



# HADDINGTON HOUSE JOURNAL

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*Back cover: Article Contributors*

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## Editor's Preface

It is once again a pleasure for me to introduce you to the contents of the *Haddington House Journal*. We continue to endeavour to combine the general and the academic to produce what we hope is a balance for spiritual growth and also reflective of our overall readership. The opening sermon is from Psalm 51. I can still recall my conversations with the students and also the former principal at Grace Bible College, Nakuru, Kenya, Dr. Kwang Ho Chung, following this sermon. Those conversations were most edifying. Thank you.

The year 2010 was historic for the Lausanne Movement. It was the third meeting of the Lausanne Congress. Many of you will know that the first Lausanne Congress met in 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland. Here the famous Lausanne Covenant, a document which has been most significant for worldwide evangelization and missions, was formulated. The second Congress met in 1989 in Manila, Philippines. The third met in Cape Town, South Africa. We have included a very informative, reflective article from Frank Retief of South Africa, who was a participant at the Congress. My wife, Nancy, and I were blessed to be invited to work at Lausanne III. Many of us left the Congress sensing that our lives will never be quite the same. The presence of the suffering church made the call to discipleship more powerful and less fearful – the grace of the Lord is always sufficient. But these were days of refreshment, and we were taught and fed richly from the Word. The fellowship was sweet with God-appointed, spontaneous meetings – such as the meeting with Martin and Lillian from Vanuatu (pictured here).



Nancy met Lillian in the corridor and read her name tag. She said to Lillian, “I’m delighted to meet someone from Vanuatu, because I’m from Prince Edward Island in Canada.” With sudden tears of joy, Lillian immediately made the connection, “My great, great grandfather was converted through the ministry of Rev. John Geddie from Prince Edward Island. So often my people have wanted to say thank you to the people of Prince Edward Island for sending us Geddie. We were in darkness and he brought us the light of Christ.” It was such a joyful meeting for the two women – generations have passed but the blessing of the Lord through Geddie is still bearing fruit today. Praise God.

Following the article on reflections from Lausanne by Frank Retief, there are three other reflective articles. From South Africa, we go to Vancouver, Canada and a minister's honest reflections on prayer. Thank you, John, for sharing this with our readers. Then we go to Australia, where Alan Harman shares with us his reflections about writing Bible commentaries. This article offers very practical advice, not only for pastors and teachers but for the laity as well. My prayer is that it will inspire many in their study of Scripture. Then from Australia we go to South Korea, where Aran Persaud shares something of his experience in teaching English as a second language. The Lord gives us so many diverse opportunities to minister, and I believe this article will speak to many.

The final general article is transitional as it begins to take us to books. This is a review article on books about ecclesiology – the doctrine of the church. Readers will notice that ecclesiology is a mini-theme running through the book portion of the journal this year. We sincerely hope this article and several of the reviews will help readers to become informed of the vast sea of new publications related to the doctrine of the church.

Some of the reviews continue the theme of the five hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth. This will likely be a blip in the Christian publishing industry for another year or so. We have also included two major Bible commentaries. Applied or practical theology reviews have not been neglected either. Our regular readership will notice that this year we have combined reviews from what were previously our "Book Review" and "Book Note" sections and added a new section called "Book Briefs" to identify other books we have received and about which we want to concisely inform our readers. (See review index page 155.) Our reviews from previous years have been picked up by publishing houses on some of their websites and also by bloggers. Many thanks to our reviewers.

The final section of the journal is the academic articles. First, Manfred Kohl has provided an excellent article on church liturgy/worship today. This material was first offered as a seminar, and we are grateful that the seminar questions have been included. Second, Bible students should know about Johann Albrecht Bengel. Al Huss' paper, given at an Evangelical Theological Society regional meeting, is an accessible academic work on Bengel. The final article, written by Matthew Ebenezer of India, considers Calvin's commentary on the theme of suffering in the Psalms.

Once again, a special word of thanks is extended to all of our writers. A journal cannot exist without your contributions. Also, thank you to all who have encouraged us concerning the inclusion in last year's *Journal* of two of Andrew Murray's messages on the Heidelberg Catechism. Lord willing, you will see more of these messages in the 2012 *Journal* as we proceed with the translation work. May the Lord edify and encourage you as you read the thirteenth volume of the *Haddington House Journal*.

*Jack C. Whytock,*  
*Editor*

# Sermon: The Mercy of the Lord

Jack C. Whytock

## Sermon Text: Psalm 51

Picture a snow-covered mountain. It is huge and completely covered in white. I want to remind you today through Psalm 51 that the Lord covers the mountain of our sin and says, “Forgiven, white as snow.” All humanity needs to hear this tremendous message. Perhaps you need to hear it today for a very particular reason. Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 51. There are three things I want to share with you from this psalm, and they can be summarized in three words:

- 1) **MERCY**
- 2) **RENEWAL**
- 3) **FRUIT**

### (1.) **MERCY – The Great Plea for Mercy (verses 1-4)**

PS 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions  
2 Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.  
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are proved right when you speak  
and justified when you judge.

Why does Psalm 51 verses 1-2 begin with such a deep, heart cry for **mercy, covering, washing away** and **cleansing**? Answer: because David, the writer, has committed **seven** identifiable sins, and he is completely overwhelmed by them. The title affixed under Psalm 51 tells us to go and read the story of David’s seven-fold sin. That story, you may well recall, is in 2 Sam-

uel chapters 11 and 12. Turn to 2 Samuel chapter 11. Here we find the tragic record of David's sins. If you look at this chapter carefully, you will see all seven. We will discuss them in a moment, but first consider chapter 12 with me. It is the record of what happened about one year later. Nathan the prophet came to visit David and to tell him a story. What a moving story he told! Truly, the Lord gave Nathan tremendous wisdom.

Here is the story. There were two men – a very poor, humble man and a very wealthy man. The poor man owned one very precious, small female lamb. All his hope for the future of his impoverished family was in that little lamb. The wealthy man had a visitor come to see him. When visitors come, we like to feed them and give them something to drink. Well, this is what the wealthy man told his servants to do – to prepare a meal for the guest. But he told the servants not to use any of his own sheep. Rather they were to go and take the little lamb that belonged to the poor man across the hills. The rich man actually stole the poor man's one lamb, the hope of his family. When King David heard this story, he was furious with this wealthy man! He wanted him identified and punished. Then came the silencing words from Nathan, "David, *you* are that man!" The story was a parable of David's sin with Bathsheba. Nathan's story cut to David's heart, and David had nowhere to run. All he could say was, "I have sinned against the Lord." No excuses, no attempt to run. No. David saw his sins.

The seven identifiable sins of David were:

- 1) **Lust** – lusting after a woman – Bathsheba
- 2) **Adultery** – breaking his marriage vow
- 3) **Covetousness** – jealousy and wanting what belonged to another
- 4) **Stealing** – this starts with covetousness, which if it is not checked, leads to stealing.
- 5) **Lying** – dishonest speech to the husband, Uriah, laying a trap
- 6) **Murder** – to cover over the adultery and pregnancy, he arranged the murder of the husband, Uriah.
- 7) **Leadership failure and scandal** – David had broken covenant with his people and was not a righteous example before them. Leaders, whoever and wherever they are, are examples to those they lead. David failed.

You will notice that Nathan's role here was to awaken the conscience of David. A pastor has called Nathan the "instrument" which God used to awaken David to his sin. God uses different instruments to awaken our consciences – a story, a sermon, a death or sickness, a godly testimony, life's problems.

Now, this is exactly where Psalm 51: 1-2 begins. David is now awake to his seven sins and he needs mercy!

**Step #1** to finding mercy is **being personal about your sin**. Do you remember in English what a personal pronoun is? "Me", "my", "our". These are all personal pronouns. Martin Luther, that thundering Reformer of the sixteenth century, over and over said it is the personal pronouns that make

the book of Psalms. Well, notice, friends, what David says, “Have mercy on **me . . . my** transgressions . . . cleanse **me**.” Do you need God’s mercy for sin in your life? Then here is the first step you must take. “Lord, I personally am the sinner. I have no excuses.”

**Step #2 – see how deep your sin really is.** The Bible uses many different words to describe our sin. Look at the different words used just in the first few verses of Psalm 51.

**Transgressions** – I am living rebelliously towards God.

**Iniquities** – I have some twisted thinking in my life, and I need to get back on the right path.

**Sins** – I have been missing the mark and aim of living for God’s honour and glory.

**Evil** – Yes, there have been matters of deliberate wickedness that I must walk away from.

“God, there is no cover-up, no denial, no blame-shifting! I am just like the prodigal or lost son, and, Lord, I am coming to You now, knowing and acknowledging something of the weight and depth of my sin. I have broken Your law, denied Your will.”

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” (Luke 15:21)

**Let’s review steps one and two –**

- 1) I am the problem.**
- 2) My sins are deep.**

**And now step three - Mercy is what I need.**

**Step #3 is pleading for the divine touch of MERCY.** Friends, I want to remind you today that our God is never frugal, stingy or miserly with His mercy – He is absolutely generous. The Lord will overwhelm you with His mercy! David speaks of God’s mercy, unfailing love and great compassion. That is what sinners need! No, we do not deserve His love, but He will give it to all who ask. He will forgive and cleanse our sins away. The stains on my clothing are so many, but He can wash them all away (verse 2).

“Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson,  
they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Here, friends, in verses 1-2, is the story of David’s great plea for mercy.

- He confesses personally his seven sins.
- He now begins to see the depth of these sins.
- He now sees God’s mercy as the only solution!

Do you say “amen” in your heart to God’s mercy as the only solution to the sin in your life?

“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”  
(Hebrews 9:22)

“. . . and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Praise God for His mercy in the blood of Jesus, which covers me like the snow-covered mountains. I am covered!

## **(2.) RENEWAL – The Great Plea for Spiritual Renewal (verses 7-12)**

<sup>PS 51:7</sup> Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

<sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Sin takes its toll on a person. It hardens the soul; it can bring bitterness and a sour spirit. It can leave a taste like a sour lemon upon one’s life. However, when one receives an experience of God’s mercy, the beginning of a wonderful process of spiritual renewal starts in one’s life. Verses 7-12 of Psalm 51 now take us from the experience of God’s mercy to the blessings of spiritual renewal. I see five elements in David’s plea for spiritual renewal.

**First, there is a plea for deeper cleansing** – whiter and whiter (vs. 7). The hyssop plant is a herb which was often used symbolically in sprinkling to show cleansing. It is like David is going deeper and deeper in this wonderful blessing of God’s forgiveness. David needs much soul healing after the seven heinous sins, and in verse 7 a genuine, deep cleansing is taking place. David comes to see that he is clean, he is renewed, he has passed under the awesome cloud of God’s mercy, and it is good!

**Second**, there is David's **plea for restoration of his former joy in the Lord** (verses 8 and 12a) – "Restore to me the joy of your salvation . . ." Sin takes joy out of your heart – it really does. The fruit of the Holy Spirit, which includes joy, cannot be exhibited if one is walking in rebellion to God. But David has now been forgiven, and he desires to walk in joy again. Thus he pleads for joy to return. And, my brothers and sisters, it does and it will!

**Third**, there is David's **plea for a greater work of full "re-creation"**, verse 10: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." David wants that new purity of heart. He thirsts for a lifestyle of purity and holiness. "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8). It is a plea for new direction, new desires, noble pursuits.

**Fourth**, David **pleads for a sealing of the Holy Spirit upon his life** in verse 11. He feels that the Spirit has withdrawn or has receded from him, and he now knows his weakness. Without the Spirit, David knows that he is powerless to overcome temptation.

**Fifth**, and finally, David **pleads for a new, willing desire to please God**. In verse 12b, it reads, ". . . and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me". Apart from the mercy of God, our wills are resistant to the leading of the Lord and to His divine will. Thus, David pleads for this mercy so that his will would truly be obedient and please God.

This section of Psalm 51, verses 7-12, is clearly about David's pleas for a deep spiritual renewal. I would say to you that David is spiritually a far deeper man now than he ever was in the past. It was a very painful road that took him to this place, yet true.

Psalm 51 is the story of a *believer* who has fallen into sin – do not forget this! There are different ways of describing this fall. Sometimes we refer to it as a believer who has backslidden. Sometimes we refer to it as a believer needing to be reinvigorated. Sometimes we refer to it as a believer in need of covenant renewal. Psalm 51 is a glorious word of hope that the believer can be forgiven and pardoned and be blessed by spiritual renewal and new growth.

There will be believers hearing this sermon today who are in need of such pardon and renewal. The sins of the believer may have been adultery, fraudulent money activities, isolation from the Lord's people, etc. You know



what the “it” is in your life. Psalm 51 is a word for you today. You need to plead with the Lord for repentance, pardon and spiritual renewal. Do not be afraid to speak of your need for spiritual renewal.

### (3.) FRUIT – The Fruit to Those Who Experience Mercy and Renewal (verses 13-17)

PS 51:13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will turn back to you.  
14 Save me from bloodguilt, O God,  
the God who saves me,  
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.  
15 O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.  
17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart,  
O God, you will not despise.

Fruit in a believer’s life is critical. You should know God’s children through their fruit. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is one fruit and can be summed up in the word “love”, yet this love is expressed in so many different ways in the believer’s life – generosity, service, kindness, faithfulness, joy etc. What specific expressions of this fruit of the Spirit can you find in verses 13-17 of Psalm 51?

David takes up a **new ministry** now that he has experienced God’s mercy. **He wants to teach other sinners the way back to the Lord.** Personal experience is a great teacher. David then becomes an evangelist to sinners. I love the old definition of evangelism: “Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to go for bread.” Brothers and sisters, we are saved to serve! When we are forgiven, we want others to know forgiveness from the Lord. This is love.

“. . . And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”  
(Luke 22:32)

**Another specific expression of this fruit is a renewal of worship and praise.** In verse 14, David says, “Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, *and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.*” David enters into a new stage as the sweet singer of Israel – increasingly there is liberty,

freedom and song! His heart is full of thanksgiving for the love of God. Anyone I know who has experienced mercy in the Lord has a new melody and freedom in his heart.

“This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long . . .”

In verses 16-17, there is the desire for **re-consecration**. David is not simply a ritualist. He desires humility. He wants to worship in love as an overflow of a broken heart. He wants also to live each day in true sacrifice.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.” (Romans 12:1)

Briefly now, the remaining verses following after verse 17 change the theme to David’s desire to lead his people once again. We will not develop these verses (18-19) but only list the desires we see here: David wants the people to prosper; he wants the people protected; and he wants a revival of true spirit-filled worship to accompany the rituals of their worship.

Let us return now to where we began this message. The Christian is like a snow-covered mountain, covered with the mercy of the Lord by the blood of Jesus Christ. I hope you know that forgiveness and mercy. David came to know it in a fresh way following his fall into his web of sins. Is there someone here who has *never* known such mercy and pardon? Do not delay. Confess your sins to God. Cry out for mercy. Is there someone here whose love has grown cold to the mercy of God in Christ? Do not delay. Confess your sins to God. Cry out for mercy.

Mercy and renewal will lead to new desires – to speak of the gospel, to praise the Lord, to be consecrated in daily living in thankfulness to the Lord. The people of the Lord will be known by their fruit.

**“True Christianity is a divine and spiritual thing. The whole work from beginning to end is a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in the soul.”**

Andrew Murray

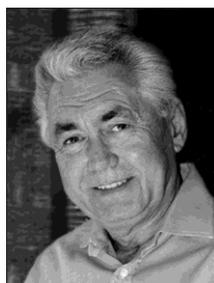


# Reflections on Lausanne III

## Lausanne: the 'main thing'

Frank Retief \*

*\* Until very recently Frank Retief of South Africa was the Presiding Bishop of the Church of England in South Africa (CESA). The following are his final comments on the Lausanne Congress, October 2010. Reprinted by permission from Evangelicals Now, December 2010, page 7. Bishop Retief is a member of the World Reformed Fellowship and the author of numerous books including Divorce (Christian Focus).*



### **There were eight major impressions made on me at Lausanne 2010.**

1. The technology has evolved to such an extent since Lausanne '74 that we were able to see the world as never before – especially in terms of gospel work. The range and effectiveness of the gospel is astounding. The number of people and the kind of people made me feel very small and insignificant. Of course we know that nothing we do for the Lord is ever in vain so we do not despise our small tasks. But it did make me realise how prone we all are to thinking what we do is so special or that we ourselves are special or how easy it is to dismiss others with whom we may have points of disagreement.

### **Reconciliation**

2. A conference of this size brings all kinds of people together. It obviously stirs up emotions and guilt – especially about our judgmental attitude to others. The session when the Latin-American group apologised to the Africans was heart-rending. The depth, sincerity and humility of their apology was astonishing. This reconciliation was demonstrated to us at the Congress in so many ways with other people, for instance the Palestinians and the Jews.

3. The testimonies we heard from Palestinians, Jews, North Koreans, Chinese, Pakistanis and others whose loved ones had been martyred made us realise that while gospel work is exploding across the world there is still a great deal of danger associated with it. Hence the Congress's call for humility and sacrifice.

4. There is a lot going on in our own continent of Africa that is not appreciated. Africa has leaders, theologians and personnel who are enormously gifted and many are being greatly used by God. However, it was good to hear the problems of corruption and immorality openly mentioned. There is a good deal of discipling work that needs to be done in Africa. There is work to be done here and, sadly, it seemed to me that more people from overseas see the potential than local. I wondered if locally we have not become so cynical about Africa that we are of little use for the gospel. Notwithstanding there are many people of whom we are not aware, who are doing good things about which we know nothing.

Much was said about African genocides and I wondered if we would ever reach the point when we would see the current crop of African leaders apologise to African people for the genocides and corruption of their predecessors in the same way that the Latin-Americans did. Having said that, the sheer power of the personalities and leadership of the African participants was enormous.

### What theological line?

5. There were times, especially in the first two or three days, when we wondered what theological line was going to emerge from the Congress. There was a lot of early talk about ‘being Jesus’ rather than simply preaching him. There was also a pronounced push to regard women as equal partners in ministry. Of course, we evangelicals do regard women as equal partners. In fact most of us in ministry feel very ‘unequal’ when we see our wives’ gifts and talents, but the impression I got was a push for ecclesiastical equality. There was also the usual strong emphasis on justice and mercy and alleviating suffering – all of which is, of course, quite right. But John Piper brought the Congress back on track with his magnificent talk on Ephesians 3 when he urged us to remember that in all the attempts to alleviate suffering we must not forget to alleviate eternal suffering by the proclamation of the Christ who died on the cross and rose again. That evening Os Guinness brilliantly reminded us that the often quoted saying (attributed to St. Francis) that we should preach the gospel and, if necessary, use words, was like saying we should feed the hungry and, if necessary, use food. It’s not enough to ‘Be Jesus’. The gospel is propositional and must be proclaimed.



*Os Guinness*



*John Piper*

6. The elective sessions in the afternoons offered anything from children evangelism, to ethics, to climate change, to developing global partnerships, to evangelism among Muslims or Jews and a host of others. It was heart-warming to me to see how firmly the elective leaders held on to the gospel imperatives. There was no doubt that for the vast majority of participants this

was a congress on evangelism and the Evangel was the central thing. There was a great push to establish new gospel partnerships around the world. Partnership is seen as the way to go. A statement was made that the day of the once great preacher and leader is over. A bit presumptuous, I thought. God can do anything. Because one Billy Graham or John Stott has been laid aside does not mean God cannot raise up another.

7. The plenary sessions became clearer and more definitive as the week drew to a close. Corruption and false teaching was condemned and the prosperity gospel was criticised as being utterly incompatible with the gospel of Christ and destructive to people in the Third World.

Each evening we were reminded of unreached peoples and challenged to reach them. We were told there were no closed countries if we were willing to pay the price. The use of multi-media was brilliant. It was professional, seamless and slick. The persons on the stage were utterly professional, humble and well cued, a riveting experience.

8. The final service dispelled any doubt that may have lingered about where Lausanne has gone theologically. It was a communion service and the preacher was Lindsay Brown. After holding many prestigious Christian leadership posts, he is now International Director for the Lausanne Movement. His closing message was magnificent and gave a clarion call to the historical, Reformed evangelical faith – the uniqueness of Christ, the importance of the cross, the lostness of people, the preaching of the gospel, the need for conversion. I am aware that there is always a push for the ‘main thing’ to be sidelined. But thank God the main thing remained the main thing at Lausanne.



## Publications by the Lausanne Movement



# Reflections on Prayer

## Prayer: A Leader's First Priority

John F. Smed\*

*\* John Smed was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta and has served in church planting for thirty-five years, seven of which were as director for Mission to North America. Over a period of twenty-five years, John and his wife, Caron, and the marvellous co-workers the Lord gave them have planted two churches. John and Caron live in Vancouver. They have five children and three grandchildren. John is the director of the Grace Project – a servant organization for urban church planting and co-founder of Prayer for the City. He has written Journey in Prayer: Learning to Pray the Prayer of Jesus for reaching seekers and discipling new believers.<sup>1</sup> John writes, “. . . I have come to a crossroads in my calling. . . . As opportunities in church planting, prayer training and evangelism expand I realize God is telling me to focus- to ‘devote [myself] to prayer and the word’ (Acts 6:4). I want to be a specific kind of leader – one who leads from the front line of mission like Paul did.”*



Early tremors signal bigger things.

It is often the incidental (seemingly innocent) passage. I was minding my own business, reading Acts, when I felt the bump: “It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables . . . We . . . will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2-4).

I was startled. Something struck me as odd, or at least different. Why the insistence on putting prayer and the Word in priority over serving widows?

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<sup>1</sup> Other works on prayer by John Smed include: John Smed, *Ancient Prayer, Learning to Pray the Prayer of Jesus* (Vancouver, BC: Prayer for the City, 2010); John Smed with Justine Hwang, “Seven Days of Prayer with Jesus (a seven part curriculum)”, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Vancouver, BC: Grace Vancouver Church, 2009); and John Smed with Justine Hwang, “Prayer Bootcamp for Urban Mission: A 12 week study that connects the gospel to prayer and mission” (Vancouver, BC: Prayer for the City, 2010).

I did a quick glance at the original language – nothing fancy. I found interesting amplifications which added life and texture:

It would not be right (fitting or pleasing – commonly used of pleasing God) for us (the “sent ones”) to neglect (leave behind or abandon) the word of God to wait on tables . . . We . . . will give attention to (hold fast to, continue in) prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:2-4).

Back to the question. Why not wait on tables? Serving the needy is exactly the kind of leadership Jesus insists on. Serve the needy. These people are neglected. They are foreigners who need care (*philozenos*). They are Grecian Jews. More importantly, they are widows. Just google the greatest and gravest commands of Scripture and you will find hospitality for foreigners and care of widows rises to the top. God loves to be called the defender of the widow: “A father to the fatherless, a **defender of widows**, is God in his holy dwelling” (Psalm 68:5). Can any activity take priority over these acts of mercy? The text is clear. For the apostles – and those who want to lead like the apostles – there is a higher priority.

I scrambled – trying to keep my footing. I steadied my nerves and reminded myself, “Of course – that would be preaching to the lost.” For the apostles, preaching to the unconverted was first of all priorities. Preaching (*knpusso*); heralding (*aggello*); announcing (*apaggelo*) and evangelizing (*euaggelizdo*) – express public square preaching, outside the confines of the assembly (*ecclesia*).

I was still on my feet. As of greater importance than deeds of mercy, the apostles devoted themselves to preaching Christ to the lost. It is safe to put proclamation before mercy, as long as they stay in close proximity. “Whew.” I prepared to move on to the next paragraph.

“Not so fast!” (and not so gently) the Spirit persisted with me, “Aren’t you missing something? What about the other priority? The apostles said, ‘We will give attention to prayer’ as well as the Word. Ask yourself. Ask the text. What about prayer? Why equal billing?”

“Now listen,” I said to myself? to my conscience? to something deeper? “In one hundred hours of seminary training, this never came up. In school we hardly glanced at this. How can prayer have equal priority to the Word? It’s absurd. I do not know a single colleague or teacher that puts prayer alongside Word ministry – certainly not equal in priority – not in theory, not in practice.”

Pursuing this logic, I was torn. On the one hand, I was more than nervous. “What if prayer is just as important as Word ministry? What comes of my education, my ministry focus over twenty-five years?” On the other hand, I began to get excited – an inner stirring. Call it a holy curiosity. I was on to something. I resolved to follow the trail.

I took some days to read all of Acts, a passage at a time – determined and with selective vision. I poured over the text to find the place of prayer in the life of the apostles (and the early Church). I took notes.

What came of this? I admit. I was shaken. I saw that prayer pervades this history. Prayer jumps out of the narrative. Even a cursory survey of Acts finds prayer at every important intersection of church and apostolic life:

They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:14). (This is commonly called the ten day prayer meeting.)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place [praying?] . . . They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:1, 42).

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon (Acts 3:1). (We know they met day by day in the temple. It can be assumed that the “hour of prayer” was a time of choice.)

<sup>23</sup>On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup>When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God . . . <sup>31</sup>After they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:23ff).

<sup>3</sup>“ . . . We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup>and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word”. . . <sup>6</sup>They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. <sup>7</sup>So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly . . . (Acts 6:3-7).

Simply put, the apostles were men of prayer. Their apostleship was birthed in prayer. They waited in prayer. They led in prayer, trained and modeled prayer, fought with prayer. Prayer permeated the early Church like indelible dye. The relative innocence of such references to prayer indicates a life and habit of prayer. This is alien to so much of our church experience, to say the least. We meet to study or to sing. They met to pray!

Prayer is one fabric with the Word in the life of the apostles (and the early Church). In this fabric prayer is the vertical strand, Word ministry is the horizontal. Loving fellowship is the rich fabric uniting both. Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

I was not finished with this text. (I should say, “This text was not finished with me.”) There was the question of sequence. The apostles “gave attention to prayer and the ministry of the word”. Prayer comes before the Word. I asked the Spirit, “Why prayer before the Word?” Perhaps it is incidental – the order does not matter. Could Luke just as easily have reversed the order? He might as well have written, “We will give attention to the ministry of the word and prayer.” Perhaps it is simply incidental. Much ado about nothing?

I considered another possibility: Luke’s order indicates that prayer is a leader’s first priority – before the ministry of the Word. I recalled a statement by Oswald Chambers, “We take it for granted that prayer is preparation for the work, whereas prayer is the work.” Prayer is not more important than the Word, but prayer must precede the Word. Why? Because prayer underlies all ministry effectiveness, including preaching. Apart from communion with Christ, nothing good or lasting comes. Only through waiting on Him in prayer will preaching the Word or any other ministry be effective. A prayerless preacher will have a sterile ministry.

I re-scanned the narrative – now with microscopic intensity. The fact that prayer comes first has solid grounding. Before the apostles received the Spirit and found boldness to announce the resurrection, they “waited in prayer” as Jesus had instructed them:

<sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about . . . <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” . . . <sup>12</sup>Then they [the apostles] returned to Jerusalem . . . <sup>13</sup>When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying . . . <sup>14</sup>They all joined together constantly in prayer . . . (Acts 1:4-14).

At the end of this prayer meeting, their prayers were fully answered. It was the answer to Christ’s promise: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:1-2).

On the day of Pentecost they were gathered in one place. It had to be a public place as they were surrounded by Jews and converts from all over the Roman Empire on this feast day. The exact whereabouts involves some conjecture – so conjecture we will. We know they met from day to day in the temple (Acts 2:46). We also know that the leaders and community observed the hour of prayer – three in the afternoon (Acts 3:1). What would be more appropriate than that a spirit of grace and supplication, promised by Zechariah (Zechariah 12:10ff), should fall upon the people of God during the hour of prayer? Was not the day of Pentecost, which signaled Spirit oneness in wor-

ship and power in mission, also the long promised day when God poured out a spirit of prayer upon his people?

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child . . . (Zechariah 12:10).

Though it was interesting to speculate about location and time, it did not matter. I was converted to the conclusion. Prayer and the Word have equal priority in ministry, but prayer has sequential priority. In practice, prayer must come first! “Prayer is the first breath of a Christian” (Luther).

When God’s people pray, Pentecost is unleashed. After persecution, before proclamation was renewed, the apostles and disciples together raised a cry to the heavens. A second Pentecost of power ensued:

<sup>23</sup>On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup>When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God . . . <sup>31</sup>After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:23ff).

If the epicenter is Pentecost, there will be aftershocks throughout history. Unlike earth tremors, the aftershocks often gain in intensity and multiply in gospel power. A tectonic process was begun with prayer.

Another time, God’s people prayed through the night for their beloved apostle. Chains fell off, prison doors were flung open and city gates “opened by themselves”. A gospel tremor cracked the foundation of every heart:

<sup>5</sup>So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him . . . <sup>7</sup>Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists . . . <sup>10</sup>They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it (Acts 12:5-10).

A similar episode occurred when Paul and Barnabas sang and prayed in the Philippian jail:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and

everyone's chains came loose (Acts 16:25, 26).

I made sure of my footing. I rode the moving crest – wave after wave: prayer then Word, prayer then Word, prayer then Word.

### **Epilogue**

This experience happened to me in the mid 1990s while I was the church planting director for Mission to North America. My foundations for ministry were radically rearranged, perhaps you might say “laid waste”. I embarked on a journey of prayer. When my wife, Caron, and I planted a second church in Vancouver, we declared one priority: “We *will be* a praying church.” We decided on one litmus test: “*Are* we a praying church?”

Each year we have run twelve to twenty weeks of leader training in prayer. Over the years we have developed a workshop for leaders, “Prayer Boot camp: Workshop for Urban Mission”; a Bible study curriculum, “Seven Days of Prayer with Jesus”; and a prayer pocketbook, “Journey in Prayer: Learning to Pray the Prayer of Jesus”. We have traveled to cities in North America and England to train leaders in this apostolic pattern of prayer. We are in the midst of teaching and promoting prayer for leaders, churches and seekers through an integrated web, blog, twitter and email strategy. Please pray for us. We believe we are doing the Lord's work. Our Christ promises, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations!”

# Reflections on Writing Bible Commentaries

## Writing Commentaries

Allan Harman\*

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### 1. The Task of Commentating

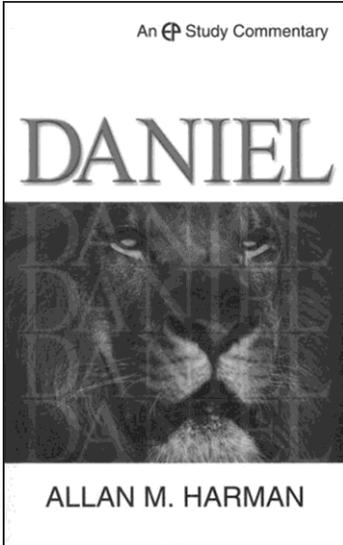
The task of writing commentaries is not just something that scholars do in preparing material to be published. Rather, it is a task for all of us who prepare notes on biblical passages, whether this is for personal devotions, for sermons, for use in teaching Sunday School or Bible classes, or to help translators with their task. A commentary is the presentation of relevant remarks to elucidate the biblical text. It is to try and make plain what is there in the Scripture, not to introduce new ideas that do not have a basis in the text. The technical word “exegesis” that is often used simply means to draw out the meaning of the passage. The term “exposition” is frequently almost identical with “exegesis”, though perhaps used more of expounding the Scripture in a public setting such as a church service.

### 2. Preparation for the Task

Two important things are essential before we begin the task of commenting on Scripture. The first is that it requires true spirituality. The Bible itself teaches that the things of the Spirit are only known with the aid of God’s Spirit. Scripture passages such Romans 8 or 1 Corinthians 2 point to the relationship between being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and understanding the rev-

elation God has given of Himself. The sinful mind is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law, and therefore cannot please God (Rom. 8:7-8). On the other hand, true believers have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and by that same Spirit they are able to understand what God has freely given us (1 Cor. 2:12).

Many people do write on Scripture without possessing genuine spirituality. That is one reason why so much false teaching can be propagated, because these writers are still blind to spiritual truths. While a commentary by a



writer who does not uphold the inspiration of the Scriptures may contain things that are correct, their overall approach is marred by their lack of spiritual perception. Young believers in particular need to exercise care in the books they use for preparation of studies and talks.

The second prerequisite flows from the first one. We need to acknowledge our need of divine help in understanding the Word of God, and this is expressed in our seeking God's aid in prayer as we approach His revelation in the Bible. It is surprising that many books on biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) omit this vital step in exegesis. By praying for assistance as we approach the Bible, we are confessing that our minds are blind to spiritual truth without the work of the Holy

Spirit and that spiritual perception must come from God Himself. We are to pray like the psalmist: "Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me" (Ps. 119:17-19).

### **3. Translation of the Text**

While scholars may turn to the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible, most Christians open up a Bible in their own language. The whole Bible is now available in over one thousand five hundred languages, with portions in a further two thousand. We should use one translation (or version, to use a synonym) for our regular Bible reading. It should be the translation we use day by day in our personal devotions and study; it helps to always use the same copy of it so that we become thoroughly familiar with it and its layout. This is the version we will memorise, either by deliberate action or simply because we read the same one time and time again. It is best to obtain one that has no notes attached to it as those notes can often be taken to be as authoritative as the text itself. There is a place for Bibles with notes but not for our basic reading of the text.

### Choosing a version

How do we choose one version over another one? For 250 years after the Authorised Version (the King James Version) was published, it was almost the only English text used. However, now we have a multiplicity of translations in varied formats. We should pick one that uses the language that is current, as using archaic language does not help us to understand the text nor does it assist in the proclamation of the gospel. However, a place does exist for some more unusual words to occur, and poetry in particular often uses words that are not in our everyday conversation. The principle has to be that the Bible should be available to us in our own language and has to speak to us in contemporary idiom. In English, several reliable modern translations are available. Of them, the New King James Version is virtually the Authorised Version updated by changing to modern pronouns (“you”) and omitting the older verb endings. The New International Version (NIV) is a fresh translation and is widely used. The English Standard Version (ESV) is a revision of the Revised Standard Version, a translation in direct continuity from the King James Version.

### Mini-commentaries

It is also important to recognise that every translation is a mini-commentary on Scripture. That is to say, every translator of Scripture has to make a decision regarding the meaning of any particular verse. While in practice many translations will be identical for the same verse, yet it can mean that quite diverse interpretations can occur. Sometimes these will be noted in the margin or by a footnote. One example can be given. A literal translation of 2 Timothy 1:12 reads: “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to guard my deposit against that day.” This raises the question: Is Paul speaking about something he has given to God (his soul), or something that God has given to him (the Gospel)? While the traditional interpretation is that Paul is referring to his soul, yet the use of the same word “deposit” just two verses later to mean “the Gospel” suggests that is also the meaning in verse 12. This is the interpretation given in the footnote of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and in the text of the English Standard Version (ESV): “what has been entrusted to me”.

When we have read the translation of the passage we are to comment on in our regular version, we should then turn to a couple of other versions to see if there is any noticeable difference between them. If there is, we may need to do some more checking to see how the variation in translation is going to make a difference to our interpretation of the passage.

## 4. Preparing a Commentary

There are two kinds of commentaries. The first is an academic commentary. This is normally based on the original text, whether Hebrew or Greek,

but it may be a discussion in English developed from an understanding of the original text. These discussions may be technical in content and deal with points of grammar or lexicography (the study of the derivation or meaning of words). This task is an important one, because we are dealing with an inspired text and need to know accurately what it says.

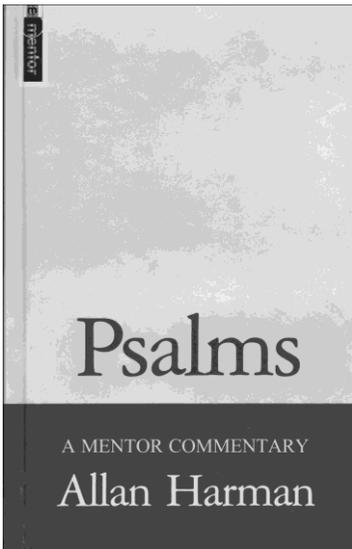
But far more common is a commentary written for devotional or pastoral purposes. Many of us write notes for our own personal use, while others do so because we are teaching or preaching from a passage. Our aim is to provide enough material to explain the meaning of the text we have in front of us.

### Beginning the task

How then do we start? First, we begin with the English text of the passage. It is good to read it through several times, including doing so aloud. Then we note down words about which we are unsure, or phrases about which we will need elucidation. It often assists to jot down in a single statement what we believe the teaching of the passage is.

The first place to look for help in elucidating the meaning is not to commentaries but rather to Bible dictionaries. They will help us with individual words but also assist us in placing the passage in a particular geographical or historical setting. Many Bibles also have good maps that help with matters relating to place names or with general questions of geographical location.

Before we turn to any commentaries, we should make the effort to understand the passage for ourselves. If we go to commentaries too soon in our preparation, what we read will mould both our thinking and our wording. We need to wrestle with Scripture ourselves and have come to grips with its teaching before we look at what additional information is available.



### Getting help from existing commentaries

Why then go to commentaries? There are two main reasons. The first is to make sure that our interpretation falls within the general scope of interpretation. The Christian church has a long history of comment on Scripture, and we should not disregard it. What others have said about a passage is not the same as the Scripture itself, but checking in this way is a safeguard against very aberrant interpretations.

Commentaries also serves another purpose. They provide additional information of which we are unaware. We cannot possibly know everything

about a particular passage, and therefore additional assistance comes from commentaries we have available to us. Not everything that we read needs to be incorporated into our own notes. We must be selective, include only ideas that supplement what we have already written, and do so normally in our own words. Quotations are best avoided in spoken presentations, though putting them in our own notes may serve as a reminder of ideas that can be developed in our own words when speaking.

When it comes to looking at commentaries, where do we start? I normally suggest that we start with the briefest ones. Many people have a study Bible, and it often has good introductory articles on the biblical books as well as notes on the text. One volume commentaries, such as *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, or *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, or the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, are good starting points. Following that, it is good to look at somewhat larger commentaries, such as the two-volume *Zondervan NIV Commentary* or individual books in the Tyndale Series, before going on to books in other series, such as the *Welwyn* and *Study* series of Evangelical Press, the *Focus* series of Christian Focus Publications, or the *Let's Learn* series of the Banner of Truth.

### Setting the passage in its biblical context

Another task that needs to be done is to consider how the passage we are working on fits into the development of biblical theology. God's revelation was given progressively over centuries, and any passage must be placed in its own context. This will often mean considering how the teaching in a passage has already been set out in the biblical books and also how it links in with later revelation, especially New Testament teaching. The subject matter of biblical theology is exactly the same as that which is covered in systematic theology. What is different is the method of approach. In biblical theology, the historical development of doctrine is primary, while in systematic theology, it is set out in logical statements depending on the precise topic under review.

## 5. Application

The significance of the teaching of any passage of Scripture is not the primary concern when working out its meaning, unless, of course, it is a passage that has clear practical concerns. In general, though, it is good after we have completed our study of a passage and written our notes (our "commentary") to ask the question: What significance does this passage have for me/us? Since all Scripture is God-breathed, it "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The teaching of Scripture that we have written about in our notes has practical implications. Those implications should flow naturally from our exegesis of the passage.

## 6. Practical Hints

While at times we have little warning that we are being called upon to speak or lead a Bible study, if we know well in advance we should do our preparation in good time. This means we are not under undue pressure to complete the task, and we have the opportunity to review what we have prepared or to add to it. Time for reflection will increase our understanding of the passage and also our ability to explain it to others.

We all have preferences in the way we make notes about the Bible. Some prefer to use a wide margin Bible, recording comments opposite verses in the printed text. Others have ways of actually marking the text. A danger exists that what we found when we first studied a passage – and marked in our Bible – may lock us into a particular interpretation with the same early viewpoint being “frozen” in our thinking. Our own techniques can at times enslave us to a certain mode of interpretation.

All the study we do in preparing commentaries on biblical passages deserves to be kept for future occasions. Hence it is helpful to do this work on the same size of paper so that it can be neatly preserved or on a computer from where it can be retrieved at a later occasion. Full notes are not necessary – only sufficient words to indicate clearly the meaning. For preparation for speaking engagements, it is good to record other details, such as the biblical readings and the hymns to be used.

A final comment needs to be made. At times Bible study and preparation of notes on Scripture can become wearisome as we toil away at our task. It may even seem to be as dry as dust. But remember this: we are working with gold dust! God has given to us His revelation in an inspired written form. As Christians we have to search the Scripture, and our prayerful study of it brings forth the riches it contains.

### For further reading:

Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach, *Dig Deeper! Tools to unearth the Bible's treasure* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005).

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993).

Alan Stibbs, *Understanding God's Word*, revised by David and Clare Wenham (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976).

# Reflections on Teaching English as a Second Language in Korea

## The Spirituality of Teaching English as a Second Language in Korea

Aran Persaud\*

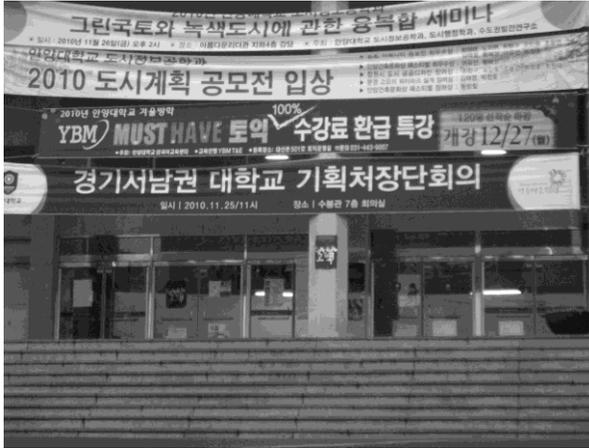
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When I went to Korea in the summer of 1998 with my wife to spend time with her mother, who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, an opportunity came up which allowed my wife to spend time alone with her mother and provided me a little more structure. I was asked by missionaries to participate in their intensive three-week English programme at a theological university. The programme was called Adventures in English, but it had at one time been called Missionary Training in English. It was basically an immersion programme in English with chapel services and a variety of courses ranging in content from translation to basic conversational English. Though the name had changed, the content of the programme had not, from what I had been told. The original name suggested what the aim of the programme had been – to give Korean missionaries and theological students the skills to function in this international language. The exact reason for the name change came before my time, but underlying it was a desire to reach out to a larger demographic of students who were eager to learn English and to encourage them to do so in a Christian environment. What follows are some of my reflections on the use of ministry as a means of teaching English as a Second

Language (ESL) versus my own approach to teaching ESL as an English speaking Christian in Korea.

First, let me set the context. Speaking English well in Korea is as valuable as gold – literally. Although the economic rise of China and its proximity is starting to create a rival interest in learning Mandarin, speaking English well is still the linguistic necessity for a successful professional life. However,



what children in English-speaking countries take for granted is an expensive and laborious-to-acquire skill in Korea. Those who can afford the high private academy fees or the expenses associated with studying abroad (4.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2008) gain the upper hand. This disparity in the ability to acquire English skills

between the haves and the have-nots has been recently recognized by the Korean government through the issuing of new guidelines for university entrance requirements. Ironically, whereas the Korean government is trying to implement a system which creates equal opportunity, some universities, emphasizing the importance of English for students trying to enter the workforce in the age of globalization, have decided to use proficiency on the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) or similar standardized test scores as a requirement for graduation. I heard at an informal meeting recently that two hundred students at one university could not graduate because their scores were too low.

The importance of English is likewise reflected in the entrance and promotional structure of established companies. According to one large English educational company in Korea, 928 out of 1000 companies use the TOEIC as a determining factor for employment. The visiting University of British Columbia professor who gave this statistic rightfully queried whether many of these jobs require English proficiency. Once hired by a company, promotion is also often dependent on English ability. Those who have the technical expertise but not the English language skills as represented in high TOEIC scores are passed over for promotion. My purpose here is not to judge whether the above government, university and business policies are effective or just, but rather to emphasize that at this point in Korea's history, speaking English well is almost an indispensable skill for one's professional life. It is this competitive environment to acquire proficiency in English which provides the background for my reflections.

One significant experience which helped me to articulate my understanding of the use of ministry as a means to teach English came from my earliest experiences of teaching ESL in the Mission English department at the theological university mentioned above. Contrary to the spiritual-sounding title, in the course of my teaching, there was almost no content that would be called overtly Christian except praying at the start of classes. We had solid secular texts and taught English from them. Nevertheless, the department



was called Mission English and a new programme to help students learn English through a more spiritual means was decided upon – English chapel. I was asked to preach at the second monthly service, and I took the task seriously and gave it my best, so to speak.

I remember the event quite clearly. I approached the rostrum in the semi-circular chapel built of wood and in the Protestant style of the early twentieth century. I laid out my sermon notes, read the scripture, prayed and began to preach. I am no prince of preachers, to say the least, but I gave it everything I had that day. Clearly articulated English words seemed to roll effortlessly off my tongue. The only problem was that as I looked out on the audience of around two hundred university students, a few missionaries and several professors, everyone's eyes were glazed and their eyelashes drooping save for a handful. The old joke about the parishioner who called his pastor in the middle of the night and said, "Pastor, please preach to me. I can't get to sleep," probably sums up the spirit of those long twenty minutes for those listening. All jokes aside, I must have done a super job because I was asked to preach

at several more (actually, at that time there was only one other theologically trained person at our school who could or would preach in English). I only accepted one of the offers and likewise turned down several opportunities to be the pastor of similarly focused English ministries in some rather large Korean churches. I might have preached at these types of services more, but when I considered the impact my preaching would have, I was not convinced that the spiritual benefits for those listening would match the hours that go into sermon preparation. Although I had great respect and admiration for the students, I was not comfortable with pursuing what I call ESL ministry.

These experiences helped me to articulate the tension that I had felt for some time, namely the difference between English ministry and ESL ministry.



The former, I suggest, has as its focus the task of ministry through English, although the recipients might not be native English speakers, and the latter constitutes the task of teaching English through the medium of ministry. The difference may seem minute, but in my practical experience significant. Both

may attract those who wish to learn English, but in English ministry learning English is incidental and in ESL ministry it is central. In English ministry, the focus remains where it should – on the spiritual benefits to those listening. Other differences between the two can be found in presuppositions, intentions, ministry experiences, expectations, preparation, focus, and in the constituency of group members. I am very eager to participate in English ministry, but I personally allocate ESL ministry to a lower priority.

On the other hand, evangelism through learning ESL seeks to use English instruction to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. What defines this type of focus is that evangelism is the central task and the target audience is defined as those who want to learn English and are not Christians. Of course, there is always the question as to what extent these programmes are transparent about their purpose to evangelize. Nevertheless, what is certain is that in some places this means of evangelism has been effective. I once studied Japanese for a short stint from a tutor whose life bore the fruit of such an ESL outreach in Japan. Such stories abound both overseas and I'm sure in many English-speaking countries.

Yet, besides teaching English to those who are sympathetic to a Christian worldview or with the specific intent to evangelize, there remains the situa-

tion of the Christian who teaches in a professional setting with students indifferent to a Christian worldview. It is in this setting that I want to briefly outline how I see my call as a Christian educator, assuming that teaching English is the issue at hand and not a mere guise to evangelize.

I presently carry out my teaching of English at a Korean university whose original roots are solidly Christian. Its inception was through missionary endeavours in the early twentieth century. After the church split during the Korean independence movement, it developed into a stalwart church and, under the leadership of its pastor, Dr. Chi Sun Kim, a Presbyterian seminary was birthed. In the 1990s the transition to a general university was completed. Although the graduate school of theology is led by some very faithful and skilled Christian scholars and there remain some theologically focused undergraduate programmes, no particular faith commitment is required to study in most of the general programmes nor is it a requirement for the native English teachers who teach English at the university. Once again, my purpose is not to criticize the policies of the university, only to establish the context. Some of my classes have students who are sympathetic to a Christian worldview and some do not.

In teaching both types of students, I see incorporated into my task of teaching ESL the softer skill of the call to care for souls. I do not want to make light of the connotation and denotation that the care for souls carries for those who are familiar with its meaning in theological writings. Nevertheless, I find it a helpful term for defining my role as a Christian teacher. The care for souls is not just limited to those who have surrendered to and acknowledged the Kingdom of God but is a term broad enough to embrace evangelism, that is, the process of ushering a non-believer into the family of God. In this way, the spiritual well-being of each individual can be seen within the task of teaching English, which occurs during a set time-period that the student is obliged to keep. In my case, this obligation extends over a semester of four months.

The question remains: With such a covert faith, how does the Christian teacher's concern for the spiritual well-being of the students differ from a non-Christian teacher's approach? After all, there are many non-Christians who are more committed to preparing for their classroom time, are genuinely concerned about their students' welfare inside the class and outside, and are scrupulous in their practices. However, I believe the difference is in the ability of the Christian teacher to draw God into the lives of the students through prayer in a way which may not happen without prayer. Prayer sets the tone for a holistic outlook which integrates the seemingly unspiritual task of teaching English with God's plan for creation and, more specifically, for each student. In other words, it is the recognition that the classroom experience of learning English can influence the students outside of class and outside-of-class life experiences can influence the quality of the students' classroom experience. Students who are perceptive in seeing this connection be-

tween classroom experiences and the rest of life are not only better learners but are in a position to better recognize God's sovereignty and providence in both arenas.

In my own classes, I pray publically to begin classes of Christian majors and privately before classes of different majors. Prayer in itself, I have found, can also be an incidental form of evangelism. I have one student who chooses not to study English with the students in his major but rather in a class of Christian Education majors. I did not pray publically in the previous class that he attended, but I do in this one. Although he is not a Christian, he continues to stay. He understands that the majority of students are Christian Education majors who are more aware of a God-centred holistic view of life, even if it is not articulated. My hope and prayer is that he will make the connection between prayer and the reasons he wants to study in this class.

In my discussion of the care of souls as it pertains to ESL teaching, I have not tried to discuss the unique problems that arise from learning a new language and culture. These do add a certain distinct perspective to what I have written above. Nevertheless, there are ample texts out there that can do a far better job of discussing cross-cultural communication, delineating the difficulties involved, and explaining the hard technicalities of ESL. The wonderful thing about prayer, however, is that God is the ultimate linguist and prayer the ultimate form of communication.

Little did I know in the summer of 1998 that I would someday be teaching ESL as a temporary vocational focus. The mission organization which ran the programme Adventures in English for all practical purposes has closed down its mission in Korea after almost one hundred years of service. However, there are still many places where ESL with a Christian focus needs clarity and direction. In short, I have found it helpful to articulate the relationship between my call as an ESL teacher and my duty to care for souls. Thus with the task of teaching English in hand and a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, I am able to teach the students English and serve God in furthering His Kingdom.

# Ecclesiology: A Review Article

Jack C. Whytock

## Introduction

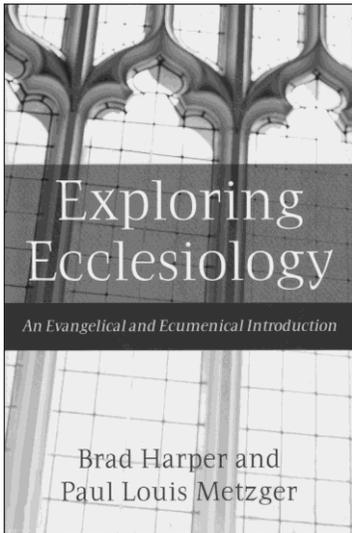
In the last five to ten years there has literally been a plethora of new books coming out on the subject of the church – what some have called an “ecclesiological renaissance”. This is very encouraging to see. It does not mean that the quality is consistent and, as in anything, discernment must always be practised. The five books under review in this article clearly are representative of these new efforts to write on ecclesiology or the doctrine of the church. They are contemporary and wrestle with the life of Christian community, the Scriptures and doctrine.

We begin with two books which endeavour to present evangelical ecclesiologies and are traditionally in the category of systematic theology. Let me first explain my philosophy on approaching them. I read and continue to recommend students and others to read and digest the great classical texts of systematic theology which almost always include a large section on ecclesiology. Here I include the works coming out of the Genevan tradition, such as Calvin’s Book IV of the *Institutes*, Francis Turretin or Benedict Pictet; the Dutch world of writers like Herman Bavinck; the Scottish world of writers like John Dick and the Bannermans; and the Americans of three strands – Louis Berkhof, Charles Hodge or Robert Dabney. I believe ecclesiological study needs to be well grounded in the “greats” of our evangelical and Reformed heritage. It will balance us, inform us and allow us to interact maturely on the subject of ecclesiology. However, we must not stop there. Thus these two books with which this review article begins help us to live in this generation, and we should take them up with enthusiasm to see what we may learn and be challenged by, but only once we have been informed by those works which have stood the test of time. As C. S. Lewis wisely said: “It is a good rule after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between.” So I have stated my method – read and know the old, now proceed to the new; if that means stepping somewhat out of your norm, that is fine.

## Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology

***Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction.* Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009, 336 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-58743-173-9**

The authors, Harper and Metzger, have both taught theology at Multnomah University and have both been involved with The Institute for the Theology of Culture: New Wine, New Wineskins at Multnomah. They note clearly in the introduction that particularly the Western world has continued on its individualistic spiritual path and has been disillusioned with “church”, the corporate entity (p. 11). There is nothing new here – numerous books on evangelical ecclesiology today make the same comment. Next they proceed to define their key terms in relation to the study of ecclesiology – evangelical *and* ecumenical. They use the term “evangelical” to refer to “that post-World War II movement in Protestant American Christianity that prizes the ‘fundamentals of the faith,’ as they were called, while rejecting a fundamentalist spirit that discourages dialogue with those outside our tradition” (p. 13). I appreciate such straightforward writing in their introduction, and they then proceed to unpack that sentence very clearly. Finally, still under “evangelical”, they state their desire to address



contemporary issues – “individualism, women in ministry, evangelism and social action, consumerism in church growth trends, ecumenism, and the church in a postmodern culture” (p. 13). Next they discuss “ecumenical”, a term which can be very loaded for many. They are not suggesting the lowest common denominator ecumenical approach but rather explain and assert the “mosaic” approach. “[This] is to take for granted that the distinctions of the various traditions have the potential to bring richness even in the midst of disagreement, creating a mosaic that, examined up close, may reveal that a few pieces are out of place or misshapen but which nonetheless at a distance becomes an image recognized by all as a beautiful work of art” (p. 17). On an aside, I thought that would have made better artwork for the back cover – the mosaic motif. The authors see this type of mosaic expressing “unity in diversity” and only able to prosper when the culture is hostile to Christianity. In other words, these two theologians are sounding a prophetic note in their ecclesiology. I believe this last point will be difficult for us in the West to come to terms with.

Now that we know the book's key terminology, we can proceed to the main body. After the essential introduction, the book falls into sixteen chapters. The first is "The Church as a Trinitarian Community: The *Being*-Driven Church" which flows well into the second chapter, "The Trinitarian Church Confronts American Individualism". Two comments here – first, this is a very different starting point in ecclesiology than we are used to. It has roots which echo more with Early Church or Eastern Orthodoxy. Does this suggest a barrenness in our own evangelical Protestantism today to fail to appreciate a deeper Trinitarian theology? Next, notice how the authors combine this with the reality of individualism. Here is a thought-provoking paragraph:

We have before us three problems: overemphasis on the individual, the individual family, and the individual church. How shall we respond? The individual is important to God, just not in isolation from the church. The family is important to God, but not to the detriment of God's family. The individual church is important to God, just not in isolation from other churches. (p. 41)

Since there are sixteen chapters, I will not mention them all. Some I thought were very helpful, such as chapters nine, ten and eleven: "The Church as a Serving Community", "Church Discipline – The Lost Element of Service" and "The Church as an Ordered Community". With the last one, I was surprised to see a section devoted to the three basic forms of church government plus "strengths and weaknesses" of each. Harper and Metzger show they have tried to read widely and see the "lay of the land". They make some fair and judicious comments. My conclusion after reading this book is that there are evangelical theologians out there who are very much trying to write on ecclesiology, even including the related area of polity. There are some good things in these chapters.

Now for a chapter which left me confused – "The Role of Women in the Ordered Community" (chapter twelve). This must be addressed in ecclesiology today. It is not there in Bavinck or Hodge, but let's commend Wayne Grudem for dealing with the subject in *Systematic Theology*. My problem was I did not find a conclusion with this chapter. The other chapter which I found "a bit fuzzie" was chapter four, "Eschatology, the Church and Ecology".

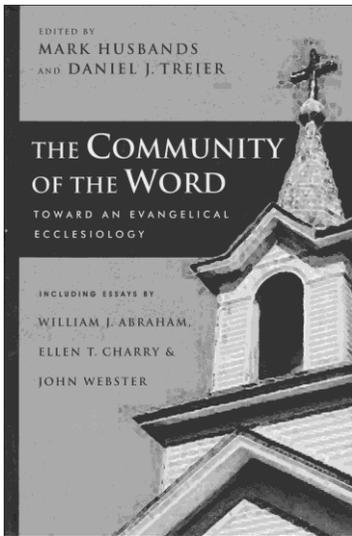
The remaining chapters tend to be dealing more with the matter of being a missional church, which over the last fifteen to twenty years has been receiving much attention and cannot be ignored now in this area of systematic theology. If you have not read much in this area, these chapters will give you quite a good overview of this theme in ecclesiology today.

The authors provide a good "Recommended Readings" section at the back for the chapters. The appendix, "Types of Ecclesiology", is interesting but appears to stand alone and in my estimation needs some more explanation. Overall this is a well-researched book and clearly helps to organize us on

moving forward in this generation towards a richer ecclesiology. I think it needed to interact more with the classical authors of Protestantism, but I am sure that would have made it double the length. However, at times by being so contemporary it loses that historical balance of evaluation. No doubt this is not the final word but another helpful step. I think we can learn and benefit from *Exploring Ecclesiology*, and it should inspire us to write more ourselves.

***The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology.* Edited by Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier. Downers Grove, IL/Leicester: InterVarsity Press/Apollos, 2005, 291 pp., paper. ISBN 0-8308-2797-8**

Now to the second book, *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, edited by Husbands and Treier of Wheaton College. Generally I find collections less inspiring and less unified. This book has thirteen different contributors, and I will confess at the outset I was drawn to one essay, one in the middle of the book, by Darrell L. Guder, “The Church as Missional Community” (pp. 114-128). This essay comes in part two of the collection, “Locating the Church Dogmatically”. It is short but well-written and very helpful to grasp the theological construct of the church as “missional”. The essay alone is worth the price of the book and will serve as an excellent essay to give to today’s students in ecclesiology courses in Bible colleges or divinity courses in a seminary.



Back to the book’s organizational structure, part one is “The Church in ‘Evangelical’ Theologies: Looking Back”. This begins with a very provocative essay by D. G. Hart. I have mentioned part two above. Part three is “The Church as Moral Community” and part four, “The Church as Sacramental Community?”. Here one sees that it is not just a discussion about the number of sacraments but rather a fuller-orbed approach to the understanding of a “sacramental theology”. Part five is “Locating the Church Culturally”.

Those familiar with the concept of cultural engagement will sense where this section charts the waters. As I read this last section of essays, I started to think that perhaps these were aimed at graduate-level seminars or advanced seminars on ecclesiology. They are demanding, and I came away thinking an essay like James K. A. Smith’s, “The Church as Social Theory: A Reformed Engagement with Radical Orthodoxy”, needs much more background than is contained in the essay for most students and pastors. Generally the other three parts of the book are much more accessible to a wider audience. The other essay writers are Dennis Okholm, Jonathan R. Wilson, John

Webster, William J. Abraham, Allen Verhey, Craig A. Carter, Gary Badcock, Ellen T. Charry, Willie James Jennings and William A. Dyrness.

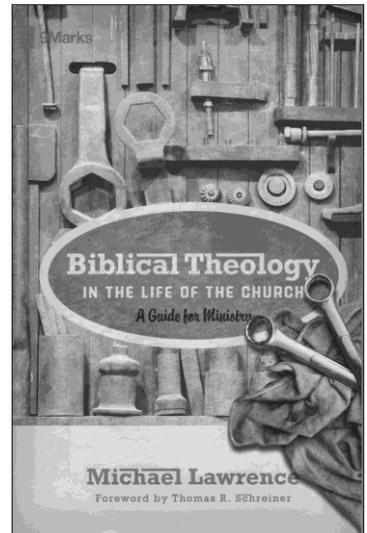
*The Community of the Word* lacks a unifying voice. There are tensions between some writers; the first essay clearly demonstrates this. I am not convinced that overall the collection moves us a great deal forward “toward an evangelical ecclesiology”. I came away saying there were some nuggets of gold “here and there”, but an overall unity appeared lacking to me.

### Biblical Theology and Ecclesiology

***Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry.* Michael Lawrence. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010, 233 pp, paper. ISBN 978-1-4335-1508-8**

From systematic theology we move over to biblical theology and Michael Lawrence’s *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry*. Graeme Goldsworthy sees Lawrence’s book as a “skilfully integrative approach” that “breaks new ground in the practical application of biblical theology”.

This book is part of the 9Marks Books,<sup>1</sup> thus readers familiar with Thabiti Anyabwile or Mark Dever will already know some of the parallel themes to that examined by Lawrence. *Biblical Theology* comments upon Dever’s formulation of the second mark of a healthy church, namely “biblical theology”. Lawrence’s chapters here emerge out of sermons he preached as part of Dever’s vision to have writers address the nine marks. From sermon form they were transcribed, and then from transcription it appears they were taught in a class setting with a book in view. Since the author, Michael Lawrence, is associate pastor at Capital Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC and works with colleague Mark Dever, there is very much a unified voice with the 9Marks movement or group. It does appear to be a distinct movement in my estimation.



<sup>1</sup> For those not familiar with 9Marks, see my article, “Reformed Identity and *Semper Reformanda* as Applied to Discussions on Ecclesiology in North America”, *Hadlington House Journal* 12 (2010): 149-160. Dever’s nine marks are: expositional preaching, biblical theology, a biblical understanding of the gospel, a biblical understanding of conversion, a biblical understanding of evangelism, biblical church membership, biblical church discipline, biblical discipleship and biblical church leadership.

*Biblical Theology* distils and integrates much of the ground which has been gone over by Meredith Kline, O. Palmer Robertson, Gerhardus Vos and Edmund Clowney. It contains some excellent charts such as the chart “Table of Major Biblical Covenants” on page sixty-one. Those familiar with the major components of what has been written on biblical theology will find many of the chapters, perhaps well over half the book, covering familiar ground. Those not as well acquainted with the subject will find a good read here. Such chapter titles as the following illustrate well my point: “Biblical Theology Tools 1: Covenants, Epochs, and Canon”; “Biblical Theology Tools 2: Prophecy, Typology, and Continuity”; “Biblical and Systematic Theology: Do We Really Need Both?”; “The Story of Creation”; “The Story of the Fall”.

This takes us then to section three of the book, namely “Putting It Together for the Church”, the shortest portion of the book with only chapters eleven and twelve – “Preaching and Teaching (Case Studies)” and “Biblical Theology and the Local Church”. Lawrence develops his “sermon application grid” in chapter eleven. Grid subjects include: the text’s points, the Bible storyline (redemptive historical), non-Christian/worldviews, society, Christ, the individual Christian, the Church, and the Shepherd’s taxonomy.

The final chapter, “Biblical Theology and the Local Church”, briefly mentions God’s people as the “assembly” and then proceeds to look at “spheres of ministry” – counselling, missions, caring for the poor, and Church-State relations.

As an exposition on Mark Dever’s mark of “Biblical Theology” being one of the defining marks of a healthy church, there is much here to be commended. The author distils the work of many authors on both biblical and applied theology. However, I came away somewhat disappointed. Yes, the book does help distil much on biblical theology. Yes, it provides many “tools”, or would it be better to say “frameworks”, for consideration; but I thought it was going to help to integrate and apply this in the life of the church. I have since concluded that the book is really foundational and that it is much more about principles as to how the Word as biblical theology shapes church life, theology and worship. This helps to explain the fact that there are only two “application” chapters (chapters eleven and twelve).

### **Applied Theology and Ecclesiology**

***The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love.* Jonathan Leeman. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010, 375 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-4335-0905-6**

Another new book expounding upon two of Dever’s formulations of the nine marks of a healthy church is Jonathan Leeman’s *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*. Leeman focuses on the two marks of church membership and discipline. He is an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in

Washington, DC and is the director of communications for 9Marks. The book's foreword was written by Mark Dever.

The thesis of the book promotes church membership and the practice of local church discipline; the way that Leeman explains these marks is to show that they are rooted in a correct understanding of what constitutes biblical love. Biblical love has commitments and relationships and has right and wrong built into its nature (p. 11).

Like many books, Leeman's book is divided into three parts: part one, "Love Misdefined"; part two, "Love Redefined"; and part three, "Love Lived". Part one has one chapter, and Leeman certainly tries to bring his subject into the reality of Western culture. The chapter's opening header is John Lennon's "All you need is love". He begins the chapter by using the style of a catechism:

**Main Question:** How do our common cultural conceptions of love today hinder our acceptance of church membership and discipline?

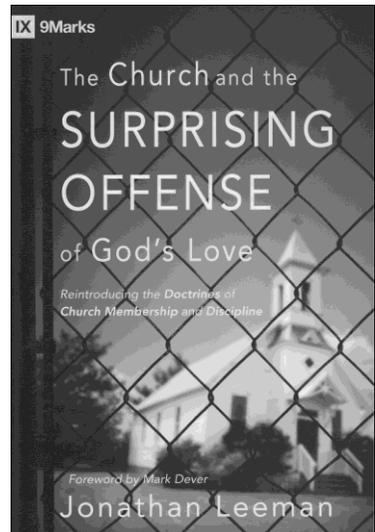
**Main Answer:** We have made love into an idol that serves us and so redefined love into something that never imposes judgments, conditions, or binding attachments. (p. 39)

It is a very stimulating chapter and certainly makes the topic of church membership relevant to today, not some historical nicety. It may not read as well outside of a Western context, where some of the illustrations may lose their impact.

Part two is the heart of Leeman's book and totals almost two hundred pages. Here he takes us to the connection between God's love and church membership. He then proceeds to the topic of authority as grounded in love, and next, the topic of Christ's authority in local churches. Again his catechetical introduction here states his thesis:

**Main Questions:** What authority does Christ give the local church and why?

**Main Answers:** Christ authorizes the local church to proclaim and protect the gospel, to recognize or affirm those who belong to him, to unite them to itself, to oversee their discipleship, and to exclude any imposters. He gives the local church this authority in order to protect and display his gospel in a fallen world which continually misunderstands and misports- trays his gospel love. (p. 169)



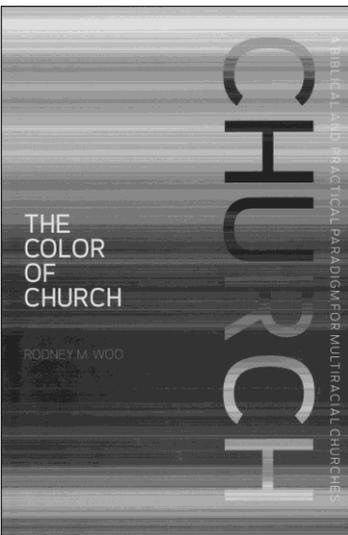
The final chapter here on love redefined is “The Covenant of Love”, which answers the main question, “What exactly is this commitment or ‘covenant’ of local church membership?”

Now, two hundred pages is a lot of reading. I did wonder if this section could have been reduced and made more concise. What is said here is sound, yet I still came away thinking there could have been more biblical development on the subject of membership. That may sound like a contradiction, but I do not see it as such. Leeman makes his point, but there is still more to argue than he has room for because it seems too exhaustive on his chief rationale.

The third section of the book tackles two “Main Questions”: “How should a church responsibly affirm, oversee, and remove members? Should it account for cultural differences in these activities?” and “What does it mean to submit to a local church? Are there limits to the church’s authority over the individual?” Even if one’s polity is not Baptist or historic Congregationalist, there is still much to learn from here. Having said that, there is an underlying polity with which not all Protestant traditions will be in complete agreement.

Leeman has certainly given us a large work on the subject of church membership. The size will limit its usage in small group settings in local churches, so it will become more the domain of the pastor or theology student.

***The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches.* Rodney M. Woo. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2009, 290 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8054-4839-9**



The last book in this review article, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches*, is distinctive in that its theme is not in the forefront of any of the other four books reviewed. However, it is a critical aspect of biblical ecclesiology and its application, namely that of church as multiracial. This book is very much a case-study text of Wilcrest Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, where the author, Rodney Woo, has pastored for seventeen years. In these years a once all-white congregation has undergone an incredible transformation to now being represented by forty-four different countries and a white population of less than forty percent. As a multiracial church, this book, *The Color of Church*, uses this definition:

“a multiracial congregation is composed of racially diverse believers united by their faith in Christ, who makes disciples of all nations in the anticipation of the ultimate racial reunion around the throne of God” (p. vii).

The book comes really as a sequel to Michael Emerson and Rodney Woo's *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States*,<sup>2</sup> and as such it is much more focused. One congregation is used as a case-study, and from this the author endeavours to develop the biblical basis for a multiracial ministry and then makes application. Thus the three main sections of the book are as follows: section one, "Biblical Basis"; section two, "Current Reality"; and section three, "Implementation". The book is reflective of the author. His father was half Chinese, his wife is Hispanic, and his Ph.D. thesis is entitled "Paul's Contextual Approach for Evangelizing the Jews and the Gentiles against the Background of Acts 13:16-41 and Acts 17:22-31".

The biblical basis section is not a difficult read, nor is the entire book. There is a lightness about the book, not shallow but light because of the author's writing and illustration style. It is not a weighty theological tome which only academics will read. It is certainly meant for church leaders and members to read and study together. This is evidenced by all the "Discussion Questions" placed at the end of each chapter. Even the biblical section is very testimonial, but this should not be off-putting because I found myself learning a great deal about congregational life in a multiracial, suburban Texan context. Given the nature of urbanization in the West today, ministerial training cannot afford to ignore such realities, or we will ignore them at our peril. I personally did not find anything biblically alarming or very controversial from what Woo was saying. I think there are some practicalities, such as language in multiracial churches, which are not factored in sufficiently here. Language does come up briefly under the implementation section (p. 192) but is very much limited to Wilcrest Church and not very well developed beyond the case study.

Two chapters which I intend to use in teaching are chapters ten and eleven, "The Role of Worship in the Multiracial Church" and "Leadership in a Multiracial Church" (pp. 180-225). The chapter on worship helps us to see different models in multiracial worship when it comes to music. These must be known and discussed. Woo does not demand one model but gives us the "lay of the land" as a helpful starting point. His eight-fold "Character Sketch of a Multiracial Leader" in chapter eleven is very engaging and good material for a seminar training session. Anyone wanting to explore leadership in a multiracial church must read this chapter.

*The Color of Church* is theologically a challenge to the development of our ecclesiology and helps us to consider how to apply our doctrine. Yes, it is very geographically bound – Houston, Texas. However, we have here an evangelical pastor and professor helping us with a very important part of ecclesiology. It is not a definitive work, because that is not the nature of this

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<sup>2</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

book. I will never forget one story from the author. When Rodney Woo was being considered as a pastoral candidate for Wilcrest, a church member approached a member of the search committee and asked if Woo had ever considered adding the letter “d” to his surname so that he would be more readily accepted by the congregation. Are you interested in the book?

### **Conclusion**

This article has surveyed recent works in the evangelical fold all related to the doctrine of the church. The first two were in systematic theology, the third in biblical theology as practised in the church, and the fourth and fifth in the area of applied theology and church life. It is hoped that by examining these five books in one review article, the large scope of the field of study and practice related to ecclesiology will be seen. Stand on the shoulders of the great classical writers but remember we live today. These five books, as works by living authors, do in different ways help us to live in our generation. Their audience is very much, I think, the Western church; yet having said that, there are universals for the global, Christian evangelical community. Though discerning these universals will require some sifting, it will be well worth the effort.

**Book Reviews**  
**and**  
**Book Briefs**



## Book Reviews

In our books section, we inform readers about works which have been recently added to the Haddington House Library. Most are recent publications, but on occasion we include rare and valuable books we have acquired which students, pastors, patrons and others may want to come and consult. All reviews are made in keeping with our editorial policy; that is, to help our readers in the stewardship of their resources and time. The *Journal* uses the standard abbreviation ‘hc’ to denote hard cover. The International Standard Book Number (ISBN) has been included with all books when available. We begin this section with “**Book Reviews**”, organized according to the four divisions of theology.

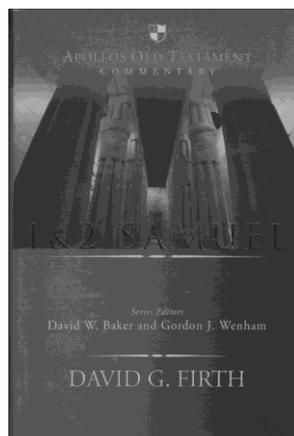
## Biblical Theology

**1 & 2 Samuel. David G. Firth. Apollos Old Testament Commentary. Nottingham, England/Downers Grove, IL: Apollos/ InterVarsity, 2009, 614 pp., hc. ISBN: 978-0-8308-2508-0**

David Firth is lecturer in Old Testament and B.A. Course Leader at Cliff College Derbyshire in the United Kingdom. In the new IVP Apollos series on the Old Testament, he contributes a very significant and weighty volume on 1 & 2 Samuel.

This commentary series from IVP is committed to offering a “full exposition of the theological message within the framework of biblical theology, and a commitment to the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament” (from the dust-jacket). Series editors, Gordon Wenham and David Baker, state in the preface that authors were selected on the basis of their ability to marry scholarship and application. This is certainly encouraging and is indeed what we find in this volume. It helps to fill the hole of good evangelical scholarship on the Old Testament histories.

The first forty-eight pages of the book are dedicated to the questions of authorship, date etc., and the book concludes with a massive bibliography and Scripture, author and subject indices. Firth argues strongly for the unity



of authorship in the book by comparing content structure and themes over the whole of 1 and 2 Samuel. He says, "1 Sam. 28 shows awareness of 1 Sam. 15, especially given that the sin which leads to Saul's death is divination, a sin already indicated in 1 Sam. 15:23" (p. 25). He says further, "The book's literary coherence along with the way that different sections of the book all interact suggest that Samuel is a planned composition" (p. 26).

The series is directed at a broad audience from Bible students to pastors and academics. It attempts to take the ancient text and make it applicable to the modern context. In order to do this, Firth breaks the commentary into four manageable sections. First, he offers a fresh translation of the text from the Hebrew. As an extension of the translation section, he draws attention to any verses and words that require special examination with regards to textual criticism or etymology and thus provides a necessary, though not exhaustive, analysis of the text.

The second section on "Form and Structure" deals with any patterns of thought or rhetorical devices that the author might be employing in drawing out his point. For example, in the chapter dealing with the calling and rise of Saul, Firth shows how the author compares this structurally to the call, rise and success of David. Again, in chapter twenty-three he points out the author's intention in reinforcing the sovereignty of God by setting His deliverance from the hand of Saul at Keilah and then at Ziph side by side to show that their striking similarity is more than coincidence but is the ordering of a sovereign and gracious God. Structural observations like these are able to help preachers to draw out the intended richness of the text.

The "Comment" section takes us simply to an outline of the major points of the text, while the "Explanation" portion of the commentary takes us beyond David to the wider application of the history in the field of biblical theology. On the famous "David and Goliath" passage he comments, "David demonstrates an understanding of the central purpose of Israel's election and this understanding has shaped his actions" (p. 212).

One criticism about the "Explanation" sections, where, as the above quotation shows, Firth seeks to draw out some broader applications, is that he is weak in developing the Christological significance of David and the ultimate fulfillment in the Kingdom of Jesus. This is born out in the thin smattering of New Testament texts in the Scripture index. There are places where Firth is able to find some "practical applications" to the life of the Christian and draw attention to how the Lord expects His people to act or not act. For instance, in commenting on Hannah's Song, Firth makes the obvious connections to Mary in the New Testament by saying quite rightly, "God remains the champion of the poor and the weak who cry to him, he still brings down the mighty and exalts the poor" and again, ". . . Paul knows that strength comes only in weakness (2 Cor. 12:1-10), that only those who do not seek power can be exalted by God" (p. 61). True enough! But one has to ask why he cannot also draw our attention to the "object" of the believer's faith in an

epoch of Israel's history that parallels the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus in such manifold ways.

On the famous account of David's anointing, he comments simply, "The human propensity is to go for the obvious, as does Samuel in his initial response to Eliab, but Yahweh's ways are not those of mankind" (p. 185). Compare that to Dale R. Davis' Christologically rich application where he says, "Perhaps at no time did the living God disclose a more flabbergasting choice than in the case of David's greater Descendant. 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.' (Ps 118:22; 1 Pet. 2:4). What should we deduce from that? We should realize Yahweh made his choice (Ps. 118:23a), and we should relish it (Ps. 118:23b). There is a delight we should have over Yahweh's unusual, unguessable ways. It honors him when we revel in his surprises."<sup>1</sup>

It is not always apparent to the exegete where those connections to the person and work of Christ are and looking to others who have done some "spade-work" in that area is helpful. Those who are preaching 1 and 2 Samuel and are looking for assistance here would have to supplement this otherwise helpful work with other sources; two modern standards would be A. W. Pink's classic on the *Life of David* and more recently Dale Ralph Davis' *Looking on the Heart*.

I would offer one further criticism. In a commentary of this size on a book of the Bible with sometimes such a dizzying amount of activity and vast amounts of territory covered by its main characters, one might expect at least one map to give us the lay of the land. For example, the ESV Study Bible in the space of 1 and 2 Samuel alone boasts of no less than seventeen color side-bar maps to give some rich geographical context to the narrative. If there are more commentaries to follow in this series, maps could be an area the editors would want to revisit.

Despite these caveats, this is a significant commentary and one that preachers and Bible students alike ought to be able to turn to with profit and confidence.

*Reviewed by Kent I. Compton, the minister of the Western Charge of the Free Church of Scotland, Prince Edward Island. Rev. Compton is a graduate of the University of Prince Edward Island and the Free Church College, Edinburgh. He pastored in Edmonton, Alberta, before returning to the Island. He also serves as a Trustee of Haddington House.*

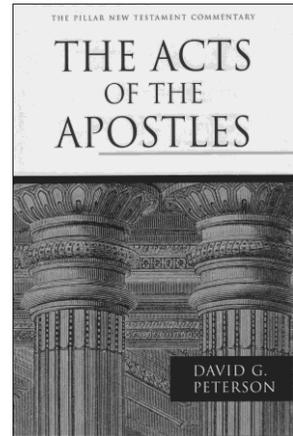



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<sup>1</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*. Focus on the Bible (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 81.

***The Acts of the Apostles.* David G. Peterson. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009, 790 pp., hc. ISBN 978-0-8028-3731-8**

This volume is one in the Pillar commentary series designed specifically for pastors and Bible teachers seeking resources which facilitate a highly informed but relevant quality of holistic Bible exposition. The series is marked by the expectation that the contributor approach the Bible text with an “evenhanded openness” expressive of the values of genuine reverence, holy joy and unquestioning obedience. An approach paired with the contributor’s method of commentary, one in which a dialogue with important contemporary scholars is exercised. In these lies the facilitative strength of the series bringing a non-technical but informed link between academic results and the sermon. The series editor, D.A. Carson, proffers that Peterson has superbly fulfilled this task, an assessment with which I must concur although with minor reservations.



Dr. David G. Peterson, an ordained minister of the Anglican Church of Australia, is currently the Senior Research Fellow at Moore Theological College in Sydney. There he teaches New Testament Exegesis and Theology, and leads two courses on Worship. Prior to this appointment, from 1996-2007, he was the Principal of Oak Hill Theological College in London, England. His commentary is the product of over fifteen years of study, teaching, scholarly interaction and writing on the book of Acts. The commentary proper is prefaced by a joint introduction to and discussion of the theology of Acts spanning ninety-seven pages. The remainder of the volume, six hundred plus pages, contains the judicious exegesis of Luke’s second volume. The commentary contains no supplementary sections such as appendices, maps or glossary.

After a brief preface, in the astute introduction Peterson deals with the usual commentary categories of, “authorship and date”, “genre”, “sources”, “character”, “structure”, “purpose”, “interpretation” and in the subsequent section treats Lukan theology. Peterson holds to traditional authorship, a mid 70s date of publication for Acts; he reads the volume primarily as historiography and therefore takes a literary-critical approach as defined primarily by Tannehill. For Peterson, Acts relates: the fulfilling of the “Plan of God” in the resurrected and exalted Jesus, as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures of Old Testament (Squires, 1993; Marshall, 1998), the Holy Spirit’s imparting of the blessings of the relationship with God by faith in Jesus, the witness and mission of Jesus’ followers and the story of the nascent church. Peter-

son's treatment of Lukan atonement theology present in Acts is good, yet reference to Mikeal C. Parsons' chapter in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (1998) on the significant connection between Isaiah 53 and Acts 8 was left out of the dialogue. This would have further strengthened Peterson's case and better addressed scholarly criticism. Also, the "we" passages beginning at Acts 16 till chapter 28, were treated mainly in the context of commentary and only briefly in the introduction. With regard to the full significance of the "we" passages, it was good to see the reference to S.E. Porter (2001), which will undoubtedly be helpful to readers. Peterson's references and notes are helpful in themselves as they provide a valuable resource pool for expanded reading.

Reading through the commentary one apprehends rather quickly that Peterson's analysis shares a commonality, has positive dialogue, with the work of C.K. Barrett, F.F. Bruce, L.T. Johnson, I.H. Marshall, F.S. Spencer and R.C. Tannehill and B. Witherington III. All of these writers are reputable Luke and Acts scholars. Interaction, though, with C.H. Talbert's writings is missing yet Peterson has provided ways around this particularity so that his commentary does not accumulate a comparative-critical deficit. The particular array of the above noted scholars gives somewhat of a pre and post 1974 balance to Peterson's observations coloured by the basic shades of historical-critical, traditional-logical, socio-rhetorical and narratological approaches.

After using this commentary over a period of time, it has been observed that it lends itself easily to the rigors of sermon and teaching preparation. It is a useful tool for focusing on information in the text and its background with a view to the broader purpose and design of Luke and Acts such that it fosters application and cultural contextualization. In this way the commentary facilitates the healthy abstraction of themes from well-rounded concepts. Peterson's commentary is consistent in this feature throughout his exegesis. A representative example of this strength can be taken from the observations on Stephen's Ministry and Defence in Acts 6-7. Peterson identifies the means and importance of Stephen's characterization in that he is contrasted with his opponents but also compared to Moses on the basis of his Spirit-filled character and on the basis of his defence (p. 244). Stephen's ministry is shown to extend beyond waiting on tables for he did wonders and signs like Jesus, the apostles and Moses thus portraying him as "fulfilling a pattern of prophetic destiny which involves rejection and suffering" (p. 238). Thus, "Stephen is a model of faithful witness and response for readers who may be in the midst of opposition and suffering" (p. 244).

Another interesting sample of Peterson's exegesis comes from Acts 20, Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, particularly verse 32. Paul warns the Ephesian elders of impending schism in the congregation such that the elders cannot even rely on themselves to be faithful in their office. Hence, Paul, "...committed or entrusted them (*paratithemai*; cf. Lk 23:46; Acts 14:23) 'to God and to the word of his grace' (*tō theō kai tō logo tēs chariots autou*).

The two parts of this last phrase probably represent one concept: they were entrusted ‘to God, who is active in the word of grace.’” (p. 572). At this point Peterson refers to Barrett who observes the use of “hendiadys”, in Greek the coordination of two independent ideas (p. 572), that is the division of what would be an adjective and noun into two nouns connected by “and”. Peterson correctly observes, however, that, “God and the gospel cannot be divided, since he uses the gospel to save those who believe, both Jews and Gentiles...” (p. 572). Peterson continues, “Once more the gospel is identified as a message of grace from God (cf. v. 24), which not only brings people to Christ in the first place but is also powerful enough to ‘build you up’ (cf. 9:31) ‘and give you an inheritance’ (cf. 7:5) ‘among all those who are sanctified’ (cf. 26:18).” Peterson points out that these are three significant Pauline terms and proceeds to make extensive references to their places in the Pauline corpus, which is an “important contribution to Luke’s theology of the gospel” (p. 572). In this example Peterson has not allowed grammatical complexities to obscure the consistent portrayal of theological interests in the text. It is evident that Peterson has in mind the sole purpose of optimizing exegetical evenhandedness.

An apparent minor “weakness” of Peterson’s commentary is that he allows the limits of the analysis of those he is in dialogue with to bear some influence on the scope of his own discussions. Also, as with most things written, time and developments in research threaten thoroughness. This is felt only in a few specific areas as one utilizes the commentary. This, however, cannot be said to be a deficiency. It is most clearly seen in his treatment of Acts 28 and its abrupt open ending, for which a number of developed explanations have been posited (Puskas, 1980 [2009]; Brosend, 1996; Marguerat, 1999; Troftgruben, 2009 [of which many could not have been aware]). It should be noted in all fairness, however, that this is a minor concern for it is evident from Peterson’s logic that he is conscious of the nature and role that secondary sources have in his exegesis.

Peterson’s contribution to the Pillar series is formidable, and to Lukan scholarship it is valuable. He has successfully synthesized a significant amount of information on Acts, which has direct bearing in a literary approach to the text and in an application respecting Lukan design. The work is far from just a collation from Acts’ scholarship; it is closer to what might be termed a “synthesis-commentary” with a goal to elevate the work of pastors, teachers and possibly even laity.

*Reviewed by Rev. Frank Z. Kovács, the tutor for the distance Bible courses at Haddington House and pastor of the Reformed Hungarian Church in Toronto. He has his M.Th. degree from North-West University in South Africa and is a Ph.D. candidate there in Lukan studies.*



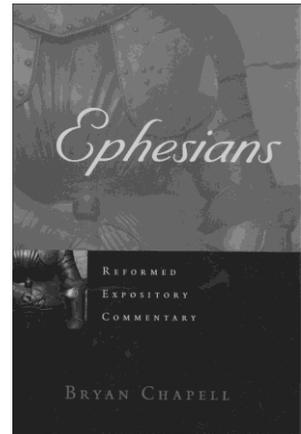
***Ephesians*. Bryan Chapell. Reformed Expository Commentary. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009, 383 pp., hc. ISBN 978-1-59638-016-5**

Covenant Seminary president, Bryan Chapell is already well known to some *Journal* readers through his now “go-to” work on preaching, *Christ Centered Preaching* (Baker, 1994). Chapell shows that his homiletical skill is not confined to the theory or mechanics of preaching but also the practice of it as his recent commentary on Ephesians ably demonstrates. Readers might recall that other commentaries in this series, *Galatians* and *1 Timothy*, were also reviewed. (See *Journal* volumes 8 and 11.)

With the rise of interest in Reformed theology throughout the Christian community (as witnessed by articles in *Time* and *Christianity Today*), there is a need not only to be able to articulate Reformed theology as a system of doctrine but, just as importantly, to model that in preaching to the world. This is where these commentaries in the Reformed Expository Commentary series are very helpful. Hopefully the title will not dissuade the Lord’s people in the pew from profiting from this helpful work since it is very much geared to a broad readership, not just pastors. In terms of its accessibility, one might liken it to The Bible Speaks Today series but with a distinctively Reformed thrust.

What you find right from the introductory chapter on election and predestination (vv. 3-6) is an unapologetic, yet attractive, presentation of the eternal purposes of God in Christ. Chapell does not treat Paul’s presentation of these doctrines as if someone were reading a systematic theology but roots Paul’s interests in the context in which the Ephesians found themselves, namely the sin, failures and struggles that we all encounter as the people of God.

Chapell provides numerous helpful illustrations. For example, he describes a struggling congregation in a hopeless district of New Orleans and asks how it is that a congregation who sometimes senses the hopelessness of their mandate continues to encourage themselves as the people of God without feeling they are disappointing their Lord all the time. Chapell says, “Wouldn’t it make a difference to your heart, to your zeal, to know God loved you forever, even when you as a church were wrestling to survive?” He adds, “Paul uses the assurance of predestination to strengthen the church for her struggle against evil and discouragement” (p. 27). He wisely concludes, “Predestination . . . was meant to give a profound sense of confidence and security in God’s love so that we will not despair in situations of great



difficulty, pain and shame” (p. 27). Chapell echoes the Westminster Confession here as it states, “So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel” (ch. 3:8).

Chapell unpacks with pastoral wisdom the many applications of the gospel outlined in this majestic letter. He covers the implications of the gospel in families with an extensive treatment of the various roles. He shows not only how the gospel is to be preached but also lived out in the home. His chapter on male headship, aptly entitled “The Sacrificial Head”, outlines the high calling of Christ-centered male headship in the home. How urgently does the church need to hear this again. He says, “Husbands represent Christ to their spouses . . . their primary purpose as heads of households is to help all persons in the home fully apprehend the Lord’s grace in their lives” (p. 277).

His masterful and liberal use of illustrations shows why it was the practice of the Lord to pepper His teaching with stories. Space would fail us to comment section by section, but, put simply, it is this use of biblical Reformed theology married to warm and practical application that makes this commentary so worthwhile.

This is not a technical commentary except where it has to be. If you are looking for that you will need to go elsewhere. It does realize its goal in integrating the doctrines of grace so richly found throughout Ephesians into modern life. We can be thankful, especially those of us in the preaching ministry, for this contemporary and accessible treatment of an epistle whose message needs to be clearly proclaimed now more than ever.

*Reviewed by Kent I. Compton*

## Systematic Theology

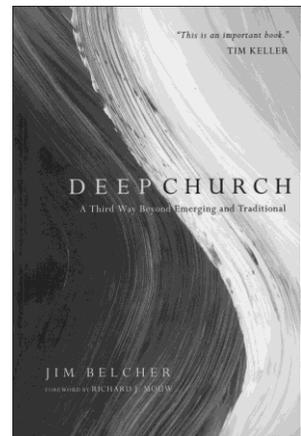
***Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional.***  
**Jim Belcher. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009, 240 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8308-3716-8**

One of the most confusing topics for many people from a traditional church background is the emerging church. Some are attempting to ignore it, others quickly dismiss it, still others vigorously critique it and many others wonder what all the fuss is about. In his book, *Deep Church*, Jim Belcher is attempting not only to bring some clarity to the topic but also to propose a response rather than simply a critique.

Belcher, lead pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California, says that he is hoping to reach a varied audience that includes four groups of people: 1) people who are unhappy with emerging only or traditional only; 2) those who do not know much about the emerging church and want to see what it is about; 3) seminary students who are trying to figure out their ecclesiology; and 4) experienced pastors who are wondering if there might be another way. While reaching such a varied audience is not easy, Belcher has done a good job of engaging the four groups mentioned. So, if you fit into one of those groups, I encourage you to give this book a try.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is an explanation of Belcher's own journey in, around, through and out of the emerging and traditional circles; a journey which led him in search of a third way. In the second part of the book, Belcher explains how his proposed third way compares to traditional and emerging churches.

While one might be tempted to get straight to the second part of the book to see what Belcher, and those he brings into the discussion, have to say about truth, gospel, preaching and so on, it is important to stress that the first part of the book sets the stage for the rest and should not be skipped over. It is here that Belcher explains his journey and this needs to be understood before his "Deep Church" proposal can be examined fairly. Understanding the



origins of his thinking greatly informs the results of it.

In chapter one, Belcher tells the story that led to the writing of this book. He recounts his sense that his local church lacked the authentic depth he was longing to see. Long discussions on what Christianity was all about with others who shared his angst led to greater authenticity. This in turn attracted more people who shared this sense of wanting something more. It was also clear that what was happening in his small group did not really seem to fit the traditional church setting.

When he began to question his church's lack of authenticity, Belcher never thought his concern would be so widespread beyond his local context. But it was not long before he met others who shared his concerns. Most of those he connected with at various emerging church conferences. In that sense, Belcher was part of the emerging church scene and was an insider.

But that did not last. While agreeing with much of the criticism of the traditional church, Belcher felt the emerging conversation created generational segregation, lacked deep enough roots, failed to have enough connection to a larger group and did not focus enough on the cross, forgiveness and grace. This made him feel like an outsider. He was left wondering where he fit; neither the emerging or traditional church had a complete enough picture. This led to the "Deep Church" idea.

If you are new to all this emerging church stuff, you are probably wondering what the emerging church is exactly. Belcher tackles that question in the second chapter. It should be noted that defining the emerging church is not an easy task. While tempting to do so, it is too simplistic to define the emerging church as the next new thing. This does not seem to be simply a variation on a seeker model. Most emerging church people critique the seeker movement just as vigorously as they do traditional churches.

So how does one define the emerging church? The best way to define it is to look at what it protests against. As a result of Belcher's research, he proposes seven main categories of protest that emerging church people have with the traditional church. These are: captivity to Enlightenment rationalism, a narrow view of salvation, belief before belonging, uncontextualized worship, ineffective preaching, weak ecclesiology, tribalism. This does help to begin to define the emerging church; those who read this book and are coming from a traditional church background are encouraged to remember the old adage, "If the shoe fits, wear it". Alongside those categories of protest, Belcher proposes and defines three main groups within the emerging church: Relevants, Reconstructionists and Revisionists. These are helpful and are based mostly on Ed Stetzer's work.<sup>1</sup>

While those who are new to the emerging church conversation might be tempted to ignore the emerging church, Belcher reminds his readers that they should not ignore a group that includes brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006).

he says the emerging church needs to be explored in order to learn from it, to refute it and to allow for meaningful dialogue. Belcher wants to caution his traditional church readers not to reduce the emerging church to one or two people or to some popular event that is easy to ridicule. At the same time, his emerging church readers are called to recognize the variety and diversity in traditional churches, including the good found there as well.

In chapter 3 Belcher lays the groundwork for his third way, “Deep Church”, or as he also calls it, “Mere Christianity”. He says that in order to move forward as the body of Christ, we need some ground for unity that is broad enough to include Christians from many places and cultures but not so broad that we lose orthodox beliefs. He proposes Robert Greer’s two-tier system: the top tier is comprised of creeds of the early church that are the test of orthodoxy; the bottom tier is made up of the distinctives of the various church groups. The ground for unity is the top tier, while grace is extended on the bottom tier.

Belcher proposes living out a third way is possible when churches remain true to and study deeply the top tier, while allowing for diversity and exploration at the bottom tier. Belcher hopes the third way will take the best of both traditional and emerging, while critiquing both as well, so that the Church can move forward in health and vitality.

In the second part of the book, Belcher gives greater depth to what the “Deep Church” is all about. The chapters are: “Deep Truth”, “Deep Evangelism”, “Deep Gospel”, “Deep Worship”, “Deep Preaching”, “Deep Ecclesiology” and “Deep Culture”. While each of these chapters could be a book or more on its own, Belcher does capture the essence of each topic quite well. He does not shy away from the controversial topics, and he willingly critiques both emerging and traditional viewpoints.

Belcher uses a three part approach in each chapter. He begins by examining an emerging church author who has either created the largest stir in traditional circles or who has explained the emerging position on that topic best. He then examines a key traditional author who has “pushed back” on this topic. There are various authors on both sides including Brian McLaren, D.A. Carson, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, Kevin DeYoung and John MacArthur. The third part of each chapter is Belcher’s attempt to critique both the emerging and traditional authors as well as to propose his third way. This often includes the “best” parts of both the emerging and traditional streams.

In his conclusion, Belcher offers seven suggestions for becoming a “Deep Church”. He is not proposing some specific model that you can follow. This is not a cookie-cutter proposal. Rather, these are broad-stroke ideas that he hopes will be a foundation for a “Deep Church” that will spread far and wide. Belcher hopes that this book will be an agent of moving towards greater unity.

While his readers might not always agree with Belcher’s assessment or critique of either emerging or traditional church thought, this book does stand

out as being different than many others on this subject. Most others attempt to defend their camp and critique the other thereby denying the possibility of a third way. Those who try to do what Belcher is doing are seen as sitting on the fence.

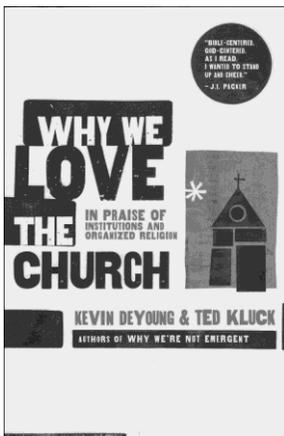
Sometimes neither group finds it satisfying when one tries to glean from opposing camps to provide a third way; that may be the case for many who will read this book. I am sure that some who read this book will “fly to the rescue” of their beloved author who has been critiqued or challenged by Belcher. Others will respond by claiming Belcher is simply living in a dream world.

In fact, this book may do two things: it may cause a defensive response from both emerging and traditional church people, and it may unite those who are unable to live in either group and are looking for a third way. The latter is a group Belcher is hoping in for the future. Either way, most people who read this book will be challenged by it. Are you interested in seeing what a third way might look like? This is as good a place as any to start.

*Reviewed by Albert J. Kooy, who is the youth pastor at the Charlottetown Christian Reformed Church, Prince Edward Island. Formerly Albert was a youth pastor in Ontario, where he had also taught at a Christian high school in the Toronto area. He is married and has six children and is a student at Haddington House.*



***Why We Love the Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion.* Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck. Chicago, IL: Moody, 2009, 234 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8024-5837-7**



*Why We Love The Church: In Praise of Institutions and Organized Religion* is written by two young men, Kevin DeYoung, the pastor, and Ted Kluck, a layman, at University Reformed Church in Lansing, Michigan. They have written two books in response to the emergent church movement. This is the second; the first book is *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)*.<sup>1</sup>

The format of *Why We Love the Church* consists of a theological chapter by DeYoung followed by a more chatty, human-interest chapter by Kluck. DeYoung says, “Come for the logic; stay

<sup>1</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)* (Chicago: Moody, 2008).

for the laughs” (p. 18).

In reviewing this, we learn that De Young directs the book to four kinds of people:

- 1) *The Committed*: DeYoung would like to encourage the faithful to keep going to church.
- 2) *The Disgruntled*: Some people are still going to church but are not happy. DeYoung and Kluck want to show them that this frustration may be out of proportion to the offence, and it may be misguided.
- 3) *The Waffling*: This group of people is dissatisfied. They are considering dropping out of church to experience churchless Christianity. DeYoung and Kluck want to show them that this would be biblically unfaithful and harmful for their souls.
- 4) *The Disconnected*: These are the church-leavers who are looking for God in other ways. The authors hope they will read *Why We Love The Church* with an open mind. (p. 15)

He sets forth his reasons for why people don't love the church:

- 1) *The Missiological*: Many Christians feel the church has lost its way, is not growing and is ignoring community problems; young people are dropping out. These people think the church has tried and failed.
- 2) *The Personal*: Many outsiders feel that the church is filled with hypocrites who are judgmental and against others; many insiders feel personally wounded and unhappy.
- 3) *The Historical*: The authors feel that some people look back to the early church, compare our failures and mistakes, and abandon today's church.
- 4) *The Theological*: The emerging church does not want organization or structure. They say that the more we can move away from man-made doctrines and rituals, the closer we will be to knowing God. (pp. 16-18)

Some samples of what DeYoung addresses under the missiological are: “How should we respond if our church is losing members?” “Are we doing something wrong?” New emergent books say we are. DeYoung points to the New Testament and quotes Matthew 7:14, “The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.” He continues, “There is simply no biblical teaching to indicate that church size is the measure of success” (p. 31). He goes on to quote Lesslie Newbigin, a renowned missiologist, on the subject of church growth. He speaks of the early church with seriousness and the urgency to warn people that they “must appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 10). In conclusion Newbigin says, “. . . but this nowhere appears as either an anxiety or an enthusiasm about the numerical growth of the church” (p. 32). DeYoung goes on to say that smallness is not a badge of honor. Are small churches making the unbeliever feel welcome and at home? He asks whether we are getting in the way of gospel.

Some criticisms and ideals from emerging church leaders include: the church's lack of purpose and mission, the over aggressiveness of evangelism, and the conviction that blessing is the best strategy. There is a huge social agenda in the church. The emphasis is on the poor, AIDS, the homeless and the environment. DeYoung thinks these are all important causes but says, ". . . it is absolutely biblically and eternally necessary that we verbally tell people the gospel and call people to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ" (p. 48). He further points out that many traditional churches have their own social program that they carry out faithfully.

### **Now let us look at Ted Kluck's contribution to this work:**

In his introduction, Ted Kluck says he has already written "a what you're doing stinks book" and he is not doing it again. However, he does mention several emerging church writers and makes some funny and rather sarcastic comments. He sees American culture being mixed in with Christianity in the postmodern world. Kluck mentions George Barna's *Revolution*,<sup>2</sup> in which two golfers on Sunday discuss the grandeur of the overlooking mountains as God's handiwork. Kluck understands the point but this is not a church substitute. Two other authors mentioned, Chris Seay and Leonard Sweet, wrote respectively *The Gospel According to Tony Soprano*<sup>3</sup> and *The Gospel According To Starbucks*.<sup>4</sup> Kluck does not feel that the Mafia guy, Tony Soprano, puts him on the road to sanctification nor does he believe that conversation over Starbucks' coffee compares to reading about the Christ of the Scriptures. He, Ted Kluck, needs church.

### **Conclusion:**

I have found *Why We Love The Church* a more mature piece of writing than *Why We're Not Emergent*. The critics have wide-ranging views on *Why We Love The Church*. On the positive side, J. I. Packer says, "Bible-centered, God-centered, and demonstrably mature, they win the exchange hands down. As I read, I wanted to stand up and cheer." On the negative side, Bill Kinnon is very critical of this book. Ultimately I think you will have to read it and make up your own mind.

I feel that DeYoung upholds the church and debates with emergent leaders, especially in assessing the church and looking back into the early Church. Kluck's work is a little sarcastic but his heart is in the right place.

I think that the emergent cause in some of its expressions is the old liberalism although some is actually quite conservative. It is important to read outside of this book to get a truer picture of the real situation in the church

<sup>2</sup> See George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Chris Seay, *The Gospel According to Tony Soprano: An Unauthorized Look into the Soul of Tv's Top Mob Boss and His Family* (Lake Mary, FL: Relevant, 2002).

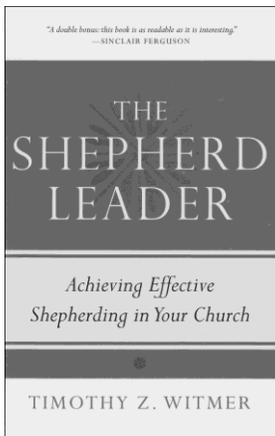
<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2007).

and to understand the scope of those with whom DeYoung and Kluck are interacting.

*Reviewed by Mrs. Elizabeth A. Underhay of Charlottetown, PEI. Elizabeth studied at Prince of Wales College, Queen's University and Teacher's College, Ottawa. She is an avid reader and committed Christian and has been involved in various writing projects.*



***The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church.* Timothy Z. Witmer. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, 268 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-59638-131-5**



Before reading this book, I could not help but notice that so many of the book endorsements on its front and back covers claimed it is very useful and practical for the church today. While I was not calling into question the integrity of those comments, I admit to being skeptical since sometimes what church leaders think of as being practical is often not all that practical. While you will need to read this book to come to your own conclusion, I am more than willing to add my agreement to the others' assessment. If you are looking for a book to work through individually, as a group or as a church leadership group, this book provides much food for thought and many practical suggestions

for church leadership.

This book is very clearly organized into three major sections. Part one, consisting of chapters one to four, is the foundation Witmer constructs for his claim that the Bible teaches there ought to be elders who lead the church. In part two, rather than remaining on a more theoretical level, Witmer uses chapters five through eight to provide some practical insights into what elders should be doing. He calls it a “comprehensive matrix for ministry” that includes a macro and micro approach in four key areas: knowing, feeding, leading and protecting the sheep. His final section of the book deals with the practical implementation of a shepherding model.

In chapters one and two, Witmer provides his case for shepherding as the model for church leadership from the Old and New Testaments respectively. He works through various Bible passages dealing with main characters, such as Moses and David, and also gives considerable time to the shepherd passages in Ezekiel. In the NT chapter, he focuses on Christ as the Good Shep-

herd Who then trains and empowers under-shepherds, the apostles, to be the ongoing shepherds of His flock.

Chapter three is an historical summary of church leadership from the early New Testament church to the nineteenth century, focusing on the early church, then Cyprian and others who were the source of why leadership moved from plurality of elders to governing bishops and professional clergy only. He skips to the Reformation after that and presents a brief summary of various “wings” of the Protestant Reformation and their views on church leadership. Witmer’s summary makes it clear that there was a fair amount of difference in the Protestant church over who should lead, what role leaders should have and what the qualifications ought to be. He makes the observation that in the history of the church, the church suffers or flourishes depending on whether its leadership is living out of the biblical framework for church leadership.

In chapter four, Witmer attempts to provide a biblical foundation for the authority of elders in the church. While he challenges the present dislike in Western cultures of anything to do with authority, he carefully argues that authority is not a negative concept but rather one that is to be used for the good of the church and its members. Witmer challenges his readers to understand authority as something given by God to leaders to use for blessing and serving, not lording it over others. While the author decries the postmodern mindset against authority, he recognizes that abuse of authority has most likely fed that reaction, especially within the Emerging Church. His call for a balanced view that calls elders to use authority with compassion challenges all of us.

Chapter five begins the second section of the book in which Witmer presents the four key things elders need to do as shepherds of the flock. These are knowing, feeding, leading and protecting the sheep. This chapter focuses on what it means to “know” the sheep. The macro part of knowing the sheep is keeping accurate membership roles and having a good handle on the strengths, weaknesses, abilities and opportunities of the congregation. The micro strategy for knowing the sheep includes the goal of having the elders getting to know the sheep personally, splitting the membership up for each elder to focus on a group as well as specific strategies for regular contact, meaning more than once-a-year visits.

The next chapter covers “feeding” the sheep. The macro components here are the public ministry of the Word, Christian education classes and curriculum as well as the administration of the sacraments. Witmer does give a fair amount of space in promoting verse-by-verse exegetical preaching. He presents many reasons for preaching this way, including the fact that this preaching requires a long period of time to cover the entire counsel of God. While he sees this as a good reason for a long tenure for a minister, I am not sure this kind of diet will be balanced enough, especially for new or young Christians. On the micro side of feeding, Witmer stresses the need for discipleship, mentoring and the need for elders to give special attention to fami-

lies, particularly fathers. This is a very good reminder of a neglected part of church ministry.

Chapter seven focuses on the work of “leading” the congregation. I think Witmer is right on here in his critique that most churches’ elders consider this as the bulk of their task, rather than one part of a bigger task. On the macro level, this leading includes vision casting, providing clear insight in the mission and purpose of the church, making bigger ministry decisions and creating a structure that allows this leadership to connect with the various parts of church ministry. On the micro level, Witmer gives the challenge to elders to be examples for the flock in their own lives and in providing biblical counsel for the day-to-day struggles of life.

“Protecting” the sheep is the theme of chapter 8. Here Witmer takes on the topic of discipline and caring for the sheep. This chapter’s macro strategy includes publicly instructing the congregation about church discipline as well as educating them in how to identify the “wolves”. Witmer spends considerably more time explaining his ideas about the micro protecting of the flock. These include private warnings and admonition as well as a large section on how to deal with sheep who are leaving the church quietly through the “back door”.

Chapters nine to eleven make up the third section of the book that is even more of a “how-to” practical set of scenarios and applications of his four-part matrix mentioned above. Chapter 9 focuses on what he calls “seven essential elements” for elders. Witmer says that an effective shepherding ministry must be: 1) Biblical, 2) Systematic, 3) Comprehensive, 4) Relational, 5) Knowing, Feeding, Leading and Protecting, 6) include Accountability, 7) include Prayer. Each of the seven includes an “Action Plan” and some of them are quite extensive. Most of this section does not consist of theoretical ideas but practical suggestions for elders. Section 4 also includes some discussion of the role of deacons in this system.

Chapter ten, entitled “Implications of Having a Shepherding Ministry”, tackles the topics of elder qualifications, selection and training. Witmer includes discussion of how to move from a different model to a shepherding one in existing churches as well as the issue of term or life eldership (he also includes an appendix by John Murray on this topic). While Witmer clearly promotes life eldership, he does not give term eldership much of a hearing, leaving his reader with a rather lopsided view of this topic. He then proceeds to lay out various implications of a shepherding model for membership, church discipline and even church planting.

In chapter eleven, Witmer answers the question that he hopes people reading his book will be asking at this point, “How do we implement this shepherding model?” Well, Witmer provides a ten-step strategy for the elders, a four-step strategy to prepare the congregation and then ends with a reminder that setting a date to begin this model must make sense in light of doing the proper preparatory work needed to be able to make this model work. He even

includes some samples of resources in the appendices to help the elders with implementation.

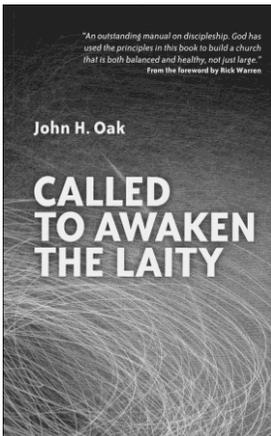
Witmer concludes his book with an exhortation and encouragement for elders, present and potential ones, to consider the importance of the work and the joy that being a shepherd can bring when the Chief Shepherd returns and you receive a “crown of glory that will never fade away”.

The author is Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia and minister of preaching at Crossroads Community Church in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania.

Overall, this book lives up to the claim that this is not a theoretical book about church leadership. While presenting biblical and historical arguments for an elder shepherding model, Witmer provides a book that will definitely be very useful for churches who are interested in following this model and who are looking for enough practical help in going from theory into practice. It would also be helpful for churches who would like to assess their present practice.

*Reviewed by Albert J. Kooy*

***Called to Awaken the Laity.* John H. Oak. Translated by Sam Ko and Jerry Vreeman. Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006, 319 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-84550-224-9**



*Called to Awaken the Laity* focuses on the biblical role of the laity and the need for the church to reform its thinking about ministry. This is a very significant topic to consider as many churches have embraced a distorted understanding of church ministry as including only the leaders of the church who are responsible for ministry. This book is written to present an alternative perspective of the ministry of the church that recognizes the reality that the laity are called to ministry themselves.

There are five sections to the book. In the opening section, “Today’s Church and the Laity”, Oak first speaks about today’s church and focuses particularly on the Korean church, where so much revival has been reported. Oak refers to a lack of spiritual growth in contrast to numerical growth in Korean churches as of late and the sad fact that Korean churches are not seen to be different than the rest of society (pp. 20, 23). The writer also takes time to look back in church history to identify some factors that have plagued our understanding of the laity. He makes reference to the institutionalization of Christianity and the contribution of Bishop Cyprian, who used the term “laity” to refer to the general population in distinction

from the clergy and so created a two class church (p. 33). Oak concludes this section by stating that a proper relationship between clergy and laity will exist when it is recognized that the laity *is* the church (p. 46).

One quotation which Oak cites presents clearly his objective: "The first reformation took the word of God exclusively out of the hands of the clergy and put it in the hands of the people. The second reformation is to get the ministry exclusively out of the hands of the clergy and into the hands of the people, where it rightly belongs" (p. 27). This then is the foundational thought that prepares the way for the rest of the book, where the author will begin to discuss discipleship in the church.

In the second section, Oak considers the ministerial philosophy for equipping and developing a healthy church. A ministry philosophy is important because it is the driving force that explains what is the identity of the church and purpose for its existence (p. 51).

Concerning the matter of identity, Oak begins by arguing that while the Reformed doctrine of the church is valid, it is no longer adequately articulated today, because it does not fully reflect the calling of mission (p. 64). Some scholars have suggested that the Reformers' view of the church was insufficient to incorporate a mission mindset to the visible church (p. 65). Oak attempts to show the validity of these criticisms by referring to both Luther and Calvin's commentary on 1 Corinthians 12:28. Both Luther and Calvin differentiated the task of the apostles and the task of preacher by explaining that the preacher is focused on a particular church instead of the whole world (p. 66). Oak is not necessarily trying to attack either of the great Reformer's views of missions but rather to show how succeeding generations could think that they have fulfilled their pastoral task by only concerning themselves with shepherding their particular churches. This leads Oak to the consideration of the definition of the church. The church should not only be thought of as God's people called out of the world, but it must also be acknowledged that as God's people they are sent into the world as disciples of Christ (pp. 56, 61).

For Oak, the key to convincing the laity of their calling is found in the apostolicity of the church, the teachings of the apostles. Although the apostleship is unique and has ceased, their teachings and ministry remain. In dealing with apostolic succession, Oak is not thinking of the Roman Catholic notion of an individual pope inheriting the office of apostle. In radical contrast, Oak is saying that just as the teaching of the apostles is given to the entire church, so the ministry is given to the entire church and not to just a few individuals (p. 75). In Acts 2:4, Luke describes how the Holy Spirit did not distinguish the apostles from the rest of the disciples but came upon all 120 who were in the room (p. 84). The church exists for worship of the Triune God, to save the world and to equip and care for believers (p. 87-94). A ministry philosophy articulates how a church explains its identity and reason for existence (p. 51).

In the third section of the book, Oak turns to discipleship or what he calls the ministry strategy. He explains that to make disciples means more than “to evangelize”. The church is called to care for and train believers and so discipleship is concerned about the believer’s lifestyle (p. 103). Oak refers to this as the ministry strategy. The church trains believers so that they may be equipped to participate in the calling of ministry. The path of discipleship applies to all believers, although there can be degrees of difference in the lives of disciples (p. 119).

At this point, Oak discusses the concept of “disciple” and highlights three elements that are underscored in Jesus’ teaching and example. These include personal commitment, witnessing and servanthood (p. 123). In considering the topic of witnessing, Oak draws attention to the fact that the New Testament is strangely silent in terms of giving commands to believers to evangelize. While there are passages like Colossians 4:5-6 that deal with the importance of using opportunities and sharing the gospel, Oak is stressing that since evangelism is so vital to the church, it would seem natural that there would be a list of commands regarding it. The author makes this point to stress that witnessing is not something that believers are to be reluctant about, but by the urging of the Holy Spirit, it is an instinctive matter (p. 137).

Building from the focus of discipleship, the fourth section considers discipleship training. Oak highlights three tools that Jesus used to train his disciples: the Word of God, His own example and the disciple’s own experience (p. 195). Oak goes further to highlight six principles to determine good teaching material for discipleship training classes: the gospel needs to be alive; the material should be systematic; it needs to have application; it is important to note doctrinal distinctives; it needs to have a clear understanding of the ministry philosophy; and it needs to make use of the inductive method for learning (pp. 204-210). Oak stresses the importance of inductive learning to emphasize the changing of character, rather than just conveying knowledge (p. 229). Discipleship training is described and compared to coaches who equip and motivate athletes to compete (pp. 241-242).

In the final section of the book, Oak focuses on the ministry field in the heritage of the Korean church. The author points to several model churches that have been active in discipleship training (pp. 258-266). As throughout the entire book, Oak writes by looking back over twenty years of experience. He lists several helpful principles for discipleship training including the necessity of training, consistency, self-development, time management and energy (pp. 275-282).

The style of the book could be compared with how a painter may apply paint with the impact of the message coming through with each successive layer being applied. This being said, the book could have been shorter in order to convey the message. John Oak is pastor of SaRang Church, a mega church in South Korea, one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the world with 58,000 members. The reader will not miss Oak’s frequent reference to statistics and surveys in the book with many of the statistics at the end of the

book showing the effect that discipleship has had on SaRang Church (pp. 297-308). Alongside this, in a book that is intentionally challenging the common notions of the ministry of the church, it would have been beneficial if the author had spent more time addressing in detail questions that the reader would naturally raise and in particular some of the distorted views to avoid.

This is an ideal book for an adult Sunday school class as the message is obviously directed toward the entire church. The format of short chapters would also make this beneficial for group studies. Overall, the book successfully identifies a weakness that exists in many churches where it is assumed that the laity are faithful Christians when they simply gather for public worship on a regular basis. John Oak stresses the need for discipleship training for the laity who may not be called to *the* ministry but are still called to ministry. The reader will come away challenged by this book. While it may seem radical, there are questions that are raised in the book that require attention; such as how could the vast majority of the church be exempt from the apostolic calling that has been given to the church? (p. 80).

One detracting aspect of this book was the need for more editing. Unfortunately, authors' names are sometimes spelled incorrectly and on occasion book titles are inconsistent.

*Reviewed by Peter K. Aiken, a lay preacher who lives on Prince Edward Island. He is a graduate of the University of Prince Edward Island with a business degree and currently works for an investment firm and studies part-time at Haddington House. He and his wife, Michelle, have one son.*



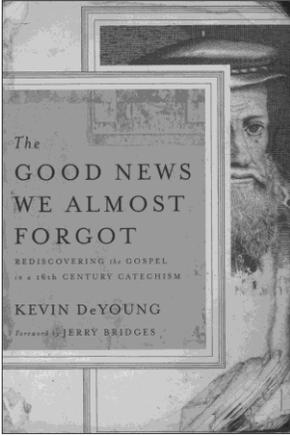
***The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Catechism.* Kevin DeYoung. Chicago: Moody, 2010, 252 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8024-5840-7**

Kevin DeYoung has given us an excellent twenty-first century exposition of a sixteenth century document. His exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism<sup>1</sup> provides a wonderful introduction to the riches of the gospel for those unfamiliar with the Reformed perspective of the Scriptures. At the same time, it is an excellent refresher course for those familiar with the great

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<sup>1</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism was published in German in 1563 in the city of Heidelberg. It was commissioned by Elector Frederick III and was intended to serve as a tool for instructing youth, a guide for preachers and a document to unite the warring Protestant factions in Frederick's domain, i.e. the Palatinate. Zacharias Ursinus is usually taken as the principal author.

teachings of the Reformation legacy. He writes in a lively and engaging style, explaining the Catechism's teaching in a clear and straightforward manner. Using the Catechism, he brings the Bible to bear on the life of the



believer, the church and our present-day society and culture. I have preached through the Catechism several times, and I was not expecting to be so effectively challenged and encouraged to more faithfully follow Jesus.

The Heidelberg Catechism is divided into fifty-two “chapters” called Lord’s Days with each Lord’s Day containing questions and answers. Each chapter is about two to three pages and outlines the relevant Scripture passages, then explains and applies the teaching. It is amazing how much he packs into a small space. As he works his way through the theology of the Catechism, he never loses touch with Christ and the gospel.

DeYoung, although born, bred and ordained in the Reformed Church in America, works through the Catechism aware of the wider church, including other Reformed traditions. This becomes apparent at the beginning of his exposition as he undertakes Lord’s Day One, which takes him to the Catechism’s most famous question: “What is your only comfort in life and death?” The answer to this question, which focuses on the blessings the believer experiences from Christ, the Father and the Spirit, is cherished by those in the Dutch Reformed tradition. Apparently, the answer has been criticized by supporters of the Westminster Shorter Catechism’s equally famous question and answer. The criticism is that Heidelberg starts with man whereas Westminster starts with God. DeYoung loves the Heidelberg Catechism but does not respond defensively. Perceptively and productively, he comments: “In truth, both catechisms start in appropriate places. Heidelberg starts with grace. Westminster starts with glory. We’d be hard-pressed to think of two better words to describe the theme of biblical revelation” (p.21).

The Catechism is known for the warmth and personal character of its expression, and at times, for its poetic description of the great truths of Scripture. Lord’s Day Ten, which takes up God’s providence, is a good example of its poetic style, providing a wonderful dramatization of God’s sovereignty over all things. It is also a good example of DeYoung’s style. He takes up God’s sovereignty with sensitivity and pastoral concern but holds nothing back. Readers are not allowed to be so taken with the language that they miss what is being affirmed and what the Bible teaches. He comments: “Like most of us, the students [seminary ordinands] are much more at ease using passive language about God’s permissive will or comfortable generalities about God being ‘in control’ than they are about stating precisely and confidently to those in the midst of suffering ‘this has come from God’s fatherly hand’ ” (pp. 59-60).

The Catechism speaks in neutral or general terms at three key theological points. This makes for the possibility of different interpretations, but DeYoung takes the reader in the biblical direction. Heidelberg focuses on the organic relationship between Adam and his posterity. DeYoung expands the discussion to include the federal aspect of this relationship. Lord's Day Fifteen makes the statement: "Christ sustained in body and soul the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race." This could be understood as supporting a general atonement, but DeYoung takes us to particular redemption. The Catechism, having no question on election, avoids a direct discussion of the subject but does refer to it in passing. DeYoung will not let election go unnoticed and picks up on the Catechism's statement regarding the Church "as a community chosen for eternal life" and sets forth the unconditional character of God's choosing.

However, the Catechism is clear on one of today's controversial issues – justification – and sets forth the traditional Reformation view in considerable detail. DeYoung, aware of the contemporary debate, gives hearty endorsement to the traditional formulation, including imputation of the active obedience of Christ.

Heidelberg's statement on faith in Lord's Day Seven is prized by those in the Dutch Reformed tradition, and DeYoung is no exception, commenting: "The Catechism gives one of the best answers [on faith] you'll find anywhere" (p. 45). Adherents of the Westminster Standards may demur, noting among other things, a different understanding of the relationship of assurance to faith. However, I think that Westminster people will feel reasonably comfortable with his exposition of the Heidelberg's description of faith as "a deep-rooted assurance" (p. 46). He writes: "It [faith] is not arrogant, but it is confident. We should have mercy on those who doubt (Jude 22), but doubt is not the goal. We want a faith that is not constantly wandering and wondering but [is] sure and established" (p. 46).

The Catechism in Lord's Day Thirty-Three asks: "What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?" and answers: "Two things: the dying of the old self and the coming to life of the new self." I have always found this Lord's Day difficult to exposit. The terminology poses a challenge for the contemporary interpreter, and I was eager to see DeYoung's approach. Like other Heidelberg expositors, he takes conversion in a broad sense. He states: "The Bible talks about conversion in many different ways," and goes on to list eight things conversion means ranging from "repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21)" to "being resurrected with Christ into a new life (Rom. 6:3-4)" to "a change of ownership, from slaves of sin to slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18)" (p. 159). However, I prefer to take a more flexible approach to the terminology. In the contemporary context, I think it is better to understand conversion as repentance and faith, i.e. our response to the gospel in both an initial and ongoing sense, and explain "the dying of the old self" and "the coming to life of the new self" as they relate

to definitive and progressive sanctification.

Heidelberg spends considerable time on the sacraments and working through the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. DeYoung provides some very helpful material in these areas, and three items in particular caught my attention.

First, he is an enthusiastic proponent of infant baptism and provides an excellent explanation and summary of the biblical basis for the practice. For those having difficulty understanding and explaining why we put water on babies, I would suggest they study and use his outline. Even for those who may not agree with the author's position on baptism, he writes in an irenic and engaging manner.

Second, he disagrees with the Westminster Confession on the Fourth Commandment. He takes what he calls a "middle road" regarding the Fourth Commandment and states: "My view is somewhere between 'the Fourth Commandment doesn't apply anymore' and 'Sunday is the new Sabbath day.'" He sides with Heidelberg rather than Westminster, and he looks to Calvin rather than the Puritans for his abiding principles regarding the Sabbath.

Third, I found his comments on the petition, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" a perceptive antidote to much contemporary teaching on forgiveness. In particular, I was happy to read: "In one sense, we should forgive all those who sin against us. We should not seek their harm. We should pray for them and desire their good. But in another sense, forgiveness can be granted only to those who seek it. That is, while we should always be ready to forgive, unless the other party is willing to repent, forgiveness cannot reach its full bloom. Forgiveness implies the restoration of a relationship, and without repentance a broken relationship cannot be truly restored."

DeYoung concludes his work with a gem, an epilogue entitled "The Crust and the Core" (pp. 241-244). Here he argues for the necessity of Christians possessing a theological core "about who God is and what He has accomplished through Jesus Christ". This core should shape and motivate those who follow Jesus. At the same time, he warns of becoming crusty: arrogant, lacking balance, judgmental and isolationist. This epilogue provides an excellent guide for all those committed to serious theological study of the Bible.

I highly recommend this book.

*Reviewed by Rev. Howard M. McPhee, the former pastor of the Springdale Christian Reformed Church, Bradford, Ontario, where he served for seventeen years.*



***Letters to a Young Calvinist: An Invitation to the Reformed Tradition.* James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010, 134 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-58743-294-1**

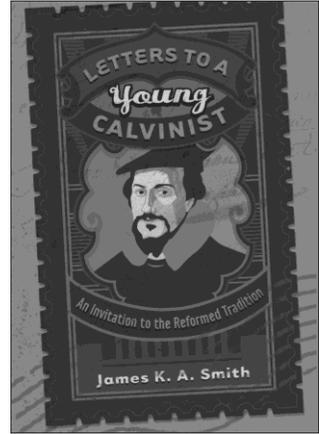
This book comes on the recent crest of attention given to Calvin and the “new Calvinism”, no doubt echoing the five-hundredth anniversary of Calvin’s birth in 2009 and the attention-making article in *Time* magazine. There certainly has been a publishing boom, if nothing else, connected with all of this! I will leave it to others to debate the benefit of the numerical increase.

The author of *Letters to a Young Calvinist*, James K. A. Smith, professor of philosophy at Calvin College, came from the Assemblies of God (and prior to that, Plymouth Brethren) to the Reformed family. With honesty, he acknowledges his entrance into the Reformed world may not have been overly gracious to others outside it and was marked by pride and unfortunate theological reductionism. Hence, these letters were written to “Jesse”, a fictitious character who stands both for the author as a “younger self” as well as for many young men and women in Los Angeles who were on that journey with the author. The letters are to be pastoral, inviting and introductory. Thus they are theological but are also about spiritual formation.

There are twenty-three letters averaging four pages each. Letter II, “On Religious Pride”, and Letter III, “Proud to Be a Calvinist”, are excellent challenges to the spiritual pride rooted in us. Some will take offence. Smith writes with boldness here: “This type of polemical religious pride almost seems like a kind of genetic defect of the Reformed tradition, one that threatens to perpetuate itself” (p. 8). Thus the letters certainly try to point us in the right spiritual direction while learning theology.

The style is obviously easy-going, conversational almost, but the author covers many key aspects of Reformed theology. The doctrine of God’s grace is introduced very early (Letter IV) and so is *semper reformanda* (in Letter VII). The author exposes his readers to much by way of the historical theology of the Reformed tradition, not just the systematic. He endeavours to balance both and at the same time tries to keep the study of theology and spiritual formation wedded together.

I found Letter X, “To Be Reformed Is to Be Catholic”, most interesting. The writer says he is worried that Jesse’s Calvinist friends are narrowing the tradition and the church. “So if I tease you that ‘to be Reformed is to be catholic,’ in all seriousness I don’t mean to be a tease. It’s just that sometimes I



worry that your Calvinist friends are trying to ‘out-Calvinist’ John Calvin!” (p. 47).

I will now just briefly summarize the remaining letters. The author extols Kuyper’s world-and-life view to Jesse and unpacks this. He commends more the “continental” Reformed tradition than Westminster, although W. G. T. Shedd certainly receives high praise. The current growth of Reformed Baptists and certain institutions in America do not come in for immense praise even though certain names do such as Piper, Driscoll or Moehler (pp. 61-63). Perhaps this is in part the author showing where he himself has “landed” within the Reformed family. It is interesting that all five writers giving book endorsement on the back cover are paedo-baptists.

I enjoyed the style. There is a creativity and freshness here. It certainly does explore the riches of the Reformed tradition. Personally, I do not like the word “Calvinist”, but I realize not all share that view.

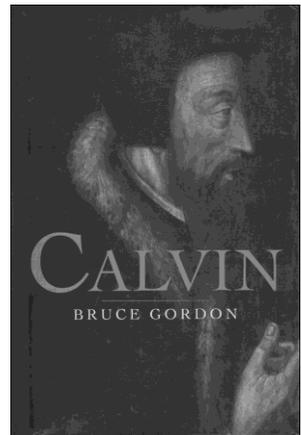
*Reviewed by Jack C. Whytock*

## Historical Theology

***Calvin*. Bruce Gordon. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, 416 pp., hc. ISBN 978-0-300-12076-9**

Bruce Gordon's biography of Calvin adds to the growing list of biographies of the sixteenth century Reformer published in recent years. While Gordon covers the same general events in Calvin's life story as the others, he presents many additional salient features both of the historical context and of Calvin's life that provide a richer and deeper understanding of this outstanding servant of God. This is clearly the most complete and elaborate account to date of the man, his actions, and his work. Gordon wants us to understand Calvin as the complex Protestant Reformer that he was in the full range of his activities as preacher and teacher, church leader, advocate for the gospel, Protestant ecumenical activist, and gifted biblical interpreter, theologian, and apologist for the Reformed understanding of the Christian faith. Gordon also provides many additional significant historical details, not found in previous biographies, of the social, political, and religious factors at work in Geneva, other Swiss cities, and other European nations, notably Germany and France. These are important to provide a complete portrait of the Reformer who rose to the position of Protestant leader and theologian influencing people and nations throughout Europe.

Gordon narrates Calvin's life and accomplishments from his early life in Noyon, France, to his death at the age of fifty-five in Geneva after three decades of ministry. The range of information that Gordon includes is sizeable, yet he keeps the narrative moving in an interesting and lively fashion. He takes us through the many events and central characters surrounding Calvin's conversion in Paris, his ministry in Geneva, relations with Swiss, Lutheran and other Reformers, the politics of Swiss cities, and the religious reform movements in European nations, notably France. Gordon avoids the danger of overloading the narrative with details; he presents the material in a manner that ably illuminates Calvin's actions and writings in relation to these persons



and events.

Gordon's account fills out the details of many of the events in Calvin's life in a manner that provides a better understanding than previous biographies. Let me give two examples. First, Gordon notes that when Calvin first came to Geneva, he was under the influence of Farel, from whom he absorbed a harsh polemical tone in dealing not only with people still retaining Roman Catholic beliefs but also with other Reformers. When Calvin and Farel were banished from Geneva in 1538, they were separated, Calvin ending up in Strasbourg and Farel in Neuchatel. In Strasbourg, Calvin was disciplined as a pastor and teacher by Bucer, and in the process he learned to temper his harsh tone and to become more moderate and conciliatory in dealing with others. Later, upon his return to Geneva, while Calvin remained a good friend of Farel for the rest of his life, he considered Farel's tone and language to be too harsh and oppositional. Calvin's own language moved toward a less confrontational style.

A second example of insight that Gordon provides concerns the problems that Calvin experienced over the matter of the Lord's Supper. Gordon indicates that these troubles had much to do with the fact that Geneva was under the authority of officials in Berne. It was the directive of the Berne officials to the Geneva Council in 1538 that communion could not be withheld from anyone that led to Calvin and Farel's banishment when they refused to obey. In addition, in subsequent years of Calvin's ministry, the Bernese officials promoted the Zwinglian view of the Lord's Supper and harassed Calvin and others who held to a real (spiritual) presence of Christ in the Supper. This caused ongoing problems for Calvin as he attempted to promote unity with the Lutherans, who held to the real presence of Christ in communion. Given views advocated by the Bernese officials, the Lutherans tended generally to see the Swiss view as Zwinglian, that is, as a mere memorial of Christ's atoning death. Gordon notes that Calvin was frequently required to distinguish his view from the Zwinglian view.

In the "Preface" Gordon indicates that his work on Calvin's life has convinced him that Calvin's greatness was due to "his brilliance as a thinker and writer, and, above all, his ability to interpret the Bible" (vii). Calvin's intellectual abilities enabled him to formulate systematically the message of God's love for humanity in Scripture, while drawing upon the teachings of ancient, medieval, and contemporary writers. His ever evolving intellect drew on his ongoing study of Scripture and on the range of Christian authors to deepen his insight into the Christian faith both in his commentaries and his various editions of the *Institutes*. This is also evident in Calvin's numerous theological and polemical works.

Yet, it is at this point that I note a major weakness in the biography. Even while Gordon does recognize the brilliance and power of Calvin's intellectual development as a Reformer, I do not think that he notes the full significance of the role of Calvin's theological development in his actions as a Protestant Reformer. In fairness to Gordon he does note at various points in

Calvin's life his major written works and the significance of their content: 1536 and 1539 *Institutes*, the commentaries on Romans (the first one) and other biblical books, the 1559 *Institutes*, and the various theological and polemical works. Yet, I do not think that Gordon's comments give sufficient weight to the impact of Calvin's growing theological understanding of the Christian faith on his leadership and actions as the leading Reformer of Geneva, and of the whole of Europe. Gordon seems more interested in the style of Calvin's prose and in his concise and elegant French than in the content of his biblical and theological works. While one has to understand Calvin in the context of the circumstances of his day and the key figures in European Christianity, one must also see Calvin's actions and influence in the light of his maturing theological understanding of the Christian faith. This biography, it seems to me, is weak in this area.

Also, Gordon clearly wants to avoid an account of Calvin's life that slips into hagiography. He presents a candid account of Calvin's sins and weaknesses as they surface in his dealings with fellow Reformers and with his opponents. But in presenting Calvin as a human figure, it seems to me that Gordon overdoes the references to Calvin's faults. In the preface Calvin is described as "a benevolent father and bully" with his friends, demanding absolute loyalty from them and no opposition. With his opponents Calvin could be "vindictive and even cruel". The references to these faults in Calvin's life are piled up to such an extent that one is left with quite a negative view of the man. In general, I question whether these negative qualities are self-evident in Calvin's writings; numerous times they appear to be Gordon's impressions of Calvin's tone in his writings. In addition, it seems to me that Gordon fails to bring some important factors to bear on the use of strong language in Calvin's writings: the language used in the sixteenth century especially in polemical works was much stronger than in our day; matters of faith and practice were life and death issues in that day; and like all brilliant men, Calvin did not suffer fools lightly, pointing out error or ignorance in his opponents with sharp rhetoric and arguments. While Calvin was certainly not perfect, it is questionable whether Calvin's negative qualities were present to the extent and degree that Gordon maintains.

In addition to these two major weaknesses in the biography, I note several other minor problems: Gordon's attempt to read a Barthian view of Scripture into Calvin (p. 104-5), his numerous references to Calvin's self-understanding as a prophet to his day without defining the different senses of the term "prophet", and a criticism of Calvin for misreading the situation of Protestant growth in France in his final years. Concerning the latter point, one can hardly fault Calvin for not anticipating the violent actions of the French Protestants, the weak resolve of the Protestant nobility, and the failure of the talks between French Protestants and Catholics to achieve compromise.

Yet, even with the above weaknesses, this biography is a notable

achievement, providing the most comprehensive account of the life of Calvin to date. Gordon's research has clearly provided a better understanding of many significant features of Calvin's life, to name a few: the circle of humanists and Protestant Reformers in Paris in the 1530s; the politics of the Swiss cities of Berne, Basle, and Geneva; Calvin's reforming work in Geneva in the context of the various religious, social, and political forces; his relations with other Protestant leaders; his numerous attempts (along with others) to forge positive ecumenical relations with the Lutherans; his ongoing battles with opponents, such as Bolsec and Castillo; his influence for religious reform on the rest of Europe; and his efforts to further the Protestant cause in France. In these matters, as well as many others, Gordon provides much rich information on this great Swiss Reformer. Thus, this biography deserves a careful reading by those who desire a deeper understanding of the life of Calvin in the context of the ecclesiastical, political, and cultural events of his day. The author is Professor of Reformation History, Yale Divinity School and certainly one of the world's foremost Reformation scholars today.

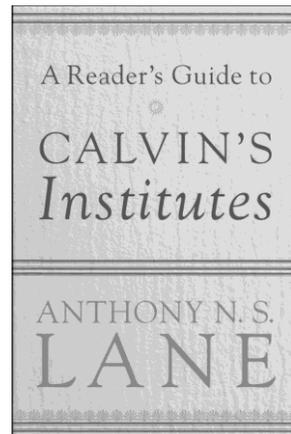
*Reviewed by Guenther ("Gene") H. Haas, Professor of Religion and Theology, Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario and the author of The Concept of Equity in Calvin's Ethics (1997). He earned his M. Div. and M. Th. at Covenant Theological Seminary and the D. Th. from University of Toronto. Dr. Haas is a minister of the Presbyterian Church in America.*



***A Reader's Guide to Calvin's Institutes.* Anthony N. S. Lane. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009, 174 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8010-3731-3**

Anthony Lane has long been a student of Calvin and has gained high respect as an international authority on the Reformer's theology. He has previously edited, along with Hilary Osborne, an abridged version of the Henry Beveridge translation of the *Institutes*.<sup>1</sup>

*A Reader's Guide* is just that, a guide. It is not intended for use instead of the *Institutes*. Though the book is keyed to McNeill-Battles, it can be used with other translations but then the references to the wording, to specific pages, to paragraphs and to the footnotes would not be relevant.



<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, eds. Tony Lane and Hilary Osborne, orig. 1986 (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

Apart from the introductory material, Lane has divided the four books of the *Institutes* into thirty-two portions. From each of these he has selected a number of suggested readings, on average a total of about eighteen pages. *A Reader's Guide* provides short summaries of these suggested readings which highlight points of special interest or value. There are a total of eighty chapters in the two volumes of Calvin's work. *A Reader's Guide* has thirty-two. However, this does not mean that it (*A Reader's Guide*) is incomplete, as one of its chapters may cover several in the *Institutes*. Having this little volume by one's side as one studies Calvin may be considered the next best thing to having a tutor. In fact it would be very useful to the tutor himself as he teaches.

At first it takes a little time to find the appropriate place indicated in the *Guide*. For example, the twenty-first chapter is entitled, "The True Nature of Christian Freedom". The selected readings in the *Institutes* are found in book 3, chapter 19, sections 1 to 5 and 7 to 15. We are directed to the place as follows: 3.19.1-5, 7-15.

Lane suggests four options for readers:

- 1) Read only the selected material and my brief summaries of the rest.
- 2) Read only the selected material and use Battles' *Analysis of the Institutes*<sup>2</sup> as a summary of the rest.
- 3) Concentrate on the selected material but skim through the rest.
- 4) Read the whole of the *Institutes*. (p. 10)

Every chapter in *A Reader's Guide* itself has a short introduction, often consisting of only a sentence or two. Following this the reader is presented with questions (usually one to three) and then brief, perceptive summaries of the selected sections in the *Institutes*. These summaries are often only a line or a few lines in length but occasionally may go to as much as a third or even half a page. *A Reader's Guide* is intended to make the student think and evaluate what he reads in Calvin. By the same token, one may assess Lane's own comments. For example, we question whether he accurately reflects Calvin's view of Original Sin. Although the statements in the *Institutes* are somewhat obscure regarding the corporate guilt involved in the first sin, it is reading too much into Calvin's statements to suggest that he dismissed it or rejected it.<sup>3</sup> Again, on page 98 he expresses the opinion that Calvin held to a "universal" rather than a "limited" atonement. This interpretation of the Reformer is well known but, we believe, will not bear close analysis.<sup>4</sup> It should be kept in mind that he was writing not only as a theologian but as a pastor.

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<sup>2</sup> F. L. Battles, *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin*, orig. 1980 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> See Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, orig. 1862 (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 371-379. See also John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> See Cunningham, *The Reformers*, 395-402.

Lane, in *A Reader's Guide*, refers briefly to the Reformer's view of assurance. He says, ". . . Calvin holds that true faith is assurance of my salvation. But does this mean that anyone who has doubts has no true faith? No" (p. 97). This observation has merit. The Reformers, including Calvin, have often been faulted for teaching a doctrine of assurance that some real Christians could not claim to come up to in their own experience. But has Calvin been partly misunderstood? Although in book 3, chapter 2, section 7 of the *Institutes* Calvin gives a definition of faith which includes assurance, in sections 17 and 18 of the same chapter his comments hardly sustain the position stated in section 7. His controversy with the unreformed church included a difference over the matter of assurance, and he may have tended to overstate his position; but it is to be noted that there is in any case a paradox. Faith involves claiming Christ as one's own Saviour. Yet since faith is not mere assent but trust and commitment, there can at times be questions in a sincere and real believer as to whether he has true trust and a real saving relationship with Christ. Lane obviously holds that Calvin was fully aware of this fact. This suggests that perhaps there is need of a better assessment of the Reformer's teaching on assurance than has generally been accepted.

The chapter on prayer in *A Reader's Guide* is a reminder to us that the *Institutes* is not simply an academic work but has a rich devotional tone, a feature which other writers on theology could do well to emulate. On the other hand, one wonders why Lane considers that Calvin's view, that the best works of believers fall short of perfection, may by some be justifiably regarded as a "hard" position (p. 117).

Chapter 1 of book 4 in the *Institutes* is reviewed in chapter 25 of *A Reader's Guide*. Here we have a discussion of the true Church and the important distinction between its visible and invisible aspects. This is a subject that is all too little understood. The two marks of the Church and its discipline are also discussed here, and Lane provides his excellent succinct summaries of Calvin's teaching on all of these subjects. Lane makes some very perceptive comments here which are most engaging:

Recognize what Calvin does not say. The Anabaptists and some of Calvin's followers included discipline among the marks. Calvin strongly believed in church discipline (4.11-12) and put it into practice in Geneva, but he deliberately excluded it from the marks of the true church. This was because that would open the door for folks to break away from the church on the grounds that the discipline was too slack for their taste . . . (pp. 140-141)

In an age when the church is often largely theologically illiterate on the one hand and on the other frequently manifesting, even among the more orthodox, a mainly academic or philosophical interest in doctrine, a solid acquaintance with Calvin could prove a real corrective. Lane has made it easier to profit from Calvin's classic work. However, it needs to be said that the reading of it will require application and discipline. Many spend a few hours

or a few days in a book and enjoy as they say “a good read”. To gain a tolerable acquaintance with the *Institutes* will require weeks or months. It would be time well spent and *A Reader’s Guide* should be of much assistance.

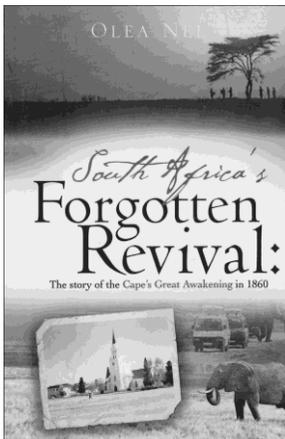
In a general comment on Calvin, Lane observes that, “He is the only writer ever to belong without question both to the first rank of theologians and to the first rank of commentators” (p. 16). At the beginning of the *Guide*, he provides an interesting account of the various editions (five in all) of the *Institutes*, all in the Reformer’s lifetime.

A defect in the McNeill-Battles translation is indicated in *A Reader’s Guide*. We are informed that, “By no means all of Calvin’s biblical references are found in MB [McNeill-Battles], and by no means all of the references found there are from Calvin” (p. 24). The same criticism is made with regard to the citation of patristic and medieval authors. This is not to say that these references are not relevant and valuable enough. It is simply pointed out that the reader is left with no way of knowing whether a particular reference is by Calvin himself.

*Reviewed by Rev. William R. Underhay, a retired minister of the Free Church of Scotland, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. Rev. Underhay is a graduate of Victoria University College, University of Toronto and the Free Church College, Edinburgh.*



***South Africa’s Forgotten Revival: The story of the Cape’s Great Awakening in 1860.* Olea Nel. Canberra, Australia: Olive Twig Books, 2010, 223 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-646-52689-8**



The year 2010 is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Awakening at the Cape in Africa. This awakening has received much less attention than the revival in approximately the same period in New York, the United States; in Belfast, Northern Ireland; or in Wales. Thus it is very good to see Olea Nel’s book appear in print for this anniversary. It appears the book first began as a private venture but now has come under the Olive Twig Books label in Australia; this will hopefully increase its sales and distribution.

The book title captures well the author’s thesis, that this is a neglected and forgotten awakening; Nel’s subtitle also captures well her methodology, *The story of the Cape’s Great Awakening in 1860*. She writes in her preface, “I have attempted to piece the data together in such a way that a discernable

picture emerges that also tells a story” (p xii). The book has much information yet does read as “a story”, which I believe will make the book very accessible to a wide range of readers.

The author knows Afrikaans very well and is a trained linguist. She was born in Cape Town and lived in Wellington; she and her husband now live in Canberra, Australia. Thus she has a good background to open up this subject. This background was very helpful to me because I enjoy reading on the book’s theme but have often regretted that I do not know Afrikaans – so many books and documents I cannot easily access.

The book is divided into three divisions: part one, the setting; part two, the revival; and part three, the aftermath. The author helps us to understand life in the Cape by including a background chapter, “A colony run by a company”.

Something I greatly appreciated was the fact that the author included a chapter each on Andrew Murray, Nicolaas Hofmeyr and Gottlieb van der Lingen. For readers outside of South Africa, these three chapters are most valuable. Nel then proceeds location by location to tell the story of the revival’s spread from Worcester and beyond over several chapters. These are highly fascinating accounts, but a map or two would have been most helpful for the reader who may not know the locations of the Cape which are mentioned in the book. I also did wonder why there were no illustrations of any of the chief leaders whose stories were given.

The author does not limit her research or writing to 1860-1862. Nel also includes the “aftermath” section (1862-1875) – covering the issues of division in Paarl, the battles against liberalism, and the pioneers of the new era in terms of the institutions which eventually emerged. As I read this, I came away saying, “I want to know much more.” The book has inspired me to read more widely on the subject overall, particularly Murray’s development of the Missionary Training Institute.

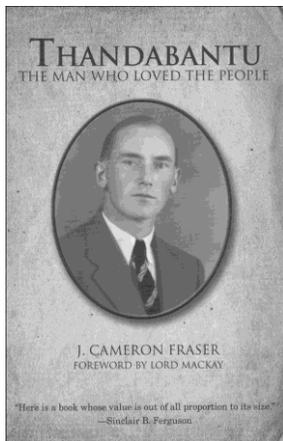
For English readers, *South Africa’s Forgotten Revival* is a good introduction to the revival of 1860-1862 in the Cape. The author is sympathetic to the subject. She introduces us to several key personalities and the spread of the awakening.

*Reviewed by Jack C. Whytock*

***Thandabantu: The Man Who Loved the People.* J. Cameron Fraser. Belleville, ON: Guardian Books, 2010, 70 pp., paper. ISBN 155452480-6**

In 1938 a young Scot, James Fraser, travelled to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). There he ministered for Christ for the rest of his short life. He died there when his son, Cameron, was only four and a half years old. In his nineteen years in Africa, he showed the love of Christ so well that the people

among whom he served named him “the man who loved the people”: *Thandabantu*.



James Fraser began as a teacher and teacher trainer; that remained a key part of his work until his death. At the end of World War II, he returned to Scotland for two years; during this time he studied dentistry, was ordained as a minister, and married his childhood sweetheart. When they returned to Rhodesia in 1947, his dentistry and her nursing skills enabled them to add medical care to his ministry of teaching and preaching. He died in Arica twelve years later after a brief but very fruitful ministry. This memoir highlights the working of God’s grace through hearts filled with His love.

*Thandabantu* is Cameron Fraser’s memoir of his father. It is not a biography as such, nor is it a detailed history of the mission. The author has gathered some verbal snapshots to help his own children know the grandfather that he himself barely had time to know as a father. *Thandabantu* is a sketch of James Fraser’s life and the mission. It is a sketch that helps to bring him to life before us and to see God’s grace working in and through him. Because of that and perhaps because the author first wrote it as a series of articles, it may seem a little disjointed. Nevertheless, it is interesting and edifying.

For many, an attractive feature of *Thandabantu* is that it is brief; the text is only forty-eight pages and is sprinkled with pictures. It is a pleasant and easy Sunday afternoon read for all but the slowest readers.

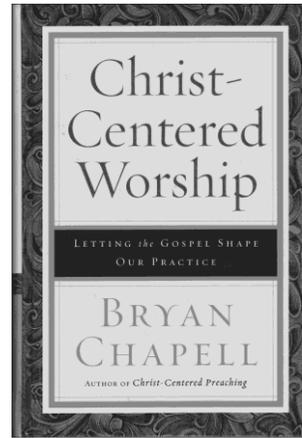
*Reviewed by Donald A. Codling. Rev. Codling recently retired as the minister at Bedford Presbyterian Church, Bedford, Nova Scotia, where he served for over twenty-five years. He continues to serve as the Stated Clerk of the Eastern Canada Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America.*



## Applied Theology

***Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice.* Bryan Chapell. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009, 320 pp., hc. ISBN 978-0-8010-3640-8**

“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Therefore, there is no more important subject than considering the worship of God and how it affects the body of Christ as well as those who are still “afar off”. In his book, *Christ-Centered Worship*, Bryan Chapell, president of Covenant Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, focuses on public worship and examines the major liturgical practices of the church from Rome to the present that have had influence in North America. Using these liturgies, he argues that it has been and always ought to be that the message of the gospel shapes worship and gives it structure while allowing for great diversity within that structure. Chapell’s goal is to show Christians that their worship patterns unite them with generations before them and different cultures around them because where the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, inevitably worship patterns will be in harmony with other faithful churches.



The first chapter is very helpful as Chapell explains the general structures of historical liturgies both for the liturgy of the Word and for the liturgy of the Upper Room. In this chapter he introduces the five liturgies that form the basis of the comparison for the rest of the book: Rome, Luther, Calvin, Westminster and Rayburn. He organizes, by way of two charts, a comparative analysis of these five liturgies. Having the distinctives of each liturgy available in chart form is extremely helpful and elucidates the text in a remarkable way.

Chapters two to six devote one chapter each to an in-depth analysis of each of the five liturgical styles. The reader is struck more by the similarities than the differences of these liturgies and this, of course, is precisely the thesis that Chapell has set out to prove – the gospel itself shapes worship and therefore the contours have remained relatively untouched throughout the ages. Once again, the charts contained in these chapters provide clarity and

strength to this argument. Where practices occur to which we might take exception, in the Roman liturgy for example, Chapell suggests that these are symptoms of where and how the gospel is misunderstood.

Chapter eight enters into a thorough analysis of Old Testament worship in the temple as Chapell shows that it is not church tradition from the time of the New Testament alone that determines the gospel structures of the liturgy of the church; in Solomon's temple the basic structures of gospel worship are discernable as well. Here we see the same elements of worship present – Adoration, Confession, Assurance, Thanksgiving, Petition, Instruction, Benediction and Praise, Communion and Dismissal. The author makes a very balanced and helpful comment that will hopefully prevent the ossification of what is meant to be free in the Spirit:

I do not mean by outlining Solomon's worship this way to imply that he consciously set out to establish a gospel message by the structure of his worship. Neither do I want to insist that every detail of his worship fits as neatly into this pattern as my categories may suggest. My intention is not to press every detail into this mold, but rather to indicate that there are regular and recognizable features to God's worship because there is continuity in his nature and the way he deals with his people. Not all occasions call for the same details of worship, but worship of God will necessarily echo basic truths about him. In Scripture these truths always have a redemptive context, so it is natural that these truths will assume redemptive features as they are communicated in worship. (p. 105)

Having established that the gospel defines the elements of worship and having shown the remarkable preservation of these elements, Chapell turns in chapter nine to examine the heart of every true service of worship; this he calls "Re-presenting" Christ's story. He suggests that this theme alone will honour the Lord, edify the saints, instruct those "learning the gospel" and speak to the outsider about the glory of God and the sin of mankind. So much of what the author says needs to be reread and deeply absorbed. Here is an example from the closing portion of chapter nine: "Worship should not be so narrowly conceived as being only about reminding people of their ethical obligations and doing proper things to honor God. Worship is about renewing relationship with the present Christ" (p. 124).

Chapter ten provides a very helpful discussion on the modern challenges of worship styles and the ensuing controversies. Once again, the author goes back to the centrality of the gospel and argues that if Christians understand the central elements of worship and the necessity of gathering together to represent the gospel, they will be willing to accept differing styles and traditions while recognizing the continuity of proclaiming Christ. "Not only can gospel priorities aid worship choices, but they can stop worship wars. . . . If gospel priorities do not determine worship choices, then people's preferences

will tear the church apart” (p. 130). Chapter eleven then goes on to expand upon modern tensions and to show that balance, rather than extreme, is not only possible but essential to true worship.

One of Chapell’s subthemes in this book is the idea that worship must contain variety within the structure of the gospel framework. In chapter twelve, Chapell discusses the various components of Christ-centred worship and attempts to show the variety that is possible within these components. For example, he shows how the call to worship can be presented as a scripture that is read, as brief words from the pastor, as a choral introit, as something recited in unison, as a responsive reading, as a song, or as a hymn. He does not mean his ideas to be exhaustive but rather to be a springboard to encourage the creative gifts of other believers.

The second half of the book, chapters thirteen to twenty-four, provides worship resources. A chapter each is devoted to the elements of liturgy that were examined and discussed in the first half of the book: call to worship; affirmation of faith; confession of sin; assurance of pardon; rubrics: transitions; historic components; Scripture-reading history and practice; Christ-centred sermons; benedictions and charges; worship service examples; communion services; and musical styles.

It is surprising that the whole topic of baptism is avoided. Clearly the author made a conscious decision here, perhaps wanting to avoid alienating a large portion of his readership and thus robbing them of the powerful principles contained in this work.

The discussion on transitions was most welcome. How many times have Christians experienced the sense that they are ticking down a “to do” list in worship rather than flowing through worship in response to each element as true worshippers?

This book is immensely helpful in causing the reader to think through the basic principles of worship and to work through his or her own personal biases that may be a hindrance to others. Chapell makes use of Hughes Oliphant Old’s work *Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture*<sup>1</sup> and actually brings Old’s careful historical work to greater use through very helpful application. There is a very fair and judicious select bibliography at the back of the book that will assist readers in studying this topic at length. Chapell himself is careful and reasoned; his arguments are clearly derived from Scripture and supported by the history of the church. This approach is somewhat of a contrast to John M. Frame’s work *Worship in Spirit and Truth*,<sup>2</sup> where the reader has a sense that Frame’s opinions and preferences carry too much weight.

Bryan Chapell has provided a wonderful treasury of worship principles and aids to the church in North America and indeed around the world. It will certainly be used widely and one suspects it will be used as a textbook in

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<sup>1</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture*, Guides to the Reformed Tradition (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1984).

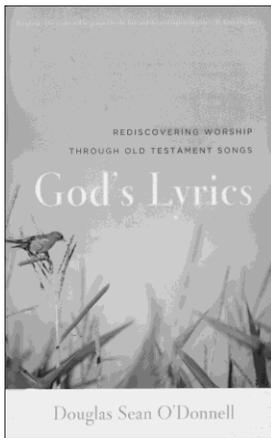
<sup>2</sup> John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996).

many colleges and seminaries. Philip Rykan, President of Wheaton College, Chicago, Illinois, is quoted on the back cover as saying that this book “seems destined to become one of the best resources available for improving the practice of Christian worship”. It is clearly a sequel to Chapell’s already well known work, *Christ-Centered Preaching*.<sup>3</sup> One hopes that a third book will follow on the subject of Christ-centred pastoral care. By the grace of God, both unity and vitality will be enhanced as readers grasp the strong and practical principles of Chapell’s writing on worship.

*Reviewed by Nancy J. Whytock, Haddington House*



***God’s Lyrics: Rediscovering Worship Through Old Testament Songs.* Douglas Sean O’Donnell. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010, 211 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-59638-172-8**



Since the time of the Reformation, debates related to congregational singing have often centred on exclusive psalmody over and against singing non-inspired, man-made songs. In *God’s Lyrics*, pastor and church planter Douglas O’Donnell laments over the modern church’s failure to not only sing the Psalms but also other lyrics found in the Scriptures. What is most alarming to O’Donnell is that the contemporary church has failed to let the theology and themes of these other scriptural lyrics influence congregational singing. The goal of his work is to call the church first to rediscover these lost songs and second to let the themes and theology of these lost songs challenge and influence the church’s congregational singing today.

O’Donnell’s work is divided into two parts. The first part surveys five important songs found in the Old Testament. Starting with the two songs of Moses (Ex. 15 and Deut. 32), the reader is sung out of Egypt in chapter one to the doorstep of the Promised Land in chapter two. After arriving in the Promised Land, the song of Deborah (Judg. 5) sings the reader from Sinai to the period of the judges in chapter 3. In chapter four, the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and the song of David (2 Sam. 22) harmonize together to rejoice in the coming of the Lord’s anointed. And finally in chapter five with

<sup>3</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

judgment coming to the unfaithful kingdom, the reader joins with the righteous remnant in the song of Habakkuk (Hab. 3).

O'Donnell sees four recurring motifs running through each of these songs. The first motif is that the Lord is at the centre of each of these songs. He is consistently "addressed, adored, and 'enlarged'" (p. 113). The second motif observed is that in these songs the Lord's "mighty acts in salvation history are recounted" (p. 113). These songs are never ahistorical; they are always connected to the Lord's actions within history. The third motif observed is that God's "acts of judgments are rejoiced in" (p. 113). The Lord's wrath and judgment against sin and wickedness are sources of joy for the Lord's people. The final motif is that the Lord's "ways of living (practical wisdom) are encouraged" (p. 113). These songs call the Lord's people to live righteously.

O'Donnell next uses these four motifs as an interpretive grid to evaluate both classical hymns and contemporary Christian choruses. Rather than choosing a random selection of contemporary choruses, O'Donnell selects the top fifty choruses recorded in the Christian Copyright Licensing International database<sup>1</sup> between 2000 and 2008. For the classical hymns, O'Donnell examines the twenty-five most popular hymns which have lyrics written before 1800 and which are still found in contemporary hymnals. A full list of these top choruses and hymns is provided as an appendix to the book.<sup>2</sup>

Though O'Donnell praises the classical hymns for being Lord-centred and for encouraging the Lord's ways of living, he refuses to allow an "old hymns are good; the new choruses are bad" (p. 138) attitude to permeate his investigation. Surprising to some, O'Donnell does not see the classical hymns consistently praising God for his specific work of salvation history. Often these hymns praise God for his general work in creation, but these praises are offered at ". . . the exclusion of the exodus, the incarnation, the resurrection, and Christ's return" (p. 137). One example of O'Donnell's findings can highlight this point: "In the top twenty-five CH [classic hymns sung in churches today] . . . only two songs . . . mention his resurrection and return" (p. 137).

Furthermore, the classic hymns fail greatly when it comes to rejoicing in the judgment of God. Of the top twenty-five classical hymns, only two mention the word "wrath". What is even more alarming is that many of these hymns originally had verses, which are no longer published or sung, that dealt with the themes of wrath and judgment. O'Donnell concludes that though songs about God's judgment and wrath do exist in classical hymns, "Our generation has chosen, intentionally or unintentionally, not to select

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) is a business that offers churches a solution to copyright issues. Over 150,000 churches in North America are registered with this organization. The CCLI chronicles the uses of songs used by churches in their worship services. The CCLI database contains over 200,000 worship songs. For more information about the CCLI see [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com).

<sup>2</sup> Some may take exception to the criteria used to define "chorus" versus "hymn".

such hymns for hymnals or congregational singing – or, if they are selected, to modify or remove the offending lyrics” (p. 150).

When it comes to contemporary Christian choruses, O’Donnell has very little praise to offer. They consistently fail to live up to the four motifs found in the Old Testament songs. Though some choruses do appear to be Lord-centred, they often end up emphasizing self over God and His glory. Of the top fifty contemporary choruses, the phrase “my heart” is the most repeated phrase (p. 128). Though O’Donnell attempts to give the writers of these choruses the benefit of the doubt, in the end he concludes these choruses “promote an unnecessary and unscriptural self-focus” (p. 129). The author does acknowledge, “Now, of course, there is nothing wrong with that phrase [my heart]. After all, it occurs fifty-one times in the Psalms . . . Yet, when that phrase is repeated more than phrases like ‘God’s heart,’ ‘Jesus died,’ or even ‘my Jesus’ or ‘my Lord,’ it shows, at the very least, a slightly misplaced emphasis” (p. 128).

Though almost nothing good is said about the contemporary choruses, O’Donnell does find a glimmer of hope. This glimmer comes from one chorus, “In Christ Alone,” a song that sings about the incarnation, death, resurrection and return of Christ.<sup>3</sup> This song also sings of the wrath of God being satisfied with Jesus’ death on the cross. This glimmer is certainly the exception rather than the rule. After examining contemporary Christian choruses, O’Donnell is forced to admit that he finds most of today’s most popular songs to show a theology that is “unchristian at worst and biblically unbalanced at best” (176).

*God’s Lyrics* does not end on such a negative note; it attempts to find ways for the church to move forward. The book surprisingly ends with sheet music consisting of O’Donnell’s personal, contemporary arrangements of the songs of Scripture. Furthermore, the book claims that mp3s of O’Donnell’s arrangements can be downloaded through P&R Publishing’s website. O’Donnell shows with both the sheet music and the downloadable mp3s that he practises what he preaches.

O’Donnell has provided the church with a prophetic call to repent for failing to offer acceptable worship to God (Heb. 12:28). His exegesis and interaction with the Old Testament songs encourages a biblical way forward. Though the exegesis is commendable, if the reader comes to this work looking for an exegetical commentary on each Old Testament song, there will be slight disappointment. However, careful observation of O’Donnell’s footnotes will show the reader that the author has studied diligently and is willing to interact with, critique or defend major commentators.

While many discerning Christians are quick to criticize contemporary Christian choruses, very few are willing to put their traditional hymnal

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<sup>3</sup> Here is an example of what some might define as a “hymn” rather than a “chorus”. See footnote 16.

through the same criticism. O'Donnell has done just that. He refuses to play favourites and is generous to both contemporary choruses and historic hymns.

O'Donnell's conclusions are far from surprising; many Christians have bemoaned contemporary Christian choruses for the past twenty years. To the discerning Christian, especially those from the Reformed tradition, his conclusions will at times feel obvious. However, what makes O'Donnell's approach unique is that he holds both hymns and choruses up against a standard put forth by the Scriptures. This practice of discerning cultural songs through the lense of the Scriptures is a great service to the church.

This book is ideal for any worship leader or any Christian who is struggling to make the transition out of a chorus-driven tradition. O'Donnell writes with an irenic tone and, because of that, he refrains from unnecessarily offending the reader. For most international readers, this book will prove confusing. O'Donnell's purpose is not to engage global or historic Christianity, but to offer a prophetic call to the contemporary North American church. Though Christians around the world need to be reminded of the importance of singing God's lyrics, most of O'Donnell's illustrations and examples will not connect as strongly with Christians outside of North America. While pastors and theologians are not O'Donnell's target audience and they will often find O'Donnell's conclusions predictable, this book is certainly a worthwhile, quick read for any pastor or elder in North American churches. Moreover, this book would be a worthy read for any Christian struggling to make sense of the verity of worship styles in North American churches.

*Reviewed by Kyle A. Hackmann, an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church in America and currently the assistant pastor of Grace Toronto Church. He is a graduate of Moody Bible Institute, Chicago and of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.*



***Learning Evangelism From Jesus.* Jerram Barrs. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009, 283 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-4335-0318-4**

*Learning Evangelism From Jesus* is the second book by Jerram Barrs on evangelism. His previous work, *The Heart of Evangelism*, was also published by Crossway (2005). Barrs is founder and resident scholar of the Francis Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.

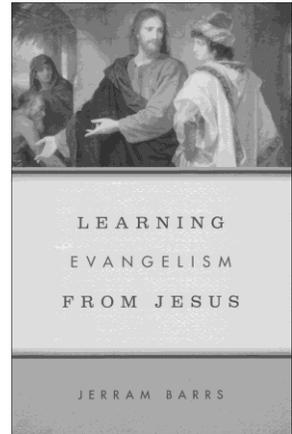
Early in the book you find that Barrs' qualification for writing this book is not purely academic. What shines through is not the mind of an academic but the heart of an evangelist and therefore a calling not confined to the elite but to all of God's people. Nevertheless, this calling must be stirred up through observing and learning from the Lord of the Harvest.

Barrs carefully and rightly discerns basically two different approaches to evangelism. Each approach is applied depending on the state of the individual's heart to which the evangelist is speaking. This is discerned, says Barrs, through prayerful observation and building meaningful relationships with people. We come to learn one of two things about people. The first is that some think themselves unworthy of God's love and beyond the pale of salvation. The other is the one who judges himself worthy of God's love and rewards based on their perceived fulfillment of God's holy law.

For those who seek to be justified by the law, Barrs shows that it is the law itself that Jesus turns to time and again to bring them to the place of helplessness before God. We might be tempted to think this approach is something that is reserved for the unbelieving pagan next door. However, he shows that in the gospel narratives, this is used for the most part for the "churched" professor of the faith. Drawing upon such examples as the rich young ruler (Matt. 19), Nicodemus (Jn. 3) and Simon the Pharisee (Lk. 7), Jesus models for us when and with whom it is appropriate to use the law as a means of undermining the righteous self-confidence of unbelievers in order to drive them to the God of grace. This was something not lost on Paul as he also wielded the law for the same purpose when "re-evangelizing" the Galatians and Romans. Indeed, a significant emphasis throughout this work is how to do evangelism among the "churched".

For those who feel completely and rightly condemned by God, it is the message of God's grace that must lead the charge. Using examples such as the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 8), the woman of Samaria (Jn. 4), Zacchaeus (Lk. 19) and others, he shows that the preparatory work of the law is not needed as much since many know themselves already condemned by it. So in the examples cited, Jesus' pure loving grace comes through to make new creatures out of condemned sinners.

The key to a right approach is not just getting alongside, serving and observing others, but also observing ourselves. Barrs devotes several helpful chapters to this. Beginning with his introductory chapter on our Christian calling to evangelize, he further challenges us to self-examination in order that the unbeliever knows it is not out of a sanctimonious spirit but out of a shared struggle that we are presenting the gospel to them. "Once our hearts are in the right place before Jesus, we will begin to think differently about our fellow sinners who, like ourselves, are trapped in sin of one kind or another" (p.159). More profoundly, what the author is at pains to impress upon us is not just the content in Jesus' evangelism but our desire to be conformed to the character and image of Jesus in the process, with the result that there



will be a natural and spontaneous desire for evangelism arising out of the love and grace of God.

Another key component in ministering like Jesus is the ability among the faithful to discern between real evangelism and imperialism. Simply put, you are there to bring people to Jesus and not conform them to your own personally held beliefs about “secondary matters”. “Think of all the laws that exist among believers today regarding music, movies, books, clothing, devotions, church membership requirements, tithing, drinking, smoking and so on” (p.167). Observation of our firmly held personal scruples or cherished traditions is not the end in view but a clear presentation of the gospel.

Another area of concern for Barrs is that, just like Jesus, the local church realize its “finiteness” or limitations in evangelism. This is expressed by the author in a couple of ways. The first is the scope of our evangelism. During the ministry of Jesus, Gentile evangelism was in an embryonic stage. Jesus said that he was sent to minister primarily to “the lost sheep of Israel”. Even He as a human understood that He had limitations. We can feel evangelism to be such an overwhelming task that we end up not doing it. Rather, says Barrs, we must recognize where God has providentially placed us, our families, cities, specializing in smaller circles and then moving out from the centre as we grow (p. 189).

Secondly, in examining Jesus’ dealing with Nicodemus, Barrs shows how limited, indeed helpless, we are before unbelieving hearts, no matter how well educated or religious they may be. We cannot argue or persuade anyone into the kingdom. We are always dependent upon the Spirit’s work. Jesus Himself knew, and told Nicodemus as much, that it was the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in enabling people to see the kingdom of God. People need to know that their problem is so profound that nothing short of the new birth will suffice. Jesus loved people enough to be honest with them about it and at the same time guarded against “easy-believism”. Christians need to be impressed again with the amount of space in that conversation with Nicodemus that Jesus gives solely to the work of the Spirit and our own finiteness.

One of the main ideas coming through in this work is that evangelism involves a commitment of the whole person – heart, mind and body. It is a craft to be worked out through trial and error but never neglected. Because no two people are the same, the evangelist must undertake to study the various ways in which Jesus engages different people. Barrs has shown that the beauty of the gospels is that we have such a broad range of characters and approaches. This book is an excellent place to start in identifying both.

A study guide concludes the book. While Barrs gives many examples from his own life, the study guide allows us to think hard about how we can live these ideas out in our own lives. This makes it suitable for personal or small group studies.

The reader cannot come away from this volume unchallenged and unexamined. It moves us out of our comfort zone but leaves us with a greater de-

sire to do evangelism, and to do it like our Lord. Here is a work to be enthusiastically commended.

*Reviewed by Kent I. Compton*

***Doing Theological Research: An Introductory Guide for Survival in Theological Education.* Robert W. Pazmiño. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009, 94 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-60608-939-2**

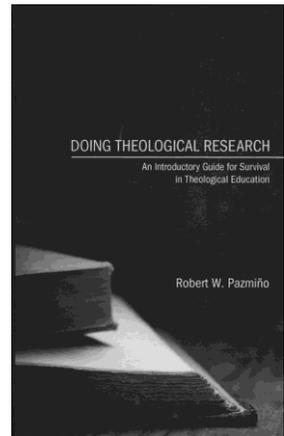
I first began reading Robert Pazmiño's material about thirteen years ago. At that time I read through his highly acclaimed work *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, the second edition, which has now gone into a third edition.<sup>1</sup> I found both that work and *Doing Theological Research* very engaging and useful.

The first fifty pages of *Doing Theological Research* are written by Pazmiño and are divided into seven chapters. These chapters, according to the introduction, are the distillation of Pazmiño's twenty-eight years of "guiding students with their research and study in a variety of settings and from working with theological faculty in a number of schools" (p. ix). He then goes on in his introduction to state his three objectives in writing the book:

- 1) To explore the purposes and basics of theological study and research.
- 2) To reaffirm the importance of theological study and research in a variety of theological disciplines.
- 3) To inspire Christians in relation to the calling to study as a form of worship and spiritual discipline. (p. ix)

Chapter one, "Where to Start", begins with what is theology, what is theological education and why do we pursue the study of theology? He introduces succinctly the issue of calling and commends Edmund P. Clowney's book *Called to the Ministry*.<sup>2</sup>

Chapter two, "The Five Commandments of Theological Research", is Pazmiño's adaptation of Max Stackhouse's formulation. There is great material here to take your students through as they begin writing in their theologi-



<sup>1</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *Called to the Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964).

cal course of studies. This chapter contains some of the best advice I have seen in print.

My other favourites were chapters five and seven: “Writing with Heart and Head” and “Practical Advice”. Too often we do not help our students to learn how to write. Perhaps as theological educators we brush this aside because we believe this is the job of someone else. We must take our students as we find them. We are there to serve them and to help. The author’s “Practical Advice”, chapter seven, contains four pages of the best advice on writing that professors can share with their students, with paragraphs subtitled “Start Early”, “Ask for Help”, “Share Your Work”, “Let Go with Prayer” and “Learn from Feedback”.

Pazmiño’s unique place as an Hispanic individual writing in the United States and as someone who has been described as an ecumenical, evangelical Reformed theologian is seen in chapter six, “A Spiritual Practice”. He is trying to cultivate an attitude in the student-writer – an attitude of spiritual humility, community and holism. There is much to be commended here, yet it was the one chapter of the book which did cause me to wonder about the author’s presuppositions and was the only chapter with which I did not find myself in complete accord.

The next portion, almost half of the book, is a series of five appendices, four of which were written by Pazmiño’s colleagues at Andover Newton Theological School; the fifth is written by Pazmiño himself. The best of these in my estimation is Appendix A, “A Brief Guide to New Testament Exegesis” (pp. 51-61). This appendix is most helpful and could easily be passed out in class to help students.

A couple of minor points should have been considered prior to publishing this book. First, perhaps the cover of the book should indicate that it was written by Robert Pazmiño “and others”. I say this because just a little over half of the book was by Pazmiño himself. Second, a final edit would have caught some missed italicization of book titles.

All professors in theological education should have this book in their libraries. Perhaps colleges could use sections from it during orientation sessions or for a seminar on “conducting theological research”.

*Reviewed by Jack C. Whytock*

***Engaging Your Teen’s World: Becoming a Culturally Savvy Parent.* Brian Housman. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009, 203 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-58743-254-5**

Culture seems to be beating down the door through communication devices that many parents are slowly familiarizing themselves with. How do parents equip their children to flourish in a godly way without having to create a culture of disengagement from the world around them?

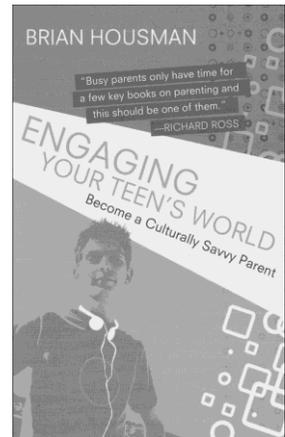
Brian Housman provides some solid answers in his book *Engaging Your Teens World: Become a Culturally Savvy Parent*. Houseman is founding director of Awake to Life, a non-profit ministry to parents and teens.

Houseman cautions against “knee-jerk” reactions to the culture in attempting to shield teens from its darker side. Rather, he sees culture as a positive thing. This is entirely biblical and a message we need to hear again. Notwithstanding the darker side of culture and constant barrage of ungodly influences children are exposed to on a daily basis, Housman wants readers to see that there are attractive aspects to culture. “Instead of running from culture you can run toward it and see the beauty and truth in it. You can lead your teen into seeing the redemption of God happening . . . all throughout culture. If you do, the depths of your conversations with your teen will be beyond your expectations” (p. 40). While not asking parents to go out of their way to engage with the seedier side of culture, the author does suggest that when it presents itself the parent ought to use the opportunity to engage the child and try to work through the reality of culture through the lens of God’s Word.

There are many strengths in this book. It is not just a book about being culturally savvy but child savvy. It is a call to engage the child along with the culture. How often do parents spend time observing the culture around them? Likewise, how often do they give thought to truly getting to know their children?

Housman warns parents not to see their children through “rose-colored glasses”. Not only has culture been an “easy target” over the years but sometimes the wrong target. He shows that parents are often ready to lay the blame of all their woes at the feet of culture, failing to recognize that the reason their children are drawn to these things in the first place is because of a sinful disposition. In his chapter entitled “Finger Pointing”, he shows that parents cannot see culture as a positive thing because they are too busy using it as a scapegoat to shift blame away from their children. He says that to make assumptions like, “My child is too disciplined to get into drugs.” or “My son is too young to get involved with pornography” is neither fair nor safe (p. 53). Parents need to be upfront with their teen about the culture of sin in their own hearts. They need to show, as those made in God’s image, what His original design was for and how we have fallen from that leading us to the choices we make.

He calls parents to carefully observe that children can be radically different from one another and says that there should not be a “one approach fits all” mentality to parenting. Parents have to put some time and thought into finding out where the particular strengths and weakness of each child lie and



nurture them accordingly. He states, “I can’t stress enough the importance of handling a teen’s passion with seriousness” (p. 112). Find out what drives the child. Find out how God has uniquely gifted them and through the Word and the grace of God, fan that passion into a flame for God’s glory. “One of the greatest things you can do is become a student of your kids” (p. 125).

This book does not pretend to be the last word on parenting teens. In fact, Housman is very honest about where he falls short and provides extra resources to supplement what is lacking. He deals honestly with where he himself is as a parent, and one is able to hear someone who is actually learning as he goes. It gives one the feeling of being in conversation.

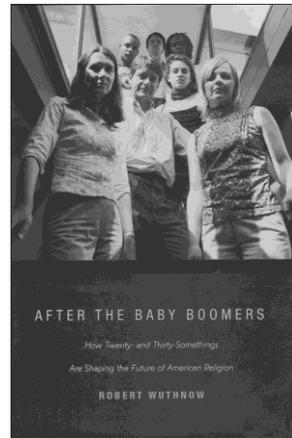
One of the weaknesses I found was the lack of engagement with the gospel’s place in all of this. It is assumed but is not as explicit as it ought to be. For the New Testament writers, the gospel was the chief tool of transforming not only the person or family but the culture as well.

However, as a parent, after reading this book I felt genuinely helped. There are many encouragements here for parents trying to navigate their way through some choppy cultural waters.

*Reviewed by Kent I. Compton*

***After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion.* Robert Wuthnow. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, 298 pp., hc. ISBN 978-0-691-12765-1**

Much has been written in the past year about the generational shift and exchange currently taking place in North America. Figures show that the baby boomer generation has begun to leave the workforce in droves, and boomers are beginning to enter the retirement stage of their lives. As their goals change from career to retirement, baby boomers are increasingly more concerned with health care and geriatric support services than the present state of the economy. Provocatively, but perhaps aptly, the generation following the baby boomers has been described by some as “Generation Screwed” because of the economic downturn and projections of drained pension funds and overly burdened healthcare systems. It is this same inheriting generation which Robert Wuthnow, sociologist and director of the Center for the Study of Religion, Princeton University, analyzes in his book *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- And Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*.



Wuthnow begins by pointing out that while there has been a considerable amount of research done on the religious make up and habits of the baby boomer generation, the generation following them is relatively understudied; and religious leaders have little knowledge of the ways in which this generation will soon be shaping and leading the American church. Wuthnow does an excellent job of defining his terms and phrases in the opening chapters of the book. It was also within these opening chapters that I found Wuthnow's analysis to be the most rich and valuable. Two essential concepts introduced here form an integral foundation to the narrative structure of the book; namely, the definition of generation and the idea of a "tinkerer generation". Wuthnow stresses that our concept of generation has changed because of the baby boomers. Before the boomers, a generation was typically defined in terms of a genealogy within a family. The term "Baby Boomer Generation" refers to anyone born between 1946 and 1964. Despite a nearly twenty year span, the people born within this time are considered to be from the same generation due to a common culture and shared experiences; for example, exposure to such formative events as the civil rights movement or the Vietnam War.

The generation after the baby boomers has sometimes been referred to as the "millenials" or generation X. This nomenclature undoubtedly refers to their ongoing search for definition, but unlike their parents there is no evidence to suggest that this generation has been particularly influenced and shaped by any of the historical events in their lifetime. Wuthnow decides to call them a generation of "tinkerers" in an attempt to describe their approach to religion and spirituality. In the same way that a tinkerer puts together a life from whatever resources, skills and tools are available to him, spiritual tinkers rummage through piles of ideas, theology, conversations, books and magazines until they have an idea or set of ideas that suit them. This concept differs from religious pluralism in that tinkerers may disagree with each other about the correct method of tinkering and piecing together instead of accepting all positions as equal.

While Wuthnow is unable to offer a perfect solution to reaching the tinkers, he does believe that the church can offer stability and comfort to a generation that must constantly piece together its spirituality for itself. His book uses copious amounts of statistics and graphs to convey his analysis of this generation, and at some points the statistical analyses becomes excessive and repetitive. Nevertheless, Wuthnow compiles some thorough research that would be valuable not only to those in the ministry but also to laymen seeking to understand and reach the next generation of the church.

*Reviewed by Ian A. Whytock, B.A. University of King's College and currently a graduate student in history at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.*





## Book Briefs

We have added a new section this year called “Book Briefs” to acknowledge new books we have received over the last year for which we have not provided full book reviews. We have organized these into topical categories to help readers become aware of new books in specific areas.

### Missiology

***Globalization and Its Effects on Urban Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.* Ed., Susan S. Baker. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009, 358 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-87808-006-9**

This book is a festschrift in honour of Dr. Manuel (Manny) Ortiz for his work in inner city ministry and his teaching on Urban Mission at Westminster Theological Seminary. Secondly, the book is a “stand-alone textbook developed around issues that are at the forefront of mission dialogue . . .” The four overall sections are globalization, reconciliation, church planting and leadership development.

***Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing It Right!* Ed., Robert J. Priest. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008, 627 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-87808-005-2**

This appears to be the most substantial book to date on the phenomenon of modern missions known as “short-term mission” (STM). The book is divided into six sections: Connecting with Long-Term Missions, Encountering Social Others, Forging Global Partnerships, Carrying Out Specialized Ministries, Considering Legal and Liability Issues in Short-Term Missions, and Evaluating and Improving the Impact of STM on Participants. There are an impressive twenty-five contributors.

The book adopts an approach “which is positive and constructive. While there are criticisms in the book, these criticisms are not directed against STM per se, but against particular ways of doing STM. That is, the goal of this book is to improve the ways in which STM is carried out and to improve the understandings needed on the part of all who are involved in short-term missions” (p. viii). A must-have book.

***Missions from the Majority World: Progress, Challenges, and Case Studies.* Eds., Enoch Wan and Michael Pocock. Evangelical Missiological Society Series no. 17. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library 2009, 411 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-87808-019-9**

A work which begins by defining the concept “majority world” and related terms will certainly help in the classroom in many Bible colleges and seminaries and bring added clarity of thought. This book’s thesis is clear – Christianity has shifted from the West to the South and East, and now we must be ready to learn from the missionary experiences of those from the majority world. Part one, Global Overview, helps with definition and context; parts two, three and four all deal with regional issues – Asia, Africa and Latin America; part five is Issues of Concern; and part six is particular Case Studies. The book speaks of the reality today – Western missionary forces are shrinking and missions from the majority world are seeing substantial growth.

***Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership.* Sherwood G. Lingenfelter. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, 175 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8010-3605-7**

This is the third book in a series dealing with culture and cross-cultural ministry. It addresses a reality which is only going to enlarge in the years to come – our ministry will increasingly be in multicultural teams and contexts. *Leading Cross-Culturally* deals with cultural diversity and the damaging tendency of forming ministry partnerships in “the way that cultural biases of every kind create obstacles to effective leadership and ministry partnerships”. The matter of control and power is a key issue as it seems this is pervasive in all cultural expressions of leadership.

The goals of the book are clear: to help leaders understand their personal culture of leadership; “to equip the leader to become an effective learner in another cultural context”; to reflect on the human desire to seek power and control; and to define the “pathways for biblically based, Christ-centered, power-giving leadership in single-culture and multicultural contexts”. Destined to be a book that will be very useful in many places for current leaders as well as for leadership training.

***Mission in an African Way: A practical introduction to African instituted churches and their sense of mission.* Thomas Oduro, Hennie Pretorius, Stan Nussbaum and Bryan Born. Wellington, South Africa: Bible Media, 2008, 228 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-86804-233-3**

Anyone preparing to do mission work in Africa must read this book or something similar. Why? Because it addresses a subject which we almost universally do not address, namely the large AIC movement on the African continent. AIC stands for African Instituted Churches or African Initiated Churches or African Independent Churches – all three names are common and interchangeable. It is that large grouping of churches started by Africans and not by missionaries. They cannot be ignored, and *Mission in an African Way* helps fill a gap to start to tell us about the AICs and mission. This is very much a “manual” style book for people in the “mainline” churches to understand the AICs. The book aims at bridge-building, description, gentle evaluation, Bible study and accessibility of style.

***The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions.* Paul G. Hiebert. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009, 217 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-8010-3681-1**

For evangelicals, the name Paul Hiebert is virtually synonymous with the words “mission” and “anthropology”. We have relied upon his books for textbooks for decades; with his death in 2007, many of us thought there would be no more new Hiebert books. However, two have appeared posthumously, this being one of those. *The Gospel in Human Contexts* was written by Hiebert but edited under his daughter Eloise’s care and oversight. It is a summary book on anthropology and mission with a view particularly to help us master the skill of doing human exegesis – that is, to learn “to study the social, cultural, psychological, and ecological systems in which humans live in order to communicate the gospel in ways the people we serve understand and believe”. The goal is always to see the gospel bring transformation in a culture, not captivity. Destined to become a standard in the field and shows Hiebert as the mature thinker he was.

## Christian Piety and Spirituality

***The Seven Deadly Sins and How to Overcome Them.* Graham Tomlin. Oxford: Lion, 2007, 187 pp., paper. ISBN UK 978-0-7459-5221-5; ISBN US 978-0-8254-6258-0**

Though this book's title begins with a certain medieval allusion, "the seven deadly sins", it is anything but medieval. (Gregory the Great arrived at the number seven, we believe.) Tomlin opens this book with a stimulating chapter on "Sins and the Soul" and then proceeds to give a chapter each to pride, envy, anger, gluttony, lust, greed and sloth. These are appropriately illustrated to engage the reader, appropriately referenced to various writers, and appropriately mingled with Scripture. The result is a helpful spiritual book to encourage us toward greater depth and to point us to a better way. There are some connections here thematically to Dallas Willard's writing.

## Christian Worldview

***Marginalising Christians: Instances of Christians being sidelined in modern Britain.* Newcastle upon Tyne: The Christian Institute, 2009, 80 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-90108-646-1**

The byline of The Christian Institute is "Christian Influence in a Secular World". This book, *Marginalising Christians*, is a reality check upon the state of things in Britain today as concerns increasing marginalization of Christians, growing discrimination, the risk of the loss of religious freedoms and speech, and the intolerance Christians are facing in a nation of "equality and diversity". The book is very well documented with instances of what is happening in education, the media, the police, employment, local councils, public funding, goods and services, and violence and crime as relates to Christianity. The last sentences in the conclusion say it all: "When it comes to applying equality and diversity laws, Christians seem to be the first to be punished and the last to be protected. This prejudice and intolerance must end."

***Art to the Glory of God.* John Barber. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010, 33 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-60899-310-9**

The author is a minister of the Presbyterian Church in America and a cultural historian and theologian. He has also authored *The Road from Eden: Studies in Christianity and Culture*. This new booklet follows on the author's

book and attempts to answer the question, “How can a Christian create a work of art that truly glorifies God?” Thus, the stress is on criteria for art of worth. Obviously “chapters” are very brief in such a booklet with some being one page, for example, “What the Artist Is Not”.

I found many quotable quotes in this small booklet, such as, “Great art is that which embodies great content.” A helpful little primer on the subject which would serve well as a brief read in a full-orbed worldview course.

***Secret Faith in the Public Square: An Argument for the Concealment of Christian Identity.* Jonathan Malesic. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009, 248 pp., paper. ISBN 978-1-58743-226-2**

This book is aimed very much at an American context. The introduction’s title is “Secrecy and Christian Faith in Contemporary America”, and part two is entitled “Concealment of Christian Identity in Contemporary America”, with three chapters. Clearly American Christians will be the chief audience, and this is certainly in order for a book’s market. Malesic’s thesis runs very counter to much of our popular notions of making one’s faith public. Rather he calls for a purposed concealment of faith in the public sphere. The author is taking Matthew 6:1, 6 and applying it in a way in which piety is kept secret and avoids falling into public hypocrisy through self-interest, etc. Part one, which is less exclusively American, explores “Concealment of Christian Identity in the Theological Tradition” and consists of six chapters. Here we encounter Cyril of Jerusalem, Kiekegaard and Bonhoeffer. The book will certainly allow for heated discussion in a worldview course and spark much original debate. It could be used as a senior-level reading outside America.

## Church History

***The Dynamics of Christian Mission: History through a Missiological Perspective.* Paul E. Pierson. Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2009, 364 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-86585-006-4**

In some ways this book is hard to classify – is it church history or missiology? I think in the end one must say it is a text for the history of missions. The title well describes the book’s thrust and tone – “The dynamics” – apt for describing the expansion of Christianity as a movement. It does not claim to be comprehensive as a history but certainly engages with a broad range of historical subjects in its thirty-five chapters. The author is hoping to develop the reader’s ability to see renewal as the seedbed for mission movements and to ask missiological questions of church history. Pierson taught the course for

twenty-five years, which is the basis for this book. The book could be considered a helpful resource next to the somewhat dated book by J. Herbert Kanes, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission*.

***Reaching Forward: From a Rich Heritage to a Certain Goal, The Presbyterian Church of Victoria, 1859-2009.* Allan and Mairi Harman. Melbourne, AU: Presbyterian Church of Victoria, 2009, 76 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-64650-971-6**

This is a regional Australian church history of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria upon the occasion of its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It is written at a general level – free of endnotes/footnotes and bibliography yet certainly has all the marks of fine research by the authors. Though it chronicles one denomination in one Australian state, there are factors here to which Christians around the world will be able to relate – church union and continuing church movements, women in ministry, training for the ministry, changing methods of evangelism and the changing face of demographics in society. Though all these are certainly illustrated in the life of the church in Victoria, they connect to the wider church. A helpful read to understand who the Presbyterian Church of Victoria is and has been.

***Ann Bradstreet: Pilgrim and Poet.* Faith Cook. Darlington, UK: EP Books, 2010, 176 pp., paper. ISBN 978-0-85234-714-0**

Faith Cook's *Anne Bradstreet: Pilgrim and Poet* is a fascinating and inspiring read from several perspectives. From the historical perspective, how enlightening to follow the course of history in seventeenth century colonial America through the eyes of the daughter of one of the founding leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Insights into that turbulent period of British history are equally revealing. As a study of the first American poet, and that a woman in a decidedly male-dominated age, there is much to learn and appreciate. Cook has liberally sprinkled passages of Anne Bradstreet's work throughout the pages. And for spiritual edification, come sit at the feet of this beautiful soul as, faced with loneliness, pain, sickness, fear, childbirth, loss of loved ones and property, and personal struggles, she turns to her God and pours out her heart in supplication and faith through her poetry. One is often reminded of the psalms of David. Highly recommended for all ages, but particularly fit for family reading or girls in their teens.

# **Academic Articles**



## Towards a Better Understanding of Church Liturgy/Worship Today<sup>1</sup>

**Manfred Waldemar Kohl\***

*\* Manfred W. Kohl was born in Germany, was educated in Europe and the United States and lives in Canada. Dr. Kohl serves as Vice-President of International Development for Overseas Council International, an organization that assists theological schools, primarily in the non-western world. He served for three years with World Vision International as Regional Director for West Africa and for fourteen years in central Europe as International Vice-President. He has spoken and published widely in the field of Christian stewardship, institutional development and theological education. We thank Dr. Kohl for permission to publish this article, which we believe will be of assistance to many. Manfred and his wife, Barbara, served as volunteers at the recent Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa.*



The Ukrainian Theological Forum lists among its objectives – to demonstrate cooperation among theological institutions throughout the country. Overseas Council International was quite active, as an external catalyst, in the conception and realization of the first forum held in 2006 under the theme “Theology and Evangelism.” This forum was a good preparation for the Franklin Graham Festival held in Kiev six months later. During that first forum, the expression of worship became an issue of some concern, leading the planning committee for the second forum to decide – wisely – to make liturgy/worship the theme for this gathering. I was asked to prepare and present a basic paper on the “The Theological and Philosophical Understanding of Church Liturgy and Worship.” I did not expect this to be such a huge assignment, and I sought the advice of Dr. Ronald Man, the speaker on “Worship and Liturgy as Part of Curriculum Development in Theological Education” at the 2006 Overseas Council Institutes of Excellence around the world,

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the Theological Forum in Kiev, Ukraine November 2009. It was published in the Russian language as part of the Theological Forum proceedings and in *ICJ* 9:2 (2010): 69-77. This paper can be used for a retreat/workshop for the worship team of any church or for a group of individuals concerned about church music/liturgy/worship. The questions throughout the paper can be a basis for discussion.

as to where to begin. There have been literally hundreds of excellent books and articles written in the last few years. For the purpose of further study, I am listing some of the most helpful of these books and articles in the footnotes.<sup>2</sup> Also very helpful were the results of several congresses on liturgy and worship held recently, as well as the many declarations from seminars and international gatherings on the subject.<sup>3</sup> It became quite clear to me that conflicting opinions on this topic are presently fueling a most heated debate, thereby dividing churches, denominations, theological schools, etc. It is time to call for a “cease-fire” to the worship wars.

In studying the subject of worship, one quickly discovers that the debates are not, in general, based on theological issues but rather on differing styles of worship or liturgy: for instance, contemporary choruses, often with endless repetition, versus simple, traditional hymns; organ music versus modern

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) and *Essay in Worship: Adoration and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (Oxford: University Press, 1993); Horton Davies, *The Worship of the American Puritans, 1629-1730* (New York: Peter Land, 1990); James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993) and *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000); Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); Mark Earey, “Worship – What do we think we are doing?” *Evangel* 16/1 (Spring 1998): 7-13; Don E. Saliers, *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996); David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992); Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise! Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Marianne Meye Thompson, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” *Ex Auditu* 8 (1992): 45-54; I. Howard Marshall, “How far did the early Christians worship God?” *Churchman* 99 (1985): 216-29; John P. Richardson, “Is Worship Biblical?” *Churchman* 109 (1995): 197-218; Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) and *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Tim Ralston, “‘Remember’ and Worship: The Mandate and the Means,” *Reformation and Revival* 9/3 (2000): 77-89; Eugene H. Merrill, “Remembering: A Central Theme in Biblical Worship,” *JETS* 43 (2000): 27-36; Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), esp. 231ff.; David Montgomery, *Sing a New Song: Choosing and Leading Praise in Today’s Church* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House and Hand-sel Press, 2000); Hotfon D. Eskrgirlf, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); John Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997); Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); John E. Burkhart, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.worr.org](http://www.worr.org), [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org), [www.calvin.edu/worship](http://www.calvin.edu/worship), [www.worship.ca/docs/lwf\\_ns.html](http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html)

instruments, such as strings, drums, even entire bands; or simple congregational singing versus singing accompanied by the clapping of hands, rhythmic performances, or liturgical dancing.

Just a few weeks ago, as I was gathering material, I was introduced to a new song that addresses the mode of worship dilemma we face today and points out that the different types of worship all focus on the one and only eternal God. This song was presented for the first time at the annual conference of Peacemaker Ministries in Atlanta in September 2007.

### Some Will Dance

See how the Father created both you and me  
He made the universe—see God’s variety  
We are His body, we worship in one accord  
We serve the same God, we worship Christ the Lord  
Some will dance, some will sing  
Some will shout—still, the praises ring  
Some people kneel, some will stand  
Some will cry, and some will clap their hands

See how the Father created both you and me  
Woman, man...both equal eternally  
Let us speak peace and show the Master’s love  
Let’s show His kingdom on earth as it is above  
Some will dance, some will sing  
Some will shout—still, the praises ring  
Some people kneel, some will stand  
Some will cry, and some will clap their hands

Some men are black, some are brown  
Some men speak my way and some are from out of town  
Still Jesus loves us and yearns that we all be saved  
Who Jesus sets free is free and no more a slave  
Some will dance, some will sing  
Some will shout—still, the praises ring  
Some people kneel, some will stand  
Some will cry, and some will clap their hands<sup>4</sup>

Overseas Council has made this text available as a gift to all participants at this Forum in the form of a bookmark.

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<sup>4</sup> Music by Brad Clarkson, lyrics by Dawn Anthony.

When we ask, “What is worship?” and “What is liturgy?”, we must begin by developing a clear understanding of first, the basic principles or theological foundations and second, how these principles can be expressed (that is, practiced or demonstrated) in our various forms of worship and liturgy. The key question is how we as human beings can effectively combine principles and practice in worshipping a holy, eternal God. Let me now make several points to help us in our discussions and workshops on the subject.

### I. *Imago Dei* – Man Created in God’s Image

The creation of man in God’s image remains a divine mystery. In order to approach the Creator, one must reflect in spirit and in truth this divine relationship (Jn. 4:24). Don Saliers, in his excellent little book *Worship Come to Its Senses*, characterizes relevant Christian worship as “renewed attention of awe, delight, truthfulness, and hope. These are called ‘senses’ because they name the patterns in human experience of God. These are also themes in praying, singing, and proclaiming good news in our gathering about the book, the font of baptism, and the Lord’s Table.”<sup>5</sup>

In our workshops on worship and liturgy, we would do well to explore these four senses of God, “awe, delight, truth, and hope,” as being foundational.

**AWE:** The Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer God described from Genesis to Revelation is beyond human comprehension and can only be understood as awesome. Man must offer himself as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Awe and gratitude are inseparable, leading to self-giving in worship as a response to the continuous creating and redeeming actions of God. He truly is awesome.

**DELIGHT:** The first question in the Westminster Catechism is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer: “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” The praises of delight expressed especially in the psalms but also throughout the Old and New Testaments must become a part of life regardless of circumstances. “Rejoice, and again I say, rejoice,” says the Apostle Paul (Phil. 4:4). Glorification of God creates delight in the relationship with Him that overcomes even the most difficult moments of life and death.

**TRUTH:** In the presence of a holy and perfect God, we must perceive the truth that we are fallen creatures in need of redemption. In the presence of God, only truth and absolute honesty is permitted. Superficiality, half-heartedness, or light-heartedness must be replaced by truthful confession, forgiveness, and transformation. In our liturgy and worship, more emphasis should be put on what HE has done. Our testimonies have to reflect His actions (Ps 73:28c).

**HOPE:** In one of the tribal languages of Ghana, West Africa, the word hope is expressed as something you eat in order that it may become part of every living cell in your body. Hope, which contains the sense of both “al-

<sup>5</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 14.

ready” and “not yet,” must lead to a commitment to finish the race and receive the promised prize (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7). Hope, in union with faith and love, must be the foundation of all our worship and liturgy.

**Questions/Reflections for the workshops: How can we practise and express in our worship and our liturgy these four senses of God – awe, delight, truth, and hope?**

## **II. The Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**

Worship comprises both revelation from the Divine and response from us humans, which is only possible with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther wrote about worship simply as God speaking to us through His Word and we, in turn, responding to Him with prayer and songs of praise as part of the “living sacrifice” we offer to Him (Rom. 12:1). The Reformers returned to the Pauline theology of not replacing the priesthood (the mediating role between God and man) by merits or intercessions of the Church. Rather, each believer has the privilege and the obligation to approach God in worship. Jesus is described in Hebrews as the *Leitourgos* (Heb. 8:2), as the Mediator providing for each believer a direct approach to God. Paul, describing God’s grace and mercy in Romans, states clearly, “Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

For James Torrance, worship as only our action is a Unitarian view, a human-centred theology. “We sit in the pew watching the minister ‘doing his thing,’ exhorting us ‘to do our thing,’ ” he says, “until we go home thinking we have done our duty for another week! This kind of do-it-yourself-with-the-help-of-the-minister worship is what our forefathers would have called ‘legal worship’ and not ‘evangelical worship.’ ”<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, the Trinitarian view of worship is that we participate, through the Holy Spirit, in the incarnate Son’s communication with His Father. The incarnate form of worship is Trinitarian. The New Testament emphasis is on fellowship, sharing, communion, participation. “Because you are sons God sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, the Spirit who calls out ‘Abba, Father’ ” (Gal. 4:6). Worship and liturgy should be addressed to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Although there is only “One in being,” the three – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – should be worshipped equally in their distinctiveness.

**Question/Reflection for the workshops: How can we change from human-centred theology to incarnate theology, worshipping the three-in-one beings of God equally?**

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<sup>6</sup>James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 20.

### III. Required, not Optional

Worship is our celebrative response to what God has done, what He is still doing, and what He promises to do. “Worship is an act of service to God,” says John Burkhart, “even though God does not really need what humans offer. For the Hebrews, God is God, whether served or not; and God deserves to be served, not for any reward to God’s servants but for God’s own worth. God does not require praise to be God; but as God, God demands it by right of being God.”<sup>7</sup> We should not ask, “What can we give to God, Who has everything?” but rather, “What can we bring to God, Who gave everything?” We honor the Giver. Bringing sacrifices to, or performing rituals in honor of, the various gods of any religion or cult requires material offerings, offerings often associated with death, whereas God requires a living sacrifice, as described in Romans 12. God has provided the ultimate sacrifice – the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, one for all” (Heb. 10:10). “Therefore, let us continually offer to God the sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16). Our worship and liturgy must include care for others – love and care for neighbors, within and outside God’s family. Evangelism – sharing the good news with unbelievers – is part of our worship (Rom. 15:16); we celebrate with the bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:8) as we share the good news. Our worship requires that we constantly refer to God’s activity, His design for a lost world, and engage with Him in building His kingdom. Sharing the Lord’s Table, inviting the outsider (Mt. 22:9), giving and not just receiving (Acts 20:35) should all be included in our liturgy of praise to the Triune God.

**Question/Reflection for the workshops: How can we best express in our worship and liturgy the requirement that we be a living sacrifice for God, and for others, as part of building His kingdom?**

### IV. Holy God and Holy Man

Glorification of God and sanctification of humans belong together. The English term “worship” is best described with the unique German word *Gottesdienst* (God service), which expresses the double action of God serving man and man serving God. The two together define the fundamental character of Christian worship. Our praying, meditating, singing, reflecting, acting, and serving in *Gottesdienst* must provide the opportunity for the holy God to speak and bless as He responds, so that we become more like Him in who we are and in what we do. “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Pet.

<sup>7</sup> John E. Burkhart, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 16.

1:15-16). All our worship, including all liturgy, must be seen in terms of holiness. As the Church Father Irenaeus tells us, “The glory of God is a human fully alive. Nothing glorifies God more than a human being made holy; nothing is more likely to make a person holy than the desire to glorify God. Both the glorification of God and the sanctification of humans characterize Christian worship.”<sup>8</sup>

The victory God’s Son has achieved must be present in His Church. “What Christ has done in the past is again given to the worshipper to experience and appropriate in the present. It is a way of living with the Lord. The church presents what Christ has done for the worshipping congregation’s reenactment of these events. The worshipper can thus reexperience them for his or her own salvation.”<sup>9</sup> Our generation seems to have forgotten that holiness – from God and towards God – requires time, practice, and adequate allowance for quietness and stillness. Action-oriented worshippers need to learn that God also speaks and blesses in silence: “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps. 46:10). Remember Elijah, who had a worship experience with God through silence (1 Ki. 19:12). Loudness, noise, or actions are not always required, nor are they necessarily the best form of worship. Proper, God-honoring celebration requires balance.

**Questions/Reflections for the workshops: How can we assure that our worship is part of our sanctification, our becoming more holy – as God is holy? How do we incorporate silence into our worship?**

## V. Corporate and Individual Worship

The church as God’s temple, the gathering of believers worshipping corporately, demonstrates that the temple of God is bigger than the individual. “You are God’s temple, and God’s spirit lives in you . . . God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:16-17). “Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). “On the first day of the week we came together to worship and to break bread” (Acts 20:7). Numerous other passages speak of the corporate worship of the early Church.

Scripture makes clear, however, that the temple of God is also the body of the individual. “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

“In Ephesians 5:19 we speak ‘to one another’ when we sing; and in Colossians 3:16, the singing of ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’ is in the

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<sup>8</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 24.

<sup>9</sup> White, 25.

context of teaching and admonishing one another – part of letting ‘the word of Christ dwell in you richly.’ This means that the purist model of addressing only God in our corporate worship is too restrictive.”<sup>10</sup> Our singing, praying, meditating or glorifying God must have elements of shaping the individual – how to behave (to think, speak, and act) so that he or she becomes more and more like Christ. The song of the great leader Moses (Ex. 15:1-18), the prayer of the schizophrenic Jonah (Jon. 2:2-9), the song of the teenage girl Mary (Lk. 1:47-55) – each of these is a liturgical expression of individual adoration of God in submitting to Him.

Both pure joy and utter despair can be expressed in our worship – individually and corporately. Like children, we approach the Father with the assurance that He hears us and acts according to His divine plan. The book of Psalms provides endless examples of liturgy, songs, and prayers offered by individuals and in corporate gatherings. In today’s worship we should rediscover the richness and the depth of the Psalms, which combine glorification and sanctification for individuals and for the church family as a whole. The reading, even responsively, or the singing of entire passages of the Old Testament – especially the Psalms – was part of worship and liturgy for thousands of years and should again become a part of our worship today. A Latin American theologian once shared with me that every day he memorizes a hymn and a Bible passage or a Psalm as part of his daily walk with the Lord.

**Question/Reflection for the workshops: How can we supplement corporate worship to help individuals to have daily worship experiences in their walk with the Lord?**

## **VI. More Practical Recommendations**

If what we sing is what we are, if our prayers and worship are a reflection of our character, if our liturgical acts are measurements of our relationship and communication with our holy God, then we should pay much more attention to what we do. Worship and liturgy must be more than just symbolic activities, habits, or traditions; they must recover and contain life itself. The gift of life requires adoration and action towards the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life.

Preparation and planning for liturgy/worship should be taken more seriously. To sing a song just to get people’s attention or to gather attendees to a conference, to repeat a chorus numerous times according to the mood of the leader, to offer spontaneous (and perhaps meaningless) prayers as is our custom is at best very superficial. Corporate worship and liturgy requires preparation, reflection, and practice. Prayer – listening and talking to the Almighty God – should not be mere ritual. “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans” (Mt. 6:7). The well-known Hollis Professor, George

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<sup>10</sup> D. A. Carson, “Worship under the Word,” in D.A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 45.

Huntston Williams, my Doctor Father, refused to pray publicly without a day's notice so that he could prepare properly. The lyrics of our songs and choruses should be checked in detail to be sure they complement the rest of the service and are theologically sound. Every song and instrument that enriches our worship should be the best we can offer to God. We have to learn and practise worship, which includes much more than just the adjustment of the loud speakers or the outward appearance of the worship team. Worship requires wisdom and experience and should not be assigned only to the youth. Emotional expression should be balanced by reflection, inner hearing, and silent praise. Worship has to be authentic, godly, and biblical.

**Questions/Reflections for the workshops: How can we include more practice, wisdom, and experience in our worship preparation? Who will evaluate what is the best for the Master?**

## **VII. Conclusion – Worship Should Be Taught in Our Theological Institutions**

In surveying all the recent material on worship and liturgy and in preparing this paper, it has become more and more clear to me that the topic of worship and liturgy must be taught in our theological seminaries and Bible institutes. At least one course for every student on “The Fullness of Worship” should be a requirement in every theological training institution. Biblical variations in worship, personal expression, and corporate adoration and action, as well as proper preparation with outcome evaluation, should be included in the course. A course on prayer is essential; Jesus taught His disciples to pray. The subject of liturgical expression should be part of the training program for every pastor. Christian leaders have to learn to select, prepare, guide, and evaluate worship teams and their leaders. Every age group should be included in worship.

The recent tension in our churches with regard to worship can be minimized if church leaders, pastors, and evangelists are properly prepared in the art of worship and liturgy. This subject has been ignored for too long. It is time that we give it the attention it deserves. As the seminary goes, so goes the church.

**Questions/Reflections for the workshops: How can we include a required course in worship and leadership in our theological schools? What should be included? Who should teach it?**

In closing, let me say with the psalmist,

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. (Ps. 95:6-8)

Let me recommend that in the remaining time allocated we split up into seven groups and discuss the questions raised.

### **Materials for break-out sessions/workshops**

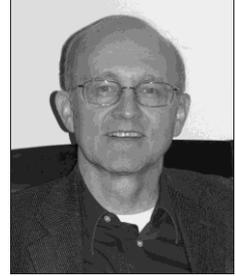
Time permitting, I would like the entire gathering to split up into seven groups (just where they sit), and each group should address the questions following each of the seven sections.

- 1) How can we practise and express in our worship and our liturgy these four senses of God – awe, delight, truth, and hope?
- 2) How can we change from human-centred theology to incarnate theology, worshipping the three-in-one beings of God equally?
- 3) How can we best express in our worship and liturgy the requirement that we be a living sacrifice for God, and for others, as part of building His kingdom?
- 4) How can we assure that our worship is part of our sanctification, our becoming more holy – as God is holy? How do we incorporate silence into our worship?
- 5) How can we supplement corporate worship to help individuals to have daily worship experiences in their walk with the Lord?
- 6) How can we include more practice, wisdom, and experience in our worship preparation? Who will evaluate what is the best for the Master?
- 7) How can we include a required course in worship and leadership in our theological schools? What should be included? Who should teach it?

# Johann Albrecht Bengel: A Prominent Post-Reformation Voice Engaging a Rising Tide of Biblical Criticism<sup>1</sup>

Albin Huss, Jr.\*

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## Introduction

In considering “voices from the edge of the Reformation,” it seems fitting that the prominent voice of post-reformation era German Pietist Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) should be heard. As a leading exegete of his time who is generally acknowledged as “the father of modern textual criticism,” Bengel’s numerous commentaries and his *Gnomon* have made significant contributions to biblical scholarship. As we begin our consideration of this “prominent post-reformation voice” and his “engagement of a rising tide of biblical criticism,” we turn our attention to the movement with which he is generally associated.

With the tide of biblical criticism rising in Europe in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and early 18<sup>th</sup> century, another movement was birthed in Germany which would have no less significant impact upon Christianity. That movement was known as Pietism. Although Michel Godfruid’s claim, “To write the history of Pietism is to write the history of modern Protestantism,”<sup>2</sup> would appear to be an overstatement, it highlights the importance of this movement. It was a movement genuinely characterized by a strong emphasis upon the personal appropriation of the Christian faith and on active “living out” of its implications.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper represents an update of a 1997 research paper submitted to Dr. John D. Woodbridge for the doctoral class “Origins of Modern Biblical Criticism” at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL.).

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Peter C. Erb, ed., *Pietists Selected Writings* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>3</sup> For a treatment of the causes, major subdivisions, and theological tenants of Pietism, see Karl A. Olsson, “What Was Pietism,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 28 (1970): 3-14.; Dale W. Brown, “Pietism: What Is It?,” in *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 8-34; and series of articles by F. Ernest Stoeffler, Egon W.

While the names Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) are synonymous with Lutheran Pietism, a less well-known but no less significant figure was one Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752). Bengel is generally considered the originator of South German (Swabian) Pietism and “the one expositor of the Bible whose authority on biblical interpretation was well-nigh universally acknowledged by Continental Pietists.”<sup>4</sup> In many ways Bengel’s legacy far exceeds those of the other more prominent Pietists of his day. Bengel’s *Apparatus Criticus* (1734), *Harmony of the Gospels* (1736), and *Gnomon of the New Testament* (1742) contributed substantially to the field of biblical studies.

It is claimed by some scholars that leading Pietists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century adopted a view of inspiration and inerrancy significantly different from that of the traditional orthodox position.<sup>5</sup> It is further suggested that Pietism and its leading figures, including Bengel, abetted the rise of higher criticism.<sup>6</sup> In light of these claims, this study will examine the life and writings of Johann Albrecht Bengel within the framework of early Pietism. Particular attention will be given to Bengel’s view of Scripture. The potential influences of rationalism and other philosophies of Bengel’s day will be considered. Specifically, we will address the question: Was Bengel, in fact, opposed to the tenants of higher criticism or did he contribute to its rising tide, either wittingly or unwittingly? These, and other, questions will be answered as we consider the voice of Johann Albrecht Bengel.

## The Historical Context

As it is impossible to justly consider individuals apart from the context in which they lived, a brief summary of the historical setting which surrounded Bengel’s life is warranted. The major movements constituting the theological environment of Bengel’s day included the waning influence of Lutheran Orthodoxy, the rise of Evangelical Pietism, and the inception of rationalism which would later develop fully into the Enlightenment. While the complex

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Gerdes, Manfred W. Kohl, and Dale W. Brown in “Contemporary Perspectives on Pietism,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 34:1 and 2 (1976): 1-89.

<sup>4</sup> F. Ernest Stoeffler, “Pietism: The Wesley’s, and Methodist Beginnings in America,” in *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 199.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Holmgren, “The Pietistic Tradition and Biblical Criticism,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 28 (1970): 51. For a more detailed analysis of claims regarding the Pietist view of Scripture, see: Alan J. Thompson, “The Pietist Critique of Inerrancy? J. A. Bengel’s *Gnomon* as a Test Case,” *JETS* 47 (March 2004): 71-88. Thompson comes to similar conclusions regarding Bengel’s view of inspiration and inerrancy as reached in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 64-82. See also Peter C. Erb, ed., *Pietists Selected Writings* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983), 24-26. And especially: Frederick Holmgren, “The Pietistic Tradition and Biblical Criticism,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 28 (1970): 49-59.

political, socio-economic, cultural, and religious circumstances which set the stage for the emergence of German Pietism are beyond the scope of this paper, the movement can be viewed in large part as a reaction to two historical phenomena: the Thirty Years' War and Lutheran Orthodoxy. The Thirty Years' War had devastated much of Europe, not the least of which was the Württemberg area of Southern Germany, where between 1634 and 1654 the population was reduced from 313,000 to less than 60,000.<sup>7</sup> Entire villages were wiped out. The people and lands were further raped by three French invasions before the turn of the century. The country was decimated and in despair with an accompanying moral decadence. The government, rather than respond to the mounting needs of the people, became increasingly corrupt and insensitive to them.

Further compounding the situation was the seeming irrelevance of Lutheran Orthodoxy to religious life. People were disenchanted with the polemics that had come to be synonymous with Lutheran Orthodoxy as well as with the all-too-often use of the sermon as a means of controversy rather than as a means of edification.<sup>8</sup> These were among the major forces which prompted the Pietistic movement with its stress upon the appropriation of one's Christian faith. The time was ripe for a renewed emphasis on the personal and experiential dimensions of religious life and Pietism did just that.

While Pietism took various forms and was comprised of numerous subdivisions,<sup>9</sup> the term "Classical Pietism" has been used to designate the form which centred around Württemberg and the work of Spener, Francke, and Bengel.<sup>10</sup> Among other features, this form of Pietism was characterized by: (1) a strong apocalyptic component, (2) a high view of education, and (3) a high regard for Scripture.<sup>11</sup> In addition, it was distinctly *Lutheran* in that it called for reform within Lutheranism rather than retreat from it as did some of the more radical forms of Pietism. The University of Tübingen, where Bengel received his training and with which he was later closely associated, became a theological centre for this movement through most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>7</sup> W. H. Bruford, *Germany in the Eighteenth Century: The Social Background of the Literary Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 152-153.

<sup>8</sup> C. John Weborg, "The Eschatological Ethics of Johann Albrecht Bengel: Personal and Ecclesial Piety and the Literature of Edification in the Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1983), 13.

<sup>9</sup> F. Ernest Stoeffler, "Pietism – Its Message, Early Manifestation, and Significance," *The Covenant Quarterly* 34 (February/May, 1976): 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Egon Gerdes, "Pietism: Classical and Modern," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 39 (April, 1968): 257.

<sup>11</sup> Weborg, 14.

## Bengel's Life And Legacy

Johann Albrecht Bengel was born on June 24, 1687, in Winnenden, a small town in Württemberg. His childhood presented him with numerous challenges which undoubtedly contributed to molding his character. His father, a pastor at Winnenden, died when Bengel was only five years old. Shortly thereafter, the family homestead was destroyed by the plundering hordes of Louis XIV, and young Bengel was placed under the care of David W. Spinder, a friend of his father. When in 1699 they moved to Stuttgart, Bengel enrolled in the *Gymnasium* where he studied ancient languages, French, Italian, history, and mathematics. Among his teachers was Andrew Hochstetter, a leading Pietist educator. Bengel remained at Stuttgart until 1703.

In 1703, Bengel's widowed mother married John Albert Glöcker, through whose efforts Bengel was enabled to enter the University of Tübingen at the age of sixteen. At that point, the Tübingen faculty was heavily influenced by the Pietistic movement centred at Halle. Bengel's personal study of Scripture was deeply influenced by the writings of leading Pietists, including Arndt's *True Christianity*, Spener's *Pious Desires*, and Francke's *Prolegomena to the Greek Testament and Guide to the Study of the Sacred Writings*.

Bengel's education at Tübingen, where he studied under John Wolfgang Jäger and Andrew Hochstetter, serves as a good example of the potential influence of one's mentors. At Tübingen, Bengel's studies included philosophy, advanced philology, and theology. During his one year of focused philosophical studies, he selected the writings of Aristotle and Spinoza for private study.<sup>12</sup> He also gave attention to Poiret, Leibnitz, and Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*.<sup>13</sup> Bengel acquired such a thorough knowledge of Spinoza's metaphysics that professor Jäger requested he prepare materials for a treatise, *De Spinocismo*, which Jäger later published.<sup>14</sup> It was through this early phase of his training that Bengel was first exposed to rationalistic thought and philosophy. The degree to which Bengel adopted such thinking will be discussed in a later section.

While Bengel's interest in philosophy was furthered under Jäger, it was Hochstetter who was instrumental in promoting Bengel's interest in textual criticism. The initial work was on the Old Testament. Hochstetter asked Bengel to assist him in editing a new edition of the German Bible. Bengel's contribution focused on the punctuation of Job through Malachi. From this work, he would later write an essay on the Hebrew accents in which he argued that, although there was general uniformity of accenting among the prophets, each book had its own distinctive accentuation. While he denied

<sup>12</sup> John Christian Frederic Burk, *A Memoir of The Life and Writings of John Albert Bengel . . . Compiled Principally from Original Manuscripts Never Before Published*, tr. by Robert Francis Walker (London: R. Gladding, 1842), 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

that the Masoretic pointing was a part of the inspired text,<sup>15</sup> he did acknowledge that an intimate knowledge of the accents was required for proper interpretation.<sup>16</sup> It was also during the first two years of Tübingen (1703-1705) that Bengel became troubled by textual variations in the Greek New Testament; this led him to in-depth investigation of the original language of Scripture.<sup>17</sup> While this area will be further considered in a later section, suffice it to say that he would spend much of his life laboring in the collection and study of manuscripts in pursuit of “a perfect Greek text.”<sup>18</sup>

Following completion of his theological training at Tübingen in 1706, Bengel served as pastor at City Church for about a year, then as a theological repentant (junior divinity tutor) at Tübingen for several years. In 1711 he was ordained and became Curate at Stuttgart, serving under his old professor, Andrew Hochstetter. During this time, Bengel continued to carry on his theological research in the library at Tübingen. In fact, it was during this period that he demonstrated his philological skill and broad historical acquaintance in his scholarly word study *Syntagma de sanctitate*.<sup>19</sup> In this work, he examined the Scriptural usages of *kadosh* in the OT and *hagios* in the New. The results of this study, in which he concluded that the holiness of God was the sum total of His attributes, would have a profound influence upon his later work and writings.

In 1713, Bengel accepted a professorship at a new theological seminary at Denkendorf where he remained until 1741. Prior to taking up his new duties at Denkendorf, he was sent at government expense on a six-month tour of the major German churches and institutions as part of qualifying him for this new position.<sup>20</sup> This tour, which included a trip to Halle and opportunity to interact with Francke, made a particularly deep impression upon him. Writing from Halle on June 17, 1713, he described the life of faith that he found

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<sup>15</sup> Contra the Buxdorfs of Basel, John Owen, Francis Turretin and The Company of Pastors, and other in the United Provinces during the mid-late 17<sup>th</sup> century who argued thus to give certainty to the biblical text in light of both mounting skepticism and Roman Catholic arguments against the sufficiency of Scripture apart from the Church. See John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 87-89.

<sup>16</sup> Joel Lee Samuels, “Bengel’s Interpretation of Matthew’s Gospel: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics” (M.Th. diss., Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968), 20.

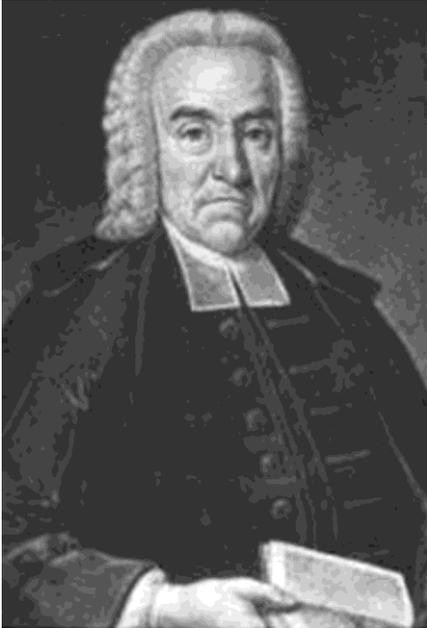
<sup>17</sup> Burk, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Helmbold, “J. A. Bengel: Full of Light,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6:3 (1963): 76.

<sup>19</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, “In Memorium: Johann Albrecht Bengel, June 24, 1687, to November 2, 1752,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 23 (November 1952): 786. Though the *Syntagma* never appeared separately, Bengel made reference to it and summarized it in *Erklaerte Offenbarung Johannis oder vielmehr Jesu Christi* (2d ed.; Stuttgart, 1746), 310-312.

<sup>20</sup> Burk, 7-8.

evident there, "What delights me above all is, the harmony of these men among themselves, which they study to keep up by social prayer . . . I had heretofore thought myself a sort of isolated Christian, left almost entirely to my own resources; but here I learn something about the communion of saints."<sup>21</sup>



It was at Denkendorf that Bengel completed most of his major textual and exegetical work. With his students, Bengel worked through the entire Greek New Testament every two years, carefully collecting notes along the way.<sup>22</sup> This would provide the basis for much of his literary contributions. Bengel's major contributions to biblical studies include: *Apparatus Criticus* (1734), *Harmony of the Gospels* (1736), *An Explication of the Book of Revelation* (1740), *Ordo Temporum* (1741), *Gnomon of the New Testament* (1742), *Cyclus* (1745), *Sixty Practical Addresses on Revelation* (1747), and his translation

of the *German New Testament* (1753). Indeed, Norman Sykes' extraordinary summary of Bengel's contributions appears justified:

His union of individual piety with sound theological learning enabled him to correct some of the dangerous tendencies of the school at Halle, but his own theological teaching was less a systematic exposition of dogmas than a continuous exegesis of Scripture. Moreover, he was significant also in another respect, as a pioneer in textual criticism of the New Testament and as an exponent of the Old Testament as a historical record of God's dealing with men, to be studied historically and with regard for the circumstances of the times in which it was compiled. Bengel and his followers not only bridged the gulf between theology and piety, but also foreshadowed the later development of literary and historical criticism of the Bible.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>22</sup> Helmbold, 74.

<sup>23</sup> Norman Sykes, "The Religion of Protestants," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 192. It is here noteworthy that Bengel's recognition of the organic uni-

## Bengel And Textual Criticism

In the early days of his training at Tübingen, Bengel had been deeply troubled by the 30,000 readings in John Mill's 1707 edition of the Greek New Testament. However, following his exhaustive study of the available manuscripts, he concluded that the variant readings were fewer than might have been expected, and that they did not impact a single doctrine of the faith. He noted that he had finally "found rest in the sure conviction that the hand of God's providence must have protected the words of eternal life which the hand of His grace had written."<sup>24</sup> It is here that one notes a marked contrast with the English Deist Anthony Collins (1676-1729), who appealed to the existence of so many variant readings in his argument against the authority of the Scriptures.<sup>25</sup>

A notable contemporary example of one who appeals to the existence of the multitude of variants in arguing against the accuracy or inerrancy of Scripture is Bart D. Ehrman, who in his *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible* asserts:

I kept reverting to my basic question: how does it help to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals! We have error-ridden copies, and the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways.<sup>26</sup>

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ty of the Old and New Testaments and of the divine economy of history laid the foundation for the *Heilsgeschichtliche Schule* to follow.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Andrew Helmbold, "J. A. Bengel – 'Full of Light,'" *Bulletin of the Evang. Theol. Soc.* 6:3 (1963): 76.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108.

<sup>26</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 7. In their insightful analysis of Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*, J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace [*Reinventing Jesus: What the Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Didn't Tell You* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 287-88] note that Ehrman (*Misquoting Jesus*, 109-112) discusses the role that Bengel played in the history of textual criticism and that he, in fact, "gives Bengel high praise as a scholar: he was an 'extremely careful interpreter of the biblical text' (ibid., 109); 'Bengel studied everything intensely' (ibid., 111)." Yet as noted by Komoszewski, et al, "Ehrman speaks about Bengel's breakthroughs in textual criticism (ibid., 111-12) but does not mention that Bengel was the first important scholar to articulate the doctrine of the orthodoxy of the vari-

With confidence that God had indeed protected his Word, Bengel dedicated much of his scholarly endeavor in an attempt to obtain a text as close to the original as possible. It is here that text-critic Bengel put forth his most ardent work as noted Bengel scholar Gottfried Mälzer states:

Of course, the defects (variants) involve no fundamental questions of faith, hence they are secondary. Notwithstanding, it is necessary for one to attempt the recovery of the original texts. Here, the text-critic Bengel put forth his ardent and dedicated work.<sup>27</sup>  
[translation mine]

While Bengel certainly considered the Bible unlike any other book in its content and character, when it came to textual criticism he applied the same basic methodologies as would be used on the classics or patristics. Mälzer further asserted: “Still, it is remarkable that, as a text-critic, Bengel rendered no distinction procedurally between the classical and patristic treatments, consequently no difference between secular texts and those of the Bible” [translation mine].<sup>28</sup>

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ants. This is a curious omission because Ehrman is well aware of this fact, for in Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), which appeared just months before *Misquoting Jesus*, the authors note that Bengel collected the available manuscripts and early translations. ‘After extended study, he came to the conclusions that the variant readings were fewer in number than might have been expected and that they did not shake any article of evangelic doctrine’ (158). On the other hand, Ehrman mentions J. J. Wettstein, a contemporary of Bengel, who, at age twenty, assumed that these variants ‘can have no weakening effect on the trustworthiness or integrity of the Scriptures’ (Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 112). Years later, after careful study of the text, Wettstein changed his views after he ‘began thinking seriously about his own theological convictions’ (ibid., 114). One is tempted to think that Ehrman may see a parallel between himself and Wettstein. Like Wettstein, Ehrman started out as an evangelical when in college but changed his views on the text and theology in his more mature years (see *Misquoting Jesus*, 1-15, where Ehrman chronicles his own spiritual journey). But the model that Bengel supplies – a sober scholar who arrives at quite different conclusions – is quietly passed over.”

<sup>27</sup> Gottfried Mälzer, *Johann Albrecht Bengel, Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1970), 364. German text: “Da es nicht mehr verfügbar ist, gelangte im Zuge der Tradition nur noch ein fehlerhafter Text der Bibel in unsere Hände. Zwar betreffen die Fehler keine fundamentalen Glaubensfragen, sind also zweitrangig. Aber trotzdem ist es geboten, sich um die Wiedergewinnung des originalen Textes zu bemühen. Hier setzt der Textkritiker Bengel mit seiner leidenschaftlichen und entsagungsvollen Arbeit an.”

<sup>28</sup> Gottfried Mälzer, *Johann Albrecht Bengel, Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1970), 364. German text: “Immerhin ist bemerkenswert, dass Bengel als Textkritiker methodisch keinen Unterschied Zwischen der Behandlung klassischer und patristischer, also profaner Texte und dem Bibelwort, gemacht hat.”

Bengel's advancements of the study and analysis of manuscripts earned him the epithet "the father of modern textual criticism." His critical principles<sup>29</sup> provide the basis for textual critical studies to the present day. Bruce Metzger reports that Bengel was the first to distinguish between families of New Testament manuscripts.<sup>30</sup> Bengel also established a canon of criticism for weighing variant readings which, in one form or another, has been practiced by critics ever since. Among the leading principles still practiced are: (1) the difficult reading is to be preferred, (2) where the manuscripts differ from each other, those agreeing with versions of the Fathers are to be given greater authority, and (3) while more witnesses are to be preferred to fewer, the more important consideration lies with witnesses from differing countries, ages, and languages who agree.<sup>31</sup>

It should be noted that Bengel was not without his critics. The mounting tensions of the day in the realm of biblical-critical studies are evidenced by the fact that following publication of both his *Apparatus Criticus* (1734) and the *Gnomon of the New Testament* (1742), Bengel was caught between attacks from both sides. Some assailed him as a dangerous innovator with "unprecedented audacity" and claimed that his Greek text would "supply infidels with weapons." Others believed that he was too timid and had not gone far enough.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, one of Bengel's sharpest critics was the son of friend and fellow Pietist, August Francke.<sup>33</sup>

### Bengel's View On Inspiration And Inerrancy

It should first be recognized that the Lutheran Orthodoxy of Bengel's day staunchly defended the infallible authority of Scripture with inspiration extending to the very words themselves. They believed in the canonical status of both the Old and New Testament books and that these books were inspired and free from any and all error.<sup>34</sup>

As we begin examining Bengel's view of Scripture, it is worthwhile first to consider those of other key Pietist leaders. With the emphasis of Spener, Francke, and Bengel on biblical theology over dogmatics, it is also not surprising that these early Pietists exalted the Bible as the supreme authority. However, their exact views on inspiration and inerrancy have been debated – with much of the discussion centring around Spener and Francke's distinc-

<sup>29</sup> John Albert Bengel, *New Testament Word Studies*, translated by Charlton T. Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1971), Author's Preface xvi-xx.

<sup>30</sup> Metzger, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Bengel, *New Testament Word Studies*, xvi-xx.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxix-xl.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Brecht, "Johann Albrecht Bengel's Theologie der Schrift," *Zeitschrift fuer Theologie und Kirche* 64 (1967): 105ff.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957).

tion between the “kernel” and the “husk” of Scripture. Holmgren suggests that such references, along with Spener’s assertion that some parts of the Bible are more important than others, set the stage for Semler and his distinction between Scripture and the Word of God.<sup>35</sup> Snyder agrees in concluding that the notion of kernel and husk had all the makings of a “canon within the canon” and the later “search for the historical Jesus.”<sup>36</sup>

While Semler and later Pietists would come under the influence of increasing rationalistic tendencies at Halle, any direct connection to Spener and Francke and their position on inerrancy appears unwarranted. For starters, the oft-cited kernel-husk duality appears to be overstated. For Francke, the “husks” referred to the externals of Scripture, that is, the history, chronology, ancient rites, laws, etc. while the “kernel” was the divine message which relates to salvation and one’s life as a Christian.<sup>37</sup> Their point in using this illustration seems more to do with differing degrees of emphasis than with degrees of inspiration. Francke, for example, lamented the fact that too many people were feeding “contentedly on the husks,” while the “heavenly delights of the kernel remained untasted and unenjoyed.”<sup>38</sup> He was not suggesting that the husks were uninspired or in error! To acknowledge that different parts of the Bible are of differing *value* is not synonymous with saying some parts are in error! For instance, what Christian would not acknowledge that they find the dietary laws of Deuteronomy 14 of less *value* than the Apostle Paul’s teaching on justification by faith in the epistle to the Romans?

The suggestion that the Pietists’ view of inspiration and inerrancy somehow opened the door for accepting the tenants of higher criticism<sup>39</sup> appears to be largely unfounded in the case of Bengel. Like the “kernel” and “husk” analogy of Spener and Francke, Bengel’s view of “graded inspiration”<sup>40</sup> is often cited as a denial of inerrancy. Here too the claim appears unfounded. While Bengel does distinguish between the apostles and the OT prophets, this distinction does not diminish his view of inspiration or inerrancy.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Holmgren, 55-56.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence W. Snyder, Jr., “The Pietist Millennium: Eschatology and the Hope for Spiritual Renewal” (M.S. diss., Wheaton College, 1985), 39.

<sup>37</sup> Holmgren, 52.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-59.

<sup>40</sup> C. John Weborg, “Pietism: Theology in Service of Living Toward God,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 182.

<sup>41</sup> Gottfried Mälzer, *Johann Albrecht Bengel, Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1970), 362-63, notes the following with respect to Bengel’s varying degrees of inspiration, “Er kennt allerdings recht verschiedene Grade der Inspiration; z. B. unterscheidet er zwischen den alttestamentlichen Propheten und den Aposteln: ‘Es ist ein Unterschied zwischen der Art von göttlicher Eingebung, welche die Apostel und welche die Propeten genossen haben; letztere eigneten sich eher für das Jünglings-, jene für das Mannes-Alter.’ Den Propheten wurden alle Worte genau

Mälzer further notes that Bengel refers to differing degrees of inspiration (“Grade der Inspiration”) with Matthew and John having greater priority than Mark and/or Luke.<sup>42</sup> However, Bengel clarifies his position in the following statement:

A minister of government may have two secretaries: a mere writing clerk, to whom every word is dictated; the other well-acquainted with his lord’s mind, and thus enabled to express it accurately in words of his own; so that what he has thus expressed is as much the will and pleasure of his principle, *as if it had been written by verbal dictation* [emphasis mine].<sup>43</sup>

In light of the above and other equally definitive statements by Bengel, it is indeed difficult to conclude that he held to anything short of a strict view on inerrancy. Mälzer himself asserts that there is no tension between a strict version of inspiration and Bengel’s acceptance of *Graden der Inspiration*: “That means that no tension exists between this strict version of the inspiration-teaching and the acceptance of extents (degrees) of inspiration for Bengel” [translation mine].<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to Semler and others who would follow, Bengel accepted the entire Bible as the Word of God. As noted by Hehl, the Bible was for Bengel truly *the book of books*.<sup>45</sup> According to Bengel, one must accept Scripture in total, not just certain parts. Both the minute parts and the whole are to be revered as he indicated in the following response to a letter from a former student:

Your query as to Scripture being divinely endited to the sacred penmen is ambiguous. If you ask whether the very words which they wrote were thus dictated to them, I can only remind you, that the apostles themselves have drawn the most important inferences from Scripture terms and expressions of the utmost brevity and minuteness . . . but if your inquiry be respecting the general inspira-

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vorgesprochen, die sie redde und schreiben sollten; die Apostel hatten eine mehrere Freiheit, aber doch sind auch ihre Schriften Gottes Wort.”

<sup>42</sup> Mälzer, 363.

<sup>43</sup> Burk, 264.

<sup>44</sup> Mälzer, 363. German text: “Das bedeutet, dass zwischen dieser strengen Fassung der Inspirationslehre und Der Annahme von Graden der Inspiration für Bengel keine Spannung besteht.”

<sup>45</sup> Werner Hehl, *Johann Albrecht Bengel, Leben und Werk* (Stuttgart: Schutzumschlaggestaltung, 1987), 83. “Die Bibel war für Bengel seit eh und je das Buch der Bücher. ‘Hier ist die Sonne, die alle Nebel durchbricht. Hier ist die einzige Schrift, die niemals veraltet.’ Seitdem er die Anfechtungen seiner Studienzeit überwunden hatte, war ihm Gottes Wort ‘unbedingt zuverlässig,’ was er gewiss, dass man ‘himmelfest darauf fussen’ könne.”

tion and authority of all Scripture, I may refer you to the proofs of it which have been collected by various excellent writers, . . . but for my own part, I am satisfied with this simple position, that the whole sacred volume is in most beautiful harmony with itself.<sup>46</sup>

Bengel, nevertheless, denied a strict mechanical dictation theory of inspiration recognizing the individualities and differences of the various biblical authors. He did, however, note that in certain prophetic parts, the text takes its form from *Divine dictation*.<sup>47</sup> In his exegesis of 2 Timothy 3:16, Bengel states “It was divinely inspired, not merely while it was written, God breathing through the writers, but also while it is being read, God breathing through the Scripture and the Scripture breathing [through] him.”<sup>48</sup> Here, Bengel affirms both the inspiration of the writers of Scripture and the role of the Holy Spirit in illumination of the reader, a teaching which received considerable emphasis within Pietism. In his studies, Bengel placed great emphasis on the individual words and their interrelationships in context. He approvingly quotes Luther’s statement that “the science of theology is nothing else, but Grammar, exercised on the words of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>49</sup>

With respect to the author’s choice of words in the writing of Scripture, Bengel appears to have held an Augustinian view of accommodation.<sup>50</sup> That is, God accommodates Himself to us by using language that we can understand, even phenomenological language, but always makes accurate statements. In the preface to his *Gnomon* in a section dealing with the style of the biblical authors, Bengel states: “Certainly the wisdom of God, even when through His instruments He accommodates Himself to our grossness . . . the result was that the writers of the New Testament, however unlearned, wrote always in a style becoming their subject . . .”<sup>51</sup> Mälzer adds: “Concerning himself about the account of its origin, Bengel sees a makeshift (stopgap), support-type design in the Bible, which God Himself uses in order to take into account human infirmity” [translation mine].<sup>52</sup> Bengel held that God accommodated *the weakness of the people* in communicating the text of Scripture. (This is also the view espoused by Francke, “Indeed, it appears that the Spirit condescended to accommodate himself to their particular genius and

<sup>46</sup> Burk, 58.

<sup>47</sup> John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, vol. 5, revised and edited by Andrew R. Fausset (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1863), 201, 183.

<sup>48</sup> Bengel, *Gnomon*, vol. 2, 553.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed treatment of the various views on accommodation, see Glenn Sunshine, “Accommodation in Calvin and Socinus: A Study in Contrasts” (M.A. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1985).

<sup>51</sup> Bengel, *Gnomon*, xxii-xxii.

<sup>52</sup> Mälzer, 362, “Um die Beschreibung der Ursprünge bemüht, sieht Bengel in der Bibel einen Notbehelf, eine Hilfskonstruktion, deren sich Gott bedient, um der Schwachheit der Menschen Rechnung zu tragen.”

modes of writing, which evidently vary in the different books of Scripture."<sup>53</sup>)

Lest there remain any doubt as to Bengel's commitment to a strict view of inerrancy and a high regard of Scripture, his following summary of the general principles of biblical exposition are decisive:

The sum, then, of the above remarks is, (1) That the Holy Scriptures are the sole repertory of that complete system of truth which man, as a being appointed to obtain everlasting salvation, needs to be acquainted with. (2) That every, even the minutest, scripture detail has its importance in the structure of revealed truth; and natural reason has often the power of seeing and tracing that importance, but never the power of choosing or rejecting any such matter at pleasure. (3) That the expositor who nullifies the historical groundwork of Scripture for the sake of finding only spiritual truths everywhere, certainly brings death upon all correct interpretation. (4) That the Scriptures best illustrate and corroborate themselves; consequently, those expositions are safest which keep closest to the text. (5) That the whole power and glory of the inspired writings can be known only to the honest, devout, and believing inquirer. (6) That much in Scripture is found to stretch far beyond the confines of reason's natural light, and far beyond even our symbolic books. Still, whatever kinds is evidently declared in Scripture, ought to be received as a part of the system of divine truth, notwithstanding all reputed philosophy, and all reputed orthodox theology. On the other hand, every theological notion, which is not evidently deducible from Holy Scripture, ought to be regarded with religious suspicion and caution.<sup>54</sup>

Lastly, Bengel's view of inerrancy extending even to historical dating is evidenced by his *Ordo Temporum* (1741), in which he detailed the chronology of the Old and New Testament. He further extended his biblical chronology in a work entitled *Cyclus* (1745) into the realm of prophecy even to the fixing of the date of the start of the millennium to 1836. To Bengel, the book of Revelation is a tightly knit compendium of future things, such that the removal of a single word would mar not only the context of its location but more importantly the comparisons of passages which contain the things which must shortly come to pass.<sup>55</sup> While Bengel certainly went too far in his

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<sup>53</sup> Holmgren, 51.

<sup>54</sup> Burk, 263.

<sup>55</sup> C. John Weborg, "The Eschatological Ethics of Johann Albrecht Bengel," *The Covenant Quarterly* 36 (May 1978), 31. Here Weborg refers to *Gnomon of the New Testament*, vol. 5, revised and edited by Andrew R. Fausset (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1859), 187.

strict chiliastic interpretation of Revelation in the predicting of dates, he did so as an earnest student seeking to exegete inerrant Scriptures, not as many charlatans have through the centuries. The charge by Snyder that Bengel's eschatological predictions resulted not so much as a fruit of exposition as from his "literalistic biblical primitivism"<sup>56</sup> is unjustified.

### **Pietism's Relation To Philosophy, Rationalism, And Biblical Criticism**

While later Pietists, and even a few in Bengel's day (e.g., Christian Wolff), were impacted by rationalism and the effects of the Enlightenment, the early Pietist leaders generally stood opposed to any philosophy which they viewed to be counter to Scripture. For example, Jacob Spener in his *Pia Desideria* (1675) sharply criticized German Lutheran theologians who had become caught up in writing showy metaphysical tractates.<sup>57</sup> Francke declared that "anybody who occupied himself with the definitions and scholastic metaphysics was a fool."<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, such repudiation of Aristotelian philosophy (which was so much a part of Lutheran Orthodoxy) is often cited as actually contributing to the growing success of Rationalism.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the broader German Pietism of Bengel's day was not immune to the effects of rationalism and the ensuing higher criticism. In particular, the thinking of Spinoza (1632-1677), Leibnitz (1646-1716) and other rationalists infiltrated Pietism largely through the University of Halle. Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), a professor of law at Halle (and one of Leibniz' teachers), attempted to provide a foundation for law apart from theology. That is, he separated natural law from metaphysics and theology. While not discarding belief in the supernatural, he sought to separate religion from the sphere of philosophical reflection.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, his emphasis that the exercise of reason should be directed to the social good is a characteristic idea of the Enlightenment.<sup>61</sup>

Pietist philosopher Christian Wolff (1679-1754), who also taught at Halle, went even further than Thomasius in drawing a rigid separation between phi-

<sup>56</sup> Lawrence W. Snyder, Jr., "The Pietist Millennium: Eschatology and the Hope for Spiritual Renewal" (M.S. diss., Wheaton College, 1985), 39.

<sup>57</sup> John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 187.

<sup>58</sup> Theodore G. Tappert, "Orthodoxism, Pietism and Rationalism," in *Christian Social Responsibility*, ed. by Harold C. Letts (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 69. Cited in Joel Lee Samuels "Bengel's Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics" (M.Th. diss., Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968), 16.

<sup>59</sup> Joel Lee Samuels, "Bengel's Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel: A Case Study in Biblical Hermeneutics" (M.Th. diss., Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968), 16.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. V: Wolff to Kant (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1964), 101-105.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

losophy and natural theology, employing the cosmological proof for the existence of God. While Wolff was banished from Halle in 1723 after imbibing the rationalist teachings of Leibnitz, he was later reinstated by Frederick the Great in 1740 and the influence of his ideas began to spread through the German universities.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Halle was the first major German centre to yield to rationalism, leading to the common eighteenth century saying that “he who goes to Halle returns either a Pietist or a Rationalist.”<sup>63</sup> With respect to the connection between Pietism and the Enlightenment, leading Pietist scholar F. Ernest Stoeffler notes:

While we should not make the mistake of crediting Pietism with the modern insights and ideals which we usually associate with the Enlightenment it needs to be pointed out that the former lent a hand, at least, in the formation of some of the important values which inform our contemporary moral self-understanding. Quite contrary to a still prevalent misconception in our day, Pietism was oriented toward the present in hope of a better future, not the past . . . this teleological element within the Pietist perspective helped to shape the later vision of an improved humanity found in men like Lessing, Fichte, Kant, Schleiermacher, and even Hegel.<sup>64</sup>

Stoeffler adds, “It is not without significance that all of these thinkers had a Pietist background,” and concludes that “the moral and cultural optimism of the Enlightenment, then, as well as its faith in educational and other programs of man’s betterment, is at least in part of Pietist vintage.”<sup>65</sup> Stoeffler goes on to draw a similar corollary between the experiential emphasis of Pietism and later emphasis on natural experience. He notes that for men like Friedrich Oetinger (1702-1782), “the transition from religious experience to the experience of nature through experimentation was but a logical step.”<sup>66</sup> (Oetinger was the second major personality in connection with the Pietism of Württemberg and was one of Germany’s most original theologians of the eighteenth century.)<sup>67</sup>

Brown, like Stoeffler, appropriately cautions against drawing too strong a cause-effect relationship between Pietism and the Enlightenment but adds, “To deny direct causative relationships because of fundamental differences is

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 152-153

<sup>64</sup> F. Ernest Stoeffler, “Pietism: Its Message, Early Manifestation, And Significance,” *The Covenant Quarterly* 34:1 (February/May 1976): 18.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Stoeffler, *German Pietism in the Eighteenth Century*, 107.

not to deny, however, that indirectly Pietism helped prepare the way for the German Enlightenment.”<sup>68</sup>

What of Johann Bengel? Bengel is cited as being not only sympathetic to Spinoza but to have incorporated aspects of Spinoza’s metaphysics into his theological framework.<sup>69</sup> Bengel did hold a degree in philosophy and had given special attention to Spinoza in his studies. Certainly the high moral ethics promoted by Spinoza in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* would have appealed to the Pietistic emphasis on practically living one’s faith. Furthermore, referring to his philosophical training, he wrote that the “attention of that season to metaphysics and mathematics gave his mind a clearness for analyzing and expounding the language of Scripture.”<sup>70</sup> The ethical treatises of Aristotle and Spinoza were likewise valued by him as helps in moral philosophy. His view of the philosophical enterprise, however, was held in check by his devotion to the Scriptures. Philosophy was always to be secondary to the Scriptures:

It is only the student who habitually delights in the Scriptures previously to entering upon philosophy for the clearer arrangement of his ideas, that can study philosophy to good effect; for to stand on the vantage of Divine revelation, is the only security for safely considering and judging of every floating system which may meet the eye.<sup>71</sup>

As noted by Pietist scholar C. John Weborg, Bengel appeared to place the value of philosophy in its teaching one *how* to think more than *what* to think.<sup>72</sup> Bengel states, “All the real advantages which *divines* can derive from philosophical training may be comprised in a very small compass; its chief use of them is for teaching good arrangement and methodological inferences.”<sup>73</sup> When confronted with the more speculative philosophy of his day, such as in the case of Leibnitz’s theodicy, Bengel’s opposition is clear:

. . . the more we talk of such things, the less we know about them. Is it to promote piety? Knowledge of this sort will not at all promote our recovery from sin; and when we are recovered enough, we shall know enough; wisdom will then be spontaneously manifested to us. This is all I now have to say upon speculative philosophy; for though I meant to have said a great deal more, the desire

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<sup>68</sup> Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 153.

<sup>69</sup> Samuels, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Burk, 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>72</sup> Weborg, “The Eschatological Ethics of Johann Albrecht Bengel: Personal and Ecclesial Piety and the Literature of Edification in the Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3,” 47.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

has left me, because I know that God cannot be pleased with our too curiously inquiring into the secret things which belong to him.<sup>74</sup>

Bengel's beliefs clearly stood in opposition to the philosophical underpinnings of the impending wave of rationalism. In fact, in his classic work entitled *German Pietism during the Eighteenth Century*, Stoeffler attributes both the delay in the Enlightenment's arrival in the Lutheran church of Württemberg and its more limited effects in that area to a form of Pietism which "had been made respectable by the Tübingen-Bengel axis around which it revolved."<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusions

While not a prominent figure in contemporary biblical studies, the impact of Bengel's work has earned him the epithet "the father of modern textual criticism,"<sup>76</sup> "the father of scientific exegesis,"<sup>77</sup> and "the father of eschatological study."<sup>78</sup> His principles of textual criticism are, with few exceptions, those used by contemporary scholars. His commentaries have received world-wide recognition and, until recently, his *Gnomon* was commonplace in the libraries of evangelical pastors.<sup>79</sup> He is acknowledged to have laid the foundation for the *Heilsgeschichte Schule*, whose main representative was J. C. K. von Hofmann. His influence over subsequent biblical scholarship has been compared to that of Luther and Flacius in the sixteenth century, the Buxtorfs in the seventeenth, von Hofmann in the nineteenth and Schlatter in the twentieth.<sup>80</sup>

On a personal note, what is particularly impressive about Johann Bengel is his focus on genuine critical scholarship while maintaining an unwavering dedication to both the text and the Author of Scripture. His testimony challenges the recent claim of narrative critic Robert Fowler that "he or she who 'serves the text' with utter devotion cannot objectify and thereby know what text is in fact being served."<sup>81</sup>

With respect to the issue of Bengel and the inception of the German historical-critical school, the results of this study suggest that while the subjectivism and experiential emphasis of later Pietists may have contributed to the rise of higher criticism, Bengel's criticism went no higher than to search for the pure text of the inerrant, inspired Word of God! The impact Bengel

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>75</sup> Stoeffler, *German Pietism in the Eighteenth Century*, 129-130.

<sup>76</sup> Helmbold, 76.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>79</sup> Pelikan, 786.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Robert M. Fowler, "Who Is the 'Reader' in Reader Response Criticism," *Semeia* 31 (1985): 9.

would leave upon German Pietist is perhaps best summarized in his own motto, "Apply thyself wholly to the text. Apply the text wholly to thyself."



JOHN ALBRECHT BENDEL'S GNOMON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: POINTING OUT FROM THE NATURAL FORCE OF THE WORDS, THE SIMPLICITY, DEPTH, HARMONY AND SAVING POWER OF ITS DIVINE THOUGHTS. VOLUME I

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# Calvin and the Human Response to Suffering in the Psalms

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The question of suffering has perplexed man throughout the ages. Any consideration of this issue has to grapple with the paradox of the goodness of God, His omnipotence, and the presence of evil. Suffering was an inescapable reality in sixteenth century Europe. Rampant religious persecution,<sup>1</sup> epidemics, inter-state rivalries, and other factors made the issue of suffering strikingly contemporary. Against such a background, it is no surprise that John Calvin's interpretation of affliction has a penetrating quality of relevance. The association of Calvinism, almost exclusively, with certain doctrines such as the sovereignty of God has led to other emphases of Calvin being largely overlooked. The issue of human suffering is one such subject. Calvin's writings contain a significant amount of material on suffering and affliction that is well worth considering.

In his expositions, Calvin struggles to articulate biblical revelation inductively. Where the Bible is silent, he too remains quiet. No easy answers are offered to solve the human predicament; the greater weight of evidence vindicates God's wisdom in allowing human suffering. This is obvious in his

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kingdon gives a graphic description of the gruesome execution of Augustin Marlorat, one of the several missionaries sent from Geneva to France. Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France 1555 – 1563* (Geneve: Librairie E.Droz, 1956), 127. Kingdon also refers to the extreme secrecy in which Protestants met for worship and theological discussion in France. Many who were caught during these clandestine meetings were punished, and in the case of preachers, suffered death (1-4). Referring to the label Nicodemite, which was used for those who publicly adhered to Protestantism in France, Kingdon says it was "certainly understandable in times of *savage persecution*." Robert M. Kingdon, *Church and Society in Reformation Europe* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 110. Emphasis mine.

sermons on Job.<sup>2</sup> His commentary on the Psalms, however, contains a wealth of material which primarily focuses on the human response. Here a variety of experiences leads the sufferer to heights of devotion and trust in God. Calvin's interpretation of the Psalms is especially illuminating because of his belief in the sovereignty of God. How does the Reformer interpret the Psalms? Calvin's approach employs a grammatico-historical hermeneutic that gives his work a solid biblical foundation.<sup>3</sup> Calvin's own experiences gave his exposition a unique character.<sup>4</sup> In his expositions we sense the Reformer grappling with the doctrine of God's sovereignty and the human response of seeking answers to the question of suffering. The purpose of this paper is to show that, for Calvin, the Psalms do not teach a fatalistic attitude to suffering. Human response is natural and expected. But the crux of the issue is: What kind of reaction is appropriate – a man-centred reaction or a God-focused one?

This paper will be limited to Calvin's exposition of the Psalms.<sup>5</sup> The paper will focus primarily on four issues related to suffering in the Psalms: the necessity and purpose of suffering, God's sovereignty, man's predicament and the human response to suffering.

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<sup>2</sup> Though many questions on evil and affliction remain unanswered in Job, the sovereignty of God in human suffering emerges unmistakably.

<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that he churned out dry theological treatises on the Psalms. His translator comments that "his first and leading object" was to "ascertain the mind of the Holy Spirit." See John Calvin, *Commentary on The Book of Psalms*, vol. I. Trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1945), vii-xii.

<sup>4</sup> Based on Calvin's letter to the Physicians of Montpellier and other sources, Dr. Charles L. Cooke diagnoses Calvin's illness as chronic tophaceous gout. Gout, in Calvin's day, included forms of arthritis. Cooke further diagnoses the related problems of kidney stones, which caused severe pain and discomfort. Calvin also suffered from chronic pulmonary tuberculosis, which caused him to cough up blood and was preceded by fever and "prolonged pleurisy or pain with breathing." Although confined to his bed for about eight months on account of hemoptysis or coughing up blood, he dictated his final edition of the *Institutes* into Latin and then translated it into French. During this time he also revised his commentary on Isaiah and printed his lessons on the minor prophets. From Theodore Beza's *Life of Calvin*, Cooke concludes that Calvin also suffered from intestinal parasites, painful bleeding, hemorrhoids, spastic bowel syndrome (irritable colon), and for at least ten years ate only one meal a day. Cooke makes reference to Calvin's migraine headaches. From Beza's account of Calvin's death, he is of the opinion that the Reformer probably died of "septicemia" or shock caused by bacteria growing in his bloodstream." Another possibility, Cooke says, is that Calvin's gout and kidney stones may have caused renal failure or uremia. See Charles L. Cooke, "Calvin's Illnesses and Their Relation to Christian Vocation," in *John Calvin and the Church*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 62-66. Also see, Calvin, *Psalms*, I:xv.

<sup>5</sup> The writer has dealt with Calvin on suffering in a general sense elsewhere; see Matthew Ebenezer, "Calvin on Christian Suffering: Temporary Punishment or Eternal Blessing?," *Doon Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (July 2006): 143-161.

## I

**The Necessity and Purpose of Suffering**

Calvin does not view suffering as an unwelcome appendage of Christian life. On the contrary he views it as a necessity. Commenting on Psalm 34:19, he says, "It is, therefore, necessary that they [believers] should be exercised with various trials, and especially for this end, that they may acknowledge that they have been wonderfully preserved by God amidst numberless deaths."<sup>6</sup> Here the necessity and reason for adversity is given. It almost seems that Calvin wants to vindicate God's goodness by placing deliverance as a corollary of suffering. Similarly, he remarks on Psalm 37:19 (In times of disaster they will not wither; in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.): ". . . the faithful have no right to expect such exemption as the flesh would desire from affliction and trial, but they are assured of deliverance in the end; which, though it be indeed obtained, yet it is of such a nature as can be realized only by faith."<sup>7</sup> In this case ultimate, not immediate, deliverance is to be expected through faith in God. The spiritual or faith aspect is also seen in Psalm 91:15 (He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.) Calvin says,

The context, too, may teach us, that faith is not idle or inoperative and that one test, by which we ought to try those who look for Divine deliverance, is, whether they have recourse to God in a right manner. We are taught the additional lesson that believers will never be exempt from troubles and embarrassments. God does not promise them a life of ease and luxury, but deliverance from their tribulations.<sup>8</sup>

A similar idea is found in Calvin's exposition of Psalm 138:7 (Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me.). He writes, "The passage is well deserving our attention, for by nature we are so delicately averse to suffering as to wish that we might all live safely beyond shot of its arrows, and shrink from close contact with the fear of death, as something altogether intolerable."<sup>9</sup> From the above comments we gather that, for Calvin, deliverance from adversity is one way that God shows His love to

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<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:572.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on The Book of Psalms*, vol. 2., trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1946), 34.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol 3., trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1947), 490-491.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol.5., trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1949), 203-204.

believers. Therefore suffering becomes a necessity for those who would taste the love of God.

Closely connected with the necessity of suffering is its purpose. The idea of deliverance, which may qualify as a purpose, has already been noted. However, there are others. One purpose is to show that God is close to the sufferer, and he/she to God. Writing on Psalm 3:1 (O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!), Calvin refers to the pride of David's enemies who assumed that he had been deserted and rejected by God. Even though David is suffering at this time, the difference between him and Absalom is that his hope is in God, while Absalom's is in himself.<sup>10</sup> For Calvin, the purpose of suffering for believers is that they should be drawn closer to God and experience His grace.<sup>11</sup> In both the necessity and purpose of affliction, Calvin emphasizes the spiritual aspect of the encounter. Referring to Psalm 31:5, Calvin calls for believers to commit their lives completely into God's hands, totally relying on His providence. The purpose of such action is two-fold: ". . . first that he may protect them by his power, so long as they are exposed to the dangers of this world; and, secondly, that he may preserve them from the grave, where nothing is to be seen but destruction."<sup>12</sup> What does he mean by protection here? Elsewhere he defends God's delays. How can the idea of "protection" be reconciled with prolonged suffering? Calvin would fall back on the sovereignty of God and His wisdom to answer this.

The spiritual aspect also includes perceiving God's will. In Psalm 9:10, according to Calvin, David restricts to believers the ability to comprehend God's ways with man in affliction. This is because their "knowledge of God" helps them discern God's ways.<sup>13</sup> Spiritual discernment is seen in Psalm 13:1. To David, it seemed that he was forsaken of God. But Calvin says, "At the same time, however, *the eyes of his mind, guided by the light of faith*, penetrated even to the grace of God, although it was hidden in darkness."<sup>14</sup> The above references indicate that the spiritual element of deliverance takes precedence over the physical. The supernatural seems to override the material realm of man's negative experience. Suffering, for Calvin, brings out the positive elements in the life of a believer. The believer begins to show appreciation for God's goodness. On Psalm 66:11 (You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs.), Calvin observes, "They express themselves thankful to God, that, while proved with affliction, they had not been destroyed by it."<sup>15</sup> The experience of suffering, in the life of a believer, is aimed at revealing our commitment. In Psalm 66:14 (vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.), he comments, "The best evidence of true piety is when we sigh to God under the pressure of our afflic-

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 182. Emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

tions, and show, by our prayers, a holy perseverance in faith and patience; while afterwards we come forward with the expression of our gratitude.”<sup>16</sup> Trials also bring out the development of Christian character. Referring to Psalm 118:18, he writes,

The main thing in adversity is to know that we are laid low by the hand of God, and that this is the way which he takes to prove our allegiance, to arouse us from our torpidity, to crucify our old man, to purge us from our filthiness, to bring us into submission and subjection to God, and to excite us to meditate on the heavenly life.<sup>17</sup>

Calvin believes that adversity, though often viewed negatively, has remedial qualities. He says (commenting on Psalm 118:18), “. . . his [God’s] chastisements, so far from being deadly, serve the purpose of a medicine, which, though it produce a temporary debility, rids us of our malady, and renders us healthy and vigorous . . .”.<sup>18</sup> He goes on to defend the goodness of adversity. Referring to Psalm 138:7, Calvin says that in the face of danger we act as though divine help is unavailable. He then comments, “This is faith’s true office, to see life in the midst of death, and to trust the mercy of God . . . for God humbles his children under various trials, that his defense of them may be the more remarkable.”<sup>19</sup> The idea implicit here appears to be: The greater the trial, the greater the deliverance. Calvin views suffering as necessary for the Christian life. Its spiritual benefits far outweigh the negative, temporary experiences. It is certain that suffering will be followed by deliverance. For the believer, deliverance not only vindicates God, it also proves His love. Suffering serves to enhance the believer’s spiritual life, draw the person closer to God, give proof of God’s deliverance, and is remedial in nature. The soul waits patiently for deliverance in the face of adversity.

## II

### God’s Sovereignty

The glory of God is the foundation of Calvin’s theology. Closely related to this is God’s sovereignty. Even in the issue of a believer’s suffering, the certainty of God’s hand in the experience gives the victim hope. In the context of self-denial, Calvin observes that since believers know that their adversity is ordained of God they will bear it “. . . with a peaceful and grateful mind so as not obstinately to resist the command of him into whose power he

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<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, II:474-475.

<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 4., trans. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1947), 386.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, IV:386.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, V:204.

once for all surrendered himself and his every possession.”<sup>20</sup> In another context he says that certainty about God’s providence will help us in all adversities. He calls for looking beyond the immediate circumstances – which might provoke to anger and impatience – and for meditating upon God’s providence, recalling always the centrality of the will of God. It is necessary for believers to bear the adversity knowing that what God wills is the best for the believer.<sup>21</sup>

In the Psalms the theme of God’s sovereignty is found consistently. Commenting on Psalm 3 he says,

How bitter David’s sorrow was under the conspiracy of his own household against him, which arose from the treachery of his own son, it is easy for everyone of us to conjecture from the feelings of nature. And when, in addition to this, he knew that this disaster was brought upon him by God for his own fault in having defiled another man’s wife and for shedding innocent blood<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the above statement, Calvin acknowledges David’s sin, and yet goes beyond this *causa secundae* to God, the *prima causa*. Suffering, even in “deserving” cases is sent by God.

God’s sovereignty is not such that He merely allows suffering to come upon people, but that He is totally in control of it. Commenting on Psalm 9:20 (Strike them with terror, O Lord; let the nations know they are but men.), Calvin says, “We are taught, by this manner of praying, that however insolently and proudly our enemies may boast of what they will do, yet they are in the hand of God, and can do no more than what he permits them . . .”<sup>23</sup> God’s overall control over affliction is presented graphically by Calvin in his comment on Psalm 11:6 (On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulphur; a scorching wind will be their lot), on which he says, “. . . while God defers the infliction of punishment, the knowledge of his justice will have a powerful influence in maintaining our faith, until he actually shows that he has never departed from his watch-tower, from which he beholds the actions of men”.<sup>24</sup> In other words, God is pictured as actively involved in the suffering of the believer. Further, even His delays are with purpose and are connected with His sovereignty. God’s patience in dealing with evil is part of his supreme will. This is seen clearly in Psalm 79:5 (How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?), on which Calvin writes:

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<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Library of Christian Classics, Vols. XX-XXI (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.vii.10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Lxvii.B. ???

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:27. Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

. . . this complaint was not ended within a month or two after persecution against the Church commenced, but at a time when the hearts of the faithful were almost broken though the weariness produced by prolonged suffering. . . . Being fully persuaded that *the wicked, whatever they may plot, cannot inflict injury, except in so far as God permits them* – from this, which they regard as an indubitable principle, they at once conclude, that when he allows such ample scope to their heathen enemies in persecuting them, his anger is greatly provoked. Nor would they, without this persuasion, have looked to God in the hope that he would stretch forth his hand to save them; for *it is the work of Him who hath given loose reins to draw in the bridle.*<sup>25</sup>

Trust in the sovereignty of God gives the believer hope in the midst of tribulation.

Calvin seems to imply that afflictions are punishments sent by God and that there is nothing that happens by chance. Referring to Psalm 107:6 (Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.), he sees God's sovereignty in all events, good and evil (see also verses 28, 13, 19). He says, "For surely it is not by mere chance that a person falls into the hands of enemies or robbers; neither is it by chance that he is rescued from them. But this is what we must constantly keep in view, that all afflictions are God's rod, and that therefore there is no remedy for them elsewhere than in his grace."<sup>26</sup>

In other contexts also he rules out chance. Alluding to Psalm 115:3 (Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.), he says,

However much, then, the faithful may find themselves cut off from all means of subsistence and safety, they ought nevertheless to take courage from the fact, that God is not only superior to all impediments, but that he can render them subservient to the advancement of his own designs. This, too, must also be borne in mind, that all events are the result of God's appointment alone, and that nothing happens by chance.<sup>27</sup>

Closely connected with the concept of God's sovereignty is the reality of *delays* in receiving deliverance. It appears that His delays have a definite purpose in conditioning the believer. This can be seen from Psalm 9:9 (The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.). In this verse Calvin sees "a remedy for the temptation" of those who are "abandoned to the will of the ungodly, while God keeps silence." David, according

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, III:286. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, IV:252. Emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

to Calvin, reminds us that God delays help and appears to forsake His people, only to assist them “at a more convenient season, according to the greatness of their necessity and affliction.”<sup>28</sup> Another purpose of delays is found in Psalm 18:17 (He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.). Calvin says, “. . . the most seasonable time for God to aid his people is when they are unable to sustain the assaults of their enemies . . . when, broken and afflicted, they sink under their violence . . .”<sup>29</sup> Reducing man to a helpless state is found also in Psalm 71:20, says Calvin, “We must be brought down even to the gates of death before God can be seen to be our deliverer.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the extremity of suffering is seen in Psalm 77:7, where Calvin comments, “He intimates that he was almost overwhelmed by a long succession of calamities; for he did not break forth into this language until he had endured affliction for so long a period as hardly to venture to entertain the hope that God would in future be favourable to him”<sup>31</sup> Calvin seems to be comfortable with these extreme delays. But are these really necessary? It appears that Calvin is trying to establish God’s sovereignty in all situations in order that all glory will be to Him alone.

Delays are also reflective of God’s own time schedules. In Psalm 9:12 (For he who avenges blood remembers; he does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.), Calvin is consistent in maintaining that God acts in His own time. The apparent absence of His help is because He is waiting for the right time to intervene.<sup>32</sup> This same idea is found in Psalm 10:15 (Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out.). Here too Calvin asserts that God will act only in His time. Commenting on this verse, which has no reference to the actual time when judgment would be carried out, the same theme recurs. He explains this verse thus: “Lord, *as soon as it shall seem good to thee* to break the arm of the wicked, thou wilt destroy him in a moment . . .”<sup>33</sup> God’s delays, however, do not affect our safety. On Psalm 12: 5 he writes, “. . . although safety is in his [God’s] hand, and, therefore, in secure keeping, yet he does not immediately grant deliverance from affliction . . .”<sup>34</sup>

In Psalm 18:27 Calvin tries to answer the dilemma of why merciful people are often afflicted by saying that David asks the believer to wait till the end. He says,

If he did not keep his people in suspense and waiting long for deliverance from affliction, it could not be said that it is his prerogative to save the afflicted. And it is no small consolation, in the

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<sup>28</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:118-119.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, III:97.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:123. Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 153. Emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

midst of our adversities, to know that God purposely delays to communicate his assistance, which otherwise is quite prepared, that we may experience his goodness in saving us after we have been afflicted and brought low<sup>35</sup>

The idea of delay reveals God's absolute sovereignty in allowing and causing suffering and also in alleviating it. But why does God employ harsh and painful methods to deal with His own children? Should God delay deliverance to His own children? Calvin almost views delay as a kind of necessity in deliverance! A similar idea is seen in Psalm 22:24 (For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.). Calvin sees here an encouragement for sufferers, that God will demonstrate His mercy to them. He continues to affirm his basic premise that patience must be exercised in affliction, ". . . however long it shall please the Lord to keep them in a state of distress, that he may at length succour them, and lend them his aid when they are so severely tried."<sup>36</sup>

The sovereignty of God over human suffering is transparent in Calvin's judgment. Secondary causes obviously have their function, but the ultimate "source" for human suffering is the action of God. There is no possibility of chance in suffering. God's sovereignty can be seen in His delays. These delays have specific functions. They are designed to bring deliverance to the believer at the right time. They also work to condition the believer to fully give up trusting in himself. The knowledge of the sovereignty of God, instead of creating frustration and despair, brings hope to the believer.

### III

#### Man's Predicament

Calvin is careful to point out that suffering is not always because of man's sin. David's flight from Absalom, the background of Psalm 3, gives interesting insights into Calvin's thinking. To him, David was punished by God because of the sin of adultery and murder.<sup>37</sup> Yet, he also implies that David did not deserve his suffering under Absalom. Commenting on verses 3 and 4, he says that David does not dwell on the punishment as coming from God. He knows it is, but he is confident of God's help. (In fact, David's action can be a model for others.) He then says, "And thus it becomes the servants of God to act when molested by the wicked . . . when *undeservedly subjected to evil treatment*."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps a more direct reference to undeserved punishment is in the twenty-third Psalm. Commenting on verse 4 (Even though I walk through

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 3.

<sup>38</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:31-32. Emphasis added.

the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.), Calvin writes, “True believers, although they dwell safely under the protection of God, are, notwithstanding, exposed to many dangers, or rather they are liable to all the afflictions which befall mankind in common, that they may the better feel how much they need the protection of God.”<sup>39</sup> When experiencing suffering, however, the believer needs to ask whether the adversities pressing upon him are due to his own faults.

The need to ascertain one’s innocence is important to Calvin. Referring to Psalm 7:4 (if I have done evil to him who is at peace with me or without cause have robbed my foe.), where David pleads his innocence he comments, “. . . as often as we have recourse to God, we must make it our first care to be well assured in our cause; for we do him great wrong if we wish to engage him as the advocate and defender of a bad cause . . .”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in connection with Psalm 25:18 (Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.), he observes a connection between affliction and sins. Sins are not always the cause of affliction. However, he says, “. . . as often as God afflicts us, we are called to examine our own hearts, and humbly seek reconciliation with him.”<sup>41</sup> It appears that the believer needs to be sure that he is not at fault. Calvin’s comments on Psalm 55:3 read, “Our greatest comfort under persecution is conscious rectitude, the reflection that we have not deserved it; for there springs from this the hope that we will experience the help of the Lord, who is the shield and defence of the distressed . . .”<sup>42</sup> The knowledge of our innocence seems to guarantee deliverance. If this is so, what if the victim of suffering deserves the punishment because of his sins? There does not seem to be an answer for this.

Calvin develops a spiritual perspective on suffering with his frequent reference to the suppression of “sense and reason.” With reference to Psalm 9:12, he says that if we judge God’s help “according to our senses,” then we will soon be discouraged.<sup>43</sup> A similar comment is made regarding Psalm 13:3, where he says, “. . . until God actually puts forth his hand to give relief, *carnal reason* suggests to us that he shuts his eyes, and does not be hold us.”<sup>44</sup> At times Calvin juxtaposes sense and reason as in his remarks on Psalm 17:15, “. . . although, to the eye of sense and reason, God has cast him off, and removed him far from him, yet he assures himself that one day he will enjoy the privilege of familiarly beholding him.”<sup>45</sup> What does Calvin advocate? Does he mean that sense and reason are unreliable? He appears to say this. In his *Institutes*, Calvin refers to the limitations of human compo-

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I:78.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 434.

<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, II:329.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:123. Emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 184. Emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

nents. Carnal sense cannot fully comprehend the extent of God's activity in the world.<sup>46</sup> It also cannot understand how God uses the wicked for good purposes.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, reason has its own limitations. In his discussion on the limits of human reason he says, in spiritual matters, "the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles!"<sup>48</sup> Thus, if the believer tries to comprehend God's dealings in human terms, he is bound to be frustrated. These two faculties – sense and reason – appear immensely crucial to Calvin. In his comment on Psalm 22:1, the two words are repeated. He says,

There is not one of the godly who does not daily experience in himself the same thing [feeling forsaken]. According to the judgement of the flesh, he thinks he is cast off and forsaken by God, while yet he apprehends by faith the grace of God which is hidden from the eye of sense and reason . . . . *Carnal sense and reason cannot but conceive of God as being either favourable or hostile, according to the present condition of things* which is presented to their view.<sup>49</sup>

A similar reference is made about Psalm 71 :10, where he says, "Measuring the favour of God only by what is the present condition of men, they conceive that all whom he suffers to be afflicted are despised, forsaken, and cast off by him."<sup>50</sup> It appears that Calvin forgets that the Psalms often speak in the terms of God being favourable or hostile. It is the present condition that makes these conclusions. How can he expect anything different? It appears that, here, he advocates a Stoic attitude towards suffering. Is it correct to respond to adversity impassively? Calvin's insights, in this regard, fail to do justice to the torment of the soul of the sufferer.

For Calvin, in the place of sense and reason, faith takes control. Commenting on Psalm 56:9 (Then my enemies will turn back when I call for help. By this I will know that God is for me.), he writes, "He had no sensible evi-

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<sup>46</sup> Calvin says that carnal sense stops only in contemplating on the wisdom and omnipotence of the Creator God, without going further. It is faith that goes beyond and perceives God as "Governor and Preserver." Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xvi.1.

<sup>47</sup> Carnal sense cannot fathom the reality that God uses Satan and his disciples and still remains pure. Therefore, some persons were trying to introduce the idea of God's permission, and not his will, to account for evil in the world. *Ibid.*, I.xviii.1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, II.ii.18. In the same section Calvin admits that there are glimpses of wisdom to be found in the philosophers. But he explains this thus: "But they saw things in such a way that their seeing did not direct them to the truth, much less enable them to attain it! They are like a traveller passing through a field at night who in a momentary lightning flash sees far and wide, but the sight vanishes so swiftly that he is plunged again into the darkness of the night before he can even take a step – let alone be directed on his way by its help." See also *Institutes*, II.ii.19-21.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:358. Emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, III:88.

dence of their approaching destruction; but from the firm reliance which he exercised upon the promise, he was able to anticipate the coming period, and resolved to wait for it with patience.”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, on Psalm 69:3, he says, “He certainly did not cry out before from mere affectation, nor was his hoarseness contracted in the course of one day. We perceive, then, that although his bodily senses failed him, the vigour of his faith was by no means extinguished.”<sup>52</sup> Faith rests on the surety of deliverance. This is seen in the following comment on Psalm 85:4, “Although to the eye of sense and reason there may be no apparent ground to hope favourably as to our condition, it becomes us to believe that our salvation rests secure in his hand, and that, whenever he pleases, he can easily and readily find the means of bringing salvation to us.”<sup>53</sup> Again, commenting on Psalm 27:5 (For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.), Calvin says, “. . . we are taught not to measure the aid of God by outward appearances or visible means, but even in the midst of death to hope for deliverance from his powerful and victorious hand.”<sup>54</sup> Calvin has shown that “faith and hope” are the antidotes for suffering. He has also asserted that “carnal sense and reason” are hopelessly inept to discern God’s ways in suffering. However, cannot faith and hope be mere spiritual “tranquilizers” to drowse the sufferer? Calvin does not think so. He consistently holds on to the belief that suffering cannot be merely viewed from a human perspective. The spiritual, divine dimension of adversity can only be understood by minds that are infused with the presence of God.

#### IV

#### Man’s Response to Suffering

Fundamental to Calvin’s position is that suffering should draw the sufferer close to God. Commenting on Psalm 4, he observes that suffering should draw the believer to contemplate on the promises of God which give hope of deliverance.<sup>55</sup> The focus should not be man, but God. With reference to Psalm 5:2 (Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.), he writes, “. . . for they who, disregarding God, either fret inwardly or utter their complaints to men, are not worthy of being regarded by him.”<sup>56</sup> Calvin says that David assumes a general principle in affliction: “. . . That whoever call (*sic*) upon God in their calamities never meet with a repulse from him.”<sup>57</sup> Again, in Psalm 28:1 (To you I call, O LORD my Rock; do not

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<sup>51</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, II:356.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, III:47-48.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:455-456.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 53

turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit,) for Calvin, affliction and suffering should drive us to God alone. He says, "It is not enough for one who is in such a state of affliction to be sensible of his misery, unless, convinced of his inability to help himself, and renouncing all help from the world, he betake himself to God alone."<sup>58</sup> Calvin continues by saying, "And as the Scriptures inform us that God answers true believers when he [God] shows by his operations that he regards their supplications, so the word silent is set in opposition to the sensible and present experience of his aid, when he appears, as it were, not to hear their prayers."<sup>59</sup>

Calvin, unfortunately, does not enlighten us on how God shows that He hears us. All along Calvin has been saying that God allows the believer to go through times of experiencing silence. What does he mean here by saying that true believers will be answered? Where is the element of indefiniteness which is present in other contexts? Perhaps a different perspective emerges in the next verse – Psalm 28:2 (Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place.) Calvin sees in the "Most Holy Place" a reminder of the covenant of God. With this understanding, he says, ". . . David clung to the sanctuary with no other view than that by the help of God's promise he might rise above the elements of the world . . ." <sup>60</sup> What then, are the "operations" of God by which a believer comes to experience deliverance? They seem to indicate a subjective, spiritual, and mystical experience. Calvin is not very clear about this.

Calvin is consistent in vindicating God of any blame, even those involved with man's response to affliction. Commenting on Psalm 34, Calvin addresses the thorny issue of whether David was guided by the Holy Spirit to feign madness before Abimelech. His answer is that David's deliverance came from God, but the "intermediate sin" was David's. He says, "It may then sometimes happen that the event shall be brought to pass by the Spirit of God, and yet the saints whom he may employ as instruments shall swerve from the path of duty."<sup>61</sup> The context plainly implies that David, *in order to escape his predicament, feigned madness*. If this is the case, then may the believer too "work out" his own deliverance? Calvin does not address this issue, but it has relevance to his concept of response to suffering. He has maintained that the believer should wait calmly for God to act. David's action seems to indicate that exceptions are possible.

The sufferer should exercise patience in suffering. On Psalm 37:39 (The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.), he comments, "By this he [David] admonishes the children of God to learn patiently to endure afflictions, and that, if God should pro-

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 466.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 467.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 556.

long them, they should often recall this to their remembrance, that after he has tried their patience, he will in the end deliver them.”<sup>62</sup> This patience, for Calvin, needs to be filled with hope. He notes on Psalm 38:15 “. . . the mind of man will never be framed to gentleness and meekness, nor will he be able to subdue his passions, until he has learned never to give up hope.”<sup>63</sup> The believer ought always to depend on God’s word for comfort. He comments, on Psalm 119:50 (My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.), “. . . if we meditate carefully on his word, we shall live even in the midst of death, nor will we meet with any sorrow so heavy for which it will not furnish us with a remedy,” and continues to say that if we are not comforted, then the blame rests on us because “despising or overlooking the word of God, we purposely deceive ourselves with vain consolation.”<sup>64</sup> The Word of God gives the sufferer true comfort. This is found again in Psalm 119:92 (If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.) Here he notes, “The prophet declares that he was grievously oppressed by a weight of afflictions enough to overwhelm him; but that the consolation which he derived from the Divine Law, in such desperate circumstances, was as life to him.”<sup>65</sup> Together with deriving hope and strength from the Word, the sufferer ought to throw himself on God’s mercy. Calvin says, in connection with Psalm 120:1, “It is therefore worthy of notice, that he [David] was heard when, constrained and shut up by tribulation, he betook himself to the protection of God.”<sup>66</sup> Does this, however, mean that the sufferer is always heard when he reposes absolute confidence in God? How often have sufferers yielded themselves totally to God’s protection and still have not been delivered? Though this may seem like an inconsistency in Calvin, we shall presently see, in connection with “sense and reason,” that he was thoroughly consistent.

Perhaps the most tangible response to affliction is prayer. Commenting on Psalm 102, especially referring to its title: “A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the LORD”, Calvin writes, “Although you may be afflicted with anguish and despair, you must not on that account desist from prayer.”<sup>67</sup> On Psalm 5:4 (You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.) Calvin asserts that trying situations can be turned to “enforce prayer for divine favour” towards the sufferer. Recognizing the abruptness of David’s language, he concludes that the saints’ “stammering is more acceptable to God than all the figures of rhetoric, be they ever so fine and glittering.”<sup>68</sup> Again, on Psalm 17:1 (Hear, O LORD, my righteous plea; listen to my cry. Give ear to my prayer – it does

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<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, II:52.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>64</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, IV:437.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 471. ??

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.??

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>68</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:55.

not rise from deceitful lips.), he says that maintaining one's innocence in the midst of suffering is important. However, this alone is an insufficient response to suffering. The victim has to engage in prayer, for one who does not pray ". . . defrauds God of the honour which belongs to him, in not referring his cause to Him, and in not leaving him to judge and determine in it."<sup>69</sup> The intensity of prayer should match the severity of the suffering. On Psalm 17:9, Calvin comments, "The greater, therefore, the terror with which we are stricken by the cruelty of our enemies, the more ought we to be quickened to ardour in prayer."<sup>70</sup> This can be misinterpreted by calling for lesser and greater effort in prayer as the case may require.

For Calvin, prayer should be the natural response to suffering. He comments on Psalm 18:6 (In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.), "Let us therefore learn, that such an example is set before our eyes, that no calamities, however great and oppressive, may hinder us from praying or create an aversion to it."<sup>71</sup> On Psalm 22:2 (O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.), Calvin alludes to the "long continuance" of affliction. For Calvin, one outcome of affliction for the believer seems to be developing constancy of faith through persevering prayer.<sup>72</sup>

What is the function of prayer? Here Calvin's observations are surprising. In Psalm 27:7 (Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.), prayer, for Calvin, is an "armor"<sup>73</sup> for David "to break through his temptations."<sup>74</sup> An interesting comment on this follows. He says, "By the word *cry* [or *call*], he expresses his vehemence, as I have elsewhere said, *that he may thereby move God the sooner to help him*."<sup>75</sup> Again, a similar comment appears in Psalm 31:9 (Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.). Calvin says, "*To move God* to succour him, he magnifies the greatness of his misery and grief by the number of his complaints; not that God needs arguments to persuade him, but because he allows the faithful to deal *familiarly* with him . . ."<sup>76</sup> These comments of the Reformer show his concern for interpreting the Word faithfully. However, does Calvin really mean that our prayers can *move* God? There is a tension here that is not easily resolved. Similarly, referring to Psalm 109:4 (In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer.), he comments, "And as the Holy Spirit taught David and all

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>73</sup> The word here probably includes weapons, not merely protective clothing.

<sup>74</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:456.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 456. Emphasis added.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 506. Emphasis added.

the godly to offer up prayers like these, it must follow, that those who, in this respect, imitate them, will be *promptly* helped by God when he beholds them reproachfully and vilely persecuted.”<sup>77</sup> Here again is apparent ambiguity. Divine assistance did not appear promptly to Job who suffered “unjustly.” In other contexts Calvin asserts the indefiniteness of deliverance. How then can emancipation here be expected promptly? A few verses below, Calvin reiterates his view of “delayed deliverance.” Commenting on Psalm 109:20 (May this be the LORD’s payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.), he says, “Should he [God], for the trial of our faith, deprive us of all earthly assistance, instead of regarding that as any reflection upon the glory of his name, we ought to wait until the proper time arrive when he will fully display that decision in which we can calmly acquiesce.”<sup>78</sup> Calvin tempers his views on divine deliverance by alluding to God’s will in suffering. Commenting on Psalm 119:107, Calvin calls praying “according to God’s word” the “key” that we need to gain access to the throne of grace.<sup>79</sup> Again, in Psalm 119:153 (Look upon my suffering and deliver me, for I have not forgotten your law), he says that saints should not be discouraged by adversity “. . . but rather rest satisfied with the consolatory consideration, that the gate of prayer is open to them.”<sup>80</sup> Prayer, then, is not an “open sesame” to cater to human wishes. Intense prayer is beneficial to expedite answers. However, the true believer always prays “according to God’s will.” The tensions alluded to in prayer in adversity show the Reformer’s sincerity in grappling with the issue of suffering.

A proper response to suffering involves a trust in the character of God. In connection with Psalm 10:1 (Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?), Calvin sees a rule which gives hope in the midst of suffering: “We should seek comfort and solace in the providence of God; for amidst our agitations, vexations, and cares, we ought to be fully persuaded that it is his peculiar office to give relief to the wretched and afflicted.”<sup>81</sup> Again on Psalm 12: 1, he says, “. . . from his [David’s] example we may learn to betake ourselves to God when we see nothing around us but black despair.”<sup>82</sup> The sufferer, in the midst of adversity, is drawn to God himself. This being “drawn” is not mere abandoning oneself into God’s hands, but an active exercise of faith. This can be seen in Psalm 54:5 (Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them.), where Calvin observes, “. . . for nothing can support us in the hour of temptation, when the Divine deliverance may be long delayed, but a firm persuasion that God is true, and that he cannot deceive us by his divine promises.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, IV:273. Emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 481-482.

<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, V:30.

<sup>81</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, I:134.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>83</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, II:325-326.

The response of the believer to suffering has many interesting facets. The basic premise is that the natural response is being drawn to God. In cases where the sufferer tries to extricate himself from his adversity, then he is guilty of any sins committed in the process, but God is not at fault. The sufferer is also called upon to exercise patience in suffering. Prayer, for Calvin, is a natural response to suffering. Here he talks about “moving” God through intense prayer. Is he right to speak thus? Perhaps the most important aspect of man’s response is that he learns to trust in the character of God.

### Conclusion

Suffering, for Calvin, is not an aberration in God’s world. He views it as an essential element of the Christian life. Several unique concepts emerge from Calvin’s interpretation of suffering in the Psalms.

- 1) Deliverance becomes the focus of the human experience of suffering. From this standpoint, suffering assumes a positive function. The prospect of deliverance significantly alters the harsh reality of suffering. This blends with Calvin’s overall view of the goodness of God.
- 2) Suffering has a remedial quality. It heals and purifies the believer. Viewed from the perspective of human depravity and the presence of sin, it is necessary.
- 3) The cognizance of one’s innocence in suffering is a source of encouragement. This gives more assurance of eventual divine deliverance.
- 4) Calvin consistently teaches the absolute sovereignty of God in human suffering. He stands on solid biblical ground. It is from this perspective that there can be any answer to the question of human suffering.
- 5) Apparent delays are only part of God’s schedule. Man must be patient. Patience is necessary to conform to God’s will.
- 6) “Carnal sense and reason” cannot perceive divine intentions in the experience of suffering. They are limited. Sense and reason tend to judge adversity externally, physically, and temporarily. For Calvin, these categories are insufficient to comprehend God’s dealings with man. The divine foci are internal, spiritual, and eternal. Faith and hope, rather than sense and reason, give the sufferer the transcendent perspective.
- 7) Prayer is the tangible human response to suffering. Prayer, however, does not guarantee immediate deliverance. Calvin wrestles with the function of prayer. He tries to reconcile earnest prayer and God’s response. Here, he comes dangerously close to denying the sovereignty of God. He talks of prayer being able to move God. He even refers to David magnifying his trials in order to get God’s response. Although Calvin does temper his statements by saying that God does not need such goads to respond, he still appears trapped in a dilemma. Positively, this tension reveals the sincerity with which the Reformer approached the text.
- 8) The proper response to suffering develops a healthy recognition and

trust in the character of God, especially His sovereignty. For Calvin, the question of suffering cannot be considered in isolation. To him, every facet of Christian life, including suffering, is like a spoke of a wheel. The hub is God's sovereignty.

In conclusion, we note that Calvin lived in a period overwhelmed by religious persecution and fatal epidemics. He developed his concept of suffering from a biblical, God-centred, spiritual perspective. He views suffering as an integral component of God's will for man. God is sovereign in allowing and willing suffering. Evil agents are used to accomplish His will, and yet He remains pure. The sufferer's predicament is that he cannot comprehend the divine scheme with his limited sense and reason. There are several possible responses to suffering. The fundamental criterion for every response is whether or not the response to the experience of adversity is helping the person come closer to God. In the final analysis, suffering becomes a positive, rather than a negative, phenomenon. Calvin develops a supra-temporal perspective on suffering in which the long-term and eternal benefits outweigh the immediate discomforts.

There are several positive elements in Calvin's understanding of suffering in the Psalms. The basic strength of Calvin's exposition is his consistent emphasis on the sovereignty of God. God's sovereignty is central to the question of suffering. Another is that the sufferer is drawn closer to God. He begins to learn about God and His character. Without the fundamental focus on God, suffering will not make sense to the believer. Calvin's insistence that "sense and reason" cannot function as aids to solve the dilemma of adversity is commendable. This position eliminates the need to answer the secular questions raised by common sense and reason. Having extricated human suffering from the temporal world, he confidently points to God's sovereignty as the answer to human misery.

The deficiency of Calvin's views is in the practical sphere. When he tries to provide a rationale for persistent prayer in the midst of suffering, his impregnable fortress of God's sovereignty almost collapses. The Reformer tries hard to reconcile the prayers of the Psalmist and the silence of God. His sincerity makes him allude to man influencing God. However, he quickly recovers to stand once more on the platform of God's sovereignty and view suffering from this all encompassing perspective. Calvin's exposition of the Psalms reveals a remarkable level of honesty in dealing sincerely with the biblical text.

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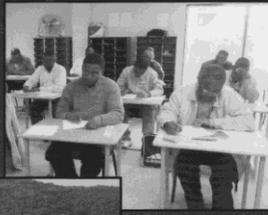
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