Calvinists gives it classic interest”.²⁷ Unfortunately, because of increasing liberalism in Europe, its influence and authority was only limited to the Swiss churches, and it ceased to be binding in 1722.

The works of Francis Turretin is also of note in this period. Besides being a key author in the formulation of the Helvetic Consensus, he also penned the three-volume systematic theology, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* that was clearly Calvinistic, and had a very high view of Scripture. Sadly, the death of Turretin and the succession of his son, Jean-Alfonse Turretin (1671-1737) to the chair of church history (1697) and then theology (1705) in Geneva ushered in decline of Calvinism in Switzerland. The younger Turretin departed from his father’s orthodoxy and was actually described as “the liberator of Calvin’s church from the tyranny of Calvinistic Scholasticism”.²⁸ It seems then that the turn of the 18th century also brought about the waning Calvinism in its birthplace, and the end of Geneva’s influence on Reformed Theology.

French Huguenots

In his lifetime, Calvin, as a Frenchman, always had a heart for the gospel in his home country. The first edition of the *Institutes* was actually addressed to Francis I, king of France, and included a preface in the form of a letter to the king explaining why Protestantism was biblically valid. While the main editions of the *Institutes* were written in Latin, he also published French editions, translated by himself for the common people. A large bulk of the students in the Academy in Geneva were also French. But the time of Calvin’s death in 1564, the Academy in Geneva had already trained hundreds of men, many of whom returned to France and started churches there. Despite heavy persecution against the protestants in France, the French church experienced an explosion of growth from 1555 to 1562: “There were only 5 organized churches in 1555; nearly 100 four years later, in the time of the first National Synod in Paris in 1559; and 2,150 in 1562, the date of the beginning of the Wars of

²⁶There was two main issues in dispute. The first was with regards to the inspiration of the vocalization of the Hebrew text, and questioned whether the vowel pointings ought to be regarded as inspired and preserved. At question was also the integrity of the Masoretic text of the Old Testament. The second issue at dispute was with regards to the logical order of decrees of God relating to the atonement. In attempting to answer critiques against the Reformed view of double predestination, Moyses Amyraut asserted that it was God’s love for the whole human race without limitations that prompted God to send Christ to save sinful men. He postulated that God decreed a universal scope to Christ’s death, though on condition of faith, but then decreed to elect only some to have this faith to believe. In time, this teaching also became known as Amyraldianism or Hypothetical Universalism. In so doing, Amyraut thought be able to find a Biblically consistent way to reconcile God’s general love for all of mankind, the universal efficacy of Christ’s atonement, and the divine sovereignty in man’s election and salvation. Summarised from Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ’s Power: The Age of Religious Conflict*, vol. 4 (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 143–156.

²⁷ A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 128, cited in Reid, *John Calvin*, 69.

²⁸ Reid, *John Calvin*, 71.

Religion.”²⁹ The large majority of these churches were Reformed, and adopted a Confession of Faith and Rule of Discipline that were initially drafted by Calvin, and closely follows the teachings found in his *Institutes*. In the years that followed, there were a number of influential French theologians did their part in the spread of Calvinism in the land.

However, the year 1633 marked the decline of Calvinism and Christianity in France. The growing influence of the Academy of Saumur in western France caused many churches to become more Arminian in theology. Theologians such as Moise Amyraut (1596-1664), Louis Cappel (1585-1658) and Josue de La Place (1596-1655) influenced the new generation of ministers to question Calvinistic orthodoxy and imbibe new more liberal doctrines. 1633 and 1634 saw the publication of a few major works that undermined the doctrines of grace and questioned issues such as predestination, election and reprobation. In the ensuing debates that followed, weak or no action was taken against the perpetrators of these heresies. By the 1650s, the French Reformed Church generally accepted Amyraldianism and other such teachings as simply a branch of understanding within the Reformed Faith, whilst orthodox Calvinism began to fade to obscurity.³⁰

Dutch Reformed

While the initial spread of Calvinism was strongest in Switzerland and France, the most enduring and influential contribution was seen amongst the Dutch Reformed churches. A year after the definition edition of the *Institutes* was published, it was translated to Dutch and became one of the most influential books amongst the Dutch Christians. The Reformed presence in the Netherlands enjoyed a modest growth through the 1500s, maintaining a small but influential minority of the population. By the 1650s, as much as 50 percent of the population belonged to the Reformed church.³¹ The documents that were adopted by the Dutch speaking churches as their doctrinal standards were known as the Three Forms of Unity, comprising the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Canons of Dort (1619).

The formulation of the Canons of Dort from the proceedings of the Synod of Dort are of particular interest. Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch seminary professor who studied at Geneva under the instruction of Theodore Beza. He originally accepted the teachings of Calvin, but later emphasized the free will of man to such an extent as to call into question the sovereignty of God. Shortly after his death in 1609, his followers, who later came to be known as Arminians presented five articles of faith based on his teachings, in the form of a “Remonstrance”. They insisted that the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism had to be changed to conform to the doctrinal views contained in their document. The five points may be summarized as follows:³²

²⁹ Reid, *John Calvin*, 77.

³⁰ Reid, *John Calvin*, 75–77.

³¹ Reid, *John Calvin*, 102–103.

³² Table taken from Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1989), 523.

Doctrine	Explanation
Election Based on Knowledge	God elected those whom He knew would of their own free will believe in Christ and persevere in the faith.
Unlimited Atonement	In His atonement, Christ provided redemption for all mankind, making all mankind saveable. Christ's atonement becomes effective only in those who believe.
Natural Inability	Man cannot save himself; the Holy Spirit must effect the new birth.
Prevenient Grace	Preparatory work of the Holy Spirit enables the believer to respond to the gospel and cooperate with God in salvation.
Conditional Perseverance	Believers have been empowered to live a victorious life, but they are capable of turning from grace and losing their salvation.

In response to this, a national synod was called to meet in Dordrecht in 1618 to examine the views of the Arminians in the light of Scripture. They met for a total of 154 sessions over 7 months, closely deliberating over the five articles set forth by the Remonstrance. The result was the unequivocal rejection of the five doctrines advanced by the Arminians, and the setting forth of the five articles of the Canons of Dort, giving a comprehensive rebuttal against the Remonstrance, and laying out the right biblical view. These Canons became recognised as a definitive summary of the Reformed or Calvinistic understanding of sin and salvation. While Calvinism had its victory in that day, Arminianism would constantly prove to be a foil against Calvinism, for the drifts away from Calvinism would often be towards Arminianism, where free will of man is emphasized over the sovereignty of God.

Through the rest of the 17th century, and also into the 18th century, the Dutch Reformed church produced various notable theologians such as Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), Johannes Cocceius (1603-69), Hermann Witsius (1636-1708) and Wilhelmus a Brakel (1635-1711). They were leaders of a movement known as the Dutch Further Reformation, “a powerful spiritual movement... [that] did much to promote sound learning, and for a time exhibited a fair measure of zeal in the maintenance and promotion of a high type of piety”.³³

However, the 18th century also brought with it Rationalism and the Enlightenment, which led many away from the supernaturalistic worldview that believed in the sovereignty of God, towards a more naturalistic and scientific worldview, which rejected the inspiration and authority of God's Word, and exalted man's reason instead. Nonetheless there continued to be a small but influential minority of Dutch Reformed churches that remained orthodox, continuing to espouse the truths of Calvinistic theology.

Scottish Presbyterians

Every mention of the historical roots of Presbyterianism would invariably be linked to John Knox (1505-72) and the Church of Scotland. Knox was converted to Protestantism through the influences of earlier Scottish reformers such as Patrick Hamilton and George Wishart. Because of the political pressures and persecution in Scotland, Knox was forced to take refuge first in England from 1549-1554, then to Geneva from 1554-1559 (with stints at

³³ James Edward McGoldrick, Richard Clark Reed, and Thomas Hugh Spence, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches: A Global History* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 64.

Frankfurt and Scotland in between). There, he came under the tutelage of John Calvin, and described Geneva as “the most perfect school of Christ on earth since the apostles”.³⁴

The year after Knox returned to Scotland in 1559, the Queen regent, Mary Guise died, the Protestants came to power. The parliament of Scotland officially renounced papal authority, and the Church of Scotland was established as a national Protestant institution.³⁵ Under the leadership of Knox, a distinctly Presbyterian polity was instituted, with elders and deacons installed in individual congregations, and the ministers gathering for its General Assemblies. A *Scots Confession* was written by Knox and his colleagues and adopted by the Church, patterned closely after the theology found in the *Institutes*.

It was primarily the Scottish Presbyterians (though supplemented with some Irish influences) that established the Presbyterian churches in America. As many of them migrated over in early eighteenth century, they brought with them their Presbyterian and Calvinistic teachings. By 1750, about two hundred thousand had moved to the colonies, settling in the areas of New Jersey, New York, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. The first synod of the colonies was held in 1716, and in 1729 the Westminster Confession was adopted as their standard of faith.³⁶

English Puritans

During the reign of Mary Tudor (1553-58), or ‘Bloody Mary’ as she is sometimes known as, the heavy persecution against Protestants forced many to flee to the continent. Of the 800 that fled, about one-third of them found their way to Geneva, and joined the English church led by John Knox.³⁷ There, various scholars worked to produce the Geneva Bible – an English translation that came with annotations that were highly influenced by Calvin’s teachings. Completed in 1560, the Geneva Bible soon became the “family Bible of the English people... The annotations of the Geneva Bible because the people’s hermeneutic, for the learned much of their biblical exegesis from these notes”.³⁸ After the persecutions ended in 1559, many of the exiles returned to England, bringing with them the Calvinistic theology that they learned in Geneva.

By 1600, many of Calvin’s works were translated and published in England, including fifteen editions of his *Institutes* – a work which became standard reading for theological students at Oxford and Cambridge.³⁹ Many in the generations of ministers that followed continued in the Reformed teachings of Calvin. However, this caused an increasing tension between the direction that the Church of England was heading. While they were generally Calvinistic in their theology, the worship retained much of the vestments and practices of Roman Catholic

³⁴ McGoldrick, Reed, and Spence, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches*, 108.

³⁵ McGoldrick, Reed, and Spence, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches*, 109.

³⁶ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 364.

³⁷ Reid, *John Calvin*, 200.

³⁸ Reid, *John Calvin*, 200–201.

³⁹ Reid, *John Calvin*, 202.

tradition. Those who called for greater reform in the Church of England became known as Puritans, for they pushed for greater purity within the established church. “Doctrinally , Puritanism was a kind of vigorous Calvinism; experientially, it was warm and contagious; evangelistically, it was aggressive, yet tender; ecclesiastically, it was theocentric and worshipful; and politically, it aimed to be scriptural and balanced”.⁴⁰

One result of this tension was that some of the Puritans left England for the Netherlands, and others for the New World in the early 1600s. It was also the Puritans who petitioned for a new authorized translation of the Bible in English – a request that led to the translation of the Authorised King James Version, which was published during the reign of King James I in 1611. For the Puritans who stayed, continual conflict between raged against Charles I who reigned from 1625 -1649, escalating to armed conflicts which he lost, and his execution in 1649. It was in this period, that the Parliament called for “an Assembly of Learned, and Judicious Divines to be consulted with by Parliament for the settling of the government and liturgy of the church, and for the vindicating and clearing of the Doctrine of the Church of England from all false Calumnies and Aspersions”.⁴¹ It was from this convening of 121 divines, who despite having diverse ecclesiological backgrounds, were of one mind in their Calvinistic soteriology, that the Westminster Standards were written. They met from 1643 to 1648, producing a series of documents that is representative of the Calvinistic persuasions of the best ministers of 17th Century England and Scotland. These were the standards that were adopted by the majority of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches, and the basis upon which other documents such as the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith and the Congregational churches’ Cambridge Platform (1648) were written.

However, in 1662 the tide turned against the Puritans, as the monarchy was restored under Charles II, and two thousand Puritan ministers were ejected from their pulpits in the Church of England. Many were hounded by the authorities and imprisoned as criminals for their opposition to the state church. As a result, English Puritanism faded from the scene by the end of the 17th century, though their writings continued to influence generations of Calvinists after them.⁴²

American Pilgrims

New England Congregationalists

Because of their discontent with the direction that the Church of England was taking, many Puritans decided to migrate to the new colonies of North America, with a vision to established a commonwealth of God. From he 1620s onwards, over twenty thousand Puritan settlers made the trip to America, settling primarily in the New England region, of Plymouth,

⁴⁰ Ferguson, Beeke, and Haykin, *Church History 101*, 81–82.

⁴¹ Reid, *John Calvin*, 213.

⁴² Ferguson, Beeke, and Haykin, *Church History 101*, 84.

the Massachusetts bay area, and New Haven. The main centre of their colonization would be in Massachusetts, present day Boston.⁴³

Theologically speaking, the Puritans were heirs of Calvinistic thought, as they “saw the Bible as regulative on every subject on which it spoke... emphasizing the sovereignty of God, human inadequacy, dependence solely on God’s grace, and the necessity of directing all life toward the end of glorifying God”.⁴⁴ They formulated the *Cambridge Platform* in 1648 as the document that all the churches would ascribe to. In it, it states that it accepts the Westminster Confession of Faith in all points except with regards to church government. They eschewed the WCF’s Presbyterian views for a congregational style of church government.⁴⁵

They began with noble intentions, seeking to establish a ‘city on a hill’ – of a model society based on the Word of God. The first generation of settlers were faithful, with a sincere desire to serve the Lord through their settlement in this new country. However, the succeeding generations became more and more secular, pursuing prosperity more than godliness. Because of their congregational polity, there was no central authority to keep ministers in check if they were to start teaching deviant doctrines.

By the 1700s there were intellectual forces at work which were to induce an increasing number in new England to modify and even do away with original sin in their own theology. The advent of Newtonian physics, and the increasing number of scientific discoveries and technological advances, had enhanced the role of science and tended to reduce the importance of theology in colonial intellectual life. By 1730 this condition was very apparent; however the dominant influence in this intellectual and philosophical transition from the Puritanism of the seventeenth century to the increasingly secularized colonial outlook of the eighteenth century was the arrival of Deism in the colonies.⁴⁶

As Puritanism was waning, some of the more orthodox Congregationalists began taking a more Presbyterian direction, coming together to formulate the Saybrook Platform, which replaced authority of individual local churches with a central General Assembly. By the time Jonathon Edwards (1703-1758) and George Whitfield (1714-1770) came to the scene, the Calvinistic influence of New England Puritanism was all but snuffed out.

American Presbyterianism

Arriving some fifty to hundred years after the initial colonisation of the English Puritans, the Scottish and Irish Presbyterians began migrating to North America in the early late 17th and early 18th century. Although initially in the minority, the Scotch-Irish influence over the

⁴³ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States of and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 35.

⁴⁴ Reid, *John Calvin*, 244–245.

⁴⁵ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States of and Canada*, 43.

⁴⁶ C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 4th ed. (Alabama: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009), 23.

colonies extended over any other group of settlers, planting churches over widespread areas, and shaping American Presbyterian tradition.

They were disciplined in doctrine and trained in administering the affairs of their churches, and this gave them a distinct advantage as they sought a new life in the colonies and erected Presbyterian churches wherever they settled. Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism was, in a very real sense, Puritanism restructured and adapted to a more pluralistic environment, no longer restricted to the narrow confines of Old or New England. Both its Calvinism and its presbyterial form of government provided the means by which it would become the dominant theological movement in American church history and also in the formation of the American national character.⁴⁷

It was therefore through the Presbyterians that Calvinism spread throughout America, and reached its high point in the 18th and 19th century. It was the Presbyterians who established Princeton Theological Seminary in 1812. Some of the names associated with this institution would be theologians such as Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A. A. Hodge, B. B. Warfield, and J. Gresham Machen. Princeton would prove to be a bulwark of orthodox Calvinism until the theological controversies arose in the late 19th and early 20th century.

The First Great Awakening

The event known as the Great Awakening was a period of revival that had some effect in reviving the flagging zeal amongst the churches in colonial America. Lasting from about 1730 to 1750, numerous people were converted, and churches revived. Many denominations enjoyed rapid growth and renewed zeal, as the gospel was preached faithfully throughout the land. Central to this movement were three Calvinists – a Presbyterian, Gilbert Tennent, a Congregationalist, Jonathan Edwards, and an Anglican, George Whitefield.

While the efforts of these men, together with many other ministers and evangelists, did much to invigorate the spirituality of the churches in the colonies, it did come with some drawbacks as well. For example, although Whitfield preached a Calvinistic gospel, it was said that he was “more interested in preaching than in theology” and was “casual in the extreme about denominational differences”.⁴⁸ While Edwards himself was sound in his theology and careful in remaining true to orthodox Calvinism, his followers such as Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) and Nathaniel Taylor (1786-1858) began to deviate from his teachings.

Underlying the rise of liberal theology was the influence of scholars whose embrace of rationalism made Calvinistic principles appear repulsive. Among them Samuel Hopkins, once a student of Jonathan Edwards, was a pioneer. His modifications of historic Calvinism were in the direction of a man-centered concept of salvation, and Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), a grandson of Edwards, also encouraged revisions of the Reformed faith.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Reid, *John Calvin*, 269.

⁴⁸ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States of and Canada*, 92–93.

⁴⁹ McGoldrick, Reed, and Spence, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches*, 219.

It is unfortunate that they are branded as ‘Edwardsean’ in their theology, for their teachings was more a “modified Calvinism, which proved to be very close to Arminianism”.⁵⁰ This New Haven theology influenced much of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, and largely influenced the methods of Charles Finney and other revivalists of the 19th Century.

⁵⁰ Reid, *John Calvin*, 275.

Decline of Calvinism: Calvinism in the 19th-20st Century

After the first Great Awakening of the 1740s, the rest of the 18th and 19th centuries saw a gradual decline of Calvinism amongst Evangelical Christianity. While the rate of decline and circumstances surround the declines are different in the various denominations and regions, nonetheless this waning of the influence of Calvinism can be attributed to several main factors.

Rise of Liberalism

Although the revivals during the Great Awakening did help to slow the onset of liberalism and modernism in the churches, it was more a band-aid than a real cure. The latter half of the 18th century brought an onslaught of liberal forces that all but snuffed out the light of the true witness for Christ, and the influence of Calvinism.

Deism, as it unfolded, proved to be a revolt against evangelical orthodoxy at practically every major point. Even when there was an apparent agreement, such as in regard to divine creation, it was only apparent and not actual. Deism denied the Scriptures as the only infallible rule of faith and practice and subjected the content of revelation to the demands of reason. It denied the doctrine of the Fall, total depravity, redemption through Jesus Christ alone, predestination, effectual calling, and nearly every other doctrine of the Scriptures. Its principal target, of course, was Calvinism.⁵¹

While such liberal thought had begun to creep into America from the early 18th century, it began to take hold after the Great Awakening in the 1750s, leading to the rise of Unitarianism and Universalism in the 19th century. It is of this downward spiral of liberal and rationalistic thought that led Warfield to lament in the early 20th century:

Now the age in which we live is anything but supernaturalistic; it is distinctly hostile to supernaturalism. Its most striking characteristic is precisely its deeply rooted and wide-reaching rationalism of thought and sentiment. We know the origin of this modern naturalism; we can trace its history. What it is of more importance to observe, however, is that we cannot escape its influence. On its rise in the latter part of the seventeenth century a new era began, an era in which men have had little thought for the rights of God in their absorption in the rights of man. English Deism, French Encyclopaedism, German Illuminism—these are some of the fruits it has borne in the progress of its development. And now it has at length run to seed in our own day in what arrogates to itself the name of the New Protestantism—that New Protestantism which repudiates Luther and all his fervid ways, and turns rather for its spiritual parentage to the religious indifferentism of Erasmus. It has invaded with its solvent every form of thought and every activity of life. It has given us a naturalistic philosophy (in which all “being” is evaporated into “becoming”), a naturalistic science (the single-minded zeal of which is to eliminate design from the universe); a

⁵¹ Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 25.

naturalistic politics (whose first fruits was the French Revolution, and whose last may well be an atheistic socialism); a naturalistic history (which can scarcely find place for even human personality among the causes of events); and a naturalistic religion, which says, “Hands off” to God— if indeed it troubles itself to consider whether there be a God, if there be a God, whether He be a person, or if He be a person, whether He can or will concern Himself with men.⁵²

As a result, the witness of Calvinism came to an all time low, as even those who claim to adhere to Calvinism did not seem to fully embrace all aspects of its theology in their life and deeds.

On the whole, however, I think we must allow, especially when we are contemplating the trend of current thought, that the fortunes of Calvinism are certainly not at their flood. Those whose heritage it was, have in large numbers drifted away from it. Those who still formally profess it do not always illustrate it in life or proclaim it in word.⁵³

Charles Finney and the Second Great Awakening

Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) was a revivalist ministering in the 19th century that is often associated with the Second Great Awakening in America. He was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1827, and began preaching across his home state in a revivalistic manner. He was influenced by the works of Nathaniel Taylor and John Wesley. Although he was said to have ministered to thousands of people in his time, and there appeared to have been many converts during this period of awakening, his theology and methods were unbiblical, and caused far more harm than good.

With regards to his theology, although he was supposed to be a Presbyterian, he was far from Calvinistic in his doctrines. He had problems with his views of salvation, regeneration, election and sanctification. He emphasised the free will of man in exercising a decision to accept salvation upon the Holy Spirit’s persuasion and rejected the notion of original sin.⁵⁴

Of his view on revival, Finney asserted that “divine intervention is not essential for revival, for proper techniques can achieve it unaided. A revival, he wrote, ‘is not a miracle...in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of constituted means—as much as any other effect produced by the application of means.’⁵⁵

However, despite his serious errors, “impressive numerical responses to Finney’s preaching convinced many Presbyterians to support him”. His theology also “received a wide reception in the Presbyterian churches of New England, and its effects caused more concern within the

⁵² Warfield, “Calvinism Today.”

⁵³ Warfield, “Calvinism Today.”

⁵⁴ For an extensive critique of the theology and practices of Charles Finney, see Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Perfectionism*, vol. II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 166–215.

⁵⁵ McGoldrick, Reed, and Spence, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches*, 223.

church than that aroused by any preceding doctrinal crisis in the history in this country”.⁵⁶ This was certain a justified concern, for it basically shifted Presbyterianism away from traditional Calvinism towards the direct of Arminian teaching. His methods would also become the mould upon which American evangelicalism would pattern their missions and evangelistic efforts after.

Compromise in the PCUSA

Thankfully, not all of Presbyterianism was swept by the errors of Liberalism and Finney’s methodology. Founded in 1812, Princeton Theological Seminary stood as a stronghold for Calvinism in America until its own capitulation to liberal theology in 1929. There were a few key events leading up to its fall, demonstrating the compromise in the PCUSA, and the extent and speed which modernism afflicted this once orthodox denomination.

The Briggs trial

On January 20, 1891, Charles A. Briggs, delivered an inaugural address entitled “The Authority of Holy Scripture”⁵⁷ at Union Theological Seminary. What he said that day shocked the congregation and caused waves of turmoil and unrest to resound throughout the Presbyterian Church. In his speech he questioned and challenged every pillar of the historic Christian faith. He questioned the authority, inerrancy and inspiration of the scriptures, also doubting the historic authorships of many of the books including the Pentateuch and Isaiah. He also challenged the doctrines of sanctification and subsequent glorification.

Charles Briggs was subsequently put on ecclesiastical trial before the Presbytery of New York, and was declared only as being ‘misunderstood’. This was not surprising, as most of the judicial committee was made up of his colleagues from Union Seminary, which by then had begun to be corrupted by modernistic thought and were willing to compromise. However, the General Assembly of the PCUSA reversed the decision and in June 1893 defrocked and excommunicated Briggs.⁵⁸

Whilst the debate over this issue was raging, Union Seminary declared its independence from the denomination in 1892, legally withdrawing itself from the jurisdiction of PCUSA. However much of their faculty remained as part of the denomination, and Briggs himself continued in his position in training prospective ministers for Presbyterian pulpits.⁵⁹ Thus, while the church did the right thing in suspending Briggs, it did not fully purge its ranks of

⁵⁶ Reid, *John Calvin*, 276.

⁵⁷ Charles A. Briggs, *The Authority of Holy Scripture: an Inaugural Address* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891), <http://archive.org/details/authorityofholys00brig> (accessed April 20, 2017).

⁵⁸ Presbyterian Church in the U. S.A., *Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, against the Rev. Charles A. Briggs : notice of appeal and appeal to the General Assembly for the decision and final judgment of the Presbytery of New York, rendered January 9th, 1893* (New York: Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1893), <http://archive.org/details/presbyterianchur0302pres> (accessed April 20, 2017).

⁵⁹ David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Greenville: Unusual Publications, 1986), 146.

apostasy, and allowed this sore to fester which would soon become a wound which could never be healed.

The Auburn Affirmation

In 1910, in response to the alarming tolerance of heresy in the Church, and the refusal to affirm certain cardinal doctrines by some men in the presbytery, ‘five fundamentals’ were drawn up. These are mainly 1) The Inerrancy of the Scriptures. 2) The virgin birth of Christ. 3) The substitutionary atonement. 4) The bodily resurrection of Christ. 5) The reality of the miracles of Christ’s Ministry. Allegiance to these five doctrines was declared to be a requirement for ministerial duties in the PCUSA. This was first affirmed in the 1910 General Assembly. Again, in 1916 and 1923, these five fundamentals were confirmed to be a requirement for ordination.⁶⁰

However, in 1924, just after the five fundamentals were passed once again in the General Assembly, Professor Robert Hastings Nichols of Auburn Seminary published a paper that was to be known as the “Auburn Affirmation”, a document that Singer noted to be “perhaps the most striking and important manifestation of the growing liberalism within circles that had once been evangelical and theology and preaching”.⁶¹ This paper was basically an assertion that it is wrong for the General Assembly to require all ministerial candidates to adhere and agree to the five fundamentals, and that they have no constitutional or biblical basis to do so. With regards to the five fundamentals, whilst claiming to agree with them on one hand, they describe them simply as ‘theories’ that every minister has a right to have liberty to either support or reject. They contend that the General Assembly alone has no right to force any presbytery to adhere to their rulings, and through this affirmation, they safeguard the ‘liberty of thought and teaching of its ministers’. This document initially signed by 150 ministers, and later signed by 1293 ministers of the PCUSA in its second printing on May 5 1924.⁶²

Little action was taken against the signers of this affirmatio. The muted response of the Church was indeed telling, for it indicated that the tide had now turned. Thirty years after the Briggs trial the liberals and tolerant conservatives within the church was growing in influence, and would soon hold the majority.

Fall of Theological Princeton Seminary

All this while, controversy was also rife in Princeton Theological Seminary. Princeton Theological Seminary, “founded in 1812, stood for just over a century as the stronghold of Old School conservative theology”.⁶³ However, as it was with the rest of the PCUSA,

⁶⁰ Margaret G. Harden, *A Brief History of the Bible Presbyterian Church and its Agencies* (Collingswood: Christian Beacon Press, 1967), 16.

⁶¹ Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*, 186.

⁶² “PCA Historical Center: The Text of the Auburn Affirmation,” <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/auburn/auburntext.html#2> (accessed April 20, 2017).

⁶³ O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, 135.

Princeton Seminary was not unaffected by the rising liberalism. As the battle was raging within the denomination, effects were carried over to the faculty and boards of Princeton Seminary as well.

Within the faculty, there was a rising tension between the tolerant conservatives, led by the president J. Ross Stevenson, and the militant conservatives, of which the most vocal and known was J. Gresham Machen.⁶⁴ In the years following the passing of the Auburn Affirmation, various events within Princeton would transpire, ultimately leading to a reorganization of the board and spell the fall of ‘Old Princeton’.

The ‘Princeton Investigating Committee’ was appointed in 1926 to consider various points of dissension that was brewing among the student body and faculty. Despite formal appeals made by both the majority of the directors and the faculty, along with numerous vocal responses from many who disagreed, the various protestations were to no avail. The report presented at the 1928 Assembly recommended changes made to the charter of the seminary that would effectively collapse the leadership of the seminary to come under one single Board of Control.⁶⁵ The next year, the General Assembly took control of Princeton and placed a new single board of control over the school which had singular authority over the direction of the school. The significance of this change is highlighted by Hart and Muether:

The seminary was reorganized in such a way that conservatives who had been a majority on the board of directors were now a minority. What is more, signers of the Auburn Affirmation were appointed to serve on Princeton’s board. In effect, the seminary had been forced to conform to the theologically tolerant – if not indifferent – character of the Presbyterian Church. Princeton Seminary, an institution that had stoutly served the Reformed faith since 1812... had been lost to the cause of Presbyterian Orthodoxy.⁶⁶

The militant conservatives had lost, for it was decided that Princeton Seminary would be reorganized in the interest of accommodating theological liberalism. This event would mark a huge turning point in the history of Presbyterianism in America, as control of this historic institution was wrestled from the hands of conservatives into the hands of inclusivists who were sympathetic to the cause of liberalism.

In response to these events, Machen together with the conservatives who supported him, left to start a new independent school, the Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929, and the

⁶⁴ Hart’s assessment of the divide states that “On the one side were strict Calvinists, a group that included Machen and the majority of professors (seven of eleven) and the majority of the board of directors (nineteen of twenty-eight), the body responsible for faculty and curriculum. On the other side were moderate evangelicals who were led by Erdman and Stevenson and included a majority of the board of trustees (seventeen of twenty-two), the officers responsible for finances.” D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing Company, 1994), 125.

⁶⁵ Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977), 435–436.

⁶⁶ D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: a brief history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Committee on Christian Education and the Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995), 25–26.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in 1936. It would be out of the OPC that the Bible Presbyterian Church and Faith Theological Seminary would be established by Carl McIntire and others, as they desired to take a more fundamentalist stance on separation, and adopt a premillennial position with regards to eschatology. Sadly, the number that stayed in the PCUSA largely outnumbered those that left, and with that, the Calvinistic influence in America had all but retreated into quiet obscurity. Of the later half of the 20th century, it was said that “Calvinism never went away, but it did remain largely quarantined among the ethnic Dutch in the Christian Reformed Church or the Princeton Presbyterians who built Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia”⁶⁷

‘-isms’ of the 20th Century

By the time of the 20th century, Christianity in America had become quite distinctly polarized, with the liberals and modernists starting to take control of most of the mainline denominations, and the evangelicals, consisting of various splinter groups that had split from their denominations. They continued to hold to the fundamentals of the faith, and sought to maintain a faithful witness for the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, Satan was hard at work amongst the conservative remnant, and various ‘-isms’ crept into the churches and further weakened the Calvinistic influences, and set the stage for the traits evident in today’s New Calvinism.

Textual Criticism

In the years following the publication of the KJV, it was widely accepted by theologians that the Bible in their hands was indeed the authoritative word of God, and the texts underlying it ought not to be questioned. Few people saw any need for any revision of the Bible in their hands, and believed that God’s “singular care and providence”⁶⁸ was what had guided the editors of the texts in the original languages such that what they had in their hands were there inspired and preserved words of God.⁶⁹

However, with the passage of time, and the growing influence of rationalism and naturalistic approaches to the text of Scripture, various scholars began to delve into the work of assembling the variant readings from Greek manuscripts, versions and the writings of the church fathers. Whilst they continued to print the text of the TR as their main text, they began to include textual apparatus in their margins and footnotes which would suggest variant readings for the reader’s considerations. At that time, the church as a whole was strongly

⁶⁷ Colin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist’s Journey with the New Calvinists* (Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 19.

⁶⁸ WCF 1.8

⁶⁹ Note that variant readings were not unknown to Erasmus and the rest of the early editors and users of the TR, as Hills explains: ‘Almost all the important variant readings known to scholars today were already known to Erasmus more than 460 years ago and discussed in the notes which he placed after the text in his editions of the Greek New Testament.’ Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 199-200. Thus it is clear that they consciously rejected the variant minority readings, but instead by the logic of faith, took a Byzantine priority in his editing of the TR. This is the same logic of faith that were followed by the succeeding editors and users of the TR.

resistant to any change to the Greek texts which they regarded as the true reading of the Word of God. Thus any “occasional brave soul who ventured to print a different form of Greek text was either condemned or ignored”.⁷⁰

By the 19th century, the field of textual criticism was maturing, with more and more scholars seeking to put aside the TR and publish critical editions of the New Testament. Men like Constantin von Tischendorf (1815-74), Samuel Tregelles (1813-75), Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1892), were actively promoting a form of textual criticism that questioned the readings of the TR and ascribed greater value to a few supposedly older and more accurate manuscripts.⁷¹

Their efforts culminated in a call for an update of the KJV. In 1870, a committee of translators were commissioned to not just to update the language and correct any translational errors and inconsistencies, but also to make changes based on “alterations due to the adoption of a Greek text different from that used for the Authorized Version”.⁷² A chief influence in introducing textual critical methods to alter the text were members of the NT committee, Westcott and Hort.⁷³ The Revised Version (RV), published in 1885, “was the first major translation to make use of modern textual critical principles, frequently noting alternative readings in the margins”.⁷⁴ For the Old Testament, they generally followed the readings of the same Masoretic Text (MT), but they did deviate in a few instances and relied on the Septuagint reading instead. In the New Testament, “there were about 5,788 changes in the underlying Greek text, about one-fourth of which altered the reading of the text”.⁷⁵

The RV was soon followed by the American Standard Version (1901). This was the work of the American committee that also worked on the RV, but continued to modify the RV after it was published to include changes in wordings that would be more suitable to an American audience. This version was met with much better reception than the RV, and the Presbyterian Church soon adopted it to replace the KJV.⁷⁶

Sadly, despite their commendable efforts in standing firm against many other aspects of the onslaught of liberalism, the Princeton professors of the time accepted the textual critical theories espoused by Westcott and Hort, and reinterpreted WCF 1:8 as speaking only of an

⁷⁰ Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 153.

⁷¹ See Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 63-67 and Metzger, *Text of the New Testament*, 165-174 for a summary of the work and influence of these men on modern textual criticism.

⁷² Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 316.

⁷³ Burgon demonstrates how the revision committee, under the influence of Westcott and Hort, had reneged from their original intent ‘to introduced as few alterations as possible into the text of the Authorized Version, consistently with faithfulness’, where only ‘plain and clear errors’ were to be corrected. As a result, multiple changes were made based on their strong adherence to the readings of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. Burgon, *Revision Revised*, 127-130, 154-164, 400-403.

⁷⁴ Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 317.

⁷⁵ Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 317.

⁷⁶ Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations*, 318–319.

‘essential purity’ found in a multitude of manuscripts, and viewed the efforts of these modern textual critics as “all part of God’s singular care and providence in preserving His inspired Word pure”.⁷⁷ Of those that espoused this view, it is said that B. B. Warfield

did more than anyone else to open the door for modern evangelicals, including those in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, to embrace the paradigm that we still do not and may never possess the Word of God in its entirety; and that certain parts of recently discovered extant copies should replace the Greek New Testament text relied on by the Reformers and their heirs in many readings. This interpretation of the meaning of *WCF* 1:8, took hold in evangelical, Baptist, and Presbyterian and Reformed churches around the world.⁷⁸

This is the view that Machen (who was a student of Warfield) and his colleagues brought with them as they established Westminster Theological Seminary. There, textual criticism and the revised interpretation of *WCF* 1:8 was taught without question. Generations of reformed ministers were trained to doubt the very text of the Bible and favour modern versions over the KJV. Till today, the vast majority of the Reformed world (including all New Calvinists) would fully accept modern textual critical theories, and have no qualms at all about using modern English translations.

Charismatism

Another error to assail Christendom in the 20th century would be the rise of the Pentecostalism and Charismatism. Beginning in 1906 at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, Pentecostalism quickly became a global phenomenon that has swept across Christendom, bringing with it error, confusion and division.

Initially, this new movement was dismissed as a fringe or even cultic group. However, their practices soon attracted media attention, and thousands flocked to witness this new style of worship that was marked by “fervent prayer, speaking in tongues, earnest new hymns and healing of the sick... it was also remarkable for the striking way in which blacks and whites joined to participate in its nightly meetings”.⁷⁹ They elevated man’s subjective experience over and above the word of God. They emphasised a special postconversion baptism of the Holy Spirit that supposedly granted special gifts of the spirit, such as tongue-speaking and healing.

Soon, many who personally witnessed the happenings at Azusa Street began bringing these teachings and practices back to their own churches. In time, many Pentecostal churches were started and denominations began to form. The new movement expanded quickly and would in time be described as a “significant third force in Christianity”,⁸⁰ after the Catholics and Protestants.

⁷⁷ Garnet Howard Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the providential preservation of Scripture* (Independently published, 2017), 25–28.

⁷⁸ Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, 38.

⁷⁹ Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States of and Canada*, 386.

⁸⁰ Ferguson, Beeke, and Haykin, *Church History 101*, 95.

The most rapid growth occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, as Pentecostal teachings moved out of their own denomination to other traditional protestant churches, and even to some Catholics. Having the apparent gifts of the Holy Spirit as their common denominator, this Charismatic renewal was able to bridge the divides between denominations that was previously separated by doctrine.

It is the only revival in history which has united evangelicals on the one hand, with their strong emphasis on the death of Christ and full atonement, and Roman Catholics on the other, with their emphasis on the sacraments. Somehow charismatic experiences have brought together people who on the face of it have little in common theologically. Certainly the doctrinal vagueness of the charismatic movement gives it a unifying ability.⁸¹

Some conservative groups took a decisive stand against the Charismatics, but others just accepted it as another stream of Christianity, urging tolerance and forbearance in areas that they did not agree. Many however, including some Presbyterian and Reformed churches, were swayed by their teachings, and fully embraced their new styles of worship, preaching, and understanding of the Holy Spirit.⁸²

Neo-Evangelicalism

In the early 1940s, after the dust of the fundamental-modernist controversies had settled, a new generation of evangelicals and so-called fundamentalists arose. They were put off by the militant stance of their forefathers which often resulted in church splits, fragmented denominations and were often looked down upon by the mainline churches. They desired recognition, unity and peace. Thus arose the mindset of ‘neo-evangelicalism’.

This term was first coined by Harold Ockenga in 1948. He was the founder of the National Association of Evangelicals, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, president of the World Evangelical Fellowship, a director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and chairman and editor of Christianity Today. In his own words,

Neo-evangelicalism was born in 1948 in connection with a convocation address which I gave in the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena. While reaffirming the theological view of fundamentalism, the address repudiated its ecclesiology and its social theory. The ringing call for a *repudiation of separatism* and the *summons to social involvement* received a hearty response from many evangelicals... It differed from fundamentalism in its repudiation of separatism and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day. It had a new emphasis upon the application of the gospel to the sociological, political, and economic areas of life.⁸³

⁸¹ Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 242.

⁸² For example the Evangelical Presbyterian Church which was formed in 1981 out of congregations that left the PC (USA) due to liberalism, allows for the practice of charismatic gifts. McGoldrick, Reed, and Spence, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches*, 354.

⁸³ Harold Ockenga, “Forward” in Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976).

Ockenga contended that evangelicals should practice infiltration rather than separation, meaning they should stay in the apostate denominations and organizations and try to change them from within rather than separate from them and serve God in pure churches and organizations. He encouraged evangelicals to practice dialogue rather than preach against error, that they should not be negative in their message by rebuking and warning the false teachers publicly, but should attempt to change the false teachers through dialogue. He taught that evangelicals should re-examine their idea of worldliness and not be as strict about separating from worldly evils as Bible-believing Christians had been in earlier days.

In time, such a mindset pervaded through all of evangelicalism. The term ‘neo-evangelical’ fell into disuse, at least by evangelicals themselves. Basically all evangelicals became neo-evangelistic to some extent or other, in that the doctrine of separation is hardly emphasised, taught or practiced today.

“Reformed Resurgence” – What is New Calvinism

History of New Calvinism

It is hard to say exactly when this recent renewed interest in Reformed theology within evangelicalism occurred. The movement is one that arose organically, and did not have any particular leader nor was it triggered by any single event. As the movement is rather new, and continually evolving, it is hard to trace an actual history of it, as the means by which the various groups and individuals were influenced to become a part of the movement differ. Perhaps we can only speak in terms of general influences and circumstances that brought about this so-called “Reformed Resurgence”. Tim Challies, a prominent internet blogger that writes a lot on issues within New Calvinism gives a useful summary as to the roots and development of this movement.

In many ways New Calvinism had its genesis as a response to the church growth movement, which, heading into the new millennium, was a dominant force within Evangelicalism. Leaders like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels were writing books and leading conferences that advocated a form of Christian pragmatism. Church leaders were told that if they followed the programs and mimicked the successes of megachurches they, too, could see wild growth. This led to a programmatic, big-box Christianity that could be bought and sold, transferred and duplicated. *The Purpose Driven Church*, the manual for the pastor, spawned *The Purpose Driven Life* as the manual for the individual. Sermons became short and topical instead of long and expository, pastoral prayer was removed from worship services in favour of prayers of response and commitment, the old hymns were neglected in favour of new choruses, doctrine was displaced by felt needs.

A growing number of people began to express concern with this movement and they responded in at least two very different ways. One group determined that they would focus on recovering authentic Christian *community* and began to refer to themselves as the Emerging Church. They called for a new kind of Christianity that downplayed theological distinctions in favour of authenticity and community. They met in small, local gatherings and fostered online communities. But theologically they soon drifted back to the familiar liberalism of the early twentieth century. The authenticity they advocated too often came at the expense of the theology the Bible demands. Without robust theological grounding and without sound institutions the movement quickly drifted, then faded.

The second group determined that they would look back to the theology of the Reformers and recover authentic Christian *doctrine*. They called for the recovery of doctrine that had been forgotten, neglected, or displaced – doctrine known as Calvinism or Reformed theology. They began to gather around a handful of notable Calvinist preachers with John MacArthur, John Piper, and R. C. Sproul most notable among them. Soon they began to gather in conferences like Together for the Gospel while organizations like The Gospel Coalition began to define and organize the movement. A new generation of leaders rose up, led by men like Albert Mohler, Mark Dever, C. J. Mahaney and behind them the next generation – Kevin DeYoung, Matt Chandler, and David Platt among them. Christian publishers turned their attention to the movement, releasing hundreds, then thousands of books by and for this group.

Christian and mainstream publications described and defined the movement with monikers such as *Young, Restless* and *the New Calvinism*.

The people of the New Calvinism movement can be defined as an eclectic and at times edgy group of multi-ethnic and age-diverse Reformed people from all parts of the world who are not satisfied with superficial Bible teaching. These people are Christ-exalting, Spirit-driven, missions-motivated, multi-denominational (and non-denominational), charismatic and non-charismatic, and Bible-believing Christians who are seeking to know God, worship God, serve God, and bring glory to God.

New Calvinism began as an organic movement and grew by connections made through the Internet and, in particular, through the new medium of social media. Social media led people to books, to podcasts, to sermon archives, to conferences, to churches. At its best, this New Calvinism is an organic, worldwide movement of Christians who long to know and serve God. But New Calvinism is also a relatively new movement and one that is dominated by young people. It is an untested movement that has not yet been challenged by ‘the next big thing.’ It is in many ways an undefined movement that continues to negotiate its boundaries to determine who and what is in and who and what is out.⁸⁴

It seems then that the origin of this movement did not arise out of traditional, more conservative Reformed groups such as the OPC or the Dutch Reformed denominations. Instead, it was of independent ministers, churches and individuals who sought to become more Reformed or Calvinistic in their doctrines.

Where then did these influences come from? How did this ‘second group’ discover reformed teachings and begin to adopt them as their own? Part of the answer can come from Mark Dever gave a lecture in 2013 entitled “Where did all these Calvinists Come From”? Matt Smethurst gives a summary of the 12 sources that Dever considers as being used by God to reinvigorate Reformed theology in the recent times:

1. Charles Spurgeon – the 19th century Baptist preacher who is widely commended and popular among both Calvinists and non-Calvinists. “If you read Spurgeon, you’ll never be able to believe the charge that all Calvinists are hyper-Calvinists and cannot do evangelism or missions.” Indeed, the Prince of Preachers seemed about “as healthy and balanced as a Bible-believing Christian could be.”
2. Martyn Lloyd-Jones – British preacher of the mid-20th century whose writings influenced many of the present New Calvinist preachers. “No other figure in the middle of the 20th century so stood against the impoverished gospel evangelicals were preaching—and did it so insightfully, so biblically, so freshly, so regularly, so charitably—all without invoking a kind of narrow partisanship that wrongly divided the churches.”

⁸⁴ Tim Challies and Josh Buice, “A Call for Discernment,” in *The New Calvinism* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2017), 111–114.

3. The Banner of Truth Trust - Motivated by truth more than by sales, the Banner's "assiduous work in publishing in the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s has clearly helped to bring forth a harvest in the 1980s and 1990s and still today." The libraries of pastors today are filled with books written centuries earlier due in large part to this vital publishing ministry.
4. Evangelism Explosion - Created by a Reformed pastor (D. James Kennedy) and promoted through a Reformed church (Coral Ridge Presbyterian) beginning in 1962, this evangelism program became a "quiet but telling piece of counter-evidence against the stereotype of Calvinism killing evangelism."
5. The inerrancy controversy - By the mid-1970s, American evangelicalism's "battle for the Bible" had reached its boiling point. Touching several denominations including the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptist Convention, this controversy gave prominence to several Reformed theologians (e.g., J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, Carl F. H. Henry, James Montgomery Boice, Roger Nicole) and reintroduced the Old Princeton divines (e.g., Charles and Andrew Hodge, B. B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen) to a new generation. Not only did the debate get people talking about theology, but the "very shape of the arguments used to promote inerrancy" exemplified the Reformed view of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.
6. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) - Born out of theological controversy in 1973, this denomination's official doctrinal standard is a revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith—a document "so associated with the history of Calvinism," Dever suggests, "it could almost be said to define it in the English-speaking world." "By the late 1990s," he recalls, you could virtually assume the "most seriously Bible-preaching and evangelistic congregations near major university campuses would not be Bible churches or Baptist churches, but PCA congregations." From the success of various seminaries to the influence of Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) on campuses to Tim Keller's ministry in New York City, it's clear the "organizing and growth" of the PCA has been a major contributing factor to the Reformed resurgence.
7. J. I. Packer - First published in 1973, this Anglican evangelical's landmark book *Knowing God* has been read by hundreds of thousands of Christians. In fact, Dever surmises, it's probably "the most substantial book of theology" many American Christians have ever read. The "current grandfather of this Reformed movement," Packer's voluminous body of work over the past 60 years has made him one of the "clearest and most popular theological tutors of Christians who grew up in the evangelicalism of the 1980s and 1990s."
8. John MacArthur and R. C. Sproul - Thanks in part to the advent of new technologies like cassette tapes, radio broadcast, CDs, and digital audio files, the teaching ministries of these two men have enjoyed remarkably far-reaching effect for more than four decades. "Their conferences are attended by thousands; their books are legion; their characters are, by God's grace, unquestioned," Dever states. "More steady than spectacular, more quiet and consistent than sudden and electrifying," the manner of their labor smells of Wesley more than Whitefield.

Thousands of contemporary Calvinists cut their theological teeth on the teachings of Sproul and MacArthur and their respective ministries, Ligonier and Grace to You.

9. John Piper - Probably “the single most potent factor in this recent rise of Reformed theology.” Dever explains:

All the previous factors are part of the explanation, but they are part of the explanation for how the wave became so deep, so large, so overwhelming—all preparing the ground, shifting the discourse, preparing the men who would be leaders in this latest resurgence. But it has been John who is the swelling wave hitting the coast. It is John who is the visible expression of these earlier men. He is the conduit through which many of them now find their work mediated to the rising generation.

Through Piper’s sermons, books, and appearances at conferences like Passion, his and Desiring God’s role in the contemporary resurrection of Reformed theology can scarcely be overestimated.

10. Reformed rap - Christian hip hop has provided a unique soundtrack for the new Calvinist movement. Reflecting on the formative rise of The Cross Movement in the mid-1990s, Dever insightfully observes how an aggressive focus on the glory of God makes sense as a response to secular rap’s aggressive focus on the glory of man. After highlighting the influence of Lamp Mode, Reach Records, Humble Beast, and others, Dever remarks “There are groups of young people all over the place, in less-than-healthy churches, who are being taught and equipped theologically by these artists.”
11. Influential parachurch ministries - In the last 20 years, in addition to the remarkable theological recovery at Southern Seminary under the leadership of Albert Mohler, Reformed influence has been steadily reaching church leaders (e.g., 9Marks, Acts 29, Together for the Gospel, The Gospel Coalition, Redeemer City to City), college campuses (e.g., RUF, Campus Outreach), and lay people (e.g., World) alike. All of these organizations, Dever explains, have “either explicitly or implicitly public commitments to Reformed theology,” presenting young Calvinists with “ministries they trust” and equipping them with solid resources for both their churches and themselves.
12. The rise of secularism and decline of Christian nominalism - This final two-pronged factor has served to “shape a theological climate in which weaker, more pale versions of Christianity fade and in which more uncut, vigorous versions thrive.” Arminian theology, Dever fears, is too frail to be helpful. “In a nominally Christian culture, Arminianism may appear to be a satisfying explanation of the problem of evil,” he admits. “But as the acids of modernity have eaten away at more and more of the Bible’s teachings and even presuppositions about God, that

explanation has proven woefully insufficient to more radical critics.” [Quotation marks mark the actual words of Dever in his lecture]⁸⁵

Characteristics of New Calvinism

With regards to the characteristics or features of New Calvinism, we shall turn to John Piper’s 2014 lecture on “New Calvinism and the New Community”, where he starts off by listing what he deems to be 12 features of New Calvinism. He identifies himself as one who is part of New Calvinism, and feels “a sense of fatherly responsibility to continually speak into dimensions of biblical truth that I think it needs to hear”. He notes that this is not a list to distinguish the old from the new, nor does it seek to commend one over another. The list is as follows:

1. The New Calvinism, in its allegiance to the inerrancy of the Bible, embraces the biblical truths behind the Five Points (TULIP), while having, at the same time, a disinclination to use the acronym and other systematic packaging, along with a sometimes qualified allegiance to “limited atonement.” The focus is on Calvinistic soteriology, but not to the exclusion of appreciating the broader scope of Calvin’s vision.
2. The New Calvinism embraces the sovereignty of God both in salvation and in all the affairs of life and history, including evil and suffering.
3. The New Calvinism has a strong complementarian flavor with an emphasis on the flourishing of men and women in relationships where men embrace the call to robust, humble, Christ-like, servant leadership.
4. The New Calvinism leans toward being culture-affirming rather than culture-denying, while holding fast to some culturally alien positions, for example, on same-sex practice and abortion.
5. The New Calvinism embraces the essential place of the local church, is led mainly by pastors, has vibrant church planting bent, produces widely sung worship music, and exalts the preached word as central to the work of God locally and globally.
6. The New Calvinism is aggressively mission-driven, including missional impact on social evils, evangelistic impact in personal networks, and missionary impact on the unreached peoples of the world.
7. The New Calvinism is interdenominational, with a strong (some would say oxymoronic) Baptist element.
8. The New Calvinism includes charismatics and non-charismatics.

⁸⁵ Summarised from Matt Smethurst, “Where Did All These Calvinists Come From?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, October 23, 2013, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/where-did-all-these-calvinists-come-from/> (accessed April 4, 2018).

9. The New Calvinism puts a priority on true piety in the Puritan vein, with an emphasis on the essential role of the affections in Christian living, while also esteeming the life of the mind and embracing the value of serious scholarship. Jonathan Edwards would be invoked as a model of this combination more often than John Calvin — whether that’s fair to Calvin or not.
10. The New Calvinism is vibrantly engaged in the publishing of books, and, even more remarkably, in the world of the internet, with hundreds of energetic bloggers, and social media activists, with Twitter as the increasingly default way of signalling things (old and new) that are worthy of being noticed and read.
11. The New Calvinism is international in scope, multi-ethnic in expression, and culturally diverse. There is no single geographic, racial, cultural, or governing center. There are no officers, no organization, nor even a loose affiliation that would encompass the whole. I would dare say there are outcroppings of this movement that none of us in this room has even heard of.
12. The New Calvinism is robustly Gospel-centered, or cross-centered, with dozens of books in recent years coming at the gospel from every angle and applying it to all of life, with a commitment to seeing the historic doctrine of justification bear the fruit of sanctification personally and communally.⁸⁶

In addition to the points listed above, there are some further claims that New Calvinist makes of their movement.⁸⁷

Identifying Grace: Whatever else we can say about New Calvinism we can say this: it displays many, many evidences of God’s grace. It is beyond dispute that God has been blessing His people and glorifying His name through this movement.

Enthusiasm for Sound Doctrine: Its favored mode of communication is the expository sermon and its conferences are based primarily around hour-long expositions of Scripture. Its books... are committed to displaying the centrality of the gospel and are promoting the glory of God in all things. Its radio programs and podcasts are led by men and women who teach the Bible, and through the Bible, the uncompromised truths of the Christian faith... From stem to stern, New Calvinism is a movement founded upon and defined by its doctrine... This enthusiasm for sound doctrine is a mark of God’s favour and blessing.

Grounding in Church History: New Calvinism... has been shaped by previous generations of Christians and by pastors and teachers who lived in centuries past. Thus a final strength of New Calvinism is its desire to orient itself within the long history of the Christian faith. As much as New Calvinism has emphasized correct doctrine, it has also emphasized church history... There has been a revival of interest in the Puritans and new books are filled with as many quotes from the sixteenth

⁸⁶ John Piper, “The New Calvinism and the New Community,” *Desiring God*, March 12, 2014, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-new-calvinism-and-the-new-community> (accessed February 2, 2018).

⁸⁷ Following points are summarised from Challies and Buice, “A Call for Discernment,” 114–120.

century as from the twentieth or twenty-first. The Reformers are revered for all we owe to them for their work in rescuing and reviving the gospel from cold Catholicism. In this way New Calvinism looks back even as it looks forward, it seeks to draw wisdom from ancient sources even as it applies that wisdom to modern realities.

It is to some of these features that we will turn to in the subsequent chapters, to discern if they are indeed Biblical, and rooted in true Calvinistic orthodoxy.

New Calvinism in Singapore

In March 2018, a new Bible College known as the Evangelical Theological College of Asia was established. They have closely aligned themselves with the New Calvinist movement and the Gospel Coalition, declaring in their mission statement: “Although our board and faculty all come from diverse denominational backgrounds we share a commitment to reformed evangelical distinctives such as those found in the Confessional Statement of the Gospel Coalition”. For their official college launch, the guest of honour who also gave the main address and a series of lectures, was no other than D. A. Carson, founding member and President of the Gospel Coalition. On the college website, he is also listed on the college’s board of reference, whose function is to “give the college leadership invaluable wisdom in theological, pastoral and administrative issues”.⁸⁸

It is clear that New Calvinism has reached our shores and is here to stay. Its influence will only increase with the training of pastors at this new college. It is therefore important that we understand what this movement represents, what errors they hold to, and how we can safeguard ourselves against it.

⁸⁸ *ETCAsia*, <https://etcasia.edu.sg/> (accessed April 11, 2018).

Old vs. New – Bible

Introduction

We will now look at various aspects of the doctrines and practices of New Calvinism, and compare and contrast them the Calvinism old. The purpose is to investigate and see whether New Calvinism is as orthodox as they claim to be, or are they an aberrant departure from the old faith, and more importantly, from the teachings of God's Word. We begin by examining their view of the Bible – for this is the most important foundation upon which the rest of their teachings and practices are built upon.

NC Claim of High View of Scripture

The New Calvinists claim to have a high view of Scripture. They express adherence to the inerrancy of Scripture. That was the claim that Piper made in the twelve features of New Calvinism, where in point one he affirms that New Calvinists have an “allegiance to the inerrancy of the Bible”.⁸⁹ The history of the role of Albert Mohler in restoring Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to a Calvinistic and Reformed school is often in narrated as a concerted push to return to a position that affirms inerrancy. It was because of the intrinsic link of Calvinism and inerrancy that led Mohler to insist on bringing back the doctrines of grace to the seminary together with an insistence on an adherence to inerrancy.⁹⁰ They would also state that “a person has not embraced the Reformed faith merely because he is Calvinistic in his soteriology, but because he has embraced the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and is seeking to apply it to every aspect of his faith and practice”.⁹¹

However, as one from within the movement has rightly and astutely warned,

Some of the people who make up the New Calvinism movement need to return to a firm commitment to God's Word. Even the slightest slip in this area will lead to further capitulation and compromise always leads to theological liberalism... A firm commitment to God's Word is the only way to prevent a Bible loving people from theological disaster.⁹²

Sadly, such a slip up has already happened, and had happened from the very inception of this movement. It is not just ‘some of the people’, but as far as we know, practically all that identify themselves as New Calvinists, and almost all who would associate with them have already capitulated and compromised in their commitment to God's Word. This can be seen

⁸⁹ Piper, “The New Calvinism and the New Community.”

⁹⁰ Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed*, 69–93.

⁹¹ Josh Buice, ed., *The New Calvinism: New Reformation or Theological Fad?* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2017), 45.

⁹² Buice, *The New Calvinism*, 34.

in two main areas – their use of modern versions, particularly the English Standard Version (ESV), and implied in such a use, is their support for modern textual criticism.

NC Use of Modern Versions

It is said that “if there is an unofficial textbook of New Calvinism it has to be Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. If there is an unofficial study Bible the honor has to go to the enormous *ESV Study Bible*.”⁹³ The ESV seems to be the overwhelming choice of Bible translation amongst the New Calvinists. The textual basis for this translation is described in the preface of the ESV

The ESV is based on the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible as found in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (5th ed., 1997), and on the Greek text in the 2014 editions of the Greek New Testament (5th corrected ed.), published by the United Bible Societies (UBS), and *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th ed., 2012), edited by Nestle and Aland. The currently renewed respect among Old Testament scholars for the Masoretic text is reflected in the ESV’s attempt, wherever possible, to translate difficult Hebrew passages as they stand in the Masoretic text rather than resorting to emendations or to finding an alternative reading in the ancient versions. In exceptional, difficult cases, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and other sources were consulted to shed possible light on the text, or, if necessary, to support a divergence from the Masoretic text. Similarly, in a few difficult cases in the New Testament, the ESV has followed a Greek text different from the text given preference in the UBS/Nestle-Aland 28th edition.⁹⁴

However, the details of the underlying text or the processes of textual criticism used to decide between variant readings are seldom raised by New Calvinists. Their concern with regards to which version to use centres more around issues like readability and how literal a translation is. With regards to that, the ESV claims to be “essentially literal” in their translation.

The ESV is an “essentially literal” translation that seeks as far as possible to reproduce the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on “word-for-word” correspondence, at the same time taking full account of differences in grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages. Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and exact force of the original.

Every translation is at many points a trade-off between literal precision and readability, between “formal equivalence” in expression and “functional equivalence” in communication, and the ESV is no exception. Within this framework we have sought to be “as literal as possible” while maintaining clarity of expression and

⁹³ Buice, *The New Calvinism*, 114.

⁹⁴ The Translational Oversight Committee, “Preface to the English Standard Version,” *ESV*, 2001, <https://www.esv.org/preface/> (accessed December 6, 2017).

literary excellence. Therefore, to the extent that plain English permits and the meaning in each case allows, we have sought to use the same English word for important recurring words in the original; and, as far as grammar and syntax allow, we have rendered Old Testament passages cited in the New in ways that show their correspondence. Thus in each of these areas, as well as throughout the Bible as a whole, we have sought to capture the echoes and overtones of meaning that are so abundantly present in the original texts.⁹⁵

Because of such a translational philosophy, many have realized some of the errors that older translations like the NIV had, and have begun to eschew it in favour of what they regard to be a more accurate and faithful translation of the Bible.⁹⁶ For example in a brief booklet, Kevin DeYoung, a prominent New Calvinist explains why he decided to move his church from the NIV to the ESV. He gave 7 reasons, all relating to translational issues, describing how he felt that the ESV was a more essentially literal, transparent, balanced and accurate translation that is more suitable for preaching from. However he makes no mention of underlying textual issues behind the translation, or any implicit theological biases it may have.⁹⁷ Such unquestioning support for modern English versions are common among all within the New Calvinist camp, with few even aware that the use of modern English versions are a problem of compromise at all.

In terms of publishing houses, Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers⁹⁸ is probably the one that is most closely affiliated with New Calvinism. They have published many works by contemporary Reformed authors such as John Piper, D. A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, Mark Dever and many more. They have also worked closely with The Gospel Coalition for many years, and signed an official publishing partnership with them in 2013.⁹⁹ Crossway is also responsible for publishing the ESV, a translation that they also strongly promote. In August 2016, they announced that they would freeze the text of the ESV and no longer make any changes to future editions published by them. This was met with a large public outcry, and so they reversed their decision a month later. In their announcement, they explained that the initial decision was a mistake. By allowing future changes to be made to the text, it will

allow for ongoing periodic updating of the text to reflect the realities of biblical scholarship such as textual discoveries or changes in English over time. These kinds of updates will be minimal and infrequent, but fidelity to Scripture requires that we

⁹⁵ The Translational Oversight Committee, "Preface to the English Standard Version."

⁹⁶ Kevin DeYoung, *Why Our Church Switched to the ESV* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011); John Piper, "Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV," *Desiring God*, January 1, 2004, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/good-english-with-minimal-translation-why-bethlehem-uses-the-esv> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁹⁷ DeYoung, *Why Our Church Switched to the ESV*.

⁹⁸ <https://www.crossway.org/>

⁹⁹ Colin Hansen, "Crossway and The Gospel Coalition Expand Partnership," *The Gospel Coalition*, July 25, 2013, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/crossway-and-the-gospel-coalition-expand-partnership/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

remain open in principle to such changes, as the Crossway Board of Directors and the ESV Translation Oversight Committee see fit in years ahead.¹⁰⁰

In making such a statement, they are basically admitting that the Bible that they have right now is not complete. They are not sure about the accuracy of every word, but that future updates to the Word of God are necessary.¹⁰¹

As mentioned earlier, the root of this problem lies within the seminaries and Bible colleges, for almost all Reformed schools within America would teach textual criticism and promote modern versions.¹⁰²

NC Support for Textual Criticism

In Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, the first part of the book has 7 chapters that cover the doctrine of the word of God. In it, he does affirm the authority, inerrancy, clarity, necessity and sufficiency of the Word of God. His teachings are generally sound, as he makes good explanation of inerrancy and argues for the importance of it. However, one major flaw is that he stresses that inerrancy is only in the original and not the copies. He writes:

The study of textual variants has not left us in confusion about what the original manuscripts have said. It has rather brought us extremely close to the content of those original manuscripts. For most practical purpose, then, the current published scholarly texts of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are the same as the original manuscripts. Thus, when we say that the original manuscripts were inerrant, we are also implying that over 99 percent of the words in our present manuscripts are also inerrant, for they are exact copies of the originals.¹⁰³

This is basically the view of anyone who claims to hold to orthodox inspiration and inerrancy, but yet denies the preservation of God's Word, and sees the necessity of modern textual criticism. While on the surface the statement may seem humble and reassurance, the fact of the matter is that it is a denial of the present perfection of the word of God in our hands today. When he speaks of the "current published scholarly texts", he is really in fact referring to the modern eclectic texts that textual critics would use. He variously uses phrases such as "extremely close", "the same as", and even "exact copies" to describe these texts, making it seem like there is no cause for concern at all. But yet he contradicts himself but putting a

¹⁰⁰ Lane T. Dennis, "Crossway Statement on the ESV Bible Text," *Crossway*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/crossway-statement-on-the-esv-bible-text/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

¹⁰¹ For a fuller review of the ESV, see *The English Standard Version: What today's Christian needs to know about the English Standard Version* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 2007).

¹⁰² As far as I am aware, the only Reformed seminaries that continue to use the KJV and teach from the Hebrew MT and Greek TR are Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Greenville Theological Seminary, Geneva Reformed Seminary and Protestant Reformed Seminary. However they all have different views concerning the perfect preservation of Scripture and the extent to which textual criticism should be employed.

¹⁰³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 96.

number to this similarity, saying that only “over 99 percent of the words” are inerrant. What that means is that there is a small percentage of the words of the original that are as yet unaccounted for. For a book that has over seven hundred thousand words, even a 0.1 percent difference is no insignificant number!

It is clear then, that although New Calvinists claim to on one hand defend inerrancy and have a high view of Scripture, yet it is only with regards to the original manuscripts, which we no longer have in our hands today. In their use of modern versions and support for textual criticism, they show that what they really believe is that the bible that they have in their hands today is an errant one, and one that needs continual updating, editing and improvements.

Reformed Understanding of Scripture

Biblical Doctrine of Preservation

The doctrine of the verbal plenary preservation of Scripture very necessarily and logically flows from the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy. It is of little use, if one argues that God has perfectly inspired His word, but then to deny that he had perfectly preserved them. Since God had so deliberately and carefully inspired His Word through His special revelation, such that every single word which He intended for man to know was written by the authors of scripture, it stands to reason that He would also providentially see to it that none of the words be lost or added to.

More importantly, this doctrine is clearly attested in passages like Matthew 5:18 and Psalm 12:6-7. The doctrine of preservation teaches that it is the very words, and not just the message of Scripture that has been preserved, down to the ‘jot and tittle’, as Jesus had declared in Matthew 5:18. Though in the context of that verse, Jesus was not directly making a case for such perfect preservation of Scripture, yet His choice of words imply that He understood the law that was available to the people in His time was as exact as it was when it was first penned by Moses, and assured that not one jot or tittle shall ever fall from it. In like manner, Psalm 12:6-7 speaks of the assurance that the godly man can have from God’s word amidst the wicked who walk on every side. The comfort from God then is the fact that His promise to protect him (v.5) is like all of God’s words, pure and sure (v. 6), and will never fail. They are words that will be kept and preserved by God in every generation.¹⁰⁴

Calvin’s Understanding of Preservation

¹⁰⁴ A common objection to this verse being used to prove the doctrine of preservation is that the ‘them’ in verse 7 is a mistranslation of a masculine pronominal suffix, and should not refer to the words of God, but the godly who are oppressed. However there are grammatical instances where a masculine suffixes can refer to feminine substantives (Gen 31:9, 32:15, Exo 1:21). From the context of the verse, the verb ‘keep’ can refer to the closer antecedent noun of the words of God, and not the godly man in verse 1. See Suan Yew Quek, “Did God Promise To Preserve His Words?: Interpreting Psalm 12:6-7,” *The Burning Bush* 10, no. 2 (July 2004): 96–98.

A recently published book by Garnet Howard Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the providential preservation of Scripture*,¹⁰⁵ the author very convincingly provided a detailed and meticulous study of the Reformed understanding of the preservation of Scripture.¹⁰⁶ With extensively references leaving no stone unturned, Milne examined the writings of Calvin and other reformers, as well as the Puritans that formed the Westminster assembly. He proved that the consistent majority view of the Reformers and Puritans was one that affirmed the perfect providential preservation of Scripture through the ages, whereby they “believed that they possessed the complete Word of God dictated by the Holy Spirit in its textual purity”.¹⁰⁷

With regards to Calvin’s view of Scripture, he carefully combed through the writings of Calvin, and concluded that

Calvin believed that he had access to the complete Bible which was the original revelation in both words and doctrine given to the authors of Scripture. He considered that God had preserved this complete Bible without error in the original languages, apart from copyist errors in some records which could be corrected by the received Scriptures or other original language manuscripts or codices.¹⁰⁸

It must be noted that Calvin existed in a time where the printing press had only recently been invented, and scholars were still in the midst of compiling the manuscripts of Scripture and editing to produce authoritative editions of texts. His colleague and success Theodore Beza was one of such compilers and editors of the Greek New Testament. While there was therefore some work of textual reception to be done, in identifying copyist errors between the manuscripts, nonetheless the theological conviction that Calvin and the other reformers had was that the providence of God would always enable them to have the complete Word of God in their hands.

For Calvin, he saw God’s preservation of Scripture as necessary, in order that the truth of God may abide forever. Thus God, through His singular providence, out of care for man, gave His word and ensured that it would remain with man forever, without any ambiguity:

For by his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion. Finally, in order that truth might abide forever in the world with a continuing succession of teaching and survive through all ages, the same oracles he had given to the patriarchs it was his pleasure to have recorded, as it were, on public tablets... and surely in this respect God has, by his singular providence, taken thought for mortals through all ages.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*

¹⁰⁶ For another similar study that proves that such a view of preservation was the consistent view of the Reformers and Puritans, see Samuel Tze-Liang Eio, “Towards a Historical Understanding of the Doctrine of Biblical Preservation (Part One),” *The Burning Bush* 23, no. 2 (July 2017): 77–108.

¹⁰⁷ Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, 302.

¹⁰⁸ Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, 47.

¹⁰⁹ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:71.

He also explained that it was important in light of the forgetfulness of man and his tendency to stray from the truth. Therefore God had to be the one to ensure that His word would never perish through the negligence or sin of man.

Suppose we ponder how slippery is the fall of the human mind into forgetfulness of God, how great the tendency to every kind of error, how great the lust to fashion constantly new and artificial religions, then we may perceive how necessary was such written proof of the heavenly doctrine, that it should neither perish through forgetfulness nor vanish through error nor be corrupted by the audacity of men.¹¹⁰

Finally, Calvin understood that while the providence of God is what superintends the process of preservation, yet it is the church that is the custodian of truth, and therefore it is through the church that the Word of God is faithfully kept and preserved in its purity.

Truth, therefore, is not extinguished in the world, but remains safe, because it has the church as its faithful custodian, by whose work and ministry it is sustained. And if this custody rests in the prophetic and apostolic ministry, it follows that this safekeeping of the truth wholly depends on whether the Word of the Lord is faithfully kept and preserved in its purity.¹¹¹

Thus together with Milne, we can safely conclude that “Calvin considered that the entire Old Testament and New Testament *autographa* was available to him in the *apographa*, having been preserved by God’s special providence”.¹¹²

Reformed Understanding of Preservation

Such an understanding of Scripture was not limited to Calvin alone. The majority of those who continued the orthodox Reformed faith after him also continued to uphold such a high view of Scripture. It was a conviction that was affirmed through the Reformation and Post Reformation period, clearly evidenced by the Westminster Divines in the seventeenth century. In the Westminster Confession of Faith, it clearly states that:

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, **by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic;** so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.¹¹³

The idea of God’s singular care, the sustained purity and authenticity of Scripture are reminiscent of language that Calvin himself used to describe the preservation of God’s Word. In order to exactly ascertain what the Westminster Assembly divines actually meant when they used such phrases, Milne did an extensive survey of their writings and examined their

¹¹⁰ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:72.

¹¹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed by. John T. McNeill, trans by. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1161.

¹¹² Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, 60.

¹¹³ WCF 1.8

theology of Scripture. In so doing, he concluded that their understanding of God's providential preservation of Scripture, and the idea of purity both affirm the notion that Scripture has and always will be preserved down to the very jot and tittle. He writes:

They believed that not only the doctrine and matter, but the very words and grammar which had formed the basis of the autographa were preserved for their own day... They believed that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament was identical to that in use at the time of Christ and that the New Testament Greek text had always been in use in the Greek speaking church, and elsewhere... They affirmed that the God who never slept had ensured that they could possess the complete autographic text in their own day, although the original autographic documents had long since perished.¹¹⁴

But beyond the WCF, the Reformed view of Scripture continued to be upheld through documents such as the Helvetic Consensus Formula. This was a document drawn up by the Swiss Reformed Church in the 17th century in response to problematic teachings coming out of the Academy of Saumur. Although the bulk of the formula was responding to the Amyraldian controversy, the first three canons also deal with inspiration and preservation, answering particularly to Louis Cappel who argued that only the consonants, and not the vowels of the Hebrew text are inspired.¹¹⁵

Canon 1: God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have his word, which is the "power of God unto salvation to every one that believes" (Rom 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets and the Apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care from the time it was written up to the present, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church justly ascribes to it his singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world (2 Pet 1:19), a "sure word of prophecy" and "Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim 3:15), from which though heaven and earth pass away, "the smallest letter or the least stroke of a pen will not disappear by any means" (Matt 5:18).

Canon II: But, in particular, The Hebrew original of the OT which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Hebrew Church, "who had been given the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2), is, not only in its consonants, but in its vowels either the vowel points themselves, or at least the power of the points not only in its matter, but in its words, inspired by God. It thus forms, together with the Original of the NT the sole and complete rule of our faith and practice; and to its standard, as to a Lydian stone, all extant versions, eastern or western, ought to be applied, and wherever they differ, be conformed.

Canon III: Therefore, we are not able to approve of the opinion of those who believe that the text which the Hebrew Original exhibits was determined by man's will alone, and do not hesitate at all to remodel a Hebrew reading which they consider unsuitable, and amend it from the versions of the LXX and other Greek versions, the Samaritan Pentateuch, by the Chaldaic Targums, or even from other sources. They go even to the point of following the corrections that their own rational powers dictate from the

¹¹⁴ Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, 204.

¹¹⁵ Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power*, 4:123–4, 151.

various readings of the Hebrew Original itself which, they maintain, has been corrupted in various ways; and finally, they affirm that besides the Hebrew edition of the present time, there are in the versions of the ancient interpreters which differ from our Hebrew text, other Hebrew Originals. Since these versions are also indicative of ancient Hebrew Originals differing from each other, they thus bring the foundation of our faith and its sacred authority into perilous danger.¹¹⁶

In this declaration, the formula rightly declares that preservation of Scripture is to be found in the Bible of the original languages, and ought not to be corrected by any translation, whether it is through the LXX, or any other early versions. They also affirm that it is not just the consonants, but also the vowel points or the vocalization of it that identifies the words that are inspired and preserved by God. It also sounds a warning against those who would attempt to correct or change the words of the original Hebrew through the process of textual criticism, and that by so doing, it would “bring the foundation of our faith and its sacred authority into perilous danger”.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that from Calvin and the Reformers and in the early part of Calvinistic history, the consistent majority view has always been that God has perfectly preserved His Word down to the very jot and tittle, such that the believer in every age can have every confidence that he has access to the very words of God. This was the belief of the Westminster Divines when they penned the confession, and therefore ought to be what everyone who is confessional and subscribes to the Westminster Standards ought to believe in. To believe in anything less would be to go against orthodox Calvinistic tradition, and be in conflict with the doctrinal standards of the Reformed church. More importantly, it would be in opposition to the clear teachings of Scripture.

The New Calvinists who claim to affirm inerrancy and inspiration, but utilise modern versions and accept textual criticism are at odds with history and the Word of God. It is inconsistent for one to affirm belief in the scriptural teachings of inspiration, but yet deny that God would direct the process of preservation in a manner that results in having all the words of scripture available to every generation. This would, in the words of Hills, result in “maximum uncertainty”.¹¹⁷ The right understanding of the doctrine of preservation would lead one to be able to know, by the logic of faith, as to where the words of God can be found and accessible in every generation. As Milne concludes,

Today the believer who accepts the teaching of the modern textual critics and their followers and promoters can only believe that he may possess the entire Word of God. His certainty can only be a moral certainty or probability which must always be open to the possibility that other manuscripts will be located or new methods of textual criticism will be invented, thus altering the text of his Bible once again. He cannot

¹¹⁶ Klauber, “The Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675).”

¹¹⁷ Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 4th ed. (Iowa: The Christian Research Press, 1984), 225.

believe, therefore, that God has preserved his Bible pure in all ages or indeed in his own age.¹¹⁸

Yet Milne does end on an optimistically hopeful note:

If the Westminster divines were correct in their doctrine of Scripture, then we can expect to see the New Testament Received Text and the Old Testament Masoretic Text continue to be preserved and used by the Lord's people. We would also expect to see the Westcott and Hort and Warfield approach to textual criticism eclipsed by a return to the Puritan religious epistemology so clearly defined in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. . . . As more Christians become educated on the developments of modern textual-critical theory they are likely to see the beauty, simplicity, and the Scriptural basis for the old religious epistemology of the Reformation and the authentic status of the common text of Scripture.

Likewise our prayer is that as the New Calvinists take a renewed interest in the writings of the Reformers and study the creeds and confessions of the past, they too would come to realise the truth about the perfect preservation of Scripture, and the problems with modern versions and textual criticism.

¹¹⁸ Milne, *Has the Bible been kept pure?*, 303.

Old vs. New – Spiritual gifts

Introduction

Another glaring inconsistency of the New Calvinist movement is the fact that many of its leaders openly declare themselves to be continuationists – that is they believe that the spiritual gifts of the New Testament have not ceased, but continue to be given to believers through the ages. Not only that, they also openly have fellowship with Charismatics, so long as they too profess adherence to the doctrines of grace – that is they preach a Calvinistic soteriology.

Continuationist Calvinists

While the majority of New Calvinists (at least for now) are not fully Charismatic, in the sense that they do not participate in the unbiblical excesses of the Charismatic movement, yet they are sympathetic to the movement and are open to some of their practices as being Scripturally justifiable. They describe themselves as being continuationists, in that they believe that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit continue to exist today, but do not identify themselves as Charismatics.

In general, these continuationists can be said to be open but cautious about seeking for and practicing spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. They would find their biblical basis from passages such as 1 Corinthians 13:10, whereby they interpret “perfect” as referring to Christ’s return, and not the completion of the canon of Scripture. As Wayne Grudem writes,

1 Corinthians 13:10, therefore, refers to the time of Christ’s return and says that these spiritual gifts will last among believers until that time. This means that we have a clear biblical statement that Paul expected these gifts to continue through the entire church age and to function for the benefit of the church until the Lord returns.¹¹⁹

He does make a distinction between the miraculous gifts in the Scripture are not like the gifts of today. He claims that “we must remember that gifts can vary in strength and no gift is perfect in this age”. His only justification for this is that the Bible gives little information about the kind and extent of miracles performed by the Christians in the time of the New Testament – an argument really from the silence of Scripture. He then makes a strawman argument, asking “if today only three hundred are converted at an evangelistic meeting instead of the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), shall we say that the speaker does not really have the gift of evangelism, since the gift did not operate as powerfully as it did with the apostles?”¹²⁰ This is really not a matter of the gift of evangelism, but of God’s work in converting souls. One’s response to the gospel is not contingent on the gift of the evangelist, but on the Spirit’s work in accordance to God’s election.

¹¹⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1035.

¹²⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1045.

Nonetheless many ascribe to such continuationalist arguments, believing there is scriptural warrant for such a position. John Piper is one who would fall into such a category. He attributes his understanding of spiritual gifts to the writings of Wayne Grudem. He explains that

I advocate obedience to 1 Corinthians 12:31, ‘earnestly desire the higher gifts.’ And I advocate obedience to 1 Corinthians 14:1, ‘earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you might prophesy.’ And I advocate obedience to 1 Corinthians 14:39, ‘earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.’ I want Christians today to obey those texts.¹²¹

Yet at the same time, he also addresses various charismatic abuses that he warns against. He observes that “there are many doctrinal abuses in the charismatic church where experience is elevated above doctrine, and doctrine is made minimally important. I think that is a huge defect in many charismatic churches.” He then continues to list various emotion, discernment and financial related abuses and excesses that are common in Charismatic churches today. In a separate interview, he also notes that he has never spoken in tongues (which he believes can be ecstatic utterances that are not real languages), though he has earnestly prayed for them.¹²²

Charismatic Calvinists

Beyond being just cautious but open to gifts of the Spirit, there are those within New Calvinism that would openly identify themselves as Charismatics. One such example would be Sovereign Grace Churches (previously Sovereign Grace Ministries) and their former President C J Mahaney. Sovereign Grace Churches describe themselves as ‘evangelical, Reformed, and continuationist.’ They acknowledge that there are differences between them and a typical confessionally Reformed church. They admit that “there are areas in which we differ from many Reformed traditions, such as infant baptism, cessationism (the belief that some miraculous spiritual gifts have ceased), and some traditionally Reformed types of church government.” Their statement concerning the Holy Spirit clearly sets forth fully Charismatic convictions:

The Holy Spirit desires to fill each believer continually with increased power for Christian life and witness, and imparts his supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first century are available today, are vital for the mission of the church, and are to be earnestly desired and practiced.¹²³

¹²¹ Tony Reinke, “Piper Addresses Strange Fire and Charismatic Chaos,” *Desiring God*, November 16, 2013, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/piper-addresses-strange-fire-and-charismatic-chaos> (accessed April 16, 2018).

¹²² Piper John, “Are Prophecy and Tongues Alive Today?,” *Desiring God*, January 17, 2013, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/piper-on-prophecy-and-tongues> (accessed April 16, 2018).

¹²³ “Statement of Faith,” *Sovereign Grace Churches*, n.d., <http://sovereigngrace.com/statement-of-faith> (accessed April 15, 2018).

While they reject the more extreme Charismatic practices such as holy laughter, being slain by the spirit, demon casting, mass healings, health and wealth gospel etc. Nonetheless they do continue to have distinct charismatic elements as part of their worship. One worshipper testifies that in their services, there would be opportunities for members to come forward claiming to have a vision to share or word of prophecy, and the elder or pastor would assess if it is a useful word for the church before allowing him to the mic. There would be occasional tongue speaking, but more often in small groups than in public worship.¹²⁴ In a way that makes Charismatism seem more respectable, and brings their teachings concerning spiritual gifts to become more mainstream. Yet that does not change the fact that they do admit to the ongoing nature of these supernatural gifts, and erroneously interpret Scripture to fit their experiences.

Although Mahaney has stepped down from leadership of SGM and disassociated himself from New Calvinist organization The Gospel Coalition in 2014, the stance of the New Calvinists with regards to Charismatics remain the same. Mahaney left not because of any doctrinal reasons relating to his Charismatic practices but because of scandals surrounding his ministry and church over allegations of sexual misconduct by some of their pastors and the ensuing coverup over it.¹²⁵ At his departure, they said nothing to condemn his actions, neither was he ever taken to task for his Charismatic beliefs or practices. It was put across as more an honourable move on his part to distance himself from TGC so that they would not suffer any ill-repute over the allegations he was involved in.¹²⁶ Till date, they continue to carry articles written by Mahaney on their website. Hansen comments,

The growing network of charismatic Calvinists led by Mahaney is one sure sign of the Reformed resurgence. Such a combination would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago. Since then the Sovereign Grace network has grown to include sixty-eight churches in the United states with eight more dotted around the world. Many more unofficially affiliate with Sovereign Grace and the Covenant Life Church, the movement's flagship congregation... Considering domestic and international trends, it's likely that Reformed evangelicals will become more charismatic if Calvinism continues to spread. Cessationism among American evangelicals has waned outside Reformed circles just as it has within.¹²⁷

Cessationalist Calvinists

¹²⁴ Ryan Jones, "What Does a Reformed-Charismatic Look Like?," *Ryan Jones Thoughts and Re-Thoughts*, December 1, 2005, <http://web.archive.org/web/20051201011601/http://blog.ryandjones.com:80/2005/11/what-does-reformed-charismatic-look.html> (accessed April 16, 2018).

¹²⁵ Hannah Ettinger, "A Guide to the Sovereign Grace Ministries Scandal and the End of New Calvinism," *Friendly Atheist*, May 29, 2014, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/05/29/a-guide-to-the-sovereign-grace-ministries-scandal-and-the-end-of-new-calvinism/> (accessed April 16, 2018).

¹²⁶ Don Carson, "On Some Recent Changes at TGC," *The Gospel Coalition*, May 21, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/on-some-recent-changes-at-tgc/> (accessed April 14, 2018).

¹²⁷ Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed*, 103.

Not all New Calvinists are comfortable with the current state of things. Thankfully there are some within the movement that do see an inconsistency in claiming to be Reformed and Calvinist on one hand, but yet accept the Charismatic understanding of spiritual gifts.

One such example is John MacArthur, who is one who is sort of on the fringe of the New Calvinist movement, whereby he joins in some of their conferences, but is unafraid to criticise them at times as well. He has written books critiquing the Charismatic movement, and organized a conference in 2013 called “Strange Fire” together with a few prominent New Calvinists that “evaluates the doctrines, claims, and practices of the charismatic movement, and affirms the true Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit”.¹²⁸ This move sparked off no small controversy within the New Calvinism world, provoking numerous responses both in online and print media. It also revealed how diverse a range of views that those who identified as New Calvinists had. Responses ranged anywhere from full support to strong condemnation, with many advocating a middle ground, mediatorial position.

Compromising Calvinists

The Gospel Coalition is an organization that tries to tread in the middle. They have both cessationists and continuationists in the council, and their statement of faith concerning the work of the Holy Spirit is vague enough to accommodate both positions.

By the Spirit’s agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God’s family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.¹²⁹

In January 2014, just a few months after MacArthur’s Strange Fire conference, TGC published two articles together, “Why I am a Cessationist”¹³⁰ and “Why I am a Continuationist”¹³¹. They had two writers, each holding a different position to argue for their case. In so doing, they seemed to be attempting to appease both camps and demonstrate that they could continue to be that ‘coalition’ that brings people together. However, it only revealed their spirit of compromise, that they would try to have as few standards as possible, in order that as many people could continue to come together in union. Whether it was Biblically sound or not does not seem to matter to them.

¹²⁸ “Strange Fire,” *Grace to You*, October 2013, <https://www.gty.org/library/strangefire> (accessed April 16, 2018).

¹²⁹ “Foundation Documents of The Gospel Coalition,” *The Gospel Coalition*, n.d., <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

¹³⁰ Thomas Schreiner, “Why I Am a Cessationist,” *The Gospel Coalition*, January 22, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-cessationist/> (accessed April 16, 2018).

¹³¹ Sam Storms, “Why I Am a Continuationist,” *The Gospel Coalition*, January 22, 2014, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-i-am-a-continuationist/> (accessed April 16, 2018).

Reformed Understanding of Spiritual Gifts

Biblical doctrine of cessation

When discussing the cessationist vs. continuationist position, the passage that is most often brought up would be 1 Corinthians 13:8-15. Verse 8 suggests that there will come a point in time where prophecies, tongues and knowledge shall all cease and be done away with. It is noted that the verbs for ‘fail’ and ‘vanish away’ are verbs in the passive voice, suggesting that there will be an external agent that would bring about this cessation. With regards to tongues, it is a verb in the middle voice, indicating that the gift of tongues will just cease automatically when God deems that it is no longer required.

Attention is particularly on the identity of the word ‘perfect’ in 1 Corinthians 13:10, for that determines when the end point of prophecy and knowledge will be. So what is this ‘perfect’ that has come? When is the end point of prophecy and knowledge? Khoo gives a detailed answer:

1 Corinthians 13:10 says, “But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.” It is very clear from this verse that there is a relationship between “that which is perfect” and “that which is in part.” The “perfect” will cause the “part” to cease. The question we need to ask first is: What is “that which is in part”? The answer lies in verses 8-9. Verses 8-9 tell us that the things partial are “prophecies,” “tongues,” and “knowledge.” All three sign-gifts are revelatory. They are supernatural gifts which communicate the Word and Will of God. Paul says that these revelatory gifts will eventually “fail,” “cease,” and “vanish away.” They will one day cease to exist, or be withdrawn from use.

The next question we want to ask is: When will this happen? This will happen when “the perfect” comes (v10). Paul says that prophecies “shall fail,” and knowledge “shall vanish away.” The words, “fail,” and “vanish away,” are written in the Greek passive. By so writing, Paul is telling his readers that something from the outside will cause the gifts of prophecy and knowledge to fail and vanish away. What is this external element? The answer is found in verses 9 and 10, “For we know (ie, the gift of knowledge) in part, and we prophesy (ie, the gift of prophecy) in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which in part (ie, the gifts of knowledge and prophecy) shall be done away.” There is a cause-and-effect relationship between “that which is perfect” and “that which is in part.” It is clear from the context that the gifts of knowledge and prophecy are only temporary gifts, and not permanent. They will be removed once the perfect comes.

Now, what is this which is “perfect” that will cause the gifts of knowledge and prophecy to cease? The word “perfect” here is the Greek *teleion* which literally means “the perfect thing.” This perfect thing is inseparably linked to the revelatory gifts of prophecy and knowledge. The cause-and-effect relationship between the perfect and the partial (ie, prophecies and knowledge) clues us to what the perfect is. The revelatory nature of prophecies and knowledge tells us that this perfect thing must of necessity be revelatory as well. It has to do with God’s revelation. The Greek word—*teleion*—being adjectival functions to describe. Here it describes God’s

revelation. The revelatory gifts of prophecy and knowledge are partial, but this coming Revelation is perfect. The “perfect” is thus God’s Perfect Revelation. When God’s Perfect or Complete Revelation comes, the partial will be taken away. God has been revealing Himself to His people part by part through the prophets (cf, Heb 1:1-2), but there will come a time when He will completely reveal what He wants to reveal. When that happens, there will no longer be any need for prophecies and knowledge. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the New Testament was in the process of being written. Prophecies and knowledge will cease when the New Testament is completed. When did this happen? This happened when the last book of the Bible was written and completed, namely, the book of Revelation. God confirmed its completion by issuing a very severe warning in the last chapter of Revelation, verses 18-19: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” This effectively sealed and finalised God’s Perfect Revelation—the 66 books of Holy Scripture.

Now, we know that the word “perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 does not mean the return of Christ because if Paul had that in mind, he would probably have used the clear and unambiguous “until he comes” which he did in 1 Corinthians 11:26, or “then the end will come” in 1 Corinthians 15:24. What is truly significant is the fact that the word “perfect” is used 18 times in the New Testament (Matt 5:48, 19:21; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:6, 13:10, 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28, 4:12; Heb 5:14, 9:11; Jas 1:4,17,25, 3:2; 1 John 4:18), and not once does it refer to the second coming or to heaven. The word “perfect” is mostly used to describe spiritually mature Christians who live in accordance to God’s Word. At other times, it is used specifically to describe (1) the will of God, (2) the wisdom of God, (3) the Law of God, (4) the love of God, and (5) the humanity of Christ. Therefore, the “perfect” refers to a book, and not to a person (Christ), an event (His return), or a place (heaven). The Holy Bible is the perfect Word or Revelation of God. It is absolutely authoritative, and totally sufficient for Christian doctrine and practice (2 Tim 3:16-17). Revelation has ceased. Consequently, all temporary means of revelation, like the gifts of prophecy and knowledge, have been withdrawn. It is unbiblical to seek a word of prophecy or a word of knowledge today. We are to go straight to the Word of God to seek His will and wisdom.

The word “perfect” therefore must mean the Biblical Canon—the 66 books of Holy Scripture. If we take the term “perfect” to mean the second coming of Christ or heaven, we will throw into disarray Paul’s careful and thoughtful argumentation in 1 Corinthians 13 on the superiority of faith and hope, and the supremacy of love over the temporariness and relative inferiority of the sign-gifts.¹³²

It is therefore a very conclusive argument that the perfect should refer to the completion of the Canon – an event that happened when Revelation written by the last surviving Apostle –

¹³² Jeffrey Khoo, *Charismatism Q&A: Biblical Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on the Charismatic Phenomenon* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1999).

the Apostle John. Any position of continuationism – whether it is a cautious one or a fully charismatic one is contrary to Scripture.

Calvin's view of Cessation

Though he was writing in response to the Catholic's demand upon Protestants for miracles to confirm the validity of their new teachings, Calvin's answer demonstrates his understanding of the danger of accepting every apparent miracle that happens to have divine origins.

The Lord made us wary of these miracles workers when he predicted that false prophets with lying signs and prodigies would come to raw even the elect (if possible) into error [Matt. 24:24]. And Paul warned that the reign of Antichrist would be “with all power, and signs and lying wonders” [II Thess. 2:9]. But these miracles, they say, are done neither by idols, nor by magicians, nor by false prophets, but by the saints. As if we did not understand that to “disguise himself as an angel of light” [II Cor. 11:14] is the craft of Satan!... What shall we say except that it has always been, and ever will be, a very just punishment of God to “send to those” who have not received the love of truth “a strong delusion to make them believe a lie” [II Thess. 2:11]?¹³³

What he says here can very well apply to the Charismatics of today as well. His exhortation is that one must constantly be on guard and wary of anyone who comes and proclaims to have some sort of miraculous ability. He warns that it is more likely the delusion of Satan and the punishment of God, than what Charismatics today claim to be the gift of the Spirit. Instead in explaining Hebrews 1:1-2, Calvin comments:

Paul means, in fact, openly declares, that God will not speak hereafter as he did before, intermittently through some and through others; nor will he add prophecies to prophecies, or revelations to revelations. Rather, he has so fulfilled all functions of teaching in his Son that we must regards this as the final and eternal testimony from him... content with the perfection of Christ's teaching, we may learn not to fashion anything new for ourselves beyond this or to admit anything contrived by others.¹³⁴

Furthermore, he warned that,

No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles; and the only authorized way of teaching in the church is by the prescription and standard of his Word.¹³⁵

It is clear that Calvin understood the primacy of the Word of God to be the factor that would cause the gift of prophecy to become obsolete. In the present age, God's Word alone is the only authority given to the church, and that every authorized teaching in the church has to be through the Word. There is no place for words of encouragements through individual prophecies or tongues, even if it is apparently through an interpreter. Because the Word of

¹³³ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:17.

¹³⁴ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1154–1155.

¹³⁵ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1155.

God is given in its fullness, there is no longer any necessity for other forms of prophetic word, revelation, or anything else that man can contrive.

Reformed view of cessation

Crampton explains that “Reformed theology in general has always maintained that the extraordinary offices of the first century church (apostles and prophets) and the miraculous word gifts which accompanied them (prophecy, tongues, etc.) passed away with the close of the canon”.¹³⁶ In fact, it is both the admission and boast of New Calvinist, that “Old Calvinism was cessationistic and fearful of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. New Calvinism is continuationist and joyful in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit”.¹³⁷

This cessationist position was demonstrated in the very first paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith:

Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; **those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.**¹³⁸

Particularly the last line, which states that the former ways in which God revealed His will to His people has already ceased. Garnet Milne studied this line in particular with the same rigour that he did in his in the previously quoted study of the preservation of Scripture. His conclusion with regards to the Reformed understanding of cessation was this:

The clear opinion of most Westminster divines, Scottish commissioners and other Reformed contemporaries that God had ceased to impart miracles, miraculous gifts and extra-biblical revelations in the post-apostolic era. The Reformed orthodox consistently dismissed the idea that miraculous gifts of the Spirit, of which immediately inspired prophecy was considered to be one, continued after the foundational period of the Christian church.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ W. Gary Crampton, *What Calvin Says: An Introduction to the Theology of John Calvin* (Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2002), 45.

¹³⁷ Mark Driscoll, “Time Magazine Names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea,” *The Resurgence*, March 12, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20121113162916/http://theresurgence.com/2009/03/12/time-magazine-names-new-calvinism-3rd-most-powerful-idea> (accessed April 18, 2018).

¹³⁸ WCF I:1

¹³⁹ Garnet Howard Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation: The Majority Puritan Viewpoint on Whether Extra-Biblical Prophecy is Still Possible* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2007), 288.

In fact, Milne also observes that “Had the divines undermined the long-established polemic against Rome and the sects that modern miracles were either delusions or of satanic origin, they would have been overturning a key plank of Protestant orthodoxy that dated from the earliest days of the Reformation”.¹⁴⁰ Such was the strong views that the Puritans had against claims of miracles that they would at times attribute it to satanic origin.

Such a view continued through the ages of the Reformed faith. In a conversation that he had with Mahaney, Hansen records how by Mahaney’s own admission, there is little historic precedence of any prominent pastor or theologian who not a cessationist. They discussed people like Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and concluded that they would have little in common with the Charismatics of today.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

It is clear that Calvinism of old has always held a cessationist view. There is little biblical or historic evidence that lends support to a continuationist, not to mention a Charismatic position. All throughout church history, there has been little evidence to suggest that there has been a continual giving of spiritual gifts like it was in the time of the New Testament. The Charismatic movement is a relatively new movement in Christendom, that began with the Pentecostals in the early 20th century. What Grudem and others are doing is an attempt to find a biblical explanation for experiences that they claim to have.

For those in New Calvinism that hold to a cessationist position, their problem is one of compromise. There are irreconcilable differences between them who seeks after Charismatic spiritual gifts. If they truly believe that gifts have ceased, then they have to conclude that what the Charismatics are doing are erroneous and unbiblical at best, or, if brought to the logical conclusion, as being empowered by the devil.

Onus therefore ought to be upon the cessationists within the movement to expose the serious errors of the Charismatics and any who hold to a continuationist position. If they continue to have fellowship with and serve together with Charismatics, and say nothing about it, they are not showing love at all, but instead doing a great disservice to those whom they claim are brothers and sisters in Christ. If they believe that the Charismatics are being empowered and used by the devil, how can they continue to remain silent!

¹⁴⁰ Milne, *The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Cessation of Special Revelation*, 288–289.

¹⁴¹ Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed*, 98–99.

Old vs. New – Worship

Introduction

Another issue of New Calvinism it's the pervasive use of various forms of Contemporary Christian music (CCM) in worship. Many of their large conferences are characterized with by loud music, with seemingly Reformed lyrics. But in some churches, the music they employ goes beyond the pop, rock music styles that arose out of the Jesus movement of the 1970s and 80s. They have also introduced genres such as jazz, rap and hip-hop music and try to pass them off as acceptable styles of music to use in worship. Of these styles, so-called "Reformed Rap" is something that has become popular amongst New Calvinists, and therefore needs to be examined.

What is Reformed Rap?

Rap and hip-hop is a genre of music that was developed among the inner-city African American community in the 1970s.

It consists of a stylized rhythmic music that commonly accompanies rapping, a rhythmic and rhyming speech that is chanted. It developed as part of hip hop culture, a subculture defined by four key stylistic elements: MCing/rapping, DJing/scratching with turntables, break dancing, and graffiti writing. Other elements include sampling beats or bass lines from records (or synthesized beats and sounds), and rhythmic beatboxing. While often used to refer solely to rapping, "hip hop" more properly denotes the practice of the entire subculture. The term hip hop music is sometimes used synonymously with the term rap music, though rapping is not a required component of hip hop music; the genre may also incorporate other elements of hip hop culture, including DJing, turntablism, scratching, beatboxing, and instrumental tracks.¹⁴²

By their own admission, Christian rappers acknowledge that the roots of rap and hip-hop are sinful and come from a culture of moral depravity:

So let's be honest. Rap isn't exactly rooted in the rich soil of holiness. While it has deep connections to jazz, blues, slave spirituals, and African drumming—we didn't have time for all that in the last chapter—rap itself rose specifically from a culture of crime, drugs, violence, racism, self-promotion, sexual abuse of women, and more. And while the DJ parties had some good fruit (such as serving as a popular alternative to gang activity), the dancing was often sexually suggestive, to put it mildly. In its

¹⁴² "Hip hop music," *Wikipedia*, April 17, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hip_hop_music&oldid=836843603 (accessed April 17, 2018).

original form, rap generally expressed and encouraged selfish indulgence and social rebellion.¹⁴³

Then, sometime in the early 2000s, some rappers were born again and started performing and releasing albums of ‘Christian Rap’. They were using the old genre but inserting Christian lyrics into them. Coming in alongside the rise of New Calvinism, many of them rapped from a specifically Reformed perspective. There were groups such as The Cross Movement and ChrisCentric, and individuals such as Curtis Allen and Shai Linne. Some Reformed pastors started to take notice of this new music and started inviting them to their churches, and began to promote it for them as well.

And then one day almost out of nowhere, Reformed rap became cool to the white boys. Actually cool. And not just to the skinny teenage dudes slouching in the back pew. Big-name preachers and teachers started going public with their appreciation of Reformed rap, endorsing it as legitimate and valuable. Sound bites from some of their sermons started showing up in songs too. These preachers could see how rappers can bring together theology, poetry, music, and energy to help make doctrine come alive. They appreciated how a good rapper can take a difficult theological topic and rhythmically explain it over a thumping beat for four minutes. The music was on the rise, but more importantly, God was being glorified through rap—something that at one time had seemed unthinkable.¹⁴⁴

Its popularity has only risen more and more in recent years. It fills concert venues, and is the draw of many New Calvinism conferences. It is reported that “There’s basically no area of evangelical life today not touched by gospel hip-hop: major conferences, Forwards to books by leading authors, John Piper’s Twitter account. Christian rap is large, it’s Christ-driven, and it’s glorious”.¹⁴⁵ There seems to be little concern or disapproval within New Calvinism on the use of such music for worship. The general consensus seems to be that it is a wonderful means to glorify God, edify the church and reach out to a culture that otherwise would never hear the gospel, at least not in terms that they would understand. As Albert Mohler opines:

Rap music is not my music. I do not come from a culture in which rap music is the medium of communication and I do not have the ear for it that I have for other forms of music. But I do admire its virtuosity and the hold that it has on so many, for whom it is a first and dominant musical language. I want that language taken for the cause of the Gospel and I pray to see a generation of young Gospel-driven rappers take dominion of that music for the glory of God. I see that happening now, and I rejoice in it. I want to see them grow even more in influence, reaching people I cannot reach with music that will reach millions who desperately need the Gospel... The good, the beautiful, and the true are to be combined to the greatest extent possible in every Christian endeavor, rap included. I have no idea how to evaluate any given rap

¹⁴³ Curtis “Voice” Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?: Christians & The World’s Most Controversial Music* (Maryland: Cuniform Press, 2013), 37.

¹⁴⁴ Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 17.

¹⁴⁵ Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 6.

musical expression, but rappers know. I do know how to evaluate the words, and when the words are saturated with the Gospel and biblical truth that is a wonderful thing. Our rapping Gospel friends will encourage one another to the greatest artistic expression. I want to encourage them in the Gospel. Let Bach's maxim drive them all — to make (their) music the "handmaid of theology."¹⁴⁶

Arguments for Reformed Rap

Curtis "the Voice" Allen is a hip-hop artist who claims to employ Calvinist theology in his lyrics but raps in a hip-hop style. Prior to his salvation, he was a rising star in the hip-hop world, about to land a record contract when he was involved in some gang activity and arrested for his part in a gunfight. After being released from a 20 month prison sentence, he started attending Pentecostal church and was saved. When he moved to Covenant Life, a Sovereign Grace church pastored by Joshua Harris, he decided to stop rapping, because he "wanted to leave behind this powerful symbol of his past". However, it was his pastor that asked him to give hip-hop "another chance", encouraging him to perform as a Christian rap artist instead.¹⁴⁷ Soon after that, his career as a Christian rapper took off, and he was invited by John Piper in 2006 to perform a rap song at his church, Bethlehem Baptist Church for their Saturday night worship service.¹⁴⁸

In response to criticism that arose over this controversial form of Christian music, as well as to attempt to develop a biblical conviction on the validity of Christian rap, he wrote a book *Does God Listen to Rap?* – a questions which he devotes the gist of the book to argue for an answer in the affirmative.

He gives three main arguments to support his claim that God would accept and even be pleased with Christian rap:

Firstly, in answering the objection that rap is a sinful origin, Allen argues that all culture is sinful in origin, and one cannot condemn culture simply because of a sinful origin. According to him, all music is pagan in origin, but God was the one who made a multicultural world with its various styles of music, and therefore all styles are acceptable to God.

The fact that rap music made by Christians borrows from and resembles that made by non-Christians with respect to performance, sound, and delivery means nothing except that it conforms to certain genre expectations and therefore can resonate with

¹⁴⁶ Albert Mohler, "Thinking about Thinking about Rap — Unexpected Thoughts over Thanksgiving," December 2, 2013, <http://albertmohler.com/2013/12/01/thinking-about-thinking-about-rap-unexpected-thoughts-over-thanksgiving/> (accessed April 17, 2018).

¹⁴⁷ Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed*, 116. In light of this move by Joshua Harris, Peter Master comments that "New Calvinists do not hesitate to override the instinctual Christian conscience, counselling people to become friends of the world." Peter Masters, "New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness," *The Sword & Trowel*, 2009, <http://www.metropolitantabernacle.org/Christian-Article/New-Calvinism-Merger-of-Calvinism-and-Worldliness/Sword-and-Trowel-Magazine> (accessed March 7, 2018).

¹⁴⁸ Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 9.

rappers and listeners as legit rap. But these similarities have to do with craft, not content or intent.¹⁴⁹

Second, Allen contends that it is not so much about rap itself, as it is about the person. If God has saved a rapper, and called on him to glorify God, he should be able to glorify God through rap with words that are biblical, glorifying and edifying. He cites examples of how God didn't call others in seemingly sinful occupations to change, such as Zacchaeus the tax-collector, Cornelius the centurion and the Philippian jailer, and so rappers shouldn't either. They can glorify God because they are saved, not because of the job they hold.

The difference between a song that honors God and one that doesn't is not style but content. Music made by Christians can and should be influenced by faith, but exactly what that looks like and sounds like cannot be conveniently defined or compartmentalized. Again, I believe that the only style God cares about is the lifestyle behind the music (see 1 Corinthians 10:31).¹⁵⁰

Finally, he explains that God called us to engage culture to evangelise to them, and that is what rap is doing. He sees rap as a strong evangelistic tool that has proven itself in how it has been used to reach out to so many, especially those within the young African American community in America.

As we seek to reach the lost, we must begin speaking to them in a language they will understand. Just like Paul did. So if you want to reach a certain kind of people through music, it's pretty simple—you had better use music they like or they probably won't listen to you. On that basis, it is unrealistic to say that God-honoring music must not borrow from the culture.¹⁵¹

Where a typical CCM song might have 50–70 words, and a typical hymn has about 200, rap songs are often 300–500 words long. A well-written rap song can fit a lot of content into a short time. Many have said that listening to a good Christian rap song can be like hearing a mini-sermon. Since rap is essentially rhythmic talking, the similarities to preaching are obvious.¹⁵²

And so he concludes by answering the question posed in the title of his book, does God listen to rap?

Finally, it is definitely true that some rap doesn't glorify God, and this includes "Christian Rap" that fails to demonstrate an attitude of honor and thanksgiving to God for who he is and what he's done for us. But rap that dishonors God does not ruin all rap. God is redeeming rap. Many of us who make rap music, and a great many more who simply enjoy it, are doing our best to honor the Lord with our lives and doctrine. Christ is being proclaimed theologically, philosophically, and personally. And God is

¹⁴⁹ Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 89.

¹⁵⁰ Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 90.

¹⁵¹ Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 88–89.

¹⁵² Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 92.

being glorified as lives are changed by the power of his Spirit working through the gospel. So go ahead and make a quick mental review of what you have read in this book. Then ask yourself, Does God listen to rap? At this point, I only have one thing left to say. Why wouldn't he?¹⁵³

He presumes to speak for God, and know His mind, in concluding that he sees no reason why God would not be pleased with Christian rap. His view is reflective of many within New Calvinism, and has been the book that many who have doubts about it would turn to. With his conclusion, he would have cause many who may have otherwise exercised more caution and perhaps trusted their own instincts and avoided such music, and turned them to listen partake in such so-called worship.

True Reformed Worship

The Biblical View of Worship

As always, it is important to know what the God himself says concerning how we ought to worship Him. I thinking of how one ought to worship God, straightaway the warnings of the experiences of people like Cain (Genesis 4:1-5), and Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 8) come to mind. In both instances, they tried to come to God on their own terms. They thought that their offerings were acceptable to God, ignoring His clear precepts for them, and arrogantly assuming that God must be pleased with what they were giving Him. In both instances, they were sternly rebuked and justly punished by the Lord. It is therefore clear that worship is something that must be taken seriously, and not something that one can afford to be flippant about. We cannot think that we can just come before the perfect, holy, righteous God and do whatever we want, and think that He must be happy with what we do for Him.

This principle is seen more directly in John 4:23-24, where Jesus corrects the Samaritan woman's notion of worship, and explains what sort of worship God expects from true worshippers. The key phrase is "in spirit and in truth". These are two aspects of worship that complements each other, working hand in hand, and that every true worshipper must have. The preposition 'in' can be understood as according to, or by. The idea is that the worshipper must worship according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit that indwells him, and to be led also by the truth of God, found in His Word. The Spirit and the Word goes hand in hand, teaching and guiding the believer to know how God ought to be worshipped. The Spirit is the one who guides the believer into all truth, guiding him to understand the truth of God's Word. The believer is therefore not free to pick and choose what sort of styles he likes or dislikes. It should not be according to his cultural background and preference, or of whatever is fashionable at a current period. It also does not allow the worshipper to do things irreverently or casually. The Word of God reveals to us that we must come before Him with reverence and godly fear for God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28-29), and one who desires order not confusion and chaos (1 Cor 14:33).

¹⁵³ Allen, *Does God Listen to Rap?*, 98–99.

Furthermore, these verses also stress the fact that worship is to God the Father, and God does actively seek for faithful and true believers to worship Him the manner that He prescribes for us. The purpose of worship is not just for our own entertainment or enjoyment. It is not to bring in the crowds, or to make sure the young people stay in church. It is not even to educate or to evangelise. Its purpose is primarily for the object of bringing glory to God in exalting Him and proclaiming His majesty. God does care about the style of music, and not just the content of the lyrics. We must understand that music is not amoral, and it does have an effect on the individual. Music has the power to calm a soul and set him in the right mood of reverence and humility, and it also has the ability to rile one's emotions and lead him to sensuality and carnal thoughts.

Calvin's View of Worship

In 1539, shortly after Calvin's first expulsion from Geneva, a Catholic Bishop, James Sadolet wrote an open letter to the citizens of Geneva in a bid to sway them from their Protestant faith and exhorted them to return to Rome. In Calvin's reply to Sadolet contained, amongst other things, an articulation of what true worship of God ought to be like, as opposed to what Calvin saw to be the corrupt and perverse worship of Rome. Calvin certainly did not mince his words when he wrote:

[T]here is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God. The primary rudiments, by which we are wont to train to piety those whom we wish to gain as disciples to Christ, are these; viz., not to frame any new worship of God for themselves at random, and after their own pleasure, but to know that the only legitimate worship is that which he himself approved from the beginning. For we maintain, what the sacred oracle declared, that obedience is more excellent than any sacrifice (1 Sam. xv. 22.) In short, we train them, by every means, to be contented with the one rule of worship which they have received from his mouth, and bid adieu to all fictitious worship.¹⁵⁴

In Calvin's commentary on John 4:20-22, he made a similar warning

[N]othing is more wicked than to contrive various modes of worship without the authority of the Word of God... we ought not to attempt any thing in religion rashly or at random because unless there be knowledge, it is not God that we worship, but a phantom or idol. All good intentions, as they are called, are struck by this sentence, as by a thunderbolt; for we learn from it, that men can do nothing but err, when they are guided by their own opinion without the word or command of God.¹⁵⁵

It is clear that Calvin's concern was very much against those who would attempt to worship God according to their own will and not going according to the Word of God. In these comments, we see Calvin's position in what is known as the Regulative Principle of Worship

¹⁵⁴ Calvin, "Sadolet's Letter and Calvin's Reply."

¹⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans by. William Pringle, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 154–159.

– that is one must only worship God in the manner that He prescribes, and not according to the desire or will of man.

The Reformed View of Worship

The Regulative Principle of Worship was the consistent practice of other Reformers and of the Puritans and other Calvinists in history. This is clearly articulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

I. The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

II. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to Him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and, since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.¹⁵⁶

All through history, Reformed and Presbyterian worship has always been characterized by simply, orderly, solemn, reverential attitudes that seeks to place attention wholly upon God. It rejects any worldly elements that would distract the worshipper away from God and towards man. The object of every item of the worship is to elevate one's heart and direct it to focus on the worship of the sovereign, almighty, holy and majestic Lord, who alone is worthy of all praise.

Conclusion

Peter Master is rightly appalled, as he observes how the worship of New Calvinism is “uniting the doctrines of grace with the immoral drug-induced musical forms of worldly culture.” He observes how “in times of disobedience the Jews of old syncretised by going to the Temple or the synagogue on the sabbath, and to idol temples on weekdays, but the new Calvinism has found a way of uniting spiritually incompatible things at the same time, in the same meeting”.¹⁵⁷

This so-called Christian or Reformed Rap ought to have no place in any church that desires to worship the Lord faithfully. It is combining the sin of the world and trying to ‘christianize’ it so that it can be pleasing to the Lord. While the lyrics may have changed, it continues to have the association with and the appearance of evil. The style of music is also hardly conducive to guide one to the reverential fear of God. Even as a tool of education or evangelism, it does not serve its purpose, for it is using an ungodly tool in attempt to achieve a godly purpose.

¹⁵⁶ WCF XXI:1-2

¹⁵⁷ Masters, “New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness.”

Our heart's cry before the Lord ought to be as Isaiah in Isaiah 6:5, "woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts".

Old vs. New – Separation/Ecumenism

Introduction

As demonstrated in various examples in the previous sections, New Calvinism is certainly not a movement that would place an emphasis on Biblical separation. It is clearly a movement that has a neo-evangelical mindset and has ecumenical tendencies. That is something that they are actually proud of and celebrate. They are unashamed in how inclusive they are, in bringing together charismatics and non-charismatics, Presbyterians, Baptists and independent churches. They have diverse styles of worship, different views on issues such as baptism, eschatology, standards of holiness, and practice of separation itself. They describe all these as secondary issues, and should not be the grounds to keep them apart. For them, as long as they are Reformed, then they should be able to work together and not have any harsh word of criticism.

Proud Ecumenists

New Calvinism is a movement that celebrates their diversity. It is not just that they do not emphasise separation, or are reluctant to practice it. It is the very opposite. They actively promote and emphasise ecumenism. They see separation to be divisive, schismatic and something that is undesirable. Instead they seek for unity and relationship.

From its inception, New Calvinism has been a movement that has emphasized a biblical ecumenism. United on the gospel and on a few key implications of the gospel, the movement has sought to unite Christians in shared relationship, ministry and mission so that Presbyterians and Baptists gladly exchange pulpits united together on the gospel.¹⁵⁸

Although they do see some problems with such openness, nonetheless to them this is not an indicator that they are on the wrong track, or that they should re-examine their ideas of ecumenism. Instead it is but a challenge to overcome, and simply a learning journey for them to improve on.

From its earliest days, New Calvinism gladly drew together Presbyterians and Baptists. As time has progressed it has expanded to Anglican and Dutch Reformed denominations and then to a host of independent churches and associations. New Calvinism has also welcomed Charismatics and Cessationists who align together on the centrality of the gospel and the validity of Reformed theology. This ecumenism has been a source of learning and encouragement for New Calvinists, so that even the very nature of Calvinism has to be negotiated between those who insist a Calvinist must adhere to all five of the traditional five points of Calvinism and those who are content with four. It has been a source of learning and encouragement but has also

¹⁵⁸ Challies and Buice, “A Call for Discernment,” 117.

been a source of challenge as to why others are excluded or exactly where the lines are drawn.¹⁵⁹

Such attitudes are certainly reminiscent of the mindset of the neo-evangelicals of the 1940s and 50s. In fact, that is the very comparison drawn by Hansen as he surveyed the issue of unity and diversity within the New Calvinists. He sees how they also experience

struggles with evangelical diversity. But they want to reclaim and reform evangelicalism, as did the early post-war evangelical leaders, including Calvinist giants Carl Henry, Francis Schaeffer, and Harold John Ockenga. Though today's Calvinists remain outnumbered, their influence leavens the evangelical movement... The growth of the Reformed ranks, especially among youth, portends significant changes ahead.

Therefore the New Calvinists today perceive themselves to be the modern neo-evangelicals within the greater evangelical world, that they seek to remain and infiltrate amongst them, hoping to influence them with their Reformed theology, to 'reclaim and reform' them from within.

Unbiblically Unseparated

But such unrestrained relationships will only lead to further compromise and ungodly unions. Their willingness to have dialogue with false teachers and their unwillingness to rebuke or warn them, will cause them to fall into serious compromise and error of their own. In his book examining the New Calvinism, Jeremy Walker cites some such examples of unbiblical compromise:

In the last few years John Piper's national conferences have included... such speakers as Douglas Wilson and Rick Warren. These men are receiving what is in essence the Piper stamp of approval... I would suggest to you that, however attractive their personalities, evident their natural gifts, and impressive their profiles, such men as Douglas Wilson (in his guise as a prime exponent of the Federal Vision) and Rick Warren (who seems to be a sort of a religious chameleon) are moving past – if not already beyond – the pale of historic biblical Christianity, albeit in very different ways. To bring these men in and to give them one of the most visible platforms in this movement is an exceedingly dangerous thing... While the desire for Christian unity is a good thing in itself, here is that potentially and actually dangerous ecumenism in which some of these men are reaching beyond the bounds of what is safe and orthodox in terms of credible biblical Christianity.¹⁶⁰

He also cites further examples, such as events hosted by former TGC council member James MacDonald. In that program, he invited high profile evangelical leaders to discuss "matters

¹⁵⁹ Challies and Buice, "A Call for Discernment," 123–124.

¹⁶⁰ Jeremy Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered: A Personal and Pastoral Assessment* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2013), 86–87.

on which they would have different opinions”, but considered them as brothers in Christ. Amongst the men that were on this program, were individuals such as Perry Noble – a pastor who began his Easter Service one year with music from secular rock band AC/DC *Highway to Hell*. Apparently his purposes for doing so was to anger religious people. Another was Charismatic prosperity preacher T. D. Jakes. In both instances, MacDonald failed to critique their error, but spent more time discussing issues that they all affirm together. In their dialogue, there were

Avoiding most of the contentious issues and pressing none of the important ones, before Driscoll and MacDonald effectively welcome the heretic with open arms into the family of Christ, fawning over a man who has built a huge church and following and ignoring the fact that these have been built on a foundation of damnable error.¹⁶¹

But what was also equally disconcerting about this issue was the lack of critique coming from other New Calvinist leaders about these events. Although at the time of these events, both Driscoll and MacDonald were council member of the Gospel Coalition, there was no official statement of rebuke or correction about what they had done. Instead in time, the matter passed over and was forgotten. Here is Walkers assessment of the whole issue:

The problem is that what was required here was a thorough, substantial, explicit repudiation of error and those who proclaim it and – at the very least - a rebuke to and pursuit of repentance of restoration from those who were countenancing its proclamation. Instead, the silence was staggering. TGC... essentially gave their imprimatur to some of this by a failure properly to censure it, and in so doing risked (and quite possibly achieved) a staggering and dangerous level of confusion and obfuscation among the many with whom their words (or lack of them) carry much weight. The absence of further and appropriate comment on this from TGC remains a genuine concern.¹⁶²

There seems then to be this aversion for any conflict or then mentioning of any disagreement at all between the New Calvinists. Although there certainly are differences of opinion and practice over various issues, there is this reticent to air any grievances. They refuse to speak the truth in love, or to admonish a brother when necessary. This lack of mutual accountability will only prove disastrous in the long run.

Reformed View of Separation

Biblical Command to Separate

The Bible is clear in issuing numerous warnings in Scripture to call upon believers to be cautious and discerning about who to and who to not have any spiritual associations with. When believers and churches fail to exercise biblical separation, they are going in the way of men like Asa and Jehoshaphat, who had tried to cooperate with unbelievers, and were

¹⁶¹ Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 87–88.

¹⁶² Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 89–91.

strongly chastised for it. They were good kings, who had done much to reform their nations. But their problem was their propensity to cooperate with unbelievers, of Asa with the Syrians, and Jehoshaphat with the wicked King Ahab. The warning given to Jehoshaphat was clear: “Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.” (2 Chronicles 19:2b)

Likewise, Paul’s instructions in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 are very explicit. There is a very stark difference between believers and unbelievers. In welcoming heretics, sharing platforms with them, it is akin to bringing righteousness and unrighteousness together, or of light and darkness, Christ and Belial. Paul reminds us all that we are temples of the living God, and it is a place where God has said will be His dwelling place. It would be a great travesty to attempt to have spiritual union with those who are enemies of God and would openly deny or speak damnable heresies against Him. The command is clear – come out from among them and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.

The Bible also gives clear instructions to separate not only from believers, but from disobedient brethren as well. Passages such as Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. The commands here are clear, that distinctions are to be made, even between believers, whereby Christians are duty bound to single out disobedient brethren and avoid them. Although they are considered as brethren, yet through their teachings or behaviours, they cause divisions and commit offences contrary to the doctrines of Christ. This is done out of love, for the purpose of admonishing such brethren is so that they would realize their error and sin, repent, and return to the Lord.

Calvin’s Understanding of Separation

In the history of the Reformation, as well is throughout church history, the faithful have always known to separate from sin and apostasy. Reformation itself began with the Protestants separating from the apostate church of Rome. Calvin himself, in wrote numerous tracts and publications as polemics against the various errors that he saw in his day. He clearly saw the danger of false teachings, and spared no effort to ensure that truth would always prevail. In commenting on the above-mentioned passage of Romans 16:17-18, Calvin wrote, “Evil is done when the truth of God is mixed with new dogmas devised by men”.¹⁶³ He lamented on how even in his day, there were those who were reluctant to criticise or take action against heresy,

for it often happens when through our neglect or want of care, that such wicked men do great harm to the Church, before they are opposed; and they also creep in, with astonishing subtlety, for the purpose of doing mischief, except they be carefully watched.¹⁶⁴

He did acknowledge that unity is important, and ought to be highly sought. But it must never come at the expense of truth, causing one to compromise and accept false doctrines:

¹⁶³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans by. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005), 548–549.

¹⁶⁴ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 549.

It is indeed an impious and sacrilegious attempt to divide those who agree in the truth of Christ: but yet it is a shameful sophistry to defend, under the pretext of peace and unity, a union in lies and impious doctrines... Paul clearly shows, that he did not condemn all kinds of discords, but those which destroyed consent in the orthodox faith.¹⁶⁵

Calvin also notes that it is the duty of the pastors and the leaders of the church to be watchful and vigilant, so as to not allow the wicked into the company of the saints.

Because pastors are not always zealously on the watch, and are also sometimes more lenient than they should be, or are hindered from being able to exercise the severity they would like, the result is that even the openly wicked are not always removed from the company of the saints.¹⁶⁶

Reformed Understanding of Separation

As the Protestant church grew, quickly various factions and denominations developed, and the Reformers and their heirs did not always agree with one another. Both Presbyterian and Puritan history is one of discerning separation as well. For the Puritans who wrote the Westminster Standards, their fight was against the Church of England who continued to retain vestigial remains of Roman Catholic teachings and practices. In their stand for wanting to maintain a pure church that had authority only in the Scriptures, they were willing to sacrifice their safety and livelihoods, in order that the truth may be observed. The very background of the writing of these Standards, was in order that they may establish a definitive guide to make known what the Biblical parameters are within which the godly and faithful church must function. Anything outside of it would be regarded as an unfaithful church. In a sense, it was written in protest against the Church of England, and were attempting to correct various corruptions that they saw within that establishment.

In WCF chapter 20, responsibility is placed upon the church to take action against those who would abuse their liberty and be disobedient to the Word of God:

And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And for their publishing of such opinions or maintaining of such practices as are contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation, or to power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ has established in the church; they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 549.

¹⁶⁶ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1029.

¹⁶⁷ WCF 20.4

Therefore like Calvin, the Puritans saw a grave duty and responsibility that the church had in ensure that errant doctrines, practices and sinful lifestyles would not be allowed to continue unchecked, but were accountable before the Lord to take action against such disobedient brethren.

Indeed the whole chapter 30, of Church Censures, is another chapter that teaches the doctrine of Biblical Separation. Church discipline is essentially one part of the body of Christ calling out errant brethren, and taking action against them to ensure that their error is not propagated, and that the brethren in error will be led to realize the error of their ways.

Conclusion

For the New Calvinists, they must understand their responsibility to one another is not just to come together with a surface veneer of peace and unity. If they know of any brother within their midst who “overtaken in a fault”, then they who are spiritual and discerning, must then “restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). If they refuse to listen, then they ought to denounce their sinful teachings or practices, and withdraw themselves from any association with them. This is God’s directive on how purity can be maintained within the visible witness of Christ on Earth.

The Reformed witness in the past have always practiced separation from error and compromise, for this is what the Lord commands. If the New Calvinists continue in their ecumenical ways, what little witness they have in the present will quickly be eroded and all their efforts will be for naught.

As Walker observes, when there is a lack of discernment and separation, it can

lead to a doctrinal minimalism in the name of cooperation. One must ask where the emphasis lies: does it lie in the fact that some truth is primary or secondary, or does it lie in the fact that we are handling the truth? ... The principled pursuit of conglomeration... can lead to an erosion not just of distinctiveness but a downplaying of truth in the name of unity”¹⁶⁸

In like manner, in commenting on the dangers of New Calvinism’s ecumenical ways, Peter Master warns that “it conditions all who attend to relax on these controversial matters, and learn to accept every point of view. In other words, the ministry of warning is killed off, so that every error of the new scene may race ahead unchecked. These are tragic days for authentic spiritual faithfulness, worship and piety”.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 85.

¹⁶⁹ Masters, “New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness.”

Old vs New – Missions and Evangelism

Introduction

In this section, there are two features of New Calvinism in particular that we would like to look at. Firstly, it is their claim that New Calvinism “leans toward being culture-affirming rather than culture-denying, while holding fast to some culturally alien positions, for example, on same-sex practice and abortion”.¹⁷⁰ This is basically the idea of the contextualization of the gospel, whereby they would seek to utilize the culture of the target audience to make the message of the gospel is presented in terms that are familiar to them. Secondly, there is the claim that New Calvinism is “aggressively mission-driven, including missional impact on social evils, evangelistic impact in personal networks, and missionary impact on the unreached peoples of the world”.¹⁷¹ Often what they mean when they make such statements, is that New Calvinism is more mission minded compared to the Calvinists of the previous generations, and are doing far more to reach the lost. For example, Mark Driscoll’s boast is that “Old Calvinism was fundamental or liberal and separated from or syncretized with culture. New Calvinism is missional and seeks to create and redeem culture.”¹⁷²

Contextualized Churches

In theory, the notion of accommodating the method of evangelism to the target audience is not wrong. To an extent, we all contextualize when we communicate to someone who is not exactly like us. At the most basic level, we must preach the gospel in a language that is familiar and understandable to the target audience. When the first missionaries when to China, many failed because they failed to understand the local culture and tried to force their western means of evangelism upon the locals. Missionaries like Hudson Tayler and William Chamers Burns were met with better success because they took time to understand the locals, and made an effort to break the barriers between them and the Chinese by dressing more like them, and learning their language and aspects of their culture.

However, taken to an extreme, this notion of contextualization can have disastrous effects. There is a grave danger when one over emphasises the need to engage culture, one ends up being changed by the culture itself. This is evident in lax standards that the New Calvinists have with regards to the worship styles, their lack of separation from the world, the desire to keep up with the latest trends in media and fashion. This is the warning that comes from some within the movement itself:

The most dangerous invention – and the one that seems to have taken many reformed brethren by storm – has to do with presenting the church to the world not as the pillar and support of the truth, but as intellectual, cultural, and cool. In such cases, the scandal of the gospel is lost, freedom becomes licentiousness, and much time is wasted trying to convince the world that we are not as ignorant, unsophisticated and

¹⁷⁰ Piper, “The New Calvinism and the New Community.”

¹⁷¹ Piper, “The New Calvinism and the New Community.”

¹⁷² Driscoll, “Time Magazine Names New Calvinism 3rd Most Powerful Idea.”

unhip as it thinks we are. In the end, the world is not convinced, and we just look silly!¹⁷³

As similar warning is given by John MacArthur:

In all candor, some of the ideas YRRs [Young, Reformed and Restless] seem most obsessed with—starting with their standard methods for reaching the unchurched and “redeeming culture”—seem to be holdovers from the pragmatism that dominated their parents’ generation. If we profess theology that recognizes and honors the sovereignty, majesty, and holiness of God, our practice ought to be consistent with that.¹⁷⁴

Contextualized Gospel

Another danger of contextualization is when the message of the gospel is altered or presented in a certain way that departs from the traditional norm. One strong proponent for this notion of contextualization is Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, and co-founder of The Gospel Coalition. A brief perusal for his book *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* demonstrates his apologetic and evangelistic methods. He carefully examines various common objections that people would have about the existence and need for God, and then uses a mix of literature, philosophy, pop culture, and intellectual reasoning to show how belief in God is logical and necessary. In so doing, he seems to answer the skeptics, atheists and agnostics well on their own terms, arguing in a very intellectually thought-provoking manner. He shows a keen grasp of culture and the common doubts that people have. However, the arguments he answers them all remain in the intellectual realm, for he seldom appeals to Scripture. Only in the final short chapter of the book, does he speak of sin, Jesus and the need for salvation.

Williams explains the problems with Keller’s practice of contextualization:

He [Keller] says the Gospel must ‘be presented in connection with baseline cultural narratives – Jesus must be the answer to the questions the culture is asking. Don’t forget – every Gospel presentation presents Jesus as the answer to some set of human-cultural questions... every Gospel presentation has to be culturally incarnated, it must assume some over-riding cultural concern... Christianity must be presented as answers to the main questions and aspirations of our culture.’

In presenting the Gospel, says Keller, we must answer the question: What puts the world right? We must also explain how we can be part of putting the world right. Not only do these views reflect Tim Keller’s claim that ‘the primary purpose of salvation is – cultural renewal – to make this world a better place’, but they also show his practical sidelining of the reformed view he professes of man’s wilful, sinful alienation from God – the only sound basis for authentic evangelism.

¹⁷³ Buice, *The New Calvinism*, 60–61.

¹⁷⁴ John MacArthur, “Grow Up. Settle Down. Keep Reforming. Advice for the Young, Restless, Reformed,” *Grace to You*, July 20, 2011, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110720/> (accessed April 3, 2018).

Basically Keller seems to skirt the whole idea of sin as the main underlying problem of all culture, and the gospel's need to address the problem of sin, judgment and forgiveness. He tried to portray the gospel as an attractive solution to culture's needs. In so doing, he demonstrates a good understanding of the local culture he is in – he may be able to speak their language, establish a good rapport with them and win their trust. But this comes at the expense of the truth of the gospel, for he attempts to 'market' salvation in culture's terms, rather than what the Bible declares to be God's solution to man's greatest problem – sin.

Another review of Keller warns of the danger of taking the glory of the cross and instead exalting the glory of the evangelist. He observes how Keller's method

promotes a contextualization that takes the transcendent truth of the gospel and adapts it to the culture so that the culture can understand it and find it attractive. The pursuit of clarity with the gospel is necessary, but the idea that the way the gospel is packaged can make it attractive to the world is theologically aberrant. For Keller, the effectiveness of one's theological vision is based on how well a church leader adapts himself to culture. This type of contextualization empties the cross of its power (1 Cor. 1:17b) and gives the credit for fruitfulness to the power of man (1 Cor. 2:4-5). The Lord calls His servants to reject the attractive methodology of the world (1 Cor. 1:17a; 2:2) in order that the fruit might be based on divinely-given faith (1 Cor. 2:5).¹⁷⁵

Not only does this rob God of His glory and give credit to man, it also reveals places the responsibility of salvation upon man and not upon God. The onus is now on man to ensure that must first understand and integrate into a culture before the gospel can be preached. As Walker comments,

The underlying pragmatism together with this view of culture have a tendency to make evangelism drift toward becoming more like the world in order to win the world. Some have suggested that this is really a Calvinistic soteriology allied to an Arminian methodology.¹⁷⁶

Reformed View and Practice of Missions and Evangelism

Biblical View of Evangelism and Culture

In John 17:14-19, Jesus prayed for His disciples who would be remaining in the world, and would face the scorn and ridicule of the world because of the gospel that they would preach. Jesus anticipated how offensive the message of the cross would be, and knew that the world would hate His disciples because of it. Yet Jesus' concern for them was not that they may be less hated so that they would not suffer so much. He did not call them to accommodate to the culture that they would be going into, or rethink the means of delivering the Word so that it may be more readily accepted. His prayer for them was simply that they would be protected

¹⁷⁵ Jon Anderson, "Center Church: summary and contextualization," *The Cripple Gate*, April 23, 2014, <http://thecripplegate.com/center-church-summary-and-contextualization/> (accessed April 19, 2018).

¹⁷⁶ Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 72.

from sin and wickedness, from the temptations of Satan. He wanted to ensure that even though they would be in the world, that they would continue to not be of the world, just as Jesus remained apart from the stain and filth of this world. Therefore His prayer for them was for their sanctification.

With regards to the actual preaching of the gospel itself, Paul was very clear that it is always about the simple gospel – of Jesus Christ and him crucified. In 1 Corinthians 1:21, Paul boldly declared that it was by the ‘foolishness of preaching’ that men believe and are saved. It is not about the wise with all their clever arguments, it is not about contextualization or the accommodation to culture, but simply Christ crucified. Paul understood what each culture needed, that “the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Cor 1:22). But his response to them was not to scramble to perform miracles or arrange things to pander to their desires, or to dispute with the Greeks on a philosophical level, but simply to preach Christ crucified. That may have made him appear foolish in the eyes of the Greeks, and cause offence to the Jews (1 Cor 1:23). But it is not about Paul and his cleverness, but about “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”. Paul knew that anyone who will be called will respond to the message of Christ, in order that man may be humbled and God glorified. Therefore in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, he further elaborated that his method was also the simple preaching of Christ, and not “excellency of speech or of wisdom”, nor was it “with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”. At the end of the day it is the power of God that saves, and our duty is to present the simple message of the gospel in the best and most faithful way that we know how.

It should be clear that modern church marketers cannot look to the apostle Paul for approval of their methodology or claim him as the father of their philosophy.

Although he ministered to the vilest pagans throughout the Roman world, Paul never adapted the church to secular society’s tastes. He would not think of altering either the message or the nature of the church. Each of the churches he founded had its own unique personality and set of problems, but Paul’s teaching, his strategy, and above all his message remained the same throughout his ministry. His means of ministry was always preaching—the straightforward proclamation of biblical truth.¹⁷⁷

Calvin on contextualization

Central to Calvin’s theology was the notion of the sovereignty of God in salvation! God alone is the one who dictates His truth. His word is what must be preached and believed in. There is never a need to dumb down or ‘intellectualize’ gospel, or to change ourselves to accommodate to the sin of the sinner in order for the message to be transmitted more effectively. For Calvin, his view of the gospel was simple – that it must always be based on the truth of God found only in His word. There are no gimmicks, no special methodologies to follow, no contextualization of the message needed. For example, in his commentary on 1 Timothy 3:15, he wrote:

¹⁷⁷ John MacArthur, “‘Contextualization’ and the Corruption of the Church,” *Grace to You*, September 22, 2011, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110922/contextualization-and-the-corruption-of-the-church> (accessed April 19, 2018).

Paul does not wish that any society, in which the truth of God does not hold a lofty and conspicuous place, shall be acknowledged to be a Church... the mistake arises from this, that they do not consider, what was of the greatest importance, that the truth of God is maintained by the pure preaching of the gospel; and that the support of it does not depend on the faculties or understanding of men, but rests on what is far higher, that is, if it does not depart from the simple word of God.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, commenting on Romans 10:17: Calvin notes that it is the working of the sovereign, and not any ability of man that saves. Only when it pleases the Lord to work, can the preaching of man be an instrument of power. It is therefore not through the clever innovation of man, it is not through accommodation to culture, that the gospel can more effectively penetrate the soul:

This is a remarkable passage with regard to the efficacy of preaching; for he testifies, that by it faith is produced... of itself it is no avail; but that when it pleases the Lord to work, it becomes the instrument of his power. And indeed the voice can by no means penetrate into the soul; and mortal man would be too much exalted, were he said to have the power to regenerate us... It must be further noticed, that faith is grounded on nothing else but the truth of God; for Paul does not teach us that faith springs from any other kind of doctrine but he expressly restrict it to the word of God; and this restriction would have been improper if faith could rest on the decrees of men. Away then with all the devices of men when we speak of the certainty of faith.¹⁷⁹

With regards to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, a passage that is often appealed to as support for contextualization, Calvin is quick to point out the phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:21, as Paul himself makes a caveat that he is ever under the law to Christ. He pre-empts those who may, like those discussed above, take Paul's words out of context and see it as a license to be like the world in order to win the world. Calvin explains:

Hence in order that this might not be taken in a wrong sense, he had added, by way of correction, that he had always kept in view one law — that of subjection to Christ. By this too he hints that odium was excited against him groundlessly and unreasonably, as if he called men to an unbridled licentiousness, while he taught exemption from the bondage of the Mosaic law. Now he calls it expressly the law of Christ, in order to wipe away the groundless reproach, with which the false apostles branded the gospel, for he means, that in the doctrine of Christ nothing is omitted, that might serve to give us a perfect rule of upright living... Now his design was, that he might bring them to Christ — not that he might promote his own advantage, or retain their good will. To these things a third must be added — that it was only in things indifferent, that are otherwise in our choice, that he accommodated himself to the weak.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans by. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005), 91.

¹⁷⁹ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 401.

¹⁸⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans by. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2005).

It is clear therefore that Calvin was against the notion of any notion of sinful or unbiblical contextualization. His desire was always for the simple gospel to be preached, and to have holy lives to back the message of the gospel.

Calvin and Calvinists as a missionaries

At this juncture, it would also be good to make a mention of Calvin's missionary endeavours, to answer critics that would say Calvinism hinders missions and evangelism, or that Calvinists never care to evangelise because they assume that Christ would save the elect whether they go forth to witness or not. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Of all the Western church Reformers of the sixteenth century, none has been so consistently defamed, none so ruthlessly castigated in both his doctrine and his personality from his own time to the present. For scores of modern-day evangelicals, Calvin is the ultimate megalomaniac, a dark figure, a theological hall monitor, a figure fixated on a wrathful God whose life and doctrines stood firmly opposed to missions and evangelism.¹⁸¹

It has often been maintained that the sixteenth-century Reformers had a poorly developed missiology and that overseas missions to non-Christians was an area to which they gave little thought. Yes, this argument runs, the Reformers rediscovered the apostolic gospel, but they had no vision to spread it to the uttermost parts of the earth.¹⁸²

A common critique and unfair caricature of Calvinists, is that because of their view of predestination, election and the sovereignty of God, they tend to be lacking in their evangelistic efforts, and downplay the importance of fulfilling the Great Commission. However, a careful study of the life of Calvin himself will show that although he was primarily a teacher, writing and preaching, he was also one who most certainly saw the need of preaching the gospel and evangelizing not just within his immediate pastorate, but was also involved in missions and evangelism throughout Geneva, to neighbouring France, and to places as far as South America.

In terms of his teaching on evangelism, Calvin was a preacher of the gospel, and also had a focus on the idea of the universality of Christ's kingdom and that all Christians have this duty to extend the kingdom. Sprinkled throughout his writings, Calvin makes it clear that "the outward call of salvation should be extended to every person within earshot of the proclamation of the Bible".¹⁸³ A zeal for evangelism and missions is not contrary to his teachings on election and predestination, as many critics have accused him of, but rather flows as a logical outcome of man's understanding of the necessity of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Calvin rightly taught that it is man's human responsibility and duty to heed

¹⁸¹ Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin's Missional Vision and Legacy* (Illinois: Crossway, 2014), 16.

¹⁸² Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 18.

¹⁸³ Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 51.

God's command to go and preach the gospel, in order to glorify Him and express our gratitude to Him.

Far from being an ivory-tower academician, Calvin was also a devoted practitioner of evangelism. In his own church, the chief means whereby he was able to evangelize was through his preaching. In all his sermons, which were multiple times throughout the week, he would continually present Christ and call them to exercise faith and repentance. He would also edify and instruct the congregation, building them in with the faithful exposition of the Word of God. Beyond his own congregation, Calvin was also active throughout the city of Geneva, where he sought to reform the city in such a way that the people would all come under the headship of Christ. He scheduled sermons throughout the week, where the people had continual access to the gospel preached; he established the Geneva Academy to train men for the ministry; he appointed elders in each congregation to maintain church discipline and installed deacons to engage in works of charity.¹⁸⁴ Despite the hostilities and thread of persecution in neighboring France, Calvin was also active in promoting missions to his own countrymen. Many of the Christians fled from France and took refuge in Geneva, and studied theology at the Geneva Academy. Under Calvin's tutelage, they saw the need to return as Reformed evangelists and missionaries to their own people back in France. Many of them were heavily persecuted, and some killed, but their zeal amidst such adversity only further fueled the revival that resulted in France, and God used their efforts to convert thousands of French people.¹⁸⁵ But not all the men trained in Geneva were sent to France. There was also a noteworthy expedition to the Indians in Brazil. In response to a request from Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon, the leader of an expedition to Brazil, Calvin and the Genevan church sent two pastors, Guillaume Chartier and Pierre Richier, along with a number of Swiss Calvinists to go along on the voyage. Their purpose was to preach the gospel to the indigenous people and bring the knowledge of salvation to them. Although the mission did not result in much fruit, and the whole expedition was soon aborted, nonetheless it does serve as a good example of how Calvin's evangelistic emphasis would result in missionaries being sent to a part of the world as far as South America.¹⁸⁶

Many more examples can be cited of the missionary endeavours of Calvinists through the ages, such as of George Whitefield to the colonies, David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards to the American Indians, of William Carey to India, David Livingstone to Africa, the list goes on.

Reformed View of Evangelism

¹⁸⁴ Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 58–62.

¹⁸⁵ It is recorded that between 1555 and 1562, nearly a hundred ministers were sent from Geneva to France. In that period, the number of Reformed churches grew from 5 in 1555 to 2,000 in 1562, and total membership numbering up to 2 million – that is 10% of the population of France at that time. Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 68–70.

¹⁸⁶ Haykin and Robinson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 71–73.

Perhaps a simple way to illustrate the Reformed view of evangelism, is through the doctrine of effectual calling. Chapter 10 of the Westminster Confession of Faith explains this clearly and succinctly:

I. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit through His Word, that God calls one out of sin into salvation. It is purely by the grace of God alone, and not through the ability of man. God works through the gospel given through His Word, and not through any clever methods of man. This was the consistent conviction of Reformed believers through the ages, and that guided their evangelistic methods to focus squarely on the Word of God, and to earnestly pray and seek for the Holy Spirit to work in their midst to bring men to salvation.

Conclusion

It is clear that this practice of contextualisation is a new invention of man, and has little precedence in the history of the Reformed church. It is probably more a vestigial remnant of the seeker-sensitive church growth movement that New Calvinism is a heir of. Such modern methods of accommodating to culture, or changing the message of the gospel to suit the audience ought to be rejected. Indeed the old ways and the old truth are always the best.

There is a reason why the church should be so reluctant to modernize, refashion or revamp itself. It is because she is founded upon the immutable or unchanging truth of God, and it is her task to set this truth before the world as absolute truth that does not bend to the whims and desires of ever-changing fallen men and their ever-changing cultures.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Buice, *The New Calvinism*, 59–60.

Old vs. New - Piety/ Worldliness

Introduction

This final section is less a direct feature, but more the result of many of the features that we have already covered. A concern of the New Calvinists, and often voiced from many within the movement itself, is a growing worldliness and antinomian attitude that is evident, especially in the younger generation.

Instead it appears that many rebellious people cling to their Calvinism, but their gospel is not changing their souls. Where is the devotion to Christ, the love for fellow brethren, the commitment to the local church, and the desire for personal holiness? These characteristics are not true of New Calvinism alone, they are found in all branches of evangelicalism in our day. For New Calvinism however, the contradiction arises out of the big God approach to life that clashes with loose living among some of the immature people who make up the New Calvinism movement.¹⁸⁸

Anti-Legalistic Antinomianism

Perhaps this is due to how popular this movement is among young people. Or maybe it is due to the prevailing post-modern, anti-establishment, anti-authority culture in America today. But there seems to be within New Calvinism, this push against any form of standards of holiness. They are quick to denounce any labelling of something as being worldly or sinful, and are quick to throw the tag of ‘legalist’ on someone who would chose to abstain from certain activities or entertainments, or not want to dress in a certain way. These are the observation of two leaders who are from within or closely associated with New Calvinism:

Within New Calvinism, there are, I perceive, many who are leery of this idea of holiness. Perhaps it sounds too puritanical for our modern tastes. Some quickly begin labelling any teaching on holiness as legalistic... They emphasize the liberty of the Christian life apart from obedience to the Scripture. In some cases, this had led to an abuse of Christian liberties.¹⁸⁹

Judging from certain church websites and pastoral blogs, a sizeable core of young men in the YRR movement are perfectly happy to give the world the impression that cage fighting, beer-drinking, cigar-smoking, hard-partying, and other forms of bad-boy-behavior are the distinguishing marks of their religion. Meanwhile, many others who identify with the movement evidently think any talk of holiness—not to mention any concern for taste or propriety—is tantamount to the rankest sort of legalism.¹⁹⁰

Walker’s observation is such a push away from legalism is one that will as a corollary set them on a course towards antinomianism. He describes what he sees in New Calvinism as

¹⁸⁸ Buice, *The New Calvinism*, 14.

¹⁸⁹ Buice, *The New Calvinism*, 75.

¹⁹⁰ John MacArthur, “Grow Up: Advice for YRRs (Part 2),” *Grace to You*, July 25, 2011, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110725/> (accessed April 3, 2018).

incipient or practical antinomianism, whereby they may not actually teach it in as many words, but he sees a seed form of it beginning to take root, and is already evident in the lives of many within the movement. He warns:

A concern not to be or become legalists has driven some back toward antinomianism. I appreciate the concern, and the possibility that some are reacting against an unnecessary and unscriptural rigidity, but one wearies of hearing, in essence, the same mantra: 'I used to be a legalist, but I got better.' We are, it seems, all recovering Pharisees. I rarely hear of anyone boasting that they are a recovering tax collector. On the one hand, much of this criticism defines legalism wrongly (accurately, legalism is the assumption that a man can get right and/or stay right with God by means of his own efforts), or seems to presume that the antidote to legalism is a smidgen of antinomianism, which would fall close to the category of frying pans and fires.¹⁹¹

One area in which such behaviour is evident is in the penchant that they have for consuming alcohol. This seems to be a trend among the New Calvinists, whereby it is almost like a badge of honour to be seen drinking. As MacArthur observes,

For some who self-identify as "Young, Restless, and Reformed," it seems beer is a more popular topic for study and discussion than the doctrine of predestination. They devote whole websites to the celebration of brewed beverages. They earnestly assure one another "that most good theological discussion has historically been done in pubs and drinking places." They therefore love to meet for "open dialog on faith and culture" wherever beer is served—or better yet, right at the brewery. The connoisseurs among them serve their own brands and even offer lessons in how to make home brew.

It's clear that beer-loving passion is a prominent badge of identity for many in the YRR movement. Apparently beer is also an essential element in the missional strategy. Mixing booze with ministry is often touted as a necessary means of penetrating western youth culture, and conversely, abstinence is deemed a "sin" to be repented of.

This tendency to emblazon oneself with symbols of carnal indulgence as if they were valid badges of spiritual identity is one of the more troubling aspects of the YRR movement's trademark restlessness. It is wrong-headed, carnal, and immature to imagine that bad-boy behavior makes good missional strategy. The image of beer-drinking Bohemianism does nothing to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom.¹⁹²

All such behaviour is indeed a very alarming trend, to see how worldliness is not only creeping in to churches, but it is becoming something to boast about. On the other hand, the pursuit of holiness is looked down upon and derided as legalistic, pharisaic behaviour.

Reformed View of Holiness

¹⁹¹ Walker, *The New Calvinism Considered*, 79.

¹⁹² John MacArthur, "Beer, Bohemianism, and True Christian Liberty," *Grace to You*, August 9, 2011, <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110809/> (accessed April 3, 2018).

Biblical Understanding of Holiness

The Bible is replete with exhortations for the believer to cast away sin and to seek after a life of holiness and righteousness. This is the will of God for all His children, and is a responsibility that we must take seriously, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Passages like 1 John 2:15-17 and James 4:4 clearly warn of the dangers of associating with the things of the world, for they stand in direct contradistinction to the things of God. They are polar opposites that can never be reconciled. We either chose the path of the will of God and be a friend of God, or we love the things of the world and become an enemy of God. There is no middle ground.

The call to the believer is therefore one of holiness, patterned after the holiness of God. 1 Peter 1:13-16 calls us to be watchful, sober, obedient. We are not to seek after the former lusts of the life that we had before our salvation, but to now pursue a life of sanctification. God's holiness now becomes the benchmark which we will continually strive to seek after.

How can we know about the holiness of God? That is clearly set forth for us in His Word. As David describes the blessed man, he is one who does not go the way of wickedness, but delights in the law of God. He meditates upon it daily, and actively seeks to obey the truths found therein. To be antinomian is to basically deny the necessity of obeying the moral law of God as set forth in the 10 commandments, saying that as believers we are under grace and therefore no longer under the law. That is a grave error, the law must always be the delight of every believer to obey.

Calvin's View of Holiness

For Calvin, the pursuit of holiness, or 'piety' – the term that was commonly used in their time, was the very foundation of the Christian life, and central to all of his writings. There is no doubt that Calvin pursued after holiness, and hated worldliness.

"Piety" (pietas), not spirituality, is the Reformer's all-encompassing term for Christian faith and practice. Even this term has lost its value in modernity. We've learned to draw a line between doctrine and life, with "piety" (like "spirituality") falling on the "life" side of the ledger. The ancient church saw it differently: eusebia encompassed doctrine and life. It could be translated "piety" or "orthodoxy" without any confusion. Calvin assumed this overarching horizon. Doctrine, worship, and life are all of one piece. The doctrine is always practically oriented, and practice is always to be grounded in true doctrine. In fact, "justification by faith . . . is the sum of all piety." The root of piety is faith in the gospel. Love is the yardstick for all duties, and God's moral law in both Testaments stipulates the character of this love on the ground, comprehending "piety toward God" and "charity toward men." Calvin even defined his Institutes as "a sum of Christian piety."¹⁹³

Therefore the right understanding of God's Word, having the right doctrines, are all essential for one to live a holy and righteous life. That was why the Reformers and Puritans placed such great importance on doctrine and the intricacies of having right theology. When one's

¹⁹³ Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), Kindle Location 198-207.

doctrine is correct, the very naturally one's life will be lived right as well. For Calvin, this was of central importance, and that is why he even desired to write the *Institutes* in the first place – as an instruction towards piety.

Therefore very related, would be Calvin's understanding of what is known as the third use of the law. He is commonly attributed to be the one who systematically set out the uses of the law. The first is to show "God's righteousness, that is, the righteousness alone acceptable to God, it warns, informs, convicts, and lastly condemns, every man of his own unrighteousness"¹⁹⁴ This then shows the sin of man and reveals his need for Christ. Second, it is so that "by fear of punishment to restrain certain men who are untouched by any care for what is just and right unless compelled by hearing the dire threats in the law".¹⁹⁵ Thus it serves to restrain sin and maintain law and order in society. The third use, according to Calvin, is exclusively for believers:

The third and principal use... finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns... Here is the best instrument for them to learn more thoroughly each day the nature of the Lord's will to which they aspire, and to confirm them in the understanding of it. It is as if some servant, already prepared with all earnestness of heart to commend himself to his master, must search out and observe his master's ways more carefully in order to conform and accommodate himself to them... because we need not only teaching but also exhortation, the servant of God will also avail himself of this benefit of the law: by frequent meditation upon it to be aroused to obedience, be strengthened in it, and be drawn back from it slippery path of transgression.¹⁹⁶

Therefore even after we are saved, it is clear that we must continue to abide by the law, not because it contributes to our salvation in any way, or that we will be condemned by the law if we break it, but simply because the servant of the Lord delights in obedience to His master.

Reformed View of Holiness

This same desire for holiness continued through all of Reformed orthodoxy. Sanctification and holiness continued to be a constant theme in their writings, and was evident in their lives. In fact the very way that the term 'puritan' is used today is testament to the very puritanical values of the puritans. They valued holiness in all that they did, and sought to apply the standards of God's law in all of life and society. A true Calvinist therefore is one that actively pursues after holiness through the grace of God. As Philip Ryken rightly observed,

Absolute dependence on God, with a complete resignation to his will, does not diminish the need for active spiritual growth. On the contrary, the true Calvinist practices the pursuit of holiness... one way to see the vital connection between God's sovereign grace and our spiritual growth is to consider what each of the doctrines of grace has to say about holiness. The Five Points of Calvinism establish what is really only one point, namely that every aspect of salvation is the gracious work of the

¹⁹⁴ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:354.

¹⁹⁵ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:358.

¹⁹⁶ Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:360–361.

sovereign God. But another great truth unifies the doctrines of grace: each of them promotes personal holiness.¹⁹⁷

Ryken then goes on to show how the right humble understanding of each of the points of Calvinism would only drive one to see his need for holiness, and motivate one to seek after it in his life.

The importance of sanctification is also evident in the chapter bearing that name in the Westminster Confession of Faith:

I. They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

II. This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence arises a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

III. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

It is indeed such a shame that the New Calvinists today would turn their backs on such a great heritage, that they would repudiate the pursuit of holiness and instead choose to cling on to what they believe is their liberty – but is really the old bondage of sin that continues to bind them. To claim to be Calvinistic, but yet show such antinomianism is a contradiction.

[O]ne cannot be genuinely “Reformed” and deliberately worldly at the same time. The two things are inconsistent and incompatible. To embrace the world’s fashions and values—even under the guise of being “missional”—is to make oneself God’s enemy (James 4:4). Many supposed reformations have faltered on that rock.¹⁹⁹

Master’s points out the great inconsistency between what they claim to be, and the life that they portray. “New Calvinists constantly extol the Puritans, but they do not want to worship

¹⁹⁷ Philip Graham Ryken, *What is a True Calvinist?* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing Company, 2003), 21–22.

¹⁹⁸ WCF XIII.1-3

¹⁹⁹ MacArthur, “Grow Up. Settle Down. Keep Reforming. Advice for the Young, Restless, Reformed.”

or live as they did... You cannot have Puritan soteriology without Puritan sanctification”²⁰⁰ It is “a seriously distorted Calvinism falling far, far, short of an authentic life of obedience to a sovereign God. If this kind of Calvinism prospers, then genuine biblical piety will be under attack as never before... a fatally flawed version of Calvinism that will lead people to be increasingly wedded to the world, and to a self-seeking lifestyle.”²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Masters, “New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness.”

²⁰¹ Masters, “New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness.”

Conclusion

It has been shown that Old and New Calvinism are really not the same thing. New Calvinists may claim to hold to Reformed soteriology, and preach the doctrines of grace, but really the similarities stop there. Master's assessment of their whole movement is that "The new Calvinism is not a resurgence but an entirely novel formula which strips the doctrine of its historic practice, and unites it with the world"²⁰².

It is unfortunate that they would chose to take the name of Calvin to apply to their movement, imagining that they do continue in the line of the great Reformer, and so proudly brandish his heritage as their own. If Calvin had known that his name is tied to this movement, how would he react? In his day, Calvin had his fair share of errant Christians that he had to deal with. He saw the grave dangers of those who would call themselves brethren, but be errant in so many ways. In fact he once declared: "I consider the principal enemies of the Gospel to be, not the pontiff of Rome, nor heretics, nor seducers, nor tyrants, but bad Christians."²⁰³

If they were open and avowed enemies, who brought these troubles upon me, the thing might in some way be borne. But that those who shroud themselves under the name of brethren, and not only eat Christ's sacred bread, but also administer it to others, that those, in short, who loudly boast of being preachers of the gospel, should wage such nefarious war against me, how detestable is it?²⁰⁴

A New Calvinist leader asked a rather poignant question about the movement as a whole:

Would the Reformers identify us as their heirs or even their children if they were to make a careful survey of our lives and ministries? Would they be satisfied with the evidence that we are truly part of their lineage simply because we read their books, build monuments to them, attend conferences about them, and are 'Calvinistic' in our soteriology? Or would they scold us for having missed the main point altogether – that we are to diligently labor not only to study the Scripture but also to submit every aspect of our lives to its doctrine, wisdom, commands and precepts?²⁰⁵

Through our assessment in the past days, it seems that it is not the case. In many instances, they have not submitted aspects of their lives and practices to the clear teachings of the Word of God. In so doing, they have not only failed the Reformers and the Reformed Faith, but they have failed the Lord Himself.

On our part, this is a humbling lesson for us to check our own lives, and the teachings and practices of our churches as well. As much as they have erred in these points, we must also be

²⁰² Masters, "New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness."

²⁰³ John Calvin, *Letter to City Council of Geneva*, quoted in D. G. Hart, *Calvinism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), Kindle Location 483-484.

²⁰⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1:xlvi.

²⁰⁵ Paul Washer, "Ecclesiology - The Church, Her Ministers, and Sola Scriptura," in *The New Calvinism*, ed by. Josh Buice (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2017).

careful to measure everything that we do against the truth of God's Word, to see if we have also 'missed the point' in some area or other.

With regards to the New Calvinists, we must be discerning in our interaction with the material that they put forth, and the influence that they will wield in Reformed Christianity. We must learn from their errors, and seek to correct them if the opportunity arises. Yet we must do so in the spirit of love, admonishing them with humility and compassion.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

[Back to Article](#)[Click to Print](#)**TIME**

Thursday, Mar. 12, 2009

The New Calvinism

By David Van Biema

If you really want to follow the development of conservative Christianity, track its musical hits. In the early 1900s you might have heard "The Old Rugged Cross," a celebration of the atonement. By the 1980s you could have shared the Jesus-is-my-buddy intimacy of "Shine, Jesus, Shine." And today, more and more top songs feature a God who is very big, while we are...well, hark the David Crowder Band: "I am full of earth/ You are heaven's worth/ I am stained with dirt/ Prone to depravity."

Calvinism is back, and not just musically. John Calvin's 16th century reply to medieval Catholicism's buy-your-way-out-of-purgatory excesses is Evangelicalism's latest success story, complete with an utterly sovereign and micromanaging deity, sinful and puny humanity, and the combination's logical consequence, predestination: the belief that before time's dawn, God decided whom he would save (or not), unaffected by any subsequent human action or decision.

Calvinism, cousin to the Reformation's other pillar, Lutheranism, is a bit less dour than its critics claim: it offers a rock-steady deity who orchestrates absolutely everything, including illness (or home foreclosure!), by a logic we may not understand but don't have to second-guess. Our satisfaction — and our purpose — is fulfilled simply by "glorifying" him. In the 1700s, Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards invested Calvinism with a rapturous near mysticism. Yet it was soon overtaken in the U.S. by movements like Methodism that were more impressed with human will. Calvinist-descended liberal bodies like the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) discovered other emphases, while Evangelicalism's loss of appetite for rigid doctrine — and the triumph of that friendly, fuzzy Jesus — seemed to relegate hard-core Reformed preaching (Reformed operates as a loose synonym for Calvinist) to a few crotchety Southern churches.

No more. Neo-Calvinist ministers and authors don't operate quite on a Rick Warren scale. But, notes Ted Olsen, a managing editor at *Christianity Today*, "everyone knows where the energy and the passion are in the Evangelical world" — with the pioneering new-Calvinist John Piper of Minneapolis, Seattle's pugnacious Mark Driscoll and Albert Mohler, head of the Southern Seminary of the huge Southern Baptist Convention. The Calvinist-flavored ESV Study Bible sold out its first printing, and Reformed blogs like *Between Two Worlds* are among cyber-Christendom's hottest links.

Like the Calvinists, more moderate Evangelicals are exploring cures for the movement's doctrinal drift, but can't offer the same blanket assurance. "A lot of young people grew up in a culture of brokenness, divorce, drugs or sexual temptation," says Collin Hansen, author of *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's*

Journey with the New Calvinists. "They have plenty of friends: what they need is a God." Mohler says, "The moment someone begins to define God's [being or actions] biblically, that person is drawn to conclusions that are traditionally classified as Calvinist." Of course, that presumption of inevitability has drawn accusations of arrogance and divisiveness since Calvin's time. Indeed, some of today's enthusiasts imply that non-Calvinists may actually not be Christians. Skirmishes among the Southern Baptists (who have a competing non-Calvinist camp) and online "flame wars" bode badly.

Calvin's 500th birthday will be this July. It will be interesting to see whether Calvin's latest legacy will be classic Protestant backbiting or whether, during these hard times, more Christians searching for security will submit their wills to the austere demanding God of their country's infancy.

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MARCH 12, 2014

The New Calvinism and the New Community

The Doctrines of Grace and the Meaning of Race

Resource by [John Piper](#) Topic: [Calvinism](#)

Among the reasons why I am honored to give the “Gaffin Lecture on Theology, Culture, and Mission,” is the fact that Dr. Gaffin’s interaction with N. T. Wright at the 2005 Auburn Avenue Pastors Conference, and his 2006 book, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, came at a crucial moment of my own wrestling with the newer views of justification and the New Perspective, and with N. T. Wright in particular. Not many books are worthy of a slow and meticulous reading. But this one, *By Faith, Not By Sight*, by Dr. Gaffin is. And what he says there will serve as a launching pad into my thoughts about the “[New Calvinism](#) and the New Community: The Doctrines of Grace and the Meaning of Race.”

But before that, we have some explaining and defining to do. First, I will try to explain why I chose this topic for the Gaffin lecture. Five reasons:

1. First, the lecture is called “on Theology, Culture, and Mission.” In my title, the Doctrines of Grace (or the five points, or soteriological Calvinism) correspond to theology. The meaning of race corresponds to culture. And the call to pursue a new ethnically diverse community corresponds to mission.
2. Second, the Doctrines of Grace are biblical and true and beautiful; the sovereignty of God is glorious beyond words; and the gracious, governing hand of God in all the details of our lives is precious and sweet. And since I love to talk about what is biblical and true and beautiful and glorious and precious and sweet, this is my theme.
3. Racial and ethnic diversity and harmony are not overly addressed in our churches and are central to the aim of the blood work of Christ in ransoming a people for God and a bride for himself.
4. I am part of the New Calvinism and feel a sense of fatherly responsibility to continually speak into it dimensions of biblical truth that I think it needs to hear.
5. As part of the New Calvinism I have a debt to pay to Westminster Seminary and the lineage of faithfulness you represent in the Reformed tradition. There would be no New Calvinism without you.

Defining “New Calvinism”

That’s the explanation. Now for definitions. What am I referring to when I talk about “The New Calvinism?” In 2008 Collin Hansen published *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists*. I’m not aware of the use of the term, “New Calvinists” before this book. (And the credit—or blame—goes to the Crossway team, not Collin, since he never uses the term in his book. It’s only in the title.) Time Magazine picked it up in 2009. The cover story on March 12, 2009, was titled “Ten Ideas Changing the World Right Now,” of which number three was “The New Calvinism.”

What is it? The best way I can think of to define it is to give twelve features of the movement as I see it. I do not mean for these features of the new to be dividing lines between the new and the old. I don’t think there are such lines. I don’t think there is a clear distinction between the new and the old except perhaps in regard to the use of media and technology that didn’t exist 20 years ago. How can there be distinctives unique to the New Calvinism when the Old is as diverse as

St. Augustine and Adoniram Judson, Francis Turretin and John Bunyan, John Calvin and Charles Spurgeon, John Owen and George Whitefield, John Knox and J. I. Packer, Cotton Mather and R. C. Sproul, Abraham Kuyper and William Carey, Lemuel Hanes and Robert Dabney, Theodore Beza and James Boice Isaac Backus and Martyn Lloyd-Jones?

If there is such diversity in the Old, can we find dividing lines between the Old and the New? I don’t think so. And why would I include Packer, Sproul, and Boice among the old and not the new? How can you draw a line between the Philadelphia Conferences on Reformed Theology, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, and The Gospel Coalition? How can you draw a hard line between Banner of Truth Publishers and Crossway Books? Or between the late Elder D. J. Ward and Thabiti Anyabwile?

The old is too diverse, and the connections between the old and the new are too organic, to claim things for the new that weren’t there in some aspects of the old. And the new is too diverse to claim any uniform downgrade or upgrade over the old. History is too complex for broad brush commendations of the one over the other, or condemnations of the one under the other. On any given issue, you could find periods and persons and movements among the old that would outshine the new. There is no claim in my assessment that the new is better.

Twelve Features of New Calvinism

So with that in view here are the features—I say *features* not distinctives—that I see in this movement called The New Calvinism.

1. The New Calvinism, in its allegiance to the inerrancy of the Bible, embraces the biblical truths behind the Five Points (TULIP), while having, at the same time, a disinclination to use the acronym and other systematic packaging, along with a sometimes qualified allegiance to “limited atonement.” The focus is on Calvinistic soteriology, but not to the exclusion of appreciating the broader scope of Calvin’s vision.
2. The New Calvinism embraces the sovereignty of God both in salvation and in all the affairs of life and history, including evil and suffering.
3. The New Calvinism has a strong complementarian flavor with an emphasis on the flourishing of men and women in relationships where men embrace the call to robust, humble, Christ-like, servant leadership.

4. The New Calvinism leans toward being culture-affirming rather than culture-denying, while holding fast to some culturally alien positions, for example, on same-sex practice and abortion.
5. The New Calvinism embraces the essential place of the local church, is led mainly by pastors, has vibrant church planting bent, produces widely sung worship music, and exalts the preached word as central to the work of God locally and globally.
6. The New Calvinism is aggressively mission-driven, including missional impact on social evils, evangelistic impact in personal networks, and missionary impact on the unreached peoples of the world.
7. The New Calvinism is interdenominational, with a strong (some would say oxymoronic) Baptist element.
8. The New Calvinism includes charismatics and non-charismatics.
9. The New Calvinism puts a priority on true piety in the Puritan vein, with an emphasis on the essential role of the affections in Christian living, while also esteeming the life of the mind and embracing the value of serious scholarship. Jonathan Edwards would be invoked as a model of this combination more often than John Calvin — whether that's fair to Calvin or not.
10. The New Calvinism is vibrantly engaged in the publishing of books, and, even more remarkably, in the world of the internet, with hundreds of energetic bloggers, and social media activists, with Twitter as the increasingly default way of signaling things (old and new) that are worthy of being noticed and read.
11. The New Calvinism is international in scope, multi-ethnic in expression, and culturally diverse. There is no single geographic, racial, cultural, or governing center. There are no officers, no organization, nor even a loose affiliation that would encompass the whole. I would dare say there are outcroppings of this movement that none of us in this room has even heard of.
12. The New Calvinism is robustly Gospel-centered, or cross-centered, with dozens of books in recent years coming at the gospel from every angle and applying it to all of life, with a commitment to seeing the historic doctrine of justification bear the fruit of sanctification personally and communally.

A New and Diverse Reality

I put 11 and 12 at the end so that we could make the transition now to the substance of the lecture. One of the most astonishing things that I have seen in my life is the gradual emergence of the multi-ethnic and culturally diverse reality of the New Calvinism. By multi-ethnic I mean the fact that the New Calvinism has sprung up with its own natural expressions among African Americans, Latinos, and Asians.

African Americans like Thabiti Anybwire, Voddie Baucham, Anthony Bradley, Michael Campbell, Anthony Carter, Leonce Crump, Carl Ellis, Ken Jones, Eric Mason, Trillia Newbell, Eric Redmond. Not to mention African Blacks like Conrad Mbewe or British Blacks like Tope Koleoso. Hispanics like D. A. Horton, Carlos Montoya, Sugel Michelén, Miguel Nuñez, and Juan Sanchez. Asians like Francis Chan, Steve Chong, Richard Chin, Steven Chin, Jeff Louie, Stephen Um.

And hundreds more names that could be in those lists.

And by “culturally diverse” I mean, for example, diverse expressions in music from Stuart Townend and Keith Getty on one side to Christian Hip hop on the other. Thirty years ago did anyone see Reformed Rap as even a remote possibility, with the likes of Lecrae, Shai Linne, Trip Lee, Derek Minor, Propaganda, and Tedashii? Did anyone foresee major urban ministry conferences where Big God Theology, sung and preached, would draw thousands?

Nobody on earth has managed this Reformed resurgence with all its diversity. Nobody has planned it, and nobody can or should harness it. This is a work of God. It may be short-lived, or it may be deep and wide and long. God will decide. I make no triumphalistic predictions. We don’t control it. But we can rejoice over it, and we can speak the word of God into it, with thankfulness for all that is healthy, and prayer for all that is not.

The Role of Justification

At the end of description 12 above I said that in The New Calvinism there is “a commitment to seeing justification by faith bear the fruit of sanctification personally and communally.” This pursuit of the new community through the gospel of justification is the link with Richard Gaffin’s work on justification in relationship to the New Perspective.

Representing the New Perspective, N.T. Wright argues, in *What Saint Paul Really Said*, that the Reformation emphasis has been mistaken and that,

“Justification” in the first century was not about how someone might establish a relationship with God. It was about God’s eschatological definition . . . of who was, in fact, a member of his people. . . In standard Christian theological language, it wasn’t so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation as about the church. (119)

In this way the New Perspective seeks to seize the high ground on the relationship between justification and the new community — the church. To this Dr. Gaffin presents his counter evidence in *By Faith, Not By Sight* and responds:

I remain unpersuaded that the Reformation has gotten it wrong and that for Paul justification is at least primarily, if not entirely, about ecclesiology rather than soteriology, about whom you may eat with and are to have fellowship as a Christian rather than how you became a Christian.

For Paul, justification undoubtedly has inalienable ecclesiological implications and these are a prominent concern especially in Galatians. These implications must not be denied, obscured, or downplayed through an unduly individualistic soteriological mindset. No doubt too they have not been appreciated heretofore as they should. But justification in Paul is essentially, primarily soteriological. It is a “transfer” term describing what takes place in an individual’s transition from wrath to grace. (44–45)

I totally agree and I give thanks for the defense and explanation of this standpoint in Dr. Gaffin’s book — namely, that the historic Reformed view of justification by grace alone, through faith alone on the basis of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone, as taught with final authority in the Scriptures alone, is true, and does indeed have massive implications for membership in the new community that the Messiah, Jesus, is gathering.

As Dr. Gaffin says, the Reformation understanding of justification “has inalienable ecclesiological implications.” That is, while justification proper — the divine act of justification itself — is not about

whom you have fellowship with, nevertheless its implications do define whom you have fellowship with. And this, Dr. Gaffin says, “must not be denied, obscured, or downplayed.”

The most common place to see this is Galatians 2 in Peter’s failure to keep eating with Gentiles. It’s as if he were saying to them: to be true Christians justification by faith is not enough. You must also observe certain food laws. So a failure to grasp the implications of justifications resulted in a de facto racism that Paul rebuked as a contradiction of the gospel.

But an even plainer connection between justification and the multi-ethnic nature of the new community is found in [Romans 3:28-30](#),

We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

The oneness of God yields a singular way of justifying the ungodly: namely, by faith alone, without any dependence on circumcision or uncircumcision. In other words, justification by faith means that no ceremonial or ethnic or moral distinctives of one race or ethnicity or religion over another is of any advantage whatsoever in being declared righteous before God. Which means (to use Dr. Gaffin’s phrase) that one “inalienable ecclesiological implication” of justification is that the new community — the true Israel — is in God’s saving design, necessarily interracial and multi-ethnic.

Calvinism’s Inalienable Implications

The New Calvinism has been vigilant in holding fast to the historic, Reformed understanding of justification over against the New Perspective. And my point here is that this allegiance, along side the serious engagement with racial harmony and ethnic diversity, is not an anomaly. The deepening discovery of Reformed truth has not obstructed the path of racial and ethnic harmony in the new community; it has empowered it. Wherever you find a failure to take seriously the multi-ethnic nature of Christ’s new community, what you find is not a people hindered by their Reformed theology, but blind to its inalienable, biblical implications.

And justification by faith is only one aspect of that theology which today is empowering the vision of visible racial harmony in Christ. There are others. I will mention only two. The Doctrines of Grace and the Glory of God.

In spite of all the disinclination to summarize the soteriological side of Reformed theology with the acronym TULIP, these five doctrines, the Doctrines of Grace, are true and glorious and explosively relevant in the pursuit of racial and ethnic harmony and diversity. I don’t have time to show this for all five. Let’s just take the first two.

Total Depravity

The most crucial meaning of “total” in that phrase is that we are totally unable to save ourselves from dead, and unresponsive spiritual condition in rebellion against God. “The mind of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” ([Romans 8:7](#)). And we are in this together — every race, every ethnicity — united in helpless depravity.

The ethnic diversity of hell is a crucial doctrine. [Romans 2:9](#) puts it like this: “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek.” God is no respecter of persons in salvation or in damnation. The human race — and every ethnic group in it — are united

in this great reality: we are all depraved and condemned. We are all lost in the woods together, sinking on the same boat, dying of the same disease.

If we saw this more clearly, two things would happen. We would be humbled and frightened and made desperate, like a little child, to find a Savior. I have never seen a white-hooded Klansman or a Farrakhan follower who was brokenhearted for his sin, humble, and desperate for a Savior. The other thing that would happen, if we saw how united we are in our depravity, is that the sins of others would look like the outworkings of our own hearts, and we would be slow to condemn and quick to show mercy.

The doctrine of total depravity has a huge role to play in humbling all ethnic groups and giving us a desperate equality in condemnation.

Unconditional Election

After Paul's sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, Luke says: "When the Gentiles heard this they were glad and glorified the word of God. And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" ([Acts 13:48](#)). People believe because they are ordained to eternal life, not vice versa. The election to salvation precedes the condition of salvation. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" ([Romans 9:15](#)).

This means that God does not choose his people on the basis of skin color or any other racial or ethnic distinctive. No ethnic group can say they are chosen because of God's preference for their physical or psychological or spiritual or intellectual qualities. And no ethnic group can say that they are not chosen because of the have or don't have, what they are or are not. God's choice is unconditional. It is not based on anything in us. He is absolutely free and unconstrained. This is his glory, his name. And acting this way to uphold his name and his glory is his righteousness.

Therefore unconditional election severs the deepest root of all racism and all ethnocentrism. If I am among God's elect, it is owing entirely to God's free grace, not my distinctives. Therefore there is no ground in God's election for pride. And there is no ground in God's election for despair. Nothing in me caused him to choose me. And nothing in you could have stopped him from choosing you. When it comes to election, we are on the absolutely level ground of unconditional mercy: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" ([Romans 9:15](#)).

From these two examples, I say again: the emergence of ethnic diversity in the New Calvinism, and the seriousness with which this issue is pursued, is not a glitch in the outworkings of the Doctrines of Grace. It is rather the outworking of their inalienable biblical implication.

The Glory of God

Which leads finally to the great unifying, overarching, all-explaining focus of Reformed theology, the glory of God. Geerhardus Vos asked the question in 1891, What is it about Reformed theology that enables that tradition to grasp the fullness of Scripture unlike any other branch of Christendom? He answered, "Because Reformed theology took hold of the Scriptures in their deepest root idea. . . . This root idea which served as the key to unlock the rich treasures of the Scriptures was the preeminence of God's glory in the consideration of all that has been created" (*Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 241–242).

If anything marks the New Calvinism it is the prevalence of Big God Theology. It is the reversal, at least in part, of David Wells' lament. "It is this God," he says, "majestic and holy in his being, this God

whose love knows no bounds because his holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world” (*No Place for Truth*, 300). The New Calvinism is one expression of the reversal of this lament.

When the New Calvinism poses the question: Why did God in creation and providence ordain that there be such a dazzling diversity among the peoples of the world, it answers: because the glory of God in Christ will shine more brightly when Christ saves and assembles a unified worshipping people from so much diversity.

Psalm 96 — “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised.” There is a greatness of praise that accords with the greatness of God’s glory. And the greatness of this praise will not be reached until his glory is declared among all the peoples of the world, because it is precisely the vast diversity of the peoples, all recognizing the glory and all reflecting the glory, and all resounding in praise to the glory that makes the praise suitable for the greatness of the glory of God.

Or, to say it another way, when Paul says in Romans 15:11, “Praise the Lord all you nations, and let all the peoples extol him,” he is saying that there is something about God that is so universally praiseworthy, and so profoundly beautiful, and so comprehensively worthy, and so deeply satisfying, that God will find passionate admirers in every diverse people group in the world. The true greatness of his glory will be manifest in the breadth of the diversity of those who perceive and cherish his beauty.

Here is a king glorious like no other king. Other kings conquer peoples, and subdue them, and put them in subjection by force, lest hatred for the king break out in open rebellion. But God is a king, so glorious and so beautiful, that he will have a willing, eager, admiring, loving, happy people from the entire, vast ethnic diversity of the all peoples of the world. The greatness of his glory — the many-faceted brilliance of his splendor — will be reflected not in the monochrome of a few million local admirers, but the polychrome of ten thousand cultures who find him to be their all in all.

A Prayer for the Movement

So the remarkable diversity of the New Calvinism, racially, ethnically, culturally is not a theological anomaly. It is a beautiful — and to be sure, imperfect — outworking of the inalienable implications of the greatest and most central doctrines of the Reformed faith — justification, the five points, the glory of God — so that, in the end, for this movement — whether short-lived or long—the meaning of race and of all the ethnicities of world — the reason they exist — is the radiance of the glory of God in the gladness of a ransomed church from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 5:9).

May God grant that these old truths would ever bear such new and beautiful fruit in all the world.
Amen.

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The Revised Standard Version of the Bible, first published on 30 September 1952, has been a theological, spiritual and translational battleground for fifty years. During those years many people from liberal, neo-orthodox and even conservative backgrounds have used it and in many instances endorsed it. Some from the evangelical camp have even classified themselves as “closet RSV people”.¹ This writer has met a number of such in both the United Kingdom and the USA. It is people like these who have formed the movement to produce a conservative revision of the RSV. The English Standard Version is the result. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the ESV is a light revision of the RSV and that, because of the textual basis and translational errors carried over from the RSV, it is not a trustworthy translation of the Bible.

Michael Marlowe gives insights into the origins of the ESV.

This is an evangelical revision of the Revised Standard Version that corrects the non-Christian interpretations of the RSV in the Old Testament and improves the accuracy throughout with more literal renderings. It also updates the language somewhat. The makers of this version undertook the work with the idea that there was a need for an evangelical version that was more literal than the New International Version but more idiomatic than the New American Standard Bible. The Revised Standard Version seemed close enough to this middle ground that it might be suitably revised in a short period of time.²

WORLD Magazine from June 5, 1999, in discussing some of the new translations in English, provides some detail of the circumstances under which the ESV was conceived.

The second translation hoping to pick up some of the Bible share lost by the NIV is the English Standard Version (ESV), announced in February by Crossway Books. The version had its roots in discussions that took place before the May 1997 meeting called by James Dobson at Focus on the Family headquarters to resolve the inclusive NIV issue.

The night prior to the meeting, critics of regendered language gathered in a Colorado Springs hotel room to discuss the next day’s strategy. During the course of the evening it became clear their concerns with the NIV extended beyond gender issues. The group discussed the merits of the Revised Standard Version, first published in 1952 by the National Council of Churches and recently replaced by the New Revised Standard Version, a regendered update.

Some months later, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School professor Wayne Grudem and Crossway President Lane Dennis entered into negotiations with the National Council of Churches to use the 1971 revision of the Revised Standard Version as the basis for a new translation. An agreement was reached in September 1998 allowing translators freedom to modify the original text of the RSV as necessary to rid it of de-Christianising translation choices.³

The ESV has been widely endorsed by numerous conservative theologians, pastors and denominations. The ESV Classic Reference Bible won the Evangelical Christian Publisher

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Association's Gold Medallion Award. It has been thought of as the formal equivalence answer to the New International Version. The Society has received numerous questions from people in churches which are planning to switch to the ESV from the NIV, AV, NKJV and other versions. They want to know if this new version is as good as the advertising says it is. Most of these pastors and church leaders would not give the RSV a chance to become their church Bible and yet are considering a change to the ESV.

The English Standard Version's name has caused some people not to understand that it is a revision of the RSV. It is clearly stated in the ESV itself that the ESV "is adapted from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA".⁴ It boasts that "words and phrases themselves grow out of the Tyndale-King James legacy, and most recently out of the RSV" but goes on to state that it is "the 1971 RSV text providing the starting point for our work".⁵ However, the name change from something identifying it as a close revision of the RSV does not seem to have come across to the average reader. Of course, it could not be called the New Revised Standard Version, since that name was already taken by another revision of the RSV. Thus a new name, the English Standard Version, was chosen.

The great similarity between the two versions can clearly be seen in the following verses. The ESV text is quoted in full, with the RSV readings where they differ given in squared brackets []. In some passages, there are no differences between the two.

Genesis 1:1-2

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over [upon] the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering [moving] over the face of the waters.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.²He was in the beginning with God.³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men.⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Romans 3:21-26

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it –²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³for [since] all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴and [RSV omits and][they] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that [which] is in Christ Jesus,²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation [an expiation] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

1 John 1:5-10

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice [live according to] the truth.⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us

from all sin. ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to [and will] forgive us [*omit* us] our sins and to [*omit* to] cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Psalm 51:1-4

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your [thy] steadfast love;
according to your [thy] abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- 3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4 Against you [thee], you [thee] only, have
I sinned
and done what [that which] is evil in
your [thy] sight,
so that you [thou] may be [art] justified in
your [thy] words [sentence]
and blameless in your [thy] judgment.

Thus, the reader can see how light a revision the ESV truly is.

With this in mind, we note the extravagant claim made by Dr. J. I. Packer, General Editor of the ESV:

We are standing on the shoulders of all who went before us. We are drawing on commentaries, which roll off the press in great numbers these days. We are drawing on the increased knowledge of the culture of the ancient world, which modern study has given us. We are drawing on the fact that computers now enable us to search the English Bible, the whole of the Hebrew heritage, the whole of the Greek heritage that has come down to us. It makes it a great deal easier for us to handle particular words and make decisions about how best to translate them. ***And in all these ways I think the ESV is going to go beyond its predecessors and establish itself as, in effect, the new King James for the 21st century.***⁶ [emphasis added]

PRINCIPLES OF TRANSLATION

The tendency in translation over the past few decades has been toward dynamic equivalence. As seen in the New International Version, the translators seek to find the thoughts behind the text rather than being concerned with the words themselves. However, with the publication of the ESV we find a refreshing move back toward more formal translation.

The ESV is an ‘**essentially literal**’ translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on ‘word-for-word’ correspondence, at the same

time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages. Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original.⁷

This work was undertaken by a large group of skilled men and women.

The ESV publishing team includes more than 100 people. The fourteen-member Translation Oversight Committee has benefited from the work of more than fifty biblical experts serving as Translation Review Scholars and from the comments of more than fifty members of the Advisory Council, all of which has been carried out under the auspices of the Good News-Crossway Board of Directors. This 100-member team, which is international and represents many denominations, shares a commitment to historic evangelical orthodoxy, and to the authority and sufficiency of the inerrant Scriptures.⁸

The members of the Translation Oversight Committee were:

Dr. J. I. Packer, ESV General Editor

Board of Governors and Professor of Theology, Regent College (Vancouver, BC)

Dr. Clifford John Collins, OT Chairman

Associate Professor of Old Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary

Dr. Lane T. Dennis, Publishing Chairman

President, Good News Publishers-Crossway Books

Dr. Wayne A. Grudem

Professor and Chairman, Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Dr. Paul R. House, OT Associate Chairman

Professor of Old Testament, Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry

Dr. R. Kent Hughes

Senior Pastor, College Church in Wheaton

Dr. Robert H. Mounce, NT Associate Chairman

President Emeritus, Whitworth College

Dr. William D. Mounce, NT Chairman

Professor of New Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Dr. Leland Ryken, Literary Chairman

Professor of English, Wheaton College

Dr. Vern Sheridan Poythress

Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Westminster Theological Seminary

Dr. Gordon Wenham, OT Associate Chairman

Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, The College of St. Paul and St. Mary (Cheltenham, UK)

Dr. Bruce Winter
Warden, Tyndale House (Cambridge, England)

Adjunct Members:

the Rev. David Jones
ESV Associate Editor, Good News Publishers-Crossway Books

the Rev. E. Marvin Padgett
Vice President, Editorial, Good News Publishers-Crossway Books⁹

CHANGES MADE TO THE RSV TEXT

One of the aims of the ESV revisers was to eliminate and correct the major translation problems with the RSV which had tended to lessen its acceptance by and usefulness to conservative and evangelical believers. The three most prominent of these are:

Isaiah 7.14 - “a young woman shall conceive” in the RSV which was corrected to “the virgin shall conceive”.

Romans 3.25 - “whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood” (RSV) is changed to “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood” (ESV). “Expiation” means “a covering for sin” whereas “propitiation” means “a wrath-ending sacrifice” which atones for sin.

Romans 9.5 - The RSV states “to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.” The ESV has “To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” Thus the RSV removes the deity of Christ (“God who is over all be blessed for ever”). The ESV restores the deity of Christ (“Christ who is God over all, blessed forever”). Christ is God who is over all.

In addition, the ESV translators sought to deal with conjectural emendations in the RSV Old Testament. There are instances in the Old Testament in which the Hebrew text is ambiguous or thought by some to be insufficient; there are a few Hebrew scholars who are unhappy with some readings found in the Masoretic Text, and even the ancient translations do not provide what they believe to be the correct reading. Therefore, they propose a conjectural emendation, “a suggestion for the wording of a particular problematic passage that is not supported by any extant manuscript evidence but seems nevertheless to be the best estimation as to the original text”.¹⁰ The RSV contained as many as six hundred such instances.¹¹ In almost all instances, emendations go well beyond acceptable practices in conservative translation. These emendations are especially numerous in the book of Job. The ESV translators corrected most of these changes to the Old Testament text.

Thus, in several ways the ESV is a definite improvement in translation over many of the modern versions. But even with these corrections, numerous problems still remain and are perpetuated in the ESV.

THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

The ESV boasts its close relation to “the Tyndale-King James legacy”, but it needs to be remembered what the introduction to the RSV stated about this tradition. “The King James Version of the New Testament was based upon a Greek text that was marred by mistakes, containing the accumulated errors of fourteen centuries of manuscript copying”. Of the text underlying the RSV, they said, “We now possess many more ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, and are better equipped to seek to recover the original wording of the Greek text”.¹² The RSV translators used eclectic principles for each variant, but the text used approximates the Nestle 17th edition of the critical text of the Greek New Testament.¹³

The ESV translators used similar textual principles for each variant and for the most part followed the United Bible Societies’ 4th edition/Nestle-Aland 27th edition¹⁴ which is based upon modern eclectic principles of text criticism. Thus in the New Testament there are the normal serious problems associated with the use of the Critical Greek text. The following verses are **omitted** from the ESV Bible in their entirety but are found in the Textus Receptus Greek New Testament, the text which underlies the New Testament of Reformation-era translations:

Matthew 17.21, 18.11, 23.14

Mark 7.16, 9.44, 9.46, 11.26, 15.28

Luke 17.36, 23.17

John 5.4

Acts 8.37, 15.34, 28.29

Romans 16.24

1 John 5.7 (the famous Trinitarian reading known as the Johannine Comma is **omitted without any footnote** to explain its omission)

Although there are a few attempts to correct the textual basis of the RSV using the eclectic method (“God” is returned to Matthew 6.33 and all of Matthew 21.44 is found in the ESV), there are still many hundreds of omissions and changes (see the Society’s article 100, *A Textual Key to the New Testament*, for a list of these). Following are examples of these:

1 Timothy 3.16

AV God was manifest in the flesh

RSV He was manifested in the flesh

ESV He was manifested in the flesh

Thus a clear reference where Jesus is called God is removed in the RSV and is not revised or corrected in the ESV.

Matthew 19.9

AV And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

RSV And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.

ESV And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.

Thus the prohibition of marriage to a divorced wife is omitted. In our day and age we do not need omissions like this:

Matthew 5.44

AV But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you

RSV But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

ESV But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

Thus the missing phrases rob the reader of the extent and intensity of those persecuting the believer (note the RSV and ESV are identical).

Two further problematic textual readings should be noted. In Matthew 1.7 the genealogy of Jesus has “Asa”, who was most certainly a king, and the Textus Receptus has Asa here. The Critical Text, both the Westcott-Hort text and the UBS 4th editions, has “Asaph”, who was a singer and not a king. Most English translations would not dare to put “Asaph” as an ancestor of Jesus even though this is the Critical Text reading. The RSV, ASV, NASB, NASB revised, NIV and the New Jerusalem Bible have “Asa”. The ESV, NRSV and the NLT have “Asaph”. The same problem is found in Matthew 1.10 where “Amon” (the king) is in many modern versions while “Amos” (the prophet) is in the Critical Text. The ESV follows the RSV and has “Amos” (“Amon” in ASV, NASB, NASB revised, NIV).

In addition to the textual problems, there are the related footnotes which attempt to inform the reader of textual changes made to the text. The most common phrase is the non-committal “Some manuscripts add...”. This phrase attempts to avoid the problems associated with notes which evaluate the evidence from a biased viewpoint, e.g., “early (or later) manuscripts...”, “the best manuscripts...”, “very few manuscripts...” etc., but does not help in explaining the reasons for the changes and omissions. It comes across to some people that the Word of God is being called into question.

In John 7.53-8.11 (ESV) there is a set of in-text squared brackets which includes the statement “[the earliest manuscripts do not include John 7:53-8:11]”. The entire passage is blocked off with double brackets and then adds the footnote “Some manuscripts do not include 7:53–8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38 with variations in the text”. This calls into question the authority of this familiar passage by making it appear that, not only do we not know if the passage should be in the text, but we do not even know *where* it should be located if it is included!

In Mark 16.9-20 there is a set of in-text squared brackets which includes the statement “[Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20.]”. This passage is enclosed in double brackets and includes a long technical textual footnote which questions the inclusion of this passage and mentions the alternative “short ending” of Mark’s Gospel. It is doubtful

whether the average layman reading the footnote would be able to understand it. More problematic, what the footnote does not tell the reader is that the “long ending” of Mark’s Gospel is included in *every* manuscript which includes this portion of the Gospel with the exception of three: the two famous Alexandrian uncial manuscripts, the Sinai (Ⲁ) and the Vatican (B), and the minuscule manuscript 304.

TEXTUAL PROBLEMS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament text which was used by the ESV translators/revisers was *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (2nd ed., 1983). Further reference came from the Dead Sea Scrolls and ancient translations of the Hebrew text such as the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Latin Vulgate and the Syriac Peshitta. The Old Testament in the RSV had numerous problems. Although the revisers/translators of the ESV attempted to correct these weaknesses, they continued to let speculative RSV readings stay in the ESV. Although using the Hebrew text as the basis of their revision, there are places where they did not feel it necessary to follow the Hebrew text fully. One famous example is Judges 16.13b-14a.

AV ¹³And Delilah said unto Samson, Hitherto thou hast mocked me, and told me lies: tell me wherewith thou mightest be bound. And he said unto her, If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web. ¹⁴And she fastened *it* with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web.

RSV ¹³And Delilah said to Samson, “Until now you have mocked me, and told me lies; tell me how you might be bound.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web **and make it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man.**” ¹⁴**So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web.** And she made them tight with the pin, and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web. (footnote: Compare Gk: Heb lacks *and make it tight... into the web.*)

ESV ¹³Then Delilah said to Samson, “Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me how you might be bound.” And he said to her, “If you weave the seven locks of my head with the web* **and fasten it tight with the pin, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.**” ¹⁴**So while he slept, Delilah took the seven locks of his head and wove them into the web.** And she made them tight with the pin and said to him, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” But he awoke from his sleep and pulled away the pin, the loom, and the web. (footnote: *Compare Septuagint; Hebrew lacks *and fasten it tight... into the web.*)

The ESV follows the lead of the NASB, NIV, NRSV and others in leaving the Hebrew text at this point and including the reading from the Septuagint.

In Psalm 84.5, the ESV follows the RSV and makes the interpretative addition of “to Zion”.

AV Blessed *is* the man whose strength *is* in thee; in whose heart *are* the ways *of them*.

RSV Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

ESV Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
(footnote: Hebrew lacks *to Zion*.)

This prepositional phrase is added to the RSV and ESV not because it is found in the Hebrew, but because of Hebrew poetry (in parallel stanzas) in the passage. In verse seven “in Zion” is used. It appears to be borrowed and placed in verse 5.

Another example of these additions/corrections is Psalm 145.13. On the basis of one Hebrew manuscript plus several ancient versions the ESV reads:

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
[The LORD is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.]

(footnote: These two lines are supplied by one Hebrew manuscript, Septuagint, Syriac [compare Dead Sea Scroll])

The RSV does not use brackets but separates the last sentence by double spacing.

“Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.” (Regarding the last fourteen words there is a footnote: “These two lines are supplied by one Hebrew Ms, Gk and Syr”.)

The problem with these and other textual additions and changes is that they do not come from the Hebrew text. Secondary translations such as the Septuagint may or may not be accurate translations of the Hebrew. Thus, the reader is at the mercy of the translator’s interpretative whims.

LANGUAGE ADDRESSING GOD

The AV translators, following the Greek and Hebrew texts, used “thee”, “thou” and “thine” to indicate “you” singular and “ye”, “you” and “your” for “you” plural. The RSV translators abandoned the practice of differentiating the second personal singular pronouns but continued to use “Thee”, “Thou” and “Thine” as a special form of language used for addressing God. The ESV translators/revisers saw this use as archaic and discontinued the practice. Regardless of the view one takes of the RSV’s use of the singular for God, not differentiating the singular and plural pronouns too often results in problematic interpretation or misinterpretation.

Luke 22.31-32

AV And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: ³²But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

RSV Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you,* that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned

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again, strengthen your brethren. *(footnote: "The Greek word for *you* here is plural; in verse 32 it is singular").

ESV Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you,* that he might sift you like wheat, ³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. *(footnote: "The Greek word for *you* [twice in this verse] is plural; in verse 32, all four instances are singular")

The ESV's footnote helps (for those who bother to read footnotes) but many people still think that Jesus is saying that Satan desires to have Peter rather than Satan desiring to have the disciples. Jesus then gives the specific prayer that he has prayed for Peter.

1 Corinthians 3.16-17

AV Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? ¹⁷If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are.

RSV Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

ESV Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (footnote: "The Greek for *you* is plural in verses 16 and 17")

Again, the footnote helps if the reader takes note of it, but many people still think that the temple referred to in these verses by Paul (and in 1 Corinthians 6.19-20) is the individual believer and not the *body* of Christ. In this individualistic "Me" generation (the secular man is often heard to say "My body is a temple, therefore I exercise"), this is an important point to notice which the AV clearly states.

Although the ESV in some instances attempts to help the reader by the use of footnotes to show how the original language text reads, this is at best inconsistent. A problem example is found in John 1.49-51 (bold added), in which no footnote is found.

AV Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, **thou** art the Son of God; **thou** art the King of Israel. ⁵⁰Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto **thee**, I saw **thee** under the fig tree, believest **thou**? **thou** shalt see greater things than these. ⁵¹And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto **you**, Hereafter **ye** shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

ESV Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, **you** are the Son of God! **You** are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰Jesus answered him, "Because I said to **you**, 'I saw **you** under the fig tree,' do **you** believe? **You** will see greater things than these." ⁵¹And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to **you**, **you** will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

In verses 49 and 50 in the ESV, the uses of "you" are singular. In verse 51 the two uses of "you" are plural. There is no footnote to indicate this. The AV reading of "thou" and "thee" in verses 49-50 indicate "you" singular. In verse 51 the "you" and "ye" indicate "you" plural. Thus Jesus is not just addressing Nathaniel. This direct reference from Genesis 28.12 has a wider audience. This can be easily seen from the AV but is impossible to see from the ESV.

GENDER ISSUES

One of the most noticeable features of the ESV is the numerous changes in gender. Since 1986, most translators have made it a point to remove “male orientated” language from modern translations. Many have sought to remove the “patriarchal language” of the Bible and change the gender of pronouns to make the text more politically correct and thus more acceptable to the masses. Translations such as the New Century Version, New RSV, NIV, Today’s NIV, NET and the New Living Translation are examples of these. Some are more radical than others.

In 1997, out of this gender confusion came a list of principles that modern translators could sign and follow. This document was called the Colorado Springs Guidelines. The ESV translators/revisers, while not endorsing the Colorado Springs Guidelines, make changes in the text based upon each individual word in the Hebrew and Greek which applies. This means that if a word in Hebrew or Greek is gender non-specific then it can be translated this way. The ESV promotional material says:

In the area of **gender language**, the goal of the ESV is to render literally what is in the original. For example, “anyone” replaces “any man” where there is no word corresponding to “man” in the original languages, and “people” rather than “men” is regularly used where the original languages refer to both men and women. But the words “man” and “men” are retained where a male meaning component is part of the original Greek or Hebrew.

The inclusive use of the generic “he” has also regularly been retained, because this is consistent with similar usage in the original languages and because an essentially literal translation would be impossible without it.¹⁵

In actual practice, this is used inconsistently. Notice that in Psalm 32 “he” is used in verse one and “the man” is found in verse two in both the AV and the RSV. The ESV changes the generic “he” to “the one” while retaining “the man” in verse two. Why could not the generic “he” be left in the text?

Psalm 32:1-2

AV *A Psalm of David, Maschil.*

Blessed is *he* whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.² Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is* no guile.

RSV *A Psalm of David. A Maskil.* Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.² Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

ESV *A Maskil of David.*

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts
no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

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One of the practical problems is that verses – even from the RSV – which are familiar to many believers have these gender inclusive word changes. This use can have an awkward or jarring effect to the reader or hearer. Please note the following examples.

Matthew 6.1

RSV Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them;

ESV Beware of practicing your piety before other people in order to be seen by them;

Matthew 10.41

RSV he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

ESV the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

Matthew 18.7

RSV but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!

ESV but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

Matthew 19.11

RSV But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying

ESV But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying

These are but a few examples of how the ESV treats gender language. Thus the ESV attempts to make generic changes which, it is speculated, meet a need (real or perceived) in modern Bible readers. This "gender-segregation" is more than that seen even in the 1995 NASB Revised edition which "makes about 85 changes that introduce gender-inclusive language",¹⁶ but is much less than the use in Today's NIV New Testament.

OTHER PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATION

Further problems with the ESV include the normal errors made by modern translators. The phrase "through his blood" is missing from Colossians 1.14 (it is omitted from the majority of Greek manuscripts but is present in the Textus Receptus). It is usually stated that since the parallel idea is found in Ephesians 1.7, there is no loss of doctrinal meaning in modern versions. The problem is that if someone reads Colossians 1.14, the blood atonement is missing. If someone happens to use a reference Bible and looks up the reference in Ephesians, he will find the phrase "through his blood". But this is lost on the person who reads the text as it is written in Colossians. The same kind of problem is found in other passages which deal with subjects such as the virgin birth (Luke 2.33, 43) and the deity of Christ (1 Timothy 3.16). Whenever something is omitted in the text being read or memorised, it is usually found in other passages, but this does not help the reader who is not aware of the other verses.

Another problematic translation is the use of the term “only begotten”. The ESV follows the RSV by changing “only begotten Son” referring to the Lord Jesus Christ to “only Son” in the Gospel of John. So, John 3.16 reads “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (see also John 1.14, 18; 3.18 and 1 John 4.9). This is particularly problematic in John 3.16, that great verse so often used in witnessing of salvation through the distinctive Son of God.

It is very clear that there is a very close relationship between the ESV and the RSV. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publisher in the USA, have said in correspondence that 91% of the ESV is word-for-word the same as the RSV. When gender-related language changes and the uses of “Thee”, “Thou” and “Thine” referring to Deity are removed, the percentage would be much higher. It is essentially the same version as the RSV but with some evangelical changes to make it more appealing to conservative Christians.

MARKET FOR THE ESV

An important question must be asked. It is, “To whom will the ESV appeal?”. First, the “Bibleholic” will like it. This is someone who just has to have every new translation which comes onto the market. Second, it will appeal to those who are never satisfied with any translation and hope that the newest one will finally be the best. Third, people who perhaps secretly used and enjoyed the RSV but were concerned about the liberal elements in it may like the ESV.

Many NIV users may be tempted to change to the ESV. The past twenty years has seen many individuals and churches change to the NIV, having accepted the Zondervan marketing statements that the NIV is the best. But some of these Christians have become concerned over its lack of accuracy and literalness, complaining that it takes too much freedom with basic Bible truth. They claim that they would switch if something more accurate and readable was produced. In addition, NASB users may want to switch to a formal equivalence version which is not as “wooden” or difficult to read as the NASB, and the NKJV user who is not concerned with textual matters but desires a Bible which is easier to read may see the ESV as the legitimate choice. It seems there will always be a market for whatever is new in Bible publishing.

People who are concerned with the truth of the Bible will not be fooled by this new version once they see that it is merely a slightly revised edition of the RSV. Since Crossway does not have the financial backing of the publishers of the NIV, there does not seem to be much of a future for the ESV. Perhaps if there had been an ESV in the 1970s, there would not have been an NIV and the even worse translations which have flooded the market today. Regardless, it appears that the desire for, and flood of, new translations will never end.

CONCLUSION

The preface to the ESV refers to the legacy of translation, stating that the words and phrases of the ESV “grow out of the Tyndale-King James legacy...”.¹⁷ This is written to give a sort of solidarity to the line of succeeding translations. The ESV is not an entirely new translation, and claims to fall into the traditional line of formal equivalence translations seen since the beginning of English versions. The ESV attempts to fit easily into the kind of translations which have the same characteristics as the Tyndale New Testament and the AV. But does it succeed? When given a cursory consideration, it appears to; it appears that the statements made about it are true. But does this bear up under closer examination? Consider the following facts.

1. Does the ESV New Testament textual basis follow this “legacy”? No, it does not. The textual basis of the AV was the Textus Receptus New Testament while the textual basis of the ESV was the modern UBS 4th edition/Nestle-Aland 27th edition Greek text using modern eclectic principles of text criticism.

2. Does the ESV Old Testament textual basis follow this “legacy”? No, it does not. The AV used the Bomberg text with a few references to the Latin Vulgate and several other translations of the Old Testament; the ESV's use of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, which is almost identical to Bomberg (less than 12 differences which make a difference in the English text), can indeed be considered a part of the legacy. But the ESV preface states that “in exceptional, difficult cases, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and other sources were consulted to shed possible light on the text, or, if necessary, to support a divergence from the Masoretic text”.¹⁸ This use of other sources goes beyond the legacy and removes the ESV from the lineage it boasts.

3. Is the use of second person pronouns the same in the ESV and its predecessors? No, it is not. The AV and other editions use different pronouns for “you” singular and “you” plural in keeping with the Biblical language texts in order to avoid confusion in understanding the text. The ESV uses forms of “you” with what the translators considered to be the more important places indicated by a footnote. Not every occurrence that causes difficulty has such a footnote, however.

4. Is the use of italics the same in the ESV as in other versions in the legacy? No, it is not. The AV used italics to indicate places where the Biblical language texts did not have the words represented in the text but were demanded usually by the syntax or grammatical structure of the Hebrew and Greek. The ESV, following the RSV lead, has no use of italics whatsoever.

One further point needs to be added to the “legacy issue”. When theological terms such as “only begotten”, “firstborn” and “grace” are altered to “only” (John 1.14), “a son” (Matthew 1.25) and “favour” for “grace” in numerous places in the Old Testament, does this merit the ESV a place in the “Tyndale-King James legacy”? Although not a new translation, it departs in many and varied ways from the AV legacy.

The ESV, along with several more new translations which are due to come on the market in the next several years, cannot begin to compete with the numbers and influence of NIVs and NIV study note Bibles which have been sold. Thus, the likelihood that it will indeed become the “English standard” is slim. In addition, God’s people have the option of the Authorised Version which has stood the test of time and critics, and still remains the king of Bible versions for those who take the time to appreciate it. People who like the AV for its accuracy, excellence and sound textual basis will not want this new revision. Thus it can be seen that the ESV is a light revision of the RSV and that because of the textual basis and translational errors carried over from the RSV it cannot be considered a trustworthy translation of the Bible.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Books, 2002), p. 16.
- ² Michael Marlowe, *English Standard Version*, <http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html>, 18 February 2003.
- ³ David Bayly, “Decline of the NIV?”, *World Magazine*, 5 June 1999. http://www.worldmag.com/world/issue/06-05-99/national_6.asp, 18 February 2003.
- ⁴ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Bibles, 2001), p. iv.
- ⁵ *ESV*, p. vii.
- ⁶ J. I. Packer, *English Standard Version: Introducing a Bible Translation that Doesn’t Improve on the Original*. http://www.gnpcb.org/page/esv_video, 18 February 2003.
- ⁷ *English Standard Version Bible*, “Translation Philosophy”, http://www.gnpcb.org/page/esv_philosophy, 18 February 2003.
- ⁸ *English Standard Version Bible*, “Translation Team”, http://www.gnpcb.org/page/esv_team, 18 February 2003.
- ⁹ *English Standard Version Bible*, “Translation Oversight Committee”, http://www.gnpcb.org/page/esv_committee, 18 February 2003.
- ¹⁰ Matthew S. DeMoss, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of New Testament Greek* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 35.
- ¹¹ Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: 1991), p. 110.
- ¹² Harold Lindsell, ed. *Harper Study Bible* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. v.
- ¹³ Lewis, pp. 110-111.
- ¹⁴ *ESV*, p. ix.
- ¹⁵ *English Standard Version Bible*, “Translation Philosophy”.
- ¹⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 151.
- ¹⁷ *ESV*, p. vii.
- ¹⁸ *ESV*, p. ix.

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FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS

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THE GOSPEL FOR ALL OF LIFE: PREAMBLE

We are a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences, we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence, or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King's highway, always aiming to provide gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that current- and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom he shed his life's blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply his disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so that we truly speak and live for him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. As pastors, we intend to do this in our churches through the ordinary means of his grace: prayer, the ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who, in addition to embracing the confession and vision set out here, seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures. You will find attached both our Confessional Statement and our Theological Vision for Ministry—a vision rooted in the Scriptures and centered on the gospel.

CONFESSIONAL STATEMENT

1. **The Tri-une God**

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

2. **Revelation**

God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

3. **Creation of Humanity**

We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

4. The Fall

We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan’s temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God’s own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

5. The Plan of God

We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

6. The Gospel

We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is “Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised”). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

7. The Redemption of Christ

We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus

has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

8. The Justification of Sinners

We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

9. The Power of the Holy Spirit

We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the "other" Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

10. The Kingdom of God

We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God. The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

11. God's New People

We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven

on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

12. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

13. The Restoration of All Things

We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.

THEOLOGICAL VISION FOR MINISTRY

This is not an outline of our doctrinal beliefs (see the Confessional Statement), but a statement of how we intend to discharge Christian ministry and interact with our culture in biblical and theological faithfulness.

I. How should we respond to the cultural crisis of truth? (The epistemological issue)

For several hundred years, since the dawning of the Enlightenment, it was widely agreed that truth—expressed in words that substantially correspond to reality—does indeed exist and can be known. Unaided human reason, it was thought, is able to know truth objectively. More recently, postmodernism has critiqued this set of assumptions, contending that we are not in fact objective in our pursuit of knowledge, but rather interpret information through our personal experiences, self-interests, emotions, cultural prejudices, language limitations, and relational communities. The claim to objectivity is arrogant, postmodernism tells us, and inevitably leads to conflicts between communities with differing opinions as to where the truth lies. Such arrogance, they say explains, in part, many of the injustices and wars of the modern era. Yet postmodernism's response is dangerous in another way: its most strident voices insist that claims to objective truth be replaced by a more humbly “tolerant” and inclusively diverse subjective pluralism—a pluralism often mired in a swamp that cannot allow any firm ground for “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” Such a stance has no place for truth that corresponds to reality, but merely an array of subjectively shaped truths. How shall we respond to this cultural crisis of truth?

1. We affirm that truth is correspondence to reality. We believe the Holy Spirit who inspired the words of the apostles and prophets also indwells us so that we who have been made in the image of God can receive and understand the words of Scripture revealed by God, and grasp that Scripture's truths correspond to reality. The statements of Scripture are true, precisely because they are God's statements, and they correspond to reality even though our knowledge of those truths (and even our ability to verify them to others) is always necessarily incomplete. The Enlightenment belief in thoroughly objective knowledge made an idol out of unaided human reason. But to deny the possibility of purely objective knowledge does not mean the loss of truth that corresponds to objective reality, even if we can never know such truth without an element of subjectivity. See CS-(2).
2. We affirm that truth is conveyed by Scripture. We believe that Scripture is pervasively propositional and that all statements of Scripture are completely true and authoritative. But the truth of Scripture cannot be exhausted in a series of propositions. It exists in the genres of narrative, metaphor, and poetry which are not exhaustively distillable into doctrinal propositions, yet they convey God's will and mind to us so as to change us into his likeness.
3. We affirm that truth is correspondence of life to God. Truth is not only a theoretical correspondence but also a covenantal relationship. The biblical revelation is not just to be known, but to be lived (Deut 29:29). The purpose of the Bible is to produce wisdom in us—a life wholly

submitted to God's reality. Truth, then, is correspondence between our entire lives and God's heart, words and actions, through the mediation of the Word and Spirit. To eliminate the propositional nature of biblical truth seriously weakens our ability to hold, defend, and explain the gospel. But to speak of truth only as propositions weakens our appreciation of the incarnate Son as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the communicative power of narrative and story, and the importance of truth as living truly in correspondence to God.

4. How this vision of truth shapes us.

- a. We adopt a "chastened" correspondence–theory of truth that is less triumphalistic than that of some in the older evangelicalism. But we also reject a view of truth that sees truth as nothing more than the internally coherent language of a particular faith–community. So we maintain, with what we hope is appropriate humility, the principle of sola Scriptura.
- b. Though truth is propositional, it is not only something to be believed, but also to be received in worship and practiced in wisdom. This balance shapes our understanding of discipleship and preaching. We want to encourage a passion for sound doctrine, but we know that Christian growth is not simply cognitive information transfer. Christian growth occurs only when the whole life is shaped by Christian practices in community—including prayer, baptism, the Lord's Supper, fellowship, and the public ministry of the Word.
- c. Our theoretical knowledge of God's truth is only partial even when accurate, but we nevertheless can have certainty that what the Word tells us is true (Luke 1:4). It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we receive the words of the gospel in full assurance and conviction (1 Thess 1:5).

II. How should we read the Bible? (The hermeneutical issue)

1. Reading "along" the whole Bible. To read along the whole Bible is to discern the single basic plot–line of the Bible as God's story of redemption (e.g., Luke 24:44) as well as the themes of the Bible (e.g., covenant, kingship, temple) that run through every stage of history and every part of the canon, climaxing in Jesus Christ. In this perspective, the gospel appears as creation, fall, redemption, restoration. It brings out the purpose of salvation, namely, a renewed creation. As we confess in CS–(1), [God] providentially brings about his eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.
2. Reading "across" the whole Bible. To read across the whole Bible is to collect its declarations, summons, promises, and truth–claims into categories of thought (e.g., theology, Christology, eschatology) and arrive at a coherent understanding of what it teaches summarily (e.g., Luke 24:46–47). In this perspective, the gospel appears as God, sin, Christ, faith. It brings out the means of salva-

tion, namely the substitutionary work of Christ and our responsibility to embrace it by faith. As we confess in CS-(7), Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

3. How this reading of the Bible shapes us.

- a. Many today (but not all) who major in the first of these two ways of reading the Bible—that is, reading along the whole Bible—dwell on the more corporate aspects of sin and salvation. The cross is seen mainly as an example of sacrificial service and a defeat of worldly powers rather than substitution and propitiation for our sins. Ironically, this approach can be very legalistic. Instead of calling people to individual conversion through a message of grace, people are called to join the Christian community and kingdom program of what God is doing to liberate the world. The emphasis is on Christianity as a way of life to the loss of a blood-bought status in Christ received through personal faith. In this imbalance there is little emphasis on vigorous evangelism and apologetics, on expository preaching, and on the marks and importance of conversion/the new birth.
- b. On the other hand, the older evangelicalism (though not all of it) tended to read across the Bible. As a result it was more individualistic, centering almost completely on personal conversion and safe passage to heaven. Also, its preaching, though expository, was sometimes moralistic and did not emphasize how all biblical themes climax in Christ and his work. In this imbalance there is little or no emphasis on the importance of the work of justice and mercy for the poor and the oppressed, and on cultural production that glorifies God in the arts, business, etc.
- c. We do not believe that in best practice these two ways of reading the Bible are at all contradictory, even though today, many pit them against each other. We believe that on the contrary the two, at their best, are integral for grasping the meaning of the biblical gospel. The gospel is the declaration that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has come to reconcile individuals by his grace and renew the whole world by and for his glory.

III. How should we relate to the culture around us? (The contextualization issue)

1. By being a counter-culture. We want to be a church that not only gives support to individual Christians in their personal walks with God, but one that also shapes them into the alternative human society God creates by his Word and Spirit. (See below, point 5c.)
2. For the common good. It is not enough that the church should counter the values of the dominant culture. We must be a counter-culture for the common good. We want to be radically distinct from the culture around us and yet, out of that distinct identity, we should sacrificially serve neighbors and even enemies, working for the flourishing of people, both here and now, and in eternity. We therefore do not see our corporate worship services as the primary connecting point with those outside. Rather, we expect to meet our neighbors as we work for their peace, security, and well-being,

loving them in word and deed. If we do this we will be “salt” and “light” in the world (sustaining and improving living conditions, showing the world the glory of God by our patterns of living; Matt 5:13–16). As the Jewish exiles were called to love and work for the shalom of Babylon (Jer 29:7), Christians too are God’s people “in exile” (1 Peter 1:1; James 1:1). The citizens of God’s city should be the best possible citizens of their earthly city (Jer 29:4–7). We are neither overly optimistic nor pessimistic about our cultural influence, for we know that, as we walk in the steps of the One who laid down his life for his opponents, we will receive persecution even while having social impact (1 Peter 2:12).

3. How this relationship to culture shapes us.

- a. We believe that every expression of Christianity is necessarily and rightly contextualized, to some degree, to particular human culture; there is no such thing as a universal a-historical expression of Christianity. But we never want to be so affected by our culture that we compromise gospel truths. How then do we keep our balance?
- b. The answer is that we cannot “contextualize” the gospel in the abstract, as a thought experiment. If a church seeks to be a counter-culture for people’s temporal and eternal good, it will guard itself against both the legalism that can accompany undue cultural withdrawal and the compromise that comes with over-adaptation. If we seek service rather than power, we may have significant cultural impact. But if we seek direct power and social control, we will, ironically, be assimilated into the very idolatries of wealth, status, and power we seek to change.
- c. The gospel itself holds the key to appropriate contextualization. If we over-contextualize, it suggests that we want too much the approval of the receiving culture. This betrays a lack of confidence in the gospel. If we under-contextualize, it suggests that we want the trappings of our own sub-culture too much. This betrays a lack of gospel humility and a lack of love for our neighbor.

IV. In what ways is the gospel unique?

This gospel fills Christians with humility and hope, meekness and boldness, in a unique way. The biblical gospel differs markedly from traditional religions as well as from secularism. Religions operate on the principle: “I obey, therefore I am accepted,” but the gospel principle is: “I am accepted through Christ, therefore I obey.” So the gospel differs from both irreligion and religion. You can seek to be your own “lord and savior” by breaking the law of God, but you can also do so by keeping the law in order to earn your salvation.

Irreligion and secularism tend to inflate self-encouraging, uncritical, “self-esteem”; religion and moralism crush people under guilt from ethical standards that are impossible to maintain. The gospel, however, humbles and affirms us at the same time, since, in Christ, each of us is simultaneously just, and a sinner still. At the same time, we are more flawed and sinful than we ever dared believe, yet we are more loved and accepted than we ever dared hope.

Secularism tends to make people selfish and individualistic. Religion and morality in general tend to make people tribal and self-righteous toward other groups (since their salvation has, they think, been earned by their achievement). But the gospel of grace, centered on a man dying for us while we were his enemies, removes self-righteousness and selfishness and turns its members to serve others both for the temporal flourishing of all people, especially the poor, and for their salvation. It moves us to serve others irrespective of their merits, just as Christ served us (Mark 10:45).

Secularism and religion conform people to behavioral norms through fear (of consequences) and pride (a desire for self-aggrandizement). The gospel moves people to holiness and service out of grateful joy for grace, and out of love of the glory of God for who he is in himself.

V. What is gospel-centered ministry?

It is characterized by:

1. Empowered corporate worship.

The gospel changes our relationship with God from one of hostility or slavish compliance to one of intimacy and joy. The core dynamic of gospel-centered ministry is therefore worship and fervent prayer. In corporate worship God's people receive a special life-transforming sight of the worth and beauty of God, and then give back to God suitable expressions of his worth. At the heart of corporate worship is the ministry of the Word. Preaching should be expository (explaining the text of Scripture) and Christ-centered (expounding all biblical themes as climaxing in Christ and his work of salvation). Its ultimate goal, however, is not simply to teach but to lead the hearers to worship, individual and corporate, that strengthens their inner being to do the will of God.

2. Evangelistic effectiveness.

Because the gospel (unlike religious moralism) produces people who do not disdain those who disagree with them, a truly gospel-centered church should be filled with members who winsomely address people's hopes and aspirations with Christ and his saving work. We have a vision for a church that sees conversions of rich and poor, highly educated and less educated, men and women, old and young, married and single, and all races. We hope to draw highly secular and postmodern people, as well as reaching religious and traditional people. Because of the attractiveness of its community and the humility of its people, a gospel-centered church should find people in its midst who are exploring and trying to understand Christianity. It must welcome them in hundreds of ways. It will do little to make them "comfortable" but will do much to make its message understandable. In addition to all this, gospel-centered churches will have a bias toward church planting as one of the most effective means of evangelism there is.

3. Counter-cultural community.

Because the gospel removes both fear and pride, people should get along inside the church who could never get along outside. Because it points us to a man who died for his enemies, the gospel

creates relationships of service rather than of selfishness. Because the gospel calls us to holiness, the people of God live in loving bonds of mutual accountability and discipline. Thus the gospel creates a human community radically different from any society around it. Regarding sex, the church should avoid both the secular society's idolization of sex and traditional society's fear of it. It is a community which so loves and cares practically for its members that biblical chastity makes sense. It teaches its members to conform their bodily being to the shape of the gospel—abstinence outside of heterosexual marriage and fidelity and joy within. Regarding the family, the church should affirm the goodness of marriage between a man and a woman, calling them to serve God by reflecting his covenant love in life-long loyalty, and by teaching his ways to their children. But it also affirms the goodness of serving Christ as singles, whether for a time or for a life. The church should surround all persons suffering from the fallenness of our human sexuality with a compassionate community and family. Regarding money, the church's members should engage in radical economic sharing with one another—so “there are no needy among them” (Acts 4:34). Such sharing also promotes a radically generous commitment of time, money, relationships, and living space to social justice and the needs of the poor, the oppressed, the immigrant, and the economically and physically weak. Regarding power, it is visibly committed to power-sharing and relationship-building among races, classes, and generations that are alienated outside of the Body of Christ. The practical evidence of this is that our local churches increasingly welcome and embrace people of all races and cultures. Each church should seek to reflect the diversity of its local geographical community, both in the congregation at large and in its leadership.

4. The integration of faith and work.

The good news of the Bible is not only individual forgiveness but the renewal of the whole creation. God put humanity in the garden to cultivate the material world for his own glory and for the flourishing of nature and the human community. The Spirit of God not only converts individuals (e.g., John 16:8) but also renews and cultivates the face of the earth (e.g., Gen 1:2; Psalm 104:30). Therefore Christians glorify God not only through the ministry of the Word, but also through their vocations of agriculture, art, business, government, scholarship—all for God's glory and the furtherance of the public good. Too many Christians have learned to seal off their faith-beliefs from the way they work in their vocation. The gospel is seen as a means of finding individual peace and not as the foundation of a worldview—a comprehensive interpretation of reality affecting all that we do. But we have a vision for a church that equips its people to think out the implications of the gospel on how we do carpentry, plumbing, data-entry, nursing, art, business, government, journalism, entertainment, and scholarship. Such a church will not only support Christians' engagement with culture, but will also help them work with distinctiveness, excellence, and accountability in their trades and professions. Developing humane yet creative and excellent business environments out of our understanding of the gospel is part of the work of bringing a measure of healing to God's creation in the power of the Spirit. Bringing Christian joy, hope, and truth to embodiment in the arts is also part of this work. We do all of this because the gospel of God leads us to it, even while we recognize that the ultimate restoration of all things awaits the personal and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ (CS-[13]).

5. The doing of justice and mercy.

God created both soul and body, and the resurrection of Jesus shows that he is going to redeem both the spiritual and the material. Therefore God is concerned not only for the salvation of souls but also for the relief of poverty, hunger, and injustice. The gospel opens our eyes to the fact that all our wealth (even wealth for which we worked hard) is ultimately an unmerited gift from God. Therefore the person who does not generously give away his or her wealth to others is not merely lacking in compassion, but is unjust. Christ wins our salvation through losing, achieves power through weakness and service, and comes to wealth through giving all away. Those who receive his salvation are not the strong and accomplished but those who admit they are weak and lost. We cannot look at the poor and the oppressed and callously call them to pull themselves out of their own difficulty. Jesus did not treat us that way. The gospel replaces superiority toward the poor with mercy and compassion. Christian churches must work for justice and peace in their neighborhoods through service even as they call individuals to conversion and the new birth. We must work for the eternal and common good and show our neighbors we love them sacrificially whether they believe as we do or not. Indifference to the poor and disadvantaged means there has not been a true grasp of our salvation by sheer grace.

Conclusion

The ministry we have outlined is relatively rare. There are many seeker-driven churches that help many people find Christ. There are many churches seeking to engage the culture through political activism. There is a fast-growing charismatic movement with emphasis on glorious, passionate, corporate worship. There are many congregations with strong concern for doctrinal rigor and purity and who work very hard to keep themselves separate from the world. There are many churches with a radical commitment to the poor and marginalized.

We do not, however, see enough individual churches that embody the full, integrative gospel balance we have outlined here. And while, in God's grace, there is an encouraging number of bright spots in the church, we see no broad movement yet of this gospel-centered ministry. We believe such a balance will produce churches with winsome and theologically substantial preaching, dynamic evangelism and apologetics, and church growth and church planting. They will emphasize repentance, personal renewal, and holiness of life. At the same time, and in the same congregations, there will be engagement with the social structures of ordinary people, and cultural engagement with art, business, scholarship, and government. There will be calls for radical Christian community in which all members share wealth and resources and make room for the poor and the marginalized. These priorities will all be combined and will mutually strengthen one another in each local church.

What could lead to a growing movement of gospel-centered churches? The ultimate answer is that God must, for his own glory, send revival in response to the fervent, extraordinary, prevailing prayer of his people. But we believe there are also penultimate steps to take. There is great hope if we can unite on the nature of truth, how best to read the Bible, on our relationship to culture, on the content of the gospel, and on the nature of gospel-centered ministry. We believe that such commitments will drive us afresh toward Scripture, toward the Christ of Scripture, toward the gospel of Christ, and we will begin to grow in our ability, by God's grace, as churches, to "act in line with the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14). We are ashamed of our sins and failures, grateful beyond measure for forgiveness, and eager to see afresh the glory of God and embody conformity to his Son.

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New Calvinism - The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness

By Dr Peter Masters

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When I was a youngster and newly saved, it seemed as if the chief goal of all zealous Christians, whether Calvinistic or Arminian, was consecration. Sermons, books and conferences stressed this in the spirit of *Romans 12.1-2*, where the beseeching apostle calls believers to present their bodies a living sacrifice, and not to be conformed to this world. The heart was challenged and stirred. Christ was to be Lord of one's life, and self must be surrendered on the altar of service for him.

But now, it appears, there is a new Calvinism, with new Calvinists, which has swept the old objectives aside. A recent book, *Young, Restless, Reformed*, by Collin Hansen tells the story of how a so-called Calvinistic resurgence has captured the imaginations of thousands of young people in the USA, and this book has been reviewed with great enthusiasm in well-known magazines in the UK, such as *Banner of Truth*, *Evangelical Times*, and *Reformation Today*.

This writer, however, was very deeply saddened to read it, because it describes the New Calvinism as a seriously distorted Calvinism falling far, far short of an authentic life of obedience to a sovereign God. If this kind of Calvinism prospers, then genuine biblical piety will be under attack as never before.

The author of the book is a young man (around 26 when he wrote it) who grew up in a Christian family and trained in secular journalism. We are indebted to him for the readable and wide-reaching survey he gives of this new phenomenon, but the scene is certainly not a happy one.

The author begins by describing the Passion, conference at Atlanta in 2007, where 21,000 young people revelled in contemporary music, and listened to speakers such as John Piper proclaiming Calvinistic sentiments. And this picture is repeated many times through the book – large conferences being described at which the syncretism of worldly, sensation-stirring, high-decibel, rhythmic music, is mixed with Calvinistic doctrine. *This gives a clear picture of what New Calvinism is about.*

We are told of thunderous music, thousands of raised hands, 'Christian' hip-hop and rap lyrics (the examples seeming inept and awkward in construction) uniting the doctrines of grace with the immoral drug-induced musical forms of worldly culture.

Collin Hansen contends that American Calvinism collapsed at the end of the nineteenth century and was maintained by only a handful of people until this great youth revival, but his historical scenario is, frankly, preposterous. As one who regularly visited American seminaries to speak from the early 1970s, I constantly met many preachers and students who loved the doctrines of grace, preaching also in churches of solid Calvinistic persuasion. But firmer evidence of the extensive presence of Calvinism is seen from the fact that very large firms of publishers sent out a stream of reformed literature post-war and through the 1980s. The mighty Eerdmans was solidly reformed in times past, not to mention Baker Book House, and Kregel and others. Where did all these books go – thousands upon thousands of them, including frequently reprinted sets of Calvin's commentaries and a host of other classic works?

In the 1970s and 80s there were also smaller Calvinistic publishers in the USA, and at that time the phenomenon of Calvinistic discount Christian bookshops began, with bulging catalogue lists and a considerable following. The claim that Calvinism virtually disappeared is hopelessly mistaken.

Indeed, a far better quality Calvinism still flourishes in very many churches, where souls are won

and lives sanctified, and where Truth and practice are both under the rule of Scripture. Such churches have no sympathy at all with reporter Collin Hansen's worldly-worship variety, who seek to build churches using exactly the same entertainment methods as most charismatics and the Arminian Calvary Chapel movement.

The new *Calvinism* with the *new* Calvinists constantly extol the Puritans, but they do not want to worship or live as they did. One of the vaunted new conferences is called Resolved, after Jonathan Edwards' famous youthful Resolutions (seventy searching undertakings). But the culture of this conference would unquestionably have met with the outright condemnation of that great theologian.

Resolved is the brainchild of a member of Dr John MacArthur's pastoral staff, gathering thousands of young people annually, and featuring the usual mix of Calvinism and extreme charismatic-style worship. Young people are encouraged to feel the very same sensational nervous impact of loud rhythmic music on the body that they would experience in a large, worldly pop concert, complete with replicated lighting and atmosphere. At the same time they reflect on predestination and election. Worldly culture provides the bodily, emotional feelings, into which Christian thoughts are infused and floated. Biblical sentiments are harnessed to carnal entertainment. (Pictures of this conference on their website betray the totally worldly, showbusiness atmosphere created by the organisers.)

In times of disobedience the Jews of old syncretised by going to the Temple or the synagogue on the sabbath, and to idol temples on weekdays, but the new Calvinism has found a way of uniting spiritually incompatible things at the same time, in the same meeting.

C J Mahaney is a preacher highly applauded in this book. Charismatic in belief and practice, he appears to be wholly accepted by the other big names who feature at the 'new Calvinist' conferences, such as John Piper, John MacArthur, Mark Dever, and Al Mohler. Evidently an extremely personable, friendly man, C J Mahaney is the founder of a group of churches blending Calvinism with charismatic ideas, and is reputed to have influenced many Calvinists to throw aside cessationist views.

It was a protégé of this preacher named Joshua Harris who started the *New Attitude* conference for young people. We learn that when a secular rapper named Curtis Allen was converted, his new-born Christian instinct led him to give up his past life and his singing style. But Pastor Joshua Harris evidently persuaded him not to, so that he could sing for the Lord. The *New Calvinism movement* or *The New Calvinists* do not hesitate to override the instinctual Christian conscience, counselling people to become friends of the world.

One of the mega-churches admired in the book is the six-thousand strong *Mars Hill Church* at Seattle, founded and pastored by Mark Driscoll, who blends emerging church ideas (that Christians should utilise worldly culture) with Calvinistic theology [see endnote 1].

This preacher is also much admired by some reformed men in the UK, but his church has been described (by a sympathiser) as having the most ear-splitting music of any, and he has been rebuked by other preachers for the use of very 'edgy' language and gravely improper humour (even on television). He is to be seen in videos preaching in a Jesus teeshirt, symbolising the new compromise with culture, while at the same time propounding Calvinistic teaching. So much for the embracing of Puritan doctrine divested of Puritan lifestyle and worship.

Most of the well-known preachers who promote and encourage this 'revival' of Calvinism (*or New Calvinism*) have in common the following positions that contradict a genuine Calvinistic (or Puritan) outlook:

1. They have no problem with contemporary charismatic-ethos worship, including extreme, heavy-metal forms.

2. They are soft on separation from worldliness [see endnote 2].
3. They reject the concern for the personal guidance of God in the major decisions of Christians (true sovereignty), thereby striking a death-blow to wholehearted consecration.
4. They hold anti-fourth-commandment views, taking a low view of the Lord's Day, and so inflicting another blow at a consecrated lifestyle.

Whatever their strengths and achievements (and some of them are brilliant men by any human standard), or whatever their theoretical Calvinism, the poor stand of these preachers on these crucial issues will only encourage a fatally flawed version of Calvinism that will lead people to be increasingly wedded to the world, and to a self-seeking lifestyle. Truly proclaimed, the sovereignty of God must include consecration, reverence, sincere obedience to his will, and separation from the world, and the New Calvinism has very little of that.

You cannot have Puritan soteriology without Puritan sanctification. You should not entice people to Calvinistic (or any) preaching by using worldly bait. We hope that young people in this movement will grasp the implications of the doctrines better than their teachers, and come away from the compromises. But there is a looming disaster in promoting this new form of Calvinism (*also known as The New Calvinism.*)

Why do some British Christians who hold the doctrines of grace give enthusiastic reviews to a book like this? There have been times in the past when large numbers of young people have suddenly become intellectually enthusiastic about solid Christian doctrine, only to abandon it almost as quickly. One thinks of the tremendous response the unique oratory of Francis Schaeffer secured on university campuses in the 1960s, and no doubt some young people were truly saved and established, but very many more turned aside. Gripped by the superiority of a biblical worldview, they momentarily despised the illogical, flaccid ideas of this world, but the impression in numerous cases was natural rather than spiritual. The present new, heady Calvinism, shorn of practical obedience will certainly prove to be ephemeral, leaving the cause compromised and scarred.

Has *new Calvinism* come to Britain yet? Alas, yes; one only has to look at the 'blogs' of some younger reformed pastors who put themselves forward as mentors and advisers of others. When you look at their 'favourite films', and 'favourite music' you find them unashamedly naming the leading groups, tracks and entertainment of debased culture, and it is clear that the world is still in their hearts. Years ago, such brethren would not have been baptised until they were clear of the world, but now you can go to seminary, no questions asked, and take up a pastorate, with unfought and unsundered idols in the throne room of your life. What hope is there for churches that have under-shepherds whose loyalties are so divided and distorted?

Aside from pastors, we know some 'new' young Calvinists who will never settle in a dedicated, working church, because their views live only in their heads and not their hearts. We know of some whose lives are not clean. We know of others who go clubbing. The greater their doctrinal prowess, the greater their hypocrisy.

These are harsh words, but they lead me to say that where biblical, evangelical Calvinism shapes conduct, and especially worship, it is a very humbling, beautiful system of Truth, but where it is confined to the head, it inflates pride and self-determination.

The new Calvinism is not a resurgence but an entirely novel formula which strips the doctrine of its historic practice, and unites it with the world.

Why have the leading preachers servicing this movement compromised so readily? They have not been threatened by a Soviet regime. No one has held a gun to their heads. This is a shameful capitulation, and we must earnestly pray that what they have encouraged will not take over Calvinism and ruin a generation of reachable Christian young people.

A final sad spectacle reported with enthusiasm in the book is the *Together for the Gospel* conference, running from 2006. A more adult affair convened by respected Calvinists, this nevertheless brings together cessationists and non-cessationists, traditional and contemporary worship exponents, and while maintaining sound preaching, it conditions all who attend to relax on these controversial matters, and learn to accept every point of view. In other words, the ministry of warning is killed off, so that every -error of the new scene may race ahead unchecked. These are tragic days for authentic spiritual faithfulness, worship and piety.

True Calvinism and worldliness are opposites. Preparation of heart is needed if we would search the wonders and plumb the depths of sovereign grace. We find it in the challenging, convicting call of Joshua:

‘Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.’

Endnotes

1 His resolution of the question of divine sovereignty versus human free will, however, is much nearer to the Arminian view.

2 A recent book entitled *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World* by C J Mahaney and others, hopelessly under-equips young believers for separation from the world, especially in the area of music, where, apparently, the Lord loves every genre, and acceptability is reduced to two misleading and subjective questions.

For a more detailed consideration of worship please see the writer’s book *Worship in the Melting Pot*, Wakeman Trust, 2002, ISBN 9781870855334. The first four chapters of this book are shown as articles on this site.